WHAT ARE THEY DOING WHEN THEY’RE NOT IN SCHOOL?
CHARACTERISTICS AND ACTIVITIES OF JUVENILES
DURING PERIODS OF TRUANCY

by

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What Are They Doing When They’re Not In School: Characteristics and Activities of Juveniles During Truancy

Thesis directed by Professor Mark R. Pogrebin and Professor Eric D. Poole

ABSTRACT

Decades of research demonstrates how truancy is continuously linked to far-reaching negative consequences for individuals, families and society. More specifically, truancy is often considered a risk factor for more detrimental forms of juvenile offending. And yet not all truant youth engage in more serious criminal acts. One of the less explored territories in truancy research is if, and for whom, period of truancy involves participation in more serious forms of juvenile delinquency. In an effort to fill that gap, this study closely examines how minor, moderate and chronic truants spend their time while truant from high school. Using a qualitative approach, thirty-four Colorado youth aged 18 to 24 provided retrospective accounts of their daily activities during period of high school truancy. The results are categorized in four time-use groups: activities (what), time (when), place (where), and people (who). An analysis of the data indicates that the majority of these youth engaged in marijuana use during truancy, but did not become involved in more serious forms of juvenile delinquency during truancy periods.
The findings of this study offer possible insights into the routine activities of truant youth through the recollections of the truants themselves. Suggestions for future research include studies that explore the triad of truancy, marijuana use, and socializing with peers; gender-based behavioral differences that may illustrate school disengagement, such as when boys “act out” and girls “drift off”; the role that the school environment plays in fostering opportunities for truancy; and the change in family roles and responsibilities for girls living with single-parent fathers and the effects these changes have on school engagement.
DEDICATION PAGE

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Alexander P. Dahl and Nicholas B. Dahl, and to the memory of their father, the late Major Dr. Howard A. Dahl.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Pogrebin who has been my professor, mentor, supporter, neighbor, and friend for many years – and to whom I will always be indebted. In particular, thank you for introducing me to the challenges and rewards of qualitative research and those invaluable “perspectives from the field.”

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My deepest appreciation and gratitude is for my two sons, Alex and Nick, who provided support and encouragement over the years as they watched me balance many roles, including motherhood and studenthood. I could not have asked for more beautiful human beings as sons.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The elastic heart of youth cannot be compressed into one constrained shape long at a time."

-- The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Time is a resource that can be used productively or aimlessly. While this truth may be apparent to most adults who seek to maximize the return on their time investments, it is a difficult concept for youth to grasp. Our adult minds tell us that making the most of compulsory school years – by attending school regularly, being attentiveness in classes, completing academic assignments, and developing relationships in school settings – are critical elements for a youth’s growth and development. Ideally, the school years culminate in a high school diploma – once the symbol of a basic education and the passport to entry-level employment, trade or technical schools, or a post-secondary college education. When students choose to be absent from school through truancy, they risk losing the opportunity for acquiring foundational academic, social, and economic skills. Having a more complete understanding of truancy involves knowing why some students refuse to attend school and how they choose to spend their time when they are away from school.
School Absenteeism

How children spend their time is an important issue to families, schools, communities, and society. Youth who spend their time in constructive ways, such as tending to school work, engaging in athletics, participating in any number of extracurricular activities, and associating with non-delinquent peers, are typically viewed in a positive light. Similarly, youth who have large amounts of unsupervised and unstructured time generate concern that these blocks of time will put them at risk for troublesome behaviors and activities. Not surprisingly, then, how an adolescent spends his/her time continues to be a crucial part of understanding how best to keep unwanted youthful behaviors from escalating into actions that can potentially disorient and disrupt the lives of youths.

Being purposely absent from school usually signifies a youth’s failure to bond to school. More importantly, school absenteeism that is driven by a student’s unwillingness to attend school is a risk factor for more serious forms of unwanted or unlawful behavior. It is this close relationship between school absenteeism and delinquent behaviors that makes truancy an ongoing societal concern (Sommer & Nagel, 1991).

The National Center for School Engagement (2007) points out that the relationship between truancy and problem adolescent behavior is circular, not linear: that is, truancy can be both the cause and the effect of any number of negative issues
in a youth’s life (National Center for School Engagement, 2007). So, while there may be a variety of reasons why truancy initially occurs (the causes), and while there may be a variety of outcomes that might occur as a result of truancy (the effects), it is less clear, however, at what point in time and in which types of situations truancy is more likely to shift from being a consequence to a catalyst for other, more far reaching problem behaviors in adolescence.

Although truancy may be representative of one type of delinquent behavior, and poses a risk factor for greater involvement in committing juvenile offenses, not all truants escalate to more serious juvenile crimes. One of the seemingly unexplored territories in both the delinquency and truancy literature is how time spent by adolescents may be related to multiple problem behaviors during adolescence (Barnes, et al., 2007).

School Absenteeism as a Subset of Delinquency

Truancy is a form of unsupervised time where boredom, peers, or other factors can lead to problem adolescent behaviors (Prichard & Payne, 2005; Caldwell & Smith, 1995).

Some research has looked at problem adolescent behaviors in terms of broad spans of time, suggesting that the development of a youth’s criminal pathway takes place over a timeframe involving several years, with contextual variables relating to the individual, the family, and the community influencing the process (Cicchetti, 1993). Other research has identified a youth’s entry into juvenile delinquency as a
series of gradually increasing acts occurring over a period of time, beginning with relatively minor problem behaviors that transition, in some cases, into more serious forms of criminal behavior (Loeber & Farrington, 2001). Still, other studies involving an adolescent’s pathway to delinquency have focused on differences between juveniles who become involved in delinquency at an early period in adolescent time versus those who begin at a later period in adolescent time (Alltucker, et al., 2006; Patterson & Yoerger, 2002; Moffitt, et al., 1996). All of these studies underscore the need to identify the various contextual factors along a time-related trajectory leading to problem adolescent behavior.

Some studies have involved more specific time-related factors. Studies involving time-use factors have often focused on time spent with families or time spent with peers, with family time described as a protective factor against problem behaviors in youth, and peer time serving as a strong risk factor for adolescent problem behaviors. Barnes, at al., (2007) used longitudinal data to examine several time-related categories (such as extracurricular activities, time spent in sports, homework time, solitary time, family time, time with friends, time spent employed, doing housework, or watching television) for effects on adolescent drinking, smoking, drug use, delinquency, and sexual activity (Barnes, et al., 2007). This study found that the strongest predictors of problem behaviors in adolescents are related to family time and peer time.
Large-scale studies of youth and how they spend their leisure time have provided data on general recreation activities, where adolescents (often during class time) report whether they have recently engaged in any of the activities listed on a survey form (Cotterell, 1990). Osgood, et al. (1996) studied deviant behavior from a routine activity perspective among a sample of more than 1,700 youth between the ages of 18 and 26. The researchers predicted that opportunities for delinquent behavior would occur more often during unsupervised free time while socializing with peers. They further hypothesized that unsupervised time periods, particularly with peers, are more likely to lead to deviant behavior in the absence of an authority figure that could monitor and supervise adolescent behaviors (Barnes, p. 700). Yet, studies involving the “leisure” or “free” of adolescents do not always differentiate between activities that are freely chosen or are obligatory activities (such as housework), nor do these studies have a full consensus on how to define “leisure” time and “free” time. This can be problematic because activities that would typically be considered “delinquent” (such as drug use or vandalism) may be counted under the heading of “leisure” time if the individual engaged in them defines them as such (Sharp, et al., 2006). Additionally, studies involving “free” times are typically confined to out-of-school time periods. The after-school hours are a particularly vulnerable time risk for youth, when unsupervised children and teens may be endangered for fall into patterns of juvenile delinquency (Larson, 2001).
Yet, few studies have explored the amount of time youth spend in various activities for its effect on behaviors (Barnes, et al., 2007). Barnes (2007) notes:

“There is relatively little empirical research documenting the actual amount of time adolescents spend on a wide variety of specific activities and how time allocations considered together are related to multiple problem behaviors in adolescence. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research examining whether or not the relationship between time-use and problem behaviors vary for special population groups; that is males versus females, younger versus older adolescents, Blacks versus Whites, as well as for those of differing socioeconomic statuses” (Barnes, et al., 2007, p. 698).

Societal concerns about truancy are based, in part, on this close relationship between truancy, delinquency, and unsupervised periods of time (Osgood & Anderson, 2004; Osgood, Wilson, O’Malley et al., 1996; Stoolmiller, 1994; Sommer & Nagel, 1991). For example, several studies have indicated that daytime juvenile offense rates decline when law enforcement undertakes truancy sweeps or open a truancy center in a particular neighborhood (NCSE, 2006; Berger & Wind, 2000; Belger, 1981). Other researchers have linked periods of truancy to certain types of daytime juvenile crimes, such as burglary or vandalism (Baker, 2001). Still, other studies have suggested that unsupervised children are more delinquent at various times and not just during the unsupervised time period, indicating that other factors beyond the absence of direct supervision are present during these times of low supervision (Gottfredson & Soule, 2004).

An even closer look at truancy reveals that girls are almost equally likely as boys to become truants (NCSE, 2006; Puzzanchera, et al., 2003). Yet, some
researchers have suggested that there may be a fundamental difference between male and female truants: for example, whereas truancy for girls may be predicated on relationship-based issues, truancy for boys may be founded in structure or rule-based issues (NCSE, 2005; Smith & Smith, 2005; Marks, 1999; Acoca, 1999). The possibility of issues surrounding interrelationships versus rules as correlates to truancy highlights the importance of considering gender factors when conducting truancy research (Weden & Zabin, 2005).

Truancy Research

The scope of research on school absenteeism is vast in that it has captured the attention of scholarly investigators in the fields of education, social work, sociology, criminal justice, law, psychology, psychiatry, and medicine (Kearney, 2008).

Overall, truancy research has focused on the consequences and the preferred prevention or intervention methods for combating this behavior (Southwell, 2006; Belger, 1981). Less effort has been put towards identifying and understanding individual characteristics and behaviors of truants (Henry, 2007). Kearney and his colleagues (2008) also identified an important problem within the literature on school absenteeism: the often confusing definitions, terminology, and classifications assigned to the subsets of juveniles who purposely do not attend school (Kearney, 2008). The result can be a general lack of consensus among various scholarly fields for appropriate definitions, typologies, assessments, causes, and interventions regarding truancy, as one form of school absenteeism (Kearney, 2008:465).
With the creation of the 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act* and federal requirements for tracking school absenteeism through yearly progress indicators, schools are continuously at risk for losing much needed financial support whenever students are unnecessarily absent from school (Barber, 2006). In 2004, the Department of Education held the first National Truancy Prevention Conference, signifying the increasing amount of attention that truancy is receiving. Researchers and policy makers at the conference recognized that state-by-state efforts for gathering data on truancy is still an issue to be addressed (Levy & Henry, 2007). And although many large cities report high rates of truancy, and less populated areas indicate that the problem is widespread, there is very little national data on truancy rates at this time due to the lack of consistent tracking and reporting practices among school districts and across states (Henry, 2007; Capps, 2003; Baker, et al., 2001).

Additionally, a significant portion of truancy research is conducted by researchers who are connected with education (Southwell, 2006); fewer studies are carried out from within the field of criminal justice, even though truancy has been continuously earmarked as an issue worth the attention of the criminal justice system (Bazemore, Stinchcomb & Leip, 2004). Lastly, there appears to be a need for truancy studies that are based on the perspectives of the truants themselves, rather than relying primarily on crime rates for information and conjecture (Barber, 2006; Southwell, 2006).
Purpose of Research

This research effort is designed to fill some of the literature gaps for researchers, administrators, practitioners, and policy makers by studying how adolescent boys and girls, from a variety of backgrounds and geographical locations within Colorado, spend their time when they are truant from school. The current study utilizes in-depth interviews to explore how 17 males and 17 females, between the ages of 18 and 25 and from three types of geographical settings (urban, suburban, and rural), retrospectively perceive their truancy experiences during high school years. The focus of this research is not to establish a cause for truancy. Rather, this study investigates how youth spend their time during periods of truancy as it relates to engaging in more serious forms of juvenile offending.
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 CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Truancy is not a glamorous or perilous offense. Yet, decades of research demonstrates how truancy is continuously linked to such far-reaching negative consequences as low self-esteem, social isolation, and educational failures (Bazemore, et al., 2004; Polk, 2001; Huizinga, Loever, Thornberry et al., 2000; Bell, Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994; Huizinga, Loever & Thornberry, 1994; Morris, Ehren & Lenz, 1991). More specifically, truancy is considered a risk factor for substance abuse, gang activity, teen pregnancy, dropping out of school, and delinquent activity (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2001; Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehart, 2000; Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Huizinga et al., 2000; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Kelly, Loeber, Keenan, et al., 1997; Garry, 1996; Huizinga et al., 1994; Dryfoos, 1990).

From a public health standpoint, the health risks associated with truancy include cigarette smoking, alcohol and drug use, violence-through-weapons, attempted suicides, driving under the influence, and unprotected sexual activity (Kearney, 2008; DeSocio, VanCura, Nelson et al., 2007).

The sheer costs of truancy - and its potential for producing high school drop outs - can be seen and felt by: what it takes to correct the problem (through families, schools, the police, the courts); by the economic impact of educational failure
(unemployment rates and lower wages for high school dropouts); and by truancy’s pervasive link to juvenile and adult criminal behavior. In practical terms, economists propose that increasing high school graduation rates could decrease violent crime by as much as 20% and property crime as much as 10% (currently, 50% of state inmate populations are high school drop outs) (Levin & Belfield, 2007; Bonczar, 2003). As well, for every high school student who graduates, it is estimated that the public would save approximately $36,500 in lifetime costs (Levin & Belfield, 2007). And data from a 2002 U.S. Census Bureau indicates that, on average, high school drop outs earn approximately $18,900 annually, while college graduates might earn approximately $45,000 (or more) per year (Mueller, Giacomazzi, & Stoddard, 2006).

Truancy in a Historical Perspective

In the criminal justice system, truancy – or the act of missing school without permission – is characterized as a status offense: that is, behavior that is considered unlawful for children, but not considered "a crime" if the behavior is committed by an adult (Steinhart, 1996; Russell & Sedlak, 1993). Children are expected to live at home, attend school, and follow the supervision of their parents. When children do not meet these expectations, their age dictates that the unwanted behavior be considered illegal behavior. Although a child’s age dictates whether some types of behavior are illegal, truancy would not be unlawful if it were not for the man-made laws that require school attendance for all children during their youth (Sommer, 1985). Mandatory (or compulsory) school attendance not only forces children to go
to school, but it also obligates parents and legal guardians to ensure that their children do in fact attend school. In order to better understand the literature on truancy, it is important to understand the compulsory schooling and attendance laws that have developed over time.

**Compulsory School Laws**

School attendance laws have had a long and problematic history in the United States (Nawaz & Tanveer, 1975). In 1642, the Child Literacy Law was enacted and is considered to be the first law to require formal schooling for youth. This law made education instruction a requirement for all children and gave initial guidance for dealing with non-school attendance (Ensign, 1921). Shortly after this law was enacted, the Compulsory School Law of 1647 was created and compulsory schooling began appearing in America, beginning with the Colonist Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Barber, 2006).

The establishment of compulsory schooling laws was not necessarily a welcomed policy change. In fact, it was a heated source of debate between those who were in support of compulsory schooling and those who were against it (Urban & Wagoner, 2000; Ensign, 1921). Urban and Wagoner note that “support came from [Protestant middle and upper class] citizens who were established in the states and fearful of migrants and immigrants” and the potential for “urban children roaming the streets without benefit of family supervision” (Urban & Wagoner, 2000, p.173). Those against compulsory schooling were fighting to protect what they viewed as the
economic value of having a large family with many children who could contribute to a family’s income through early (childhood) employment (Ensign, 1921).

Issues surrounding child labor and a child’s education were conjoined throughout much of the early days of compulsory school legislation and, not surprisingly, many early attempts to limit or legislate the employment of children for the sake of greater educational opportunities were met with opposition to what was sometimes viewed as unjustified interference with parenting and the surrogate parental role of the employer. The interests of the employer and the needs of impoverished parents superseded those of the child in early laws governing child labor and a child’s education (Ensign, 1921, p. 233). Formal education for children, even to those who valued schooling, continued to be viewed as a “luxury” for those fortunate enough to truly afford it (Lynd & Lynd, 1929), even while formal education was increasingly enhancing the socio-economic welfare of youth (Stadum, 1995). As a result of this split over the value of compulsory education in society, many families refused to abide by the newly enacted laws (Rogge, 1979). Finally, the Province Charter of 1692 was enacted which, as Ensign noted (1921, p. 21), “set the precedent for truancy laws of the second half of the nineteenth century.”

However, it wasn’t until after the Civil War that state legislatures in America began to take on a more active (and accountable) role in educational issues by passing laws requiring mandatory school attendance in conjunction with laws that discouraged child labor (Urban & Wagoner, 2000). In 1852, Massachusetts was the
first state to require school attendance for children between the ages of 8 and 14 (Christie, 2007, p. 341). By 1890, twenty seven other states had passed compulsory education laws, and by 1918 all forty eight states enacted such legislation (Barber, 2006; Urban & Wagoner, 2000, p. 72).

Children between the ages of 7 and 15 were required to attend school for at least 12 weeks in a given year (Ensign, 1921). Seventy five years after Massachusetts enacted its school attendance laws for children between the ages of 8 and 14, thirty seven states increased the mandatory age requirement to age 16 (Stadum, 1995). The minimum and maximum age level for mandatory attendance at school has continued to be a source for debate over the years. In Colorado, mandatory school attendance laws recently were raised to 17 (from 16) and lowered to 6 (from 7) beginning July 1, 2007 (Senate Bill 06-073, amending CRS 22-33-104: Compulsory School Attendance). Nationwide, an increasing number of states are reviewing their mandatory school laws, with an eye towards raising the limit to age 18.

One evident effect of compulsory school attendance laws is that someone has to enforce these laws (Nazaw & Tanveer, 1975). The Education Act of 1944 helped extend the responsibilities of mandatory schooling to parents as well as to local authorities (Barber, 2006; Le Riche, 1995). Enforcement of these laws took the form (at the time) of workhouse sentences, monetary fines, and truant officers (Stadum, 1995).
School administrators and law enforcement officials continue to wrestle with the issue of school absenteeism, truancy, and enforcement of school attendance laws (Dougherty, 1999). In 1974, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) was enacted which, among other things, required status offenders to be deinstitutionalized and for states to create alternative, community-based methods for intervention and treatment of these youth (Steinhart, 1996; Russel & Sedlak, 1993).

By the 1980s, the inability to put chronic truants in detention or jail extended the truancy problem beyond court interventions and served as a catalyst for a renewed interest in school-attendance issues and its connection to delinquency (Bazemore, Stinchcomb & Leip, 2004).

The 1992 reauthorization of the JJDPA created further change by acknowledging that certain components of the juvenile justice system may need to be more aware of, and responsive to, the developmental differences between boys and girls. The rising number of female juvenile offenders and the continued interest in status offenses prompted the federal government to ask each state to research, assess, and address any chasms that may exist in gender-specific services for status offenders (Feld, 2009; Ziemba-Davis, Garcia & Kincaid et al., 2004; Budnick & Shields-Fletcher, 1998). The 2002 reauthorization of the JJDPA finds truancy again being viewed as an issue to be addressed using criminal justice resources through federal funding for delinquency prevention programs and a multitude of initiatives to support state and local efforts (American Bar Association, 2007).
In Colorado, the current compulsory school attendance law reads as follows:

"Except as otherwise provided in subsection (2) of this section, every child who has attained the age of six years on or before August 1 of each year and is under the age of seventeen years, except as provided by this section, shall attend public school for at least the following number of hours during each school year:

(I) One thousand fifty-six hours if a secondary school pupil;
(II) Nine hundred sixty-eight hours if an elementary school pupil in a grade other than kindergarten;
(III) Nine hundred hours if a full-day kindergarten pupil;
or (IV) Four hundred fifty hours if a half-day kindergarten pupil." (C.R.S. 22-33-104).

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) has concluded that forcing youth to attend school is not enough; the children must have a desire to succeed and a variety of resources to help them (NCSE, 2006). While states continue to wrestle with the policies and practices surrounding truancy, much depends upon how each state chooses to define truancy.

**Defining Truancy**

Truancy has been present since compulsory education took hold in the U.S. The youthful desire to break free from the confines of the classroom and formal schooling is not something new (Levy, 2008). Amongst school boys in the mid-1800s, truancy was often referred to as playing hooky—a phrase made popular through the writings of Mark Twain when truancy was often associated with the fun of being outside of school when compared to sitting in a classroom and learning.
The term “truancy” was used again in the early 1900s when social documentary photographer Lewis W. Hine visited cities across the U.S. on behalf of the National Child Labor Committee and photographed examples of boys who skipped school so that they could sell newspapers on the streets of U.S. cities (Time Exposures, n.d.). The term “playing hooky” has evolved into “skipping school” and, more currently, “cutting classes” and “ditching school.” School administrators, public officials, and the criminal justice system continue to use the word “truant” for children who are purposely absent from school.

When the New York Yankees won the 2001 World Series, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani provided a city-wide celebration that included encouraging students to skip school and partake in the festivities (Levy, 2008). While truancy may have been initially viewed as a mischievous act with few consequences (and even today the occasional missed class is accepted when there is good reason), truancy is now recognized as a major problem with 30% of students labeled as truants, over 9% of students dropping out before finishing high school, and far-reaching negative affects being felt in communities, families, and (primarily for) the truants themselves (Levy, 2008; DeSocio, VanCura & Nelson et al.; 2007; Belger, 1981).

Definitions of truancy are not always uniform, varying in time and location (Belger, 1981). In general terms, truancy is missing school without permission to do so. According to the National Center for School Engagement (2006), any unexcused absence from school is considered truancy; however, individual states pass their
particular school attendance laws and consequently may create their own legal
definitions for truancy (NCSE, 2006). State laws decide at which age a child must
begin attending school, when age a child can legally stop attending school, and how
many unexcused absences a student can have before he/she is considered legally
truant (see Figure 2.1 for how the Colorado Department of Education calculates
truancy rates).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Total Days Unexcused Absent} & \quad = \quad \text{Truancy Rate} \\
\text{Total Days Possible to Attend}\ast & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\ast \text{Total Days Possible to Attend is:}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Total Days Attended} \\
\text{Total Days Excused} \\
\text{Total Days Unexcused Absent} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
= \text{Total Days Possible to Attend}
\]

Figure 2.1 How the Colorado Department of Education Calculates Truancy Rates
Individual schools or school districts make distinctions, too—between students who may occasionally “ditch” a class and those who are habitually truant. Generally speaking, school absences may be divided into three categories: excused, unexcused, and non-enrollment (Sommer, 1985). In 2004, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) issued a survey to every Colorado school district to determine how truancy was being defined, in order to work towards a more unified definition. The survey results indicated that 77% of Colorado school districts based their (local) definitions on the definition provided by the Colorado Association of School Boards. That definition reads as follows:

“If a student is absent without an excuse by the parent/guardian or if the student leaves school or a class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, it will be considered to be an unexcused absence and the student shall be considered truant.” (CDE, 2007).

Colorado Revised Statutes define “habitual truant” as: “A child who has attained the age of seven years and is under the age of seventeen years having four unexcused absences from public school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from public school during one school year.” (C.R.S. 22-33-107(3)(a).

How youth are defined as truants by each state or each school district contributes to how truants are statistically represented in school records and these findings have important implications for practitioners and policy makers. Yet, the numbers alone do not adequately portray a complete picture for this particular type of
school problem, nor do the numbers tell us very much about the individual youth who may or may not be actively engaged in delinquent behavior during periods of truancy.

Causes and/or Contributions to Truancy

There are a number of ways to view truancy literature and the conjectured categories of the causes and contributions to truant behavior. To begin with, much of the truancy literature points to three primary and broad categories of potential causes or contributions to truancy: family factors, school factors; and individual factors (NCSE, 2007; Corville-Smith, Ryan & Adams et al., 1998; Bell et al., 1994). Not surprisingly, these three categories are also considered the primary risk factors for child delinquency and violent juvenile offending (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, n.d.; Flores, 2003; Loeber & Farrington, 2001).

Three other areas affecting truancy that are sometimes listed separately in truancy literature - and at other times may be included in the three primary categories - are economic factors (Zhang, Katsiyannis & Barrett et al., 2007; Baker, Sigman & Nugent, 2001), mental or physical health factors (DeSocio, et al., 2007), and, perhaps to a lesser degree, community factors (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2010; Rohrman, 1993).

Another way to categorize these primary areas affecting truancy is through “pullout” and “pushout” frameworks. The pullout framework identifies non-school factors affecting attendance that work to pull a student out from normal attendance at school. These may include family responsibilities, care giving, the need for employment, pregnancy, family divorce, financial problems, family illnesses or any
other non-school situation that disrupts a youth's school engagement (Bennett & MacIver, 2009; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). The pushout framework focuses on school-related factors that seem to push the student out of the educational system. These factors may include relationships with teachers and school staff, school disciplinary policies relative to achievement and attendance, and school safety issues such as bullying and harassment (REFT Institute, 2009).

The various terms used to explain and classify school absenteeism have been further categorized by Kearney (2008) as "proximal" variables (risk factors that have a direct and immediate effect) and "contextual" variables (risk factors that have an indirect or less immediate effect) (Kearney, 2008, p. 457). Kearney and colleagues (2008) have proposed classifying age-related risk factors as: (1) mostly younger children who experience school-related conditions that produce general anxiety or depression (such as riding on a school bus, moving from one class to the next, or entering a classroom); (2) mostly older youth who experience general anxiety in social situations at school (such as taking an exam, giving an oral presentation, eating in a cafeteria filled with students); (3) mostly younger children who experience separation anxiety from parents or loved ones (and refuse to attend school or are noncompliant in other school-related ways); and (4) mostly older youth who choose more tempting activities outside of school (such as playing videogames, socializing with friends, and using drugs or alcohol). It is this last category that is most closely
related to the traditional perceptions and classifications of truant behavior (Kearny, 2008, p. 457-458).

In Colorado, these various categories of issues – whether causal or contributory factors – were supported by an informal and unofficial 2003 study conducted by a juvenile magistrate overseeing truancy cases, where it was found that 37 out of 40 truants experienced a diverse range of problems – from abandonment and neglect to physical health problems (Heilbrunn, 2004).

A summary of the various factors that are considered either causes or contributors to truancy follows.

*Family, School, Economic, Individual, and Community Factors*

**Family Factors**

Family factors can include any number of variables that have an impact on a youth’s ability to attend and stay focused in school. As some researchers have noted, these factors have included: single-parent families; family size; internal family strife and stress; parental alcohol or substance abuse; ineffective parenting skills (inconsistency, lack of discipline, over-protectiveness, neglect, or rejection); or transportation issues (Jones, Harris & Finnegan, 2002; Baker, et al., 2001; Corville-Smith, et al., 1998; Bell et al., 1994).

In Colorado, a study of truants and their juvenile justice records conducted by Heilbrunn (2004) found that 41% of the youth (or 12 of the 29 for whom judicial records were available) had at some point experienced home removal by child social
service agencies, with an average out-of-home placement lasting twelve months (NCSE, 2007; Heilbrunn, 2004). The literature clearly identifies a strong relationship between a healthy home environment, parenting, and a youth’s performance in school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Alexander, Entwisle & Kabbani, 2001; Hess, Lyons, Corsino et al., 1989). Subsequently, satisfaction with one’s family life can easily affect adolescent adaptation in other areas of life, including school (Plunkett & Henry, 1999).

**School Factors**

School factors that have been identified as contributing to truancy include: the size of the school; an unsafe or undesirable school environment; push-out disciplinary policies and approaches when attendance is poor; and the attitudes of teachers, counselors, and administrators (Hendricks, Sale & Evans et al., 2010; Spencer, 2009).

An ethnographic study conducted by Enomoto (1994) in a large urban school also found that inconsistently applied attendance policies can foster a sense of confusion and unfairness (NCSE, 2007; Enomoto, 1994) and, in a later study based on organization theory of routines, made recommendations for school adaptations to organizational change through a case study in school attendance records (Conley & Enomoto, 2009). Other research pertaining to the school environment and how it plays a role in truancy suggests such factors as the ability of the school to meet individual student needs; fostering engaging and supportive relationships; providing incentives for attendance (rather than relying on punitive approaches); and utilizing a
multiagency approach involving health and human service departments to assist students and their families (DeSocio, et al., 2007; Roderick, Arney & Axelma, et al., 1997).

**Economic Factors**

While parental involvement plays an important role in truancy and typically appears under the heading of familial factors, it also corresponds to the findings that families with a higher socio-economic status experience fewer truancy problems than families who face depressed economic conditions (McNeal, 1999). Economic factors often overlap with the other categories related to truancy and can include: students who have to work while attending school; parents with multiple jobs, particularly single parents; high mobility rates; and lack of affordable transportation (Hendricks et al., 2010).

**Individual Factors**

Individual factors usually point to low self-esteem; poor relationships with peers or lack of positive role models; lack of school engagement or commitment; involvement with gangs; student alcohol or drug abuse; lack of English-speaking skills; poor academic skills in general; and mental, physical or emotional problems (Hendricks et al., 2010; NCSE, 2007; Baker et al., 2001; Fritsch, Caeti & Taylor et al., 1999; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Jenkins, 1995).
Community Factors

Social disorganization theory suggests that difficulties in reaching shared values and strong relationships within communities can contribute to an increase in crime and delinquency for those neighborhoods (OJJDP, 2003; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Neighborhoods with low-income and poor housing, gang activity, and high crime rates may also lack sufficient community resources that foster positive growth and regular school attendance for youth (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, n.d.).

Mental Health Factors

Some of the literature suggests that mental health problems, in and of itself, can be a contributing factor to truancy. DeSocio et al. (2007) notes how an early study of truancy in Chicago schools omitted the possibility of mental health problems associated with school absenteeism - in a city where “poverty and violence” could easily have contributed to stress within the family through chaotic lives, suffered losses, and resulting mental health issues (DeSocio, et al., 2007, p. 3; Roderick, et al., 1997).

The distinction between the more common causes of truancy and mental health/clinical causes is worth noting because some researchers and clinicians believe there are two distinct groups of children who fail to regularly attend school: those who “ditch” school due to apathy (and there could be a number of causes for this lack of interest) and those who purposely miss school because of a clinically-based fears
or anxieties. The first group is considered “truancy” as is commonly associated with delinquent behavior; the second group is believed to represent “school refusal behavior” – an umbrella term based in emotional disorders, with truancy (unexcused absences related to academic problems or social conditions), school refusal (anxiety-based absenteeism), and school phobia (fear-based absenteeism) as its symptoms (Kearney, 2008, p. 453; Egger, Costello & Angold, 2003; King & Bernsetin, 2001).

From a contextual standpoint, Kearney (2008) identified certain indirect risk factors affecting school absenteeism that mirrors the three major categories of family, school, or individual issues: homelessness and poverty; teenage pregnancy; school violence and victimization; school climate and connectedness; parental involvement; and family and community factors (Kearny, 2008, p. 458-461).

Kearney and his colleagues (2008) also identified an important problem within the research literature on school absenteeism: the sometimes confusing truancy-related terminology and classification of subsets of juveniles who purposely do not attend school. The result can be a lack of consensus for definitions, typologies, assessments, causes, and interventions among the fields of psychology, medicine, education, social work, criminal justice, law, and sociology (Kearney, 2008, p. 465). The problems associated with defining and classifying truancy, then, underscores the need to delve more deeply into the nature of truancy in order to fully understand this form of behavior, particularly as it relates to juvenile delinquency.
Special Needs Factors

Less attention has been paid to another group of students who become truant: those who have special needs due to various physical or learning disabilities. According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, students with disabilities in 8th and 10th grades (for example, 13 to 17-year-olds) are more prone to missing school than their peers who do not have disabilities (Spencer, 2009; National Center for Special Education Research, 2003).

In a one-school-district-study that reviewed absenteeism rates for students with communication disorders (CDs), learning disabilities (LDs), and emotional disturbances (EDs), researchers found elevated levels of absenteeism among the students with LDs and EDs, and to a lesser extent, the students with CDs (Redmond & Hosp, 2008).

Regardless of the cause, most of the truancy literature seems to agree on these points: (1) Truancy causes harm. The harm may be primarily to the absent student, but effects can be far-reaching and felt by families, classmates, teachers, the school systems, communities, and society-at-large; (2) Truancy is costly. The amount of resources and money it takes to monitor and encourage appropriate school attendance, or to deal with the consequences of chronic truancy, can be a drain on families, schools, communities, and components of the criminal justice system.
Who Are the Truants?

Perhaps the most famous example of a truant was the fictitious character of Tom Sawyer, an adventurous boy growing up along the Mississippi River who decided to skip school to form a group of pirates with his best friend, Huckleberry Finn. The image of the truant as a rural, barefoot boy who spends his time hiding from the truant officer to go fishing with friends is long gone. Nowadays, the truant can be found in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and is equally likely to be a girl or a boy – one who is presupposed to be engaging in some type of illegal activity when away from school (Belger, 1981).

Gender and Age

More than twenty five years ago, a study indicated that there was very little gender difference in the number of self-reported truants from a sample of 3,000 adolescents. Likewise, in a study conducted over ten years ago, findings indicated that the number of petitioned truancy court cases in the U.S. was almost evenly divided between boys and girls: the National Center for Juvenile Justice found that 54% of these petitioned cases were boys, while 46% were girls (Puzzanchera, Stahl & Finnegan et al., 2003). More recently, the National Center for School Engagement (2006) reported that males and females are equally likely to be truant from school, based on the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement study (NCSE, 2006). And although females are being arrested for a greater number and variety of crimes these
days, the majority of females still enter the juvenile justice system because of status offenses (Poe-Yamagata & Butts, 1996).

Some researchers and practitioners have suggested differences between boys and girls that may impact their truancy. Acoca (1999) and Marks (1999) suggested that girls’ participation in delinquent behavior is often related to their relationships with important others in their lives, such as family, friends, and boyfriends. Smith & Smith (2005) later noted that a female’s identity is primarily concerned with issues of attachment, development, and maintenance of emotionally-based relationships. More specifically, behavioral differences related to relationships have been identified in truant girls as including: caring for their own children, caring for other family members, being involved with a boy, or having a difficult relationship with an adult male in their household who is not biologically related to them (NCSE, 2005).

Further studies have suggested that unnecessary school absenteeism can be classified as “school refusal” or a “conduct disorder” (Kearney, 2007; Boals, Foster & Brown et al., 1990), depending on whether the child does not attend school because of emotional issues (school refusal) or a behavioral problem (conduct disorder), which may speak to gender differences. All of these classifications and conjectures point to important potential differences between male and female truants that dictate further study within truancy research.

Truancy continues to occur most often during grades 9, 10, and 11, with a sharp increase when some students move from middle school to high school. Some
research suggests that truancy is occurring increasingly in earlier, elementary school grades now – some as young as second grade (Capps, 2003).

Clearly, the stereotypical truant depicted in the fictional character of Tom Sawyer has evolved over the years from that of a mischievous rural boy, to boys and girls living in cities and suburban areas as well as rural settings. What may not have changed over the years, however, is the impact that unsupervised time during periods of truancy can have for youth, relative to its potential connection to delinquency.

The Link Between Truancy and Delinquency

There may be no single reason why a young person begins to purposely miss classes or, worse, becomes chronically absent from school. Truants may avoid school because of bullying, gang involvement, peer pressure, lack of monitoring from parents, pregnancy, having to work, having to care for family members at home, involvement in drugs or alcohol, relationship problems, abuse on the home front, difficulty with classes, falling behind and an inability to catch up, boredom with classes – the list is extensive. The National Center for School Engagement (2007) has noted that truancy can be both a cause and an effect related to any of these disturbances in a child’s life (NCSE, 2007). Some prior research has also suggested that school absenteeism is not necessarily an “independent predictor of offending behavior or other poor life outcomes” (Sheppard, 2007, p. 350; Farrington, 1996).

What remains clear is the strong link, whether direct or indirect, between truancy and its potential pathway to delinquency.
**Daytime Juvenile Crime Rates**


During research of 400 youth in a Cambridge, England study, Farrington found that 48% of truants were convicted of delinquency, while only 14% of non-truants were convicted (Farrington, 1996). Similarly, data from a Rochester Youth Study showed that students who reported skipping classes even occasionally were four times as likely as non-skippers to report having committed a serious assault, almost five times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and twice as likely to have been arrested. Chronic truants were twelve times as likely to report having committed a serious assault, twenty one times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and almost seven times as likely to have been arrested versus non-skippers (NCSE, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2005).

The connection between truancy and illegal substance use has also been established (Henry & Thornberry, 2010; Henry, 2007b; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002; Dryfoos, 1990). The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services concluded that serious truants are prone to substance abuse at much higher rates than non-truants and that about 24% of serious truants needed alcohol or drug treatment, while only 10% of moderate truants and 3% of non-truants needed such
treatment (NCSE, 2007). In another study conducted in 2007, researchers found that “students who are disengaged in school and using drugs have the highest probability of recent truancy” (Henry, 2007, p. 33). More recently, a study conducted on the relationship between truancy and the escalation of substance use found that truancy is a predictor of substance use, and that once a youth begins substance use, truancy – in turn – is also likely to increase (Henry & Thornberry, 2010).

Other studies have suggested that when truancy is addressed in a community, crime and delinquency rates will most likely drop. For example, a drop in crime rate was reported to have occurred when police conducted truancy sweeps in Miami (Berger & Wind, 2000), in St. Petersburg, Florida (Gavin, 1997), and when Tulsa County, Oklahoma schools implemented a new policy for filing court cases (Wilson, 1993). The Dallas Police Department is reported to have reduced some gang-related crime by aggressively pursuing truant youth (Fritsch, Caeti & Taylor, 1999). Additionally, data from the federal government’s National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) indicate that the number of crimes committed by school age youth in Denver during school hours exceeded those committed after school (NCSE, 2007).

Yet, other researchers have found that certain types of juvenile crimes (such as violent crimes) actually occur more often in the hours between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. when school already has been dismissed (Gottfredson & Soule, 2004; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). In fact, after-school hours are often considered a “time of risk, when unsupervised children are endangered and teenagers use drugs, commit crimes,
and have sex” (Larson, 2001; Flannery, Williams & Vazsony, 1999, p. 247).

Whether crime rates of juveniles are more likely to occur before, during or after school hours, the central point is that large blocks of unsupervised time for adolescents can simultaneously lessen the presence of protective factors and increase the presence of risk and opportunity factors for delinquent behaviors in juveniles (Fleming, Catalano, & Mazza et al., 2008; Barnes, et al., 2007; Stoolmiller, 1994).

Strategies for Combating Truancy

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) dictates that school districts provide attendance data to state governments in order for the school districts to receive federal money earmarked for education (NCSE, 2007). According to the National Center for School Engagement (2007), states are not yet required to submit this data to any federal agency and states have the flexibility of determining their own data formulas for calculating truancy rates, which may or may not be comparable to other states (NCSE, 2007).

Efforts to reduce student absenteeism typically fall into several broad categories. These categories can be defined as (1) individual school or school district programs; (2) juvenile court programs; or (3) community-based truancy programs (NCSE, 2007). Mueller et al. (2006) offers another way to view strategies for combating truancy: through get-tough sanctions, attendance monitoring efforts, school enrichment programs, or collaborative efforts among several agencies (Mueller, Giacomazzi & Stoddard, 2006; Trulson, Triplett & Snell, 2001).
The early 1990s ushered in the era of zero tolerance philosophies in school discipline. While this philosophy was initially geared towards drug possession and use, it has been extended to other forms of behavior in school environments (Reynolds, Skiba & Graham et al., 2008). In 2006, over 3 million students faced out-of-school suspensions and, although to a much lesser extent, expulsions from school. And yet students who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to simply drop out of school altogether (Dignity in Schools, n.d.) In 2006, the American Psychological Association (APA) determined that recent exclusionary and zero-tolerance discipline strategies in schools showed no evidence that suspension and expulsion practices had improved student behaviors (or made schools any safer) than they had been (Dignity in Schools, n.d.; Reynolds et al., 2008).

The get-tough approach has some states turning to more aggressive tactics for dealing with truants—particularly chronic truants. Although the number of truancy cases being processed by juvenile courts is considerably small, the court systems have become increasingly involved in truancy behavior. Between 1985 and 2000, juveniles (ages 15 and younger) made up 78% of all truancy cases; 63% of these cases were adjudicated, with probation being the most common sanction. The majority of truancy cases that were not adjudicated in this time period were dismissed (Zhang et al., 2007; Puzzanchera et al., 2004). Some examples of recent get-tough approaches invoking judicial authority can be seen in Texas and Utah.
In Texas, students with a history of missing school are required to wear ankle bracelets with global positioning [monitoring] systems through a pilot project introduced by the court system. The reasoning behind this effort was: “We can teach them now or run the risks of possible incarceration later in life” (New York Times, 2008).

In Utah, a truancy court that is staffed by a juvenile judge will issue a court order requiring students to attend classes. If the juvenile continues to miss classes, it can be considered “contempt of court,” resulting in the juvenile being placed in a youth detention center. In juvenile detention, “the staff strips, showers, and searches the body cavities of the child...the staff then places the child in felon’s attire where the child will spend a few nights in a cold, dark cellblock” (Bradsahw, 2008, p. 229).

Parents are also becoming increasingly accountable for the truancy of their children. Federal education laws dictate that both truants and their parents can be subject to mandatory counseling and prosecution (Levy, 2008). In 1996, the city of Chicago began a six million dollar effort to combat truancy. While this effort included extensive measures (such as an automated calling system, a 24-hour hotline, six police vans to “sweep” neighborhoods, and a requirement that schools with less than a 95% daily attendance rate improve their truancy-related plans), the one component of these measures that was never implemented was administrative sanctions against the parents of habitual truants. Five years later, 30 of Chicago’s schools with the highest attendance problems began forcing parents of habitual
truants (those with 18 days or more of unexplained absences) to attend court hearings, parenting classes, counseling sessions or face arrest for misdemeanor charges (Spielman, 2001).

In Philadelphia, as many as 15,000 students are missing from classes without an excuse on any given day (Pascopella, 2003). The city initially implemented a Parent Truant Officers (PTOs) program where designated staff informs parents about their child’s truancy. The judge in charge of the city’s family court vowed to “make certain that this year parents will be going to jail who do not cooperate” (Pascopella, 2003, p. 10). Parental jail time would come after a lengthy process of trying to help parents who have been referred to the court system; however, the students could face a type of boot camp or their parents could be jailed for up to five days for failing to comply with court orders (Pascopella, 2003).

In South Carolina, if a child is considered a habitual truant and continues down this path, a juvenile judge can order the parents/guardians and child to appear in court. If the parent fails to appear, he/she could be held in contempt of court with a fine or imprisonment as a sanction; the child could be adjudicated as a delinquent (Zhang, et al., 2007).

And in Green Bay Wisconsin, a judge recently made the news after deciding to fine parents of truants $366. If the parents appear in court with their child after receiving the citation, the fine will be dismissed, but if the parents do not show up, a warrant could be issued for their arrest (www.todaysthv.com, 2009).
School enrichment programs are utilized by providing academic programs and counseling services to youth who are at-risk of leaving school due to poor grades (or who have poor grades due to absenteeism (Mueller, et al., 2006).

Conclusion

Truancy has been an issue for parents, schools, and communities since compulsory education in the United States was first introduced. The legal term and definition for truancy is typically defined by each state and can be applied whenever a child has a certain number of unexcused absences from school.

While truancy in and of itself is not a "serious" juvenile offense, its potential for leading to other adolescent problem behaviors and school dropout is well documented in the literature. Numerous factors play a role in truancy, leading to a circular relationship with truancy being both a cause and effect (NCSE, 2007). Factors involving the family, the school, poverty, the individual, or the community can influence youth to purposely miss school.

These periods of unsupervised truancy times can put youth at risk for association with delinquent peers, for substance use, and more serious forms of juvenile delinquency. This study was designed to fill in some of the truancy literature gaps by investigating how youth spend their time while being truant.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

According to Becker (1986), the literature on a given subject matter contains basic assumptions that, while helpful in the exploration of a topic, can also mar the way a research effort is framed. For that reason, Maxwell (1996, p. 34) asserts that previous literature can sometimes make it “difficult to see any phenomena in ways that are different from those that are prevalent in the literature.” Maxwell also notes that “trying to fit” insights into an existing framework “can make it more difficult to see ‘a new way of framing’ a phenomena” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 34).

Since much of the truancy literature focuses on theories of causation or intervention and prevention methods, a qualitative approach to studying truancy – one that allows a researcher to explore truancy through the descriptions and experiences of the truants themselves – is vital to understanding truancy in a manner that departs from the literature and presents a fresh, new view of this longstanding juvenile behavior.

Understanding truancy in terms of how adolescents spend their unsupervised time while being truant lends itself to a qualitative research approach exploring any connections between periods of truancy and for whom that unsupervised time provides a pathway to more serious forms of juvenile delinquency.
Formulating a Research Design

This research project begins with the recognition that, while there may not be a specific formal theory for truant behavior, truancy often finds its way into definitions of deviancy and delinquency – with some factors believed to be causes, some believed to be effects, and some acting as potential predictive factors (Sommer & Nagel, 1991). Although truancy represents one type of delinquent behavior and poses a risk factor for greater involvement in committing juvenile offenses, not all truants escalate to more serious juvenile crimes. In viewing truancy as one quintessential subset of delinquency, then, the premise for this research project is to explore how adolescents spend their time while truant from school in order to more fully understand what factors might be present that could lead some truants down a path to more serious forms of juvenile delinquency.

The premise for this research project lends itself to a qualitative methodology. The unique strengths of a qualitative approach to studying truancy lies in this research method’s emphasis on describing the context and settings of a phenomena, thereby allowing for a “deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences” (Marshall & Rossman, 1996, p. 39). Maxwell (1996, p. 17) notes that a qualitative approach to studying a subject is especially suited for research that strives, from an inductive standpoint, to “focus on specific situations or people” and to highlight “words rather than numbers.” Qualitative researchers are able to concentrate on “unanticipated phenomena and influences” in their research because
they usually confine their studies to a smaller number of individuals or situations, rather than trying to gain knowledge through larger samples. As a result, qualitative researchers are more apt to “understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances” in which a phenomena occurs (Maxwell, 1996, p.19).

Mohr (1982, p. 20) calls this the “distinction between variance theory and process theory,” and Maxwell further describes variance theory and process theory by saying:

“Quantitative researchers tend to be interested in whether and to what extent variance in x causes variance in y. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, tend to ask how x plays a role in causing y, what the process is that connects x and y” (Mohr, 1982, p. 20).

Maxwell (1996) outlines five purposes for which qualitative research is particularly appropriate: (1) understanding meaning (the participants’ perspectives as representative of a partial reality trying to be understood); (2) understanding context (the individual and unique circumstances that mold “events, actions, and meanings” of the participants); (3) identifying the unanticipated (“phenomenon and influences”) that help create new theoretical propositions; (4) understanding the process (that feeds into the outcomes); and (5) developing causal explanations (the causal processes involved in an event affecting or influencing other events) (Maxwell, 1996, p. 20).
While some qualitative approaches incorporate a well-defined theory in its research framework, other qualitative approaches generate theory based on the data acquired during the research process. The latter approach is referred to as *grounded theory*. Denzin and Lincoln, drawing upon the works of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, describe grounded theory as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. 158).

Strauss and Corbin noted earlier that a grounded theory methodology places an emphasis on theory development that occurs "throughout the course of a research project, rather than assuming that verification is possible only through follow-up quantitative research" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. 161). Grounded theory, then, builds upon previous conceptions of a phenomenon through the descriptions, perspectives, and interpretations of the human "actors" who actually experienced that phenomenon, as well as the researcher's sensitivity to existing theories regarding a phenomenon (Denzin & Corbin, 1998a, p. 172-173).

Glaser and Strauss (1967), who first introduced grounded theory, argue that:

"In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. The evidence may not be accurate beyond a doubt (nor is it even in studies concerned only with accuracy), but the concept is undoubtedly a relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied" (p.23).
It is this interplay between actor and researcher, between voices and concepts, between narratives and comparative analyses that allows a grounded theory approach to be the most appropriate qualitative methodology for exploring the direct and indirect links between truancy and more serious forms of juvenile delinquency.

