To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jody G. Manning entitled "Why is Johnny Failing? It Depends on Who You Ask." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Sociology.

Michael Benson

Michael Benson, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance

Accepted for the Council:

Interim Vice Provost and
Dean of The Graduate School

WHY IS JOHNNY FAILING?

IT DEPENDS ON WHO YOU ASK

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
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Jody Gordon Manning
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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the problem of explaining the academic performance of children and on the differences that may arise when reports of academic performance come from the child versus the parent. Data for this study came from Waves I and II of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). Based on theory and prior research, it was predicted that the following factors would have a significant affect on the child's school performance: interparenal violence, parental drug or alcohol abuse, socioeconomic status of the family, personality traits of the child, level of parental support provided to the child, and gender of the child. Furthermore, it was predicted that the child's feelings toward school, as well as the level of family cohesiveness and stability as reported by the child would have significant effects on the child's school performance. Finally, the frequency with which the child skips or cuts school was expected to be significantly and negatively associated with academic performance. Because reports on academic performance at Wave II came from both the child and parent, differences in the significance of the aforementioned factors based on the respondent were investigated.

The children at the center of this study were in the first through fourth grades during Wave I and approximately five to six years further along in their education at the time of Wave II. Logistic regression was used to determine the effects of family and individual factors on the child's school performance at Wave II. Results indicate that many of the factors predicted to exert a significant affect on a child's school performance, such as interparental violence, socioeconomic status, and parental support, had no such effect. Other factors, such as the family environment appear to have

moderately significant effects on both parental and child reports of academic performance. Factors which consistently had a significant effect on performance in school were the child's gender, the child's school performance at Wave I, and the frequency with which the child skipped or cut school. While the previously mentioned factors were significant regardless whether parent or child reported, anitsocial personality traits of the child were significant only when the parent reported and the child's feelings about school were significant only when the child reported. This suggests that while parental reports of child outcomes can provide a great deal of information about the factors that may be affecting the child, it is equally as important to obtain information directly from the child when attempting to determine what and how certain factors affect their behavior and performance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past fifty years, it has been well established that an extensive variety of factors contribute to the scholastic abilities and performance of children, from family environment to the gender. Correlates of academic adjustment include levels of marital and family discord (Grych and Fincham, 1990; Rutter and Garmezy, 1983) and the child's or adolescent's perceptions of various dimensions of family climate, including the quality and supportiveness of relationships among family members (Nelson, 1984). For example, in their extensive survey of child-rearing practices, Sears, Maccoby, and Leven (1957) found much evidence linking parental attitudes and practices to children's psychological adjustment. Furthermore, Lorion et al. (1977) found that familial atmosphere had a significant effect on the child's school adjustment. Repeatedly, both psychological and school adjustment levels for children have been found to affect their academic performance (Deal et al., 1998; DuBois et al., 1994).

Other factors, such as the gender of the child and the socioeconomic status of the family, have also been shown to affect academic performance. For instance, Werner found, in her longitudinal study conducted in 1967, that low socioeconomic status was associated with problems in language, perception, reading, and control of aggressive behavior. Of children in need of placement in a class for the learning disabled, three out of four were from low SES homes (Werner & Smith, 1977). While the effect of the child's gender on school performance has been less clear, with some studies indicating that females outperform males (Benson and Harrison, 1989; Stumpf, 1995; Halpern,

1996) in certain areas and others implying the opposite (Stumpf, 1995; Halpern, 1996; Voyer, Voyer, and Bryden, 1995), a degree of variability has been found in the vast majority of studies which suggests that the child's gender may play an important role in the child's school performance.

However, what has not been adequately explored is the possibility that these factors may carry varying degrees of significance depending on who is supplying the data used to determine the child outcome, the child or the parent. Because the NSFH provides an account of both the child's and parent's report of academic performance, it is of interest to determine what factors may have an effect on these reports, including any significant differences and the implications they may have for future studies on child outcomes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Domestic Violence

Estimates regarding the prevalence of spouse abuse range from 10% to 30% of U.S. families (Geffner & Pagelow, 1990; Pagelow, 1984; Straus & Gelles, 1986); thus, it is apparent that a substantial number of children live in violent homes. When investigators ask women who have been beaten where their children were while they were being assaulted, in 90% of the cases the children are reported to be either in the same, or the next room (Hughes, 1988; Rosenberg & Rossman, 1990). According to Carlson (1984) approximately 3.3 million children in the United States see or hear at least one incident of physical conflict between their parents annually. The mean age when such family violence was first witnessed was found to be approximately 8 years (Henning et

al, 1996). Although battered women frequently report trying to shield their children from interspousal conflict, Rosenberg (1984) reports that in her interviews with children over 80% of them reported seeing and hearing the scenes of conjugal violence. Children of battered women, then, see and hear much of the conflict (McCloskey et al, 1995).

There is mounting evidence that exposure to this type of family violence has a negative psychological effect upon children (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; McDonald & Jourilies, 1991) which may manifest itself in a variety of ways, including poor academic achievement and disciplinary problems at school. In addition, physical abuse between parents has been found to affect children more profoundly than marital discord alone (Jouriles, Murphy, and O'Leary, 1989). Grych and Fincham (1990) corroborated these findings, reporting that children's behavior problems increased as a function of the intensity of the parental conflict, with interparental aggression exacting a serious toll on children's adjustment. Likewise, Fantuzzo et al (1991) observed the additive effects of verbal conflict plus physical violence on the psychosocial functioning of preschoolers. In a related study, children who saw conjugal violence as well as verbal conflict fared worse than children exposed to only verbal conflict (McCloskey et al, 1995).

The presence of domestic violence appears to put children at risk for early problems in social development, possibly disrupting their relationships with people in the home, with parents and siblings, and with those outside the home (friends and peers). Research on abused women indicates that physical violence perpetrated by the partner is often nested in a web of intimidation, inclusive of threats, insults, psychological abuse, and controlling tactics (Graham-Bermann, 1998; Marshall, 1992; Tolman, 1989; Walker,

1983). Hence, the context of domestic violence includes both coercive and control tactics that the child observes on a daily basis and that provide the background for the less frequent acts of physical violence (Browne, 1993; Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Dutton & Painter, 1993). According to Graham-Bermann (1998), there is every reason to expect that the general ambiance of these homes is associated with negative social and emotional outcomes for the child. Correspondingly, Long, Forehand, Fauber, and Brody (1987) found lower rates of marital conflict to be related to higher general competency, higher grades, and higher cognitive competency for children.

