

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:                   DEPRESSION AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS  
IN YOUNG, LOW-INCOME AFRICAN-  
AMERICAN MEN AND FATHERS

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Depression is a debilitating mental illness that in its most serious form, major depression, has affected between 3.6% to 12.7% of men in the United States (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Jonas, Brody, Roper, & Narrow, 2003; Kessler, McGonagle, Zhao, & Nelson, 1994). It has consistently been found to be twice as prevalent in women as in men, and yet the suicide rate of men is four to five times that of women (Singh, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 1996; World Health Organization, 2005). Despite this, little is known about the experience and expression of the full range of depression in men, and specifically, young, low-income men of color who are fathers.

When young fathers suffer from depression, there are enormous consequences for young families, both financial and emotional (Ansseau et al., 2008; Mirowsky & Ross, 2002; Montgomery, Cook, Bartley, & Wadsworth, 1999; Patten et al., 2006; Rehman, Gollan, & Mortimer, 2008; Soares, Macassa, Grossi, & Viitasara, 2008). It is possible that the risk for depression increases when fatherhood includes the

challenges of nonresidential parenting and financial stress (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2002; Roy, 2004). This has implications for their co-parenting relationships, and shapes their identities and roles as parents and providers (Bouma, Ormel, Verhulst, & Oldehinkel, 2008; Kim, Capaldi, & Stoolmiller, 2003). However, fatherhood also brings many opportunities for young men; it is a chance for them to be generative for the first time in their lives and to experience the joys that accompany the challenges of parenthood (Palkovitz, Copes, & Woolfolk, 2001).

I conducted research guided by a combination of symbolic interaction theory and the cognitive theory of depression to answer the following questions: how does depression emerge in toxic environments, how do young men experience and express the full range of depression in those environments over time, and, what was the reciprocal relationship between depression and fatherhood? I conducted in-depth interviews with 40 at risk, low-income young African-American men and fathers.

Growing up in high crime neighborhoods meant that many had strained and fractured relationships with law enforcement, teachers, peers, and families. Young men engaged in identity work while trying to avoid problems at school and with law enforcement. They also reported substantial substance abuse, usually starting recreationally, but moving to daily self-medication for stress and anger. Depression was expressed at multiple points, through depressive language, extensive anger histories, fatigue, protracted cycles of avoidance, and episodes of major depression. Young men who were also young fathers found that fatherhood brought added responsibilities, which added to stress, but also found great joy and motivation in their children.

DEPRESSION AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IN  
YOUNG, LOW-INCOME AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN AND FATHERS

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2012

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## DEDICATION

Do not worry if you have built your castles are in the air.  
That is where they should be.  
Now put the foundations under them.  
*Henry David Thorough*

I dedicate this work to my father. I have tried to use his humanity and commitment to truth as guides through this process. He once gave me card with the above quote, and wrote, “Meg, your dreams are in the air. Let’s work together to build the foundations.” I think he would be proud, and equally grateful to the many people who have helped me build that foundation in his absence.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to both the members of my committee and multiple research partners in the Baltimore community. My deepest goes thanks to Dr. Kevin Roy for his endless support, depth of knowledge, and persistent guidance. I am very grateful for your commitment to me as a person, parent, and scholar, demonstrated multiple times and many ways, with remarkable timing, throughout this process. And for toast night.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Elaine Anderson, for her support, generous volunteering of time, and helping me to develop my knowledge through multiple research projects throughout my time at the University of Maryland. I would also like to thank Dr. Norm Epstein, for challenging me and helping to further my understanding of depression and mental health; Dr. Mia Smith Bynum, for both her expertise and for recognizing ideas that I tried to express and offering suggestions as to how to better understand and articulate my work; and to Dr. Donna Howard, for bringing a broader perspective to this work and reminding me of the context and greater community in which all of this takes place.

Thank you to the 40 young men and fathers who shared their time and experience with me, and, in turn, many others. I would also like to thank Dr. Darius Tandon from Johns Hopkins University and Lois Mitchell, Director of HEBCAC (Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition) Programs, as well as all of the amazing staff at the Get Ready Program for their support and insight, without which, this project would not have been possible.

And thank you to my many friends and large family for their incredible support, particularly my two lovely daughters, Amelia Jane and Violet, who appeared and joined in along the way. Most especially, thank you to my amazing husband, Jay Ferrari, general contractor for the air castle and maker of the toast.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Depression has very serious consequences for men and their families, and yet may be under reported and under diagnosed, particularly in young, low income African-American men. Multiple consequences have been associated with the full range of depression, including: personal consequences such as unemployment, substance abuse, and suicide; and family consequences, including strained relationships, financial hardship, and intergenerational transmission of depression. Very little research has been conducted specifically on depression in young African-American men and fathers, despite the fact that they are over-represented in areas where depression rates are usually high, in the juvenile justice system or low-income neighborhoods. The purpose of this research was to further examine depression in young African-American men and fathers participating in a job readiness program with historically high rates of depression in order to learn more about their experience with depression.

Major depression has been consistently found to be twice as common among women as men (Jonas, Brody, Roper, & Narrow, 2003; Kessler, McGonagle, Zhao, & Nelson, 1994), but men commit suicide at almost 5 times the rate of women (Singh, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 1996), and, according to recent estimates from the Centers for Disease Control, the percentage of men in the United States currently suffering from any type of depression is 8% versus 10.2% of women (2010). Depression may actually be less prevalent in men than in women, or it may appear that way for several reasons: men may be more likely to present symptoms that do not meet the current criteria for depression, symptoms of depression may be masked

by substance abuse, there may be gender bias in diagnosticians and helpers, and the population of men most likely to suffer from depression is least likely to receive assistance for mental health issues (Addis, 2008, Jonas et al., 2003; Oquendo, Lizardi, Greenwald, Weissman, & Mann, 2004; Zimmerman, Christakis, & Stoep, 2004).

Depression often begins to manifest in childhood, and then continue both chronically and episodically for the duration of adolescence and adult life (Kessler, Avenevoli, & Ries Merikangas, 2001; Weissman, 1999). Prevalence levels are the same in boys and girls until adolescence, when the dramatic disparity in prevalence levels starts to appear, and then is steady through adulthood (Feldman & Elliott, 1990). High levels of depression impact the many pivotal developmental tasks during adolescence and young adulthood, such as identity and relationship formation, school completion, and pursuit of employment (Dekker et al., 2007). Tragically, suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents in the United States (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 1999).

Populations with the highest rates of depression include young men with: lower socio-economic status, involvement with juvenile services, and experiences with racism (McCarty, et al., 2006; McLaughlin, et al., 2007; Mizell, 1999). Prevalence of depression varies with ethnic group, and some of this variation is attributable to socio-economic status, but much more needs to be explored on possible differences in expression of depression according to cultural norms of ethnic groups and instrument sensitivity.

Young men from populations with higher rates of depression are also more likely to become fathers at a young age, and this has enormous consequences for

young families, both financial and emotional (Anseau et al., 2008; Mirowsky & Ross, 2002; Montgomery, Cook, Bartley, & Wadsworth, 1999; Patten et al., 2006; Rehman, Gollan, & Mortimer, 2008; Soares, Macassa, Grossi, & Viitasara, 2008). When they become fathers, it is possible that the risk for depression is then increased due to the challenges of nonresidential parenting and financial stress (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2002; Roy, 2004). This has implications for their relationships, intergenerational transmission of depression, and shapes their identities and roles as parents and providers ( Bouma, Ormel, Verhulst, & Oldehinkel, 2008; Kim, Capaldi, & Stoolmiller, 2003). However, fatherhood also brings many opportunities for young men; it is a chance for them to be generative for the first time in their lives and to experience the joys that accompany the challenges of parenthood (Palkovitz, et al., 2001).

Two theoretical approaches helped to examine the intersection between depression and the developmental stages of young adulthood and fatherhood: cognitive theory of depression and symbolic interaction theory. According to the cognitive model of depression, individuals use distinct attributions, engage in negative self-statements, cognitive distortions, and have negative core beliefs that cause them to view themselves, their personal circumstances, and the world around them negatively (Abramson, et al., 2002, Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1980). It is not known if depressive thinking causes depression or depression causes depressive thinking, but high levels of depressive thinking are typically present in individuals with multiple symptoms of depression. This is a process referred to as “the downward cycle of depression,” meaning that depressive thoughts make it harder to

function, and decreased functionality increases depressive thoughts (Beck et al., 1980). It has been found that the content of middle class white males' core beliefs is, not surprisingly, different from the content of middle class white females' core beliefs, but this content is also different for depressed and non-depressed men (Mahalik, 1999; Mahalik, 2000). Using cognitive theory allows for the examination of depressive cognitions that may be more common among young, low income, African-American men, assisting clinicians and other professionals to design and implement effective programs serving this clientele.

Symbolic interaction asserts that individuals develop their self concepts and identities through social interactions with others (as summarized by LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Self concept and identity are both examples of core beliefs, and are both deeply held, yet malleable, particularly during times of developmental growth. The goal of combining these two theoretical approaches is to examine the interactive process of identity formation and simultaneously determine if negative thinking patterns act as a filter between the self and the interaction. In other words, how does a tendency toward negative cognitions assist or hinder young men in constructing positive identities of themselves as individuals and as young fathers? Using symbolic interaction theory allows examination of possible connections between depressive cognitions and concepts such as role and identity.