*Research Theory*

In qualitative research, and grounded theory in particular, the researcher has a unique role in that he/she goes beyond the act of giving voice to viewpoints; the researcher takes on the charge, and has accountability for, interpreting what is "observed, heard, or read" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p.160). And out of that interpretation comes theory development – theory development that can be taken to a number of different levels and beyond a particular topic or issue as concepts unfold, develop, and are continually associated with the data during the process of the investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). A grounded theory research methodology, then, emphasizes inductive discovery as the researcher draws closer to the data throughout the research process, rather than deductive reasoning based on prior established theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 1983).

One of the tenets of grounded theory is to seek multiple perspectives throughout the research process. This is accomplished through a constant comparison of the voices of the subjects (as well as progressively accessing relevant literature). Data sets are coded and compared one by one for emerging themes and patterns; the data sets are then compared to theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Orona
(2002) argues that "the beauty and strength of grounded theory is that it is not linear.

the approach allows for the emergence of concepts out of the data – in a schema
that allows for introspection, intuition, ruminating, as well as analysis in the
'traditional' mode" (p. 374).

This research strategy fits well with exploring and describing periods of
truancy and the overt or covert pathways that may lead to more serious forms of
juvenile delinquency in this target population. We may be able to explore those
pathways through quantitative measures, but some expressions of reality cannot be
easily quantified to show the depth of a topic or issue. Instead, we can explore the
pathways in question through grounded theory, as researchers actively engaged in
the theory development process. As Gherardi and Turner describe in "Real Men
Don't Collect Soft Data."

"We are active in attending to various facets of the
encounters which we experience, we are active in the early
stages of analysis when we divide up our experiences into
fragments, dimensions, characteristics and features which
we make noteworthy and we are active in the new
syntheses..." (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. 91-92)

Research Design

This research seeks to explore three questions that serve as the premise for
this study: how are adolescents spending their time during periods of truancy; what
are the differences, if any, between what males and females do during periods of
truancy; and were the truants in this sample exposed to or involved in any (other)
type of delinquent behavior during periods of truancy? The research strategy for this study is grounded theory.

Bayens and Roberson (2000) argue that qualitative research can involve one of several modes of inquiry: in-person interviews, telephone interviews, and self-report questionnaires. For this study, in-depth interviews were used as the data collection method to obtain retrospective accounts from youth who had been identified as former truants during high school.

Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 80) describe in-depth interviewing as “a data collection method relied on quite extensively by qualitative researchers.” The strength of in-depth interviewing is found in the ability of the researcher to obtain a large amount and wide variety of information across any number of subjects, while allowing for clarification and understanding of everyday activities as participants describe their perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In-depth interviewing also allows for the examination of relationships and patterns of interaction that cannot always be captured through written questionnaires that do not allow for the ebb and flow of information between a researcher and research participants.

An interview data sheet was used to collect demographic information (see Appendix A). A semi-structured interview protocol using topical questions was developed for this study in order to allow participants to determine, in part, the direction of the interview (see Appendix B) (Offord, Turner & Cooper, 2006). As Bernard (2000, p. 191) states, “In situations where you won’t get more than one
chance to interview someone, semi-structured interviewing is best" by employing a list of questions as a guideline for investigating a phenomenon through dialogue with participants.

Four topical categories pertaining to time-use factors were embedded in the interview questions in order to find out how former truants spend their time while engaged in periods of truancy: activities (what activities were the subjects engaged in during periods of truancy?); time (when, during periods of truancy, were the subjects engaged in activities and how long did they spend doing these activities?); place (where were the subjects engaged in activities during periods of truancy?); and people (who was present with the subjects during periods of truancy?)

Conceptualization and Operationalization

Methods for abstracting and analyzing qualitative data can vary, but one element these methods have in common is the identification of categories in the data and the "generation of ideas" about them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b, p. 214). This section discusses how some of the categories were created and operationalized for this particular study.

Definitions of Truancy

Sommer notes (1985) that school absences are typically divided into the three categories: excused, unexcused, and non-enrollment. The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) notes that any unexcused absence from school is considered truancy (NCSE, 2006). Individual schools or school districts also make
distinctions between students who occasionally “ditch” a class and those who are habitually truant. The Colorado Association of School Boards defines truancy as:

“If a student is absent without an excuse by the parent/guardian or if the student leaves school or a class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, it will be considered to be an unexcused absence and the student shall be considered truant” (CDE, Internet Resource, 2007).

Colorado Revised Statutes define “habitual truant” as:
“A child who has attained the age of seven years and is under the age of seventeen years having four unexcused absences from public school in any one month or ten unexcused absences from public school during one school year” (C.R.S. 22-33-107(3)(a).

For purposes of this research, “truancy” was defined according to the Colorado Association of School Boards, which states that “if a student is absent without an excuse by the parent/guardian or if the student leaves school or class without permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, it will be considered an unexcused absence and the student shall be considered truant” (CDE, 2007).

Since the self-reported levels of truancy in this study could not be verified through school records, the subjects were categorized as class skippers, moderate truants, and chronic truants - drawing upon some of the truancy levels and measurements used in a 2007 study that made similar distinctions (NCSE, 2008; Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

Henry and Huizinga (2007) constructed six categorical variables for skipping school “without an excused absence” for their sample (N = 304) from a Denver
Youth Study (1988-1992): 1) non-truant; 2) class skipper (never missed more than one class at a time); 3) minor truant (3 or fewer days missed during a school year); 4) moderate truant (4 to 9 days missed during a school year); 5) chronic truant (10 to 35 days missed during a school year); and 6) severe truant (36 or more days missed during a school year) (NCSE, 2008; Henry & Huizinga, 2007, p.358e.11).

This study used only three categories, but with similar measurements as these previous researchers: 1) class skipper (a combination of class skipping and minor truant measures that were collapsed into one category); 2) moderate truant; and 3) chronic truant (a combination of chronic and severe truant measures that were collapsed into one category) (NCSE, 2008, Henry & Huizinga, 2007). The category of “non-truant” was not needed for this study since this research focuses only on youth who had experienced some form of truancy.

The term class skipper was operationalized as youth who occasionally missed individual classes (“here and there” as several of the youth termed it) or who reported missing, on average, only less than three full days in a year as the most serious and longest period of time (in days) that they were absent from school as a direct result of truancy. Moderate truants were operationalized as youth who missed individual classes on a sporadic yet somewhat ongoing basis or who reported missing four to nine full days in one year as the most serious or longest period of time (in days) that they were absent from school due to truancy. Chronic truants were operationalized as youth who missed individual classes on a regular and
ongoing basis or who reported missing over ten full days as the most serious or longest period of time (in days) that they were absent from school as a direct result of truancy (which corresponds to Colorado’s legal definition of chronic truancy).

Geographical Areas

This study identifies the geographical areas in which the subjects attended Colorado high schools (either traditional or alternative schools) to determine the type of geographical setting where the high school was located and truancy occurred. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) classifies Colorado school districts as:

“Denver Metro: Districts located within the Denver-Boulder standard Metropolitan statistical area which compete economically for the same staff pool and reflect the regional economy of the area.

Urban-Suburban: Districts which comprise the state’s major population centers outside the Denver metropolitan area and their immediate surrounding suburbs.

Outlying City: Districts in which most pupils live in population centers of seven thousand persons but less than thirty thousand persons.

Outlying Town: Districts in which most pupils live in population centers in excess of one thousand persons but less than seven thousand persons.

Rural: Districts with no population centers in excess of one thousand persons and characterized by sparse widespread populations.” (CDE, 2010)
Several of these established CDE school district/geographical categories were combined to represent three simplified categories of urban, suburban, and rural school settings. The CDE criterion used for "rural" and "outlying towns" were combined into one category to operationalize the term "rural" (representing areas in the study with a population between 1,000 and 7,000); the CDE standards for "outlying city" and "urban-suburban" were combined to operationalize the term "suburban" (representing areas in the study with a population of more than 7,000 but less than 100,000); and the CDE criterion for "Denver metro" was used to operationalize the term "urban" for this study (representing areas in the study with a population of more than 100,000).

Study Sample

The selection of a research sample in qualitative research is typically purposeful, the basis for which is utilizing specific cases or subjects to gain insights into the phenomenon that is being studied (Patton, 1990; 2002). This is especially true within criminal justice research where researchers can draw upon "his or her experience" to choose a sample that is "typical" of the population being studied (Bayens & Roberson, 2000, p.158). A purposive sample was used for this study to recruit participants from a specific group of a population: former high school students aged 18 to 25 who were truant during their high school years. Since nearly an equal number of males and females are likely to engage in truancy as reported by the National Center for School Engagement (2006), this study used an equal number
of males and females to allow the gender component to reflect the similar proportions in the overall truancy population.

The criterion that was used to select participants for this study was:

- Males or females who are comfortable speaking English
- Between the ages of 18 and 25
- Experienced truancy for any length of time while attending high school
- Not currently incarcerated or enrolled in an alternative sentencing program
- Willing to be interviewed
- Willing to have the interview recorded
- Willing to create a "pretend name" for the interview to protect their true identity
- Willing to sign a consent form at the time of the interview

While interviewing current truants would have been ideal, it can be said that the relatively young age of the participants for this study (and, therefore, closeness in time to their former high school years) contributes to their recall of truancy periods and provides a first-person perspective that is not available through other avenues, such as reports by teachers or archived data, or perspectives that are difficult to access because of the young age of research subjects (Urquiza, 1991).

Sampling in qualitative research typically continues until "no new information is forthcoming" or "heard in the case of interviewing," with the level of data saturation being dependent upon the ongoing, side-by-side process of data collection and data analysis (Tuckett, 2004, p. 49; Patton, 2002). For this study, 50 volunteer participants (25 males; 25 females) were initially interviewed, with saturation levels reached at thirty-four interviews (17 males; 17 females). Due to the unpredictable nature of subject recruitment (that is, not knowing in advance how
many subjects would be available at which sites on any given day), a decision was made to select participants according to: the research aim (recruiting an equal number of males and females); participant availability (guided by logistical access to an unknown number of potential subjects); the ongoing process of confirming emerging or atypical data (comparison of interview data throughout the interviewing process); and the evidence of data saturation (redundancy or lack of new data). This process led to having more research participants than was needed, with sampling driven by a number of (unpredictable) factors and with saturation levels being determined once the experiences of the individuals (across equal numbers of gender) were reached (see the Saturation Point section of this chapter for further discussion).

Sample

Seventeen males and seventeen females were used for this study (see Table 3.1). The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 24: seven were 18, nine were 19, seven were 20, four were 21, three were 22, two were 23, and two were 24. The races of the participants were self-reported as: Caucasian (18), Hispanic (13), Native American (2), and Asian (1). No African Americans volunteered to participate in this study.
Table 3.1  General Characteristics of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male (n=17)</th>
<th>Female (n=17)</th>
<th>Total (n=34)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at Time of Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education Level</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated/Diploma</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained GED</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Graduate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Truancy Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Skippers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Geographical Areas</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of where subjects were recruited, 11 individuals were recruited through recruitment flyers posted at adult/GED education centers located within three community college campuses in the Denver metropolitan area (Denver, Lakewood, and Westminster); 2 individuals were recruited at an alternative high school in Denver; 12 of the subjects were recruited during drop-in adult, GED, or resume writing classes held at a homeless/runaway shelter and outreach center in
Denver; 9 of the subjects were recruited through flyers distributed by onsite points of contact at an adult/GED "gateway to college" education center located in a community college in Pueblo, Colorado and its sister-site in nearby Canon City (see Appendix C for recruitment flyer).

Research participants were also categorized according to their particular level of truancy based on the average number of classes or days that were missed in a year or the longest period of time they were absent from school as a result of truancy (see the Conceptualization and Operationalization section of this chapter): 1 male and 6 females were class skippers; 1 male and 3 females were moderate truants; and 15 males and 8 females were chronic truants. As the numbers indicate, the majority of both the males and females in this sample had experienced serious and habitual truancy during high school. That is not surprising since this study was limited by the types of agencies (adult education institutions that tend to cater to individuals who have not yet completed a high school education) from which to draw a sample truant population.

Likewise, the graduation rates (or lack thereof) for the participants would be expected to correspond to the types of agencies used to recruit the sample: 14 of the participants did not graduate from high school and had not yet obtained a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), although some of the participants were in the process of working towards completing a GED at the time they were interviewed; 14 of the subjects had graduated from high school with a traditional high school diploma (four
of the participants were approximately one month from completing a high school program and were included in the “graduated with diploma” count; and 6 of the subjects had already earned a GED at the time of the interviews (in sum, 41% of the participants had not completed a high school level education, while 58% of the participants had earned either a high school diploma or GED).

The participants of this research project attended traditional high schools located in the following 19 Colorado cities: Aurora, Bennett, Boulder, Canon City, Castle Rock, Centennial, Colorado Springs, Denver, Elizabeth, Englewood, Evergreen, Florence, Fowler, Lakewood, Littleton, Parker, Pueblo, Thornton, and Westminster. While 28 of the participants had been enrolled in traditional high schools, 6 had also attended alternative high schools for some periods of time, typically after spending time unsuccessfully at a traditional high school.

These cities are categorized as urban, suburban, and rural areas (see the Conceptualization and Operationalization section of this chapter): 7 of the cities were in urban areas, 8 of the cities were located in suburban areas, and 4 of the cities were in rural areas. In terms of the individual subjects and these locations, 19 attended high schools in urban areas; 11 attended high schools in suburban areas; and 4 attended high schools in rural areas. Graduation rates (or lack thereof) relative to these geographical locations are as follows: for the urban areas, 4 participants had graduated with a high school diploma, 3 had received a GED, and 12 had not yet completed a high school level education; for the suburban areas, 6 had graduated
with a high school diploma, 3 had obtained a GED, and 2 had not yet completed a high school level education; and for the rural areas, the 4 participants had graduated from high school with a diploma (for a full summary of participant characteristics, see Table 3.2 and Table 3.3).

Table 3.2 Summary of Categories for Female Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pseudo-Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Geographical Area</th>
<th>Level of Truancy</th>
<th>Previous Criminal Record, If Known</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Class Skipper</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Diploma (attending college)</td>
</tr>
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*Counted as a diploma; subjects were graduating a month after the interview
**Minor offense (disturbing the peace)
Table 3.3  Summary of Categories for Male Research Participants

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<tr>
<th>Pseudo-Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Geographical Area</th>
<th>Level of Truancy</th>
<th>Previous Criminal Record, If Known</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
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<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Chronic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Counted as a diploma; subjects were graduating a month after the interview
**History of mental health issues, including a suicide attempt

Subject Recruitment

Ideally, this research project would have involved interviews with juveniles who are current truants during their high school years. One of the primary challenges for researchers attempting to investigate truancy through qualitative methods is the ability to access the truants themselves, along with their truancy-
related school records. The effort can be exasperated by the restrictions researchers face in obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) and/or Human Subject Research Committee (HSRC) permission to recruit and interview subjects who are juveniles (that is, under the age of 18). For that reason, I decided to focus my research on youth who are above the age of 18 (and under the age of 25) for a retrospective account of their high school truancy experiences.

This research project began with an invitation from the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) to co-research two specific high school issues (truancy and bullying) under a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at both the University of Denver and the CFFC had granted permission to a senior researcher for this study to be conducted. Shortly afterward, I was invited to become a co-researcher where our mutual research interests could be combined during semi-structured interviews of high school aged youth who were already scheduled to be interviewed through a court-ordered truancy program in Adams County, Colorado.

Although I obtained permission from the University of Denver and the CFFC IRBs to be added as a co-researcher, problems arose when I tried to obtain permission from the University of Colorado at Denver's IRB/HSRC to participate in this research project for my dissertation work. The University of Colorado at
Denver’s IRB/HSRC refused to designate the University of Denver and the CFFC IRBs as the primary agencies for oversight of human subjects for this initial project.

Subsequent discussions with the University of Colorado at Denver’s IRB/HSRC indicated that attempts to receive their approval to interview juveniles under the age 18 as a solo researcher for my dissertation work would most likely be rejected because of the young age of the participants and the fears of potential psychological risks to the juvenile participants on the part of the University of Colorado at Denver’s IRB/HSRC. It was then mentioned that my best chance to receive University of Colorado at Denver IRB/HSRC approval would be to limit my research subjects to youth who were over the age of 18. With those recommendations in mind, I decided to pursue research subjects over the age of 18 and under the age of 25 for a retrospective account of their truancy issues during high school years. After receiving IRB/HSRC approval from the University of Colorado at Denver, I approached multiple agencies and organizations in search of possible study participants.

Participation in this study was voluntary and I began by contacting several educational institutions in the Denver metro region to obtain permission to post IRB/HSRC-approved flyers with my contact information at their locations.

A common feature of qualitative research and an avenue for locating a purposive sample to interview begins by identifying settings where these subjects would be found (Warren & Karner, 2005). The institutions that I targeted were either
geared toward or provided services for subjects who would most likely be over the age of 18, may not have completed high school, may have been in the process of completing a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), or were attending adult education or community college classes. The assumption was that I would find young males and females at these settings who had experienced some form of truancy during their high school years.

These institutions included: GED/adult education centers located in several state community colleges in the Denver metro area (the Community College of Denver, Front Range Community College, and Red Rocks Community College); a GED/adult education center located within a Denver public alternative high school (Emily Griffith Opportunity School); a dropout prevention and recovery center in Jefferson County, Colorado (the Office of Dropout and Prevention Recovery for Jefferson County Public Schools); an alternative high school in Jefferson County, Colorado (McClain High School); a tutoring and educational center within a Denver-based non-profit youth shelter/runaway outreach agency (Urban Peak); and an adult learning/GED center at a Pueblo community college, along with its sister-site in Canon City, Colorado (Pueblo Community College and the Fremont Campus).

Each of these institutions granted permission for me to post or otherwise distribute recruitment flyers in public, student-oriented places at their locations (such as community bulletin boards) and to leave the flyers on the desks of administrative personnel who had daily contact with students. That permission was granted only
after I completed formal institutional requests to these organizations and awaited their approval or rejection letters, which took one to two months.

The state community colleges and the alternative high school in the Denver metro area allowed me to post recruitment flyers in areas of their campuses that were accessible to students. I was successful in recruiting and interviewing a number of participants from the community college and alternative high school centers.

While I received approval from the Jefferson County public school system’s IRB to approach one alternative high school and one dropout prevention/recovery center in Jefferson County, the principal of the Jefferson County alternative high school never returned inquiring telephone messages or emails during my attempts to contact her and, therefore, that site could not be accessed. (Permission from the Jefferson County public school system’s IRB did not guarantee that individual school administrators would agree to participate in the research effort.) The Jefferson County dropout prevention/recovery center allowed me to mail flyers to 50 youth whom they identified in their database (based on my research participation criteria). While I was permitted to fold the flyers, place them in envelopes that I had purchased, and provide the completed mailings to the dropout center administrative staff, I was not permitted to follow up on this process with subsequent mailings or to recruit individuals who visited the center in person. Participants, I was told, would either reply or not. No individuals responded to the flyers that were mailed by the dropout center on my behalf.
The Denver-based shelter/runaway outreach center allowed me to attend several of their drop-in educational classes in order to present my flyers to prospective volunteers and to be readily available to interview interested participants. I was successful in recruiting and interviewing a number of participants at this site.

I also contacted a community college in Pueblo, Colorado that had an adult learning/GED center at its Pueblo and Canon City locations. This particular community college (and area of Colorado) had been actively involved in truancy prevention programs in schools and in courts, which prompted me to contact them. After their review of my flyers and granting me permission to utilize the institution’s educational centers, I arranged to make several trips to these centers for the purpose of potentially recruiting on-the-spot participants who were given flyers ahead of time by the institution’s point of contact (as part of their requirements for flyer distribution). I drove to the Pueblo and Fremont County centers on two occasions where I was able to interview several research participants after they volunteered to participate.

With the approval of the University of Colorado at Denver IRB/HSRC, I compensated each research participant with a $10 gift card to their choice of a Colorado grocery store chain or a Walmart store. (A gift card was used instead of cash in order to avoid funding illegal activity.) The compensatory gift card was provided in exchange for the participants’ time and efforts to meet with me and was noted on the recruitment flyer(s) through the statement, “You will be reimbursed for
"your time with a small gift card," as well as a similar statement provided on the consent form (see Appendix D for the consent form).

As mentioned, my sample consists of seventeen males and seventeen females. This distribution was by design, since I wanted an equal number of males and females to investigate any gender themes or issues that might emerge in the data.

Sample Limitations

As mentioned previously, the initial proposal for this study that was presented to the University of Colorado at Denver’s IRB/HSRC was a joint effort with a senior researcher at the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC), which would have involved interviewing current truants recruited from a court-ordered truancy reduction program in Adams County, Colorado (part of the Denver metro area). Ideally, I would have liked to interview current high school aged truants – either through the already recruited youths who were going to be involved in the CFFC study or on my own as a solo researcher.

However, recognizing the difficulties in obtaining University of Colorado at Denver IRB/HSRC approval for research involving juveniles (under the age of 18) and the IRB/HSRC’s fear of psychological harm to minors, I felt I had no choice but to assume that such a research request would not be approved. Accordingly, I designed a retrospective study using older youth (males and females aged 18 to 25) and former truants (of different truancy degrees) who attended Colorado high schools in various geographical locations (urban, suburban, and rural locations).
The most difficult challenges I faced in terms of the sample was gaining access to sites that would allow me to recruit subjects; finding a good range of truancy levels and experiences; and not knowing how accurately and reliably the participants would be able to recall their truancy memories.

Access to the sample was overcome with persistence, determination, and (most often) luck. Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 51) note that an ideal setting for qualitative research is one where “entry is possible” and the researcher is “likely to build trusting relations with the participants.” And yet nearly any type of exploratory fieldwork requires a certain amount of “flexibility” in seeking data and a corresponding “open-mindedness” as to where to find that data (Shaffir & Stebbins, 2003, p. 4). Certainly, flexibility and open-mindedness was a crucial part of gaining access to the participants of this study.

Warren and Karner (2005, p. 130) mention how finding and recruiting subjects to interview “without the assistance of a cooperating organization can be a daunting task.” I found this to be true. Several organizations in the Denver metropolitan area were initially contacted; some with more success than others. Even when entry was gained through the initial gatekeepers, establishing points of contact with frontline personnel who were cooperative was sometimes frustrating and often challenging. This can be seen in the fact that, after two months, I obtained a school district’s IRB approval, but was (in essence) rejected by an individual school’s principal through unreturned emails and telephone messages.
Much depended upon whether the organization, gatekeepers, and/or frontline personnel were interested in the topic of truancy – or not. For example, at the alternative high school in Denver I was able to gain access because an individual at a school superintendent level had a keen interest in truancy issues. He, in turn, provided me access to the next gatekeeper: a mid-level manager who was mildly supportive of my efforts. Once the mid-level manager delegated my research needs to the frontline personnel at the actual site location, I was greeted with far less enthusiasm, cooperation and assistance than I had experienced at the superintendent’s level. Fortunately, I was able to recruit some participants from this site, while continuing to make contacts with other agencies through which I had more successes.

My sample is primarily chronic truants. This outcome is not surprising given the fact that the recruitment process had to rely heavily on accessing adult learning facilities where there is an overrepresentation of young adults who had not completed their high school education. The positive effect was that these locations, with a fair amount of clientele who had not completed high school, provided a pool of responders who, as one would expect, had experienced some type of difficulty in the high school completion process, including issues of truancy. The difficulty was that it was primarily one form of truancy: habitual. While it was my original intention and hope to avoid studying truancy that was skewed towards chronic truants (since much of the truancy literature focuses on this extreme segment of the
truant population, to the exclusion of other levels of truancy), I believe the subjects in this study did, in fact, provide an interesting (and often unexpected) distribution of levels, experiences, outcomes, and perceptions of truancy, despite the prevalence of extreme truancy in the sample.

My sample is also English speaking, predominantly Caucasian youth who had attended high schools in urban settings. This seems to mirror the general demographics for truants (although caution must be used here because of the variations in truancy data collection across Colorado and nationwide). Early studies in truancy and profiles of court-petitioned truancy cases (1990-1999) indicate that Caucasian students represented 71% of these court cases; a more recent study echoed these findings when 50% of reporting jurisdictions in Colorado indicated Caucasians were the highest ethnicity among its truancy populations, closely followed by Hispanics (Rubio, 2004, p. 12, 67). As well, urban youth are considered to be at “greater risk” for truant behavior (Trujillo, 2006, p. 75).

Researchers have commented on the problems associated with oral histories, such as the unreliability of personal memories and the subtle influence that hindsight can have in retrospection (Noaks & Wincup, 1984). However, Cohen, Kasen & Bifulco et al. (2005, p. 345) note that “most research-generated self-report data” is retrospective to some extent in that it requires subjects to reconstruct a past experience, either through a specific point in time or an implicit duration in time.
To maximize the reliability and validity of memory recall, researchers often use contextual elements to stimulate remembrances of a particular time period. Literature addressing the issue of autobiographical memory suggests that the use of these contextual cues can help promote memory recall of behaviors in a particular setting (Cohen, et al., 2005; Bradburn, 2000; Brown, Shevell & Ripps, 1986). Crisanti et al. (2003) notes that a timeline follow-back strategy, where reference points representing important events or locations in an individual’s life, can help improve the validity of self-reports by creating “memory landmarks” to help reduce recall errors (Crisanti, et al., p. 568; Sobell & Sobell, 1978). I used contextual cues strategically embedded in the semi-structured questions and designed to help participants mentally place themselves back in time to their high school years and to help facilitate memory recall of events (see the Data Collection section of this chapter).

At the conclusion of each in-depth interview, I also asked research participants a series of short questions, with their permission, concerning whether or not they: 1) had witnessed a crime during truancy; 2) had been asked to participate in a crime during truancy; or 3) or had participated in a crime during truancy. These questions were designed to corroborate information provided in the in-depth interviews, as well as to explore any exposure to delinquency or more serious crimes for periods of truancy. The participants were instructed to answer “yes” or “no” for these questions and to not reveal any information that would identify specific people
in their responses. The term “crime” in these concluding questions were defined for the participants as acts that involved either: 1) “smoking pot, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes” or 2) an illegal act that could be considered “more serious” than smoking pot, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes.

Another limitation associated with the sample could be the fact that I offered compensation in the form of a $10 gift card to volunteering participants. It can be said that offering a $10 gift card to research participants solicits research volunteers who are primarily interested in the compensatory payment and/or coerces individuals into volunteering. Taylor (2009) notes the significance of the timing for compensating research participants, as an “engagement strategy.” Taylor suggests that paying a research participant at the start of an interview, rather than at the conclusion, can help prevent participants from feeling “socially obligated” to complete the interview process and gives participants the feeling that a “social exchange” is occurring without making the participant feel as if he/she has to say the “right thing” during an interview (Taylor, 2009; p. 403; Willimack, Schuman & Pennell et al., 1995). For this research project, I provided the gift card at the beginning of each interview.

It was made clear to each participant during the review of the consent form that they could terminate the interview at any time, without questions asked. I also reminded the participants of this at regular intervals of the interview process and then asked their permission to continue interviewing them after various interview
segments. It is hard to imagine that subjects would have felt coerced when they could have ended an interview at one of several stages during the interview process. Additionally, each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, not counting the participants' transportation time to and from the interview location or the meet, greet, and farewell time periods. In fact, it was not unusual (and very surprising to me) for some participants to take a bus, drive in snowfall, or even schedule and reschedule an interview more than once (as two female participants did).

With that being said, if the participants truly felt uncomfortable with participating in the project or were only participating for the $10 gift card, it is unlikely they would have gone through great lengths (as some of them did) to meet with me, or they would have chosen to shorten the interview to less than 60 minutes when they had multiple opportunities to do so, considering the small compensation that I offered. Finally, most of the participants expressed a heartfelt "thank you" for the small stipend, in addition to gratitude for the chance "to talk" or "to vent" about their high school years. One of the organizations that allowed me access to research participants sent an email afterward, thanking me for the gift cards and mentioning how much the participants "really appreciated" the gesture.

Data Collection

I conducted thirty four semi-structured interviews over the course of six months with Colorado males and females between the ages of 18 and 24 who had experienced some form of truancy during their high school years.
Prior to each interview, students were screened for their eligibility to participate in the research project through email and telephone screening instruments (see Appendix E for the Email Screening Script and Appendix F for the Telephone Screening Script). Since the recruitment flyers contained my personal email address and home telephone number, most participants initiated contact with me by sending me an email or by telephoning my home number.

The participants who initiated contact with me by email were asked to telephone me or to provide me with their telephone number so that I could conduct a telephone screening. The email responders who provided me with their telephone number and the responders who initially contacted me by telephone were then screened by the prewritten telephone script used to determine eligibility as research participants. Those who satisfied the criteria by answering “yes” to the questions during the telephone screening were then scheduled for a day, time, and place to be interviewed; those who did not meet the criteria were read the prewritten script for responders who answered “no” to any of the screening questions. Email responders who did not provide a telephone number or who did not telephone me when given my home number did not participate in the study.

Participants who responded to flyers by volunteering during visits to onsite locations were screened for the participation criteria by reading the telephone screening script to them prior to beginning the interview process. If the onsite volunteers answered “yes” to the screening questions, the interview process
proceeded; if the onsite volunteers answered “no” to the screening questions, the volunteers were read the telephone script that indicated that I could not include them in the research project.

Because the screening questions were able to immediately identify non-qualifying volunteers, I had no problems with this process. However, two female volunteers were declined because they did not meet the age criteria (one was under 18; one was over 25); two males and one female were declined because they had not attended high schools in Colorado for the duration of their high school attendance years.

Once it was determined that a volunteer met the criteria for participation in the study and an interview was scheduled, I used the screening instrument for determining “decisionally challenged individuals” (see Appendix G). This process involved asking the subject to explain, in his/her own words, certain segments of the consent form to show their understanding of the written material. No participant was deemed decisionally challenged.

I also verbally read and reviewed the consent form with the subject, going through it paragraph by paragraph, and explained: that they could stop the interview process at any time with no questions asked; that any personal identifying information revealed to me would be kept confidential; that I would be using direct quotes from the interview in my research report; and that the interview would be recorded by a handheld recorder, with their permission. I then asked the participant
if they would agree to sign the consent form; all participants signed consent forms. Subjects were told that a copy of the signed consent form would be sent to them through U.S. postal mail if they were willing to provide a mailing address on an envelope that I supplied at the time of the face-to-face interview. All participants provided a mailing address on individual envelopes and were subsequently mailed a copy of the signed consent form within three to five business days of completing the interview(s). This was the only occasion where I came in contact with the participants' identifiable residence or mailing address.

After the consent form was signed and prior to beginning the actual interview, I asked participants to create a pseudo-name to protect their privacy and confidentiality in tape recordings and in research records. Each participant created a "pretend" name that is used to identify them in digital recordings and research documents.

As mentioned previously, I asked participants basic demographic questions on the Interview Data Sheet regarding their gender, age, race, the last grade they completed in high school, the names and types of the Colorado high schools they attended, and the Colorado city in which the high school was located. The location of the high school was important for determining if the high school was in an urban, suburban, or rural area.

The demographic data as a whole was also important for analyzing the interviews. Riessman notes that narratives are "multilayered, involving the historical
moment of the telling, the race, the class, and gender systems that narrators manipulate to survive and within which their talk has to be interpreted” (Reissman, 2002, p. 234). Connecting narrative text to its author in terms of demographic details moves narrative analysis beyond the limits of what is simply being said in an interview.

Once the demographic data was collected, I began asking a series of topical semi-structured questions that are categorized on the interview question sheets as: general information; time-use factors (what, when, where, with whom); and perception factors.

Although I was using semi-structured interview questions for my data collection, I felt it was important to use these questions as a guide to what can best be described as normal conversation. Fontana and Frey (1998) support this idea by noting how “the researcher is involved in an informal conversation with the respondent, thus he or she must maintain a tone of ‘friendly’ chat while trying to remain close to the guidelines of the topics of inquiry he or she has in mind” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b, p.67). This approach allowed for give-and-take dialogue and also permitted the participants to elaborate on certain topics through either their voluntary verbal expression of thoughts or my casual prompts or follow-up questions. In order to fully understand the lives, times, and perceptions of these former truants, it was important to allow them to speak freely, as necessary.
Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. I also took notes during the interviews. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, with the average interview lasting approximately 60 minutes.

As Rubin and Rubin note (1995, p. 122), “Interviews work best if you and your conversational partner are in a small room, maybe sipping coffee while quietly discussing an event or exploring some aspect of a culture.” The interviews for the Denver community college educational center participants took place in cafeterias, coffee shops or other public eateries located on, or within walking distance, of the campuses where the participants attended education classes. These settings provided a safe public place in which to conduct the interviews. The participants were asked to select the public location of their choice to facilitate trust, comfort, and ease of transportation for the subjects.

Participants from the Denver public alternative high school and Denver shelter/runaway center were interviewed on site in quiet, private rooms provided by each of these institutions. I received no responses to my flyers at the Jefferson County dropout and prevention center. Because of the distance between the Denver and Pueblo/Canon City areas (approximately 115 miles between Denver and Pueblo) and not knowing if, how many, or which students would be interested and available to volunteer for the study, I had to wait until I arrived at these institutions before I knew if any of the students would volunteer (and qualify) to participate after the point of contact at those locations had provided the students with my flyers. As it
turned out, several students did volunteer and qualified to be research participants on the two days that I drove from the Denver area to the Pueblo/Canon City institutions.

To maximize the reliability and validity of memory recall, researchers often use contextual elements to stimulate remembrances of a particular time period. Literature addressing the issue of autobiographical memory suggests that the use of these contextual cues can help promote memory recall of behaviors in a particular setting (Cohen, et al., 2005; Bradburn, 2000; Brown, et al., 1986).

For this study, I used such contextual cues and memory landmarks. Each interview began with asking the subject to “tell me how you spent your sixteenth [or eighteenth] birthday (what was that like)?” This allowed the participant to begin the process of mentally placing him/herself back in time, to a period when the participant was attending high school or was of high school age. Other contextual cues were presented intermittently during the interview process and included asking the participant to: “Tell me about the last high school you attended (what was it like there?)”; “Tell me about your hobbies when you were in high school (what did you enjoy doing?)”; and “Tell me about your closest friends in high school (what were they like?).”

Data Transcription

I transcribed the thirty four interviews myself. Reissman (2002) notes how researchers often delegate the art of “crunching text” to others because of the time and tediousness associated with transcribing data when, in fact, researchers should be
involved in the transcriptions or these oral accounts (Reissman, 2002, p. 249). Since I had prior experience in transcribing oral accounts verbatim and had the equipment to do so – and because I felt I could more easily recognize the significance of emotions and other nuances in what was being said – I opted to transcribe the data myself rather than delegate it to a professional transcriber. This also allowed me to transcribe portions of the data that may have been difficult to hear due to unfamiliarity with the conversations that occurred, participants who spoke English as a second language, or simply background noise that occurred during interviews in public locations. Each interview was transcribed within a week to two weeks of completing an interview; most of the transcribed interviews contained approximately twenty five pages of dialogue. As Bayens and Roberson (2000, p. 166) note, qualitative research is “language intense” and the importance of transcribing interviews accurately for data analysis cannot be understated.

**Coding of Data**

The primary categorizing strategy used in qualitative research is coding, whereby the researcher “fractures” the data into categories that allow for a comparison of the data both within and between categories (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78-79; Strauss, 1987, p. 29). Maxwell (1996) notes how the coding process can also involve “contextualizing strategies,” where understanding the data occurs in the context of “relationships that connect statements and events . . . into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79). A purely categorical (broad) approach or purely
contextualizing (situation or individual specific) approach is not nearly as good as a combination of these strategies for a "well-rounded account" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79).

Grounded theory is often denoted in literature as the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once an interview was transcribed, I created main coding categories pertaining to how the participants spent their time during periods of truancy (as mentioned previously, the time-use factors were indicated by activities, time, place, and people). Initially, these coding categories were noted on the transcripts themselves; later, the categories were transferred to Excel spreadsheets that I created and which allowed me to track emerging data within and between the interview transcripts.

Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 240) note how one "may see connections" through "hearing the meaning in the data." As I continued to collect data and transcribe the interviews, new themes, concepts, and patterns emerged which prompted me to go back and reread previous interviews for similarities or dissimilarities and thereby conduct an ongoing comparative analysis. The inductive analysis of themes and subthemes, of categories and concepts are discussed in a subsequent chapter (see Chapter 4, Findings).

At the beginning of this study, I explored the possibility of using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo or Ethnography. Since I have conducted and transcribed interviews in the past, I was aware of the rigorous and time consuming nature of the data collection and analysis
methods involved in this research effort—particularly since I had hundreds of pages of interview transcriptions to read and reread. However, in an effort to stay close to the data as much as possible and because the (often subtle) experiences of the participants varied significantly, a more hands-on approach was used.

The essential tools that I used were Microsoft Word word-processing software, Microsoft Excel spreadsheet applications, and colored pencils. The initial coding process of the transcripts involved colored pencils to denote the different themes and subthemes on the margins of the transcripts. Both Microsoft Word and Excel have word-search and text editor highlighting functions, which allowed me to search for specific words, to color-code specific data that was gleaned from the initial coding process of the interviews, and to add additional analytic comments as needed.

**Saturation Point**

Grounded theory was the research strategy for this study in order to gain a new perspective on the familiar topic of truancy. Strauss and Corbin (1994) note how a grounded theory approach seeks perspectives, patterns, and processes that are then linked to specific conditions and consequences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a). Glaser and Strauss (1967) previously highlighted how a constant comparative method using both theoretical samples and coding procedures can affect data saturation (Bowen, 2008; Glaser & Straus, 1967). The concept and awareness of data saturation is important because it “ensures replication in categories; replication
verifies, and ensures comprehension and completeness” (Bowen, 2008; Morse, Barnett & Mayan et al., 2002, p. 12).

For the current study, the concept of saturation had to be balanced with the purposive need to include an equal number of males and females, the desire to represent varying geographical locations, as well as the unpredictability involved with gaining entry to recruitment sites (and their willingness to continue to allow me access) and obtaining volunteer participants (the inability to predict who, how many, and when individuals would volunteer to participate).

As mentioned previously, I initially interviewed 50 subjects (25 males, 25 females). Saturation levels were reached at thirty four interviews (17 males; 17 females). As I conducted my interviews, I began to see common elements that appeared in the data, but often times with unicity that prompted me to continue interviewing. However, it was not possible (logistically) to determine an appropriate saturation level until after the more recent interviews had been conducted and these most experiences of the participants had been analyzed. This was due to the unpredictability of knowing which sites would allow me access and how many participants would volunteer on any given day, as well as the inability to analyze the data until after a series of interviews had been conducted (since the process of recruiting and interviewing often occurred simultaneously at sites). To do otherwise would have required me to turn away some of the (later) research participants during the final visit(s) to sites - simply because I may have reached data saturation in the
midst of these final sets of interviews. I felt this would have risked jeopardizing my relationship with the recruitment sites as well as the individuals who were aware that I was onsite (or returning to a site) and took the time and interest to volunteer for the study. In the end, the data categories were saturated; however, this was accomplished without saturating the study with participants (Morse et al., 2002). Any data that was acquired after the saturation point was not used in this study.

The interview process culminated in thirty-four interviews at saturation. I considered saturation as meaning data categories appearing repeatedly in interviews, but with no new information being provided. I would have liked to interview additional participants who were of varying races and geographical areas (my sample has an overrepresentation of Caucasians and urban settings), but time and money constraints were also factors (in addition to the already mentioned challenges).

Research Method Limitations

As mentioned previously (see the Sample Limitations section of this chapter), perhaps the most obvious limitation to my research was my sample. The most difficult challenges I faced (in terms of the sample) was gaining access to sites that would allow me to recruit subjects; finding a good range of truancy levels and experiences (without knowing if, when, and who, as research participants, would be available); and not knowing how accurately and reliably the participants would be able to recall their truancy times.
My inability to identify a method that would allow me to more easily access a broader range of ethnically diverse former truants across three types of geographical settings is clearly a drawback to this study. Additionally, the restrictions I faced in being able to access younger, current truants is equally, if not more, problematic.

And while memory recall in retrospective accounts has been addressed previously (see the Sample Limitations section of this chapter), it should be noted that this issue can affect the reliability of the findings, regardless of the precautions that were taken in terms of using contextual cues to enhance memory recall of subjects. It was not possible to confirm or disconfirm what the research participants relayed to me since I was not able to access their official school records for at least some type of verification.

Other limitations to the methods of this research include validity, reliability, and generalizability. Maxwell (1996) describes three types of threats to validity: description, interpretation, and theory.

Providing a valid description involves the researcher’s ability to describe what he or she saw or heard, with accuracy and completeness, in order to provide equally accurate and complete inferences from the data (Maxwell, 1996). Since I was the sole interviewer and transcriber for this research, descriptive validity was minimized as much as possible. However, it is always possible that I inadvertently led study participants to respond in interviews with information that I wanted to hear.
This threat was minimized by allowing the participants to speak freely in their
descriptions, explanations, and perceptions during our conversations.

Maxwell’s (1996, p. 89-90) second threat to validity is interpretation, where
"imposing one’s own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the
perspective of the people studied for the meanings they attach to their words and
actions” can cause questionable interpretations and validity for a study. This threat
to validity was challenging for me since a critical part of this research depended
upon my interpretation of the experiences and words supplied by the subjects. While
I could not eliminate this threat to interpretive validity, it was at least offset by the
fact that I had opportunities to ask specific questions (and follow-up questions) in
order to clarify the meanings that the participants seemingly attached to the words
they expressed and the actions they described.

Maxwell’s third threat to validity (theory) is considered “the most serious
threat” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 90). This threat involves ignoring discrepancies or not
considering the possibility of alternative explanations for the phenomenon being
studied. If I was merely describing some of the time-use truancy themes that were
the premise for this study, there would be less concern about threats to theory
validity. However, since this research includes connecting aspects of truancy and its
pathway to delinquency, my analysis and interpretation – if inaccurate – could pose a
threat to theory validity and may not be supported in subsequent, future studies.
Maxwell considers generalizability to be a "separate issue" from validity, but equally important and he discussed two types of generalizability: internal and external (Maxwell, 1996, p. 96). Internal generalizability pertains to generalizability within a group, while external generalizability refers to generalizability beyond a setting or group. For the current study, internal generalizability could be affected because the interviews revolved around individual accounts, actions, and perceptions that may or may not apply to similar individuals. However, it could also be said that if consistent themes, patterns, and trends surfaced during the course of thirty four interviews, the findings could be applied, at least at some level, to similarly situated individuals beyond the setting or groups of this research.

Lastly, the issue of researcher bias must be addressed. Maxwell (1996, p. 91) notes that although researcher bias cannot be eliminated, it can and should be acknowledged. Warren and Karner (2005, p. 8) use a camera analogy to describe researcher bias: "a picture is skewed towards the researcher's own values or beliefs." My own personal, professional, or knowledge-based experience in dealing with juveniles who are truants was a bias that I was keenly aware of from the inception of this study. In particular, I was aware of a bias based upon knowing juveniles who had experienced truancy and had not, for whatever reasons, been involved in more serious forms of juvenile delinquency. Referring back to Warren and Karner's camera analogy (2005), this research represents a snapshot of reality filtered through
the lens of an attentive researcher who set aside personal or professional biases in
order to relay as much of an objective reality (in this study) as was humanly possible.

Any of these barriers can prevent findings from this research project from
making inferences that can be generalized to the entire truant population.

Carl Leggo (2007, p. 194) writes:

"If we think about the prefix re in researcher, we understand that our
questing and questioning are always a returning, a turning again. This
is a ruminative process."

Given the practical considerations in truancy research, such as the difficulty
of manipulating experiment groups or exposing children under the age of 18 to
potential psychological risks, a retrospective design utilizing the narrative accounts
of former truants between the ages of 18 and 25 seemed to be a viable and practical
source of truancy-related data.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

It is useful to revisit some of the concepts that were found in the literature review and discussed in Chapter 2. The literature on truancy illustrates different frameworks from which truancy can be viewed. Three broad and primary categories of causes or contributions to truancy have been identified as family factors, school factors, and individual factors (NCSE, 2007; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Bell, 1994).

This study found patterns associated with all three of these primary frameworks. However, in attempting to address the basic research questions of how truants spend their unsupervised time during periods of truancy, what gender differences are present (if any), and what factors might lead some youth down a path to more serious forms of delinquency, the patterns and themes gleaned from this study have been classified based on these research questions.

The main themes that surfaced from the interview narratives are categorized in this chapter as: substance use factors; home environment factors; peer factors; school environment factors; time factors; gender factors; and delinquency factors—with noteworthy subthemes provided for some of these main categories.

Narrative analysis is an investigation of a story. As Riessman (2002) observes, researchers have several points of entry into the story for their analysis: the
text (Gee, 1986); the conversation (Polany, 1985); the culture (Rosaldo, 1989); the history (Mumby, 1993); or the performance of the subject (as he/she struggles to make sense of the experience that is being retold) (Langellier, 1989).

The narratives from this study were fragmented accounts of life during high school that revolved around times of truancy. What was revealed, however, was perhaps a much broader picture – one that, from both a thematic and theoretical standpoint – contained themes and patterns that often overlapped. As a qualitative researcher, it was my role to ultimately organize and interpret the accounts through the words, the text, the culture, the history, and the performance of the participants in order to address the research questions. The organization and description of the accounts is provided in this chapter; the interpretations of the narratives are provided in Chapter 5.

Substance Use Factors

A recent national survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that the use of illegal drugs in the U.S. increased between 2008 and 2009 to roughly 10% for 12 to 17 year olds. The level of marijuana use in this age bracket increased to 7.3% in 2009 (SAMHSA, 2010). The 2007 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), released by the Drug-Free American, notes that 73% of teens defined school stress as the top reason for their drug use, followed by: to “help them feel better” (65%), to “look cool” (65%), and to help them manage problems they are experiencing at home (55%) (Brown
Regardless of the reason for drug use, one of the most common themes that emerged from the interviews with the thirty-four youth in this study was the involvement in, as well as exposure to, substance use – particularly marijuana. The substances included marijuana, alcohol, other (more serious) drugs, and cigarettes. This corresponds to previous studies documenting the connection between substance use and potential adolescent behavioral problems (Henry & Thornberry, 2010; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, et al., 2002; Kosterman et al., 2000; Kandel, Yamaguchi & Chen, 1992).

For the current study involving thirty-three research participants, half of the participants – that is, eight females and nine males – reported smoking marijuana at least once during periods of truancy; three females and one male engaged in underage drinking at least one time during truancy; three females and one male referred to the use of more serious drug use beyond marijuana (such as acid, mushrooms, methamphetamine or heroin) during truancy; and four females and five males engaged in cigarette smoking while truant (see Table 4.1 for a summary of self-reported substance use during periods of truancy).

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1 For questions involving illegal activities where the subjects would be self-identifying, n=33 (17 females, 16 males). One male declined to respond.
Table 4.1 Self-Reported Substance Use During Periods of Truancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Smoking Cigarettes</th>
<th>Smoking Pot</th>
<th>Other Drugs*</th>
<th>Underage Drinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=17)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=16*)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=33)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:
Males (n=16) = One male respondent declined discussing self-reported illegal activities;
Other Drugs = Acid, mushrooms, methamphetamine, heroin

As noted in Chapter 3, at the conclusion of each interview research participants were also asked a series of short questions concerning whether or not they: 1) had witnessed a crime while skipping school; 2) had been asked to participate in a crime while skipping school; and 3) if the participants themselves had participated in a crime while skipping school. These questions were designed to help corroborate information provided in the narratives, as well as to explore the level of exposure to more serious forms of delinquency during truancy periods. The term “crime” in these concluding questions were defined for the participants as acts that involved either: 1) “smoking pot, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes” or 2) an illegal act that could be considered “more serious” than smoking pot, drinking alcohol, or smoking cigarettes.
In response to these short concluding questions, the majority of the thirty-four participants – that is, fourteen females and sixteen males – reported witnessing smoking marijuana, underage drinking, and cigarette smoking during truancy (see Table 4.2). Likewise, a majority of the thirty-four participants – thirteen females and fourteen males – reported being asked to participate in smoking marijuana, underage drinking, or cigarette smoking while truant (see Table 4.3). (A discussion of other "more serious" crimes is addressed in the Delinquency Factors section of this chapter.)