Furthermore, Scarr (1992) noted that a home environment that includes abuse and violence is considered to be outside of the range of adequacy for optimal child development. On measures of social competence, such as participation in social activities, these children scored significantly below their peers (Fantuzzo et al., 1991; Hughes, 1988; Wolfe, Zak, Wilson & Jaffe, 1986). Other problems noted among these children included school adjustment difficulties (e.g. poor academic performance, difficulties in concentration, and school phobia), deficits in problem solving, low self-esteem, and lack of empathy (Hinchey & Gavelek, 1982; Hughes, 1988; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; Rosenberg, 1987). It is difficult to determine the exact cause of a child's problem's in this situation since being a witness to marital violence is typically embedded in other family pathology. Therefore, attempts to isolate the effects of witnessing physical parental conflict from the effects of their related factors may not only be statistically impossible but also contrary to the reality of the situation in which the violence is observed. For example, in a study conducted by Henning and colleagues (1996) 96% of the subjects who witnessed parental physical conflict experienced at least one of the other

three family risk factors they controlled for (physical abuse, verbal aggression between parents, and lack of parental caring), and 38% experienced all three.

An additional complication is that many statistics used in an effort to unearth possible effects of domestic violence may underestimate the occurrence of domestic violence, and thus lead to potentially unreliable results. Precise quantification is difficult because victims often hesitate to report incidents of domestic violence out of fear, love, lack of viable alternatives, or cultural commitment or pressure (Mills, 1998). Indeed, Straus and Gelles (1986) estimate that less that 15% of victims report domestic violence incidents. Also, although there is mounting evidence that witnessing aggression in the home is harmful to children, it is notable that (1) some studies unearth no such effects (Cummings et al, 1989; Jouriles, Barling & O'Leary, 1987); (2) even in those studies where effects emerge, many of the children appear to be functioning normally (McCloskey et al, 1995).

The findings of McDonald and Jouriles (1991) also indicate that physically aggressive marital discord exerts a negative impact on parenting skills. Abuse of the mother can be indirectly related to children's behavior problems because it can lead to a deterioration in the mental health of the mother and the quality of the parent-child relationship (Hughes, 1997). Wolfe et al. (1985b) investigated the extent to which shelter mother's physical and mental health influenced children's adjustment. They found that maternal stress variables predicted child adjustment better than physical violence between parents, and suggested that the impact on the child of observing spouse abuse may be partially a function of the mother's impairment following specific events, such as being beaten, as well as the accompanying disruption and uncertainty in the family. Thus, it is

possible that some of the negative effects in the child may be transmitted through the mother. That is, if there are detrimental physical and psychological consequences for the mother, she will be less equipped to care for her children. Her mental health status could adversely affect her children.

Additionally, Straus and Gelles (1990) report from their survey conducted in 1985 that battered wives have more sick days, are more likely to seek medical attention, are four times more likely to be clinically depressed, and are five and a half times more likely to have attempted suicide than nonbattered women. Not surprisingly, a common outcome of being beaten is depression (e.g., Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Orava, McLeod, & Sharpe, 1996). Depending on the length of time the women have experienced depressive symptoms and the severity of their dysfunction, the parent-child relationship could be negatively affected. Research indicates that children of depressed women are at-risk for adjustment difficulties (Downey & Coyne, 1990; Lee & Gotlib, 1989). Moveover, evidence from areas such as child psychopathology indicates that depression can disrupt parenting (Downey & Coyne, 1990).

Cummings and Davis (1994) propose a model based on attachment theory in which they present evidence for their hypothesis that marital conflict causes children to have concerns about their emotional security, leading to adjustment problems. According to this hypothesis, emotional security is a central mediating mechanism, a link between parents' destructive styles of conflict and children's behavioral/emotional outcomes. Therefore, it may be proposed that the effect of witnessing interparental violence has a negative effect on the level of parental support, and ultimately the parent-child relationship. This lack of support by the family and the absence of a close relationship

with at least one parent may be reflected in the child's feelings about their parent(s) as well as their attitude about school. A negative family environment, combined with negative feelings about going to school and participating in school activities, may be reflected in the child's academic performance.

Family Environment and Parental Support

Over the years, researchers have agreed that the features most needed in a nurturing home for the child are a supportive family and opportunities to interact with peers and others outside the family (Baumrind, 1993). A high level of parental support, defined as parents who are responsive and accepting of their children, generally results in higher levels of social competence and adjustment for the children (Bowlby, 1969). Research shows that early supportive relationships are central to the moral, psychological, and behavioral development of young children, the absence of which can have diverse and long-lasting effects (Hartup, 1986; Radke-Yarrow and Sherman, 1990). Conversely, families that are immersed in an abusive and violent home environment are generally considered to be outside of the range of the adequate level of functioning necessary for optimal child development (Scarr, 1992).

Supportive relationships with parents can also afford youth with protection from the challenges of adolescent development. Among early adolescents, the benefits of high family support can be evident in reduced levels of both psychological distress and conduct problems over time (Reiss, 1989). Rossman and Rosenberg (1997) theorize that marital conflict can interfere with parenting, resulting in caregiving which is insufficient for meeting a child's developmental needs. Through parenting that does not meet the

youngsters' emotional needs, disruption of children's personality and psychological functioning occurs, resulting in difficulties for the children in the areas of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Furthermore, parental support has been identified as a major dimension of parent-child relations, with supportive parents taking an interest in their children's activities, showing affection, and providing help with everyday problems. A high level of support from parents has been shown to be associated with socially valued characteristics of young children, including high self-esteem, cognitive development, academic success, and general psychological adjustment (Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Rollins and Thomas, 1979) Generally speaking, positive interpersonal processes within families, such as mutual support and cohesion, provide opportunities for the development of mastery and competence. On the other hand, negative interpersonal processes, such as indifference and conflict, provide few opportunities for development (Amato, 1989). A good relationship between parents is reflected in a warm and supportive family climate for children. An unhappy marriage, in contrast, may lead to problems in other family relationships and is likely to result in a unsatisfactory family climate (Amato, 1989). Overt conflict between parents, in particular, has been found to be associated with behavior problems and emotional maladjustment in young children (Amato, 1986; Emery, 1982; Ochiltree and Amato, 1983). Research shows that positive family processes are associated with high levels of social and personal competence among children (Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Rollins and Thomas, 1979).