The purpose of this research was to learn more about the experience that young, African American men and fathers participating in a job readiness program, living in a low-income, urban environment, have with depression. The goal was to find out what depression felt like for them, what triggered depressive symptoms, how

they responded to them, what their depressive cognitions were, and more about the reciprocal relationship between identity and depressive cognition. Specifically, I asked:

How do young, African-American men, living in low-income, urban neighborhoods, participating in a job readiness program, experience and express the range of depression? How does depression emerge in toxic environments, how do young men experience and express the full range of depression in those environments over time, and, what was the reciprocal relationship between depression and fatherhood? I conducted in-depth interviews with 40 at risk, low-income young African-American men and fathers.

Half of the young men were fathers (Stouthamer-Loeber & Wei, 1998), and little is known about the reciprocal relationship between fatherhood and depression in young African-American fathers in GED programs. Young men may be motivated or daunted by the responsibility of fatherhood, which may buffer or exacerbate depression. The cognitive theory of depression asserts that depression will reciprocally shape the course of fathering and co-parenting for young men.

How do young, African-American fathers, living in low-income, urban neighborhoods, participating in a GED program, experience depression? How have new expectations of them shaped their health and well being? How does the experience of depression shape young men's experience of co-parenting and fatherhood?

This research is situated on the beliefs of post-positivism as described by qualitative researcher Kerry Daly, "The idea that objective reality exists out there, but



this is a reality that is imprecisely apprehendable,” (Daly, 2007, p. 30). The apprehension of depression is imprecise, in part, because much of the available research on prevalence, symptom expression, and cognitive theory has been conducted with an understanding of depression based on middle class white women (Addis, 2008; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). There has been limited scientific inquiry into depression as experienced outside of traditional understanding. There is also nothing that specifically focuses on both depression as a barrier to effective parenting and also the joys of parenthood as a healer of depression. It is the limited understanding and knowledge about the overall experience and impact of depression on young African-American fathers that made it desirable to use the habits and tools of social constructionism, such as field observations, interviews, and interpretation to gain a better understanding of how and in what context low-income young African American men experience depression, and what meaning it has in their lives (Daly, 2007).

Phenomenological inquiry and modified grounded theory methodology were used to conduct this research. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on describing the world of sub-groups of the population, and modified grounded theory allows for the use of sensitizing concepts from literature and folk wisdom, such as the concept of possible selves, as part in the inquiry into young men’s unique experience with depression.

This study was conducted at a job readiness program, Get Ready, located in Baltimore City, Maryland that is currently partnered with two different, but collaborative research projects. Program participants are primarily African

American, many of them are young fathers, and approximately 70% exhibit elevated levels of depressive symptoms, as measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Tandon, Mendelson, Turner, & Byrd, 2008). I conducted in-depth interviews with 40 youth; 20 fathers and 20 non-fathers, and theoretical saturation was reached. These interviews were semi-structured, with set up preordained questions, but there was flexibility to pursue varying lines of inquiry according to the data as they emerged, as is consistent with grounded theory methodology (Daly, 2007).

Interviews were transcribed by an undergraduate research assistant (UGRA). Transcribed interviews were transferred into ATLAS/ti Version 6, which is a software program for qualitative data analysis. I then conducted three waves of coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), according to methodology outlined by Daly (2007).

Data quality was ensured by following criteria and strategies outlined by Guba's model of trustworthiness (as cited and discussed by Krefting, 1999). Guba's criteria are common to both quantitative and qualitative research, but have been adapted to allow for the methods of qualitative research. The methodological strategies included: time in the field, triangulation of data and investigators, and reflexivity throughout the project (as cited by Krefting, 1989).

I spent approximately 9 months in the field. In order to triangulate data, I used both the aforementioned interviews and field notes. Triangulation of investigators was achieved by conducting peer debriefing with two different, but overlapping teams throughout data collection and analysis. Debriefing was conducted with a research team, from the partner project with the Center for

Adolescent Health at the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, which is evaluating the mental health intervention that is in place on site.

Finally, I utilized multiple reflexive practices in order to separate my own experience from the data. I reflected on my own background and experience, and how it has shaped my approach to this project, and continued to influence data collection and analysis.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Current Definitions and Measurement of Depression**

#### **Types of Depression**

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), there are three basic types of depression: major depression, dysthymia, and bipolar depression. Additionally, DSM-IV outlines consideration for minor depression, and criteria for other mood and psychiatric disorders frequently seen or comorbid with depression. Most types of depression are characterized by the symptoms of major depression, such as sadness or irritability, problems with sleep, inability to concentrate, physical slowness, or inability to feel pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). Depression has been well studied over time; however, authors Cochran and Rabinowitz state that the *DSM-IV-TR* definitions were largely developed from clinical samples of middle class women, and these definitions have shaped the understanding of the experience and expression of depression in general for the past 50 years.

The *DSM-IV-TR* specifically defines an episode of major depression as five or more of the following symptoms experienced nearly every day within the same two-week period: depressed mood most of the day (in children and adolescents this can be irritability, diminished interest or pleasure in most activities, significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain, insomnia or hypersomnia, psychomotor agitation or retardation that is observable by others, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt, diminished ability to think or concentrate, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation (American Psychiatric Association

[APA], 2000). Major depressive disorder is defined as a single or multiple major depressive episodes with no history of manic episodes. It is usually experienced as episodes of very intense, sometimes debilitating, depressive symptoms (APA, 2000).

Dysthymia is a form of depression associated with more mild depressive symptoms, but is longer and chronic in duration (APA, 2000). Dysthymic disorder includes having a depressed mood for most of the day, more days than not, for at least two years, with at least two or more of the following symptoms: sleep difficulties, fatigue, low self esteem, difficulty concentrating or decision making, feelings of hopelessness, and over or under eating (APA, 2000). Dysthymia has not been studied as extensively as major depression, and is probably under diagnosed, as it is harder to detect than major depression (Jonas, Brody, Roper, & Narrow, 2003; Kessler, McGonagle, Zhao, & Nelson, 1994; Sansone & Sansone, 2009). It is often comorbid with major depression, and then called double depression, but some studies have revealed physiological differences from major depression. For example, dysthymia has been linked with higher levels of cortisol than major depression, and may be more closely linked with intergenerational transmission than major depression (Field, Diego, Dieter, Hernandez-Reif, Figueiredo, et al. 2007).

Bipolar depression is the third major type of depression, defined by manic or hypomanic episodes. A manic episode is marked by a heightened mood, intensity or irritability that lasts a minimum of one week, and causes significant social or professional impairment. Individuals must exhibit three or more of these seven symptoms: grandiosity or inflated self-esteem, the need for very few hours of sleep (three versus eight), increased talkativeness, racing thoughts or ideas, heightened

distractibility, more intense goal-directed activity, or excessive pursuit of pleasurable activities such that negative consequences are experienced, such as gambling or spree shopping. Hypomanic episodes are similar, but although heightened moods are noticeable, they do not cause discernible problems with others, and fewer symptoms are required for a diagnosis. Bipolar depression has specific subtypes: bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymia, all delineated from each other dependent upon type of mania as well as history and type of depression (APA, 2000).

The DSM IV-TR also recommends more research on episodes of minor depression, also known as subthreshold or mild depression, or depressive symptoms, with the specific criteria of two to four symptoms of major depression and the inclusion of suffering or impairment. Minor depression is considered by many researchers to be on a continuum of depression with major depression, but more research is needed. In general, it does not have the number of symptoms nor the duration of symptoms required to meet the criteria for a diagnosis of major depression or dysthymia, respectively, but has been recognized as causing considerable distress as well as social and professional impairment for individuals. Subthreshold or minor depression has been found to be associated with fewer numbers of depressive symptoms than major depression, but greater levels of functional impairment (Karsten, Hartman, Ormel, Nolen, & Penninx, 2010), and may go easily undetected in men.

In lieu of a specific diagnosis, depression has also been conceptualized as a continuum of depressive symptoms, ranging from mild or minor to severe, and is often studied with this model in empirical research (Kessler, Zhao, Blazer, & Swartz,

1997; Lewinsohn, Solomon, Seeley, & Zeiss, 2000; McCullough et al., 2003). The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10<sup>th</sup> Revision (ICD-10) has established similar criteria for descriptors of depressive episodes and disorders, ranging from mild to severe (ICD-10, 2010). For example, many studies treat depression as a continuous variable measured by number or intensity of symptoms, equating fewer or more symptoms with more or less depression. Some studies also group symptom levels; the number of symptoms may be low, medium or high, or subthreshold, meaning that the number of symptoms is not high enough to meet the cutoff for a diagnosis of major depression, but is high enough to be correlated with consequences that are often associated with major depression (Ayuso-Mateas, Nuevo, Verdes, Naidoo & Chatterji, 2010).