Table 4.2 Respondents Who Witnessed Peers Participating in Substance Use During Periods of Truancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance Use - Witnessed During Periods of Truancy:</th>
<th>Smoking Cigarettes</th>
<th>Smoking Pot; Underage Drinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (n=17)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males (n=17)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=34)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 Respondents Who Were Asked to Participate in Substance Use During Periods of Truancy

Substance Use – Asked to Participate During Periods of Truancy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Smoking Cigarettes</th>
<th>Smoking Pot; Underage Drinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (n=17)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males (n=17)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=34)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The prevalence and exposure to substance use during truancy, particularly marijuana, was significant for the respondents in this study. It was not uncommon for the respondents to imply during the course of the interviews that smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes was ordinary, typical, expected, and accepted forms of leisure time for adolescents – with marijuana being the substance of availability and choice. One respondent questioned if drug use was a crime, as when Amber noted:

Oh, yeah, all – they’d -- well, I don’t know if doing drugs is a crime...
(Amber, age 22)

*Marijuana*

Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal substance in the United States. According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2008), over 25 million Americans over the age of 12 had used marijuana at least once in the twelve months
prior to the NIDA's survey. Drawing upon the NIDA's 2008 *Monitoring the Future* Study, over 10% of 8th graders, over 23% of 10th graders, and over 32% of 12th graders had used marijuana at least once in the year prior to NIDA’s study (NIDA, n.d.). It is not surprising, then, that half of the respondents – a nearly equal number of females and males – indicated that they had participated in smoking marijuana during times of truancy. The various levels of involvement with marijuana use during truancy can be seen in some of the narratives. As Nicole, Jane, Sparks, Amadeus, and Bob seemed to indicate, it was a common occurrence:

My freshman year [during truancy], I — I smoked a lot of weed. I did. (Nicole, age 18)

...and then new people came to the school, too, that smoked pot all the time, so I thought that was cool and started being friends with them and ditching class so I could smoke pot with them. We would smoke pot, you know, we'd jam out to music or, you know, play guitar or something and then, you know, smoke some more pot... (Jane, age 20).

So, yeah, smoking a little pot here, you know. Somebody would bring the schwag [low-grade marijuana] and somebody would bring the pipe, somebody would bring lighters. We all contributed. And then we also had to have money for munchies. [When asked what his favorite thing to do while ditching, he replied:] Smoke pot. And just for the record, I actually am clean off drugs now. I graduated rehab on the 20th of last month. If I wouldn't have been so ignorant and so thick-headed and wanting to get stoned all the time, I probably would have finished high school. (Sparks, age 21)

Um, well, there was, like, pot... (Amadeus, age 18)

...we'd act like we're gonna go to school. We'd just go to a buddy's house and smoke [pot], play video games... yeah, just smoke pot and play video games. (Bob, age 19)
One of the respondents reported using marijuana as early as the elementary school years. Simon described how he “got in trouble for ditching” in fourth grade, followed by getting “in trouble” for smoking pot in fifth grade:

Fourth grade I got in trouble for ditching and in the fifth grade I got in trouble for smoking [marijuana], so I was expelled...yeah, smoke cigarettes and weed [while ditching]. (Simon, age 19).

Four of the research participants, two females and two males, described their use of marijuana as one of the primary reasons they ditched classes in high school, as noted by Stacey, Bliss, John #2, and Victor:

I would say most of the time the people that I was ditching with were people who all – who all abused marijuana. So, that was usually the – that was usually the central focus of attention. (Stacey, age 19).

[What she liked best about ditching:] (Laughter) I got to smoke weed for free. (Bliss, age 19)

Just went and hung out, smoked weed – that’s about it...Uh, with my friends...Yeah, that was the reason for the ditching. (John #3, age 20).

Yeah, there was always weed. That’s the only reason I really ditched, to tell you the truth ’cause I liked to get high and then go back to s school. Yeah, that was the only reason I ditched. I never ditched just to ditch, ever...I didn’t ditch unless there was weed. (Victor, age 20).

Four female subjects alluded to smoking marijuana as a daily routine, with some of these female subjects indicating that smoking marijuana was a part of making it to or through the school day, perpetuated by periods of truancy, as described by Sara, Denise, Susan and Bliss:

[During truancy:] ...I liked to go out and get high with my friends before class a lot...um, so yeah, I’d meet with my friends, and usually I
had a friend or two that would buy me cigarettes or something. Um, we would – you know, from there, find a ride or somebody who drove, and then we'd go to somebody's house and, yeah, we'd smoke pot. (Sara, age 23)

I’ve been smoking [marijuana] since I was 15 and so that – that was kind of like me – kind of like my release and stuff... So, I ditched – I ditched class with them [friends] and we went to the park... and we -- we smoked marijuana... And that’s when I started. (Denise, age 20)

When I used to smoke marijuana [during periods of truancy while at home], I – that’s when I would get in my own zone and do homework. I would clean, cook me something, I would take a shower, do my hair -- that was my time and marijuana was involved. (Susan, age 22)

If I didn’t have weed in the morning, it was no-go. I was not gonna listen to any of the teachers. I could not handle it... I'd be like, “You know what? I don't have any weed. I'm not gonna be able to get high before school, so I'm just not gonna go to school. I'm gonna go downtown and go smoke,” and then I'd come back that day and have a dime, you know? And then I'd be able to smoke in the morning and then I'd go to school 'cause I was stoned, you know? (Laughter) (Bliss, age 19)

Three female and three male participants discussed how smoking marijuana occurred during periods of truancy, but not necessarily as the primary reason for being truant. Perhaps Jennifer summed it up best when she said, it “wasn’t the meat” of truancy times:

Um, we would – you know, from there find a ride or somebody who drove, and then we'd go to somebody’s house and, yeah, we'd smoke pot... we would get high and fool around and do all the things that teenagers aren’t supposed to do but they do anyways (laughter). (Sara, age 23)

That [marijuana] wasn’t the primary reason [for ditching]. (Noel, age 23)
...it [marijuana] wasn’t the meat – it wasn’t the reason for the ditching. (Jennifer, age 18)

...once in a while. We weren’t, like, heavy users, but like once every blue moon, like, Eddie would come across some weed... No, we didn’t ditch school just to smoke weed... I mean, like – it’d be like, “Oh, you’ve got something to do. Let’s do that.” (Laughter) (Alexi, age 18)

Once in a while, yeah... not everybody smoked, either. (John #2, age 18)

I mean, we would go to the mall, stuff like that, and just cut around, see what we could get into. Hmm, smoke weed. Yeah, it’s just we all used to have it, so we all just eventually just started smoking weed. I wouldn’t say that’s the reason why we did it [ditching], though. Yeah, we didn’t just leave class and like, “Let’s smoke.” But, like, when we were out of class, we were just like, “Why not?” (Anthony, age 20)

Four males seemed to show less of an interest in smoking marijuana, even when the substance was available to them during periods of truancy:

Uh, my older friends – they used to smoke weed a lot. I was never – I never liked smoking weed, but they would smoke weed, I’d hang out, um, meet back up after school with friends, hang out there, then go skate again. (John #2, age 18)

Not during the day. During the days, you really do try to keep it low key. If you attract attention to yourself, you’re gonna get busted... every once in a great while we’d have a party and get really screwed up... and I’ve tried smoking pot... I throw up, I get hives... something in my body chemistry rejects it... (Killian, age 24)

You know, I really stayed away from partying ‘til I got out of high school and I’m hung-over right now (Laughter). (Tom, age 19)

No, I would just – no, no drugs... the first time I done drugs was in 11th [grade]. (Dad, age 21)
Other Drugs

Three of the seventeen female participants and one male participant made references to the use of other, more serious drugs (along with marijuana) during periods of truancy. These more serious drugs that were mentioned were described as acid, mushrooms, methamphetamine or heroin:

I wasn’t ever a meth head, you know? I never did enough to [pause] – I don’t know how to explain this. I never did it [meth], like, a serial event for me. It was occasional, every now and then, um, usually on weekends. Um, the only drugs I really ever did, like during school [truancy periods], were, you know, maybe smoke pot, did some acid once, ’shrooms [mushrooms] probably a personal favorite back in the day. (Sara, age 23)

It started with ditching ‘cause then I was like, “You know, screw this. I’m gonna miss class” and I’d take the Light Rail and go downtown off the 16th street mall and go get coke or heroin or whatever and so I started doing drugs... It was just something to do...But by the point I had actually stopped going to school I was so deep into meth...I stayed in the house for almost a year, did not leave, only to go to work. And I’d go back and smoke almost an eight-ball of meth a night... (Bliss, age 19)

Alcohol

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service Center for Disease Control and Prevention, juveniles between the ages of 12 and 20 account for 20% of the alcohol consumption in the United States, despite the fact that alcohol use by underage youth is illegal in every state (Morbidity & Mortality Report, 2009).
Underage drinking seemed to be less frequently involved in periods of truancy. More often, it may have been present in and around the school environment – and described as anecdotal observations from some of the respondents.

I think it was mostly pot...there was a little underage drinking going on. (Elizabeth, age 21)

I started drinking and stuff...there’s no dignity in that...there was alcohol and drugs at the parties and stuff – ditch parties was what you’d call them. (Denise, age 20)

I know some kids would sneak alcohol to school...a girl who I was involved with at the time was incredibly drunk, which I would have to help her to the door of the school. That was bad. (Mike, age 24)

I mean, I remember times we showed up, like, drunk to school and, like – like the teachers weren’t like – they didn’t really care. I mean, maybe they did, but – never towards me. (John #1, age 20)

Yeah, we used to drink every now and again [during truancy]. (Anthony, age 20)

...and that’s what got me in trouble the first time [at school]. I got caught with a bottle of, uh, a pint of Smirnoff. That was the first time I got caught drinking and that was, like, the first or second time I’d started drinking. And that got me in trouble ‘cause I was already on probation. (Mime, age 19)

Alcohol, definitely. Sometimes weed – especially when I was in foster care ditching classes. Like, even when I was in foster care I still did. I got in trouble for it, though, so I had to stop... (Viper, age 20)

It was like, I went to a party and I still smelled like alcohol the next day. I took a shower, brushed my teeth, but one of my friends spilled alcohol on my leather coat – I didn’t even know, I forgot about it. And I went in and my counselor wanted to talk to me ‘cause of CSAP and she asked me, have I been drinking. I was like, “Yeah, yesterday,” you know what I mean? Yesterday night. So they called the sheriffs, all this, and I took a breathalyzer, failed, didn’t pass it, whatever. So,
[they] tried to give me a ticket and the district white dud tried to say I
was lying and I was like, I wasn't ling, you know what I mean?
Actually, I drank a lot for being a little guy... (Simon, age 19)

*Cigarette Smoking*

The overall trend for cigarette smoking among high school students in the
U.S. has shown a gradual yet steady decline since the 1990s. According to the Center
for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2010 analysis of the national Youth Risk
Behavior Survey, approximately 46% of U.S. high school students had tried smoking
cigarettes at one time or another, 19.5% of U.S. high school students reported current
cigarette use, and 7.3% of U.S. high school students reported current frequent
cigarette smoking (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 2010).

Cigarette smoking was also another form of illicit substance use that occurred
among the research participants in this study. As Sara, Mike and Killian indicated,
cigarette smoking was a “coming of age” act related to their teen years and, in
particular, turning 18 when they could legally purchase tobacco products:

[On her 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday:] I bought a pack of cigarettes ‘cause I could.
(Sara, age 23)

[On his 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday:] I do remember going to a convenience store at
about 11:50 p.m. the day before [turning 18] and just milling about for
a good nine minutes, going up to the counter with my ID in hand,
ready to purchase a pack of cigarettes \textit{(Laughing)} and then, you know,
as the clock struck 12:00... (Mike, age 24)

[On his 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday:] I went out, uh, registered to vote, bought a pack of
smokes, bought a lottery ticket, and looked around an adult bookstore.
Basically, all the things that you’re allowed to do I went and did. The only
thing I missed out on was I didn’t go out and buy a rifle... (Killian, age 24)
For others (one female and four males), the cigarette smoking seemed to be tied, specifically, to periods of truancy:

And a lot of times it’d be like, “You want to go have a smoke in the car?” So, we’d go out and have a cigarette...and then the bell would ring and we’d be like, “We’re already so late, we might as well just not go back...” (Jennifer, age 18)

Uh, I was half-addicted to cigarettes then, so I had to go get my fix [during school hours]. You know, towards the end of the year when I was getting more into it, it was...I guess it was kind of a big thing... (Tom, age 19)

I would come outside during a passing period, uh, go to the smoker’s pit, have a cigarette with, you know, people I knew. And then after the cigarette, they would go inside and I wouldn’t. (Mike, age 24)

...just go and sit, smoke cigarettes, read [during truancy]... (John #1, age 20)

There was a bridge that was right over it, right next to the school – a footbridge – and it was right over the highway...I’d go on the, you know, little rock way and just sit down and watch the traffic and smoke for two hours...I – I’m not gonna lie. I’ve been smoking since I was about five and I still smoke...I – I’m addicted to cigarettes. It’s like a normal thing for me...it’s a routine...it’s – it’s not a habit. It’s a lifestyle now...it’s part of my life. (Mime, age 19)

Two female and three male subjects seemed to indicate that smoking cigarettes was an avenue for socializing with like-minded peers at school:

Um, so yeah, I’d meet with my friends [during truancy] and usually I had a friend or two that would buy me cigarettes or something. (Sara, age 23)

And then, like – or we’d, like, run errands that any of us [girls] had to do or we’d go downtown, too, and stuff...But a lot of it – it was all...
pretty fun, a lot of smoking cigarettes (*Laughing*)...We all just, like, loved smoking cigarettes all the time. (Paris, age 20)

There – our school is on a hill, so, like, we would be down – there’s an area called the pit. It’s the smoker’s pit...and, like, it would be right by the drive or the parking lot and we’d just sit there and we would just hang out and smoke [cigarettes]. (Nicole, age 18)

People could just sit around [at a Texaco station], smoke [cigarettes], talk [during truancy]... (Mike, age 24)

...usually me and my buddy, we’d leave and go sit behind my truck, which was – it was tall, blocked by cameras and [we would] smoke cigarettes...I’d probably attend about ten minutes worth of class, then leave, then go back for the last five, ten minutes. It’s pretty much more of a social thing... (Tom, age 19)

Home Environment Factors

Researchers have found that family factors can include any number of variables that play a role in a youth’s ability to attend and stay focused on school. As noted in Chapter 2, these factors can include: single-parent families, family size, internal family strife and stress, parental substance abuse, and ineffective parenting skills (Jones, et al., 2002; Baker, et al., 2001; Corville-Smith, et al., 1998; Bell et al., 1994).

In the current study, the nature and state of the home environment was another major theme that surfaced among the research participants. Home environment, for this study, is further delineated by the subthemes that seemed to appear in the narratives: (general) family issues; abuse/neglect, family obligations, sleep issues, and parental responses to truancy.
As noted in Chapter 3, contextual cues were used in this study to help stimulate remembrances of a particular time period so that reference points representing important events or locations in an individual’s life could help create “memory landmarks” and improve memory recall (Crisanti et al., p. 568; Sobell & Sobell, 1978). An overall sense of the home environment for some of the participants in this study can be seen when the subjects were asked quite casually (as a “memory cue” prompt) to describe how they spent their 16th or 18th birthdays, as exemplified in one respondent’s recollection of his 16th birthday (for a complete list of responses to birthday memory cues, see Appendix H):

[About his 16th birthday:] Uh, I came from a very dysfunctional family, so, uh, birthdays just kind of float by... I don’t really remember anything special about it. (Killian, age 24)

For one female and five male respondents (out of thirty-four subjects), “home” was a treatment center/hospital, group home, foster care, or the streets at either age 16 or 18:

[About her 16th birthday:] I was in a treatment center. Yeah, my mom brought in cupcakes and cake – my mom was always there, you know. She brought in cupcakes, cake, presents, brought movies in for all the girls, brought little bags in for all the girls of, like, little makeup kits, and little – so my mom’s always been involved, you know. And just kind of hung out and it was all right. (Laughter) It wasn’t the 16th birthday that most people would expect, you know? But it was a birthday, so I couldn’t complain. (Bliss, age 19)

[About his 16th birthday:] I was in foster care by then. (Viper, age 20)

[About his 16th birthday:] I got – I got, um – actually – actually, no, I was at Children’s Hospital for – in their psych ward [for threatening to
commit suicide]. And they, uh – they made me, like, a little cake, like – like the size of two hands holding out and, uh, they spelled my name wrong, but (laughter) um, and, uh, yeah that was it. ‘Cause my mom, she doesn’t celebrate birthdays. And so, like, she [mom] didn’t come for my [16th] birthday or anything. I mean, she used to when I was little. [When asked about his father:] I kind of stopped talking to him for a while because I was getting tired of his empty promises ‘cause, like, when I was little he did that a lot and he just started it up again. And I’m just like, “Don’t – don’t say you’re gonna get this for me if you don’t intend on getting it.” (Alexi, age 18)

[About his 16th birthday:] ...[I was living with] foster parents. “Til I was almost 18. From 15 to 18. [Because:] Uh, I got – I just got drunk one night and, uh, the cops came and I just got a little violent and they arrested me. And after that – from then on I was – I did nine months and then – in a juvenile home... [Later, he notes:] When I came back, me and my mom, we just didn’t get along, so we both decided, hey, it’d probably be better if I just went to foster care... almost a year after I got out of jail, she died...she passed away when she was – when I was 16. (Victor, age 20)

[About his 18th birthday:] ...when I was 15 I started committing charges. Well, I didn’t – I was on probation and then I kept revoked – getting it revoked, and then I got committed to the Division of Youth Corrections. And I got committed for zero to two years. I was in a placement where – it was like a group home, but a halfway house at the same time. And that’s where I spent my 18th birthday. (Mime, age 19)

[About his 18th birthday:] Uh, my 18th birthday I ran away from the system and I lived on the streets for three years after that. (Sparks, age 21)

Seven of the thirty-four research subjects (three females and four males) seemed to indicate a somewhat transient lifestyle around the time of the 16th or 18th birthdays – either residing on and off with parents, relatives, or simply living on their own near the time that they turned 18 years of age:
[About her 18th birthday:] Um, I was working and hanging out. I wasn’t in school, so...I was living on my own. (Amber, age 22)

[About her 16th birthday:] I think I sat in my room and cried ‘cause my mom forgot my birthday. My mom forgot my birthday a lot during my life...Like, she remembered everyone else’s, but when it came to me, just, like, she forgot about me...Yeah, I was the middle child, so...But I was moving from here and there ‘cause me and my ma – my mother wasn’t really getting along too good...And my two sisters – my older sister had already moved out from my mom kicking her out when she was 16, and she never came back. She went and stayed with her boyfriend and his family. And my little sister had moved back to Kansas City with my dad... (Susan, age 22)

[About her 16th birthday:] Um, actually I was working for my 16th birthday. I had a job – I worked at Popeye’s Chicken. And I worked that day, and I lived with my dad and my big sister and my little brother in a house, like, in the city – well, not in the city, but like in the city area...by my school. And, uh, like my – I hadn’t lived with my dad before and I started living with him when I was 15, like a year before... (Denise, age 20)

[About his 16th birthday:] Um, my 16th birthday I was living with my sister on the south side, probably partying. [She’s] a year [older]. [I was] ...drinking, smoking pot [for his 16th birthday]. (Bob, age 19)

[About his 18th birthday:]...Yeah, I got an apartment and things went downhill...I don’t want to talk about it. (John #3, age 20)

[About his 16th birthday:] Uh, I was living with my mom. I’ve pretty much been living with my mom all my life, on and off. I’ve moved around. I mean, I’ve been to – I was moving – or left to move with my dad in Mississippi and came back to here, and then moved to Keystone to live on my own [at age 18] and, uh, now I’m back here [with my mom]. (A.C., age 21)

[About his 16th birthday:] Uh, I moved around to different foster homes a lot, so – I don’t know. I didn’t like it at all... (Victor, age 20)

[During High School:] I was moved around too much in foster care and treatment centers. Seven or eight. I mean, ‘cause it could either
be 'cause I ran away, or my funding ran out, or Weld County didn’t want to pay that much money, or they just wanted to move me because they felt it was time...And I wanted to stay with one foster family that I really, really liked, and she [caseworker] yanked me from them...because X County didn’t want to pay the amount of money to the agency, and it was the only foster care that treated me like their own child. (Sparks, age 21)

Nine females and three males among the thirty-four research subjects indicated spending time with their immediate families – either enjoyably, with some mixed emotions, or simply without fanfare - for their 16th birthdays:

[About her 16th birthday:] Um, my 16th birthday I went to lunch with my grandparents and my mom and my little brother and my best friend. Um, we had lunch, they gave me gifts and stuff, and I opened up, um, this really round gift and it was a steering wheel over....And I go outside and my grandpa’s like, “I need you to park my car.” I was like, “The car is parked.” And he’s like, “Well, yeah, but I want you to move it up here.” I was like, “Okay,” so I go to his truck and the key doesn’t work and he’s like, “Try that car right there.” And it was my car...So, I was excited, yeah! (Nicole, age 18)

[About her 16th birthday:] My 16th birthday? I just spent it with my family. Um, I got my license and a car. (Laughter)...Yeah, so I celebrated with my family and we – like we did all the time in my entire life, and we would have dinner, presents... (Noel, age 23)

[About her 16th birthday:] I didn’t actually do anything. Um, me and my sister have the same birthday – we’re three days apart – ten years and three days. Yeah, and it’s really – and she’s...and so we just – we always have to celebrate our birthday together, (Laughter), so we just had – I had a couple of friends over at the house, and she did, and we just all went to my parents house and had cake. (Jennifer, age 18)

[About her 16th birthday:] My 16th birthday was actually very calm. I just stayed home and I spent it with family. I think I went to go see my grandma for my 16th birthday...[I] lived with my mom...Um, my dad isn't in the picture at all. (Kristy, age 19)
[About his 16th birthday:] Amazing – amazing because at the time I was living with my mom and with my brothers and sister, and she – she made me a big pie with all my friends, my sweet 16... (Cynthia, age 18)

[About her 16th birthday:] Hmm. Well, pretty much like it was any other day, just like any other birthday. Um, you know I – we – when we were young my parents would do the cake thing and, you know, presents and everything... But as we got older, eventually, you know, we would just say, “Okay, we want this for our birthday.” So, um, that year I got, uh, - I got – I requested an external hard drive for my computer – for my birthday, but, uh, other than that the day was not any different than any other day... I mean, I never had any parties really. I never – my parents never threw a party because of the obvious space problems and – everything. So, you know, I – just another – another day. (Stacey, age 19)

[About her 16th birthday:] No, it wasn’t special. It was, um – well, I was working a lot at that age. Yeah. Um, I was actually out of school – my birthday’s in June, so school was out. The summertime and my parents would usually let me have, like, a friend over or something like that. We went to a carnival in a neighboring town that was always held on the weekend of my birthday. Um, and then we went out to dinner – like Applebee’s or something. It was really – like, it was fun that my parents were taking the time to bring me out for my birthday, but it was kind of lame ‘cause I always thought I’d have this big, like, sweet 16 birthday party... My parents let me go – let me get my permit, my driver’s permit... Um, they wanted me to wait longer because we came from New England and all my brothers and sisters had to wait ‘til they were 17 to get their driver’s license. So, they didn’t think that it was fair that I would get mine earlier than theirs, so they made me wait six extra months. (Sara, age 23)

[About her 16th birthday:] Um, my dad took me out to dinner and then we actually came to the 16th street mall and walked around. Yeah [it was fun]. Yeah, we do the same thing every year. My dad and my grandma take me out to dinner and then we go to a movie or something afterwards. (Angela, age 19)

[About her 16th birthday:] Uh, my parents threw me a sweet 16, which I didn’t want. I didn’t invite my friends ‘cause one of my friends was,
like, 14 and she got pregnant, and I didn’t want my mom to say anything or judge my friends. Um, she [mom] told me it was just gonna be a small party and it turned out to be a sweet 16, which I didn’t want. And I was crying because I was not excited. That’s not what I wanted...And she took me to the salon. I – it took forever. I was there, sitting there for, like, three hours. I couldn’t even have breakfast. Hmm. After that I went to go take pictures. I was really mad because she wanted the pictures a certain way, I didn’t. (Rachel, age 25)

[About his 16th birthday:] My 16th birthday? It was just kind of, like, normal. I was just, like, at home, like – I had, like some family over, my brother and stuff...Just kind of had, like, a little family thing ‘cause I – I normally don’t have, like, big parties. (Amadeus, age 18)

[About his 16th birthday]: Just pretty laid back. Just had a party, birthday party...with my family, went out to dinner...Just like regular parties, birthday parties...Then I got in trouble. (Laughter) ...[for] fighting...[with]...uh, somebody that was acting stupid at my party. So, I got in trouble... (Simon, age 19)

[About his 16th birthday:] It was pretty good. I spent time with my parents, got a lot of presents, money – spending time with my – my parents, that’s about it. It was pretty fun... (John #3, age 20)

*Family Issues*

Areas of influence on school performance can include the experiences and influences of a youth’s home environment (Jones et al., 2002; Alexander, Entwisle & Kabbani, 2001; Baker et al., 2001; Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Further, research has often pointed to parental characteristics and traits, such as support, caring, warmth, and an overall closeness with teen children that can help foster a healthy development of youth (Roche, Ahmed & Blum, 2008; Bugental & Goodnow, 1998).
In this study, the participants’ overall home environment at the time the participants were enrolled in high school and experiencing periods of truancy can be seen in some of the remarks within the narratives. For three females and one male respondent (out of thirty-four participants), references were made to less-than-ideal conditions at home due to overcrowding and/or financial issues:

I didn’t spend my nights there [at home with parents] most of the time. Uh, I was – I – I made a really good friend at the time and, um, and her family became like my second family...most of this time period, even near the end of my school career, you know, I – I wasn’t at home as often as a normal teenager should be...Well, it was mostly because my parents – they had been married four years and they had settled into a two-bedroom townhome that they had planned to have for themselves. So, you know, I – I lived in a house, you know, of about roughly 1,000 square feet, you know, with four people and two animals my entire life and it was very crowded...And at that point in time, you know, I was trying to develop my – assert my individuality and – and so I figured it would be best done outside of the home. You know, it was mostly just because of the cramped environment. You know, I’d never known my own room. I had always shared my room... (Stacey, age 19)

...there was, like, ten of us living in a two-bedroom apartment...’Cause he [uncle] was, like – he has – he was going through a divorce, so he was very – he wasn’t stable at the time. And then his two kids, and then my mom’s boyfriend, my big brother, my big sister, my little brother, and me, and then one of our friends who was homeless, so we let her stay with us. (Denise, age 20)

...we moved around a lot. Before my parents got a divorce, they didn’t – Dad didn’t know how to keep money. He’d go and spend it and we wouldn’t have rent, so we’d have to find another place. Then he would spend rent there, and then we’d have to go find another place... (Bliss, age 19)

Switching, yeah...they [parents] broke up when I was, like, three...Yeah, went back and forth living with my mom and my dad, yeah. Just money problems, having to move, just different jobs that
my parents have...like my dad, he never graduated, he dropped out, he’s never had his own house until I moved in with him. He’s pretty much just been homeless all of his life that I’ve known him.
(John #2, age 18)

Nine females and seven males – almost half of the participants – commented specifically about the relationship with their parent(s) or families(s), mentioning the absence of at least one parent in their home life or indicating that their relationship with at least one parent was a direct source of frustration for them:

My mom’s not the most, um, external emotional person. I mean, that’s fine. That’s just the way my mom is. It was okay. Like, you know, I never doubted that my mom loved or cared about me – or had my best interests, but, you know, my mom’s not the type of person who showers you with hugs and kisses and – you know, told you regularly that she loved you. It was, you know [pause] – if I needed to talk to my mom, she was there. She would listen. And it’s just the way she grew up, too...she came from a very alcoholic family, you know.
(Sara, age 23)

...I was just pissed off about it [parents’ divorce], about the whole thing, with me – with both my parents and the way that they handled it, um, mostly because my sister and I – like, when they first got divorced they, like, wanted to make it really even and so my sister and I were going back and forth, like, every two days or even every one day and it was horrible. Um, you know, we were constantly losing things and it was just – it was bad. It was a very hard time, actually, and I was – I was really in the emotional dumps...It was a really weird and horrible sort of time for me...it’s all kind of a blur of pain, really...I’m remembering and having compassion for the 16 year old in me...’cause I was – I was a mess. But the problem then became that the relationship with my Dad was really strained because he suddenly felt like he had to pick up all of the parental slack he had been letting drop. He didn’t know how to cook and he didn’t know how to, uh, have a house with food in it and we didn’t know how to tell him what we wanted, so there was no food and it was all...he was trying to, like,
make us do stuff and we were teenagers. My mom was thinking she was finally gonna get some time to herself for the first time in 20 years so - so, I was really upset over all of that. I was really upset over all the relationship crap that was going on. It [truancy] was entirely an emotional turmoil thing. (Elizabeth, age 21)

[Why she is currently living with her sister:] Problems I had with my step-dad, so... Yes, there was a problem, but now - um, I am cool now... (Cynthia, age 18).

I lived with my mom my whole life when I was young and then I moved in with my Dad and I - when I went to high school. And it was different. I had to adapt a lot. You know, I had to - I had more responsibility, like, the woman's job was put on me, you know, all in one - all in one year when I was 15. So, I was just barely learning, like, how to clean and cook and all that stuff, and then juggle school and work... But then I had to make those transitions of, you know, of a little girl into becoming a woman. It was tough, you know? It was, like, kind of tough, you know, mentally and, like, emotionally 'cause my dad's very - he's very strict and he's very, like, intense, outspoken and very - like, you know how men are... (Denise, age 20)

... I would go to Good Times at 1:00 in the morning 'cause I'd have family problems, 'cause I grew up with family problems... I didn't have a good home life so I didn't have a good atmosphere to do homework in... (Katie, age 22)

I was moving from here and there 'cause me and my ma - my mother wasn't really getting along too good. And she used to always kick me out, so I used to go stay at my neighbor's house or go to my god-family's house and stay over there a time until she's not mad at me no more. Then I'd go back home... The time of the day I hated, though, was when my mom and her boyfriend got home... [I] tried to keep my distances as much as possible... (Susan, age 22)

I moved in with my dad when I was ten and I didn't see her [mom] the entire time I was in high school. (Angela, age 19)

My mom's in Mexico. Yeah, she lives by herself. Uh, they're [parents] - they're still kind of going through that [divorce] because they didn't want to get divorced. Well, one of them didn't, but I guess
stuff happens, so one of them figured, "You know what? I'm getting divorced no matter what. I'm done."... No, it started to happen when I — I was 16, 17... Me and my mom are like water and oil.  

(Rachel, age 19)

Um, I was living with my mom all throughout high school except for, we'll say, three or four months when she was in Georgia and I was living with my grandparents, so... I have one brother who lives with my mom... and then I have a brother and two sisters that live with my dad in California.  

(Nicole, age 18)

No, [I was living with] just my mother... And we were living, uh, in poverty and in a very, very crappy apartment... Because of our dysfunction, um, mostly I always wanted to spend my time away from her anyways. So, you know, I would disappear for days at a time. I tried to make it so that way she never knew where I was at. 'Cause I always avoided her at all times... But once again, dysfunctional family... I am actually not in communication with my mother... I try to avoid her at all costs.  

(Killian, age 24)

...I just didn't really get along with my stepdad, so... I was actually living with one of my friends [during high school]... Well, my mom got sick and she was in the hospital and so I came back to visit and, like, at school up there — 'cause I was doing an online program kind of like the one here, but I was doing it in Denver. And, uh, my mom got sick so I stayed for a while and they're [his uncle and aunt] like, "Well, you just might as well just stay up there. You can't come back." So, I was like, "Whatever," so I just stayed up there after that... Well, actually it was his wife that told me that. My uncle said, he's like, "You could come back," but I was like, "No, not if your wife's gonna act like that."  

(Bob, age 19)

Yeah, I was living at home with my mom 'cause I don't have a dad... I never met him.  

(Anthony, age 20)

I was, uh, living with a roommate [in high school]... Like, my freshman year I messed up my whole freshman year. But, like, when I was getting in the process of doing my job and I was getting this on track and I was living by myself, I had to get myself in school, I had to buy books myself... Like, I was trying to get in school, try to graduate, but
because of my family... It [school] was very important 'cause like I said, I wanted to graduate so bad. (Dad, age 21)

I was living in an out-of-home placement... and then I had transferred foster homes and went into a new school. I was having problems with the foster family in the home. And so I got kicked out of that foster home and taken to the new foster home and that's when I started a new school. I think with the new school I just didn't care anymore. So, I just lost interest. (Mime, age 19)

[I lived in foster care] 'til I was 18 – from 15 to 18... Uh, my mom passed away when she was – when I was 16... and then my dad, he lives in – he went back to Columbia... (Victor, age 20)

[I've been through] 33 different places [foster homes]. I have a brother named Damascus. I don't know how old he is. And I have a sister named Rachel. But I don't know them because I wasn't part of - I wasn't with them when I was growing up. [In the foster care system since he was 8] (Sparks, age 21)

Abuse/Neglect

Another area pertaining to the home environments appeared to be issues of abuse or neglect for a small sample of the research participants in this study. Although the participants were not questioned directly about abuse incidents in their home during the interviews, three females and three males (of the thirty-four respondents) indicated in their conversations that they had either witnessed or experienced some form of abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional) or neglect from a biological parent(s):

Yeah, I ran away from my dad's house 'cause he, uh, he got us a puppy, but that puppy – I guess he, like, pooped everywhere and stuff and made my dad mad. So, one morning he woke up and there was, like, poop and stuff everywhere 'cause we forgot to leave the dog outside. And he got mad and he, uh – he – he, like, threw the dog
outside. And I heard the dog crying and stuff and he broke the dog's legs. So, that made me really sad... My dad has a really bad temper... and I didn't really want to - it wasn't really comfortable. I couldn't really pay attention to what I had to do [at school]... I was constantly worrying about if I'm gonna make him [dad] happy or...

(Denise, age 20)

Well, see, also though, like I could talk to my mom right now, but I'm not allowed to have contact with my dad because we just went through some stuff on him molesting me and stuff. So, he's not allowed to have contact right now... and like my mom, she's still my mom, but like, she don't have a phone, so I can't really talk to her, really... Like, I still hate him [dad] for it, but in a way he's still my dad, you know, and I'm still gonna love him because he is my father... yeah, now he's on probation for ten years and he's gotta do some kind of classes for four years... (Jane, age 20)

... my parents divorced when I - their divorce was final when I was in the 6th grade, and my dad got custody of us. My mom was very controlling and obsessive, and my dad was very negligent and negative. So, my dad usually had no idea where I was, and he would always get really angry with me when I got my report cards. Like, he never hit me or anything, but he was very - both were very, very emotionally abusive. [Later, she adds:] ... if I would've changed anything or if I had the ability to change anything, I honestly wouldn't have been - wouldn't have lived with either of my parents through high school. If I had the ability to choose a family to live with, then I would've done that in a second and I know - I feel that everything would've been a lot better. (Katie, age 22)

...through all my life I’ve been in foster care because my mom had some neglect issues. I was put in foster care because of that. She was investigated, my dad lost custody, and I’ve been in and out of foster homes... When I started catching more charges and they started - they started kicking me out of school, I ran away. I was living in alleyways and stuff like that... I skipped all the court stuff because I was on the run... So, there was a lot of stuff that was happening that time during high school. (Mime, age 19)

I don't have a family. I was living with a foster family. I was being bound in and out of treatment centers. Uh, my 18th birthday I ran
away from the system and I lived on the streets for three years after that. I was a pretty angry kid when I was growing up...the ultimate purpose was because my mom left me and I was pissed off about it. She dropped me off into the system one day and said, "I'll be back next week," and she never showed up again. (Sparks, age 21)

There was belief in my house that there was abuse, but they [dad and step-mother] - no one ever talked about it. And my parents didn't want any more [talk] of it, so they put me in foster care just to say - just to prove that they weren't doing anything to me. And, uh, so I went into foster care for three years...I was in foster care by then [age 16]. I was in foster care my 16th year...graduated with a 3.8...just kept up on studying, kept on doing what I was supposed to do... (Viper, age 20)

*Family Obligations*

Another area reflecting family factors in this study can be seen in the respondents' perceived need to assist their families with home chores, child care, or provide some type of financial assistance during their high school years. Two female and four male respondents talked about the need to provide some type of assistance to their families as a connection, if not a direct reason, for their periods of truancy:

The rest of the time [truancy] had to do with my brothers. For example, like, after school I would have to go pick them up from daycare, clean the house, fix dinner because my mom and dad were working. By the time they would come home, the house was clean, the kids were showered, they were in bed, and dinner was ready...If I had to go take the kids to daycare - 'cause if I had to get up at 5:00 a.m. to get them ready to have them ready by 6:30 a.m...and after that I would run back home, get my stuff, go catch a bus, get to school, see what I was gonna do - if I had homework or whatever 'cause I was normally early to school. I would try to do my homework and then see what classes I was going to...So, I would get homework and then go home, clean, go pick up the boys and -- all over again. Yeah, because by the time my parents got home, they didn't necessarily have the energy or anything. (Rachel, age 19)
Well, my mom is sick. Like, she's sick. She's got MS, so I can't just leave sometimes and go to school and leave her at home sick all the time. I have to help her out with the - the housework and stuff, and cooking and stuff. I can't just leave her there. (Kristy, age 19)

...'cause normally - like, it started off as, like, I would be home from school because my mom would need help for, um, like with my other sisters and stuff and she'd be sick - and my mom was sick a lot. So, I was home a lot...I took advantage of that. I'd be like, "Can I please help you today 'cause I don't' want to go to school." ...It's like - it would be that she needed help at home 'cause like my step-dad would be at work, and my sister was getting home-schooled, and then I have my other three-year old sister, like, running around. So, she needed to, like, have somebody watch the little sister while she's, you know, home-schooling my other sister. (Alexi, age 18)

I - well, I helped them [family] babysit, I helped go do errands for them while they're here with their kids or just - just things like that. That'd be, like, aunts, my uncle, my mom and my grandma, my dad...You gotta - you gotta do it at one point or another, so I don't know. I mean, it's not like I ditched school just for the hell of it or just to be cool like everybody else. I had lots of reasons, to tell you the truth, yes...I'd probably just go for a class and - I don't know...It all depends who calls me or it all depends what they need or - it all depends. They [family] send, like, messages to the office, I'll call them to see how they're doing, or I'd get it [messages] from friends. You know, "Your Mom just called. She needs this, she needs that..." Yeah, I went to my mom's place, did errands for them, that's pretty much it. I'd been going through a lot of family problems...like, a lot. Like, so much when I was in high school it'd just been hell for me, so now I gotta catch up all the mistakes that my family put me through...Well, like - like I say, you know, there's lots of family getting into it, so I would like, do my homework, get finished with it, do half of it, deal with my family. Get back to homework, do half of it, get back with my family. (Dad, age 21)

Yeah, because she [Mom] used to tell me, she goes, "Well, you're gonna do something. You ain't gonna lounge around all day. You need to help clean up or do something, or go mow some lawns." So, I said, "Okay." So, I used to clean up around the house or go mow lawns... (Anthony, age 20)
No, no. My motivation for ditching was, uh, like I said, uh, working at Burger King and making money and, uh, you know, having a job and, uh, helping my mom basically, uh, pay bills, putting food on the table... Yeah, I was helping her with, uh, bagging groceries – you know, bringing groceries in the house and, uh, helping pay for a few bills. I’d help her pay, you know, different bills, water bills, whatever I could find to help her with... (A.C., age 21)

Sleep Issues

It is worth mentioning that several of the respondents in this study remarked about their sleep patterns, which – for some – had an effect on their ability to get to school on time, to focus on classes once they were at school, or the need to catch up on sleep during the day and often during times of truancy. Three females and six males of the thirty-four subjects commented about their sleep habits or patterns:

Yeah, I never slept at night. When I was older, I started sleeping at night, but when I was younger, um, I was up all night on the phone with my friends or just doing my own thing in my room, you know? I’d have my light off for a couple of hours, Mom and Dad go to bed, turn the light back on... I’m sure the drugs had a lot to do with it. (Sara, age 23)

I used to sleep in class ‘cause I wouldn’t get sleep at home from all the fussing and fighting. If it wasn’t me and my mom fighting or me and her boyfriend fighting, it was him and her fighting and all you here is doors slamming, stuff getting thrown around... (Susan, age 22)

And there were a lot of times I would just go home and hang out, take a nap, go back to sleep. I missed my first class a lot of the day ‘cause I just wanted to sleep in. (Jennifer, age 18)

I started sleeping through classes or not even waking up at home until about 11:00, noon. (Mike, age 24)

I slept in class even before I started truancy... I would sleep all day... I would sleep all day and I would sleep all night and I would wake up
the next morning and I’d be like, “All right, I’m ready for school. I’m gonna stay up,” you know? And go to call and I’m passed out...I’d go to class, the minute that I – just, I don’t know. The minute that something went off in my brain, “sleep,” I’d be like – I’d be sleeping. My teachers come up, “You need to wake up.” ...there were no drugs involved whatsoever. I just – when I get into a class setting, my instant thought is to sleep. (Mime, age 19)

I’d just sleep in – I’d sleep in and then I’d go eat breakfast upstairs. (Viper, age 20)

...even then I’d probably just, like, take a nap and I enjoy naps. (Amadeus, age 18)

If my parents weren’t there [at home], I’d just fall back sleep ...sometimes I’d just sleep at my house for a while, sleep in, just get up, make some food, watch TV, play my video games... (Bob, age 19)

So, I would just be sleeping ‘til noon and then show up for lunch [at school] and then just eat lunch and then just chill. (Anthony, age 20)

Parental Responses to Truancy

Compulsory school attendance in each state puts legal responsibility on the shoulders of parents or guardians to ensure that youth regularly attend school. Another family factor theme that surfaced in the interviews with the thirty-four youth were recollections of how the respondents’ parents or guardians did or did not impose consequences for the youths’ known acts of truancy during high school, and whether or not any consequences had a positive or negative effect on the youth’s attendance at school.

One female and two male respondents (the male respondents were in foster care at the time) indicated that although their parents or guardians were aware of the
truancy and had implemented some consequences, those consequences did not seem to have much of an effect on their school attendance during high school:

They [parents] were very much aware that if I wanted to do it [ditching], I was gonna do it, and the more they tried not – the more they tried to keep me from doing something, the more I was wanting to do it to break away – the rebellion thing. I mean, they were mad, they would ground me, but eventually grounding me didn’t faze me because I never watched TV that much... and I’d play piano and draw and write and pretty much spend all my time alone at home anyways, so what were they gonna ground me from? (Sara, age 23)

...they [foster parents] sent me to the school and then they restricted me to the house (Laughter). Rule – one of the rules – of their family rules there is that you were restricted to the house, as they said, or put in the house for a certain amount of time... I had music and stuff, so I mean, I was good (Laughter). (Viper, age 20)

They [parents] would always try to bring us back home, ground us, you know, just like regular parents, but even sometimes... they once tried to nail our window shut so we wouldn’t get out ‘cause we used to sneak out from our window (Laughter). So, then after a while we finally got out and then out again and they just, you know what I mean? They’d just call the cops over. We’d just run from them. Some days, they’d catch us, some days, they won’t... (Simon, age 19)

Five females and four male respondents seemed to indicate during the course of the interviews that their parents or guardians did not provide many consequences. In some cases, the respondents felt that their parents either did not (exhibit) care, could not control the youths’ school absenteeism, or had simply given up on trying to correct the truant behavior:

Well, the school, they would constantly call my parents and stuff, but I wasn’t living with my dad, so he – he had no control over that. And my mom, she just... was always fighting about us [her and her siblings] going to school or not going to school. And my – my big brother and
my older sister had dropped out... I don’t know... I don’t want to say they didn’t care; they just gave up on this. That’s what I’d say.
(Denise, age 20)

...but my mom really didn’t care anyway. She didn’t care if I ditched or not. She would say something about it, but she wouldn’t do nothing about it. She rarely ever went to any of my parent-teacher conferences – any of that... And once I hit high school, she was like, “I gotta work,” or “I gotta give my friend a ride and he’ll give me gas money,” or whatever. She wouldn’t go, so I couldn’t go. I couldn’t ask for help on my homework ‘cause my mom only completed the 10th grade... It [truancy] became a habit because I knew my mom – like, once I figured my mom wouldn’t get mad at me or, you know, really go off the wall, like, “You need to go to school,” and force me to do it, it was like – ‘cause there was no support and encouragement... Well, at the time – ‘cause when I was in the 10th grade I was 15. I wasn’t 16 and I kept telling my mom, “Mom, put me back in school, put me back in school.” She was like, “I gotta work, I gotta work, I don’t have time to do that.” I would say, “Well, why did you pull me out of school?” She was like, “Well, the – tomorrow, tomorrow” – she always put it off and put it off and put it off, so by the time I was able to put myself back in school, I was already doing my own thing, I just said, “Why not give up?”... But now that I’m older, I shouldn’t have thought or cared about how she felt. It was for me to do, and I didn’t understand that back then, but now I do. (Susan, age 22)

...when they take attendance, they notice who’s in class and who’s not in class, so then they report it to the office and the office gives a call to your house everyday for every class that you missed. My mom – she was like, “Well, if you – if you need time to study, do what you need to do,” you know? Because I was also working when I was 15, so it’s not like I could just go home and just do schoolwork... She [mother] didn’t want me to drop out, but at the same time, she didn’t want to help me get into the [alternative] program. She should’ve been fighting for me, you know, to go into the program...[but] she was a single mom and had to work a lot... I did [have consequences] from the school, but not my mom. (Amber, age 22)

...So, my mom was like, “you know, it’s up to you. You can either graduate or you can’t. If you want to go to class, go. If not, don’t. I’m not gonna make you do anything anymore.” So, I was like, “I’m
not gonna do this for another year,” so I decided just to start going to all my classes [on my own] and I graduated... Yeah, I knew that I wasn’t gonna get in trouble for it ’cause my mom knew I didn’t like the school and my mom’s the kind who’s like, “Oh, it’s okay. It’s okay,” you know? So, I just didn’t go to school. Like, she would leave an hour before I even had to go to school, so I would get up and make it look like I was doing something, but I would go hang out with friends at school and not even walk into the building once. And I lived right down the street... Yeah, I think I did it a lot because I knew I could get away with it and I wanted to see how far it could go before she said anything and she never said anything... I’m not blaming it on my mom ’cause it was my choice not to go, but I think I wanted to see what she would do if she found out that I wasn’t where I was supposed to be. I mean, I was there, but I wasn’t in the classroom... And I think I was always kind of looking for that discipline, like that, “Hey, pay attention” type thing. So I don’t – I think that’s what it was and I think I finally gave up on waiting for her, and I was just like, “No, I have to do it myself.” So, I – I disciplined myself to go back. Nicole, age 18)

I was about ten when I moved in with him [dad] and, uh, I was going to school there and he let me get away with anything pretty much. So, I didn’t – he didn’t really care that I was ditching. He didn’t even know, you know? He was just like, “Whatever.” She [mom] couldn’t do anything. I was too out of control. She’d just yell. And then the truancy cops got called on me... it took a while... um, about four months. (Bliss, age 19)

Well, they [parents] – um, they would get, like, upset and stuff, and I would just, like, tell them pretty much some of the stuff I told you. Like – ’cause school was getting, like, really hard for me. I just told them, like, it’s just getting hard for me and stuff. So after, like – I just kind of didn’t really want – I just didn’t really get in trouble I guess. (Amadeus, age 18)

At first they [my parents] would – I would hide it from them a lot. And then they’d find out, and then they’d get really mad. And it got to the point where, like, “If you’re not gonna go to school, we’re gonna take you. You better,” you know, “it’s your life.” And then – and then I just dropped out. And they – they were pretty pissed. So, they told me, “You’d better get your GED at least or do something,” you
know? And so I did that and they were – they were satisfied with that compromise. (John #1, age 20)

Um, she [mom] just screamed at me and tried to shake me out of bed, but I’m a stubborn guy so she never really could get me to go when I didn’t want to go...They – they told her and I – I just didn’t care. I didn’t deny it. You know, I wasn’t trying to lie about it. Pretty much, she [mom] knew I was ditching. (Anthony, age 20)

My foster parents didn’t really want to do anything ‘cause they’re too they were – they were too overwhelmed by what I’d be – that I’d do, so my past history – fire starting, things like that. They figured that I’d do something destructive, so they really tried not to punish me to the point where I’d be super mad...[truancy] was a tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny, grain of sand... (Mime, age 19)

Contrastingly, two female and three male respondents acknowledged receiving parental consequences for truancy and they commented about the (mostly) positive effects those negative consequences had for them. Additionally, at least one (male) respondent openly credited his parents with helping him to “succeed” in terms of eventually completing high school:

Oh, I’d get in, like, a lot of trouble. I’d get grounded, or she [mom] would – at one point she started making me give her money for every class I ditched and, like, she didn’t let me, like, learn how to drive, and I still don’t know how to drive, because she was like, “I have no problem with you having a car. I will get you a car. But I am not gonna get you a car when you don’t go to class as it is, and you already come home late, because it’s just like encouraging you to be irresponsible. So, once you show me that you are gonna go to class and you aren’t just gonna leave all the time and stuff, then maybe I’ll, uh, take you to driver’s lessons.” ...I think that – that – no, I think that makes total sense. (Paris, age 20)

They were irate. Um, in the beginning they’d be really mad if I’d ditched, and they – they’d be like, “Your grades are gonna slip.” And if I had below and A I was grounded until the next report card came
out, and there was no choice about it. I never was allowed to have bad grades. And then, um, towards the end they just kind of knew I didn’t care to be there, my grades were still good, I wasn’t struggling in anything. And they were like, “If she can keep her grades up and she doesn’t need to be there every day, whatever. Let her do her thing. She’s not – the cops aren’t calling me about her, so...” (Jennifer, age 18)

Yeah, she [mom], uh, just tried to make me go to school and I didn’t want to go...uh, just, uh encouraging me to go – telling me that, uh, it’d be best for my future if I go...pretty much encouraging me. He’s [dad] the main reason why I’m doing this high school class is ‘cause, uh, he told me that, uh, I needed to do something with my life besides, you know, working dead-end jobs...him and my mom have worked dead-end jobs all their lives and, uh, they want me to do better... (A.C., age 21)

Yeah, my – my dad ended up having to contact the school and go down there...my dad, yeah, had to go down to the school and talk to them and, uh, found out that I was gone. Even when we went to go see, I was gone that time, too. I was gone all the time. He got mad, took away the car, took away the TV, everything. It made me appreciate it more, appreciate the fact that I didn’t really gotta go out and get a job – right now, anyways. (John #2, age 18)

I – I got expelled and then just – they put me in a home school – homebound [at the library for] ditching and writing fake passes to get out of class...Like, extra chores at the house and they [parents] made sure I went to all my classes. They actually made sure I graduated. They were the ones that pushed me to – well, not pushed me, but helped me succeed.” (John #3, age 20)

Peer Factors

High school is a time when youth typically spend fewer hours with their families and more time with their friends. It is also a time when youth struggle with individual identity, peer acceptance, and finding sources of social support (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009; Hartnett, 2007). The outer world, away from the home and
particularly in the school settings, becomes the focal point of adolescents (Ardelt & Day, 2002).