Parental Deviance

In a family where there is alcoholism and/ or drug addiction, relationships are almost always strained, resulting in anxiety and depression (Whitfield, 1980). Children who come to school angry and depressed are not only unprepared for instruction themselves, but also make it difficult for others to learn and teachers to teach. It has been theorized that lower cognitive and emotional functioning among children of alcoholics/ addicts may be the result of the alcoholic family's being generally less successful than the nonalcoholic family in establishing a well-planned, stable, and meaningful family life. Children of alcoholics/addicts typically are victims of child neglect and, in particular, of educational neglect. This kind of neglect takes the form of a lack of interest on the part of the parents in how well or poorly the child is doing in school, or even whether the child attends school (Towers, 1989).

Parental drug use also has implications for the nature of the parent-child dyad and ultimately for child development (Harden, 1998). Children of substance abusers tend to live in chaotic and often dangerous home environments that are not conducive to their overall physical, social, and psychological development. It is extremely difficult for parents who are abusing substances to fulfill their parenting roles and responsibilities (Resnik et al., 1998). The need for drugs and/or alcohol usually takes precedence over providing food and other necessities for children (Feig, 1990). The accomplishment of developmental tasks that children need to complete as toddlers and prior to the years entering kindergarten or first grade may be impeded by an alcoholic mother or by living in a home preoccupied with a parent's substance abuse. Children who grow up in homes where alcohol and drugs are abused are at risk of developing physical, developmental,

and/ or psychological problems that may surface as attention deficit disorders (Towers, 1989).

Research indicates that boys and girls from alcoholic homes have poorer school performance and lower academic achievement than children from nonalcoholic homes (Chandy et al, 1993; Sher et al, 1991). There is consistent evidence that children of alcoholics (COAs) evidence impaired academic achievement. Studies using standardized measures of academic functioning such as the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) and the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) (Bennett et al., 1988; Ervin, Little, Streissguth, & Beck, 1984; Hegedus, Alterman, & Tarter, 1984; Marcus, 1986) generally indicate impaired performance by COAs relative to nonCOAs. Examination of the school records of COAs and non COAs also reveals that COAs have greater academic difficulties, such as having to repeat a grade, failure to graduate from high school, and referral to a school psychologist (Knop et al., 1985; Miller & Jang, 1977; Tarter. Jacob, & Bremer, 1989). Childhood academic problems appear to be related to both paternal and maternal alcoholism (Sher, 1991). According to Sher (1991) children of alcoholics have a variety of childhood behavior problems, intellectual deficits, and are at high risk for school problems. The research is unclear as yet regarding the reasons behind the greater academic difficulties among children of alcoholics. Presumably, their impaired academic achievement could be attributable to underlying learning deficits, psychological maladjustment (e.g., conduct disorder), motivational problems, or an unstable home-life. In the case of maternal alcoholism, fetal alcohol effects also needs to be a consideration (Sher, 1991).

Like their emotional development, the social development of children of alcoholics is hampered and social interactions are complicated (Deutsch, 1982; Tharinger & Karanek, 1988). Living with the extreme mood swings and unpredictability of an alcoholic parent, children of alcoholics learn to mistrust authority figures. They also have elevated levels of anxiety, may demonstrate hyperactivity and frequent restlessness, and are perpetually busy. In a recent study of problems among school-age children of alcoholic parents, significant differences were found in emotional and cognitive factors including self-concept, emotional disorder, and intelligence between children with alcoholic parents and those with nonalcoholic parents (Bennett, 1988).

Socioeconomic Status

It is well established that poverty alone has a deleterious impact on child development (Huston, Garcia-Coll, & McLoyd, 1994; McLoyd & Flanagan, 1990). Psychological deficits are overrepresented among poor children, such as lower IQ scores, academic underachievement, psychopathology, and behavioral difficulties (McLoyd & Wilson, 1991; White, 1982). In a longitudinal study of academic performance of children from different social classes in Winnipeg, Bell and her colleagues found that lower socioeconomic status was associated with lower achievement test scores in reading and arithmetic even when IQ and a measure of school readiness were controlled (Bell, Abrahamson, & McRae, 1977; Bell, Aftanas, & Abrahamson, 1976). Furthermore, Werner (1980) states that the most powerful environmental predictor of childhood learning and behavior disorders is the "social status and family characteristics of the caretaking environment" (p 215). In addition, Alberman (1973), drawing mainly on

results from the English National Child Development Study, concluded that "overwhelmingly the best predictors of learning disability are poor socioeconomic circumstances, the child's position in the family, and the size of the family" (p 204).

The specific stressors associated with poverty shape the experiences of the children reared in these families. Among these stressors are housing instability, community violence, inadequate nutrition, and poor health care (Huston et al., 1994). Children growing up in these poverty-stricken, often violent, drug involved neighborhoods are disproportionately exposed to violence and display increased psychological difficulties in reaction to the violence (Osofsky & Fenichel, 1994; Reiss, et al, 1993).

Gender Differences

The data on gender differences in levels of academic achievement have been varied and somewhat inconsistent, with a definitive answer far from reach. The most consistent findings have been not on overall academic performance, but instead in three cognitive areas: verbal ability, visual-spatial ability and mathematical ability. Generally speaking, girls have greater verbal ability than boys (Stumpf, 1995; Halpern, 1996), and boys have better visual-spatial ability and mathematical ability than girls (Stumpf, 1995; Halpern, 1996; Voyer, Voyer, and Bryden, 1995). In all of these studies, however, the magnitude of the gender differences was very small.

However, Benson and Harrison (1989) maintain that as a group, girls seem to do better in school than boys during middle childhood, although both sexes may enjoy and like school. They propose that the enforced quiet and lack of motor discharge and the

"feminine" characteristics of school seem to impose a greater burden on boys than on girls, which ultimately affect how well the child does within the school environment. Because the school environment, at least during middle childhood, is more "female friendly," boys may not have grades comparable to their female counterparts even though they are comprehending the material at the same, or perhaps a higher, level. Additionally, the school environment as a whole is less tolerant of the possible behavioral and academic problems that may accompany a male, and thus the child's performance in school may be negatively affected. If these male children fail to perform well in the academic realm during middle childhood, this may have a negative effect on their future academic performance.

Importance of the Respondent

As reflected in the works discussed in the previous section, stressful experiences occurring during childhood may contribute to emotional and behavioral problems and ultimately disrupt positive development. However, the vast majority of studies have, historically, relied primarily on parental reports, specifically maternal reports, to measure the child's level of functioning and their responses to stressful life events (Mangelsdorf, Schoppe, & Buur, 2000). While some support the use of parental reports, noting that parents know their child better and observe their child's behavior over a wide variety of situations and across more extended periods of time than anyone else (Carey & Jablow, 1997; Rothbart & Bates, 1998), others criticize the sole reliance on parental reports, maintaining that it is unlikely for parents to be able to have an unbiased and objective

view of their child's behavior and performance (Bates, Freeland, & Lounsbury, 1979; Kagan, 1998) .