Other mood disorders that have been highlighted as common in populations with substance abuse issues include: substance-induced mood disorder, mood disorder due to a general medical condition, and adjustment disorder with a depressed mood (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64063/>). Substance-induced mood disorder is associated with the effects of either using a substance or withdrawal, and is considered to be fairly short in duration, dependent upon the chronicity of the substance abuse. Some medical conditions directly cause physiological depressive symptoms as well. Adjustment disorder involves depressed mood as the result of a major stress, and can be acute or chronic, but symptoms do not often meet the criteria of a major depressive episode or last as long as dysthymia.

There are also several psychiatric conditions that are often seen in populations at risk for depression and in combination with depression: post traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, and personality disorders

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64063/>).

### **Measurement of Depression**

Prevalence estimates of depression in the general population of the United States and worldwide have varied according to assessment technique. The most often cited estimates come from surveys that incorporate face-to-face diagnostic interviews into their design. There are also several acceptable self assessment inventories that have been used in studies, including the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D).

One of the reasons that prevalence of depression is difficult to estimate is that certain populations express depression differently. Researchers use either the measurement instrument that they believe is most appropriate for that population or that is the most practical given the parameters of the study. Wide disagreement about the best way to capture depression remains. For example, face-to-face diagnostic interviews have been considered to be the gold standard by clinicians, but studies have indicated that when groups of men and women with similar scores on the Beck Depression Inventory are given subsequent interviews, more women than men will be diagnosed with depression (Callahan, et al., 1997). It is therefore generally accepted that women have higher rates of depression, but there is much disagreement about whether this is due to instrumentation, actual difference, or variation in the expression of depression.

The following review of the literature will be as specific as possible in discussion of depression and will refer to depression as the researchers do, whether it



is a specific type of depression (such as major depression or dysthymia) when it has been determined by a diagnostic tool or clinician, or to depressive symptomatology ascertained through well known survey instruments, and specifically, when it is being treated categorically or continuously according to recommended symptom level cutoffs.

### **Prevalence According to Major Surveys**

There have been three recent nationally representative studies that use face-to-face interviews to diagnose major depression as well as other depressive disorders: the Epidemiological Catchment Area Study (ECA), the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS), and the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Kessler, McGonagle, Zhao, & Nelson, 1994).

Major prevalence surveys have consistently found that depression is twice as prevalent among women as men, but according to recent estimates from the CDC (2010), this gap is much narrower than previously reported, and the percentage of men in the United States currently suffering from any type of depression is 8% versus 10.2% of women.

The Epidemiological Catchment Area Study (ECA) was the first of the major studies attempting to ascertain levels of depression in the United States (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) conducted this large-scale study from 1980 to 1985 using trained interviewers in five population centers in the United States to gather information on mental disorders utilizing the Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS) from 19,182 participants. This study found that 3.6% of males and 8.7% of females in the United States suffered from major

depression at some time in their lives. It also reported that 2.2% of males and 4.1% of females suffered from dysthymia (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000).

The second major study that conducted face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample was the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) (Kessler et al., 1994). NCS is a survey of the prevalence and correlates of DSM III-R psychiatric disorders, and was conducted from 1990 to 1992. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 8,098 participants, ages 15 to 54, and in order to minimize any gender bias that may have occurred during the ECA, the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) was used to assess mental health (Kessler et al., 1994). Lifetime prevalence rates of major depression were estimated at 12.7% for men and 21.3% for women, and these are the citations most often seen in the literature. Dysthymia was estimated to occur in 4.8% of men and 8% of women. Both of these estimates were much higher than the ECA (Kessler et al., 1994).

The third, less well known estimate of the prevalence of major depression and dysthymia in the United States was reported from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III) (Jonas, Brody, Roper, & Narrow, 2003). This study was conducted from 1988 to 1994, with a nationally representative sample of 8,602 men and women from the United States, between the ages of 17 and 39. In order to measure depression, the Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS), a structured psychiatric interview, was conducted. According to this survey, overall, 8.6% of Americans have experienced a major depressive episode, and 6.2% have experienced dysthymia (Jonas, et al., 2003). This rate of dysthymia was almost twice

the rate of 3.3%, which was reported by the Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study (ECA), but lower than the estimates from NCS. However, the NHANES III also captured important information on the rates of major depression and dysthymia by socio-economic status and ethnic minority group.

The most recent survey of a nationally representative sample is the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcoholism and Related Conditions (NESARC), which conducted face-to-face diagnostic interviews with 43,093 Americans over the age of 17 during the years 2001 and 2002, using DSM IV criteria (Hasin, Goodwin, Stinson, & Grant, 2005). The lifetime prevalence rate of major depressive disorder for men and women was 9% and 17.1%, respectively.

### **Depression in Men**

Depression is associated with very serious consequences for men and their families, ranging from direct consequences such as unemployment and suicide, to indirect consequences, such as absenteeism and substance abuse, and yet it may not be very well reported, diagnosed, or understood. Estimates on the percentage of men in the United States who have suffered from major depression at some point in their lives have ranged from 3.6% to 12.7% (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Jonas, Brody, Roper, & Narrow, 2003; Kessler, McGonagle, Zhao, & Nelson, 1994). Major prevalence surveys have also consistently found that depression is twice as prevalent among women as men, but men commit suicide at 4 to 5 times the rate of women (Singh, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 1996; World Health Organization, 2005). As a result, much of the research on depression in men has been focused on how they compare to women. Depression in men is probably under-diagnosed for many

reasons, but primarily because they may be more likely to present symptoms that are atypical of the current understanding of depression, gender bias in diagnosticians and helpers, and because the population of men most likely to suffer from depression are the least likely to talk about it or seek assistance.

### **Consequences of Depression in Men**

The relationship between depression and associated consequences is very complex, as it is very difficult to know if depression is the cause, catalyst, or result of events such as unemployment, suicide, relationship problems, substance abuse, and many other problems. There is a dynamic association between depression and associated consequences or social problems, such that depression makes problems such as unemployment worse, and problems (such as unemployment) make depression worse.

The most severe and immediate consequences of depression from a public health perspective are suicide and unemployment. The suicide rate of men is more than 4 times the rate of women (Singh, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 1996; World Health Organization, 2005). It is also well known that unemployment is both caused by and contributes to depression in men (Anseau et al., 2008; Patten et al., 2006; Soares, Macassa, Grossi, & Viitasara, 2008; Virtanen et al., 2008), and it has been found that unemployment can trigger levels of depressive symptomatology that require medical interventions in men with and without a predisposition toward depression (Montgomery, Cook, Bartley, & Wadsworth, 1999). The World Health Organization has cited depression as the leading cause of disability in the world (WHO, n.d.).

From a family science perspective, there are multiple indirect consequences of men's depression, but two of the most troubling occur when men enter relationships and become fathers: conflict with their co-parents and transmission of depression to children. Depression in men is highly correlated with conflict in both marital and partner relationships (Choi & Marks, 2008; Christopher, Pflieger, Canary, Guerrero, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2008). Research on whether depression causes marital conflict or conflict causes depression has been contradictory and inconclusive, but the two are highly correlated (for a full review see Rehman, Gollan, & Mortimer, 2008). Further, depression may be one of the factors that affects whether low-income men get married at all. In her examination of fathers from the Fragile Families Study, Meadows (2009) found some evidence of a selection effect: men with better mental health and higher socio-economic status were more likely to get married than other men.

It is well known that maternal depression can have a devastating impact on children, but research on paternal depression is emergent. Both maternal and paternal depressions predict child and adolescent depression, although routes of transmission are complex. For example, a recent study of at risk youth found that maternal depression correlated with depression in male adolescent children only when paternal depression was also above average or high (Kim, Capaldi, & Stoolmiller, 2003). Another longitudinal study of 2,127 Dutch children revealed that adolescents in families where parents have experienced a depressive episode over their lifetimes will experience more depression when they are exposed to a stressful event than adolescents in families where parents have not experienced depression (Bouma,

Ormel, Verhulst, & Oldehinkel, 2008). This finding indicates that increased sensitivity to stressful events is a part of depression in children of depressed parents, but still leaves questions about from where that sensitivity comes (Bouma et al., 2008).

### **Depression in Men is Controversial**

Depression may actually be less prevalent in men, or it may just seem that way for several reasons: they may be more likely to present symptoms that do not meet the current criteria for depression, they may mask depression, they may have better coping skills, and there may be gender bias in diagnosticians and helpers (Addis, 2008). In his article *Gender and Depression in Men*, Michael Addis has summarized four major areas of research on depression in men: sex differences, masking theory, masculine depression, and gender socialization (2008). Addis states in this article that research has focused largely on the discrepancy in prevalence and symptoms of major depression between men and women, but suggests that future research focus on the elements of depression that may be more common to men due to gender socialization, but are not necessarily exclusive to their experience (Addis, 2008).

**Symptom expression difference.** Many researchers have looked for differences in the symptoms of depression between men and women, and nothing has emerged consistently. For example, a symptom of depression thought to be more common in men than women is anger or irritability, but few studies have actually found this difference (for a full review, see Addis, 2008). Addis points out that research looking for “sex differences” has been flawed for two reasons: one,

differences in symptom expression have been conducted primarily on samples of men and women already diagnosed with depression, based on a similar set of symptoms; and two, there is so much variance in the expression of depression within each gender that it tends to overshadow differences between men and women (for a full review of sex difference theory, including studies of physiology, comorbidity, and coping style, see Addis, 2008).