It is not surprising, then, to find that social interaction occurred during times of truancy and seemed to be a major theme that surfaced in the narratives. Whether it was time spent with groups, a few close friends, or (for one respondent) family relatives, such as brothers or cousins, the opportunity to socialize and bond with peers seemed to be an important factor in the lives of the respondents and how they spent their unsupervised periods of truancy in high school.

Social Interaction

In the following examples, eight females and eight males – or nearly half of the thirty-four research participants – indicated that friendships and socializing were enjoyable and important to them for their periods of truancy, particularly within groups of acquaintances, classmates or friends:

‘Cause I’d rather hang out with my friends than go to school. (Angela, age 19)

I – I guess it was just to hang out with my friends. It – it was much easier than having to deal with the schoolwork and the teacher and not having my homework done, and it – it was just nice. (Nicole, age 18)

..well, socially I liked to ditch classes. If it was ‘cause I was behind, I was ashamedly ditching classes. But if it was a reason that I liked, I would be seeing some of my friends...That would be a – I guess my favorite thing to do when I ditched. (Katie, age 22)

...and then the other reason was because my friends – you know, my friends tell me, “We’re going to the mall. Do you want to go? I have money. I can buy you something. You know, we can go eat” and all
this stuff. "Well, okay, let's go" because, like, when I was living with my mom I just [have] house, school, school, house, you know? So, now when I was in 11 [11th] grade I have the opportunity to go see and then we went to the mall. Just go out with my friends and meet other people. That's all. Always with my friends; I don't like to be alone. When I go out, I don't like to be alone. (Laughter) I have a lot of friends. (Cynthia, age 18)

...you know, someone would have a different off hour than you or something and they would say, "Well, we're gonna go to lunch at such and such place," and you'd be like, "Oh, that sounds really good. I wish I had the same off-hour as you." And then you'd be like, "Well, I could just go" and you would join them. So, a lot of times it was that - that maybe not everybody in the group was ditching, but somebody was...I think that - I think that it's such a social thing. (Noel, age 23)

I was with other people. I guess it was kind of like if I'm in class and they're out there, I'm missing out on something more important with my friends. I was never by myself when I ditched - ever...I think that's how I thought about it then. I was like, "Well, what are they doing when I'm sitting here doing nothing?" So, yeah...I was never by myself when I ditched. (Nicole, age 18)

[What she liked best about ditching:] Just hanging out with my friends. (Kristy, age 19)

'Cause when I was ditching school, it was just pretty much all about my friends. Me and my friends, that's all I cared about, just my friends, nobody else. (Jane, age 20)

See that's - that's when I didn't like to ditch. When I didn't have nothing to do I would just go to school and find something to do 'cause that's where everyone was at anyways. I wouldn't just sit there [at home] all bored, you know. I mean, 'cause I tried that for, like two days, you know just - I just stayed home or I just went somewhere by myself, and it just didn't cut it. I didn't like it so I just went to school, yeah. (Anthony, age 20)

That's really it, and most of the time I just didn't go to class so that I could spend time with people...most of the time with other people...really, that's about it. It was just about hanging out with
people, making friends with people...appreciating other people...
(Mike, age 24)

Mostly, it was just to hang out with that group ‘cause, I mean you
know, when we were hanging out in school, we were hanging out of
school, and we were hanging out during vacation because we were a
support group for each other’s problems...the complexity of the group
is really hard to truly describe... (Killian, age 24)

I would consider them [youth he was truant with] – now, I mean – I
would look back at it and I would say they were, uh, acquaintances –
so, not really friends, but kind of friends...but I always tried to stay
around a group of people because if you’re in a people group, it’s less
likely the cops are gonna give you trouble than if you’re solo...
(Sparks, age 21)

...just go to school and be having fun, get too excited and all my
friends are planning on leaving. They’re all, “Oh, well, we’ll come
back, we’ll come back.” And then I’d just decide to leave, decide to
go with...usually with friends. Yeah, pretty much a social thing just
to...I’d be ready to go to school and go over there and everything,
but...Yeah, just friends at school, yep. (John #2, age 18)

Yeah, I just hung out with friends at their house. Yeah, with friends
usually...We went to a friend’s house and just smoked there, or in a
car...Mmm, I liked it [school] for all the wrong reasons. Hitting on the
girls, and just being able to start a party easy, you know, ‘cause you
could just by word of mouth you start – especially in X [small town],
you start – by Friday morning you get a party started Friday night, you
know? (Victor, age 20)

I was out hanging out with my friends downtown when we’re
supposed to be in school and, like, I just didn’t care anymore...it was
kind of social. Like, I never – the only time I ditched by myself was
when I was in middle school...Um, I didn’t like school, but I – I liked
the environment with my friends, so that’s why I went to school. Like,
it was kind of like the unofficial hangout spot. (Alexi, age 18)

...I went to just mess around – mess – so I’d basically go for the girls,
you know what I mean? Just like any teenager would go. (Simon, age
19)
In addition to groups (of acquaintances, friends or classmates), three females and four male respondents mentioned being truant with just a few select, close friends:

[Why she was truant more in one year than another]: I had a close friend my junior year, like, to spend time with, I guess. So, I had more things to do besides go to school. (Angela, age 19)

You know, I would say that there were – you know, I had acquaintances in this group and I had friends in that group...it was just a conglomerate of different people. (Stacey, age 19)

My friend – my best friend, X. We’ll smoke [pot]. We’ll do our homework together, we’ll sing, I’ll do her hair or – like, it was – the only thing negative of us ditching was the smoking weed, but other than that we did positive things. We surrounded ourselves with positive...We went home...I’m a homebody... (Susan, age 22)

Um, yeah, we would – like, for the most part, like, everyone, we would hang out with, like, we would normally just, like hang out at his [friend’s] house...’cause we were, like, best friends and stuff. We [laughter] didn’t really have nowhere else to go. [On ditching alone:] That would be just kind of boring...just by myself. (Amadeus, age 18)

Um, it [truancy] was mostly with one of my better friends and then there was a couple of girls that would follow us occasionally... (Tom, age 19)

Yeah, to be around my friends, get away from school for a while ...small group, just me and two other kids [males]. (John #3, age 20)

I actually really wanted to be alone...and I’d spend time with just like one or two people – one of my good friends. That’d be it. I’d never ditch class with, like, ten people. I never hung out with more than, like one, two people at a time. 1 – I never – I had one friend. (Mime, age 19)
Only one research participant, Simon, mentioned spending time with siblings or close relatives of similar age during periods of truancy:

...and then someone would just be – my brothers would be talking. Before you know, we’ll just – we’ll all just ditch, all just go to my cousin’s or somewhere, my friend’s house, which we know they would ditch, too. I was there with my – my cousins and they’d always have the girls come over and we’d just be chilling all together...I was always with my brother ‘cause I was so close – close with him. (Simon, age 19)

In contrast, four females and one male respondent (of the thirty-four research participants) discussed truancy as a time to separate themselves from some of the relationships and social interactions at school or as simply a preference for spending time alone:

I hated school. I hated high school. The other kids. (Paris, age 20)

[What she liked best about ditching:] Um, I didn’t have to be around, like, a lot of people – a lot of the classmates – worrying about everybody else, like what they think about me and stuff. I didn’t want to face – I wasn’t – I didn’t feel like, at the time – like, at the time I could face the challenge...I just didn’t have that – that frame of mind...I just – I just took the easy way out. I was just scared of boys back then ‘cause they [family] told me that all they wanted was one thing, so I stayed away from boys...plus, I don’t trust nobody... (Denise, age 20)

...if, like, people [at school] would get on my – how can I say it? – my bubble, I would just keep a distance. I didn’t want anybody in my bubble. My bubble was my bubble. Not even my friends could pop my bubble ‘cause there were gonna be gone...I don’t feel, like, completely attached. I don’t like to attach myself to things or people...so, it’s mostly me, myself, and I. (Rachel, age 19)

...I didn’t really have too many friends. I had maybe two friends and they were nice, good kids. I would just go – not go to class by myself
I wish I had the same off-hour as you.” And then you’d be like, “Well, I could just go” and you would join them. So, a lot of times it was that—that maybe not everybody in the group was ditching, but somebody was... (Noel, age 23)

...there were so many of us for the lunch periods, I’m sure I ditched the classes around the lunch periods so that I could – I know I did – so that I could be with my friends during their lunch period...Because even though we’ll all get screwed in our schedules ‘cause there are so many of us and we won’t have the same schedules, or I might have different groups of friends – maybe the having different groups of friends comes with being structured differently so you have to group with someone of your same lunch, and I don’t know. I – I’m social and I ditched to be social, I guess... (Katie, age 22)

A lot of times it was, like, leaving for lunch and it was really hard to come back after that. (Paris, age 20)

...just like – ‘cause we – whenever we would leave [during periods of truancy], like, we’d go out and eat so – better food. (Kristy, age 19)

...but I think just because it was right around lunch, so I wouldn’t go to the class before it if I wanted to go somewhere that’s further away for lunch, or if I wasn’t back in time I just wouldn’t worry about going to the class after lunch. (Jennifer, age 18)

‘Cause we’d go out to eat – yeah. We’d just ditch school and go out to eat and do what we wanted to do...and then I’d go to, like, two of the classes and then by the time lunch came I just didn’t go back...I would just stay out eating my lunch and stuff, and then I’d hang out with the guys and smoke pot. When it’s time for lunch, you go to lunch and you don’t come back (Laughter). (Jane, age 20)

...they [girls] like to go hang out somewhere you could go buy food for them at a restaurant... (Viper, age 20)

The only two things I looked forward to was lunch and science. That was it. (Sparks, age 21)

Um, just go somewhere to eat. That’s probably the best thing to do [when ditching]. (John #2, age 18)
...and then I would show up around lunch time, eat lunch, and then stay for the remainder of the day. (Anthony, age 20)

[His favorite time for ditching:] Lunchtime because, um...with the block schedule, there was always a chance that one of your friends had lunch after class when you had lunch before class, so you'd miss out on having lunch with that person... (Mike, age 24)

Most days we would go to our first class, um, our two classes and then be like, “All right, meet up at the square at lunch.” We’d eat lunch and then we’d get out...getting food was always fun, going to a restaurant or something. (John#1, age 20)

...everybody meets in the lunch room and we’re like, “Let’s go ditch! Everybody’s here. Let’s go ditch!” (Alexi, age 18)

Uh, just – I would go – it would usually be at lunch and if I didn’t get to smoke [pot] at lunch, then I would probably ditch the hour to smoke – to try to smoke... (Victor, age 20)

Like, around the afternoon was pretty good though because, you know, everybody got out for lunch and that was the best time to just sneak – sneak out of there. (A.C., age 21)

Peer Influences

Peer influences can have both positive and negative influences (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2009). Several of the respondents in this study discussed the influence (or lack of influence) that their peers had on them for involvement in truancy during high school years.

Eight females and three males of the thirty-four respondents indicated how current friends or classmates, meeting new groups of peers, or older peers may have impacted their choice to engage in truancy (see Table 4.4):
Table 4.4 Number of Respondents Indicating Peer Influences for Truancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Influences for Truancy</th>
<th>Indicated: Peer Influences</th>
<th>Indicated: No Peer Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As some of the respondents indicated in the narratives, peer influences for engaging in truancy ranged from meeting new and different groups that were already involved in skipping classes, to the desire to “fit in” and gain peer acceptance, to the feeling that they would be missing out on something important if they were in class rather than with their peers.

And so I knew that I’d be coming back to Colorado...I’d be going back to my old school and my friends would still be at the school. And my friends would still be expecting to have that relationship with me and I wasn’t comfortable with it anymore...I was a little more smart about it [drugs and truancy], you know? (Sara, age 23)

And I did it because I – I went to this new school and I met these girls and they were like, “Well – well, let’s go over here and let’s – let’s not be in school because it’s funner over here,” and – you know just that influence. I was like, “Okay.” I was just trying to fit in with – with them, you know? So, I ditched class with them and we went to the park. And we – and we smoked marijuana. And that’s when I started. (Denise, age 20)
Junior year I – well, the middle of sophomore year I started cheerleading, and so the cheerleaders kind of – definitely influenced me being with the older girls in cheerleading... but, um, so I think that just kind of influenced me. I made different friends my – my junior year. Um, I had a friend that was – we were really close and she was a year older than me. And she introduced me into more partying and the bad veer and so I ditched a lot with her. We didn’t care. (Jennifer, age 18)

I think that was another reason why I actually began to ditch. I was kind of an awkward kid and I didn’t really ever have very many friends. And then, you know, come high school, you know, I found my niche and, you know, I found, you know the group of people that – that, you know, I could associate with... I just – I blossomed – this new circle of friends you know, it – it was absolutely fantastic. I wanted to spend time in – in that, you know, in the group of people... If I wasn’t gonna be with anybody, I wouldn’t have ditched... it was because I started ditching that I started doing all these stupid things. I started letting my – my, uh, my standards slip, um, very much... you know, because their [friends’] priorities were not the priorities that I needed at that age, as a teenager. You know, their priorities were, you know, okay, get money, find someone over 21, get booze, find a house, let’s get drunk, you know? That – that, you know, that was kind of their mentality... (Stacey, age 19)

[What changed for her as a high school freshman when ditching increased:] Different crowd I was hanging with, met different people in higher grades... You’re trying to fit in, you know what I mean? (Jane, age 20)

One day these people are just like, “Hey, let’s go,” you know? “We’ve got gym next and then we get out after that.” What’s the point, you know? And I was like, “Okay,” well, then, ditched a class. And I was like, “You know, that’s kind of cool... it [ditching] gradually started building. (Bliss, age 19)

... just started hanging out with different people... I mean, they, like offered for me to go, but they didn’t really peer pressure me into it. (Kristy, age 19)
Because if you – if all of my friends had to be in class, I think we would’ve just suffered through it together. But if – you know, like I said, some of us were off and some of us weren’t, it was like – you know, it gave the temptation. It left that there on the table. (Noel, age 23)

It was a couple of classes and then [I] started hanging out with the wrong people – ditching more classes...yeah, meeting new people in class that ditch everyday...gets you in the mood. (John #2, age 18)

... I heard the older people [students] talking one day and I wanted to see what it [ditching] was like, so me and a group of friends, it was just like, “Let’s do it,” and then we went ahead and ditched a class. And that’s what happened... (Anthony, age 20)

Uh, just the influence of my – my friends... (Victor, age 20)

Two males, on the other hand, remarked about how they did not consider any influence from friends or classmates to be peer pressure for truancy, while one male indicated that friends or classmates may have actually provided encouragement to attend classes rather than be truant:

Like, it wasn’t just like one person trying to drag us all out here [to ditch classes]. (Alexi, age 18)

I think it was one of my old friends. He was like, “Hey, you want to ditch class?” and I was like, uh, “Where we gonna go? What are we gonna do?” He’s like, “Nothin’, just go chill.” I was like, “All right, I’ll go.” So, it wasn’t really peer pressure. It was just like me being lazy and not saying no. (Mime, age 19)

Oh, man. It would be hard to say because every once in a while I’d have a few friends in classes who would convince me to come to class...It’s kind of a back and forth relationship that fed into itself... (Mike, age 24)
Several of the respondents also discussed the process involved in getting together with peers for periods of truancy. Six females and eight males of the thirty-four research participants suggested that truancy times often were not necessarily planned far in advance, but rather occurred more often as the result of casual, day to day encounters with peers and spur-of-the-moment invitations or decisions throughout the course of a school day (see Table 4.5):

### Table 4.5 Number of Respondents Indicating Planned vs. Unplanned Truancy Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned vs. Unplanned Truancy Periods of Truancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicated: Planned Truancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No, usually it was like you’d run into each other beforehand, or you’d have a class together beforehand, so you’d wait outside before it started to talk or whatever, so you’re not just sitting in the classroom with a bunch of people who don’t like it...And the – so – and then you’d just be like, “Do we really need to be here? Well, the teacher hasn’t seen us yet” and we’d just leave. (Paris, age 20)

You know, I’d have it on my mind: “Gonna go to classes, gonna go to classes.” And then after first hour I’d be walking down the hallways and I’d see a friend and they’d be like, “What are you doing?” “You know, nothing.” “Are you going to class?” “Yeah.” “You shouldn’t.” “All right, what do you want to do?” It was usually their [idea] – but
there’s those friends that are just like, “You sure? No, I’m not sure, let’s go...”  
(Nicole, age 18)

My friend – my friend name Samantha, my friend Samantha. She was...she told me, uh, “You want to go, like, to the mall?” – something like that. I say, “Yeah, sure and so after school we going.” She told me, “No, we’re going now.” I said, “We’re going now?” “Yeah, you want to go?” I said, “Sure, yes...”  (Cynthia, age 18)

I would catch the RTD up to the school and then I would meet up with other people who weren’t going to class...pretty much it was always left to the individual. We would – we would ask each other, “Well, are you gonna go to second period?” “Yeah, no I’m not gonna go to second period.” So, I mean, we would just kind of talk about it as periods came and went...some people would come and go over the day, you know, and join and leave the group of people...  (Stacey, age 19)

...me and, like, a lot of my friends used to share lockers and so we’d just meet up at the locker. And then whenever we were all there, whoever was gonna leave – whenever we were all at the locker we’d just make plans and leave. Like, someone would be like, “Well, do you want to go to McDonald’s? Do you want to go here and eat? Do you want to go to my house? We can go there.”  (Kristy, age 19)

Any random time that I felt that I did not want to be there, I made my decision and left.  (Bliss, age 19)

I don’t think anyone ever just came up [with the idea of ditching]...we just did it...and, like, it’d be different people every time...and then whoever mentioned it at the time, whoever came...  (John #1, age 20)

Um, well, it wasn’t really like, “Who wants to do what?” It was kind of like, um, like, “We need to find something to do since we’re ditching a class.” (Laughter) So, it’s – anybody’s idea was a good idea. (Laughter) It wasn’t like, “Hey, come over here. We’re gonna ditch.” It was like the un – unspoken law. We were just like if – if there was somebody by the tree, we’d go...[or] we’d wait by the tree for somebody to show up and then we’d go hang out with them.  (Alexi, age 18)
...you know, we just did it anyways. No one really — no one really said, “Hey, we should be bad-asses and go ditch class,” you know. We just pretty much — you know, we’d be hanging out outside and the next thing you know, we’d leave...” (Tom, age 19)

...in the morning everyone kind of just waits around for school...for class to start and stuff and, uh, I would just like wait for, like, my friend to come. And then, like, right there we’ll decide if we wanted to go to school or not. Um, we’d just be like, “Hey, do you want to leave?” or something. (Amadeus, age 18)

No, they would usually invite me...I’d think about it and then eventually just decide, “Yeah, might as well take a break, come back.” Um, it just depended on my mood or how school’s going. (John #2, age 18)

We’d – we’d just go to our classes and then we’d ask to go to the restroom and then we’d ditch. (John #3, age 20)

Yeah, it was just a bunch of friends and we all just used to go. Sometimes some people wouldn’t be there, sometimes they would. Sometimes I wouldn’t even be there...I would just go to lunch and then sometimes I would be like, “Wassup?” See what’s up with everybody and then sometimes you just leave with different people and then some people don’t come, and then sometimes some people come. (Anthony, age 20)

I just – the days basically if I feel like going to school, I’ll go to school, but some days I’d be like, “Nah, I ain’t gonna go” ’cause I seen somebody I run into, “Let’s go here, let’s go” – you know what I mean? (Simon, age 19)

Contrastingly, one female and two male respondents indicated that truancy times were more planned than unplanned (see Table 4.5):

Yeah, we’d plan to hang out...Um, if I’d ask her [girlfriend] if she would be able to come up to Evergreen ‘cause she lived in Broomfield, and I’d be like, “So, you’re gonna be up” – ‘cause she came a lot ‘cause her mom lived up there. I was like, “Well, if – are you gonna
be up in Evergreen today?" "Yeah." "Okay, come pick me up from school." (Angela, age 19)

I'd say freshman year, no. Sophomore year, maybe. End of sophomore year, beginning of junior year, I would definitely [instigate ditching]. (Mike, age 24)

I would call them or we'd make plans previous days. We'd be like, "I'll meet you here at this time. Don't be late." (Laughter) (Sparks, age 21)

School Environment Factors

Several school factors have been identified as potentially contributing to truancy, such as: the size of the school; an unsafe or undesirable school environment; push-out disciplinary polices and approaches when attendance is poor; and the attitudes of teachers, counselors and administrators (Hendricks, Sale & Evans, et al., 2010, Spencer, 2009). Various school-related themes were identified in the chronicles of the thirty-four respondents for this study. This section highlights them and they include: cliques and different groups; fights, violence and bullying; school size, teachers and curriculum; classes and selective ditching; boredom; and school responses to truancy.

Cliqués and Different Groups

"There are cliques all over the place," said Meg Hains, a former Columbine High School student from Colorado. "You can't go to high school without cliques" (NY Times, 1999). Peer acceptance and status can have powerful effects on teens and their adjustment to the high school years (Staff & Kreager, 2008; Hartnett, 2007).
Two females and five males in this study mentioned various social groups and cliques, providing a backdrop to the high school setting:

I don’t know if we fit into any specific group. I think we were kind of, you know, friends with a lot of different people, but we definitely had our solid, like, core maybe, like five or six of us and we hung out a lot. (Noel, age 23)

[At an alternative school:] Oh, the weirder you were, the more cred [credibility] you had. There were kind of – it was kind of a reversal of the usual, uh, high school hierarchy where the weirdoes are on the outside because it was the school of the weirdoes. (Elizabeth, age 21)

I could be in every single one [groups at school]. I could be goth, jock, emo...I realize that I have goth friends, I have gangbanger friends, I’ve got emo friends, I got cheerleader friends... (Mime, age 19)

Yeah, it’s just a regular high school. Just mostly where, like, all the jocks and Mexicans go...yeah, everybody had, like, their own group...like all the jocks over here and all the cowboys over here and all the Mexicans over here...and if you knew Spanish, then you can, you know, talk to them...everybody there is all wearing, like, tight pants, cowboy hats, cowboy boots, and then the Mexicans – you know, I’m not, like, full Mexican. They all speak nothing but Spanish, you know? So, it was, like, kind of hard. Like, I would just basically keep with all the football players and basically all the jocks ‘cause, you know, I’m good at sports. (Simon, age 19)

...some in gangs, some in – some are gothic. Just whoever’s cool. It would vary. It was like a giant group of different people. Each one of us would, like, just switch and we’d all take different groups...Like, I’d hang out with the jocks in weightlifting and gym class, and then I’d hang out with all thestoners when I’m ditching, or everybody else, and then just whoever – and all the preppy girls. No guy wouldn’t want to hang out with all of them. (John, #2, age 18)

I was a drifter. (Laughter) I’d go between groups. I’m a friendly guy. I get along with everybody... Yeah, I’d be between groups. Like, my top friends, like one is a sports guy, another one is an emo rocker type,
one's a total freak metal head, stoners - these are all good friends of mine. They're all in totally different groups, but then all of a sudden you see us hanging out in the same care, you know? (Tom, age 19)

See, I - I hung out with everybody. I hung out with the druggies, I hung out with the preps, I hung out with the, uh - uh, just everybody. So, there wasn't really a group that I chose or anything. (A.C., age 21)

Five female and four male respondents relayed the difficulties often associated with trying to “fit in” with some of the high school groups - from either their direct experience or as observations of others:

I just didn’t feel like I fit in...I couldn’t relate to them [the other students]. Yeah, a lot of them were like jocks...and popular...and cheerleaders...and, like, people who were really superficial and people who were like really into sports...It was - it wasn’t so much you wanted to be around this group, it was more that you didn’t want to be around the rest of the kids. And a lot of times my friends wouldn’t be going to class either and, like, so I’d just be like, “Well, I want to hang out with you guys since you guys are hanging out. I don’t want to sit with those people...” (Paris, age 20)

I wasn’t surrounded by other kids or teens that were concerned about - that girl was concerned about her makeup, that other girl was concerned about “my boyfriend dumped me.” And the guys were concerned about throwing pieces of paper and spitballs all over. But, I mean, I couldn’t say it out loud ‘cause I kind of didn’t fit in. If I wanted to fit in, I had to do something stupid...they’re concerned about their makeup, teasing their hair while it’s break or while class is starting, and hairspray, and this and that...”Oh, my God, that guy likes me! He’s looking at me! Oh, my nails! Oh, my shoes!” (Rachel, age 19)

I was, like the lightest one in - in, like, a Mexican and African American school, so I was, like, the white girl. So, everybody picked on me, so I didn’t like it... (Denise, age 20)

...it’s very cliquey as far as like the kids that go there...there’s always kids that, like, don’t fit in and, like, don’t like – there were a lot of kids
that, like, didn’t have friends. Like, I did and I was lucky, but it’s not
good to, like, have that elitist thing. It sucks. (Angela, age 19)

...it was huge culture shock [moving to Colorado from the New
England area]. And people don’t like you ‘cause you have an accent
and you have an edge and you’re sarcastic. I got made fun of...people
didn’t understand me... I didn’t like it when I was older. There was a
lot of drama there [at school]. That’s why I left [graduated] early. I
wanted to get out of there as soon as I could... (Sara, age 23)

It was pretty rough. You know, I was – I had just come out of the
closet when I was younger... Yeah, there was only a select few people
that liked me for who I was, so those were the people I tried to stick
around. Granted, they were acquaintances ‘cause a couple of them
were jocks and they’re kind of – they’re meatheads, so they’re like,
“Huh?” One too many times with the football. It’s like, “Oops,
there’s a pole there. What’s my name again?” (Sparks, age 21)

I didn’t like the school environment. Like, me and my friends were
kind of outcasted in that area...It was about a group of about 15 kids.
Some would go [ditching], some would switch on and off... (John #1,
age 20)

I never really did much of that [partying] like, despite the fact that a lot
of my ditching was for social reasons. I was never really one of the,
quote, “cool kids” in school. I was just kind of there...So, really, when
I first went to high school, I barely knew anybody. It was pretty
difficult...[with] subcultures within the school. I never really got along
too well with the athletes, but I did kind of, um, get my own group of
misfits together who just never went to anything...I didn’t really like
them as – I didn’t really like them very much, as much as other people.
It was just kind of a matter of convenience at that point. (Mike, age
24)

I was a social outcast – uh, a smoker, and I was uncomfortable with
the team spirit because you’ve got the jocks, you’ve got the people
who were, you know, plastic perfect, and then you have the hicks, and
then you had the skaters, the stoners, and the freaks, so I hung out with
the skaters and the stoners, and some of the hicks also fell into that
same category...Well, I was a freak so I hung out with the skaters and
the stoners...but we had a group distaste for major school
functions... pep rallies, games, things like that – anything where the whole school got together... There was a local bar that we would go shoot pool at every once in a while, just to kill the boredom... Because of this group of people that I hung out with, nobody touched you 'cause they were, well, rightly feared because they're freaks, they're the stoners, they're the skateboarders. So, a jock isn't gonna come up and slam you up against a locker because he's afraid his hubcaps are gonna go missing from his big truck later on... so, he knows not to touch you. (Killian, age 24)

_Fights, Violence, Bullying_

The Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2003) reports that approximately one in twenty high school students miss school days due to safety concerns (deLara, 2008). Four female and five male respondents mentioned incidents of fights, violence or bullying while attending high school:

...I didn't want to be around the kids [at school] 'cause girls always started trouble with me in school because I was always the new girl... (Denise, age 20)

Each year it [the high school] seemed to get a little trashier and a little trashier and a little worse... I don't know how many times I saw fights in the hallway... There was a girl that was in the bathroom and she came out of the bathroom stall and this other girl grabbed her hair and threw her against the sink and just beat her – beat her up. It's just it got to a point where the kids didn't care. They didn't want to listen to the teachers, they didn't have any – they didn't feel like they had any reason to... each year, like the class of people was just less interested in being there and less interested in getting the education, and so I think that had a lot to do with it getting worse 'cause they just – it didn't matter to them. (Jennifer, age 18)

I started getting teased 'cause I was about 345 pounds, you know?... and then that was another reason why I'd leave school 'cause I just didn't want to hear it. You know, I'd get books thrown at me, pieces of gum stuck in my hair, I'd get candy thrown at me. Like, "Eat, fatty," you know?... then I started doing meth and heroin and
then started losing a bunch of weight (because it eats your body)...and I’d go back to school and everybody’s like, “Whoa, you’re getting cute,” you know? And stuff started changing and then, like, it’s just – I don’t know, it’s a big vicious cycle, huh? I don’t talk to females really because they are the roots of evil, as I used to put it, because they would be the ones that started all the drama and the lies...
(Bliss, age 19)

...obviously, you know, unfortunately it comes with other ethnic groups. You know, we started to get a lot of problems...there were a lot of drugs. Um, there was a lot of violence. There were a lot of gangs represented at the school...You know, there have been arsons, there have been – there’s been graffiti, there’s been animal mutilations. I mean, a lot of really bad stuff has gone on... (Stacey, age 19)

...there was some gang activity, uh, lots of fights, uh, lots of drugs – lots of drugs inside the school...it wasn’t like a high school you’d see on TV, you know? ...kids aren’t as crazy here [in one high school he attended], but at X [another high school he attended] it was just kind of like, I don’t know – “Let’s get out of here.” (John #1, age 20)

...like, once I got into my junior year of high school people stopped teasing me ‘cause, like, freshman it was happening and, yeah, I got teased a lot...And, uh, didn’t have to deal with, like, ignorant people trying to, like – just trying to show off for their friends, making fun of me. (Alexi, age 18)

I got made fun of in gym – gym class when I went a couple of times, you know. It just was – it – too much stimulation. Too much. Just too many people, too much stimulation, stuff like that...
(Sparks, age 21)

...it was becoming not – not a safe environment. Uh, it was, like, you’d go outside and there’d be riots all around there’ be, know you, a lot of trouble...well, yeah, kids fighting and then there was, you know, a lot of gang activity going down. More kids were coming in from, like, Denver or, you know, just all over. I mean, it was just crazy and, uh, it’s – you’d hear about, you know, people got stabbed across the park, you know. So I – I just – at that time I didn’t even what anything to do with that school...yeah, kept to myself, didn’t talk to anybody,
just, um, didn’t want much to do with anybody that had an association in trouble or any mixed stuff in that part. (A.C., age 21)

Like a couple of times where I got severely injured from being attacked, I got suspended, so that was another problem I had with the system. Both students get suspended for even being in a fight...You don’t want to travel in groups larger than three because, uh, even now they consider you to be a gang. If – if you see a group of teenagers in larger than three, you are immediately harassed by the police for being gang-affiliated. (Killian, age 24)

Two of the male respondents talked about how they themselves may have been the source of problem behavior, such as fighting, in high school:

I started realizing [in 9th grade] how much I hated school...I’d thought about it, but didn’t really have the ability to do anything about it...I...I don’t like school. I – I’m too much of a distraction in – in class. I’d rather be listening to music. I’d rather be talking to people. I’d rather be making fun of the teacher – doing something like that. Doing something other than working. (Mime, age 24)

...I kept on ditching school...I was a bad kid in high school. I had gotten in a lot of fights, I was, uh, the class clown, made fun of a lot of people. I was – I mean, I was – I mean, I got good grades, I did good in sports, but I wasn’t the nice guy to be around in high school...I was just really bad back then. Nowadays, I’m cool and patient and easygoing. (Viper, age 20)

School Size, Teachers, Curriculum

As noted at the beginning of this section on school environment factors, the size of a school can have an effect on truancy by detracting from the overall school environment or by adding positively to it. In particular, large schools can foster an anonymous presence for many students as well as their teachers (Cheung, 2009).
Three female and four male respondents in this study remarked about crowded schools or classrooms, packed hallways, or the difficulties of getting from one class to the next as a result of the school size:

...it was a big school and there were a lot of kids. (Paris, age 20)

...it was really big, really hard to get to your classes on time in the five minutes they gave you between classes ’cause...run from this side to that side...it was super crowded near the lockers and it just – sucked. (Sara, age 23)

Like, you could never get help because there wasn’t enough time in the class period. The teacher would lecture for 30 minutes and then you only had 15 minutes to do your work, and there’s, like, 45 to 50 kids in your class. There’s no way that she’s gonna be able to answer everybody’s questions. Yeah, it’s like, “Um, just go and try and figure it out by yourself,” you know? (Amber, age 22)

...first of all, it was really crowded. I think it has something around a 700 or 800 recommended maximum capacity...and there were easily 1,100 or 1,200 students there...made things difficult. Made it especially hard to – like, I don’t even understand how people used the passing periods to get from one class to another. (Laughter) ‘Cause – oh, if your last class was on the third floor and you were going to the first floor, you were gonna be late...and people would just congregate in the hallways, just right in the middle...big group, 20, 30 people, right in the middle of the hallway...made it hard... (Mike, age 24)

I mean, it was, like really overcrowded. I mean ‘cause it was just, like, an overpopulated amount of students there. And I guess it was, like, an okay school...they weren’t, like, really good with, like, paying attention to, like, the students. I mean, sometimes they’d even think that some students weren’t even there when they were there the whole day. I just know they can’t really keep track of everybody... (Amadeus, age 18)

I – I didn’t really care what my teachers thought of me...when I was in high school it was kind of like – you got, like, 1,000 other kids that
you can worry about, but I’m like – I’m just me... Yeah, I’m just, like, one of the – one of the few ants in the colony. (Alexi, age 18)

...I just didn’t like it [traditional high school]. It was too crowded, too many people, you know, doing stupid things and I just couldn’t handle it. (A.C., age 21)

Contrastingly, two females and two males remarked about some of the differences in schools that had smaller populations:

Well, um, pretty small – 300 kids. When they upped it to 350 I was kind of pissed, uh, ‘cause I thought we would lose a little bit of the – like the really tight-knit community that we had...like, everyone had their own group of friends, but you kind of knew everybody’s face, and you knew a little bit about them, not a lot. (Elizabeth, age 21)

...I mean, it’s kind of a small school, like, and the town’s really small. Everyone knows each other... (Angela, age 19)

[It was a] ...small school. Everybody knows everybody, or at least everybody knew me, it seems. (Laughter). My graduating class I think was supposed to be 98. I don’t think all 98 graduated...yeah, I liked it. I guess I do kind of like the small town environment. You know, you walk down the hallway and you recognize everybody’s face anyway, so it’s natural that someone’s gonna see you and be cool with you.” (Tom, age 19)

Uh, it’s boring. It’s a little town, very little town. Yeah, there’s nothing to do but get in trouble... [Regarding school:] ...‘cause you could just by word of mouth you start – especially in X [small town], you start – by Friday morning you get a party started Friday night, you know? (Victor, age 20)

Two females and five males discussed positive aspects of their high schools and in each case particular teachers were identified as having a constructive influence on the youth:
For the most part, I cared a lot ‘cause I had a lot of respect for most of my teachers, ‘cause, um, I got really lucky and, um, ended up really, really liking quite a few of them where I, like, had, like, relationships with them, like, outside of, like, the class, or I’d talk to them while I was at school...If I didn’t like a teacher, that’s how I knew I should get out of that class as fast as I can because...’cause I know if I don’t like a teacher, I don’t have respect for them, I will not go to their class

(Paris, age 20)

My – a lot of my encouragement came from one of my teachers in high school...um, I mean, I – I failed one or two of her classes, but we connected kind of on an intellectual level...And on the last day of school, she gave me a Target gift card for $50 and said, “I want you to invite me to your college graduation, and I want you to give me your first CD that you publish.” So, that always stuck with me...I mean, she’s had years of different kids since then, but it’s – it’s haunted me, like, as somebody wanting to encourage me, you know, like that I can do it and that I should do it and that I will do it. (Katie, age 22)

I was pretty popular. I was, um, good in sports there, I got along with a lot of the coaches, was in great shape, um...a lot of the teachers were cool. I mean, there was not really many times where I didn’t really like that school...it was a cool school...And I developed a great relationship with that counselor ‘cause he loved sports, too, so we’d go play sports together, we’d go run or something, ‘cause I used to run every day, back in the high school days, too. (Viper, age 20)

There was only one teacher I liked. Her name was Mrs. X. And was like me, you know, she has ADHD and all this stuff that I got, but she was just great – she was so cool. She was awesome. She broke things down so that way I could understand, while the rest of the classes that I started ditching ‘cause I didn’t like them, was “Okay, we’re gonna teach this style and if you can’t keep up, we’re sorry.” Mrs. X broke it down and made sure everybody was understanding things all at the same time, you know? She would have a slow but consistent pace, where the rest of them [teachers] were just like, “Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch on the chalkboard...and I’d be the only one at the end of the class – I only got like two or three things done out of, like, 15 or 20. And then they give me bad grades because I wasn’t paying attention. Well, it wasn’t that I wasn’t paying attention, it’s I couldn’t learn as fast as you’re teaching. (Sparks, age 21)
I mean, they [high school teachers] were just really nice and nurturing, and a few of my English teachers, actually, were great...there was a particular math teacher that I had a problem with and I actually went back to X [high school] after, um, I had been accepted into college and apologized to him for being such a stupid teenager... *(Laughter)*

(Mike, age 24)

I like it here [an alternative high school] a lot better. I mean, the teachers, they help you more than at regular high schools, there’s more one-on-one time. So, like, if you need help, like, they’ll come to you. There’s more instructors in that class than at a regular high school. There’s one teacher to, like, 30 to 35 kids in a [traditional high school] class and they don’t really take the one-on-one time ‘cause they just want to get their lesson done so they could get ready for their next lesson. *(Bob, age 19)*

Some of them [teachers] were cool. Like, there was a couple of teachers that were really cool with me that — that you could tell cared. But then the other ones I really didn’t care about. *(Victor, age 20)*

*Classes and Selective Ditching*

A number of the research participants reflected on how they were truant selectively — for particular classes — during high school. In the following example, three females and one male participant discussed how truancy, for them, varied depending on the level or year of high school:

... the different school years were different. Like, my freshman year I usually ditched class to go hang out with a boyfriend. Um, my sophomore year I would ditch class to have an extra lunch hour or a longer lunch hours. Um, my sophomore year I would ditch class ‘cause I wanted to go to work, make some extra hours, some extra money. I ditched less in my senior year because I wanted to graduate early... *(Sara, age 23)*

I had a close friend my junior year, like, to spend time with, I guess. So, I had more things to do besides go to school. *(Angela, age 19)*
Um, I actually started spending a lot of time by myself in senior year when I was ditching a lot, um, because among other things the way that my schedule was that year was... (Elizabeth, age 21)

... at the end of my sophomore year, the second semester, how it was laid out is that it was a block schedule, so you had blocks, um, one, three, five, and seven on—you know, every other day, and then the even-numbered ones alternating. And lunch occurred on periods five and six, and the classes you had during those periods affected whether you went to class before lunch or after lunch... And then when I went in for junior year I had five [blocks] off, but I had biology on [block] six, so suffice it to say I barely ever went to biology. (Mike, age 24)

Likewise, the following group of respondents discussed how they were truant for some individual classes, depending upon school schedules or preferring one class over another. Thirteen females and seven males—more than half of the respondents, but primarily females—described this form of selective ditching:

...certain classes I didn’t like, I would cut ‘em so I didn’t have to be there... (Jane, age 20)

Well, it depended on my schedule because there’d be, like, classes I’d be willing to not go to and classes I’d want to go to... ‘cause your classes were, like, ditching one class meant ditching for two hours instead of for, like, 40 minutes. (Paris, age 20)

A couple of classes, I mean, the—because I hate math. So, when I have my math class I used to—I just go walk and then I see the time and then I just go back to school for my next class. (Cynthia, age 18)

Sometimes it would just be for one period, class period, um, and other times it would be for maybe a handful of them...it would be a portion of it. (Noel, age 23)

...there were classes and teachers that I really liked that have really influenced me now, and there were classes that really discouraged me and I hated. (Katie, age 22)
Because on Wednesday, um, you would have, uh — you’d have one of your normal classes, a workshop class that only happened on Wednesdays, and then everybody got out at about 1:00 in the afternoon. It was like a half day every week. Um, so if you were gonna ditch something that would be a great day to ditch ‘cause you’re only missing one class... (Elizabeth, age 21)

Well, the thing with me was is I had to — I had to go to my first class, and then I had the rest of the day until, like, 3:00 ‘cause I had to come back for band practice or wrestling practice...my junior year I was drum major, so I couldn’t miss it ‘cause I was the conductor. Um, so I mean I — they were just more important to me than class... those are just things I cared about a lot more than school. (Angela, age 19)

Dance class I never missed at the beginning of the semester. After a while, I just felt like I didn’t have the energy, so — ‘cause one of the times I almost fainted and I guess it was because it wasn’t event breakfast. So, yeah, after a while I just didn’t feel energetic. (Rachel, age 19)

...the school system was divided up, uh, they had a block schedule system, um, so at the beginning, you know, I would try to only ditch, uh, blue day classes so that I would only miss, you know, half of my classes as opposed to all of them. And then that went on for about two months until I just decided to, you know, just — just completely give it up. I’m a violinist and — and that’s one thing that, you know, I wanted to even put half- half of, you know, effort into...If it weren’t for orchestra, I think I would’ve dropped out a lot sooner than I actually did. (Stacey, age 19)

I only went to classes I liked...I just always ditched my second period, World History. I never went to World History. The classes that I didn’t like, I would not go to... (Susan, age 22)

...but when I did ditch I would go to some classes and then not go to others, go out, do whatever, hang out with friends. And then if I wanted to come back, I’d come back. If not, just stay gone until the day was over and then come back to the school when my ride was there. (Kristy, age 19)
...I remember I started ditching that class [ROTC] because my cousin was in that class with me and, uh, our parents were fighting so they wouldn’t allow him to talk to me. So, it hurt my feelings, so I just didn’t want to face that. (Denise, age 20)

...and I was on varsity cheerleading my junior and senior year...Yeah, that took up - we had a three hour practice every day. That was a long day...and I was in auto. I loved cars - working on them, anything about them, I just loved it...That was one class I never ditched. I was always in auto. (Jennifer, age 18)

...and maybe every once in a while there was a class that’d give me an assignment that I – I thought it was worthwhile, so I’d go. (Laughter) ...Like, I did have classes that I would go to at least semi-regularly...I was picking and choosing what I felt like doing...I liked the opportunity to be in an establishment around a bunch of other people – you know, there was never really a dull moment – but I disliked the class curriculum, so. (Mike, age 24)

...the only real class that I had any interest in – was my choir class, and I rarely, if ever, missed choir. So, I’d show up for choir, um, and then I would go ahead ‘cause after choir was, uh, my woodworking class and I’d attend that because those were classes where you’re always moving forward. (Killian, age 24)

There were some classes that I really liked in high school. Um, wood shop – that’s kind of fun. I just started realizing a while a go – long time ago – that I – I can’t really do things by reading a book or hearing it from somebody. I need to do it with my hands and see me doing it in order to understand it. (Mime, age 19)

Well, there was one class, like, I showed up, got attendance and left. That was an agricultural mechanics class. And, yeah, so made sure that my presence was known and then when everybody went in the shop, me and my buddies would take off. That happened almost every day. It was just I’d hate the class that I was in, so I’d leave. I guess there was another class, my earth science class, you know, where I’d sometimes – a couple of times I faked a bloody nose to get out of class (Laughter) and – ‘cause I really hated that class. (Tom, age 19)
Yeah, I’d get ready to go to school and then – I always had PE my first hour or second, so I would always go to first and second ‘cause I liked playing hockey. Usually that’s what we did, and lifted weights, so I liked to do that. And then I would usually ditch, like, either math or – would be, like, third period and I’d ditch, and then come back fourth period...Yeah, I didn’t just ditch a whole – I never ditched a whole day. (Victor, age 20)

That’s why sometimes I would go, like, on tests, they [girls] would tell me that – you know what I mean? They’ll basically cheat for me for that, you know what I mean? ‘Cause they knew I would get all mad, but just these chicks that just used to like me or whatever, they just used to do it for me, so that’s the only time I’d basically show up, try to get a good grade even though I didn’t do the work. (Simon, age 19)

Some teachers really didn’t like me and I really didn’t like them, and I think that played a big role into me first starting to ditch. ‘Cause I really wasn’t ditching that much, but – until this one teacher, she kept losing my homework. I was trying to bring my grade up and she kept losing my homework, and that really pissed me off so I stopped going to her class. (Anthony, age 20)

**Boredom**

Boredom in school is not uncommon and there a number of reasons why it can occur. However, a recent nationwide survey of 81,000 students found that two thirds of high school students experience boredom in school on a regular, if not daily, basis (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2009; American School Board Journal, 2007). For this study, five females and six males indicated that they experienced some level of boredom during high school:

I got bored a lot at school...just a lot of it was boring for me, like the work was boring for me. That was a lot of it. (Kristy, age 19)

“...after a while I decided I wanted to keep going and it was – I don’t know. As long as it was boring I wasn’t gonna go... (Rachel, age 19)
“Sometimes, like, we’d study and stuff ’cause sometimes you’d have, like, all this stuff due and you’d be like, ‘Oh, no!’ And then you’d be like, ‘Oh, well, I can go to class and be bored and waste my time or I could go home and work on all of this stuff and get it done.” (Paris, age 20)

’cause it depends on – ’cause some reason why I liked my classes ’cause my teachers were nice, and the way that we did the activities, to learn about what they were teaching us. So if – if the class isn’t boring – ’cause sometimes if a class was boring a lot of the students will not go. Like, it needs to be more interesting. (Susan, age 22)

I don’t – I guess when – the classes that I had were so repetitive. You heard the same thing from the same teacher every day, and it was just like, “What am I gonna miss if I’m not here?” (Nicole, age 18)

...hands-down, I was not challenged by the curriculum...for the first grade I ended up in, uh, accelerated program called CHIPS, so I was all about that. It was a lot of fun. And then middle school came and I started finding that the curriculum there wasn’t as challenging as I wanted it to be. A lot of the time it was redundant...uh, because of that my grades started to slip a little and I started entering the, albeit clichéd, adolescent rebellious phase...and then for high school...I was definitely under-stimulated so I just stopped going. There was nothing in it for me. (Mike, age 24)

I mean (Laughter) – I mean, you know, it’s like you – there’s somebody behind you pushing you straight. You can – you can go forward, you can go backward, you can go left, you can go right, but you’re not pushing yourself. You’re just – you’re just – you’re just going in a – in a direction with a motor - momentum. The way I saw it, though, is that I was being pushed in a direction where I didn’t have to do anything at all. I could’ve just skidded through...I just got a piece of paper saying I can do something. (Mime, age 19)

Being outside was better than being in school. That’s another reason why I kind of ditched a lot, was because it was boring. Yeah, it was a pretty flat atmosphere. (Sparks, age 21)

It’s just – I was already tired of school. I was already fed up with it, so I – I just seen it as something more, like, redundant. Like, there’s no
reason why I’m going there. I’m getting nothing accomplished, wasting my whole day talking about bullshit like math or history or English or whatever, and I have all them skills already. I could write an essay. I could read at college level. And so I figured, like, why am I here? What am I learning? I’m not learning shit. I’m just wasting my whole day here for no reason. And then that’s when I made up in my mind and from then I just cut it up...I knew at the end of 8th grade. (Anthony, age 20)

I liked some of it [school]. I liked when I was able to move forward. I hated the review. I didn’t like most of my teachers. And I hated the system. I hated the setup of it, the way that it’s designed and the fact that the system is over 50 years old and has not changed with the progression of time. That’s how I felt. (Killian, age 24)

“And sometimes we’d get bored and call up a friend, be like, ‘Hey, you should ask to go to the bathroom,’ yeah.” I’m always bored (Laughter). You know, that’s why I ditched. I’d have nothing better to do. I was bored.” (Tom, age 19)

School Responses to Truancy

Efforts to reduce student absenteeism usually fall into several broad categories that include: individual school or school district program, juvenile court programs, or community based programs (NCSE, 2008). In this study, a number of students recalled school consequences for truancy that ranged from verbal admonishments from school officials, phone calls to the students’ homes, in-school detentions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and court-ordered sanctions.