According to Kagan (1998) in the *Handbook of Child Psychology*, parent reports may be biased and may in fact reflect more about the parents' characteristics than they do about the child's characteristics. It is possible that parents may have a positive bias and only want to describe their child in a socially desirable light, in which case their reports on child behavior and performance may depict circumstances which are not an accurate depiction of the reality of the child's personality or actions. Likewise, parents may have a negative bias, perhaps influenced by their own feelings of negative affect, such as depression, or by basing their reports on previous negative experiences with the child, instead of making informed, unbiased reports regarding the child's behavior and performance (Moore, Cohn, & Campbell, 1997; Richters, 1992). For example, it has been found that mothers who endorse negative statements about themselves (e.g. anxiety, depression, general negative affectivity) also rate their infants as having more negative temperamental traits (Bates, 1987; Daniels et al., 1984; Mangelsdorf et al., 1990).

Furthermore, parents' reports of their own stress and psychological symptoms are more often associated with their reports of their children's maladjustment than with the children's self-reports of distress (e.g. Cohen et al., 1987; Glyshaw et al., 1988; Siegal & Brown, 1988). As noted by Compas and Phares (1991), it appears that in prospective studies, child and adolescent self-reports of stressful events are associated with their self-reports of emotional and behavioral problems, but they are not related to parents' reports of children's maladjustment. These findings suggest that relying solely on parental reports to determine the causes of child behavior and performance may lead to unreliable

results, since the parents' reports are commonly more reflective of the parents' characteristics than the actual behavior and performance of the child. While it is important to note that child reports may also be affected or skewed by certain biases that affect each child individually, integrating the child reports into studies which are attempting to unearth the causes and correlates of their behavior and performance will undoubtedly provide a clearer picture as to what is causing the eventual child outcome. After all, it may not be the presence or absence of a certain stimuli (e.g. domestic violence, parental support) that ultimately affects the child's actions, but instead how the child interprets the situation and responds to it. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the behavior and performance of the child *as reported by the child*, and compare and contrast it to parental reports, in order to gain a better understanding of what and how certain events may affect the child.

EXPECTATIONS

It is believed that the family environment as perceived by the child as well as the child's feelings about school are reflective of the child's level of commitment to the academic environment, a factor which is partially manifested in the child's academic performance. According to previous research, these feelings are strongly affected by the overall family environment, including the presence of interparental violence, drug and/or alcohol abuse, the socioeconomic status of the family, and the level of parental support provided to the child. Therefore, I hypothesize that the child's rating of the family environment, as well as their feelings toward school, are positively related to both their and their parent's report of school performance. Similarly, it is expected that the

presence of parental deviance, interparental violence, low socioeconomic status, and a lack of parental support are negatively related to the reports of the child's performance in school.

While it has been well established in previous research that certain family and individual factors can influence a child's academic performance, the question remains as to the degree of importance these factors maintain when the children are asked to report their performance in school, especially as compared to their parent's report. Therefore, I am investigating the relationships between the aforementioned variables and the reports of school performance by both the parent and the child in an attempt to determine the importance of the respondent. An important consideration when attempting to unravel what may affect school performance is how the children themselves are interpreting the family environment and their attitude toward school and how this may in turn affect their school performance. The understanding and feelings of the child may be the most important factor to investigate when exploring what ultimately helps determine a child's academic performance, since it is their interpretation of the family dynamics and environment that help determine what effect it may have on their school performance. Parental reports of the family environment may be inaccurate in predicting a child's school performance, since it is not the parents interpretation of family life, but the child's, that ultimately help determine how well the child does in school.

Because so many children do, in fact witness episodes of domestic violence, it is suggested that the presence of domestic violence significantly affects the school performance of the focal child, regardless of whether the school performance is reported by the focal child or the primary respondent. A similar relationship is anticipated

regarding reports of parental deviance, as well as the child's school performance as reported by the primary respondent at NSFH1. Due to the fact that gender is a constant variable regardless of the respondent, it is assumed that gender effects are similar for both respondents, with males performing slightly worse than their female peers in both parental and child reports of school performance.

For factors such as the child's feelings about school, it is expected that the significance level is slightly stronger in the child's report than the parent's, yet at least moderately significant for both reports. Similarly, it is anticipated that the significance levels for both aggressive and amicable personality traits are slightly stronger in the parent's report as opposed to the child's, since the parents were solely responsible for reporting the child's personality traits. Both the parental support variable, as well as the measure of the family environment, are expected to be positively related to both the child and parent reports of academic performance, while the frequency with which the child has reported skipping or cutting school is anticipated to have a negative affect on school performance in both reports.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

DATA AND SAMPLE

Both waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) were used to explore the importance of the respondent when attempting to determine the effects of the variables discussed earlier on children's academic performance. The NSFH is a multi-stage nationally representative sample of households. The first wave of NSFH, completed in 1988, included interviews with a probability sample of 13,007 adult respondents, representing 9,637 households. A *primary respondent* was randomly selected from each household, and both face-to-face interviews and self-administered surveys were given to this individual. Additionally, a *secondary respondent,* most often the primary respondent's spouse or cohabiting partner, was given a shorter self-administered questionnaire (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call, 1988). Completed in 1994, Wave 2 of the NSFH included interviews with all surviving members of the original sample (n = 10,007) and with the current spouse or cohabiting partner of the primary respondent (n = 5,624). There were also approximately 789 interviews which were conducted with the spouse or partner of the primary respondent in cases where the relationship had ended.. Within families in which there were one or more children, a randomly chosen *focal child* was selected by the interview staff. The parent was asked more detailed questions about this child than about the other children in the family. This study is based on this subsample of *focal children.*

At the time of NSFH1, the parent reported the focal child's school performance, the child's grade in school, the amount of time spent with their child(ren), the presence/absence of drug/alcohol problems with either themselves or their spouse, the presence of domestic violence, the family's socioeconomic status, as well as aspects of their child's personality. At the time of NSFH2, the parent was again asked about the focal child's school performance and the presence of domestic violence, while the focal child was asked questions about the family environment in their home, their feelings about school, their school performance, and the frequency with which they skipped or cut school.