**Masking.** Men may not have a unique set of depressive symptoms, but it is very probable that this phenomenon is due to a tendency to under report, self medicate or otherwise “mask” felt or anticipated depressive symptoms. There is a large body of research in this area, but most of it is theoretical or correlational, as this is a very difficult theory to support empirically (Addis, 2008). One recent longitudinal study found that a high level of depressed mood in childhood predicted greater alcohol use and problems related to alcohol use in adolescence, as well as alcohol dependence in young adulthood (Crum, et al., 2008). Terrence Real (1997) called this “covert” depression, suggesting that men use many means to mask or self-medicate, but do so most often with substance abuse or anti-social behavior.

Men may be more likely to mask depression than women due to either physiological differences or gender socialization. Only two differences between men and women have been found to align both consistently and logically with masking theory: women have a tendency to ruminate while men take action when depressed, and men are less likely to seek help for depression itself (as cited in Addis, 2008). Although the research on physiological differences is flawed and the theory should not be completely dismissed (see above discussion on symptom expression and sex

difference theory), little empirical support has emerged thus far. More promising is the idea that gender socialization, perhaps combined with physiological predispositions, causes men to mask depression. In other words, men are more likely to get drunk or high when they feel bad than women, because it is more socially acceptable for men to act this way.

**Gender socialization.** In order to further examine both men's experience and expression of depression, further attention should be paid to gender socialization. Addis has suggested that to further the understanding of depression, research is needed that moves past the focus on sex differences, masking theory, and even masculine depression, and focuses on gender socialization, specifically, "The relationships between individual differences in adherence to traditionally masculine norms, and various aspects of depression," (Addis, 2008, p. 163). In other words, men may be less likely to experience depression because they are taught not to feel it, and when they do feel it, they are encouraged to make it go away. These tendencies may not be exclusive to men, but more common in men due to gender socialization and relative privilege.

### **Prevalence of Depression in Marginalized Populations**

It makes sense that prevalence of depression is higher in populations that have less access to socially acceptable prevention and coping mechanisms, most often women, but also men who are marginalized and oppressed (for a full review see Zimmerman, Christakis, & Stoep, 2004). Depression is known to be more prevalent among groups with low socio-economic status, and has sometimes been found to be higher among populations of color (Jonas et al., 2003). These men are socialized not



to experience or express depression just as men in mainstream culture, but they have many more risks and fewer protective factors for depression. Traditional male coping or masking mechanisms, such as substance abuse, may also carry more risk for marginalized populations, who have less access to treatment and a higher probability of facing penal consequences for engaging in substance abuse and related behaviors (Piquero, 2008).

**Prevalence in low-income men.** Depression is more prevalent in low socio-economic status groups (for a full review see Zimmerman, Christakis, & Stoep, 2004). Data from the NHANES III revealed significant differences in type of depression according to socio-economic status. Both major depression and dysthymia were highest in low education and low-income groups, but the difference was significant for dysthymia (Jonas et al., 2003). The relationship between socioeconomic status and depression may be caused by factors associated with employment. Employment may also be more relevant to men's depression than women's. Fathers in particular closely identify with their roles as providers (Roy, 2004).

A recent study utilizing a nationally representative sample (n = 3,753 men), found that work factors were more likely to be related to depression in low socio-economic status men than in low socio-economic status women. Among low-income groups, types of low-income employment have been found to be associated with depressive symptomatology such as jobs that are stressful, uncertain, and low status (Zimmerman, Christakis, & Stoep, 2004). The same study found that controlling for socio-economic status, job security was associated with fewer depressive symptoms

for black men, and physically uncomfortable or dangerous jobs were associated with more depressive symptoms in Latino men (Zimmerman et al., 2004).

**Prevalence in racial and ethnic groups.** Just as depression may be more subtle and harder to detect in men than in women, it may also be under-diagnosed in ethnic minority populations. Data from national prevalence surveys suggest that prevalence of major depression is highest for Native Americans and whites, and lowest for African Americans, but findings on dysthymia and minor depression are mixed. Data from the NHANES III indicated that lifetime prevalence of a major depressive episode was highest for non-Hispanic whites, specifically, non-Hispanic white females (12.7%), and lowest among non-Hispanic black men (4.6%). However, dysthymia was most prevalent among non-Hispanic blacks (7.8%) and Mexican Americans (7.5%) (Jonas et al., 2003). The NCS also found both minor and major depression to be highest for whites, next highest for Hispanics, and lowest for non-Hispanic blacks. The most recent data from a nationally representative survey (the NESARC) indicate that Native Americans were most likely to have a major depressive disorder, then whites, and finally, African Americans (Hasin et al., 2005). The National Survey of American Life also found prevalence of depression to be higher in whites than in blacks, including both African American and Caribbean blacks, but severity and chronicity of depression were higher for blacks (Williams et al., 2007).

Rates of major depression vary widely among Latino groups, which may help explain why some studies find low rates of depression in Hispanic adolescent and adult groups, but studies of sub-populations of Hispanic or Latino adolescents find

high rates of depression (Oquendo, Lizardi, Greenwald, Weissman, & Mann, 2004). Using a combined data set of the ECA and the Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (HHANES), researchers found that Puerto Ricans had significantly higher rates of major depression and suicidality than Mexican-Americans, and Cuban-Americans had the lowest rates of major depression and suicidality (Oquendo et al., 2004).

**Racism and discrimination.** Research on depression levels among people of color is mixed, but perceived racism and discrimination are clearly linked with depression. Research indicates that perception of racism causes depression and not the reverse (Brown, 2000). However, individuals who do not suffer from depression may have better coping skills for handling racism and discrimination (Utsey & Payne, 2000).

A recent, comprehensive review of the limited research that has been conducted on African American men and depression found that factors most commonly related to higher levels of depressive symptomatology are coping skills, socioeconomic status, and experiences with racism (Watkins, Green, Rivers, & Rowell, 2006).

Using data from the National Survey of Black Americans ( $n = 779$ ), authors determined that education, financial status, age, and being female predicted depression (as measured dichotomously by the Diagnostic Interview Schedule), and perception of discrimination predicted depression at the trend level (Brown, 2000). Taking advantage of the longitudinal design, authors determined that depression did not predict perception of racial discrimination in subsequent years.

An examination of both clinical and non-clinical samples of African American men found that although most African American men experience similar levels of racism, these do not appear to be related to depression and anxiety, suggesting that men who were not in the clinical sample may have better coping methods or other resources for dealing with the effects of racism (Utsey & Payne, 2000). These authors did not control for demographics or other factors, so there are many possible reasons for the difference in depression and anxiety scores that need to be explored.

### **Depression in Young Men**

Depression in young men may be particularly problematic for several reasons: prevalence is high in adolescence and young adulthood; it interferes with many developmental tasks (identity, relationships, school, employment); and may be difficult to detect at subthreshold levels, due to societal perceptions of normal teenage behavior. Disparity between prevalence of depression between girls and boys becomes evident at this time of identity development, supporting the theory that depression is related to gender socialization. Depression often manifests in childhood, and then continues at varying levels for the duration of adolescence and adult life (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). Depression may also make developmental tasks during adolescence more difficult, delaying and negatively impacting transition to adulthood. Suicide at any age is tragic, but particularly when it causes the premature death of an adolescent; it is the third leading cause of death among adolescents in the United States (CDC, 1999).

## **Experience of Depression from Childhood to Young Adulthood**

Children and adolescents express depression differently from adults. Young children are likely to express depression in the form of not wanting to attend school, saying that they are sick, or being clingy with a parent, as well as worrying that a parent might die (Ezpeleta, Keeler, Erkanli, Costello, & Angold, 2001). Major depressive disorder is thought to affect 2.5% of children and 8.3% of adolescents at any given time (Birmaher, Ryan, Williamson, & Brent, 1996). A major depressive episode for children usually lasts between six and seven months (Birmaher & Brent, 1998). Childhood depression often predicts depression in adolescence and in adulthood (Kessler, Avenevoli, & Ries Merikangas, 2001; Weissman, 1999).

Depression in young boys is often expressed as irritability, and is frequently seen in an increase in aggressive or destructive behavior. Scott and Lagges (2007) surmised that young boys are frequently diagnosed with ADHD, when it may actually be depression that is causing difficulty in concentration. They further theorize that the problems with concentration then cause dropping grades, and finally, decreased motivation to attend school. Finally, the authors asserted that depression also causes anhedonia or the inability to feel pleasure, and young males are unable to enjoy the good grades that they do get.

Many adolescents will express depression through bad behavior at school and general moodiness that is often mistaken for normal development (Ezpeleta et al., 2001). A study of a clinical sample of 373 adolescent males and females referred to a university pediatric depression clinic, ranging in age from 11 to 20, found similar rates of depression in both groups, but varied symptoms of depression (Bennett,

Ambrosini, Kudes, Metz, & Rabinovich, 2005). Adolescent females were more likely to endorse depression items related to guilt, body image, self-blame, self-disappointment, failure, concentration, difficulty working, sadness, sleep problems, fatigue, and health worries. Adolescent males in this study were more likely to express depression as anhedonia, depressed morning mood, and morning fatigue.