Avoiding school consequences by hiding acts of truancy sometimes took creative efforts, as Jennifer and Killian described:

...I would just write a note and say my mom - I’d sign it, my mom’s name and they never noticed. They didn’t care. (Jennifer, age 18)
...and sometimes we'd screw with them [school guards]. You'd find a place to meet up, and then you have your diversionary – somebody who's going to class anyways; they're just gonna give you a hand. They do a quick lap, they take the long way to their class and get the security guards to follow them while somebody makes the break in that one opening that – that one shot. And it took about two weeks to study when, you know, the routine of the guards 'cause you've got two campuses and – you've got two campus guards. But we got it down to a perfect science of what time, when to be there, and just down to the step, how far you have to go until you’re off grounds. Once you’re off grounds, he [school guard] can't do anything, but the police can...
(Killian, age 24)

For eight females and two males in this study of thirty-four participants, pre-recorded automatic phone calls to the students' homes, in an effort to notify parents of school absences, were mentioned, as was most of the respondents' intercepting of the phone calls, to prevent parents or guardians from becoming aware of their school absenteeism:

Oh, yeah, the – they – when they take attendance they notice who’s in class and who’s not in class, so then they report it to the office and the office gives a call to your house everyday for every class that you missed. (Amber, age 22)

They [the school] would call my house and, like, I'd try to hide it from my mom...a lot of times I'd just catch it 'cause it was this automated thing and I'd answer it and I'd act like it was a telemarketer 'cause we had caller ID. (Paris, age 20)

Just them [school] calling. They didn't really – they didn't really do anything about it [truancy]. (Denise, age 20)

Um, and, um, I was the one who checked the messages at home at that time, so I just deleted all of the messages going, “Your student was not in school today.” I mean, she [mother] knew I was ditching school. She didn't know how much or how often. Um, a couple of times she actually encouraged me to say home 'cause I was so distraught...Uh,
well, this was – this was the period where I was calling myself in and – and, you know, I had come up with a pretty good excuse, so you know...They [school] did eventually call my parents but, um – um, X [school] was not as – the new staff and the new system that they had at X wasn’t quite as – as keen on – on watching out for – for that sort of thing. (Elizabeth, age 21)

They would call the house, but I would be there to answer the phone... ’cause my mother wasn’t there, she was at work...and by the time my mom gets home, I can answer the phone. (Susan, age 22)

Um, they would call every night around 7:00 and say that I wasn’t in certain classes and – um, I – sometimes I did [intercept the calls], other times I just went into the office and I was like, “We moved, here’s my number.” It was totally my cell phone number. Yeah, so I would get the calls, so I – my mom never really found out until my senior year, so... No, my freshman year she didn’t find out anything. They – I guess she just never answered the phone. (Nicole, age 18)

They’d [the school] call the house and I’d be there and I’d pick up the phone... (Bliss, age 19)

You – you get a call every time you ditch. Your – they say you missed this class or – but my dad worked a lot, so I was always able to delete that message. (Angela, age 19)

Um, yeah they called the house, like, every time. (A.C., age 18)

But I found ways of circumventing the [phone] system... (Killian, age 24)

Four female and four male research participants described little to no formal sanctions (or at best delayed sanctions) occurring as an actual disciplinary outcome from the school for their periods of truancy:

...I think there were a few minor, uh, disciplinary actions, but it mostly was, like, my teacher coming and talking to or something... (Elizabeth, age 21)
...the way it worked is they had to put it in a system and they’d never put that I was there when I wasn’t, but usually in order for a student to get in trouble, like, seriously, the teacher would after three times or something like that, they go to the officer of whatever and they put in a thing. But my teachers would never do that for me because they were all, like, advanced classes and I knew all my teachers really well. And, like, I’d go and talk to them and I was doing really well in all my classes... I’m, like, surprised, you know? ‘Cause I – I ditched all the time, and my friends who would ditch would get in-school suspensions and stuff... (Paris, age 20)

Never been suspended or never been expelled from school. Um, my freshman year they were going to suspend me because I had so many [missed days], and then if it were to happen again after the suspensions, I would’ve been expelled. But neither of them happened because I provide to them that I would start going to class. I had to do that for, like, two weeks. And then after I was done with that, I just stopped going to class again... Honestly, I’ve never been disciplined for my attendance problems, ever. (Nicole, age 18)

And then the truancy cops got called on me...before I was 16...It took a while...Um, about four months. I’m sorry, I don’t mean to laugh, I just think it’s funny. I did. I used to ditch so bad, man. (Laughter) (Bliss, age 19)

Well, I rarely got caught. I got caught a couple times, like, probably two or three times and then I sweet talked my way out of it...I had trash duty a couple of times...detention...after school. See, I worked with the – I guess he is the Dean, but I – I did the times and whatnot for the basketball games and stuff like that. So, we were good together, so he never really punished me too bad. I guess it didn’t really make that big of a fear if I did get caught ditching, so I was more willing to do it, I guess...It was kind of corrupt the way it was run. If you, uh – if the teacher saw that you were at least had a project going on in the class, then they generally give you your points... Yeah, see I – me and this teacher were good together, so they never really busted me too hard. (Tom, age 19)

...I seen that they didn’t really do anything bad to you. See, I was more worried about the consequences for doing it. There wasn’t really no consequence so I just did it ‘cause some days I just woke up and
was like, “Nope, I ain’t going to school today” and then I just didn’t go. That’s – that’s what I didn’t get. I’m like, “I’m not coming, so you’re gonna suspend me?” (Anthony, age 20)

But then, like – so teachers got kind of the – like, their – this mindset that, “Oh, Alexi’s helping his mom if he’s not in class.” So, they were like – so they’d mark me absent but they wouldn’t – it’d be excused... Well, on days that I wasn’t helping my mom I would be – I would be ditching class. Never, never formally disciplined at school for ditching. (Alexi, age 18)

Probably would’ve scared me more [if I had gotten caught]. (John #3, age 20)

For four females and eight males of the thirty-four respondents, formal disciplinary actions on the part of the school took the forms of verbal threats, signed contracts, in-school community service, in-school detentions, out-of-school suspensions, or expulsions from high school altogether:

...later in high school, when it became more of a pattern in some – for some class periods or something, I was asked to have a meeting with my mom and, uh, my counselor and one of the administrators, and we discussed going on an attendance contract, so basically saying if you did not make it to class and you were ditching, then you would do community service for the school of some sort. (Noel, age 23)

I – I can’t remember how many classes you had to be – miss to get an in-school suspension or a detention. But they did their in-school suspensions on Saturdays so we had to go sit in the auditorium for I think four or five hours on Saturday mornings... (Amber, age 22)

...so they had an in-school suspension... that was a little bit more enjoyable because I’d sit in my own little cubicle, get all my school work done before lunch, and then spend the rest of the afternoon reading, writing, and drawing... I liked it more than being in my normal classes some days... and they brought you lunch [if you didn’t have lunch money].... they couldn’t not let you eat, so they brought you
lunch. So, I kind of played that one, so when I was in trouble I made sure I didn’t bring anything, but, like, snacks... (Sara, age 23)

I got a five-day suspension. I didn’t go for ten days – no, for like 15 days and I chose to go back and they told me that I was gonna pay the consequences and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I was like, “Okay, whatever.” So, I guess it was – it was nothing. (Rachel, age 19)

...and as far as detention went, if I knew that there would be somebody in detention that I knew and was friends with, I’d go. Otherwise, I’d ditch detention because I thought it was kind of redundant to, as a punishment, ask someone to be somewhere for, you know, not being where they were supposed to be (Laughter). (Mike, age 24)

Having to come and make up work on weekends, so, like Saturday school...Um, then they [school] got to a point where they’re like, “We’ll take you to court.” That – that never happened, though, like...they said it a lot. (John #1, age 20)

Like, the first couple of years I’d always ditch and just leave whenever, and so I was gonna go back and get all my stuff straight, but they told me if I got in trouble for anything they were gonna kick me out. And I got written up for my eyebrow being pierced, my lip being pierced, my pants sagging, and my shirt being untucked...I was pretty mad. Uh, yeah, after you ditched 20 times in one class, you fail that class, so...so, if you had 20 unexcused absences they’d automatically fail you. (Bob, age 19)

I got ex – uh, suspended a lot and then I got expelled. That’s why I bounded around the schools...Friday was my favorite day to ditch ‘cause they couldn’t do anything until Monday. (Sparks, age 21)

Well, it [getting suspended] was for just ditching. It was also for being late and for – I don’t know, just ditching and for being late. (Dad, age 21)

Um, just having to do work around the school – sweep the hallways and clean the windows...yeah, like a detention, pretty much. (John #2, age 18)
Um, you know, what ended up happening is eventually people found me and I had been ditching classes so often that it was grounds for my removal, essentially...kind of - it was kind of a mutual thing, actually. (Mike, age 24)

...they’d [school] always threaten to send me away or whatever. And then they started leaving it alone until I started getting in trouble with the law...They were, like - they figured me a failure so they stopped. The way that I think I see it as, is that I was ditching classes and I’d consistently do it. The principal got mad and started threatening me with juvenile hall and called my foster parents. (Mime, age 19)

Two of the respondents in this study (Jane and Killian) reported having their truancy issues escalated to the juvenile justice system where the youths were required to attend court proceedings (one female respondent, Susan, seemed to be aware of court-related consequences for truancy):

Yeah, I was suspended from school for ditching too many classes and fighting...and missing so much school, I got put into court and had to go to court all the time...I had to do that, and then I got in the high school one - the alternative high [school]... (Jane, age 20)
And then I missed, uh - I think the final judgment was a full nine days, plus my previous truancies. They just kind of stacked on top of the other, but the final nail in the coffin was nine days. I was taken to court on behalf of the school district - for my truancy. And if you miss so many consecutive hours on such a period of time, then you go to a juvenile detention facility...Uh, the detention facility that I was sent to was for all juvenile offenders, so I was put in there with people who committed your basic misdemeanor crimes and probably some who committed felonies...Yeah, I was sentenced to, uh, 45 days in the correctional facility...And because I was such a low offender, they just figured, “You know, there’s no real reason for him to be in here. This is bull crap. We’re going to go ahead and flush him out of the system...” (Killian, age 24)

Um, I know ditching could get you in a courtroom. Haven’t been there, but I’ve seen people who end up in court...Some of them - majority of them had to pay fines, but I know a couple of them went to
jail, into juvenile, for not going to school. And after a certain amount of time that you keep getting tickets for truancy...you end up having to do the time... (Susan, age 22)

Time Factors

Studies involving youth and free time are typically confined to scheduled out-of-school time periods. One of the themes that surfaced in this study was the participants’ need for more “free” time than their schedules or lifestyles seemed to allow, resulting in the borrowing of time from high school class periods through the avenue of truancy.

Jobs and School

For three females and two males in this study, the combination of attending high school and working paid jobs, or simply the desire to work and earn money, led to borrowing time from attending school:

When I got to high school, at the beginning of the years I did really good. But when it started going to the end of the years, that’s when I started, like, ditching more and more and more and amore. Because, like, when I’d go to school I would just go to school and then right after that I’d just go to work, so I didn’t have no free time to myself. So, I started taking the initiative to make free time for myself. I wouldn’t go to the classes... (Denise, age 20)

I was kind of burnt out ‘cause I was working full-time – 40 hours a week of work and then 40 hours a week of school...and I just got burnt out and I’m like, “Yeah, I’m gonna stay home today, work on homework, watch some TV, sleep in, take a nap...my parents said that they were not gonna do anything for me other than what they had to. They weren’t going to, you know, give me extra money, um, buy thinks for me outside of birthday and Christmas, and it was pretty much I had to support myself [due to Level II Drug Trafficking charge]. ...I bought a car myself, paid for the insurance, bought my
own cell phone, paid for that – paid for everything. Bought my own clothes, my own toiletries, I mean, most of my own food. I had my own little shelf in the pantry and everything and it’s pretty much my parents’ say of saying, “Yeah, you’re gonna get your life on track a little earlier because we’re not gonna see you do this... I chose to work full time... I’d look at the other kids at school, I mean, like, “Yeah, mommy and daddy gave you everything. You know, I worked for what I have.” (Sara, age 23)

...always the work...because I was also working when I was 15, so it’s not like I could just go home and just do schoolwork. I had to go home and go to work and I didn’t get off work until 10:00, 11:00 at night. Then I’d have to get up and go to school again. (Susan, age 22)

Because I’m like, “I’m not – I’m never gonna come. I’m not gonna come. I’d rather just get a job and work,” and then so they handed me some forms, signed them, my mom signed them and... I knew at the end of 8th grade - 8th grade when I could finally just get a job. I knew I wasn’t gonna go nowhere with high school... because I figured I could just get my GED, start working, and that would be that... so, I figured the sooner the better. I was just like, “I don’t want to go to school anymore. I’m almost old enough to work. You know, I know I’m not gonna go all the way through high school, so... (Anthony, age 20)

...’cause at the time I had worked for Burger King, so my favorite thing was to basically ditch class and go to work... um, yeah, I’d go to work and, uh, then, uh, just not go to class the rest of the day... I was working about 40 [hours] to save up for a vehicle, uh, to do what I wanted to do that I felt necessary at the time, have money for whatever I wanted, you know, extra cash... (A.C., age 21)

Control Over Time

Another reason for borrowing time from attending high school seemed to revolve around the participants’ desire for individual freedom and the ability to have more control over the use of their time. In the following examples, four females and five males of the thirty-four participants expressed these sentiments:
[What she liked best about ditching:] Free time...I got off of school at 1:30 p.m. so if I wanted, um, time off sometimes I would just leave during lunch and not go to my class in the afternoon. Or I would sleep I and ditch first class 'cause I needed the rest. Or I would just take the entire day off to work on a project or a paper...or, uh, I just wanted to play piano all day. It was really like my junior year and my senior year that I was doing it to be alone, just relax...pull myself together...when I was older, it was just I wanted time alone at home to just get stuff done or, you know, relax – mental health days (Sara, age 23)

[What she liked best about ditching:] My own time 'cause on my own time if I helped someone out or something I would have money and I could go to Six Flags without telling anybody – no friends, no brothers, no parents, nobody. It was just my moment...basically, ditching wall all about me – all my attention, everything just for me. It was, like, good. (Rachel, age 19)

[What she liked best about ditching:] The freedom. The freedom from, uh, authority. It was...that was really the best part was just that, you know, there was a time in the day that I could have all to myself to do what with that I wanted without, you know, some adult standing over me telling me what I needed to do during that time, you know?...And, um, you know and I – I’d do all these cool things. I’ve made so many cool friends and so many awesome memories out of class, you know, why would I go back into class and have to wait another three years for my – you know, for – for – what am I doing this for? (Stacey, age 19)

And that’s was – was my – one of my main reasons why, when I go to school, I’ll ditch ‘cause I felt like that was my peaceful time, rather than being in class. I’d take that time since my mom and him [stepfather] weren’t home because they were at work. I would go home and that would be my time to myself...clean up my room and have my time...to keep occupied and just enjoy the peacefulness inside the house...best thing I liked about ditching school ‘cause when I would ditch, I’ll go home, was the peaceful time...I’m just all to myself. I can enjoy myself. (Susan, age 22)
Uh, if felt like – like the school – when I was in school, it felt like I was wasting time. Like, when I was out of school it felt like I was doing stuff that, like, I wanted to do and the way I wanted to...

(John #1, age 20)

[What he liked best about ditching:] ...I was able to be free. I didn’t have people telling me what to do or how to do it. I wasn’t real good on taking orders or people telling me what to do. My own motto is, “If you ask me to do something, I’ll be more than likely to do it. But if you tell me to do something, I won’t do it. I’ll do the opposite just to make you mad. Because I look at it as I’m a human being. I should be treated as an equal, now as a lower purpose. (Sparks, age 21)

[What he liked best about ditching:] That I didn’t have to listen to nobody all day. I just had either the house to myself or went over to a buddy’s house and just did whatever. [Time alone] – it’s relaxing and peaceful. (Bob, age 19)

[What he liked best about ditching:] That I could be by myself. I – I’ve realized over the years that I’m a very, very, very [pause] – how is it? I don’t like to be by anybody...I exile myself...and I like it...I’ve always been secluded. I didn’t like being around people at all...I’m not a people-person. (Mime, age 19)

[What he liked best about ditching:] ...a feeling of control. I was in control of my circumstances, not having their schedule running, not having to deal with other people around me. I’ve had a few years to look back on it [truancy]. (Killian, age 24)

For six female respondents, borrowing time from high school attendance was actually used to catch-up on class assignments:

...If I ditched a class it was not always but almost always because I didn’t have my homework done or didn’t have some paper done and it’s – it was embarrassing to go to class and have everyone turn in their papers and you can’t just...so I save myself the embarrassment and not go. It’s usually because I’m falling behind. (Katie, age 22)

Sometimes, like, we’d study and stuff ‘cause sometimes you’d have, like, all this stuff due and you’d be like, “Oh, no!” And then you’d be
like, “Oh, well, I can go to class and be bored and waste my time or I could go home and work on all of this stuff and get it done.” I got to, like, do what I want. I, like, found it really productive ‘cause I could do my schoolwork and my studying and stuff and I wouldn’t just have to go through it, like, go and reinforce it in class. (Paris, age 20)

I was a bit of a procrastinator on homework so if, um, I had not completed my homework...and I would ditch, you know, to catch up on it. It was more to get things done. (Noel, age 23)

I just ditched them just to have time to do my work...try to stay caught up, but then of course, when I’d miss the – the class, I’d have homework and missing assignments from when I missed class, so that – so that it just – piles up. (Susan, age 22)

If I didn’t do my homework, it was easy. Just don’t go and do it before you go back. (Laughter) (Jennifer, age, 18)

I just ditched then just to have time to do my work. Tyr to stay caught up, but then of course, when I’d miss the – the class, I’d have homework and missing assignments from when I missed class... (Amber, age 22)

*Progression of Truancy*

Borrowing time from school classes has its consequences regardless of the reasons; the debts eventually build up if the borrowing becomes a regular habit. Four female and seven male respondents of the thirty-four interviewees mentioned how truancy progressed and worsened over time:

Well, at first – at first, uh, it would be just one every once in a while. Um, I was going through a - a very intense emotional period. Um, and, uh, I was kind of – it was kind of a relief to start ditching...I was relieved to leave every once in a while...at first I only did when I, like, absolutely felt like I couldn’t bear it anymore...um, by the time – by the time I was in my senior year, I was almost consistently ditching. (Elizabeth, age 21)
...I would ditch maybe half a day at a time for a while. And then – and near the end I was calling myself in and I got away with that for – for a month and a half almost. And, um, so it – it really progressed very quickly from missing just, you know, a – a few classes a day to just being gone the entire day...when I got used to being able to do what with my time that I’d like, um, it was very difficult for me to work up the – the self-motivation to – to go back to the class. (Stacey, age 19)

Yeah, and each year it just got worse, and you could tell – each year, like, the class of people was just less interested in being there and less interested in getting the education, and so I think that had a lot to do with it getting worse, ‘cause they just – it didn’t matter to them. (Jennifer, age 18)

Started out with a couple of classes here and there...It was just a habit, like – ‘cause certain classes I didn’t like, I would cut ‘em so I didn’t have to be there, so. (Laughter) (Jane, age 20)

When I first started, it was just a class here and there...over time, yeah...I started sleeping through a few classes or not even waking up at home until about 11:00, noon. Once I was able to drive to school, it got worse... (Mike, age 24)

...when I got to high school, uh, I mean, I ditched class within the first week ’cause there was a pep rally going and I was not about ready to go to a pep rally – no way in hell. It did build up over time. Uh, at first I just tried to put a sincere effort into my classes, but whenever there was gonna be a big event, I’m out of there...It started to grow more as, uh, I started to feel that my classes weren’t worth my time being there. (Killian, age 24)

Um, I first started out as, like, sort of you can explain the addiction cycle where it starts out as just, you know, simple, couple of times every now and then it happens repeatedly. Like, I’d do it, like, once a week and then that’d be one class. And then the next week I would do it, like, three or four times, but three or four different classes. And the next week I’d ditch, like, the class, like two or three times. And then it got to the point where it’s like every other week I wasn’t in school. (Mime, age 19)
Yeah, it started twice a week and then it, uh, progressed to more of not – me not going at all... Yeah, it felt like a habit – habit towards the, uh – as I moved on... (A.C., age 21)

There’d be times when I would ditch whole days... Like a day, then I wouldn’t do it for a while. And there – there came to a point at the end of the year where I didn’t go past three periods in school, and I had seven classes. I would go to the first three and not go for, like, the last four whole months of school. (John #1, age 20)

...I’d wake up and, like, I wouldn’t even be, like, “Oh, maybe I should go to school today.” I’d just be, like – it’d be, like, more of an effort to go to school than to ditch, you know? Like, it’d be more of a drag to just go to school, like, “Ugh.” But if I was just ditching I’d just – it was just a habit... Just became a habit, I guess. (Bob, age 19)

It – it all adds up in the end. You could end up not graduating... (Victor, age 20)

Lost Time

For seven of the respondents – four females and three males – the accumulation of lost time through truancy in high school culminated to a point where the youth felt it was too late to continue down traditional paths to completing high school:

...I was so behind on my homework that there was no way I was gonna catch up... I then decided it was no longer – there was no longer any point and then I just kind of gave up on it all... (Elizabeth, age 21)

...I was already far behind and, like, I didn’t – I just thought I’d be lost if I went back to school. Like, I just thought – like, I was so far behind that I couldn’t catch up. Yeah, because there was times when I was ditching that I didn’t – and I was like, “I should go back to school,” and – but then these thoughts came in my head: “Well, if I go back, you’re already far behind and, you know, you don’t want to fight with your cousins, or you don’t want to” – you know? Everybody was
already, like, doing – like on the ball. Everybody was already on the ball... (Denise, age 20)

...so I told them since I was 16 at that time that I didn’t need anybody to, you know, I didn’t have to have parental permission to drop out ’cause I wasn’t gonna do four more years of high school. I’d be like 21 by the time I graduate...And I was like, “I’m not gonna – I’m not gonna be 16 and starting all over again...like, there – there was just no point to it. (Amber, age 22)

...I knew I was just so behind that there was no way of catching up, and I just decided to drop out...I was in the 11th grade. I was supposed to be a senior that year, so I knew there was no way of me catching up and there was no way of me graduating on time with my class. So, I just decided to drop out and come here [alternative high school] and get my school done here instead. (Kristy, age 19)

...consistent ditching in 9th grade – as soon as I hit high school. God, like, I’d probably attend three classes a day – and I had seven...like, some days we didn’t – like, we just ditched just ’cause that’s what we ended up falling into the habit of doing...like, routine to, like, “Let’s get out of here.” Like, and then when you try to go to your classes you’re so far behind, it’s like, “Why did I come here?” (John #1, age 20)

My caseworker wanted me to drop out so I could get into college faster...I was just way behind. Like, with my work and so I’d - I know if, like, I came back to class I would have, like, stacks of, like, makeup work to do and – that was like – that kind of, like, made me not want to go to class. (Alexi, age 18)

Well, see after a while I just – I realized that I – I, like, kind of messed up enough to where I couldn’t get my grades up...I couldn’t have made it up in time – to graduate on time with, like, everybody else in my class...or go, like, an extra year, you know? (Amadeus, age 18)

For three of the female subjects, the lost time from not attending high school did not have a negative, long-term impact because they managed to maintain good grades in high school, despite their times of truancy:
I always got pretty good grades, so, like, going to class for me, there really wasn’t much point, like, going every single day ’cause, like, I had good grades and I wasn’t gonna get bad grades and I knew that...high school was kind of a waste of time for me, I felt like. (Laughter) So, but that’s just me. (Angela, age 19)

I failed 9th grade and then I made up for it and finished early...’cause I realized – I realized that I hated being there, so I was looking at it ’cause I had a full schedule...and I was like, “Oh, if I keep doing this I can get out of this place early.” (Paris, age 20)

...I had a unique situation in that I think part of the reason that maybe I didn’t get punished more seriously would be because I was able to keep up my grades without being there, I guess...So, when I wanted to ditch it wasn’t an issue ever of, like, “Well, where am I gonna go or what else am I gonna do?” I could just go home. (Noel, age 23)

Gender Factors

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the truancy literature suggests that girls are just as likely to be truant as boys (NCSE, 2006). In this study, the research participants were asked to comment on their perceptions of any differences between females and males and how they spend their time during periods of truancy. A summary of the female responses is provided in Table 4.6, while a summary of the male responses is provided in Table 4.7.

Three of the seventeen females perceived girls as spending more time focused around some type of activity that allowed them to socialize with other females, as Noel, Angela and Jennifer illustrated:

Uh, I feel like the guys were always the ones who would be content to just, you know, hang out, just go to a park and sit together rather than, like, some of the girls it would be about, you know, “Oh, well, we should go to the mall or we should go to eat or something or...” – it’d
be more, like, focused around an activity...but I can't really think of a whole lot of staggering differences. (Noel, age 23)

The guys liked to, like – they liked to go home and, like – like, watch a movie and hang out at home, and I think the girls liked to go out and, like, do stuff at the mall and, like, do things like that. (Angela, age 19)

Um, the guys just want to go hang out at a house and – or sit at a park and just chill. Like, they didn’t have any big agenda, but the girls would be like, “Let’s go tanning. Let’s go shopping. Let’s do this. (Laughter) (Jennifer, age 18)
Table 4.6  Female Perceptions of What Girls and Boys Like to Do When Truant

Female Perceptions (n=17):  "Girls Like To..."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Times Activity Was Mentioned</th>
<th>Hang Out and Talk</th>
<th>Go to the Mall</th>
<th>Shop</th>
<th>Be with Other Girls</th>
<th>Eat out</th>
<th>Focus on an Activity</th>
<th>Smoke Pot</th>
<th>Don't Know; Most Friends Were Males, Not Females</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Both Sexes Like to Do the Same Things</th>
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Female Perceptions (n=17):  "Boys Like to..."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Times Activity Was Mentioned</th>
<th>Hang Out and Talk</th>
<th>Go to the Mall</th>
<th>Go to the Park</th>
<th>Be with Other Boys</th>
<th>Eat out</th>
<th>Go to Parties</th>
<th>Drink Alcohol</th>
<th>Smoke Pot</th>
<th>Go to Someone's House</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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Table 4.7  Male Perceptions of What Girls and Boys Like to Do When Truant (n=14)

Male Perceptions (n=14):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. of Times Activity Was Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Hang Out and Talk</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the Mall</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Out; Have Sex</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat out</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to Class &amp; Not be Truant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke Pot</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know; Most Friends Were Males, Not Females</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Sexes Like to Do the Same Things</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
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Male Perceptions (n=14)  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. of Times Activity Was Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hang Out and Talk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Sports</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the Park</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to Parties</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke Pot</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be More Outgoing, Show Off</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>
A few of the females did not feel there were significant contrasts between the way in which females and males spend their free time during times of truancy. However, two of the females implied that what was important was not the activities as much as it was having the two genders “together,” which made it “very social.”

Um, the girls tend to want to, like, hang out and talk and be social and listen to music, and the boys are more about, “Let’s watch TV, play video games,” you know...But when they’re hanging out together, it was very social. It was, you know, if the girls and the boys were together, they weren’t sitting around watching TV, playing video games...but when they all got together, that was when I enjoyed it the most. (Sara, age 23)

...women liked to – women like to hacky sack and men like to skateboard and, um, you know there were – but, oh, they would still be together. I mean, there would – there wasn’t really too much of a, “Okay, well, the guys are gonna go over here and do this thing, and the girls are gonna go over here and do this thing.” It was everybody was usually together. (Stacey, age 19)

A summary of the male responses are listed in Table 4.8. Two of the fourteen male respondents perceived boys as spending more time involved in more outgoing or more aggressive activities than girls during periods of truancy:

And the guys – they’re crazy. They’ll just do whatever, destroy anything, holler at the teacher and run, or whatever...Guys are more outgoing. (John #2, age 18)

Guys like to do, like, stuff that will, like, gain attention like go play sports or go show off or go blow something up (Laughter), or go play paintball or, you know, something – throw an M-80 in a mailbox, you know, stupid stuff, you know...Girls would usually like to go to the mall, they like to go shopping, they like to go hang out somewhere you could go buy food for them at a restaurant – you know, just the – the more mellow stuff compared to men, obviously, you know? (Viper, age 20)
Four of the fourteen male subjects who responded perceived the girls with whom they were truant as wanting to talk or gossip, go shopping, spend time on their hair or makeup, or as casual sexual partners:

Girls talk shit about guys and guys just don’t care. “Well, did you hear about this? Oh, oh, oh!” Guys are like, “So, what are you gonna do after school?” “Nothing.” “Cool, me neither.” Girls are like, “I can’t wait to get home. I’m gonna text you and talk to you all night, and we’re gonna make fun of this person. Did you know about that new girl?” Guys are like, “Whatever.” Go home, go to sleep. (Mime, age 19)

Girls would rather go home or go shopping or something like that, and guys would be like, “Let’s go hang out, let’s go to the park, let’s smoke pot...” (Sparks, age 21)

Yeah, they’re [girls] more like shopping and going out, their makeup, or doing this and that. We [guys] – we just, like, lay back. If we want to play something we’ll go play basketball, football, or just kick back and listen to music and play [video] games. Them [girls] are probably in the restroom, curling their hair, doing makeup, doing that kind of stuff. If not, they’ll end up going to the mall, getting clothes, having their little good time then come back and tell us about their stories and we tell them ours. Same as usual, you know? Just chilling... (Simon, age 19)

[I preferred] girls. Because I’m straight and single (Laughter). I get – (Laughter) and, uh – and, uh, also because – yeah, the other bad reason, because usually there’d be sex happening and that’s be another reason [for truancy]. I’d go and have sex...essentially with, um, the girls... I mean, there was a couple of girls I knew that were good, um – I wouldn’t say they’re girlfriends, I’d say they’re more – how do I was this in an appropriate way? Like, more butt buddies, you know? Kind of like more sex buddies? (Viper, age 20)

Three of the fourteen male respondents mentioned that girls were more reluctant to engage in truancy because the females were perceived as having more
fears of getting caught or had exhibited a strong(er) desire to complete high school than perhaps the males:

Like, if we did ditch with girls, they’d just — I don’t know, they wouldn’t play the video games. I guess they weren’t up on video games, but they’d still smoke [marijuana] with us. We’d watch TV, listen to music... A lot of the girls we knew were all about school. Like, they wanted to graduate so they didn’t really ditch. (Bob, age 19)

Yeah, the girls don’t want to get caught. They usually don’t want to go. And the guys — they’re crazy. They’ll just do whatever, destroy anything, holler at the teacher and run, or whatever... Guys are more outgoing. (John #2, age 18)

Uh, girls are more — I think a lot less girls ditch and when they do ditch, they usually don’t go smoke weed. They just go home for the day to go hang out or go to sleep... basically, that’s what I saw. (Victor, age 20)

Six of the fourteen male respondents indicated that although girls and boys may or may not enjoy the same activities during periods of truancy, the fact that the two sexes were together in a social situation was what mattered the most, as illustrated by John #1 and Mike:

We would all kind of just hang out and do the same thing. Like, say if we were with the girls, we’d be like, “We want to go skate.” And the girls would be like, “All right.” And they’d go sit and watch us skate. So, they wouldn’t want to go skate, but they would want to go and hang out with us while we skated, so that was — that — I mean, not really the same thing, but kind of the same thing — whatever we were doing... (John #1, age 20)

...around that time, hormones are going crazy, too, so you know, even if the guys aren’t necessarily interested in doing the same things [as girls], or if the girls aren’t necessarily interested in doing the same
things, they still do them just so that they can mingle with the opposite sex. (Mike, age 24)

Delinquency Factors

Research has clearly documented over the years that there is a strong link between truancy and its potential pathway to delinquency or more serious forms of juvenile offending (NCSE, 2007; Sheppard, 2007; Wang, et al., 2005; Balfanz et al, 2003; Hirschi, 2002; Farrington, 1996; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hawkings & Lishner, 1987; Hahn, 1976).

While the focus of this research was not to establish a cause for either truancy or delinquency, any data regarding other forms of juvenile offending, beyond truancy, were extracted from the narratives as well as the series of short questions that were asked at the conclusion of each interview where research participants were asked if they: 1) had witnessed a crime while skipping school; 2) had been asked to participate in crimes while skipping school; and 3) if the participants themselves had participated in a crime while skipping school. The term “crime” in these concluding questions was defined for the participants as acts that involved either: 1) “smoking pot, drinking alcohol, or smoking cigarettes” or 2) an illegal act that could be considered “more serious” than smoking pot, drinking alcohol, or smoking cigarettes.

A summary of these findings are presented in Table 4.8 (Self-Reported Participation in Crimes [Other than Substance Use]); Table 4.9 (Witnessed Crimes...
During Truancy [Other than Substance Use]); Table 4.10 and (Asked to Participate in Crimes During Truancy [Other than Substance Use]).

Self-Reported Crimes During Truancy: Participated, Witnessed, Asked to Participate

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the majority of the participants (17 out of 34 respondents) acknowledged smoking marijuana during periods of truancy. To a lesser extent, the respondents mentioned smoking cigarettes, underage drinking, and the use of other, more serious drugs while truant.

The second most frequent self-reported crime-activity noted by the respondents was shoplifting, as mentioned by five females and two males who mentioned that they had participated in this activity while truant. Shoplifting seemed to range from taking items from a fast food restaurant to clothing from retail stores:

[Participated:] We went to A&W. We, um, pirated the glass A&W mugs – okay, I just committed to stealing from A&W...Uh oh. 
(Laughter) (Sara, age 23)

[Participated:] I did steal once, but only to prove that I could do it better than this other person. (Laughter) I knew there was crime going on. Like, there was some shoplifting going on, there was some underage drinking going on, there was some pot smoking going on, but that's really it... (Elizabeth, age 21)

[Participated:] Like taking something from a store – a 7-11...
(Nicole, age 18)

[Participated:] Stealing from stores, you know what I mean? We used to just steal candy, you know? (Bliss, age 19)

[Participated:] It was taking stuff from a store...you know, we'd go to 7-11 and jack some chips and candy, you know, 'cause we were
hungry and had the munchies (Laughter) but that’s about all. (Jane, age 20)

[Participated:] It was – not – well, not a crime, but just going to go to a little store, go rob some chips or some pop. Yeah, I was asked to do that. (Dad, age 21)

[Participated:] Yeah. A couple of kids tried stealing out of a corner store when I was in there with them... Yeah, I stole from stores. (Mime, age 19)

Four respondents (three females and one male) noted witnessing shoplifting while truant, and three respondents (two females and one male) mentioned being asked to shoplift during truancy:

[Witnessed:] Uh, there was also a lot of theft... but a lot of people did shoplift as well... And that’s anywhere from a snack to, um – I remember, uh, a girl that I knew went to – went to the Aurora Mall and came back with a – with a – with a trash bag full of clothes... (Stacey, age 19)

[Witnessed:] I’ve seen friends – friends of mine walk out of a store with stuff that they didn’t pay for. It’s just every day there was something different. Because they never got in trouble for it. They were never disciplined... (Nicole, age 18)

[Witnessed:] And then there were a couple of times I’d go into a store, we’d go somewhere, and you would just see people right front of you just stealing something, and they just didn’t even care (Laughter). (Jennifer, age 18)
Table 4.8  Self-Reported Participation in Crimes During Truancy (Other than Substance Use)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Panhandling</th>
<th>Trespassing</th>
<th>Disturbing Peace</th>
<th>Robbery/ Theft</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Graffiti, Tagging</th>
<th>Running Away</th>
<th>Drug Paraphernalia</th>
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<tr>
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<th>DWAI</th>
<th>Assaults, Fighting</th>
<th>Drug Trafficking</th>
<th>Vehicle Damage</th>
<th>FTA</th>
<th>Arson</th>
<th>Criminal Mischief</th>
<th>“More Serious Stuff”</th>
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*Notes:*
Males *(n=16)* = One male respondent declined to respond
“More serious stuff” = Respondent declined identifying these crimes
Table 4.9  Witnessed Crimes During Truancy (Other than Substance Use)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vandalism</th>
<th>Graffiti, Tagging</th>
<th>Sneaking into Movie Theaters</th>
<th>Assaults, Fighting</th>
<th>Vehicle Damage</th>
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<th>Reckless Driving</th>
<th>Arson</th>
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Table 4.10  Asked to Participate in Crimes During Truancy (Other than Substance Use)

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<th>Vandalism</th>
<th>Graffiti, Tagging</th>
<th>Vehicle Damage</th>
<th>Auto Theft</th>
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<td><strong>Males</strong>&lt;br&gt;(n=17)</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong>&lt;br&gt;(n=34)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shoplifting</th>
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<th>Assaults, Fighting</th>
<th>Robbery/Theft</th>
<th>Arson</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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[Witnessed:] I’ve witnessed shoplifting. A few of my friends took it upon themselves to think that was, uh, a cool thing to do...back in the younger days. And, uh, I’ve witnessed a lot of - I mean, I still witness this to this day, but I witnessed a lot of 14 year olds, you know, out there smoking cigarettes, and 13 year olds. (A.C., age 21)

[Asked to participate:] I - she wanted to go to the mall and she’s like, “Oh, we should empty our backpacks so we can steal dresses.” I was looking at her like, “Um, I’m not trying to get caught for one, ditching, two stealing,” and I’m like, “Yeah, you are - there’s something wrong with you.” (Rachel, age 19)

[Asked to participate:] Oh – “Oh, will you steal me a ring from Walmart?” I’m like, “Dude, they’ve got clasps on the rings at Walmart.” I’m like, “Are you that dumb?” you know? (Laughter) (Bliss, age 19)

[Asked to participate:] Yeah, I was asked to, you know, steal some Red Bull from, you know, a Safeway or, you know, whatever - you know, whatever they wanted, sandwiches or whatever, but, uh, I never - I never participated in it. (A.C., age, 21)

Other types of theft or robbery were also mentioned by a few of the respondents. Four males participated in these types of crimes, four males reported witnessing a theft or robbery crime, and one female reported being asked to participate in this type of crime (as well as witnessing it):

[Participated:] ... then this one got [me] in trouble for, um, I think it was theft from a person...Like, just stealing from somebody...Like, robbing them basically. Like, they’re walking on the street and I robbed them...I never, like, stabbed nobody or none of that...And I been, like - yeah, a lot of like - like, in and out of trouble since I was a juvenile. Been locked up, like mostly all my life. (Simon, age 19)

[Participated:] I got into some trouble about a year ago...I got arrested on a felony case...Uh, burglary. I went into somebody’s house while they were there and I robbed them. And then the cops caught me, like, four blocks down the road with all their stuff. (Bob, age 19)
[Participated:] Like, I remember a couple of times when I was at the mall and, uh, do you know those chairs that, like, massage people? Um, we found a way to pop open the money box on them. *(Laughter)*

[Participated:] And so we stole money from the mall...No violence ever. *(John #1, age 20)*

[Participated:] Um, possession of alcohol, um – let’s see. What else? Theft – I had two theft charges. That’s what started it all off...after I got the alcohol charge, I didn’t go to court for it, then...I skipped all the court stuff because I was on the run. I grabbed all my stuff and just ran... *(Mime, age 19)*

[Witnessed:] So, I knew people who stole electronics, you know, uh, and all that sort of stuff. Uh, and yes, you know, I was – I was there some of the time when – when, you know both the – both the, uh, misdemeanor and felony crimes were taking place, um, but I never participated in any of the felony – in any of the felony crimes. *(Stacey, age 19)*

[Witnessed:] Well, um, I know my friend X used to steal cell phones from other kids, but I never...I just remember, like – like, once – like, once a week he’d have, like, three cell phones in his hand. He’d be like, “You guys want to go pawn these?” *(Alexi, age 18)*

[Witnessed:] I can tell you the charges...30-some counts of conspiracy to commit vandalism, theft, and arson. Because this case spanned from a small group of people, and just because of guilty by association, spread out to our entire group, which was at the time, 37. And this was people from Castle Rock, Conifer, and Highlands Ranch...Yes, I was in the area. No, I was not part of the theft...There were people who went to jail for what they did, and because I caught a ride with them, that automatically put me in the guilty pool...But I was able to prove the fact that I couldn’t have known what they were doing, because when they did it, I was somewhere else. And we didn’t hear about what they did until the day that they, uh, brought the piece of stolen article, which was a – uh, it was the school’s golf cart...the security golf cart. *(Killian, age 24)*

[Witnessed:] I’ve seen robberies happen...’Cause I mean, you’re hanging out with the teenagers. I mean, the majority of them are just always taking from stores. *(Laughter)* *(Viper, age 20)*
[Witnessed:] I seen people rob people. (Bob, age 19)

[Asked to participate:] Um, you know, there were times where I was asked to, uh, - in fact, this became a very - very popular thing, what’s called gripping. That’s the - that was the colloquial term for it, but, uh, pretty much you would travel around with, um... you would have, uh, um, bolt cutters and, uh... a pair of, um, fishing grips. And you would go and these people would break into, um, uh, soda machines and just - and take the change and the dollar bills... (Stacey, age 19)

Assaults and fighting were the leading type of illicit behavior that was witnessed during truancy (three females and five males), with three males reporting participation in these actions while truant and one female reporting being asked to participate:

[Participated:] Yeah, [for] fights, stuff like that... Sometimes we’d ditch to go fight... Fist fight, something of that nature... You know, something happens in the school, and say, “Put up or shut up,” you know, so you go throw down, feel better about yourself (Laughter), I guess... I was bad in that manner. (Laughter) Yeah. (Tom, age 19)

[Participated:] And fighting... Yeah, yeah... I was in a gang. (Simon, age 19)

[Participated:] But, uh, it was for fighting, for getting in the faces of teachers, getting into a physical altercation with a teacher, even though the teacher initiated it, so he got fired and I got suspended. (Laughter) I should’ve been expelled, but because the teacher – he but since he initiated it and since he swung, I got to go on. I just got suspended. (Viper, age 20)

[Witnessed:] I’ve seen a lot of fights. (Jane, age 20) [Witnessed:] I’ve seen a couple of fights... But not no stealing or anything. I – I didn’t see none of that. You’d see the Crips with the Crips and then Bloods with the Bloods, and then the people who always had their little cliques together. I never seen, like, a gang rival in school... They would be – there would be students that’d be from one gang, then their people – the older people that’s not in our school
or the people that are not in our school and go to another school, 
ditching their school and they'll come to our school just to see their 
friends that's from their gang, and there would be, like, a big crowd of 
them, a big thing. They'll be out there acting silly, play fighting, and 
trying to holler at the girls, or the girls talking to the boys, or whatever 
the case may be. (Susan, age 22)

[Witnessed:] Every time I ditched. It was more the regular teenage 
stuff. I've seen fights, I've seen, you know - like, I've seen this guy 
attack some girl's care with a baseball bat. (Nicole, age 18)

[Witnessed:] Un, I've seen - I've seen a dude get the living crap 
beaten out of him once...It was a guy - two guys jumped and he got 
the living hell torn out of him. (Laughter) Oh, yeah. I mean, I didn't 
really want to do anything either, because I mean, I was 15 at the 
time...And I was - I was big. I mean, I was athletic, I was fast, I had 
muscle, I was built, but there was no way...with two - especially with 
two guys...That's another reason why I didn't want to get involved, 
because I knew - I was afraid of the cops, and so I actually left the 
situation. (Viper, age 20)

[Witnessed:] Just like we'd see fights, tagging, smoking, just - and all 
that stuff. (Simon, age 19)

[Witnessed:] Fighting...[and] yeah, the typical teenage stuff. Nobody 
really went that far with it. (John #2, age 19)

[Witnessed:] Uh, fighting. I mean, uh, I did witness a lot of that. Just 
- just fighting. (A.C., age 21)

[Witnessed:] I seen some fights. (Bob, age 19)

[Asked to Participate:] I had friends ask me to help jump this person 
and I'm just like, "No." (Nicole, age 18)

While the focus of this research was not to establish a cause for either truancy 
or delinquency, the narratives from this study help to present a picture of how youth, 
while experiencing unsupervised periods of time during truancy, are exposed to other
forms of delinquency through participating, witnessing, or being invited to other forms of unwanted, illegal behavior. The chronicles of the participants in this study illustrated involvement in, primarily, shoplifting as a criminal activity while truant. Yet, exposure to other forms of delinquent behavior – ranging from forms of thefts or robberies to assaults and fighting – were also prominent in the narratives. To a lesser extent, other more serious criminal behavior was noted by a few of the respondents – as participants and witnesses; to a lesser extent, as temptations from the invitations of others.

The primary themes that surfaced from the interview narratives were categorized in this chapter as: substance use factors; home environment factors; peer factors; school environment factors; time factors; gender factors; and delinquency factors. The chronicles from the participants in this study portrayed segments of life during high school as it occurred around times of truancy. What was revealed, though, was a much broader landscape of an adolescent’s life. The organization and description of the accounts that were provided in this chapter will be interpreted in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through a sample of young adults, how they had spent their time during periods of truancy in high school. More specifically, this study pursued a better understanding of the activities, times, places, and people involved in periods of truancy for youth. Since truancy is a subset of juvenile delinquent behavior and traditionally believed to be a potential correlate to other, sometimes more serious forms of delinquency, this study also explored the relationship between the unsupervised times of truancy and other forms of delinquent behavior.