The current study focused only on children reported to be in the first through fourth grade at the time of NSFH1, and correspondingly in the sixth through ninth grade at the time of NSFH2. This age cohort was chosen because the children would be old enough during both Waves 1 and 2 to provide substantial information regarding family life, and because it is believed that they would be in the final years of childhood where family factors may have strong influence on their behavior (as opposed to the teenage years). From the total number of focal children and their families included in both Waves 1 and 2 of the NSFH, 734 were selected on the basis of their grade in school (first through fourth) at the time of NSFH1. During the data analysis, however, the numbers were reduced to 389 when the parents were used as a source for the child's academic performance during Wave 2, and 412 when the child report was used. It is believed that the primary reason for this reduction is the high amount of missing data in the domestic violence variable, where there were 284 out of the original 734 cases where the parent refused to answer the question about domestic violence.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Academic Performance at NSFH2

Academic performance at the time of NSFH2 was assessed by asking both the focal child and the primary respondent about the child's grades in school. Responses were rated on an eight level scale ranging from mostly A's (1) to mostly F's (8), but the responses were then recoded so that a lower grade (indicating poorer scholastic performance) was indicated by a lower number. In the end, the eight level scale measuring both the child's and the parent's report of the child's grades were numerically coded from mostly F's (1), and D's (2), to A's and B's (7), and mostly A's (8). A bivariate correlation was run to determine the strength of the relationship between the parent and child reports. The result showed a strong, but not perfect, positive relationship with $r = .686$. Thus, parents and children did not always agree about the grades the child is receiving in school.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Domestic Violence

The NSFH asked respondents how often during the past year they became 'physically violent' during arguments with their spouse or partner. Respondents were also asked how often arguments resulted in their spouse or partner becoming physically violent with them. The five-category response set ranges from 'none' to 'four or more' times. To measure violence by men, a dichotomous variable was created in which 0 indicates that neither partner reported violence and 1 indicates that either the male reported becoming physically violent with the female, or the female reported that the

male became physically violent with her, or both. In cases where the reports did not agree, a code of 1-indicating wife assault- was assigned provided that at least one partner reported violence against the female partner. These variables, suggesting the presence of male aggression, were noted at NSFH1 and at NSFH2. An identical measure was created of violence by the female member of a couple, indicating the presence of female aggression, and again noted at both NSFH1 and NSFH2.

The variables denoting male and female aggression at NSFH1 were then combined to form a new variable indicating the presence of domestic violence at NSFH1. The absence of domestic violence was indicated by a value of 0, while the presence of domestic violence was indicated by 1 if either male or female aggression is reported and 2 if both male and female aggression was reported. Values of 2 were then recoded as 1, thus dichotomizing the variable. Likewise, the variables indicating male and female aggression at NSFH2 were then combined to form a new variable denoting the presence of domestic violence at NSFH2. Again, the absence of domestic violence was indicated by a value of 0, while the presence of domestic violence was indicated by both values 1 and 2. Values of 2 were then recoded as 1, thus dichotomizing the variable. Finally, the variables denoting domestic violence at NSFH1 and NSFH2 were combined to form a final variable to identify the presence of domestic violence in the home and were given values accordingly: (2) the presence of domestic violence at *both* NSFH1 and NSFH2, (1) the presence of domestic violence at *either* NSFH1 or NSFH2, or (0) the absence of domestic violence at either time.

Parental Deviance

Both the primary respondent and the secondary respondent were asked who in the household (if anyone) had 1) a problem drinking too much alcohol, and 2) a problem with drug use. I focused only on the answers pertaining to the primary and secondary respondents regarding a problem with drugs or alcohol.. The respondents were asked to circle either themselves and/or their partners on the response form if the individual did have a problem with drugs or alcohol. The responses were then coded 1-circled, 2-not circled, 6-inappropriate, and 9-no answer. The responses were then recoded so that 1 retained its value of 1, indicating the presence of a drug or alcohol problem, while recoding 2 and 6 as 0, indicating the absence of a drug or alcohol problem. A value of 9 was listed as a missing value.

This binary two-item measure was first used to assess the presence of either a drug and/or alcohol problem by the parents, and then to create a measure of the presence or absence of parental deviance (taking into account both alcohol and drug abuse by the parental figures). If either the primary or secondary respondent answered in the affirmative for either themselves or their partner regarding a problem with alcohol, the parents received a score of 1, while the absence of any report received a score of 0. Similarly, if either the primary or secondary respondent answered in the affirmative for either themselves or their partner regarding a problem with drugs, the parents received a score of 1, while the absence of any report received a score of 0. The variables indicating alcohol and drug abuse were then combined to form a new variable encompassing both forms of abuse and thus measuring the level of parental deviance present in the household. In the parental deviance variable, 0 indicated an absence of a drug and or

alcohol problem, 1 indicated that at least one parent had a drug or alcohol problem, and 2 indicated that either one parent had a problem with both drugs and alcohol or both parents had a problem with drugs and/or alcohol.

Parental Support

At the time of NSFH1, parental support was measured using ten items to determine the degree of support parents provide to their child. To determine the degree in which parents provide affective displays of support, parents were asked how often they 1) praise and 2) hug their child, with responses ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (very often). The level of support was also determined by asking the parents about the amount of leisure time they spent with their children, working and playing with the children, talking privately with their children, and assisting children with their homework. These variables were coded on a six-point scale ranging from 1 (never or rarely) to 6 (almost every day). Two additional measures of support were included that measure how many days in the last week they had eaten 1) breakfast, and 2) dinner with at least one of their children, with scores ranging from 0 (no days) to 7 (every day) for both breakfast and dinner. Finally, each parent was asked the amount of "enjoyable time" they had spent with the focal child in the past month with responses ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (almost every day). The parental support scale was computed through standardizing all support variables and then summing the scores for each variable.

Family Environment

The family environment was assessed using a five-item measure. The focal child was asked questions (at the time of NSFH2) about his/her family life, such as whether the family 1) has fun together, 2) shows concern and love for one another, 3) is distant and apart, 4) works as a team, and 5) if things are tense and stressful in the family. Responses were recorded ranging from 0 (Not at all true), 1 (Somewhat true), 2 (Pretty true), to 3 (Very true). In order to assess a measure of family environment, the scale was reversed for the items such as *distant and apart* and *tense and stressful.* Therefore, a higher score (5) indicated a positive family environment, while a lower score (0) indicated a negative family environment.