#### Longitudinal Impact of Depression from Childhood to Young Adulthood

The difference in the expression of depression may have a differential effect on boys and girls as they progress through the education system and transition into young adulthood. There are very few longitudinal studies of depression from childhood to young adulthood, but these studies clearly illustrate the differential effect of depression on educational achievement for adolescent males and females, and also the long-term consequences.

In a longitudinal study of two time points, childhood (ages 10 to 16) and young adulthood (ages 19 to 24), it was found that depressed mood level in children predicted problems related to alcohol use in young adulthood, including greater levels of alcohol intoxication and dependence (Crum et al., 2008). This sample (n = 1,692) was of youth from the Baltimore, Maryland area, approximately 70% African American, with an even sex distribution. The association between alcohol related problems and early depression was most significant for boys, and the association between alcohol dependence was most significant for African Americans.

In a study examining 2,600 Dutch children it was found that levels of depressive symptomatology varied quite a bit over time, but could be grouped into trajectories and had different effects (Dekker et al., 2007). This study found that

males with high levels of depressive symptomatology during childhood that dropped during adolescence were significantly more likely to do poorly in school than either males or females with varying levels of depression. These children were followed from 1983 to 1997, and five waves of data were collected. Depression was measured using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) for children and the corresponding Young Adult Behavior Checklist (YABCL) for young adults. The investigators found support for six different trajectories of depression for both males and females. Most of the participants (846 males and 814 females) had relatively low levels of depression that stayed low. However, for a small group of males ( $n = 38$ ), there were an additional three trajectories of depression found: high decreasing (starting with a high mean score at age 4 and ending with a very low mean score at age 18), high childhood peak (starting with a medium to high mean score at age 4, peaking slightly higher at around age 8, and ending with a very low mean score at age 18), and increasing high males (starting with a low mean score at age 4 and ending with a high mean score at age 18). The researchers found no relationship between educational attainment and depression for any of the female groups, but males who followed the high childhood peak trajectory were significantly more likely to end up with a lower educational level than found in the three low depression trajectories. It is also interesting that among the three higher depression trajectories found for males, two of them end with very low mean scores, suggesting that at least some males are finding ways to prevent or cope with depressive symptoms.

A longitudinal study followed a sample of 2,194 Finnish youth from 16 years of age to 32, and found that low socio-economic status was significantly correlated

with depression at age 16, but did not predict depression at age 32 (Huurre, Eerola, Rahkonen, & Aro, 2007). However, the low education levels at age 22 that were more prevalent in the low socio-economic status group did significantly predict depression at age 32.

### **Symptoms in Young Adulthood**

By young adulthood, young men have a tendency to describe symptoms of depression as tiredness, irritability, loss of interest in things that used to interest them, or sleep problems (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). Some of the consequences of depression in young adulthood are similar for men and women, such as risky behavior, while others are quite different, such as suicide attempts and completions. In a large international study of 5,529 young adults, ages 18 to 30, depression was found to correlate with irregular sleep patterns, skipping breakfast, low levels of physical activity, and not buckling one's seatbelt for both men and women, controlling for age and social support (Allgöwer, Wardle, & Steptoe, 2001). The emotional and behavioral symptoms of depression in young adult males can result in personal and interpersonal difficulties because depressed individuals often avoid problems, withdraw from interpersonal support, excessively criticize themselves or others, and develop severe physical health conditions (Pollack, 1998). The most permanent and tragic consequence of depression for young adult males is premature death due to suicide, which is highly correlated with major depression (Shaffer, 1996). Despite research findings that women are more likely than men to experience major depression, and have many more suicide attempts than young men, men are at



much greater risk for suicide than young women (Blazer, Kessler, McGonagle & Swartz, 1994).

### **Populations of Young Men at High Risk for Depression**

There is quite a bit of evidence that depression is more prevalent in some populations of young men than others, but little research has been done on the experience and expression of depression in these groups (McCarty et al., 2006; McLaughlin et al., 2007; Mizell, 1999). Populations at higher risk for depression include young men with: a low socio-economic status, involvement with juvenile services, and experiences with racism and discrimination (McCarty et al., 2006; McLaughlin et al., 2007; Mizell, 1999). Again, there is very little research specifically on young men, but much on adolescents. Research indicates that prevalence of depression varies with ethnic group, and some of this difference is attributable to socio-economic status, but there is still much more to be done on possible variation of expression of depression according to cultural norms of ethnic groups and instrument sensitivity to this possible variation.

### **Socio-economic Status and Race Ethnicity**

**Socio-economic status and race ethnicity in adolescents.** Multiple large-scale studies have been conducted on depression in adolescents in the United States, but despite having large numbers of subjects, most of these studies are regional, with varying results on the prevalence of depression according to race/ethnicity. Most of these studies indicate that, unlike the adult population in the United States, depression is least prevalent among whites. It is consistently most prevalent among Native

American adolescents, Latina female adolescents, and results are mixed for African-Americans.

Some regional studies of adolescents have found depression rates highest among Latinos, but it is not clear why. In a study of adolescents from the southwest (n = 2,046) the investigators found that Mexican-American adolescents had the highest rates of major depression, then Anglo-Americans, and African-Americans were third (Doi, Roberts, Takeuchi, & Suzuki, 2001). However, after controlling for socio-economic status, differences between the ethnic groups disappeared, and the significant predictors of depression were the father's educational attainment and family financial status. Another study of 5,423 middle school students from Houston, Texas found that Mexican American youth were significantly more likely to report depression than other ethnic groups, but these differences remained significant after adjustments were made for age, gender, and youths' perceived socio-economic status relative to others (Roberts, Roberts, & Chen, 1997).

A survey of California youth between the ages of 12 and 17 (n = 3,196), utilizing the CES-D to assess depression, revealed that white Latinos were twice as likely as non-white Latinos to express depression and that low levels of acculturation were one of the predictors of this depression (Mikolajczyk, Bredehorst, Khelaifat, Maier, & Maxwell, 2007). However, there were no significant differences in depression levels between Latinos and non-white Latinos among low socio-economic status individuals, but when the high socio-economic status group was examined, Latino ethnicity emerged as a significant predictor of depression.

Adolescent males may already be exhibiting depression through aggressive behavior and masking. Using the Children's Depression Inventory with 1,400 low-income middle school students from Connecticut, McLaughlin, Hilt, and Nolen-Hoeksema (2007) found the highest levels of depressive symptomatology first in Latina girls, and then in African American males, with African American males also exhibiting the highest levels of aggressive behavior, anxiety, and disordered eating.

In a study of seventh graders (n = 3,621) from different schools in the Minneapolis area, Kubik, Lytle, Birnbaum, Murray, and Perry (2003) found that 30% of boys in this sample had elevated rates of depression, which they defined as scores of 16 and over on the CES-D. Socio-economic status was a significant predictor of depression for boys, as was ethnic group, with Native Americans, Asians, and African Americans all significantly more likely to have elevated depressed symptomatology than whites. Additionally, inhalant and alcohol use was associated with depression for boys in this group.

In a study of 77 adolescent African American males, aged 13 to 16, from a high-violence neighborhood school in the Midwest, the investigators found that half of the sample reported elevated levels of depressive symptomatology, as measured by the 20 item CES-D (Paxton, Robinson, Shah, & Schoeny, 2004). They also found that exposure to violence predicted both clinical levels of depressive symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder. The study also examined social support and did not find a relationship between social support and levels of depressive symptomatology, suggesting that in high crime neighborhoods social support is not enough to alleviate depressive symptoms for adolescent males.

Social support may differ from parental support. In a longitudinal study of 173 adolescent African American males from Baltimore, Maryland, which assessed depression using the Brief Symptom Inventory, and treated it as a continuous measure, it was found that increased depression was associated with stressful events, and lower levels of parental support (Zimmerman, 2000). There was also an interactive effect between stressful events and parental support, suggesting that parental support helped to buffer the effects of stressful events.

In another longitudinal study of depression in African American men, Mizell (1999) looked at 779 men from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, both as adolescents and adults. He found that factors such as education and self esteem predicted depression in adolescents, but those factors were no longer significant in the adult model, and were cancelled out by earnings and a sense of mastery. This was not the case in the pooled sample of white and African American adult men ( $n = 2,334$ ) for which not only did the adolescent variables retain significance, but variables involving household composition were also significant.

**Socio-economic status and race ethnicity in young men.** Research on prevalence levels of depression among African Americans is mixed, but this may be because African Americans under-report depression. One qualitative study to date has examined the experience of depression in a group of 28 college-educated young black men (Kendrick, Anderson, & Moore, 2007). Researchers found that the men discussed feeling stressed in relation to their experience of daily living as black men. They had a variety of coping mechanisms in order to not get depressed, they dealt with a constant sense of being different due to their ethnicity, they were particularly

stressed by interactions with law enforcement, and finally, they all agreed that depression was not only different for black men, but a fact of life for them because of the unique and constant stressors that young black men tend to face in the United States (Kendrick et al., 2007). African Americans are also less likely to use mental health services, particularly young men (Neighbors et al., 2007).