In-depth interviews and semi-structured questions were used to collect retrospective accounts from seventeen females and seventeen males between the ages of 18 and 25. The data was coded, analyzed, and organized by major themes and subcategories and guided by the research questions: how are adolescents spending their time during periods of truancy; what are the differences, if any, between what females and males do during periods of truancy, and were the truants in this sample exposed to or involved in any (other) type of delinquent behavior during periods of truancy? A description of the data was provided in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides the researcher’s interpretations of the data.
The findings in this study revealed that the most common, top three conventional activities of youth who were truant were sharing meals together, spending time at a friend’s house, and traveling to an off-campus location. For the females, this was generally a shopping mall; for the males, this was typically an outdoor location (see Table 5.1 for a summary of conventional activities). With the exception of where the youth travelled to for off-campus locations, there seemed to be very little difference between the dominant three activities that girls and boys participated in during truant times. The most common delinquent activity for both genders that was conjoined with truancy was smoking marijuana, followed by shoplifting.

The primary thread that seemed to tie the findings of this study together was the importance of social bonds in families and with peers. Examining how the subjects in this study spent their time while truant may have revealed a larger, more complex picture about social connectivity: how relationships on the home front might influence behavior in youth; how behavior in youth can attract and foster peer relationships in school; how peer relationships centered around a hub of activity and networks in a school setting can invite positive or negative influences; and how those positive and negative influences can fuel the choices and decisions that youth make in
Table 5.1  Self-Reported Conventional Activities and Places for Youth During Truancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Home Chores</th>
<th>Home Child Care</th>
<th>Personal Errands</th>
<th>Go Home to Relax</th>
<th>Sleep, Nap</th>
<th>Doing Homework</th>
<th>Drive Around</th>
<th>Walk Around</th>
<th>Job, Paid Work</th>
<th>Eat Out</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parties, Raves</th>
<th>Read, Write, Art</th>
<th>Card Games</th>
<th>Music (Listen, Play Instrument)</th>
<th>Movies</th>
<th>T V</th>
<th>Video Games</th>
<th>Shop</th>
<th>Time with Romantic Partner</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Tan Salon</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
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Table 5.1 (Continued)  Self-Reported Conventional Activities and Places for Youth During Truancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Friend's House</th>
<th>Mall</th>
<th>Downtown Areas</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Parks, Fields, Lakes</th>
<th>Pool Hall</th>
<th>Recreation Center</th>
<th>Amusement Park</th>
<th>Staying on School Grounds</th>
<th>Galleries, Museums, Cultural Events</th>
<th>(Hanging Around:) Bridges, Buildings, Alleys, Drainage Tunnels, Train Tracks, Gas Stations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>
terms of problem adolescent behavior. This chapter is organized by the following
general categories to address the three research questions and findings: 1) *social bonds*, 2) *gender differences*, and 3) *truancy and other forms of delinquency*.

**Social Bonds**

School is the ideal climate for youth to experiment with many activities, behaviors, and relationships because the environment provides access to networks of youth who are of similar age, developmental stage, and interests. High school, it may be presumed, provides one of the venues for students to be out from underneath the supervision of their parents, yet with temporary, secondary, and indirect oversight provided by school authorities such as principals, teachers, administrators, and school staff. When students in high school leave school classes or premises to be truant, their unsupervised, unstructured time can lead to the development of adolescent problem behaviors – most notably, through association with peers.

And yet how youth spend their unsupervised, unstructured time can often be molded by the experiences the youth have with family, since family is the origination point for most social interactions in life. The literature over the years has revealed that a youth’s strong family bonds are correlated to less problem behavior in adolescents (Roche, Ahmed & Blum, 2008; Brendgen, et al., 2000; Warr, 1993; Ranking & Wells, 1990; Hirschi, 1969). The literature highlights what would seem to be common sense.
*Parental Relationships*

The family provides the first opportunities to form relationships and can serve as the foundation for other and future social interactions. A noteworthy theme that emerged from the data was the number of youth who seemed to have poor relationships with their parents.

This was discovered, quite unexpectedly, when research participants were presented with “memory landmarks” or contextual cues that are used to improve memory recall (Crisanti, et al., 2003, p. 568; Sobell & Sobell, 1978). For this study, participants were asked to describe how they spent their 16th and 18th birthdays at the beginning of each interview (see Appendix H for a complete list of responses for recollections of 16th and 18th birthdays).

In particular, six respondents (one female and five males) reported living in a treatment center/hospital, group home, foster care, or on the “streets” during their 16th or 18th birthdays. Seven respondents (three females and four males) indicated a somewhat transient lifestyle around the time of these birthdays – either living on and off with parents, relatives, or simply living on their own around the time that they turned 18 years of age. In sum, nearly half of the respondents in this study portrayed a somewhat unstable home environment during the peak times of adolescence, such as 16th or 18th birthdays.
This is perhaps best summarized by Killian who recalled how birthdays “just kind of float by” in his “dysfunctional” family, and by Susan who mentioned how her mother “forgot my birthday a lot during my life,” as described in Chapter 4.

A limitation of this study was that the majority of the sample was recruited from locations that catered to youth who had previously experienced difficulties in high school. In that sense, then, it may not be surprising to find a larger number of adolescents who seemed to indicate a disconnection with their families, particularly parents, since the literature identifies a strong relationship, whether directly or indirectly, between a healthy home environment, parenting, and a youth’s performance in school (Warr, 2005; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Warr, 1993; Hess, Lyons & Corsino et al., 1989). Still, it is worth highlighting the relationship between the research participants and their parents because of the possible impact (as either risk or protective factors) that the family socialization and bonds had on truancy, peer selection and activities during truancy.

As stated, one of the features that surfaced among the youth in this study was the overall sense of discontentment they seemed to feel and express when discussing their home environment, particularly the relationships with their parents. And there may be many reasons for that discontentment – more than what the subjects revealed during conversations as a product of interviews regarding truancy. It is not uncommon for adolescents to clash with their parents, particularly during the teen
years when youth want to exert their independence and establish their identities in the midst of hormonal changes.

Yet, the influence of parents does not suddenly disappear once a youth enters the teen years (Day, 2002). Parental influence continues in the form of parents as positive or negative role models and parents as effective or ineffective guardians and monitors of youth behavior. These dimensions of family life speak to both attachments and parental controls. If a child has weak bonds or is not sufficiently attached to his/her parents, the child may be less likely to care about parental opinions for behavior (Rankin & Wells, 1990; Hirschi, 1969); if a child’s behavior is not regulated, monitored, and rewarded or sanctioned appropriately by parents, the child may be less likely to comply with conventional norms (Ranking & Wells, 1990; Nye, 1958). The resulting satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with family life can easily affect adolescent adaptation in other areas of life, such as peer selection (Plunkett & Henry, 1999).

For several of the thirty-four respondents, the negative feelings expressed towards their home environment seemed to be based in situations that went beyond the typical parent-teen friction that occurs when youth enter into the adolescence stage of life. These situations have been outlined in this study as: dependency, neglect, abuse issues; single-parent families; and parenting characteristics, skills and styles.
Dependency, Neglect, Abuse Issues

Any form of abuse or neglect within the home would take center stage when looking at parent-child relationships and the effect on school engagement. Six of the respondents (three females and three males) voluntarily discussed bits and pieces of their past involving possible abuse or neglect on the home front. Perhaps the story relayed by Denise was the most poignant when she described how her father, in a fit of anger, “threw the dog outside” and after hearing the cries of the dog, discovered that her father had broken the dog’s legs. Not surprisingly, Denise found that she “was constantly worrying” about whether or not she would upset her father, which became a significant distraction for her from school.

Other respondents spent time in the Colorado foster care system as a result of some type of abuse or neglect issues originating with the biological parent(s). Three male respondents in this study lived in foster care during their high school years: two of the respondents had spent most of their lives in the Colorado foster care system; one had entered the Colorado system during his high school years.

As an example (mentioned in Chapter 4), Sparks recalled how he was “a pretty angry kid” while growing up in the foster care system after his mother dropped him off “into the system one day” and, after telling him that she would “be back next week,” never returned for him.
Similar findings resulted from a Colorado study of truants and their juvenile justice records conducted by Heilbrunn (2004) where 41% of the youth (or 12 of the 29 for whom judicial records were available) had at some point experienced home removal by child social service agencies, with an average out-of-home placement lasting twelve months (NCSE, 2007; Heilbrunn, 2004).

Satisfaction with one’s family life can be related to various types of life-stressors, and any form of parental abuse or neglect would seem to be at the top of the list of stressful events that could interfere with a youth’s ability to be, and remain, engaged in school. Further complicating the issue would be growing up in various foster care homes (as a result of parental abuse/neglect), where a youth is being raised by temporary, non-biological parents and under the risk of having to move at a moment’s notice, reestablish one’s self in a new foster home, and begin anew at a different school. In this study, several respondents illustrated these risk factors (Roche, Ahmed & Blum, 2008) for disengagement from school.

Single-Parent Families

Even when a youth had the benefits of a biological family, there were times when a few of the respondents in this study expressed discontent or frustration with their home environment. For example, Katie described how simply living with a family other than her biological parents would have made her home and school situation “a lot better:”
More than half of the respondents in this study (eleven females and seven males) were living with a single parent during high school years. For some of the youth in this study, the single parent was the mother; for others, the single parent was the father. This study takes a gender-neutral approach to discussing parental socializations and bonds (with a few exceptions mentioned under the Gender Factors section of this chapter).

Some of the feelings of discontent appeared to be directed towards parents who had divorced, and seemed to involve the challenges (for the youth) of dealing with significant and disruptive changes in familial bonds on the home front (see Table 5.2 for a summary of the living arrangements for subjects).

Table 5.2 Where the Participants Lived During High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>At Home with Both Parents</th>
<th>At Home with Parent &amp; Step-Parent or Parental Partner</th>
<th>At Home with Single Parent</th>
<th>With Close Relative</th>
<th>Foster Care</th>
<th>With Roommate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males (n=17)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=34)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
*One male was initially at home with a parent and step-parent during high school years before being placed in foster care.
As an example, Elizabeth recalled what it was like to experience her parents’ divorce and the attempts that her mother and father made to “make it really even” in terms of how much time each (solo) parent would spend with the children. Elizabeth described how she and her sister were “going back and forth” between the two parental households every few days and “constantly losing things” in the process. For Elizabeth, then, truancy may have been related to the disruption of social bonds within her family in the aftermath of parental divorce. As she noted, truancy for her was “an entirely emotional thing.” Another example was when Rachel described how her mother and father are “still kind of going through” a divorce, with Rachel’s mother having moved back to Mexico and the father resigning himself to the dissolution of the marriage. For Rachel, the marital difficulties diminished her relationship with her mother to “water and oil.”

Conflict within families is not unusual. And while conflict between parents can be viewed in that light, it can also be considered a family stressor for many children and one that impacts children in several areas, including the ability to successfully perform in school (Plunkett et al., 1997). In addition to interpersonal conflict within families that is brought on by the dissolution of a marriage, other potential risk factors may surface as a result, such as a lower family income, a more transient lifestyle for the children, less parental supervision, and children turning to delinquent behavior as a maladaptive coping strategy.
Current and previous research in criminology and other fields continues to suggest that the absence of one parent on the home front serves to weaken family bonds and functioning and, as a result, can make children more susceptible to problem behaviors including various forms of delinquency (Anderson, 2002; McLanahan, 1985; Amato & Keith, 1991; Hirschi, 1969; Shaw & McKay, 1932).

Further, research conducted by Anderson (2002) suggests that youth who are either placed in the context of a single-parent household or are exposed to many youth who live in single-parent households (such as through peers or attendance at schools with higher numbers of single-parent families) were more likely to engage in different forms of delinquent behavior.

In this study, a little more than half of the respondents were in single-parent homes during their high school years. It was apparent in many of the narratives that youth who were living with one parent experienced some indirect effects in terms of family socialization and bonds, parental controls for teen behavior, and economic factors such as a decreased family income. While the current research effort cannot adequately address the direct impact of these single-parent families on either truancy or other forms of delinquency, the narratives of the youth and the preponderance of single-parent families in this study do suggest that single-parent homes may provide a significant contributing factor to truancy – and through a variety of possible avenues.
Parenting Characteristics, Skills and Styles

The individual characteristics and traits of the parents themselves can impact the development of youth (Roche et al., 2008, Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Rankin & Wells, 1990). Research has identified certain characteristics of parent socialization and parenting styles, which can include: an ability to monitor children, parenting knowledge and effectiveness, and parental closeness and warmth (Roche, 2008, p.2024; Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Other studies propose that out of four identified categories for parental socialization styles – authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and indifferent – children with authoritative parents have the most positive outcomes, while children with indifferent parents have the most negative outcomes (Pellerin, 2005; Cohen & Rice, 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

This study may support previous findings when the characteristics or traits of the individual parent(s) are examined. Since compulsory school attendance in each state puts legal responsibility on the shoulders of parents and guardians, how a parent responds to a child’s truancy can be indicative of certain parental characteristics, such as ineffective parenting styles or skills. Parental characteristics, manifested in the form of parenting styles and skills, can effect a youth’s development, and this may be seen in this study particularly through the level of supervision and the kinds of consequences that parents imposed on their teens who were truant in high school.

In this study, nine respondents (five females and four males) seemed to indicate that their parent(s) either did not exhibit care or concern, had acknowledged
that they could not control the youth’s truancy, or had given up in trying to encourage the youth to attend and complete high school – perhaps because the parents were preoccupied and prioritizing their own issues, such as employment or marital difficulties. Or perhaps the parents simply lacked effective parenting experience, skills, or resources.

This study was not able to explore the family histories or specific variables associated with the participants’ parents beyond what each respondent voluntarily offered during the course of being interviewed. Still, nearly a third of the respondents voluntarily commented about the lack of consequences from their parents for school absenteeism. This was illustrated best when Susan explained how she had expected – and was actually looking for – her mother to “force” the issue of school attendance. Instead, Susan was faced with an overall lack of “support and encouragement” from her mother when it came to Susan’s attendance in high school, as noted in Chapter 4. Likewise, Paris observed how some of her friends’ parents “let it [truancy] slide,” suggesting that lack of consequences for truancy from parents may not be all that unusual.

A lack of parental consequences for truancy can be viewed more specifically as a lack of parental support (illustrated through parental involvement), a lack of parental controls (demonstrated by parental monitoring and limit-setting), and – in general, but perhaps most importantly – a lack of overall family socialization and bonding (fostered by affection, caring, and closeness) (Roche et al, 2008).
As a point of comparison to youth in this study who appeared to receive little attention or consequences from their parents for truancy, five of the subjects in this study (two females and three males) seemed to feel that it was the parental characteristics of support and encouragement that helped them overcome problems with school absenteeism and eventually return to complete high school. Perhaps more importantly, most of these five youths appeared to receive discipline or consequences from their parent(s) for truancy in high school.

When compared with the number of youth in this study (albeit, a small sample) who remarked about parental consequences for truancy and how those consequences had a positive effect on school attendance, it provides a contrast indicating the importance of parental support, controls and bonding, as supported by truancy and delinquency research.

In addition to a lack of consequences for truancy from parents, another finding in this study related to parental attentiveness and supervision was the disclosure by respondents for how phone calls from the schools to the youth’s homes, in an attempt to notify the parents of truancy, were intercepted by some of the participants.

Six females and one male told how they used interception methods as a means of preventing parents from learning about their truancy times. As Angela described, she was able to “delete that message” because her dad “worked a lot.” For Nicole, intercepting the phone messages from the school resulted in her mother not learning of her truancy until her senior year in high school.
As mentioned in Chapter 4, a 2006 truancy study in Denver concluded that only 6% to 9% of high school students who were truant experienced consequences from schools beyond letters or telephone calls to the students’ homes (NCSE, 2006). This would seem to indicate that the schools, and not just parents, may need to take greater responsibility in providing consistent and appropriate supervisions, interventions and consequences for truancy. In this study, four female and four male subjects described little to no formal sanctions (or, at best, delayed sanctions) from schools for periods of truancy. In one case, a female subject (Paris) described how she was “surprised” that, unlike some of her peers, she managed to avoid receiving consequences from the school even though she “ditched all the time.”

Another pattern in this study that may be correlated to parental characteristics, skills and supervision was the unintended finding regarding the sleep patterns of the research participants. Of the nine participants (three females and six males) who casually made references to their sleeping habits during the course of the interviews, eight of these youth indicated that they had difficulties sleeping at night or waking up in the morning in time to attend school. And while there may be many reasons for these sleeping or waking difficulties, it may also represent a lack of parental attentiveness – either at night when the parent(s) were home or in the morning when the parent(s) left for work, believing that their adolescent had gotten up and gone to school. This may also suggest a wider problem of weakened family bonds.
As Susan recalled, she “wouldn’t get sleep at home from all the fussing and fighting” that occurred. As a result, she slept in class. Katie mentioned that “she grew up with family problems” and would go to a fast food restaurant at “1:00 in the morning,” due, in part, because she “didn’t have a good atmosphere to do homework.” Sleep issues were also illustrated when Sara discussed getting to bed late at night as a result of substance use that appeared to occur in the home after her parents went to bed.

In this discussion of parental characteristics, skills and styles, it also should be mentioned that a 2006 study found parental ability to supervise adolescents rested, in part, on the willingness of youth to keep their parents informed of their activities and whereabouts (Warr, 2006). Warr’s research suggested that parental “inattentiveness” cannot be solely blamed on the parents because youth who are involved in juvenile offenses tend to “actively seek to keep their parents in the dark” (Warr, 2006, p. 619). This can be seen in the efforts that the participants continually put forth to keep their parents from receiving the truancy-alert phone calls from the schools. Less is known about why some of the participants’ schools did not seem to enforce truancy consequences beyond telephoning the youth’s homes.

However, some of the youth in this study seemed to underscore Warr’s (2006) conclusions about adolescent deception, even when applied to school, and not just parental, sanctions. Killian described – with metaphorical language for a prison escape – the two-week process of “watching” the “routine” of school guards, the use
of a decoy or "diversionary," and the opportune moment when a student "makes the break" in that "one shot" to escape the view of school guards, sneak off the school campus, and successfully ditch classes. As Warr describes (2006, p. 607), issues of parental attachment, supervision, youthful deception and problem behaviors are a "tangled web." Parts of that web were illustrated in the narratives in this study.

While parental characteristics can impact the development of youth, the individual coping skills of a youth can also come into play. As Plunkett & Henry (1999, p. 599) suggested, the coping skills of teens (such as finding "social support" or engaging in "avoidance") can vary from adolescent to adolescent. So, even though a juvenile may not get parental support for school attendance, the youth's own characteristics and traits may, in some situations, compensate for what might be lacking in the parents.

One student in this study (Nicole) exemplified this concept by recognizing her mother’s inattentiveness (or lack of parenting skills) and assembling her own self discipline to return to high school. Ironically, while some parents in this study may have resigned themselves to giving up on their truant teens, Nicole "gave up" on waiting for her mother to provide structure, discipline, and encouragement for high school attendance. Nicole, instead, found those attributes within her and eventually graduated from high school with a diploma.

The importance of parents establishing clear, consistent consequences for breaking rules, as well as providing rewards for positive, constructive behavior, is
supported in literature, particularly through the Social Learning Theory (Akers, 2005; Ardelt & Day, 2002; Wells & Rankin, 1988). Through Social Learning Theory, parents are presumed to be good role models who reinforce standards and guide against unfavorable behaviors (Ardelt & Day, 2002). The findings in this study seemed to illustrate elements of Social Learning Theory that connect parental characteristics, traits, and skills (role modeling, reinforcing standards) to a youth’s inability to attend school (unfavorable behavior). This can be seen in the general lack of supervision and support from parents as reported by some respondents, when compared with the respondents who attributed any school attendance successes to their parents’ oversight and encouragement. To a lesser extent, a lack of parental oversight also may be illustrated in the youth who were permitted to stay out or stay up late at night or who were presumed to wake in the morning and go to school without the parents verifying the school attendance.

In perhaps a broader view and context, Hirschi’s (1969) Social Bond Theory (often referred to as a social control theory1) posits that youth with ineffectual bonds to conventional others can lead to problem behaviors in youth (Warr, 2007; Krohn, 2000; Huebner & Betts, 2002; Hirschi, 1969). The bonds in Hirschi’s theory were identified as attachment to parents, schools, and peers; commitment to conventional behavior and actions; involvement in conventional activities; and belief in a common, moral value system.

1 This study uses “Social Bond Theory” to refer to Hirschi’s 1969 theory.
Consistent with the Social Bond Theory, some of the relationships between the research participants and their parent(s) seemed to reflect a weakening of that most important bond: the attachment between a parent and child ("attachment" for this section refers to the closeness between parents and children). This was reflected in the strain and discontent that some of the respondents felt with and towards the relationship with their parents, particularly for the youth who experienced either parental abuse or neglect, situational adaptation to parental marital problems and shifting family relationships, or lack of parental responsibility, skills or concern.

The lack of attachment, as one form of social bond (found in the family), may have contributed to the problem behavior of truancy for a number of youth in this study because a lack of strong family bonds can impact, among other areas, whom a youth selects as peers and why the youth make those selections for friendships (Warr, 2005). Hence, the family bonds are one factor to highlight and consider from this study and may have had some bearing on the next type of social bond to be discussed: peer relationships.

**Peer Relationships**

Much of the literature over the years supports the concept that teens who share a strong, positive bond with their parents may be more likely to associate with peers who have a positive influence on them and less likely to become involved with peers who exhibit problem behaviors, such as delinquency (Warr, 1993; Sutherland, 1992; Massey & Krohn, 1986; Hirschi, 1969). It is believed that this can occur for usually
two reasons: either the youth gravitate towards peers that will meet with parental approval, or the youth selects peers without the benefit, oversight, or concern of parental regulation. It can be said, then, that the development of youth through the social bonds that they do or do not experience in the home environment can feed into the selection process for relationships that are formed in school settings (Warr, 1993).

The groups with which adolescents associate can provide the setting and context for additional social learning and bonds, and one of the most important groups that can facilitate this process are the friends, acquaintances, and classmates formed in school.

One theme that surfaced from the interviews in this study seemed to be the importance of establishing some level of peer relationships in a school setting. That is not surprising given the fact that adolescents are transitioning – not only physically and emotionally – but through independence from their parents. The outer world represented in the high school campus (and beyond) becomes the focal point for adolescents (Ardelt & Day, 2002). However, one venue for establishing or fostering those peer relationships at school may have been during truancy times.

Three quarters of the respondents in this study (fourteen females and ten males) seemed to indicate a desire for, or an enjoyment of, spending time socializing with friends, acquaintances or classmates\(^2\). This was especially apparent during times of truancy and could be considered, in a general sense, an “activity” that was enjoyed.

\(^2\) These figures are based on text analysis of words or phrases that indicated the respondents spent some amount of time (or wanted to), in some manner, with one or more peers while in high school.
during school absenteeism (that is, the "activity" of socializing and establishing social bonds with others).

This finding may correspond to a recent study on truancy where Henry (2010, p. 116) noted that youth who were truant from school tended to "skip school in pairs or groups." The fact that many truants skip school with other youth may indicate that there is a tangible and genuine social context to truancy that can be overlooked in truancy studies, where the primary focus tends to be connecting truancy and its unstructured, unsupervised times to other problem adolescent behaviors, usually through delinquent peer associations. As Katie described, "seeing some of my friends" was one her "favorite" things to do while truant; similar sentiments were echoed by John #2 who described his truancy as "pretty much a social thing" (see Chapter 4).

In terms of a more specific activity and preferred time period for ditching that was gleaned from this study, much of the social bonding at school appeared to revolve around lunch times and the sharing of meals, whether on school grounds or at off-campus eateries. One of the most common (top three) conventional activities that were mentioned for times of truancy was categorized in this study as "eating out," noted by eight females and nine males or half of the subjects in this study (see Table 5.1, provided earlier in this chapter).

That may not be surprising since youth spend most of their days in school, where the midday lunch time becomes an important part of the day, as mentioned in
Chapter 4 (Woodruff et al., 2010). Yet, little seems to be known about the social context of eating lunch at school. In this study, the findings suggest a possible association between lunch times and opportunities for truancy. Further research in this area may be helpful for truancy intervention and prevention.

Midday lunch periods, then, appeared to be a pivotal part of the day for reasons beyond hunger. During lunch periods, different groups of youth were coming and going from classes and to and from the school campuses (particularly if it was an open\textsuperscript{3} school campus). Perhaps more importantly, the respondents in this study often had peers with a lunch hour that differed from their own. When that occurred, some youth tried to synchronize social time with their peers by “ditching” a class or set of classes in order to join peers during lunch time. But the social act of sharing of a meal with peers, and the rearranging of school schedules to accommodate that process, may have also provided temptations and opportunities for truancy.

As Jennifer described it, one of the most common time periods for her truancy was “around lunch” – particularly if she left the school campus to eat elsewhere and had to compensate for travel-times by missing classes before or after her lunch periods. In reflecting back on her high school years, Noel commented about the “structure” of school lunch periods and referred to how the differing schedules among students, as friends, might have lessened the

\footnote{\textsuperscript{3} An “open” school campus does not restrict students to school grounds for lunch periods and/or during certain high school years, such as upperclassman juniors and seniors.}
opportunity for camaraderie and positive peer influences and opened the door for reasons and temptations to skip school.

While some developmental theories suggest that youth may alter their behavior for the sake of gaining peer acceptance (Newman, Lohman & Newman, 2007), that may not have been the case for some of the respondents in this study who altered their behavior (in terms of skipping classes) for the purpose of creating times to meet with peers during lunch periods. Rather, several of the respondents appeared to be genuinely motivated by social interaction, rather than peer-acceptance behaviors alone, in their decision to skip classes to share meals with others (whether at or away from the school campus). Perhaps Katie said it best when she emphasized the social nature of skipping classes around lunch periods. For her, truancy centered on the chance "to be social" and lunch periods were the opportune time for that, even if it meant missing classes.

In contrast to the hub of activity that seemed to occur around lunch times for many of the respondents in this study, several youth (four females and one male) may have actually used times of truancy to remove themselves from the relationships and social bonding that can occur at school. As mentioned previously, adolescent coping skills can involve finding "social support" or engaging in "avoidance" (Plunkett & Henry, 1999, p. 599)

Two particular respondents in this study best described this purposeful avoidance of others when Denise explained how truancy, for her, often meant that she...
“didn’t have to be around” a lot of people and “worrying” about what others think of her. Truancy, then, became her “easy way out.” Viper explained how his times of truancy involved being “by myself” even while he was among other people.

The social context of truancy may also be illustrated in the fact that a third of the respondents in this study (eight females and three males) seemed to suggest that friends or classmates, meeting new groups of peers, or older peers were a catalyst, to some degree, for the decision to be truant from school. While there is a wide range of evidence in truancy and delinquency literature to support the premise that negative peer influences can propel youth to engage in problem adolescent behavior, the actual social context of these interactions deserves attention as well.

As mentioned, a prominent and reoccurring theme in truancy (and delinquency) literature over the years has been how peer influences can negatively affect the behavior of adolescents (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2009; Warr, 2005; Hayne, 2002; Akers, 1998; Hirschi, 1969). This connection between peer associations and problem adolescent behavior cannot be understated and is often related to (among other theories): Aker’s Social Learning Theory (a combination of Sutherland’s Differential Association theory and psychological behavioral-learning theory) (2009; 1998; 1973), Hawkins and Weiss’s psychologically-based Social Development Theory (1985) (which integrates elements of Differential Association Theory, Social Learning Theory and Social Bond Theory); and Hirschi’s original (1969) Social Bond Theory (often called a social control theory).
Issues of peer influence versus friendship selection have been noted in previous criminological research (particularly in regards to delinquency), with the selection process between adolescents being advocated by social control theories and the influence process being promoted by differential association-based theories (Knecht et al., 2009).

While it may be beyond the scope of this study to provide direct support, or be directly supported by, these major criminological theories, the narratives of the research participants seemed to illuminate the important influence that peers have on a youth’s involvement in problem adolescent behavior (in this case, truancy) as outlined in Social Learning Theory, Social Development Theory, and Social Bond Theory.

The need to understand the specific characteristics of social-friendship networks and processes is important to understanding the nature of peer influences, regardless of which theoretical framework is employed (Haynie, 2002). Some researchers have found that in social networks a youth can be in the role of choosing friends, being chosen by others as a friend, as a peer who influences others, and as a peer who is influenced (Knecht, Snijders, Baerveldt, et al., 2009; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The present study may support the concept of various, distinct roles that youth adapt in social networks, as it is applied to the decision to skip school.

In some instances in the findings of this study, the decision to skip school may have been the result of youth being in the role of “a peer who is influenced” by
others, as when Bliss met “these people” and was casually invited to join them in skipping school (see Chapter 4).

For other research participants, the role of “choosing friends” seemed to be adopted. Stacey described how she found her “niche” among a certain group of peers in high school, where she “blossomed” and wanted to “spend time” with this “group of people.” Her decision to spend time with these particular peers was a strong attraction and pull for her, and seemed to be based in friend-selection—although, in hindsight, perhaps not a wise selections or decision. Stacey recognized (in retrospect) how association with these particular peers had a negative influence on her own personal “standards” (see Chapter 4).

Conversely, the role of choosing friends can also mean disassociating with peers who have negative influences. For Sara, returning to Colorado and her regular high school—after a previous history of drug use and a brief time period spent with relatives on the east coast—meant that, upon her return, she would have to disassociate herself from prior friends who “would still be expecting to have that relationship” with her. Paris recalled how truancy, for her, was not necessarily founded in a desire to be with friends or particular groups as much as it was a rejection of the more popular conventional groups in high school (such as “cheerleaders” or “jocks”) based in the feeling that she didn’t “fit in” with them. For Paris, then, “choosing friends” among non-mainstream groups that provided validation for her may have been her push

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towards skipping school. As Paris explains, she “didn’t want to be around the rest of the kids” (see Chapter 4).

Ironically, one of the respondents who experienced truancy in high school was, in fact, an active member of one of the popular mainstream and conventional high school groups: the cheerleaders. As Jennifer noted, the “older” girls in cheerleading had an effect on her skipping school. The desire for social interaction with favored individuals or groups, as well as the factor of peer acceptance, may have urged Jennifer to explore truancy, since her periods of skipping school tended to be with peers that she liked, was involved with, and who may have placed Jennifer in the role of “being chosen by others to be a friend.” Mike, on the other hand, described how he eventually progressed to being “a peer who influences others.” As he explained, by the time he reached his junior year of high school he was the one who influenced others to engage in truancy (see Chapter 4).

As mentioned, the need to study the specific characteristics of social-friendship networks is important to understanding the nature of peer influences (Knecht et al., 2009; Fleming et al., 2009; Haynie, 2002), regardless of which theoretical framework is the backdrop. Another characteristic of social networks that surfaced in this study, relative to truancy, was process-oriented: almost half of the thirty-four respondents (six females and eight males) did not seem to plan their truancy far in advance (see Table 4.6 in Chapter 4). Rather, truancy tended to occur as a result of casual, day to day encounters with peers who came and went within the
hub of social settings and networks in the high schools. The process of initiating truancy occurred while waiting for school to begin, at lockers, in hallways, in classes, or any other location where students had time to casually meet, connect, and talk.

These comings and goings within and between different friends or groups of peers seemed to be, as one male respondent (Alexi) noted, “the unspoken law” (see Chapter 4). It appeared to be common knowledge among the youth in this study that if a student wanted to skip school, they could easily find like-minded peers — regularly, unconstrained, and without fanfare. Likewise, it was also implied that youth came and went, entered and exited, participated or did not participate in truancy on any given school day in the hub of high school social networks without the respondents feeling directly pressured to do so.

These seemingly unplanned invitations or suggestions to leave school reflect the significance of peer influences, as established in major criminological theories. The spontaneous decision to stay at or leave school may also speak to impulsivity or self-control as an individual characteristic, also recognized in some of the major criminological theories. The casual, day-to-day, unplanned process by which youth seemed to engage in truancy may also correlate to the general social context of truancy: its wide acceptance as a common teenage behavior in high school subcultures, its utilization of both homogeneous and heterogeneous friendship networks, and the opportunity that truancy periods provide for social interaction and social bonds.
Researchers who study truancy often look at how that behavior is correlated to other problem adolescent behaviors. Peer association and influence is a primary area that is a focus in truancy (and delinquency) research. However, more research may be needed to examine, simply, the social context of truancy. This is especially true given the strong connection between the social bonds established on the home front and the effects those bonds can have on a youth’s peer selection process.

Some youth who are lacking in family bonds may peer-select to compensate for what is missing on the home front and as a coping strategy. Other youth may peer-select the wrong friends because of a lack of choices; “bad” friends are better than no friends. In sum, further research may be needed to examine and more clearly define the subliminal and social nature of truancy.

The findings in this study indicated that the most common, top three conventional activities of youth who were truant were sharing meals together, spending time at a friend’s house, and traveling to an off-campus location (for the females, this was generally a shopping mall; for the males, this was typically an outdoor location). Chapter 5 has discussed one of those activities, the sharing of meals, to examine a primary way in which both female and male youth spent their time during periods of truancy. For the participants in this study, lunch periods seemed to be a common time during a high school day when youth had opportunities to engage in truancy, particularly with their peers. In sum, eating together (what) occurred on or off a school campus (where) typically near or during lunch times
and as a shared experience between peers (who) for the youth who were truant.

The primary thread that seemed to tie together the totality of findings from this study was the importance of social bonds in families and with peers. Examining how the subjects in this study spent their time while truant may have revealed a larger, more complex picture about social connectivity.

From a criminological and theoretical standpoint, the findings in this section of Chapter 5 may support two particular theories: the Routine Activity Theory and the Social Bond Theory.

The Routine Activity Theory proposes that crime (in this case, the status offense of truancy, as a subset of delinquency) depends greatly on the opportunities that are available and if the rewards for the (troublesome) behavior are worth the effort (Osgood & Anderson, 2004; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson, 1998).

Cohen and Felson (1979) applied this theory to adolescent activities that occurred outside and away from the home environment as these time periods create “opportunities” for youth (Osgood & Anderson, 2004, p. 520), as did studies investigating everyday activities and delinquent behaviors of youth (Agnew & Peterson, 1989).

The current study was based in the premise that ordinary time-use among truants might help shed light on that particular form of delinquency. The grounded theory approach and semi-structured interviews allowed research participants to
discuss, at will, how, when, where, and with whom they generally spent their time while truant. The findings in this study illustrated some of those routine activities at both an individual and group level and, further, highlighted the social nature of truancy, particularly in terms of social bonds – those that occur on the home front (parent-child) and those that occur in a school setting (peer-to-peer).

Hirschi’s (1969) Social Bond Theory, one of the most discussed and tested theories of delinquency for more than forty years, suggests that a juvenile’s behavior is affected by the levels of one’s social bonding in four distinct areas: attachment (positive relationships with others), commitment (investing in positive values, norms and institutions), involvement (in conventional activities), and belief (in good values – what is right and what is wrong) (Hirschi, 1969).

The current study seems to also support elements of the Social Bond Theory, particularly in the area of attachment, through the socialization and social interactions that occurred on the home front between parent and child and how this social bond of attachment (as a potential protective factor) may have affected youth later on when they begin to separate and become independent from parents, and cultivate bonds with peers through different social peer-to-peer roles.

While Felson and Cohen’s pragmatic Routine Activities Theory would address the situational and individual properties of a truancy study in time-use, Hirschi’s 1969 Social Bond Theory helps examine the underlying core components of
bonds, particularly attachment, that may be the driving force behind acts of truancy in this study.

**Gender Differences**

One of the purposes of this study was to explore any possible differences between boys and girls for truancy times. As illustrated in Table 5.1 at the beginning of this chapter, the results of this study indicated that the top two self-reported conventional activities during times of truancy were: *eating out* (eight females; nine males) and *going to a friend's house* (seven females; ten males). These top two activities did not show a significant difference by gender other than a few more males preferring to spend time at a friend's house.

The third most popular conventional activity during truancy seemed to indicate a potential gender difference in terms of where the participants may have spent their time during periods of truancy (beyond eating out or going to a friend's house). For the females, one of the most frequently reported activities during truancy times was visiting a *shopping mall*; for the males, one of the most frequently reported activity was categorized as *hanging around outside areas* because it involved a variety of outdoor locations such as bridges, buildings, alleys, drainage tunnels, train tracks, and gas stations.

While the females may have had a specific destination in mind, some of the males seemed to support the "wandering boys" concept found in some studies, where
truant males were more likely to engage in unsupervised “wandering” with peers (NCSE, 2005; Stoolmiller, 1994, p.263).

Some stereotypical gender differences in how time was spent during truancy were mentioned when a few of the respondents were asked about their perceptions of what girls and boys liked to do when truant (see Tables 4.6 and 4.7 for female and male perceptions). This may have been based, in part, on individual personalities or background differences between the respondents. It also may have been due to the adolescent age where, as some researchers have found, the compulsion to act in traditionally stereotypical ways is common (Huebner & Betts, 2002; Crouter, Manke & McHale, 1995).

As Cynthia described, girls engaged in activities during truancy that are generally associated with being female such as doing “your nails.” This was corroborated by Susan who explained how she would do her best female friend’s “hair.”

However, more males (five) than females outwardly expressed what could be considered stereotypical perceptions of activities during truancy when these males described their views or experiences of how the different sexes spend time during truancy.

These stereotypical perceptions can be seen when Viper implied that girls engaged in the “more mellow stuff compared to men” because boys like to “gain attention,” “show off,” “or blow something up.” Mime was a little more direct when
he made references to how girls liked to “talk shit about guys,” with the males showing a lack of interest. John #2 described the boys as “crazy” because boys take greater risks and are “more outgoing,” while Simon believed that girls like to “go shopping” and “have their little good time,” returning so that both genders could exchange their “stories” (see Chapter 4).

Six males and two females seemed to indicate that both boys and girls liked to do the same activities while truant or, perhaps more importantly, that the activity really did not matter as much as having the opportunity to “mingle” with the opposite sex, as Mike explained.

The inquiry into what girls and boys liked to do when truant seemed to be a difficult question for some of the male respondents to answer because either they felt they were not sure (six males mentioned that they were “not sure”) or because they did not know since most of their friends were male (five males noted that “most of their friends were male”). Contrastingly, four females mentioned that they were “not sure” and four females mentioned that they did not know because “most of their friends were males.”

This may be an interesting point in the findings because it directs attention to potential preferences for same-sex or other-sex peer relationships. The males who were not sure of the activities of girls during truancy indicated a preference for male friends; that is, they spent more time with other males and, therefore, could not define how females liked to spend time during truancy. Yet, the females who were not sure
of the activities of other girls indicated a preference for male friends; they spent more time with boys and, therefore, could not define how females liked to spend time during truancy. This may suggest that some of the male respondents in this study had more same-sex peers (during truancy times), while some female respondents seemed to have more opposite-sex peers (for times of truancy).

Some research suggests that one of the maturing differences between females and males is in the area of identity development: females may focus more on attachment and emotionally-based relationships, while males may concentrate more on autonomy and a sense of separation (Smith & Smith, 2005, p.367; Archer, 1992; Patterson, Sochting & Marcia, 1992). These developmental gender differences may speak to some of the same-sex and opposite-sex relationship preferences noticed in some of the respondents. Also, some recent research has suggested that higher rates of antisocial behavior were related to having other-sex friendships in certain school grades (including eighth to eleventh grade), particularly for females (Arndorfer & Stormshak, 2008). This may be an area of research that needs further exploration for gaining a better understanding of gender-based friendships in the context of truancy times.

Perhaps more important than the stereotypes or gender-based friendships illustrated by some of the research participants is the differences in the general behavioral approaches of both sexes. In 2009, the National Center for School Engagement conducted a study on gender and the dropout problem in Colorado
schools (Bennett & MacIver, 2009). The results of the Colorado study found that boys’ approach to school life is more volatile, more disruptive, and involved more “acting out” when they were disengaged in school – and how this behavior compels school officials to “interact” with the boys to prevent disruptions from “getting out of hand” (Bennett & MacIver, 2009, p. 17). The current study, while not purposely addressing the same issues in the 2009 Colorado research effort, may provide some support for the 2009 Colorado findings.

For example, four males indicated during the interviews that some form of “acting out” may have occurred during their high school years. Viper recalled how he got suspended from school for “getting in the faces of teachers.” Mime described how he was “too much of a distraction” in classes because of the nature of his behavior, while Tom mentioned that he was suspended for “fights” that sometimes occurred during periods of truancy. Sparks described how he had been “suspended a lot” resulting in an expulsion from school, indicating that perhaps his behavioral problems went beyond acts of truancy.

These views of boys “acting out” were also supported by some female perceptions of what boys like to do while truant. Two females seemed to corroborate boys’ behavioral “acting out” when the females described their perceptions of what boys like to do when truant, as illustrated in Susan’s remarks.
The 2009 Colorado study also found that while boys are more “overt” in their approach to school, girls tended to be “non-overt.” That is, girls were more likely to “drift off” rather than “act out” if the girls were not particularly engaged in school life (Bennett & MacIver, 2009, p. 17).

Bliss seemed to illustrate this non-overt approach to avoiding school when she described how she engaged in truancy: if she did not want to attend school, she would simply make that “decision” and leave, without fuss or fanfare. Elizabeth, too, may have illustrated the “drift off” girl-approach to school life when she reflected on what she could have done differently when it came to being truant in high school.

A 2006 study by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) suggests that girls are just as likely as boys to be truant (NCSE, 2006). While comparing rates of truancy by gender was not one of the purposes of this study (since an equal number of females and males were selected and interviewed), the truancy levels for the subjects in this particular study seemed to indicate that fewer females were chronic⁴ truants than boys (see Table 3.1, Table 3.2 or Table 3.3 in Chapter 3). Of the thirty-four participants in this study, eight females and fifteen males were categorized as chronic truants; three of the females and one male were identified as moderate truants; and six of the females and one male were considered class skippers.

⁴ As noted in Chapter 3, Chronic truants were operationalized as youth who missed individual classes on a regular and ongoing basis or who reported missing over ten full days as the most serious or longest period of time (in days) that they were absent from school as a direct result of truancy (which corresponds to Colorado’s legal definition of chronic truancy).
By appearances in this study, then, the females seemed to be more likely to attend school than the males, even while engaging in truancy. Similar findings may have been found in a 2005 study where, at intervention, truants had low grades, but the females had higher grades than the males in the four subject areas of math, English, science, and social studies (NCSE, 2005).

The appearance of females being slightly more committed to school than males in this study is supported, first, by three male participants who shared their perceptions of what females liked to do when the females were truant. As John #2 noted, there may have been some level of apprehension or anxiety in the females that acted as a deterrent for the females because “the girls didn’t want to get caught.” This sentiment was also expressed by both Bob and Victor who described girls as “all about school” and less inclined to skip school.

Another area that may show support for the females being more concerned with attending high school, despite their truancy, was through the pattern of selective ditching; that is, how some of the respondents purposely chose some classes to attend and some classes to skip. In this study, thirteen females – more than twice the six males – referred to selectively skipping some classes and not others. Part of the reason for the pattern of selective ditching among the females may have been because some of the female respondents appeared to be more involved in school activities beyond the classroom. As Angela noted, even when she was truant she felt obligated to “come back for band practice or wrestling practice.” Likewise, Jennifer recalled
how she was on varsity cheerleading and enjoyed an automotive class, the "one class I never ditched," while Stacey had orchestra and "would've dropped out a lot sooner" if it had not been for the music class in high school.

It is difficult to make too many conjectures about the level of school commitment (even while engaged in truancy) for the participants of this study without knowing the full extent of the respondents' backgrounds, history of involvement with school, or any other factors that might have affected their interest level in high school academics. As well, studies have indicated that other gender-related factors, such as school responses to male versus female school disengagement can also affect the outcomes involved with academic interests.

One of the gender-based behavioral differences found in some truancy studies has suggested that girls are often truant because they are more likely to be caring for their own children or for other children in the family (NCSE, 2005). In this study, one female and two males (of the thirty-four participants) referred to providing childcare assistance at home as a partial reason for skipping school. Rachel described how "the rest of the time" for periods of truancy revolved around caring for her four younger brothers.

However, five participants — one female and four males — indicated that other forms of family-motivated truancy affected their ability to attend school, with one male student admittedly taking advantage of the home environment to skip school. In most of these cases, assistance with chores and
errands were provided at home in lieu of attending classes. This is, perhaps, an area of truancy that has not changed since the Province Charter of 1692 was enacted and the foundation for truancy laws were established. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these initial laws were originally designed to address child-labor issues, but were met with resistance by some parents who, for economical reasons, felt that family finances superseded a child’s education. This philosophy may be still hold true in some modern-day families.

One male respondent (Dad) recalled how it all “depended” on what the family needed at the time. Sometimes he would receive a “message from friends” that his mother had called needing something from him; at other times he would telephone his family to “see how they’re doing.” Two of the participants (one female and one male) mentioned how they were needed at home because of a family illness, usually involving the mother. The number of youth in this study who referred to family-motivated truancy was small, but the respondents indicated that this particular driver of truancy was not limited to females; in fact, more males than females in this study hinted at family-motivated reasons for truancy, which is a different finding than previous studies on causes or reasons for truancy. Both genders seemed to become involved in child care at home, tending to chores or errands for family members, or providing care or oversight for a parent who was ill, but more males than females in this study referred to these family-based reasons.
for truancy. Further exploration of this gender-based component for truancy may need to be pursued in future studies – including determining how often the youth themselves used family-based needs as opportunities, if not justifications or excuses, for purposely missing school.

A subtle, yet important, gender-based difference that may have surfaced in this study is how a few of the young women who were living with their single-parent fathers had to assume some of the traditionally adult-female roles in their households. As Denise described, the transition that occurred when she moved in with her father placed her in the position of having to adapt to “more responsibility” in the form of “the woman’s job,” where she had to learn “how to clean and cook” in addition to juggling “school and work.” This occurred in an atmosphere of a “very strict” father who was also abusive (see the Abuse/Neglect section of this chapter). Similar sentiments were mentioned when Elizabeth described the aftermath of her parents’ divorce and how her father’s adjustments to being a solo parent – a parent who “didn’t know how to cook” or “have a house with food in it” – put her and her siblings in the role of taking on more household responsibilities as “teenagers.”

Over the past twenty years, the United States has seen a 62% increase in the number of single-father households and has been classified as one of the fastest growing types of families (Lee, Kushner & Cho, 2007). A recent study
that compared single parent households involving mothers and fathers as heads of households found “no significant differences in academic achievement” between teens who resided with (primarily) their mothers or their fathers, which contrasted with previous studies and findings over the years (Lee et al, 2007, p. 153). This same 2007 study also found that daughters who resided with fathers that were significantly involved in their daughters’ education showed greater academic achievement for the daughters (Lee et al., 2007).

Less seems to be known about the specific effects, if any, of single-father versus single-mother households on a child’s truancy. In this study, one of those effects may be seen in the additional household duties and the changing roles described by a few females who lived with single-parent fathers. It may be that daughters, in particular, are put in the position of replacing the head female (mother) in terms of household duties (such as cleaning and cooking) to assist the single-parent father. This, in turn, can add additional life-stressors for female adolescents who, in trying to develop their own, individual identity during teen years, have to adapt to an additional and perhaps conflicting role: that of the father’s surrogate partner-helper. Identifying households run by single mothers versus single fathers and the subsequent role and responsibility changes that occur for both female and
male adolescents may be an area of study that could further the understanding of truancy.

In sum, the outcomes of this study denoting any possible gender differences seems to speak to developmental or behavioral differences rather than stark differences in how girls and boys actually spend their time during truancy periods.

While several of the boys seemed to experience undirected, unsupervised “wandering” during truancy, the girls seemed to have more activity-directed periods of truancy, even if that activity involved going to the mall. A few of the respondents indicated that truancy occurred, in part, due to assisting families with child care, chores or errands, and this occurred for both genders rather than predominantly females, as noted in previous truancy studies.

Some stereotypical perceptions of what girls and boys like to do during truancy were noted, but more so by the males than the females. However, some females and males seemed to agree that having both sexes spending time together in mixed company was more important than what activities actually occurred during truancy. The perceptions of what girls and boys like to do during truancy were limited in this study due to the fact that several females and males simply did not know the answer to that question. And this may have been the result of preferences for same-sex or opposite-sex peer relationships for girls and boys during adolescence.
Some gender-based developmental and behavioral differences found in this study seemed to be supported by other truancy research that indicates how boys may "act out" and girls may "drift off" when disengaged in school. Some of the females seemed to be more involved in school activities and perhaps less likely to engage in chronic truancy than the boys. A few of the females in this study experienced additional responsibilities and roles on the home front when living with a single-parent father, as opposed to the youth in this study who lived with single-parent mothers.