Another variable was originally constructed to gauge the child's family situation, one that measured the child's feelings about his or her parents. Focal children were asked how, on a scale of 0 (really bad) to 10 (absolutely perfect), they would describe their relationship with their mother (step-mother, father's partner), and how they would describe their relationship with their father (step-father, mother's partner). In order to determine the child's perceived level of their relationship with their parents, the scores for both the mother and father were averaged. When the child only reported on their relationship with one parent, that score was retained and used as the rating for that child's relationship with their parent.

However, when a bivariate correlation was run, it was determined that the family environment variable and the variable measuring the child's relationship with his or her parents was highly correlated (.532). Additionally, the regression analysis indicated that including both variables in the multivariate model led to multicolliniarity problems.

Therefore, it was determined that family environment would be used in the final analysis because it provided more information about family dynamics and the overall climate of the household.

Aggressive Traits

Two items from the child personality scale were used to determine the level of aggressive traits the child displayed at NSFH1 1) focal child loses temper easily and 2) focal child is cruel to others. Responses ranged from often true [1], sometimes true [2], to not true [3]. The responses were then recoded so that often true has a value of 0, sometimes true has a value of 1, and not true has a value of 2. The scale measuring aggressive traits was computed through summing the values of the two items and then dividing by two to achieve a mean score for aggressive behavior with the final scores of the new variable ranging from 2 (low) to 0 (high).

Amicable Traits

Two items from the child personality scale were used to determine the level of amicable traits the child displayed at NSFH1, 1) focal child tries new things and 2) focal child keeps self busy. Responses ranged from often true [1], sometimes true [2], to not true [3]. The responses were then recoded so that often true has a value of 2, sometimes true has a value of 1, and not true has a value of 0. The scale measuring ambicable traits was computed through summing the values of the two items and then dividing by two to achieve a mean score for amicable behavior with the final scores of the new variable ranging form 0 (low) to 2 (high).

Academic Performance at NSFH1

At NSFH1, the academic performance of the focal child was assessed through responses of the primary respondent. The primary respondent was asked about the 'school performance of the focal child.' The school performance of the child was rated on a five level scale (1-5) ranging from ' one of the best students in his or her class' (1) to 'near the bottom of the class' (5). The responses were then recoded so that a better overall rating of the child's school performance was indicated by a higher numeric value, so that 'one of the best students in his/her class' carried a value of 5 and 'near the bottom of the class' carried a value of 1.

Behavioral Problems at NSFH2

Behavioral problems at the time of NSFH2 was first determined by asking the focal child if he/she ever cut or skipped school. Children who responded negatively to this question were assigned a value of 0, while children who responded positively were assigned a value of 1. The children were also asked how many time in the past year they had skipped or cut school, with the answers ranging from 1 to 99 times. In the final analysis, the variable measuring the number of times the child reports skipping or cutting school was used to assess whether this behavior affects the child's performance in school. Children who responded negatively when asked if they had ever skipped or cut school were assigned a value of 0, with the children who responded positively received a value in accordance with the number of times they reported the behavior. Because the frequency with which the children reported skipping or cutting school was highly positively skewed (9.378), a log transformation was performed on the original variable in

an effort to make the skewed distribution more normal. While the log variable still had a high degree of skewness (4.093), the level was greatly reduced by the log transformation.

Child's Feelings about School

The child's feelings about school were assessed in NSFH2 in the interview conducted with the focal children (aged 10-17). The child was simply asked how they felt about school, with responses ranging from (1) love it, (2) like it, (3) dislike it, (4) hate it, and (5) both like and dislike it. First, the score indicating that the child both liked and disliked school was recoded with a value of 3 so that the measure would be a continuous rating of the child's feelings. Then the codes were switched so that the highest rating of feelings about school, love it, was given the highest numeric value (5), and the lowest rating of feelings about school, hate it, retained the lowest numeric value (1). In the final analysis, the child's feelings about school were rated accordingly: hate it (1), dislike it (2), both like and dislike it (3), like it (4), and love it (5).

Poverty

To measure poverty, data on household size and the total household income was used to calculate the income to needs ratio, which is the household income divided by the poverty line for households of that size. This technique adjusted for the size of the household.

TABLE 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the variables used in the analysis.

TABLE 1 VARIABLES IN THE ANALYSIS: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	N	Mean	SD
Parental Deviance	733	8.731E-02	.3629
Domestic Violence	450	.1244	.3921
Gender	734	1.52	.50
Socioeconomic Status	634	3.1222	3.0217
Parental Support	707	4.4365	.7429
Aggressive traits	733	.5846	.5243
Amicable Traits	734	1.6860	.3863
Academic Performance at Wave I	732	3.9795	.9650
Family Environment	708	2.1920	.6117
Feelings about School	730	3.67	.96
Frequency Skip/Cut School	726	.1995	.6416

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

TABLE 2 displays the logistic regression of the factors on the parental report and child report of academic performance. The most significant difference appears when we attempt to determine the importance of the child's personality traits in relation to the child's school performance during Wave 2. When we look at the grades of the child as reported by the parent, antisocial traits appear to be significantly related to the child's school performance (Beta = -.136). However, when the child's report of his/her grades is used, the apparent effect of *both* aggressive and amicable traits on how well the child performs in school becomes insignificant.

The presence of drug and/or alcohol abuse by parents appears to have had a moderate effect on the child's grades as reported by the child but is only marginally significant at the .10 level when we look at the grades as reported by the parent. The direction of the relationship between the two variables is negative (B = -.094) when the child report is used, indicating that the presence of parental deviance is associated with a lower level of academic performance. While the significance level of parental deviance is almost negligible in the parent report, it is important to note that their appears to be a positive relationship (Beta = .077) between the two variables, indicating that the presence of drug or alcohol abuse is slightly associated with a child's higher academic performance.

TABLE 2 LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AS REPORTED BY PARENT AND CHILD

	Parent Report		Child Report	
Variables	Beta	Signficance	Beta	Significance
(Constant)		.372		.007
Parental Deviance	.077	.102	-.094	.054
Domestic Violence	-.074	.115	-.030	.536
Gender	.198	.000	.116	.019
Socioeconomic Status	.061	.191	.049	.305
Parental Support	.041	.399	.005	.917
Aggressive Traits	-.136	.005	-.035	.472
Amicable Traits	.036	.457	-.031	.521
Academic Perfomance at Wave I	.336	.000	.243	.000
Family Environment	.085	.078	.199	.000
Feelings toward School	.070	.148	.120	.016
Frequency Skip/ Cut School	-.195	.000	-.162	.001

One of the more significant findings of the study is the difference regarding the importance of the child's feelings about school in relation to the child's and parent's reports of academic performance. While the child's report of his or her feelings about school is significantly related to the child's report of school performance (Beta = .120), it does not appear to be a significant factor in regards to the parent's report.