Young black men may have an additional set of risk and resiliency factors in terms of identity formation and depression that stem from racial identity and racism. Research indicates that black men may be more vulnerable to depression due to encounters with racism, but that racial identity is related to well being in black men, either directly impacting self-esteem or buffering the negative impact of racism (for full review, see Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009). Ethnic identity and cultural learning experiences also correlate with self esteem in fathers and their ability to empathize with their children (Terrell, 2005).

### **School Failure and Dropout**

School failure has been linked to depression, and may also be an indicator for dropout, although this has not been verified empirically. School failure and dropout are disproportionately high for urban minority males and may be related to depression. The dropout rate for African American and Latino youth is more than twice the dropout rate for white and Asian youth (Orfield et al., 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The status dropout rate, which is the percentage of 16 to 24 year olds who report not being enrolled in high school and do not have either a high school diploma or a general equivalency diploma (GED), was 5.8% for Whites, 10.7% for African Americans, and 22.1% for Latinos (U.S. Department of

Education, 2008). Additionally, the graduation rate in urban public schools, where the ethnic majority is African American and Latino, is much lower than suburban and rural schools. The national graduation rate, which is the percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> graders who graduate 4 years later, is 75% in suburban schools and 60% in urban schools, with some urban districts, such as Baltimore, having graduation rates as low as 35% versus 82% in their surrounding suburban school districts (Swanson, 2008). Forty-six percent of African Americans and 40% of Latinos attend city schools with graduation rates lower than 50% or “dropout factories,” (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Finally, African American and Latino males have the lowest graduation rates of any ethnic or gender group at 42.8% and 48% respectively (Orfield et al., 2004).

### **Juvenile Justice**

Youth involved with the criminal justice system have consistently higher rates of depression than in the general population. It is not certain whether or not this is due to the actual experience with the criminal justice system or other risk factors that caused youth to be involved with the criminal justice system.

A study of 228 youths, 170 boys and 58 girls, (51% Caucasian, 34% African-American, 7% Asian or Pacific Islander, 4% Hispanic, 3% American Indian, and 1% mixed race) aged 13 to 18 who were admitted to King County Detention Center, found that youth involved with the juvenile justice system had depression levels 3.81 times higher than that of the general population (McCarty, Vander Stoep, Kuo, & McCauley, 2006). Another regional study in Utah found that over 60% of youth who commit suicide had been involved in the juvenile justice system (Moskos, Achilles, & Gray, 2004).

The Oregon Youth Study (OYS) is an ongoing longitudinal study of 206 boys randomly selected from schools in areas with high rates of crime, and has released several important findings (Stoolmiller, Kim, & Capaldi, 2005). Participants were interviewed using a range of methods, including phone and in-person interviews, every year for 15 years, from when they were 9 years old to 24 years old, using the CES-D 20 item scale to determine levels of depressive symptoms. The researchers found varying patterns of depressive symptoms over time, but only 6% of participants had consistently low levels of depression over time, which is the reverse of what is indicated by large epidemiological studies of the general population. They found that 30% of participants had high levels of depressive symptoms consistently from childhood to young adulthood. Using latent class analysis, the researchers also found that chronic young adult offenders also had chronic high levels of depression (Wiesner, Kim, & Capaldi, 2005).

### **Depression in Young Fathers**

From this population of young men with high concentrations of depressive symptoms emerge a large percentage of young fathers (Stouthamer-Loeber & Wei, 1998). Transition to fatherhood is one of the most dramatic changing points in a man's life, and very little is known about depressive cognitions and symptoms during this time, particularly with this population. How young men incorporate the role of father into their self concept may act to either buffer or exacerbate depression, depending on their circumstances and perceptions. Depression may reciprocally shape the course of fathering and co-parenting for young men: it interferes with men's relationships (for a full review see Rehman, Gollan, & Mortimer, 2008), their

ability to provide for their families (Ansseau et al., 2008; Montgomery, Cook, Bartley, & Wadsworth, 1999; Patten et al., 2006; Soares, Macassa, Grossi, & Viitasara, 2008), and their ability to parent effectively. However, the opportunity for generative development and a positive identity as a father may offer young men a reprieve from depression, and how they internalize parenthood may determine how long that reprieve lasts.

### **Prevalence of Depression in Young Fathers**

Young fathers are usually defined as young men who have their first child before the age of 25 (Institute, 2008). There are very few statistics on young fathers, but in a study using a nationally representative sample (n = 2,592) it was found that approximately 10% of men have their first child by the age of 20, 35% by the age of 23, about 50% by the age of 25, and 85% by the age of 30 (Mirowsky & Ross, 2002).

**Young fathers at risk.** Young fathers are more likely to come from populations at risk due to socio-economic status or experience with the juvenile justice system. There are few studies of young fathers between the ages of 20 and 25, but multiple studies indicate that adolescent or teen fathers are more likely than their non-father peers to come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001).

In a longitudinal matched sample study of urban males under the age of 19 from the Pittsburgh public school system (n = 124), fathers were found to be more than twice as likely as non-fathers to have been delinquent, both prior to and after becoming fathers (Stouthamer-Loeber & Wei, 1998). A longitudinal study of juvenile offenders found that 25% to 28% of them were fathers (Unruh, Bullis, &



Yovanoff), versus a rate of 4% to 7% experiencing fatherhood in the general juvenile population (as cited in Shannon & Abrams, 2007). Some studies have found that young fathers are more aggressive and engage in more self-medicating behaviors (Weinman, 2007). Some young fathers are in prison, and there is a growing body of research on their needs, as well as specific parenting programs that are being developed for them (Meek, 2007a).

**Depression in young fathers.** In the few studies that have tried to estimate prevalence of depression in young fathers, it was found that depression was higher in young fathers than their non-parent peers, and it was higher in young fathers than in older fathers (Heath, McKenry, & Leigh, 1995; Mirowsky & Ross, 2002).

In the same study, Mirowsky (2002) found that parents have lower depression than non-parents, both men and women, if the parent's age at first childbirth is 23 or over. Another study, using a nationally representative sample of adult males ( $n = 1,259$  and mean age = 31), compared men who became fathers as adolescents (under the age of 20,  $n = 227$ ) to men who became fathers as adults (between the ages of 20 and 30,  $n = 1,032$ ), and found that men who became fathers as adolescents had higher levels of depression, but also greater parental satisfaction, even when controlling for age, race, and socioeconomic status (Heath, McKenry, & Leigh, 1995).

There may be many reasons for this unexpected disparity in satisfaction. It may mean that younger fathers may have had more time to adjust to fatherhood, and are enjoying the benefits of older children - transition to parenthood is known to be stressful, and has been linked with depression (Keeton & Sayer, 2008). It is also possible that younger fathers had lower expectations of fatherhood and were surprised

at the results; that younger fathers had more intentionality to begin with, maybe they became fathers early because they wanted to; or fatherhood brought more status to these young men, as well as the opportunity for generativity, which may be more gratifying for young men from high risk backgrounds. All of these possibilities should be examined in order to assist young fathers in off-setting the strains of young fatherhood that may contribute to depression.

Despite dealing with multiple mental health issues, young men will often seek assistance with finding a job before getting help with depression or anxiety. In a needs assessment of 143 young fathers (ages 16 to 33, 73% African American, 21% Hispanic, 3% Caucasian, and 3% other) participating in a fatherhood program in the southwest part of the United States, fathers discussed having feelings of anger, depression, tension, helplessness, and aggression. These fathers also engaged in multiple risk behaviors, and although 22% of fathers did request mental health services, the most frequent service request (made by 87% of fathers) was assistance with employment (Weinman, 2005).

**Additional challenges for young fathers.** Transition to fatherhood is challenging for most men, but particularly young fathers who may not be prepared to provide for a family yet, and do not yet live with their co-parent. Fathers in particular closely identify with their roles as providers (Roy, 2004). Young fathers may be non-residential. It is well known that non-residential fathers are at greater risk for depression than residential fathers, but there are probably many reasons for this, not all of which can be attributed directly to their non-residential status. However, within non-residential father groups, some conditions have been associated with greater

levels of depression, such as ambiguous parenting roles and low child contact, although no longitudinal or causal research has been conducted in this area.

Non-residential fathers may also be at greater risk for depression than men in the general population due to separation from children. Divorced fathers with low child contact suffer from higher levels of depression than fathers with high child contact (Bokker, Farley, & Denny, 2006). Cochran and Rabinowitz (2000) discuss the relationship between nonresidential fathers and depression, and they suggest that fatherhood is thought by some to be an essential developmental phase for men; thus when males are, “Deprived of the opportunity to fulfill this important role, many men face a crisis of meaning and purpose.”

### **Generativity in Young Fathers**

In addition to responsibilities and burdens, fatherhood brings joy and opportunity for development. Young fathers may start thinking and acting generatively for the first time, and how they do this will shape and be shaped by depression. All of the positive feelings, identity messages, and growth that come with fatherhood may counter depressive cognitions and symptoms. However, the reverse may happen as well; depression may overwhelm the experience of fatherhood. Finally, depression may also make it difficult for young men to live up to new responsibilities, and cut them off from fatherhood in that way.