_Truancy and Other Forms of Delinquency_

The literature suggests that school commitment is especially vulnerable during teen years - more than any other developmental stage in a youth's school life (Henry & Thornberry, 2010; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Weakened bonds to school are more likely to be followed by other problem behaviors, such as substance use or more serious forms of delinquency (Hirschi, 1969).

One of the most common themes that emerged from this study on how youth spend their time in periods of truancy was the use of, or exposure to, marijuana as an illegal substance. Half of the participants, eight females and nine males, reported smoking marijuana during periods of truancy (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4). To a lesser extent, underage drinking (three females and one male), smoking cigarettes (four females and five males), and more serious forms of substance use were mentioned as an activity during truancy (three females and one male), although the
majority of the respondents indicated that they had witnessed or had been asked to participate in underage drinking and smoking cigarettes while they were truant (see Tables 4.2 and 4.3 in Chapter 4). Since marijuana use was so prevalent in conjunction with truancy among the respondents in this study, it is the main focus of this section addressing other forms of delinquency.

Marijuana Use and Truancy

Half of the participants in this study (eight females and nine males out of thirty-four participants) voluntarily self-reported the use of marijuana during periods of truancy. The respondents, however, may have differed in regard to individual levels of marijuana use during truancy, with some respondents engaging in casual, occasional marijuana use and others a higher, more regular use of marijuana.

Individual Levels of Marijuana Use

For four of the male respondents in this study, marijuana use seemed to hold less of an appeal during truancy times even when the substance was available to them, as summed up by John #2 who “never liked smoking weed” and Tom who “stayed away from partying” during high school.

Several of the respondents seemed to indicate that although marijuana use occurred during periods of truancy, it was not the central reason for skipping school, as noted when both Noel and Jennifer mentioned that smoking marijuana was “not the meat” or “primary reason” for skipping school. Other respondents indicated that
their high school years, in conjunction with periods of truancy, were the time periods in which marijuana use may have been initiated or escalated.

Four of the respondents in this study outwardly indicated that smoking marijuana was a primary focus when skipping school, best summarized by Stacey who mentioned that it was “the central focus of attention,” and Victor who noted that he would not skip school “unless there was weed.”

While some of the respondents did not outwardly acknowledge that marijuana was the primary purpose for skipping school, it is possible that smoking marijuana was nevertheless closely tied to periods of truancy without the youth consciously recognizing it as such, simply because the youth “all used to have it” – a self-reported prevalence that was shared by a majority of the thirty-four research participants.

A closer look at the narratives showed that three female participants indicated that marijuana was used as a mechanism to help start their day, to manage their time at school, or to create relaxation afterwards. This may suggest that some respondents used, and not necessarily viewed, marijuana as an important focus in their lives, regardless of whether or not smoking marijuana occurred during every or only some instances of truancy. As Susan recalled, marijuana was used when she was truant and at home during the day, to help her “get in my own zone and do homework” as well household chores. Bliss mentioned how school would be a “no-go” if she did not have marijuana to start her day. Instead, she would attend school only after securing marijuana from a downtown area. As well, two of the respondents had a (revealed)
history of truancy and substance use, as illustrated when both Bliss and Simon mentioned skipping school and using marijuana as early as elementary school.

Fleming et al. (2008) note that antisocial behavior that surfaces in one time period of a youth’s development can often lead to reduced opportunities and influences for prosocial behavior in the next expected developmental time period, as may have been indicated in the cases of Simon and Bliss. Without knowing the history for the onset of either truancy and marijuana use for the subjects in this study, it is difficult to make any conjectures about how many youth exhibited problem behavior in earlier grades that carried over and escalated in high school. That is an acknowledged limitation of this study.

Yet, it is quite possible that for some of the subjects in this study who may have had previous exposure and involvement with truancy and substance use (particularly marijuana), the risky behaviors that had begun earlier in time were carried over into and during the participants’ high school years (for a variety of reasons), making it difficult to provide conjectures on which came first: marijuana use or truancy.

Other researchers have suggested that there are different factors that can affect a youth’s current use of marijuana and those that may affect an escalation to greater or more serious usage (Butters, 2005; Esbensen & Elliott, 1994). So, while many of the respondents did not voluntarily identify their marijuana use as a primary reason for being truant, it is possible that using marijuana during truancy was perceived as a
casual, commonplace activity when, at times, it was more frequent and held more importance than the respondents could recognize or acknowledge.

*Availability, Acceptance, and Modeling of Marijuana Use*

Some research has suggested that school-related substance use can lead to individual use through several pathways, including the availability of the substance, how socially acceptable the substance use is, and the modeling of the substance use behavior (Mrug et al., 2010, p. 489; Hawkins et al., 1992).

What was most noticeable as a key pattern in the responses was how marijuana use was an activity during truancy that did not seem to occur in solitude, but rather as a shared experience with peers. This was highlighted in the dialogue (see Chapter 4) where many of the respondents nonchalantly used the term “we” to describe, in their own words, how and when marijuana was used during periods of truancy.

Some participants openly remarked about sharing this experience with peers, illustrated when Jane described how “we would smoke pot” and when Sparks described how “we all contributed” to the act of smoking marijuana during truancy.

Sharing the experience and activity of smoking marijuana during truancy is supported by recent studies that showed how youth who are truant from school tend to “skip school in pairs or groups” (2010, p. 116) and where “all levels of marijuana use were associated with increased truancy and dropout” (2009, p. 140) (Henry & Thornberry, 2010; Henry, et al., 2009).
It is beyond the range of this study to speculate which had come first: the act of being truant or the use of marijuana. It is not known which of these variables provided the stronger influence and "pull": truancy leading to marijuana use, or marijuana use leading to disengagement from school and periods of truancy.

This study does seem to show, however, that the prevalence and availability of marijuana was widespread among high school students, and that smoking marijuana and truancy were often simultaneous activities. Even if marijuana smoking was not the primary focus of truancy for some of the respondents, it was at the very least a byproduct of having free, unsupervised times through periods of truancy.

Warr (1993) observed how adolescents participate in a "culture of their peers, a culture with its own rules of dress, music, speech and behavior" (Warr, 1993, p. 247). The prevalence of marijuana use among the thirty-four research participants seemed to indicate that the activity of smoking marijuana was an acknowledged, established, and accepted social norm for a high school setting, thereby fostering a high school drug subculture that crossed socioeconomic, geographical, or gender boundaries. This was confirmed when the subjects were asked a few brief semi-structured questions at the conclusion of each interview where thirty of the thirty-four respondents nonchalantly acknowledged that substance use, particularly marijuana, was a cultural norm for high schools across urban, suburban and rural settings. Attending any school with a drug-subculture and strong user’s network can foster temptations and risk factors that may go beyond skipping classes (Butters, 2005).
Some of the literature on adolescent substance use has suggested that schools vary in substance use levels according to the social demographics of the neighborhoods (Borticello, 2009). The present study was not able to determine the relationship between socio-demographic factors of neighborhoods and marijuana use.

However, the youth in this study attended primarily traditional high schools in nineteen Colorado cities, with seven of the cities in urban areas, eight in suburban areas, and four in rural areas, as mentioned in Chapter 3. One youth in this study had attended a school district in an affluent suburb of Denver, where the median income is over $89,345 and the high school is designated as a Blue Ribbon school by the U.S. Department of Education (Public School Review, 2010). The participant attending this school indicated that the student population at this more affluent school had discretionary money from parents, which was often spent on substance use.

By all appearances in this study, the research participants were exposed to somewhat equal levels of substance use, particularly marijuana, across different types of geographical areas and among various types of neighborhoods, adding support to the notion that marijuana use is prevalent and socially acceptable in many high school settings.

An interesting question is why many of the respondents who acknowledged smoking marijuana during regularly scheduled school times (such as periods of truancy) did not limit this activity to non-school, unsupervised periods such as evenings or weekend. The answer may be found in the context in which the
respondents used marijuana: a high school setting where the school environment acts as a hub of social networks through which many various activities and people revolve. As Anthony disclosed, whether an adolescent wanted to attend high school classes or not, that did not change the fact that school is “where everyone was.”

The high school as a central meeting ground provides youth with various opportunities to experience independence and unsupervised free time without the watchful eyes of parents or even school administrators. The sheer prevalence of marijuana in these high school settings seemed to suggest that the substance is easily accessible to purchase, share, and use through other students at school, which – when combined with periods of unsupervised time (such as truancy) – may be one reason why youth engaged in smoking marijuana during school times rather than reserving that activity for unsupervised times of evenings or weekends.

As well, a high school campus may place fewer restrictions on students for entering and leaving facilities than middle or elementary schools, particularly if the high school has an “open” campus where students, especially upper classman, have similar freedoms to those found at a community college. Students are permitted to leave the school grounds during lunch times, for paid jobs in the afternoons, and generally experience a greater, overall sense of individual freedom and responsibility.

Many high schools, then, allow some students to enter and depart throughout the day, and this can be seen in youth who live within close proximity to the school campus as well as in youth who have to travel a longer distance to attend school, as
explained by Nicole and Noel in Chapter 4. So, whether or not a youth lives close to a school, the school remains the hub of activity, with pockets of unsupervised time periods.

Perhaps more importantly, the primary context in which youth in this study simultaneously experienced truancy and marijuana smoking was as a common, shared experience among friends, acquaintances, or classmates. Only one respondent (a female) mentioned smoking marijuana in solitude while truant from school. The association between these three factors – truancy, marijuana use, and social interaction – may be worth exploring further.

From a criminological standpoint, several theories may be able to shed light on the association between truancy and marijuana use in the context of social interaction. Research has shown that activities undertaken by youth during unsupervised and unstructured time periods can put youth at risk for association with delinquent peers and individual problem behavior (Fleming et al., 2008; Osgood & Anderson, 2004). Yet, there can be variance in individual behavior, across groups of friends, and in different settings, such as schools (Osgood & Anderson, 2004; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993).

Without the benefit of knowing the backgrounds and histories of the individual participants in this study, it is difficult to assess or speculate as to the extent of their association with delinquent peers, or whether the respondents in this study were themselves the delinquent peers with whom others associated. However,
what seemed to surface in this study is that marijuana use occurred in primarily socialization settings (albeit during truancy) with other youth. Beyond the well known and studied negative-influence-of-delinquent-peers approach to studying youth behavior, the social context of marijuana use, and marijuana use as one socializing agent (during truancy times), may be important in its own right and may require further study.

If one of the dominant peer cultures in high school involves a socially accepted subculture of marijuana use, then adolescents attending high school may be especially susceptible to exposure to this norm. More specifically, when periods of unsupervised activities (truancy) are coupled with a socially acceptable subculture activity (marijuana) and the opportunity for social interaction (bonding), then periods of truancy may be more complex than just the effects of peer-to-peer influences. One theory that may shed more light on this subject is the Social Development Model.

The Social Development Model, which has its roots in psychology, integrates key components of Hirschi’s Social Bond Theory, Aker’s Social Learning Theory, and Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory to explain how youth adopt the patterns and beliefs of the major social units in their lives (for example, family, neighborhoods, or peers) to which they become bonded. As a result, youth will either exhibit positive (prosocial) or negative (antisocial) behavior, depending upon the risk and protective factors that are present (Duerden & Witt, 2010; Kosterman, Hawkins, Guo et al., 2000; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins & Weis, 1985).
The Social Development Model also proposes that causes of delinquent behavior are more complex than merely peer-to-peer influences, involve multiple factors, and represent an intertwining path of prosocial or antisocial outcomes as youth progress through development stages involving preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school. In each stage of development, youth have risk factors that can "push" them towards delinquent behavior and protective factors that can "pull" them from delinquent behaviors, based on four factors involved in the socialization process of each development phase: 1) the opportunities that are presented for interactions and activities with others; 2) the degree of involvement and interaction; 3) the skills with that youth have and use during these interactions; and 4) the reinforcement that youth receive during these interactions with others. This theory addresses problem behavior for youth in general (not just at-risk or high-risk youth specifically) and has been found to apply to females and males across different social backgrounds (Regoli, Hewitt & Delisi, 2010; Fleming et al., 2002; Hawkins & Weiss, 1985).

In this study, and applying the basic premises of the Social Development Model, some of the youth may have adopted the patterns and beliefs of the drug subculture in high school through their current and primary social unit, their peers. In doing so, the youth may have been acting within the realm of norms in the high school setting and its drug subculture. Becoming involved with peers or groups who simultaneously share the experience of truancy and marijuana smoking may have
been compounded by the lack of protective factors found at home, leading some of the participants to compensate for familial bonds through social bonds with peers. If that is true, then the social context of conjoined truancy and smoking marijuana may represent something more complex than just peer-to-peer influences. Truancy may provide the vehicle for social bonding, with marijuana smoking as a shared activity during this socialization process.

Another connection between truancy, marijuana use, and a high school setting may be found in a 2007 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) that showed how 73% of teens defined school stress as the top reason for their drug use (Brown University, 2008). This is not to say that smoking marijuana was a stress-reducer for all the participants, as there appeared to be many social reasons, too. However, as other researchers have noted, “these enjoyable social experiences may evolve into coping techniques” that are found through the school environment (Butters, 2005, p. 852; Wills, 1986).

It is not difficult to imagine how school-based stress could have played a hidden role in the social context of truancy and marijuana use if truancy is viewed through the lens of school-avoidance, marijuana use is considered a stress-reducer, and both of these activities provide opportunities for social interaction and support.

For some of the students in this study, the high school culture and environment itself may have produced risk factors that contributed to problem
behavior through two themes that surfaced in the interviews: 1) peer group acceptance or rejection, 2) safety factors in schools.

Although the truancy literature recognizes the extent of school absenteeism problems, less is known about how school environment factors effect truancy because the school-based factors have received less attention in the literature (Spencer, 2009; Corville-Smith et al., 1998).

Nine participants (five females and four males) remarked about the difficulties associated with trying to “fit in” to certain groups in high school. The presence of high school cliques and different groups are common, but being rejected by (or rejecting) conventional peer groups may propel some youth to have to look elsewhere for an opportunity to socialize and bond with peers. As Mike noted, sometimes one’s selection of peer groups can be “a matter of convenience.” The selection of peers “as a matter of convenience” also seemed to be illustrated when Paris expressed how she “couldn’t relate to the other students” and, as a result, felt drawn to other, nonconventional groups of peers, as mentioned in Chapter 4. She may have highlighted an important point when she stated that peer relationships were sometimes based on not wanting to associate with certain groups of youth. Regardless of the reasons for that, what may remain, then, are relationships based on convenience and availability.

As noted in Chapter 4, Killian considered himself a “social outcast,” a “freak,” and “uncomfortable” with mainstream high school events and groups. For
those reasons, he may have gravitated towards the only groups that were left available and accessible to him: the “skaters” and the “stoners,” two groups in high school that are typically associated with marijuana use. For Sara, the move from New England to Colorado set her apart from the mainstream high school groups because of her accent and style, whereby she felt she was subjected to ridicule and prompting her to graduate early just to “get out of there.” For Sparks, being gay prompted him to associate with only “a select few people” whom he considered “acquaintances” rather than close friends. Ethnic or racial differences may have played a part in Denise’s selection of peers, since she described herself as the “white girl” in a high school that had predominantly Hispanic or African American groups whom she felt “picked on” her. Angela perhaps summed it up best when she remarked how there were some youth in high school who “don’t fit in” and that she was one of the “lucky” students to have friends.

It may not be a far stretch of the imagination to see how the acceptance or rejection from certain groups in high school may lead students to form their own subgroups. Coupled with the lack of choices for peers from which to select, it is also possible that the availability of friendships leads some youth to self-select into groups that are prone towards delinquent behavior, such as truancy and marijuana smoking. As one researcher on peer group membership notes, even when some peer groups create a distraction from school, the peer group may also serve as a buffer against “rejection by peers, parents or schools” (Newman et al., 2007, p. 260).
Another school-based risk factor that might influence the social contexts of truancy and marijuana smoking is the overall safety environment of the school. Just as violence and aggression can attain a certain amount of prestige, respect, and peer acceptance among some youth in high school (Staff & Kreager, 2008), that same violence and aggression might “push” others into certain peer associations - for camaraderie, for safety, or for escape.

In this study, four females and five male respondents mentioned incidents of bullying, teasing, fights, or violence while attending high school, indicating that high school “stress” reaches beyond merely completing homework assignments on time. With such goings-on in high school, peer selection may be limited. As well, the use of marijuana as a stress-reducer in a socialized context among mutually accepting peers may be part of the reason why truancy and marijuana use are so closely tied during times of truancy.

For example and as noted in Chapter 4, Bliss described how she had items thrown at her because she was overweight. She developed drug habits that extended beyond marijuana (and included methamphetamines and heroin). Her consequential drug-induced weight loss prompted other students to see her as more acceptable, to treat her differently, and “stuff started changing.” The dynamics of peer rejection and acceptance among high school peers is, as she noted, “a vicious cycle.”

Alexi (male) also described “teasing” that was directed at him during high school, particularly in his freshman year, and which may have influenced
his selection of peers. For Denise, changing high schools when her home situation required moves to new locations put her in the position of “always being the new girl” and vulnerable to girls who “always started trouble” with her. Similarly, Elizabeth remarked how, at an alternative high school, the peer acceptance “hierarchy” was opposite of a traditional high school. At an alternative high school, then, peer selection expectations meant associating with the “weirdoes” because that is who made up the primary composition of the student population.

In sum, the primary context in which youth in this study simultaneously experienced truancy and marijuana smoking was in a common, shared experience among peers with whom they felt most comfortable, where a reciprocal peer-acceptance existed, and in a seemingly social context that allowed for some social bonding that, otherwise, may not have been available to the participants. Two risk factors associated with high school environments and cultures—peer acceptance or rejection and the safety environment of the school—may have contributed to truancy (as an avoidance mechanism) and marijuana use (as a stress-reducer) during times of truancy (an opportunity for social bonding with peers).

Other Forms of Delinquency

Research has clearly documented over the years that there is a strong link between truancy and its potential pathway to delinquency or more serious forms of juvenile offending (NCSE, 2007; Sheppard, 2007; Wang, et al., 2005; Balfanz et al,
One of the purposes of this study was to explore forms of delinquency that may be correlated to truancy times, since unsupervised time during periods of truancy can put truant youth at risk for other, more serious forms of delinquency. A list of the illegal activities that subjects of this study participated in during truancy, as gleaned from the interviews, is summarized in Table 4.9 in Chapter 4. In this study, the most prevalent delinquent behavior during times of truancy (other than marijuana use) appeared to be shoplifting. This is not surprising considering that truancy involves unsupervised periods of time and, in this study, a larger portion of that time was spent in retail locations such as malls (for the females) and wandering about (for the males).

The National Association of Shoplifting Prevention (NASP) reports that approximately one in eleven people have shoplifted over the course of their lives (Blanco, Grant, Petry et al., 2008). Shoplifting is fairly common among teens, and in a 1990 study it was reported that shoplifting was equally likely to occur among males and females, despite the general perception that shoplifting is a “female” crime (Cox, Cox & Moschis, 1990). The results of this study seem to provide support for the 1990 findings in terms of involvement by both females and males. Shoplifting is a costly crime for society, averaging approximately $400 each year in higher retail costs for every American family and, therefore, cannot be viewed lightly (Stankevich, 2004). Stacey recalled how “a lot of people did shoplift” items from food to “a trash
bag full of clothes.” She also described how forms of delinquent theft often extended into other realms, such as electronic equipment. Viper recalled seeing “robberies happen” and how “the majority of them [teens] are just always taking from stores.”

To a lesser extent than shoplifting, the other delinquency-related activities that occurred during truancy included: the use of more serious drugs such as acid, methamphetamines, cocaine, or heroin (mentioned by three females and one male); underage alcohol use (reported by three females and one male); trespassing (mentioned by one female and three males); and assaults/fighting (reported by four males).

Without knowing the full histories of the research participants in this study, it is difficult to speculate on the extent of involvement in other types of delinquent or illegal acts beyond what the subjects were willing to voluntarily share during the course of the interviews. Four females and eight males indicated through their conversations that they had prior involvement with the juvenile justice system during the course of their young lives, but not necessarily during periods of truancy. This ratio of male to female involvement with the juvenile justice system seems to be supported by the many studies that indicate males are more likely to commit crimes than females, particularly for more serious offenses (Landsheer et al., 2008; Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 1998).

Another pattern that surfaced in the interviews is that, while truant, the research participants were sometimes exposed to other forms of delinquency or illegal
acts, but most of the participants in this study remained in the role of observer rather than participant. This is a finding that seems to underscore the truancy literature which indicates how, during unsupervised free times of truancy, youth are exposed to opportunities to commit more serious forms of delinquency (NCSE, 2007). However, this study differs from some prior truancy research in that for many of the youth in this study, the temptation may have been there through observing other delinquent, criminal behavior, but very few respondents indicated that they acted upon those temptations. The findings in this section of the study may underscore what Thornberry noted (2000): the need to be careful about making “broad generalizations” regarding the relationship between “persistent delinquency and other persistent problems,” such as those involving school (Huizinga et al., 2000).

It is difficult to say what this means: did the lack of involvement in other, more serious forms of truancy indicate that these youth had enough self-control or pro-social bonds with family and friends to avoid temptations to engage in more serious criminal offending? Were these youth – for the times during truancy that they observed others engaging in criminal behaviors – surrounded by peers who, like themselves, chose not to become involved in serious delinquent behaviors and, therefore, had peers with some level of pro-social behaviors that acted as buffers against the observance of others with more serious anti-social behaviors?

While this study cannot provide conjectures about why many of the youth did not seem to engage in more serious forms of delinquency, despite witnessing these
acts during truancy, this study does suggest that more extensive and specific research is needed to identify which truants (and why) cross over from less serious forms of delinquency to more serious forms of delinquency even when they have the opportunity to do so during truancy times.
"What's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same?

-- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

This study began with a natural curiosity about what teens do with their time when they are truant from school. That questioning had its roots in the generally held notion that teens who ditch classes in high school are "probably up to no good" and wondering if that was true. There is no doubt that truancy has the potential for leading to other, more serious problem behaviors. The widely published literature over the years on both truancy and delinquency has confirmed this time and time again. As well, the costs of truancy to individuals, families, communities and society as a whole are tremendous and cannot be understated.

The results from this study seem to confirm many of the long-held beliefs about truancy. This can be seen simply by looking at the categories of major themes that were gleaned from the narratives: substance use factors (particularly the use of marijuana conjoined with truancy); home environment factors (the relationship with parents; dependency, neglect or abuse issues; the impact of single-parent families; parenting characteristics, skills or styles and issues of supervision or consequences for
truancy); peer relationships (the social context of truancy and marijuana smoking with peers); school environment factors (high school subcultures with substance use, cliques, and at times violence); gender factors (potential developmental and behavioral differences between girls and boys); and forms of delinquency beyond substance use (shoplifting, exposure to others committing delinquent or criminal acts). Yet, the underlying thread that seemed to tie these pieces together can be best described as social bonds – the attachments, the connections, the links to others that can either nurture and protect youth or strain and endanger youth.

The fragments of stories from the research participants began in Chapter 4 (Findings). A casual question posed to the participants to aid in memory recall asked the participants how they spent their 16th or 18th birthdays. This question opened the door to further conversations in which the participants described, sometimes distressingly, their home environment. For some of the participants, home had been a treatment center, group home, foster care, or the streets. Others transitioned back and forth between divorced parents or spent some time living with relatives, friends or roommates while in high school. Still, others had what one would consider a typical, if not, advantaged home life. In sum, nearly half of the thirty-four respondents in this study portrayed a somewhat unstable or unsatisfying home life while they were enrolled in high school. And while an acknowledged limitation of this study was the preponderance of subjects who were recruited from adult learning centers geared
towards helping youth complete high school or a GED certificate, the implications of a less than ideal family setting cannot be ignored.

More than half of the respondents in this study were residing with a single parent during their high school years. While this study took a gender-neutral approach to the issue of single-parent homes – since some respondents reported living with a mother and some with a father – the aftermath of a parental separation or divorced was noticeable in a few of the subjects, whereby transitioning between households and adapting to new roles and responsibilities seemed to occur.

Abuse or neglect from a parent was noted in six of the narratives. Other youth seemed to experience forms of parental inattentiveness, deficient supervision, or a lack of consequences for problem behavior (such as truancy). Some respondents, however, acknowledged how their parents' care, support, and encouragement helped them to get back on track towards completing high school. Overall, it seemed that many of the respondents in this study had poor relationships with their parents. Without knowing the full history of either the parents or the youth, it is difficult to speculate too far or too wide. However, the lack of social bonds at home seemed to be a fairly consistent pattern among the youth in this study, regardless of the causes for that disconnection.

Peer relationships were another social bond that came to the forefront in the narratives. The results of this study seemed to suggest several factors as they relate to truancy and peers. The youth in this study typically engaged in truancy with at least
This study was not designed to explore which had a stronger pull or which preceded the other: truancy or marijuana use. But this study does underscore what has been recently found in other truancy studies: that truancy and marijuana use often occur together. Further, this study highlights a third factor in truancy and marijuana use: the social context in which skipping classes and smoking marijuana seems to occur.

The narratives in this research also seemed to indicate that in some ways the school environment may have inadvertently played a role in sustaining truancy. Regularly monitoring those who skipped classes and providing consistent, speedy consequences for truant students were practices that may have been lacking in some school administrations. The high school subculture of cliques, bullying, violence, and illicit substance use may have added to the problem of truancy by the limited choices of available peers who foster a positive, rather than a negative, influence for high school youth.

The top two conventional activities that females and males participated in during times of truancy did not indicate significant gender-based difference: both sexes reported that eating out and going to a friend's house were the favored activities. The third most frequently reported activity for truancy times indicated a potential gender-based difference: the girls preferred to visit a shopping mall, while the boys reported "hanging around" various outside locations (such as bridges, buildings, alleys, drainage tunnels, train tracks and gas stations). While the females
had a specific destination or activity in mind, the males seemed to support the "wandering boys" concept found in some truancy and delinquency studies, where boys tend to engage in unsupervised "wandering" with peers.

Some other potential (developmental and behavioral) gender differences were also highlighted in this study. Some males indicated a preference for same-sex friendships, while some females seemed to prefer opposite-sex peers. These findings may reflect recent studies that showed how same-sex or opposite-sex friendships in particular school grades, such as high school, can influence higher rates of antisocial behavior.

While the interviews suggested that girls and boys, for the most part, tend to participate in the same conventional activities during truancy, the responses also seemed to indicate that girls may be more engaged in high school academics and activities than boys, even while both genders are involved in truancy. Similarly, some of the interviews in this study seemed to lend support to the truancy research that has identified girls' non-overt or "drift off" approach to school disengagement and the boys' overt "acting out" means of disassociating with school. To a lesser extent, a possible gender-based factor that was noted in a couple of the interviews suggests that some girls are compelled to take on additional household roles and responsibilities when residing with a divorced and single father who is not yet accustomed to managing a home. Even though both sexes, to a small degree, were shown to skip school to provide assistance at home, it was the females who seemed to
take on additional responsibilities and roles in the home in order to assist newly
divorced fathers.

The use of marijuana was the most common illegal activity during truancy,
followed by shoplifting. What was noticeable in this study, however, was how some
of the respondents were exposed to more serious criminal behavior or acts during
truancy times through observations of others (rather than as participants). Being
exposed to more serious forms of delinquency may provide a temptation for youth to
escalate to more serious juvenile offending, but few of the respondents acted upon
those opportunities.

Since this study was conducted with a grounded-theory approach, it began
with more questions than answers, more notions than theoretical hypotheses. This
exploration of how youth spend their time when they are truant led to a larger, more
complex picture about social connectivity: how relationships at home might influence
behavior in youth; how behavior in youth can attract positive or negative peer
relationships while at school; how peer relationships centered around social networks
at school can invite positive or negative influences; and how those positive or
negative influences can impact the choices and decisions that youth make in terms of
problem adolescent behavior.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current research supports many of the findings related to unsupervised
periods of truancy, the significance of peer associations and influences, and the
importance of social interaction that begins with the family. Yet this study also raises some interesting questions.

What type of socialization or social bonding has occurred at home for truant youth? Are the parents attuned to their adolescent children in terms of the importance and need for youth to attend and complete school – even in its simplest form such as ensuring that teens get adequate sleep for school attendance? Are their competing interests at home that are producing family-motivated truancy? If so, what are those conflicting interests? What role do youth play in hiding problem behavior from parents or enabling dependent parents in order to justify school absenteeism? Answering these questions may help shed light on the role of family bonds and their direct or indirect impact on truancy.

As well, the triangular nature of truancy, marijuana use, and socializing with peers is an area that may need further exploration for better understanding this triad. While much of the truancy and delinquency research seems to couple truancy with either problematic associations (peers) or problem behavior (delinquent acts), this study suggests viewing truancy, substance use, and the social rewards gained through these unsupervised time periods as a *triad* rather than isolated or coupled components. Questions to be asked might include: which of these three components has the strong pull for youth – being absent from school, smoking marijuana, or socializing with peers? Which of these three behaviors is more or less likely to occur first?
Some developmental and behavioral gender differences were also highlighted in this study as a result of the narratives. Some males indicated a preference for same-sex friendships, while some females were found to prefer opposite-sex peers. This may be an area that needs further research since some of the truancy and delinquency research has found that gender-based peer associations, particularly in certain school grades, serve as greater risk factors for problem behavior. When a boy prefers to be with other boys during high school, will that make the boys more susceptible to problem behavior? When girls prefer to be with boys during high school, how does that affect the problem behavior for girls? Likewise, are boys more likely to “act out” when they are disengaged from school, and are girls more likely to “drift off” and away from school, as truancy research seems to indicate? If this is true, then perhaps intervention and prevention methods may need to be more gender-based as some studies have suggested.

Likewise, what role does the school environment play in harboring both truancy and substance use? If lunch periods seem to foster opportunities for skipping classes, should high schools reevaluate the block schedules that separate cohorts of students? Should high schools reconsider the risks associated with open campuses that often tempt students to miss classes or not return to school for large blocks of time? If prerecorded phone calls from schools to alert parents of teen truancy are usually intercepted by the teens, should other, more direct communications to parents be initiated by schools – with school oversight for truancy and parental notifications
occurring in a timely, expedient fashion? If high school youth subcultures openly acknowledge and accept marijuana use as a “typical teenage behavior,” what can be done to intervene and prevent this distraction to high school attendance and academics? This will be a particularly poignant question to investigate if society-at-large continues down a path towards accepting marijuana as a common medicinal substance or a substance that has the strong potential to be legalized in many states.

Children who are truant from school have been a concern to families, schools, communities and the juvenile justice system since compulsory school attendance laws were first created. This study reinforces, and is supported by, a number of findings from truancy and delinquency research. Yet, this study is unique in that it provides a glimpse into the world of truant teens, based on the personal accounts of seventeen girls and seventeen boys, and how they spent their time being truant from school.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW DATA SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW DATA SHEET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo-name of Interviewee:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date &amp; time of Interview:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Interview:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Female ___ Male ___ Transgendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Age (at time of interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Hispanic ___ White ___ Black ___ Asian ___ Native American ___ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Last grade completed in high school: |
| ___ 9th ___ 10th ___ 11th ___ 12th |

| Type of high school last attended: |
| ___ Traditional School ___ Alternative School ___ Summer School ___ Other |

| Location of high school attended: |
| ___ Urban location ___ Suburban location ___ Rural location |

| Interview: |
| ___ Individual consent form signed ___ Copy of consent form mailed or faxed to participant |
| ___ Agrees to recording of interview ___ Withdrew from interview |

| Additional Notes: |

INTRODUCTION: Assumes that a prior contact has been made, the person is willing to talk about his/her experiences during periods of truancy, and that signed permission documents have been received.
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Section I
(General Information)

I would like to ask you some questions about your own experience in ditching high school. Again, you do not have to answer these questions and we can stop the interview at any time. May we continue?

(Contextual Cue)
First, tell me how you spent your last birthday. What was that like?

1. How old were you when you first ditched a class?

2. What grade were you in when you first ditched a class?

3. When you were in high school, did you usually ditch school for just one or two periods?

4. Did you ever miss a whole day of school because of ditching?

5. Did you ever ditch school for several days in a row?

6. Did you ever ditch school for several weeks in a row?

7. In an average week, how much school would you usually miss because of ditching classes?

8. What was the longest period of time you were gone from school because you were ditching classes?

9. Were you ever suspended or expelled from school because of ditching classes?

10. Were there any other types of consequences you received from the school for ditching classes?
11. What did you like best about ditching school?

12. What did you like least about ditching school?

13. What do you think is the main reason you ditched school?

Section II
(Time-Use Factors)

I would like to ask you some questions about how you spent your time when you were ditching school. Again, you do not have to answer these questions and we can stop the interview at any time. May we continue at this time?

(Contextual Cue)
Tell me about the last high school you attended. What was it like there?

14. Describe for me a typical day when you would ditch school. What was that like?

Prompt, as needed:
How much time would you spend doing these things?

What time of the day would you do these things?

Where would you do these things?

Who would you do these things with?

15. What would usually prompt you to ditch school?

Prompt, as needed:
Was it because of the classes, the teachers, the school, the kids at school?

(Contextual Cue)
Tell me about your hobbies when you were in high school. What did you enjoy doing?

16. What was your favorite thing to do when you were ditching classes?

Prompt, as needed:
So, you would typically do this when you were ditching school?
17. Did you have a favorite time of day to ditch school?

18. Did you have a favorite day of the week to ditch school?

19. Did you have any favorite places to go while you were ditching school?

   Prompt, as needed:
   What were some other places that you would go to when you were ditching school?

20. Were you ever bored while you were ditching school?

   Prompt, as needed:
   Tell me what a really boring time would be like for you while you were ditching school.

(Contextual Cue)
Tell me about your closest friends when you were in high school. What were they like?

21. When you were ditching school, were you usually alone or with friends?

22. Who would usually come up with the idea of ditching school – you or a friend?

   Prompt, as needed:
   Was this planned ahead of time or on the spur of the moment?

23. Did you have a favorite person or group of people to hang out with while you were ditching school?

   Prompts, as needed:
   Would you typically hang out with this person (or group of people) when you were ditching school?

   Did you typically hang out with them when you were not ditching school?

   Did this person (or group of people) go to the same school as you?

   Did this person (or group of people) live in the same neighborhood as you?

   Was this person (or group of people) male(s) or female(s)? Both?
24. Did you spend more time with male friends or female friends when you were ditching school?

25. What did you do with your male friends when you were ditching school that was different from what you did with your female friends when you were ditching school?

26. From your experience, do you think boys usually like to do the same things as girls while they are ditching school?

Section III
(Perception Factors)

I would like to ask you some questions about how you view ditching school. Again, you do not have to answer these questions and we can stop the interview at any time. May we continue at this time?

27. If you could go back in time, would you do anything different when it comes to ditching school?

28. What advice would you give to other students who want to ditch school?

29. What do you think would help kids to NOT ditch school?

30. Do you have any other thoughts about ditching school that you would like to share with others?

Section III Questions
(Delinquency/Crime Factors)

The following questions have to do with illegal activities that you may have seen, heard about, or even participated in while you were ditching classes in high school. You do not have to answer these questions and, as I mentioned before, we can stop the interview right now. Would you like to continue with this final set of questions?

(Contextual Cue)
Tell me about where you lived when you were in high school. Did you live close to any parks or recreation centers?

Without giving me any names, dates, locations, or specific details, can you tell me:
31. Did you ever witness a crime being committed on the days that you were ditching school?

Prompt, as needed:
   a. Please explain.

32. Were you ever asked to participate in a crime on the days you were ditching school?

Prompt, as needed:
   a. Please explain.

33. Did you have any friends or classmates who participated in a crime while they were ditching school?

Prompt, as needed:
   a. Please explain.

34. Please simply answer “yes” or “no” to the following question: Have you yourself ever participated in a crime while you were ditching school?

   a. ____ yes  b. ____ no
Research Project

Seeking Volunteers!

This study has been reviewed and approved by UCD’s Human Subjects Review Committee, Spring 2009.

What is the purpose of the study?
- To learn about youth who ditched classes when they were in high school

Who is eligible to participate?
- Males or females who speak English
- 18 to 25 years of age
- Ditched school at least once during high school years

What will happen during the study?
- You will be asked to create a “pretend name” for the study, to protect your identity.
- You will be asked some questions about the times you spent ditching classes in high school.

Where will the study take place?
- Your school location (before or after classes)
- Or a public location (such as a coffee shop) that is easy for you to get to
- Daytime, evening, or weekend appointments to suit your schedule

What is the time commitment & compensation?
• About 50 minutes
• You will be reimbursed for your time with a small gift card

Who can I contact to set up a date & time to participate?
Name: Patricia Dahl, Doctoral Candidate, University of Colorado-Denver
Home: 303-279-4840
Cell: 720-849-1863
Email: PatriciaDahl@aol.com

HSRC #: 2008-164
Principal Investigator: Patricia Dahl
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Date: Valid for Use Through:

Study Title: What Are They Doing When They’re Not In School? Characteristics and Activities of Juveniles During Periods of Truancy

Principal Investigator:
HSRC No:
Version Date:
Version No:

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. A member of the research team will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don’t understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Why is this study being done?

This study plans to learn more about how youth spend their time during periods of truancy in high school. The researcher also will be studying differences between males and females, and between urban, suburban, and rural youth who experienced truancy during high school.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you ditched school (for any amount of time) while you were in high school.

Up to 60 people will be involved in the study.

What happens if I join this study?

If you join the study:
• You will be asked to create a “pretend” name for yourself that will be used to identify you in the study, in order to protect your true identity. Your real name will not be used in recordings or documents associated with the study.

• During the interview process, you will be asked questions about the high school(s) you attended; about your activities, hobbies, and friends while you were in high school; about how you spent your time when you were truant from classes during high school; and about your thoughts and feelings about truancy.

• The interview and paperwork process will last approximately 50 minutes.

• The interview will be tape-recorded, with your permission, on a handheld digital recorder so that the researcher can remember and review your answers to the interview questions.

• At the end of the interview, you will be asked to provide a mailing address or fax number so that the researcher can mail or fax to you a copy of the signed consent form for you to keep, if you want it.

**What are the possible discomforts or risks?**

Discomforts you may experience while in this study include:

• Feelings of regret or guilt at remembering the experience of being truant from classes in high school.

• Feelings of mental stress at remembering uncomfortable situations you experienced or encountered while you were attending high school.

• This study may also include risks that are unforeseeable or unknown to the researcher at this time.

**What are the possible benefits of the study?**

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about truancy. The benefits of the study will be:

• Allowing others to learn about how youth spend their time when they are truant in high school
• Helping others to understand any differences or similarities between males and females who were truant during their high school years

• Helping others to understand any differences or similarities between youth who were truant in high schools that are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas in Colorado

• Giving research participants a chance to think about, discuss, and share their past experiences of truancy in a comfortable and confidential setting

Will I be paid for being in the study? Will I have to pay for anything?

You will be given a $10 a gift card to King Soopers stores. You will be given the gift card even if you choose to withdraw at any time during the interview process. You will need to pay for transportation to and from the location where you will be interviewed.

Is my participation voluntary?
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you refuse or decide to withdraw later, you will not lose any benefits or rights to which you are entitled. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them. Participating or not participating will not affect your grades at school in any way.

Who is paying for this research?

There is no funding for this research.

Who do I call if I have questions?

The researcher carrying out this study is Patricia Dahl. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Patricia Dahl at 303-279-4840.
You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. You can call Patricia Dahl at 303-279-4840 with questions. You can also call the Human Subject Research Committee (HSRC). You can call them at 303-315-2732.

Who will see my research information?

We will do everything we can to keep your records a secret. It cannot be guaranteed.

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others. They are:

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- Human Subject Research Committee
- The researcher doing the study (Patricia Dahl)
- Regulatory officials from the institution where the research is being conducted who want to make sure the research is safe
- Recipients at fax machines (if a copy of the signed consent form is faxed to you, rather than mailed to an address that you provide)

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your name will be kept private when information is presented.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse, Neglect, or Threatened Violence:

- Some things we cannot keep private. If you give us any information about child abuse or neglect, we have to report that to Colorado Social Services office in your county. Also, if we get a court order to turn over your study records, we will have to do that.

- If you tell us you are going to physically hurt yourself or someone else, we have to report that to the Colorado police department in your city or county. Also, if we get a court order to turn over your study records, we will have to do that.
Confidentiality of Digital/Audio Recordings:

- Your interview will be recorded on a handheld digital recorder owned by the researcher. The recording of your interview will be labeled using the name you create for yourself as a research participant. Recorded conversations will be heard only for research purposes and only by the researcher. Your true identity and any other identifying personal information that may become known to the researcher will not be used in any recordings for this research project.

- The recorded interview will be transcribed (typed) so that it becomes a typed document. Once the interview is transcribed and changed to a typed document, the original digital recording will be erased from the recorder.

- The transcribed (typed) document will be stored in a locked file cabinet that is available only to the researcher. The typed document will be labeled using the name you create for yourself as a research participant. Your true identity and any other identifying personal information that may become known to the researcher will not be used in any documents for this research project.

- The typed document will be stored in a locked file cabinet for 3 years. After 3 years, the typed document will be destroyed by shredding the document.

Agreement to be in this study
I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

Signature: ____________________________________________
Date: _________
Print Name: __________________________________________
Consent form explained by: ____________________________
Date: _____________
Print Name: ________________________________
Investigator: ________________________________
Date: ____________
APPENDIX E: EMAIL SCREENING SCRIPT

Script for Initial Email Screening

(The PI's response via email:)

Thank you for your interest in my research project! I'm happy to discuss the project with you further. Please provide me with a telephone number where I can reach you, and the best day and time to call you. You may also telephone me at any time: 303-279-4840. If you're calling long distance, feel free to call collect. I look forward to talking with you!

Regards,
Patricia Dahl
APPENDIX F: TELEPHONE SCREENING SCRIPT

Script for Initial Telephone Screening

Thank you for your interest in my research project. I'm glad you called! First, I would like to make sure that you are eligible to participate in the project. May I ask you a few questions?

(If the caller answers “yes” to the above:)

- Are you comfortable with speaking English?
- Are you between the ages of 18 and 25?
- Did you experience truancy (that is, ditched classes) for any length of time while you were attending high school?
- Are you currently incarcerated or enrolled in an alternative sentencing program?
- Are you willing to be interviewed for this project?
- Are you willing to have our interview recorded so that I can go back and review what was said when I am analyzing my data? I will ask you to create a “pretend name” for the interview so that I can protect your true identity.
- Are you willing to review and sign a consent form at the time of the interview?

(If the caller answers “no” to the above:)

Well, I’m sorry, but I do need to find out if you are eligible to participate in the research project, and the only way I can do that is by asking you some initial questions.”

(If the caller answers “yes” to all of the above:)

Great! I’d like to set up a date, time, and location that are convenient for you so that we can talk about your involvement in the project, sign some paperwork, and begin the interview. I anticipate that the whole process will take about 50 minutes of your time. I suggest that we meet in a public location, such as a restaurant, that is easy for you to get to. What works for you?
(If the caller answers “no” to any of the above:)

Well, thank you so much for your interest in the research project. But I'm sorry to say that because I am looking for research subjects that are [are not] ______________________, I won't be able to include you in the research project. But, again, thank you for your interest and for taking the time to call me. I really appreciate it.
APPENDIX G: DECISIONALLY CHALLENGED SCRIPT

Ask the subject to read "why the study is being done" from the consent form:
"This study plans to learn more about how youth spend their time during periods of truancy in high school. The researcher also will be studying differences between males and females, and between urban, suburban, and rural youth who experienced truancy during high school."

Ask the subject to explain in his/her own words why the study is being done.

Ask the subject to read "what happens if I join this study" from the consent form:
"During the interview process, you will be asked questions about the high school(s) you attended; about your activities, hobbies, and friends while you were in high school; about how you spent your time when you were truant from classes during high school; and about your thoughts and feelings about truancy."

Ask the subject to explain in his/her own words what will happen if he/she joins the study.

Ask the subject to read "is my participation voluntary" from the consent form:
"Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you refuse or decide to withdraw later, you will not lose any benefits or rights to which you are entitled."

Ask the subject to explain in his/her own words what it means for participation to be voluntary.
APPENDIX H: BIRTHDAY MEMORY CUES AND RESPONSES

Responses to “Memory Cues”: Recollections of 16th or 18th Birthday(s)

Females (n=17)

Sara
[About her 16th birthday:] No, it wasn’t special. It was, um – well, I was working a lot at that age. Yeah. Um, I was actually out of school – my birthday’s in June, so school was out. The summertime and my parents would usually let me have, like, a friend over or something like that. We went to a caravan in a neighboring town that was always held on the weekend of my birthday. Um, and then we went out to dinner – like Applebee’s or something. It was really – like, it was fun that my parents were taking the time to bring me out for my birthday, but it was kind of lame ‘cause I always thought I’d have this big, like, sweet 16 birthday party...My parents let me go – let me get my permit, my driver’s permit...Um, they wanted me to wait longer because we came from New England and all my brothers and sisters had to wait ‘til they were 17 to get their driver’s license. So, they didn’t think that it was fair that I would get mine earlier than theirs, so they made me wait six extra months. (Sara, age 23).

Katie
[About her 16th birthday:] No, that was – I know – I knew that I – I couldn’t drive, so that was I guess a little bit more frustrating and exasperating ‘cause most of my friends were getting or had their licenses already and I didn’t have mine. But I – it was similar, I didn’t – I didn’t do anything that stood out at all. I just – I probably had some kind of small party with some friends. (Katie, age 22)

Elizabeth
[About her 16th birthday:] ...my 16th birthday I went to the art museum with my first boyfriend and – and we went to dinner afterwards and it was the best date we ever had – pretty much the only date we ever had...Anyway, I’ve never really been able to get the hang of birthdays, really. Um, that one actually turned out pretty well, though. (Elizabeth, age 21).
Angela
[About her 16th birthday:] Um, my dad took me out to dinner and then we actually came to the 16th street mall and walked around. Yeah [it was fun]. Yeah, we do the same thing every year. My dad and my grandma take me out to dinner and then we go to a movie or something afterwards. (Angela, age 19)

Paris
[About her 16th birthday:] I don't know if I can remember my 16th birthday. Um, I think – I lived in – I lived in Lakewood and I, um, I think I was – it would, like be at the end of my sophomore year. (Paris, age 20)

Denise
[About her 16th birthday:] Um, actually I was working for my 16th birthday. I had a job – I worked at Popeye's Chicken. And I worked that day, and I lived with my dad and my big sister and my little brother in a house, like, in the city – well, not in the city, but like in the city area...by my school. And, uh, like my – I hadn't lived with my dad before and I started living with him when I was 15, like a year before... (Denise, age 20).