When we look at the family environment variable, the child's measure of the family environment is significantly related to the child's academic performance, at the .10 level with the parent's report (Beta = .085) and at the .05 level with the child's report (Beta = .199). As expected, a more positive ranking of the family environment is associated with a higher level of academic achievement by the child. Interestingly, the level of parental support, as reported by the parent, was not significantly related to either the grades as reported by the child or the parent.

The presence of interparenal violence, at either Wave 1 or Wave 2, does not appear to have an effect on school performance as reported by either the child or the parent. In both reports, interparental violence is deemed insignficant with a significance value of .536 in the child report and a significance value of .115 in the parent report. Likewise, the socioeconomic status of the family was not related to reports of academic performance, in either the parent report or the child report.

The frequency with which the child reported skipping or cutting school during the previous year was significantly related to academic performance, both as reported by the parent and the child. In general, the more often the child skipped or cut school, the worse the child's scholastic performance, regardless of the respondent (Beta = -.195 parent; Beta = -.161 child).

According to both the parent and child reports of grades, the gender of the focal child had a significant relationship to the child's academic performance (Beta = .198 and .116, respectively). In both cases, female children did significantly better than their male counterparts. A oneway analysis of variance was run to determine the size of the gender difference. The results showed that the average difference measured .87 (6.21, female; 5.34, male) in the parental report and slightly lower, at .62 (5.99, female; 5.37, male) in the child report (on a scale of 1 to 9; mostly Fs to mostly As).

In conclusion, when we take into account only the parent's report of the child's school performance, the factors which appear to have the strongest effect are the child's previous performance in school (Beta = .336), the focal child's gender (Beta = .198) the frequency with which the child skips or cuts school (Beta = -.195), and the level of aggressive behavior displayed by the child (Beta = -.136). Also deemed moderately important are the family environment (Beta = .085) and drug or alcohol abuse by a parent (Beta = .077). Variables which appeared to have no effect on the child's grades (as reported by the parent) were the level of parental support given to the child, socioeconomic status, interparental violence, the child's feelings about school, and the child's amicable personality traits.

However, when we look at the child's report of his or her school performance, not only do the child's feelings about school emerge as an important factor (Beta = .120), but the family environment emerges as highly significant (Beta = .199). Factors such as the focal child's gender, the child's previous school performance (Beta = .243), and the frequency with which the child skips or cuts school all remain highly significant. While parental deviance, indicating the presence of a drug or alcohol problem by at least one

parent, remains moderately significant ($p = .054$), the direction of the relationship shifts, indicating that, when the child is reporting his or her grades, the presence of parental deviance exerts a negative effect on school performance. Factors which did not have an effect on the child's report of school performance include the presence of interparental violence, the personality traits of the child (both amicable and aggressive), socioeconomic status, and the level of parental support.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

After comparing the size of the effects and significance levels of a variety of factors and their relationship to a child's performance in school, first as reported by the parent and then as reported by the child, it becomes clear that there is a significant difference as to the import of these factors depending on who reports on the final child outcome.

First and foremost, because both the child's and parent's reports are moderately affected by the family environment as reported by the child, we may postulate that, regardless of some of the differences in the reports of the child's grades in school, as a whole, a more positive family environment has a positive impact on the child's performance in school. Also, it is important to note that the report of the family environment, provided by the child, was proven to be a more significant factor in the child's outcome in both reports, as compared to the parental support variable, which was provided by the parent. What this finding suggests is that, regardless of how much time the parent reports spending with the child, what is more important is how the child perceives the family environment as a whole. Therefore, it does not seem to be the amount of time per se that the parent spends with the child, but the quality of that time spent building a cohesive and loving family environment, that ultimately affects the child's scholastic performance.

Likewise, the frequency with which the child skips or cuts school remains a significant factor regardless of the respondent, with a higher frequency of skipping or

cutting related to poorer school performance. This finding is not altogether unexpected, for the less the child is at school, the more assignments and tests the child will miss, thus negatively affecting the child's grades. While this information was originally supplied by the child, it proved to be a significant factor in both reports, suggesting that, despite the discrepancies between the reports on grades provided by the parent and child, any notable amount of skipping or cutting school had a definite detrimental effect on school performance.

On the other hand, when we look at how the child's feelings about school affect school performance, it becomes clear that this factor plays a more significant role in the child's report of grades than it does in the parent's report. While some of this may be attributed to the fact that the children may report lowered scholastic performance based on their dislike for school, we may also postulate that how the child feels about school may, in fact, have positive or negative ramifications for the child's school performance. Therefore, even though there may be a certain amount of shared method variance occurring, it must also be noted that a child's perceptions of the school environment as a whole may have serious ramifications for the child's performance in school.

Another rather large discrepancy lies in the effect of the child's aggressive personality traits on scholastic performance, with the parent's report suggesting a strong relationship, and the child's report indicating no such association. One of the possible explanations for this discrepancy may be that the personality traits of the child were determined not by objective measures of the child's behavior and interactions with others, but only through the reports of the child's parent. As it has been previously established, the validity of parental reports is somewhat questionable due to potential

biases (both positive and negative) that a parent may have toward their child. For example, if the child is a "good" or "easy" child, the parent may rightfully rate the child's personality, but inadvertently allow their positive portrayal of the child to place their child's scholastic ability in a more positive light. Likewise, if the child is a more "difficult" or "restless" child, the parent may report the child's grades to be lower than they actually are, since their relatively negative experiences with the child have led to lowered expectations for the child, specifically in the realm of academic performance. Ultimately, the phenomenon that best explains this situation is known as shared (or common) method variance.

The socioeconomic status of the child's family was not found to be a significant factor as it related to the child's and parent's reports of academic performance. However, while the previous literature has focused primarily on standardized scores as a measure of scholastic performance, this study relied on *reports* of grades received in school. Additionally, this study was limited to academic performance as reported by the parents and the child. The NSFH did not include information regarding the child's school performance obtained from the actual school. That is, there was never a "hard copy" of the child's school performance, such as a report card, provided as a source of information. What can be proposed from the data made available through the study, however, is that as far as the parents and the children are concerned, socioeconomic status does not have a deleterious effect on school performance. In other words, there was not a significant difference in how the parents or children reported academic performance based on socioeconomic status alone.