Generativity is one of the later developmental stages identified by Erickson (1950), usually taking place in adulthood, after intimacy. It refers to a feeling or sense that one is taking care of the next generation (Erikson, 1950). Fatherhood is

thought to be a turning point marked by generativity. Hawkins (1993) maintains that the presence of a child and child care activities stimulate generativity.

Snarey (1993) further developed generative concepts to include biological, parental, and societal generativity. Biological generativity refers to meeting a child's basic needs during the first year of life. Parental generativity requires more self-reflection on the type of parenting to which an individual aspires, and a long term commitment to helping a child grow. Finally, societal generativity is marked by extending generative thoughts beyond one's own child to all children, although, again, it is not limited to parents (Snarey, 1993).

Fatherhood may stimulate generativity in young fathers, given the right circumstances, but it is a life-changing event for young men, and they may not be prepared to make adjustments rapidly. In a qualitative study of 40 fathers (ages 20 to 40), Palkovitz et al. (2001) found that early time fathers (became fathers before 21,  $n = 7$ ) tended to have lifestyles that were not conducive to fathering, such as partying frequently. Early time fathers reported that fatherhood caused a dramatic change in their thinking, caused them to think about behaving more responsibly, and try to settle down. On time and older fathers (over 20 when first child was born,  $n = 33$ ) reported that fatherhood brought more subtle changes; older fathers were not as surprised by the changes, and talked more generatively about fathering.

Generativity may be a second chance for fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds to create more successful identities as fathers (Roy & Lucas, 2006). In a qualitative study of low-income men ( $n = 77$ ), the authors found that even with all of their struggles, low-income men have a strong desire to be good parents, and love

their children, which is at least the starting point of generativity. In many cases, fatherhood was men's only opportunity at generativity, due to failed relationships and poor work histories.

What happens may depend on cognitions – men want their children to do better than them, have more, but this is especially true for low-income men (Palkovitz, et al., 2001). Men in this study who had a tough time during their own childhoods expressed generativity as a desire for their children to both have more than them, but also to make better choices. It is natural for parents to want their children to have better lives than themselves, but the way that fathers talk about this may reveal underlying depression. For example, in addition to wanting more for their children, fathers with a criminal record often reflected that they did not want their children to be like them or make the same mistakes they made.

Erikson (1950) posited identity, intimacy, and generativity as taking place from adolescence to young adulthood, but development may be slowed down and even arrested by depression, or depression may motivate increased generativity. In a qualitative study of three women with depression, each of these developmental stages were experienced as hard fought major turning points in adulthood (Paris, 2001). These women found that depression and self medication through substance abuse made achieving adult milestones very difficult. However, a contrasting qualitative study of, again, three women, found that the women were profoundly generative despite histories of childhood abuse and struggles with depression as adults (Thomas, 2008). These women were able to use motherhood and care for their children to relieve feelings of depression.

Family often shapes men's perceptions of father roles and the way to be generative (Kost, 2001). How men process messages about generativity may determine how fatherhood impacts them. In a qualitative study of fathers (ages 18 to 30, n = 20) men reported that they formed their ideas about what it is to be a father from their own fathers, both positively and negatively. These men also judged themselves, sometimes quite harshly, according to family and societal messages of good fathering, and not on feedback from their children (Kost, 2001). Norms of young parenthood in particular may vary with cultural background. A recent study of young fathers revealed that young African-American men who became fathers in high school were more likely than young White fathers to complete their high school education (Weinman, Buzi, Smith, & Nevarez, 2007).

Young fathers also learn to be generative from supportive parenting programs. A recent study of young fathers found that regardless of residency status, young fathers who participated in a co-parenting intervention had a more positive perception of their parenting skills than those who did not (Fagan, 2008). A qualitative study of 38 young African American fathers from the southwest of the United States participating in a fatherhood program found that young fathers who felt positive emotions toward their children in the beginning of the program were likely to shift to being engaged with their children by the end of the program (Saleh, Buzi, Weinman, & Smith, 2006).

### **Theory**

The theoretical approach taken with this study combined symbolic interaction and cognitive theory. Symbolic interaction theory is broadly defined as making

meaning, language, and thought through interactions with others (Blumer, 1969). More specifically, it asserts that individuals develop their self concepts and identities through social interactions with others (as summarized by LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). According to the cognitive theory of depression, individuals engage in depressive cognitions such as negative self-statements, cognitive distortions, and have negative core beliefs that cause them to view themselves, their personal circumstances, and the world around them negatively (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1980). The goal of combining these two theoretical approaches is to examine how depressive cognitions and symptoms shape meaning making and identity in young low-income men of color, and particularly in young fathers.

### **Symbolic Interaction Theory**

Symbolic interaction theory was used in this study to integrate gender, race, ethnicity, and social class into status, identity, and role for young men. This study examined the interactive dynamic between meaning making (interpreting the world around them) and identity formation (figuring out who they are in that world) for young African American men who are at risk, and young African American men who are at risk and are fathers, by incorporating the most relevant facets of identity and role theory.

Status, identity, and role are inter-related areas, with several sub-concepts: status content, salience, centrality, role norms, role expectation, role strain, and role enactment. These concepts are defined the same way, so the following will outline the definitions driven by the research on fathering and racial identity. They are used in this study as sensitizing concepts to help understand what young men think about

their statuses as young African American men and fathers. Racial and fatherhood identity have extensive literatures, but both draw from the identity literature and deal with similar ideas. From the fatherhood literature, most of the definitions used in this section were drawn either directly from authors Rane and McBride, or were cited by them in their (2000) paper *Identity Theory as a Guide to Understanding Fathers' Involvement With Their Children*. Definitions from the literature on racial identity were drawn primarily from the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), a model designed to, "Address both the significance and the qualitative meaning of race in the self-concepts of African-Americans," (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

**Personal identity.** Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1993) define status as a label, and they are referring primarily to the status of fatherhood (as cited by Rane & McBride, 2000). However, there are many labels that might have meaning for the young men in this study such as father, worker, brother, man, black man, friend, student, dropout, partner, or son. Status content refers to an individual's personal vision of a given status (McCall & Simmons, 1978). For example, for some men, being a father means providing emotional support for their co-parents and nurturing their children, and for others it means being the primary breadwinner, and supporting their families financially. Centrality refers to the prominence or self reported importance that status or race has to an individual (Rane & McBride, 2000; Sellers et al., 1998). This is usually considered to be stable and hierarchical, such that when it is measured, individuals are asked to rank or weight the different statuses that they associate with themselves. Finally, identity is also determined by salience. Salience refers to the



frequency to which a status is referred, or the proclivity for referring to a status, depending on context or situational cues (Rane & McBride, 2000; Sellers et al., 1998).

Racial regard and racial ideology are elements of racial identity that refer to what being black or of color mean to individuals (Sellers et al., 1998). Racial ideology is defined by Sellers et al., as the way that an individual feels that people of their race, specifically African-Americans, should act. Racial regard is the extent to which an individual feels good about his race, and this is both public and private. Private racial regard refers to how an individual feels both about being of color, and about others who share a similar racial or ethnic background to that individual. Public racial regard is how the individual thinks others view people of color.

Racial identity may vary with socio-economic status, and so it is important to examine the two simultaneously. For example, blacks with low socio-economic status reported feeling closer to other blacks than did blacks of higher socio-economic status, but also less positively about blacks as a group (Allen et al., 1989). Utilizing data from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA), with a nationally representative sample of 2107 African Americans, (Demo (1990) found that adult socioeconomic status significantly predicted positive black group evaluation.

**Societal role messages.** There are several aspects of role theory that will be considered both for young men and young fathers: role norms, role expectations, role strain, and role enactment. The first aspect of role theory to be examined is role norms. Role norms are determined by society, and there are typically role norms for each status that an individual has. These may be particularly challenging for young

African American men, because role norms also vary with cultural background, and members of minority cultures are often bicultural. For example, it is well documented that in African-American households there is more shared responsibility for chores between men and women than in white households (as cited in White & Klein, 2008). Role expectations are similar to role norms, but take place at the personal level, and are held both by the individual and the people closest to them.

Role norms and role expectations directly affect role strain. First, the more roles that a person plays, the more role strain he or she will experience. Young men may feel strain regarding meeting multiple role expectations, particularly during this developmental period, when centrality of multiple statuses are shifting with transition to adulthood. Young fathers are definitely juggling multiple roles: father, son, partner, and provider.

Role enactment is the behavior associated with a certain status and is driven by each individual's identity. This may be very complex for young men at risk and particularly young fathers. For example, father involvement is largely determined by aspects of identity, and these aspects tend to be inter-related (as cited by Rane & McBride, 2000). When being a father (status content) means nurturing, then father involvement is higher (Rane & McBride, 2000). Nurturing status content has also been found to predict both centrality of father status and father-child bonding, and the centrality of father status has been found to correlate with father-child bonding before the child is even born (Habib & Lancaster, 2006).