Cynthia
[About his 16th birthday:] Amazing -- amazing because at the time I was living with my mom and with my brothers and sister, and she – she made me a big pie with all my friends, my sweet 16... (Cynthia, age 18)

Noel
[About her 16th birthday:] My 16th birthday? I just spent it with my family. Um, I got my license and a car. (Laughter)...Yeah, so I celebrated with my family and we – like we did all the time in my entire life, and we would have dinner, presents... (Noel, age 23)

Rachel
[About her 16th birthday:] Uh, my parents threw me a sweet 16, which I didn’t want. I didn’t invite my friends ‘cause one of my friends was, like, 14 and she got pregnant, and I didn’t want my mom to say anything or judge my friends. Um, she [mom] told me it was just gonna be a small party and it turned out to be a sweet 16, which I didn’t want. And I was crying because I was not excited. That’s not what I wanted...And she took me to the salon. I – it took forever. I was there, sitting there for, like, three hours. I couldn’t even have breakfast. Hmm. After that I went to go take pictures. I was really mad because she wanted the pictures a certain way, I didn’t. (Rachel, age 25)
Stacey  
[About her 16th birthday:] Hmm. Well, pretty much like it was any other day, just like any other birthday. Um, you know I -- we -- when we were young my parents would do the cake thing and, you know, presents and everything...But as we got older, eventually, you know, we would just say, “Okay, we want this for our birthday.” So, um, that year I got, uh, - I got - I requested a[n] external hard drive for my computer - for my birthday, but, uh, other than that the day was not any different than any other day. I mean, I never had any parties really. I never -- my parents never threw a party because of the obvious space problems and -- everything. So, you know, I -- just another -- another day. (Stacey, age 19)

Susan  
[About her 16th birthday:] I think I sat in my room and cried ‘cause my mom forgot my birthday. My mom forgot my birthday a lot during my life...Like, she remembered everyone else’s, but when it came to me, just, like, she forgot about me...Yeah, I was the middle child, so...But I was moving from here and there ‘cause me and my ma – my mother wasn’t really getting along too good (Susan, age 22)

Amber  
[About her 18th birthday:] Um, I was working and hanging out. I wasn’t in school, so...I was living on my own. (Amber, age 22)

Nicole  
[About her 16th birthday:] Um, my 16th birthday I went to lunch with my grandparents and my mom and my little brother and my best friend. Um, we had lunch, they gave me gifts and stuff, and I opened up, um, this really round gift and it was a steering wheel over....And I go outside and my grandpa’s like, “I need you to park my car.” I was like, “The car is parked.” And he’s like, “Well, yeah, but I want you to move it up here.” I was like, “Okay,” so I go to his truck and the key doesn’t work and he’s like, “Try that car right there.” And it was my car...So, I was excited, yeah! (Nicole, age 18)

Kristy  
[About her 16th birthday:] My 16th birthday was actually very calm. I just stayed home and I spent it with family. I think I went to go see my grandma for my 16th birthday...[I] lived with my mom...Um, my dad isn’t in the picture at all. No. (Kristy, age 19)

[About her 16th birthday:] I didn’t actually do anything. Um, me and my sister have the same birthday – we’re three days apart - ten years and three days. Yeah, and it’s really – and she’s...and so we just – we always have to celebrate our birthday
together, (*Laughter*), so we just had – I had a couple of friends over at the house, and she did, and we just all went to my parents house and had cake. (Jennifer, age 18)

**Bliss**  
[About her 16th birthday:] I was in a treatment center. Yeah, my mom brought in cupcakes and cake – my mom was always there, you know. She brought in cupcakes, cake, presents, brought movies in for all the girls, brought little bags in for all the girls of, like, little makeup kits, and little – so my mom’s always been involved, you know. And just kind of hung out and it was all right. (*Laughter*) It wasn’t the 16th birthday that most people would expect, you know? But it was a birthday, so I couldn’t complain. (Bliss, age 19)

**Jane**  
[About her 16th birthday:] I was getting drunk (*Laughter*) with some friends up here, actually, and having sex. That’s what I was doing. (Jane, age 20)

**Males (n=17)**

**Mike**  
[On his 18th birthday:] I do remember going to a convenience store at about 11:50 p.m. the day before [turning 18] and just milling about for a good nine minutes, going up to the counter with my ID in hand, ready to purchase a pack of cigarettes (*Laughter*) and then, you know, as the clock struck 12:00... (Mike, age 24)

**John #1**  
[About his 16th birthday:] I don’t remember what I did. Oh, no! I met my – that’s when I met my friend Chase. He was – he’s now my – he’s my best friend now. I met him that day. And, uh, we stole popcorn from the teacher’s lounge, and then we went and had a party at his house, playing music and just hung out. Yeah, that’s what I did. (John #1, age 20)

**Killian**  
[About his 16th birthday:] Uh, I came from a very dysfunctional family, so, uh, birthdays just kind of float by...I don’t really remember anything special about it. (Killian, age 24)

**Mime**  
[About his 18th birthday:] ...when I was 15 I started committing charges. Well, I didn’t – I was on probation and then I kept revoked – getting it revoked, and then I got committed to the Division of Youth Corrections. And I got committed for zero to
two years. I was in a placement where – it was like a group home, but a halfway house at the same time. And that’s where I spent my 18th birthday. (Mime, age 19)

Alexi
[About his 16th birthday:] I got – I got, um – actually – actually, no, I was at Children’s Hospital for – in their psych ward [for threatening to commit suicide]. And they, uh – they made me, like, a little cake, like – like the size of two hands holding out and, uh, they spelled my name wrong, but (laughter) um, and, uh, yeah that was it. ‘Cause my mom, she doesn’t celebrate birthdays. And so, like, she [mom] didn’t come for my [16th] birthday or anything. I mean, she used to when I was little. [When asked about his father:] I kind of stopped talking to him for a while because I was getting tired of his empty promises ‘cause, like, when I was little he did that a lot and he just started it up again. And I’m just like, “Don’t – don’t say you’re gonna get this for me if you don’t intend on getting it.” (Alexi, age 18)

Viper
[About his 16th birthday:] I was in foster care by then. (Viper, age 20)

Tom
[About his 16th birthday:] I know the family was broke. Didn’t get much of anything. I think it was just dinner with the family. (Tom, age 19)

Sparks
[About his 18th birthday:] Uh, my 18th birthday I ran away from the system and I lived on the streets for three years after that. (Sparks, age 21)

Dad
[About his 18th birthday:] That’s a really good question. (Laughter) I – well, I really didn’t have an 18th birthday. I just – just hanged around. (Dad, age 21)

Amadeus
[About his 16th birthday:] My 16th birthday? It was just kind of, like, normal. I was just, like, at home, like – I had, like some family over, my brother and stuff...Just kind of had, like, a little family thing ‘cause I – I normally don’t have, like, big parties. (Amadeus, age, 18)

Simon
[About his 16th birthday:] Just pretty laid back. Just had a party, birthday party...with my family, went out to dinner...Just like regular parties, birthday parties...Then I got in trouble. (Laughter) ...[for] fighting...[with] ...uh, somebody that was acting stupid at my party. So, I got in trouble... (Simon, age 19)
Bob
[About his 16th birthday:] Um, my 16th birthday I was living with my sister on the south side, probably partying. [She's] a year [older]. [I was] ...drinking, smoking pot [for his 16th birthday]. (Bob, age 19)

John #2
[About his 16th birthday:] Um, I think that was the first time I never had a party, first time I didn’t have a birthday party...Yeah, just pretty boring. (John #2, age 18)

Anthony
[About his 16th birthday:] It was pretty fun, my 16th. Uh, just hanged out with a couple friends, you know; got drunk, stuff like that. We just kicked back. Yeah, it was pretty nice.
(Anthony, age 29)

John #3
[About his 16th birthday:] It was pretty good. I spent time with my parents, got a lot of presents, money — spending time with my — my parents, that’s about it. It was pretty fun...Yeah, I got an apartment [at age 18] and things went downhill...I don’t want to talk about it.
(John #3, age 20)

Victor
[About his 16th birthday:] ...[I was living with] foster parents. “Til I was almost 18. From 15 to 18. [Because:] Uh, I got – I just got drunk one night and, uh, the cops came and I just got a little violent and they arrested me. And after that – from then on I was – I did nine months and then – in a juvenile home...Uh, my mom passed away when she was – when I was 16...
(Victor, age 20)

A.C.
[About his 16th birthday:] Uh, I was living with my mom. I’ve pretty much been living with my mom all my life, on and off. I’ve moved around. I mean, I’ve been to – I was moving – or left to move with my dad in Mississippi and came back to here, and then moved to Keystone to live on my own and, uh, now I’m back here [with my mom]. (A.C., age 21)
APPENDIX I: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS: PSEUDO-NAMES, DESCRIPTIONS

Sara is a reserved 23 year old female who moved from the east coast to an upper middle class home in a rural (“horse country”) area in Colorado just before the start of her high school years. She refers to this untimely transition as “culture shock” and talks about how it contributed to her hanging around with the wrong crowd. Sara was convicted of drug trafficking charges in her first year of high school, which added to the alienation from “undemonstrative” parents. She was more successful in her last two years of high school, where she worked full-time, attended high school regularly, and graduated early from a traditional high school while on probation. Sara is working on repairing the relationship with her parents.

Katie is a happy-go-lucky, bubbly 22 year old female who has a long history of involvement in gifted and talented programs during her elementary and junior high school years. She’s very proud of that. Her primary reasons for ditching high school classes was to avoid “boring classes” and to catch up on any missing homework assignments. Katie graduated from a traditional suburban high school.

Mike is a bright 24 year old high school drop-out who initially ditched high school to “hang out with friends” at a local meeting place behind a Texaco station in south Denver. The owner of the station was so used to the local high school kids ditching classes that he set out lounge chairs for them, where the group would talk and listen to music. Mike’s absences from high school increased the more he was “not challenged” by “standard curriculum” and when he finally got a car – his vehicle to “freedom.” Despite dropping out after his sophomore year, Mike obtained a GED and went on to complete a four-year college degree at a local community college.

Elizabeth, now 21, feels that she was “always the odd one out” in high school and recalls many emotionally challenging experiences during her high school years: primarily, a “horrible home situation” and “relationship crap” involving a few girlfriends and one particular boyfriend. Ultimately, it was easier for Elizabeth to “give up” on attending high school and simply opt for a GED certificate, which she earned after trying her hand at both traditional and alternative high schools.

John is 20 and recalls the two things he liked most about his high school years: skateboarding at a park and practicing with a garage-band in his neighborhood. John ditched high school classes the moment he became a freshman at a north Denver high school; he says he did so because it was a way “to hang out with friends.” John didn’t stop ditching classes until he was a junior and then dropped out of school altogether. John earned a GED certificate and still practices with his garage-band.
Angela is a pretty, 19 year old blonde-haired girl who graduated from a traditional high school in a small affluent mountain town in Colorado. Her favorite time in high school was when she became an exchange student in Italy. She speaks fluent Italian. Warm weather and spending time with two close girlfriends enticed Angela to ditch classes – but not excessively because she was also involved with the high school band and high school wrestling team. As Angela notes, “high school is a waste of time” and what kept her there were “the activities, not school itself.”

Paris, at 20, recalls how she “hated school” and “the other kids” who attended. For Paris, ditching was a “productive” way to spend time – whether it was getting coffee with her close girlfriend, drawing or painting, catching up on homework, running errands, or just sleeping in. After getting caught missing too many classes and having her mother take away driving privileges, Paris began to take her high school classes more seriously and with one intention in mind: “to get out.” She took AP classes, worked a part-time through high school, and eventually graduated early. She got her driving privileges back.

Killian is articulate, serious, and very tall. At 24, he doesn’t seem to hesitate to talk about his high school years because “he’s had a few years to look back on it.” Despite attending high school in a popular suburban area south of Denver, Killian and his mother “lived in poverty.” Killian feels he was a “social outcast” in high school and began ditching classes (everything except choir and woodworking) during the first week as a freshman. Killian’s truancy, along with other problem behavior, resulted in a court ordered stay at a juvenile detention facility. He liked the “thrill” of sneaking off the high school campus and “the feeling of control” it gave him. Killian is currently attending a community college.

Mime is 19, with a round face, jet-black hair, and a long history of involvement in the Colorado juvenile justice system. He describes how he spent most of his life in foster homes due to his mother’s “neglect” and how there was “so much stuff happening” during his high school years that it was “really tough to focus on high school.” Mime ran away from several foster homes, felt the schools just “gave up” on him because he was already a “failure,” and that contributed to his getting “kicked out” of high school. There is no need to get a GED because “it’s just a piece of paper saying I can do something.” Mime is currently living in a homeless shelter for youth.

Alexi, at the age of 18, is familiar with group homes, psychiatric wards, and attempted suicides. What he liked best about ditching classes in high school was sneaking into downtown movie theaters and playing in a park playground while he was “stoned.” He was bullied in his freshman year, which stopped once he reached his junior year. Alexi’s mom was sick a lot during his high school years and he “took
advantage" of that to stay home and help her and his sisters. He describes himself as a "lone wolf" who experienced many "empty promises" from an absent father. Alexi is living in a homeless shelter temporarily and is enrolled in a GED program.

Denise is 20. What she liked best about ditching high school classes was "not having to be around a lot of her classmates" and worrying about what they think of her. She just didn’t have the "frame of mind" to "face that on a regular basis." Her ditching continued "more and more and more" as she progressed through high school. Denise feels her truancy was, in part, the result of a "strict" father with "a really bad temper." She feels she couldn’t "pay attention to school" while "constantly worrying about making Dad happy." She feared her father during high school and she feared boys in high school. She just stopped going to high school altogether.

Viper is a handsome 18 year old youth with unusual maturity and piercing dark eyes. He sees himself as a "cool, patient easygoing" person today. In high school, he feels he was a "bad kid" who was mean, made fun of other people, fought with others, was proud to be "straight and single," and loved sports. His accusations of abuse towards his father and step-mother while they lived in an upper middle class suburban area outside of Denver landed him in foster care during high school. He had "too much stuff on his plate" to concentrate on finishing high school. Viper is married now, has a baby due soon, and is looking forward to being a father. He and his wife live in a youth homeless shelter that is helping them relocate to a small apartment.

Tom is 19, tall and skinny, and likes to smoke cigarettes. His family "was poor in high school" and his least favorite high school class was agricultural mechanics. He also remembers faking a bloody nose to "get out of the earth science class" that he hated. He feels most of the classes were "boring." Tom is very proud of his truck and points to it through the windows of the restaurant where we are eating. He feels that "living in a rural area," where "everybody knows everybody," kept him from ditching classes excessively. There was no place to go except to "sit in his truck in the parking lot." And smoke cigarettes.

Sparks is 21, wears round glasses, is openly "gay," and dresses in a colorful, flamboyant style. He is very talkative. Sparks feels the main reason he eventually dropped out of high school was "anger" -- the anger he felt after his mom dropped him off "into the system" and telling him "she would be back." She never came back. At age eight, Sparks began a life in foster care. He has been in and out of many schools, including at least five different high schools. He liked science and lunch, but didn’t like gym because the other boys would make fun of him. He reads at the eighth grade level and is working on finishing his high school diploma at an alternative high school.
Cynthia is a petite soft-spoken 18 year old Hispanic youth who learned to speak English four years ago. She proudly states that she stayed away from the “troubled people” during high school, but admits that she has some regret at dropping out in her senior year. She says she left because of “problems” with her step-father. Her favorite way to spend time while ditching classes was going to the mall with a large group of girlfriends, eating at McDonald's, or making new friends. Cynthia describes herself as “very social” and doesn’t like to be alone.

Noel is a bright 23 year old young woman. She attended Columbine High School the first school year after the Columbine shootings. She feels her situation with ditching classes was “unique” because of how she managed to keep up her grades. Her primary reason for ditching classes was to find time to do homework, since she was working through high school. She lived across the street from the school and found that doing her homework during the day, when her parents were at work and the house was quiet, was “nicer.” Noel graduated from high school with a diploma.

Rachel, at 25, speaks with self-assuredness as she explains how ditching classes was “all about me.” Rachel’s mother “walked out” on the family and went back to Mexico when Rachel was 16. Rachel helped raise her four younger brothers. She got up each day at 5 a.m. to feed and dress her brothers before dropping them off at daycare; when she returned home, there was the house to clean and dinner to prepare. By the time she got to school, she didn’t “feel like being there.” Missing school was “alone” time when Rachel could visit museums and art galleries. She boasts that she is the only member of her family who has seen a “diamond show” and “Egyptian mummies” at a museum. Rachel never finished high school, but is proud that she was in ROTC for a short period of time. She plans to join the army.

Dad is 21 and chose his pseudo-name because he is going to be a father soon. He says he missed a lot of high school because he had “family problems” and had to “catch up on all the mistakes” that his family “put me through.” Most of his time ditching classes was spent helping babysit his siblings and running errands for his family. His mother was sick most of the time. He says he regrets not graduating from high school and his “dream” is to go to college. He is working on completing a GED. He is excited to be a father.

Stacey is 19 and explains how she lived in a “cramped environment” of 1,000 square feet that she shared with four people and two animals while attending high school. She spent weeks at a time living with her girlfriend’s family so she could have some “space” to herself. She wonders what it is like to have her own bedroom. Stacey frequented pool halls and sat in drainage tunnels with friends when she ditched
classes; she admits that she was a “lazy teenager.” If it wasn’t for her love of the violin and the orchestra at school, she feels she would have dropped out sooner.

At 22, Susan refers to her high school years as her “old lifestyle.” She tells how she “moved around a lot” with her mother and stepfather. Her mother “kicked” her out at one point and Susan lived with a variety of people “on and off” until she ended up with no place to live. When she ditched classes, she liked to spend her time at home when the house was empty, quiet, and she could “enjoy the peacefulness inside the house.” She would clean the house, listen to music, and “get into my zone.”

Amber, now 22, recalls the car accident and back injury she sustained one month into her freshman year in high school. Things were never the same after that. Amber lost time, lacked school credits, continued to fall behind, and felt she was facing “too much homework” on a regular basis. And she did not want to be “older” than the other students at graduation. It was easier to ditch school until she could drop out. She wishes she had gotten more help at the time from her mother who was a “single mom and had a lot of work to do.” She wishes her mother had been “fighting” for her.

Nicole is a genuinely happy 18 year old who boasts how “no one found out” that she was ditching classes until she was 17 and how she managed to graduate high school despite her mother who “didn’t care” if she attended school. She recalls how ditching classes was “a waste of time, but back then it was fun.” She especially “hated” school assemblies. And if she didn’t ditch, she always felt as if she was “missing out on what her ditching-buddies were doing.” She got serious about finishing high school in her senior, made up the lost credits, and graduated with a diploma.

Amadeus is an inquisitive 18 year old. He asks lots of questions and he laughs easily. Amadeus explains how he did not start ditching high school classes until he was in his junior year when “school was getting harder.” The harder it got, the more he ditched. And the more he ditched, the harder it was to catch up with his classes. He says that one day he realized that he had “messed up enough” that he “couldn’t go back.” He explains, too, how he has always “had trouble finishing something on time, within a time period.” He is in a new program now — an alternative high school that he likes. He is anxious to earn his high school diploma.

Simon is to-the-point and, at 19, has experience with the Colorado criminal justice system. He has “had a crazy life all my life” and feels his primary reason for ditching so many classes was the “stress with the classes.” He explains that he can’t read very well, the school was “overcrowded,” and that the teachers “weren’t really good with paying attention” because there were too many students “to keep track of.” He didn’t
have a car in high school so he “walked everywhere.” He never ditched alone; he was always with his brother, cousin, or a “mixture of kids” from the school. The first time he ever ditched a class was in the 4th grade. He is working on completing his GED.

Kristy is 19 and says “there were a lot of reasons” she was bored in high school. She was selective about the classes she ditched because some classes “she liked.” But she also liked to “chill” and “hang out” with her friends, whom she would meet in the morning at the school lockers and whoever wasn’t going to classes that day would begin to make plans. She would join them – as long as there was “no drama.” Kristy beams with pride when she says that she is graduating from an alternative high school next month.

Bob is 19 and speaks with hints of anger when he says he “didn’t like how they treated us” in high school. He feels the “teachers didn’t really help” because they “just worried about getting their work done.” Bob also feels the schools were too “strict” because he “couldn’t have piercings” or his “shirt had to be tucked in.” During high school, he clashed with his step-father, moved out, and lived with his aunt or friends. What he liked best about ditching classes was how he “didn’t have to listen to nobody all day.” Bob likes to play video games.

John, now 18, recalls how he spent a lot of his high school years “living back and forth between mom and dad” who “broke up when he was three.” He also recalls how there were always “money problems” and the “different jobs of his parents.” At some point, he started “hanging out with the wrong people.” They “get you in the mood” and ditching classes became a “routine.” For John, ditching was “pretty much a social thing” – with some kids in gangs, and some kids being “the Goths.” He is graduating in a month with a high school diploma from an alternative high school.

Jennifer is pretty, dark-haired, and 18 years old. Her boyfriend keeps a protective eye on her from another table in the coffee shop where we are talking. She tells how she sometimes ditched classes just to do homework that she hadn’t completed. But her favorite ways to spend time when ditching were tanning, eating out with friends, going shopping, taking naps, and smoking cigarettes in someone’s car. Sometimes she had her mom’s “approval.” And she liked it when the boy next door, who was older and always working on his car in his garage, would let her and her girlfriends “hang out” with him instead of going to school. Jennifer graduated from a high school in east Denver.

Anthony is 20 and by the time he completed the 8th grade he knew that he could get a job, work, and “wasn’t going to go anywhere with high school.” In fact, he wanted to
“just skip over high school.” He feels there is “no use for math beyond adding and subtracting.” Anthony lives with his mom and has never met his dad. His first experience with truancy was in the 4th grade and born out of “curiosity” when hearing other students talk about ditching classes. He says his mother knew about his truancy and would put him “to work cleaning the house” if he stayed home. Anthony dropped out of high school and earned his GED. He feels he “has no vision for the future” beyond working at a job.

John is a quiet, private individual at the age of 19. He readily admits that his main reason for ditching classes in high school was to get high on pot. John was expelled in his junior year for truancy and “had to be home-schooled,” where his parents “made sure” he graduated from high school with the assistance of an alternative high school program. John credits his parents with “helping me to succeed.” He has three brothers, a sister, and left home when he was 18. John graduated from the alternative high school with a high school diploma.

Bliss is a bubbly, talkative 19 year old female who tells how she was “living on the streets since 9 or 10.” Bliss has been in and out of the Colorado juvenile justice system for running away from home, truancy, prostitution, and the use of meth and heroin. Her first time ditching school was in the 5th grade. She portrays her mom as a “drunk” and her dad as “too involved with his tattoo shop” to pay much attention to her truancy. She has been married, separated, has a daughter, and is working on completing her high school diploma through an alternative high school. She proudly proclaims that she will be the first in her family to finish high school.

Victor is a handsome, muscular, and a quietly confident 20 year old. He tells how his truancy “got real bad in the 10th grade” and that he “made his own choices” in that regard. Victor lived in foster homes for at least three of his high school years. His mom died when he was 16 and his father relocated to another state. And he regrets the fact that he “got a little violent with a cop when he was drunk,” resulting in Victor entering the Colorado juvenile justice system. He likes lifting weights and working out. Victor is scheduled to graduate from an alternative high school next month and wants to go to college. He wants to be a personal trainer, too.

A.C. is 21 and explains that his main reason for ditching classes in high school was because “he had to work 40 hours per week.” And he liked working better than being in school. He wanted to “help mom with extra cash” and to “save for a car.” A.C. confides how he felt very “alone” in high school and remarks how it “wasn’t a safe environment” with “kids fighting . . . gang activity . . . people get stabbed.” It was best just to “keep to myself.” But his “whole family” encouraged him to finish his high school education – especially his father and grandmother. A.C. has had two
underage drinking citations and a DWAI. He obtained his GED and is taking classes at a community college.

Jane is 20, married, and pregnant with her second child. She has lived in three juvenile placement centers in Colorado – primarily for running away and drug use. She nonchalantly talks about her previous addiction to alcohol, pot, and meth and her father’s ten year probation sentence for molesting her. He is not allowed to have contact with her and she feels sad about that. Jane’s mother doesn’t have a phone, so she doesn’t speak to her mom very often. She attributes her ditching classes to the “high drama” of high school and joining a “different crowd, new people” who she feels influenced her behavior. Jane will receive her high school diploma in two weeks from an alternative high school. She is excited about the new baby. Her husband is on parole.
APPENDIX J: ADDITIONAL NOTES

Comments from the Participants:
If you could go back in time, would you do anything differently?
Do you have any advice about ditching school?

Sara (age 23)
Would you do anything different?
No. Don’t be stupid about it. You know? Like, if you don’t want to be in school, you don’t have to be in school, you know? You – and no matter what they tell you, you have your free will and so if you don’t want to be there, don’t go. If you don’t want to learn, then that’s your choice. It’s a stupid choice, but that’s your choice. But if you want to go to school and you want to ditch classes, you know, know when the tests are, know when the homework’s due, know when the labs are, know which teachers and which [guards] are watching the school grounds, and where they’re at. And have a backup story – there’s nothing wrong with a backup story! And if you get caught, it’s okay to tell the truth; they like it when you tell the truth.

Any advice?
I think that when you’re a teenager you’re starting to really, really get that itch to just go out and do – like, have that freedom, when you just want to go places...I think it’s a necessary part of the teenage life, especially at high school, to do it [ditching]. I think that those kids that follow the rules 100 percent of the time are missing out on something, you know? I think it’s necessary. I think you should do it.

Katie (age 22)
Would you do anything different?
Well, yes, especially if I was ditching for – I’m – well, that’s really tricky. I feel like it’s kind of a catch-22 kind of question because if I would have – if I would’ve changed anything or if I had the ability to change anything, I honestly wouldn’t have been – wouldn’t have lived with either of my parents through high school. If I had the ability to choose a family to live with, then I would’ve done that in a second and I know – I feel that everything would’ve been a lot better. Because even though it would’ve been really odd and different, I’ve stayed with different people and kind of families now.
Any advice?
...to make sure they go to college, no matter what happens or what they go through in high school, since they’re still, in most circumstances, have to stay at home. Whatever happens, it’s just a temporary phase. High school is temporary and so if – if they can make it through high school then they can do whatever they want with their lives, but hopefully not get – not blame it all on school ‘cause a lot of things aren’t school’s fault. It’s just that school’s the circumstance that they can take out their other problems on...But I would say it definitely added experience that going to all of my classes wouldn’t have...

Mike (age 24)
Would you do anything different?
Uh, I might have actually left high school once I turned 16. Just because, like, I went straight to college, I – and college took me a while just because of different life circumstances – I won’t get into it, but it took me a good while. Uh, I think that I could have gone through faster and got life started faster had I just gotten out of high school earlier.

Any advice?
Um, I’d say, um, for people that are ditching school already to either try to find something in high school that suits them and suits their interests – like if somebody’s interested in computers, you know, see if there are any computer classes that would strike their fancy. Like, try to get something out of it, but if it’s just not working for you, um, try to find a way to college because from my experience what happens is that people who didn’t really do the high school thing, people who didn’t appreciate it or like it at all, typically have a much different experience in college...one thing I definitely want to say over all of that is that everybody tells you that high school is incredibly important and that, you know it – you need it to be one of the popular kids, etc., etc. Um, it’s not like that at all. (Laughter) It’s just not. Like, high school really works for some people and a lot of people really learn a lot from it. Um, some people don’t and it’s not the end of the world...And kids who find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder now, I mean, in college people don’t tolerate the same stuff that they did in high school, you know? If some big, like – some just huge guy comes up to you and he’s like, “Hey,” you know, “Get out of my way,” or “Give me your lunch money” or something, you can just tell him, “Hey, we’re in college. Shut up.” (Laughter) “This isn’t high school anymore.”
Elizabeth (age 21)
Would you do anything different?
N/A

Any advice?
...if the kid is - is ditching for much the same sort of reasons that I was, like - like emotional distress, get the emotional distress handled and then get back to school. Don’t let the emotional distress, like, keep taking you out of the game ’cause - and - and if it’s not appropriate to finish school, then don’t do it. Don’t - and don’t waste your time trying to, but - but make sure you talk to other people. Make sure that you don’t, like, cut yourself off from – from support, which is a lot of what I did ‘cause, you know, I could’ve talked to my parents about a lot of this stuff even without a lot of pain or embarrassment and they could’ve helped me out...Just don’t let it wreck your life. Don’t let it stop you from going and doing what you really need to do.

John #1 (age 20)
Would you do anything different?
Maybe I shouldn’t have ditched as much, but I definitely had fun when I - like, I don’t regret all the experiences I had. But, um, I don’t know... I don’t know. Like, I’m not doing bad. Like, everyone’s like, “If you’re a dropout, you’re gonna be so horrible,” but like, it’s not that bad. Like, I – I do fine, like, you know? But, like, maybe it would’ve been cool to, like, you know, graduated...I know a GED’s less, but like – I don’t know. The way I always used to put it – I always thought it was like, “The reason people finish high school is to get a good job to sit in some office and do something they don’t like and prepare themselves to die.” And I was like, “That’s not for me.” That’s how I used to, like, you know, validate it, I guess.

Any advice?
Not ditch? Make school more appealing to kids. I mean, have like – I don’t know...change the curriculum a little. I mean, I don’t – I don’t really know. School – I don’t know, it’s different for everyone. Just make school more enjoyable. I don’t know how people would do that, but maybe get a group of students and study them...

Angela (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
Honestly, I probably would’ve ditched more school. Like – because, like, when you get into college and you realize how insignificant high school is, like - I probably would’ve spent some more time having fun.
Any advice?
It depends. Like, if you’re doing well in school I don’t think there’s any problem with ditching school, um, but I think you have to figure out, like, what you want. Like, if you know that you’re gonna ditch and you know that you’re gonna go to college, then really it shouldn’t be a problem ‘cause you obviously have your head on straight and you should have more freedoms. But if you’re kind of a screw-up maybe you should think about getting your shit together first.

Paris (age 20)
Would you do anything different?
Probably would ditch school a lot less. And I probably would’ve done better as far as grades and stuff go so I could get, like, scholarships and grants for, like, college so – ‘cause I have, like, a lot of college to do...So, I think I’d just, like, emphasize that, like, you can’t – like, it’s so easy to do well in school, especially high school. Like, if you’re, like, having problems with grades and stuff – which are important ‘cause of scholarships and where you’re gonna get in – then, like, you should maybe just go to class more...I’d never tell someone, like, “Don’t ditch class!”

Any advice?
...I felt, like, in high school I had a lot of things working against me ditching, you know? Like – ‘cause my mom was like – wasn’t okay with it [ditching], ‘cause I had friends whose mothers were, like, fine with it and, like they’d call them and they’d be like, “Mom, I missed this class,” and their mom would call them in. And, like, my mom would never do that – ever – for me. And so I think maybe a lot of it is just with the parents ‘cause I think that’s what made the difference for me, compared to my other friends, ‘cause my other friends ditched way more than I did...it was more like they let it slide, not that they didn’t care. They were just kind of like, “What do I do?”

Mime (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
I’d kick the shit out of myself and tell myself, “Get to class!”...Yeah, I would – I would definitely force myself to go to school...I would sit in the class with me. I would sit in the classroom and be like, “Pay attention.” ... ‘Cause it’s like I – I was paying attention in class, but I wasn’t paying attention. Like, my focus wasn’t on the teacher. Yeah, I heard the words. Yeah, they went straight to my brain. Yes, I remember them. I remember all – like, my math teachers, all the theorems and everything that she said, and all the weird
English lessons that I was taught. I mean, yeah, it all went to me but I just didn’t feel like doing it. I felt lazy and unmotivated.

Any advice?
If you’re gonna ditch school, at least do the homework...Ditch it – do it while you’re ditching. At least do something constructive. Go get a job or something...Go fill out applications...If you’re at least gonna ditch class, don’t do something stupid. You can do that after school. You gotta be patient. If you’re gonna ditch class, ditch like for a good reason...Do something rather than just sitting around on your ass smoking pot or drinking, or just shooting the shit with your friends” ...It’s just – it’s more of the consequences five years, two years, a month, two months. You’re sitting in lockup or you’re sitting in your parents’ basement not doing anything. You’re having to work a really shitty, dead-end job. You start realizing, “Hmm, I could’ve been doing this dead-end job while I was still in school”...I realized that when I actually got my first job...I could’ve been – I could’ve been working. I could’ve just gotten my work permit, found a job, started working, making money after I got off of school or on days – or on, you know, hours that I wasn’t working, things like that...Talked to the principal, gotten a work schedule, set it up so I could go to school and go to work, things like that. It would’ve just been so much easier.

Alexi (age 18)
Would you do anything different?
N/A

Any advice?
...I think they should have a better reason than just – if they want to ditch school I think they should have a better reason than just, “Oh, I don’t like that teacher,” or “Oh, I don’t like school.” I think it should be, like, “I’m having problems in class,” or I mean, like, even though that’s still not an excuse and you should at least look for help, but, like, if – if you’re just too afraid to go ask for that help, then that’s really all you have to do, is to ditch.

Denise (age 20)
Would you do anything different?
Yeah, I wouldn’t have ditched. Because it’s hard without education and, like education opens more door now that I don’t – I didn’t pursue that. A lot of doors were slammed and, um, you know – like, I’m homeless now and, like, I think that If I – if I would’ve faced things like a stronger person I would have excelled and I would be stable right now, so yeah.
Any advice?  
Be cool. Stay in school.  (Laughter)

Viper (age 20)  
Would you do anything different?  
I would’ve never ditched school again. Um, because if I had never ditched school I’d probably gotten a 4.0…Yeah, I drew – I finished with a 3.8 and the trust me, it was extremely fun when I did [ditch] and it was – well, I guess I take that back. It was pretty extreme fun, especially what I did, you know and what happened and stuff like that. But I just – I don’t know. Like, I don’t know if I would go back and change it or not, I guess, to be honest. I guess I would go back and change that one. I don’t – I don’t know….But if they are going to [ditch], to be smart about it…Don’t do anything stupid…Don’t do what I did (Laughter)…Don’t drink, don’t do drugs, you know, don’t – you know – just don’t – don’t be, like stupid about it. Don’t, like, make it obvious, you know? ‘Cause cops don’t like it when kids ditch school.

Any advice?  
If you want to look at it in a parent/teacher way, I believe that – that, um, if there’s a way that – tell them that there is a future in their life getting paid a lot, ‘cause it is hard once you graduate high school, if you do graduate high school…If you don’t ditch too much and you do not graduate high school it’s a – it’s a hard life. It’s ten times harder. And if you do graduate it’s still harder even – anyways because you still have to have a place, you still have to go to – maybe go to college or not, but you do have to have a job, and I mean it’s not – it’s not a cake walk, you know?…I’d say just look at your future and don’t – don’t try and mess it up, you know what I mean? I mean, all that fun, all that partying, all that sex, all that stuff – sports, trust me, it was extreme fun…I had a blast, but it’s not worth it.

Tom (age 19)  
Would you do anything different?  
Um, I don’t know. I guess, yeah, there was a couple of things I would’ve done. I guess so much as being a little bit more sneaky with doing it the couple times I did get caught, and I had other places I could’ve been going, I guess…I usually had a valid – well, other than smoking or whatnot, but sometimes my truck would break down on me, and I’d let the AG teacher know what happened and I’d show him, or I’d have to go to the auto parts store, which isn’t too far away from the school. So, he would hesitantly let me go.
Any advice?
Be sure you’re doing something you want to do, I guess.

Sparks (age 21)
Would you do anything different?
I wouldn’t ditch school at all. Because my education is what’s stopping me from getting good jobs right now. That and my criminal background. They’re all misdemeanors or city offenses, but – possession of an injection devise. I – when I graduated rehab I was coming off ecstasy, marijuana, methamphetamines and a little bit of heroin. So, I was battling four demons when I graduated. I’ve been out of rehab a month, less than a month. I was there for five months on outpatient – intensive outpatient...I’m graduated...I’m trying. I don’t come downtown unless I go to JRT or I go to meet my doctor. I just stay away from downtown ‘cause that’s where it all started.

Any advice?
If you ditch school you hurt yourself in the future. You may not see it now, but it’s – it’s hard being over 18 and not being able to get in school or get a job or get anything serious because you can’t afford it because – well, it’s just basically fucked. Let’s put it the way it is, you know? Your education is what allows you to see – find out how much money you can make. If affects your financial state a lot.

Noel (age 23)
Would you do anything different?
Um, I – I think if someone told me how habit forming it could be – obviously it’s not like I’m ditching out on my responsibilities now, but you know, it definitely doesn’t form – like I said, about ditching to complete homework. I mean, I definitely – that behavior followed me into college, and I was always very, very behind and just, like, right to the minute on any assignments. So I think if – if I had considered that maybe I wouldn’t have ditched as much, but I don’t think I would’ve done anything differently.

Any advice?
I think that when you consider the reasons – you know, just talking to you about how – what reasons I ditched school for, they seem so trivial. It’s like, I – I don’t know that I was getting a whole lot out of that. And, um, I could’ve gotten a little bit more out of school, and I think that part of my reason why I liked school less and less as I – as the years went on, it really had to do with, like I wasn’t interested in joining up with all sorts of things at school. I was very interested in just, like, school being for academic work, and then leave, go home, and do my own thing. And I think I could’ve gotten more out of, you know, joining groups, and I would’ve had a better
time while I was there, since I had to be there anyway. And that’s one thing that I definitely – that’s – I mean, if you – if you aren’t’ keeping up your grades, I think I would tell people, like, it’s not worth ditching if your grades are slipping. Because I think so many people in high school, especially in the early years, don’t realize how important those grades will be to them eventually, come senior year, if they want to go to school or they want to, you know, pursue further education. It’s hard to realize when you’re 15 that when you’re 18 you’re gonna rally care that you failed some class... I guess more advice front, I think, like the structure of the school that I had, where it was over campus, where you had kids who had all sorts of different hours off, I think that really contributed to, you know, being able to or wanting to ditch. Because if you – if all of my friends had to be in class, I think I would’ve just suffered through it together. But if – you know, like I said, some of us were off and some of us weren’t, it was like – you know, it gave the temptation. It left that there on the table.

Rachel (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
Um, if I could I think I would’ve stayed in school and got my stuff done. Because – I don’t know. I guess now at this point I’ve had my brother – he’s the freshman in high school – and every now and then he’s like, “Ha, ha I’m a freshman. I’m gonna graduate before you.” And it’s like, “Gee, man.” When I was a freshman I was too busy going places, but then again I’m like – I can still do it....but then again, if I would’ve not done that [be truant], I wouldn’t – I would have no idea where the IMAX, the museum is...I wouldn’t – I wouldn’t never seen Lucy [at the museum] in my whole entire life.

Any advice?
You should think before you do certain things, even if you do need your time. Just try to stick with what you got, meaning if you – you’re still in high school, just stay in school and finish and actually get good grades.

Dad (age 21)
Would you do anything different?
I’d stop all the little girlfriend crap, stop all the little this and that crap, all the little thing crap, and I would just go and focused. Like, I would – I would change so much (Laughter) so much just to get back in school. It’s a lot of stress...you got a lot of shit on your plate. You know, you gotta take one piece off, another piece off, another piece off. It’s gonna take time.
Any advice?
I would tell them [students], “No, way. Just get on the right track because it’s gonna kick your ass in the end.” Excuse my language. It’s gonna bite you at the end. It’s gonna – it’s gonna affect you. Like, you know, I wish I could talk to students. I wish I could. I wish I could tell them what not to do and what’s – what’s there in front of you. You know, you’re not – you’re not gonna get this opportunity in the long run...Just don’t ditch. That’s all I got to say, is don’t ditch.

Stacey (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
...it was because I started ditching that I started doing all these stupid things. I started letting my – my, uh, my standards slip, um, very much...you know, because their [friends’] priorities were not the priorities that I needed at that age, as a teenager. You know, their priorities were, you know, okay, get money, find someone over 21, get booze, find a house, let’s get drunk, you know? That – that, you know, that was kind of their mentality...

Any advice?
Oh, my goodness, don’t do it. (Laughter) That – you know, um – you know, like I said, I don’t regret what I did because I think I’ve learned a lot of important life lessons having done what I did, but I think I would’ve been much better off today if I’d stayed in school. You know, I do have dreams for myself...And, you know, had I – Had I gone to high school, had I done, you know, had I gone the right route, you know, I could’ve – I could’ve found scholarships and grant to go to school...But instead I’m – I’m unemployed, you know. I’m – I have a crappy apartment and, you know, and I have a crappy car and, you know, I’m really – I’m really struggling right now and – and I’m doing nothing with my life right now, you know? I still have these goals and I still have these dreams and I do want to accomplish that, but it’s going to take a lot more time and a lot more effort and, you know all of this – all of this time and effort that I could’ve saved by just going to school. You know, there are some [schools] that were completely open campus. There are some that are closed campus. And, you know, even the studies will show that, you know, if you have a closed campus you’re gonna have a better attendance rate than if you have an open campus. So, that’s the best thing that the school could do, is just close campus.

Susan (age 22)
Would you do anything different?
I would’ve actually went to class, even if I liked it or not. ...by the time I was able to put myself back in school, I was at her [sister’s] house, I had a boyfriend, I tried going back to school after I had my son – just – I – like, he [boyfriend] wasn’t supporting me, my child’s father...It’s not smart ‘cause you – because you have to
think about your future. Even though right now they [current high school students] probably won’t understand, they should sit down and actually sit back and think where will they be five years from where they are now. Nowadays, how the economy is, there’s no way you can get a job without having a high school diploma or a GED, and they will be stuck in a situation that they will not be able to get out of for a long time unless they put their mind and heart to it.

Any advice?
N/A

Nicole (age 18)
Would you do anything different?
N/A

Any advice?
It’s bad when you get into all the stuff that the other kids do. Like, when somebody would come up and ask me, “You want to smoke weed or do this?” I told them no. But when you start to do that and you’re like, “Yeah, sure,” like, that’s — that’s when it gets out of hand because it’s not necessary. Like, you can have fun ditching, but you don’t have to do the drugs. You don’t have to fight people and steal and stuff like that...Just watch what you’re doing and who you’re doing it with...I don’t think anything will ever stop them [from ditching]...I mean, a lot of kids ditch and they get into that habit and then they just don’t even go back to school. I’m really glad that I was one of them that did because I have so many friends that are still trying to go to high school that are older than me...

Amadeus (age 18)
Would you do anything different?
N/A

Any advice?
Um, [pause] probably just recommend – I’d probably just find out why, first of all. Why would you want to go [ditching]? ‘Cause if they don’t, like, have any reason they should just stay in class and just do their work. But, like, if — if first of all, they’re not doing their work and they’re not gonna, like, pass or anything, and that’s, like, their reason, like kind of me, then I’d probably just tell them, well, “Just talk to your parents about — get, like, a new program or something like I did” ‘cause that worked out.
Simon (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
Try harder. Like, I’d go to all my classes, try harder. Probably by now I’d probably have my diploma – a long time ago, probably, if I would’ve tried, you know what I mean? Now I’m trying to get my GED...

Any advice?
I’d say get your education before you do something stupid like that. ‘Cause you’re just wasting all your time, you know what I mean?

Bob (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
Yeah, I wouldn’t have ditched. I would’ve actually got my diploma on time...Uh, well, I missed a lot of things in high school, you know?...Well, just a lot of the social stuff, like a lot of the dances, a lot of the games and everything – football games, basketball games. I missed walking with my class actually, like, all my friends. You know, they all walked together, but I’m gonna be walking with these people. I mean, I’m not saying they’re my friends, but they’re just not the people I hung out with growing up.

Any advice?
Probably not to. Like, I guess it’s even stricter now. Like, if you miss, like, ten unexcused days now, it’s – you fail that class, so...it’s not worth it. Just get your stuff done...Just to know that it’s hard to make it without your diploma or anything, you know? It’s not fun. I mean, I was supposed to graduate two years ago....And maybe if I wouldn’t have grad – or if I would’ve graduated and actually been doing that I wouldn’t have got into some – the trouble that I got into ‘cause I got into some trouble about a year ago and that’s really why I came back [to complete a GED]. I got arrested on a felony.

John #2 (age 19)
Would you do anything different?
Yes, I wouldn’t ditch. Yeah, I would go to class, get my work done. Because I never thought I would be regretting it eventually, I would be looking back thinking, “I wish I could go back and just get it done...And I have to waste all kinds of time. [I see now]...that life is more important than jacking around, doing whatever you think is right, whatever you want.
Any advice?
Um, ditch sixth grade, and then after that, do what you got to do. Ditch a little bit of sixth grade, just to have a little bit of fun at least, but – I don’t know. You kind of mature over time, though, some people...throughout high school.

Jennifer (age 18)
Would you do anything different?
I probably wouldn’t do it as often. I would’ve pushed myself harder because I wasn’t – I was always in advanced classes, but I would’ve...pushed myself harder to do more of, like the business classes and just get past the hard classes I was in to do ones that were even harder because I could’ve. I know I could’ve. I just didn’t push myself to. I didn’t care at a certain point.

Any advice?
I would tell them – they’re not gonna listen. I mean, no high schooler listens. (Laughter) But I’d tell them not to, that it just – it’s not worth it because everyone always told me, “It goes so fast. You will not believe how fast high school goes,” and I was like, “Whatever. If feels like I’ve been here forever.” And then I left early and I came back and I was like, “Wow, that was quick. That went really fast.” And I would just tell them to not take advantage of it, to push themselves, because really that determines a lot of the rest of your life, based on where you’ll get into college and what you’ll be able to do...A closed campus...that would make a huge difference. You wouldn’t be able to leave. You wouldn’t have a choice because we could just, I mean, freely walk in and out whenever we wanted to. It didn’t matter.

Anthony (age 20)
Would you do anything different?
To be honest, I can’t – I can’t say whether I would do anything different. I know I would be ore black and white about it. Well, I know if I went to school I would try my best to accomplish it, to get a 4.0 and keep on with it and, you know, eventually finish...[I] couldn’t get myself motivated enough to do it, to stick with it, then I would just cut it off, just like I did. I wouldn’t be halfway about it, you know. ‘Cause a lot of that is what it was. ‘Cause truthfully I stopped trying in school when I was in 6th grade, you know what I mean? So I wish I could’ve just went back, told myself to do better. “You’re here, you might as well just do better,” and who knows where things would be for me now, you know?

Any advice?
Just if you want to make it somewhere school-wise, then just do your best at it when – at the time, because you don’t get a second chance. Time will pass you up like that and a lot of it you might regret...I think a lot of those closed campuses definitely
helped because the didn’t – they couldn’t leave and then not come back...But people are still gonna ditch, regardless. I think you got to change something in the school to make – to bring more fun, where people actually want to go, not that they have to be there...

**John #3 (age 20)**

Would you do anything different?

A lot. I’d do a lot – I’d just stay in classes and get my stuff done with. Uh, [I] could’ve got better jobs and been a little bit more smarter.

Any advice?

Mmm, not to do it. It’ll actually mess up your grade point averages ‘cause if you keep going to school every day, you’ll get – you’ll get your grades and stuff. And ditching, that’s just gonna get you suspended and whatnot.

**Bliss (age 19)**

Would you do anything different?

N/A

Any advice?

For every hour of work, give them 15 minutes of chill time or something, you know? Make it a little bit more easier, make a little bit more fun, you know? Don’t always be so focused on the hard thing, you know, make it like – a true – almost an individual learning...Even though you’ve got 20 students in the class, pay attention to everybody, you know?...It doesn’t always have to be, “Oh, you need to sit down, do the books, do your math homework,” you know?...And if you ditch, don’t do drugs. It makes it worse. It makes you just not want to go back. It makes you lazy.

**Victor (age 20)**

Would you do anything different?

Yeah, I would’ve went, and cared, and not got as – got so high all the time. I got – I wouldn’t have got high at all probably...Yeah, that was the whole part of ditching. I didn’t ditch unless there was weed.

Any advice?

It – it all adds up in the end. You could end up not graduating or – I mean, if they want – I could see them every once in a while, somebody doing it, if they just wanted to stay home and they were feeling sick, or they just didn’t feel like going that day and they had most of their work done. I could see that, but if you’re doing it on a regular basis, it – like I said, it just all adds up.
A.C. (age 21)
Would you do anything different?
Yeah, I wouldn’t have ditched, period. (Laughter) If I would’ve known that, uh, life is hard without education, I would’ve, uh, just stuck it through. No, I — I didn’t think anything of it, you know. I thought people were just, uh, messing around with me, you know, and telling me, “Oh, you need your high school.” I figured, you know, where do you need sci – science? You know, where do you need social studies?
And, uh, I thought people were making a joke out of it, you know?

Any advice?
Uh, I’d have to say, you know, stay in school and, uh, don’t be a fool. (Laughter)
Uh, I’d have to say basically, um, do what you can. Uh, if it seems hard at times, um, just, uh, ask for help. That’s what I’m realizing now, you know. I didn’t – I didn’t realize the whole, you know, put your hand in the air and ask questions. You know, I didn’t think about that in high school, you know? My main goal was to, you know, be quiet, sit in the corner, and do my work, whether I knew how to do it or not, you know?

Jane (age 20)
Would you do anything different?
I wouldn’t ditch – wouldn’t have ditched school. That it definitely wasn’t worth my time, being in trouble and the people I was around, ‘cause I was – after a while you get backstabbed and stuff by people, you know, and they end up screwing you over and you take the fall for everything. So, I’d definitely change that, and probably ‘cause I wouldn’t have to be here today, pregnant, trying to get my high school diploma, so – ‘cause I could’ve had it already, but decided not to, took the wrong fork in the road, so. [And] ...drugs, after I moved up here. I didn’t care. All I wanted to do was do dope and get high and stuff.

Any advice?
N/A
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\(^1\) British spelling