It is important to note, however, that this study used only linear regression to determine the significance of the effect of socioeconomic status on academic performance. It is possible that a nonlinear relationship may exist between the variables which is not revealed unless more complex analysis, such as quadratic regression, is utilized. For example, while there may not be a significant effect on a child's grades if the child comes from a lower middle class home versus an upper middle class home, if the socioeconomic status of the family falls below a certain "critical" level, then a child's academic performance may in fact be negatively affected. Upon further investigation, it may be revealed that when socioeconomic status falls below some critical level, such as the poverty line, it may have a negative affect on school performance, while above this level socioeconomic status has no such effect. An effect such as this would not be readily apparent in a linear regression model, but could possibly be unearthed with further analysis.

As far as gender is concerned, girls tended to do better in school than boys in both the parent and child reports. Again, because only subjective measures of scholastic performance were used in this analysis, what we may actually be witnessing is the fact that not only do parents tend to rate female children (as a whole) as performing at a higher level in school, but also that female children tend to rate themselves higher than their male peers when asked about their grades in school.

Contrary to the majority of literature on the subject, the presence of interparental violence in the home did not appear to have an effect on scholastic performance, either as reported by the child or the parent. When we look at the domestic violence variable, the findings suggest that perhaps children may not be as aware of, and

therefore not as negatively affected by, the presence of interparental violence as the literature suggests. Likewise, because the parents who reported the presence of domestic violence did not report grades that were signficantly different from the families who did not report domestic violence, it may be concluded that the presence of interparental violence does not have a significant impact on the child's academic performance. However, it is important to note that out of the 450 reports of the presence/ absence of interparental violence, 404 reported no violence, 36 reported violence during either Wave 1 or Wave 2, and only 10 reported violence at both Wave 1 and Wave 2. Because there are so few cases of violence in the sample, it is difficult to make generalizations to the wider population without further investigation with a larger, and perhaps more diverse, sample.

Furthermore, one of the reasons that there does not appear to be a relationship between the presence of domestic violence and the child's report of academic performance, may be that a mediating factor, family environment, greatly reduces the effect of the interparental conflict on the child outcome. If, despite the presence of interparental violence, the parents can present a somewhat stable and cohesive family environment for the child, perhaps the child is somewhat protected, or the effects of witnessing the violence nullified, by this stabilizing factor, and therefore there is not a direct impact on the child's performance in school.

What does appear to have a more significant impact for children's reports of academic performance is the presence of a drug or alcohol problem by one or more parents in the home. According to the findings, child reports of grades in school are negatively affected by the presence of parental deviance, while parent reports are not

affected by the parental deviance factor. This suggests that children may perhaps be more sensitive to the presence of such deviance than the parents are, in so far as it has a negative effect on the child's performance in school.

In conclusion, many of the factors previously believed to be detrimental to a child's scholastic performance, show no such effect in the current study. The presence of interparental violence, the level of parental support, and the socioeconomic status of the family all appear to play an insignificant role in determining a child's performance in school. However, the presence of a parental drug or alcohol problem and the child's feelings toward school appear to have a more significant effect on the child report of academic ability, while the child's aggressive personality traits maintain greater significance in relation to the parental report of grades. Factors which appear to have the greatest effect on a child's school performance, having appeared as significant variables on both the parent and child reports, include the child's gender, the child's family environment, and the frequency with which the child skips or cuts school.

Most importantly, what may be concluded from the findings of this study is that the child's point of view, or report of his or her 'outcome,' is not only relevant but necessary in order to gain as much information as possible to determine what family and individual factors are having an effect on the child's academic performance. Especially when dealing with children who are in their late childhood/ early adolescence, as were the children in this study at Wave II, it appears to be a relevant avenue of research considering that the children, as a whole, are beginning to be influenced more and more by a variety of outside factors at this age. Using only parent reports, and not utilizing the

wealth of "inside" information the child could possibly provide may result in an inaccurate portrayal of the factors affecting child outcomes.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research regarding factors affecting children's academic performance and the inclusion of the child's perceptions of his or her family and academic environment would undoubtedly benefit from the addition of a 'hard copy' of the child's grades in school. If perhaps school records could be obtained, providing an unbiased source of information and used in accordance with the parent and child reports of grades, then a clearer picture of not only what factors affect academic performance, but also what factors affect parent's and children's perceptions of academic performance, could be realized.

Additionally, future research on child outcomes as a whole may benefit if the focus was placed more on the child's perception of events and surroundings, as opposed to parent or teacher reports. While parents and teachers, as well as other outside observers, may provide some relevant information as to why the child is behaving or performing in a certain manner, the solution to figuring out why a child acts a certain way lies within the child. Using the child as a primary source of information would largely depend on the age group of interest, for younger children are limited in their ability to verbally express themselves, but children in middle to late childhood and beyond could serve as an invaluable source of information when it is their behaviors and actions that are being evaluated.

Another area of consideration relates to the importance of the role of parental behaviors in affecting the child's perception of academic performance. In both Wagner and Phillips (1992) and McGrath and Repetti (2000), it was determined that parents expectations and interactions with their children can have a profound effect on how the child perceives their academic performance. While Wagner and Phillips found that the role of the father had a more significant impact than did the mother, McGrath and Repetti found that the level of maternal interaction played a more significant role in the child's level of perceived academic ability. Considering that the current study partially relied on the child's perception of academic performance, further investigation of the affect parents' behavior may have on these perceptions is of interest and import.

While not covered in the present study, an increasing amount of literature in the area of academic outcomes for children suggests that both the size of the family, as well as the birth order of the child, may have a significant effect on the child's performance in school. Furthermore, assuming that both birth order and family size play a vital role in child's perception of the overall family environment, a factor that appeared highly significant in the current study, it would be useful to include these factors in future research on academic outcomes. Future inclusion of these factors may provide valuable insight into the dynamics of the family environment, how these factors affect individual outcomes, and the role they play in determining the child's behavior and actions.

Finally, the results obtained from this study suggest that utilizing both parent and child reports on child outcomes may provide further insight not only into what is affecting certain aspects of the child's life, but into how the child and parent are perceiving the child's life as a whole. Noting the similarities and differences between

how the child is reporting how his or her life is going, versus how the parent is reporting certain aspects of the child's life, may allow a deeper understanding of how children perceive themselves and their surroundings. Additionally, it may provide a useful tool to clinicians and counselors working with children and their families as they attempt to gain a better understanding of and ultimately help these individuals work through their problems.

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VITA

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