**Looking glass self.** One of symbolic interaction theory's central concepts is the looking glass self, developed by Charles Cooley, which is the idea that one

develops a concept of one's self by imagining what other people see (as summarized by LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). The literature indicates that young men and young fathers in particular, are very sensitive to what they think others' perceptions of them are, and one of the goals of the present study was to determine what messages young men got, both from their families and society in general, and how they internalized them. For example, program director Mark Osborn of the UK reports that young men, and young fathers in particular are very interested in receiving sexual health services, but are often too embarrassed to go about looking for them (Osborn, 2006).

**Possible selves.** This is not just a negative phenomenon. A study of young fathers in prison revealed that young men consider fatherhood to be linked with the concept of possible selves, not who they are currently, but who they could be (Meek, 2007b). Programs may assist with this process. A study of young fathers in the UK found that they used the support of various networks to help them form a positive self-identity as fathers (Reeves, 2006). Further, interventions based upon possible selves may be more effective for young fathers than young mothers. Young parents have both feared and hoped-for parenting possible selves that influence parent self-regulation, but mothers have more feared possible selves than fathers (Morfei, Hooker, Fiese & Cordeiro, 2001).

However, in order for practitioners and programs to be effective in supporting young men of color at risk, and young fathers of color, they must be sensitive to possible internal barriers, specifically, depression and depressive cognitions. Research indicates that depressive symptomatology may be high in these populations, and so it is essential that professionals who work with young men learn to recognize

depressive cognitions in order to help young men work through the cognitive side of the illness. The specific aspects of the way in which they internalize these concepts make them more resilient or vulnerable to depression, through negative cognitions.

### **Cognitive Theory of Depression**

The cognitive model of depression posits that depression is a continually reinforcing process of negative thinking that causes individuals to view themselves, the world, and the future negatively (Beck et al., 1980). Additionally, attribution theory is an important part of the cognitive model, and states that the how individuals classify negative events may also contribute to depression. Specifically, when individuals attribute a negative event to a global, stable, and internal cause (e.g., one's personality or competence), this can be depressing, but when individuals attribute negative events to specific, external, and unstable causes, this helps them to cope more effectively (Abramson, 2002). Beck did not assume that negative cognitions are the sole cause of depression, but that they are distinctive patterns of thinking that contribute to what is referred to as "the downward cycle of depression" (Beck et al., 1980). Contemporary research indicates that depressive cognitions and depressive symptoms are reciprocal (for a full review, see Oie et al., 2005).

Cognitive theory proposes that there are two major categories of cognitions: automatic thoughts and core beliefs (Beck, 1964). Automatic thoughts are the thoughts that individuals have without thinking or consideration, and in persons who are prone to depression these thoughts are typically negative and often inaccurate (Beck, 1964). Negative automatic thoughts are based on underlying negative core beliefs, which are fixed ideas that individuals have about the world. Both automatic

thoughts and core beliefs associated with depression also are called negative cognitions, depressive cognitions, depressive thinking, or cognitive distortions. For the purposes of this paper all cognitive constructs related to depression will be referred to as depressive cognitions.

An easy way to consider depressive cognitions is to use methods outlined by popular psychiatrist, David Burns. He outlines multiple common cognitive distortions, such as: all or nothing thinking, personalization and blame, catastrophizing, emotional reasoning, should or must statements, selective abstraction, discounting the positive, overgeneralization, magnification and minimization, labeling, and mind reading (Burns, 1980). All or nothing thinking means that if an individual cannot do something perfectly, then he or she considers the self to be terrible or the worst at it (Burns, 1980). Personalization refers to the habit of blaming one's self for everything that goes wrong, and blame refers to not ever taking responsibility for errors that one makes (Burns, 1980). Catastrophizing is related more closely to anxiety than depression, and it is the habit of predicting a dangerous future (Burns, 1980). Emotional reasoning involves a person relying on his or her feelings and not on external evidence as the basis for judging situations (Burns, 1980). Should or must statements are beliefs that people hold about ways that they should be or behave, but that others may not even expect of them (Burns, 1980). Selective abstraction involves an individual perseverating over an event or detail that they find upsetting to the exclusion of any positive materials (Burns, 1980). Discounting the positive is similar, but it is when a person chooses to believe negative information and disregard positive information as false (Burns, 1980).

Overgeneralization refers to the habit of applying a negative appraisal from one situation to all situations, related or unrelated (Burns, 1980). Magnification and minimization, refer to exaggerating the negative and minimizing the positive aspects of a situation (Burns, 1980). Labeling is giving oneself or others an extremely negative trait label (Burns, 1980). Finally, mind reading involves making assumptions about other people's thoughts about you (Burns, 1980).

The content and type of the distortion that men engage may be linked to gender socialization. In a study of 27 depressed and 27 non-depressed men (90% white) Mahalik (2000) found that depressed men are likely to use should or must statements. The content of internalized messages was distinctly masculine as well, with message such as, "I must be successful to be happy and fulfilled"; "For things to go right, I have to be in charge"; and "If I can't do it myself, people will think I'm inept."

Most of the research indicates that there is a strong reciprocal relationship between depressive cognitions and depressive symptoms. Overall, however, depressive symptom levels fluctuate over time, and depressive cognitions tend to remain steady, and this is also true for ethnic minority youth (Kennard, Stewart, Hughes, Patel, & Emslie, 2006). There are also multiple other well-developed concepts in the cognitive model that are related to depressive symptoms, such as attributional style, dysfunctional attitudes, and hopelessness. In a study of adolescents (n = 688, in grades 7 through 12) Garber (1993) found a small, but significant positive correlation between depressive symptoms and age, but no correlation between depressive cognitions and age. Another study found that

negative cognitions decrease when depressive symptoms have remitted, but remain significantly higher than negative cognitions in non-depressed adolescents (Marton, 1993). More recent research focused on specific relationships within the cognitive model suggests that dysfunctional attitudes are persistent states (Parslow, 2006). In the cognitive diathesis-stress model of depression, research on early adolescents indicates that hopelessness, dysfunctional attitudes, and attributional style are all persistent states in both boys and girls, but girls' stronger tendency to ruminate makes depressive cognitions more accessible during stressful events (Kercher, 2009). These authors also found that depression predicts choices that lead to more stress for adolescents.

### **Intersection of Symbolic Interaction Theory and the Cognitive Theory of Depression**

Symbolic interaction theory has many well-developed concepts on the process of the identity and roles of fatherhood, and depression researchers have used advanced statistical methodology to focus on the specifics of the cognitive model, but nothing has been done to look at depression in men through the lens of identity as a father. Hawkins (1993) suggested that the, "Disequilibrium of fatherhood stimulates new cognitive structures," making the study of cognitive processes during this time ideal.

In line with symbolic interaction theory, Burr et al. (1979) developed a series of inter-related propositions, as summarized by authors White and Klein, which illustrate how role enactment may develop in young fathers (White & Klein, 2008). Burr et al. proposed that the quality of role enactment affects the satisfaction with the

role. If fathers feel good about how well they are fathering, they will enjoy it more. However, feeling good about fathering may have more to do with internal processes than external skills. Most father programs offer skill building classes, but research indicates that sensitivity to child and self-confidence (which are both eroded by depression) are both more important to father involvement than specific skills (Pleck, 1997). Depressive symptoms may make it more difficult to perform fatherhood tasks (role enactment), and depressive cognitions may make it difficult to feel good about them, due to a tendency to screen out positive feedback from others.

Burr et al. (1979) further proposed that as role expectations become clearer, the quality of role enactment is improved. The more that fathers understand what is expected of them, the better they are able to do their jobs. For example, caregiver identity in fathers is a function of perceived reflected-appraisals from their partners (Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2001). When adolescent mothers reported a stronger role for fathers, their satisfaction with father involvement six months after the birth of their child was higher (Krishnakumar & Black, 2003). However, cognitive distortions may make it very difficult for young fathers to communicate clearly with their co-parents, as well as other family members, and supporters from helping professions.

The final proposition made by Burr et al. is that the more role strain that individuals experience, the more difficult it will be to take on the responsibilities of that role, and the less likely it is that role enactment will occur. It is well documented that transition to fatherhood is challenging, and easy to imagine that transition being that much more challenging due to the strain of trying to be a good friend, son,



student, worker, partner, or father simultaneously. Again, depressive cognitions may amplify role strain while symptoms make role enactment more challenging, leading to the cycle of depression in young fathers.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to learn more about the experience that young African American men and fathers participating in a GED program, living in a low-income, urban environment, have with depression. The goal was to find out how depression emerges in toxic environments, how young men experienced the full range of depression in those environments over time, and, for young fathers, the reciprocal relationship between depression and fatherhood.

Depression is a debilitating mental illness that has consistently been found to be twice as prevalent in women as in men, and yet the suicide rate of men is five times that of women (Singh, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 1996; World Health Organization, 2005). Despite this, little is known about the experience and expression of depression in men, and specifically, young, low-income men of color who are fathers. It is possible that the risk for depression increases with fatherhood due to the challenges of nonresidential parenting and financial stress. However, fatherhood also brings many opportunities for young men; it is a chance for them to be generative for the first time in their lives and to experience the joys that accompany the challenges of parenthood.

I used a combination of symbolic interaction and the cognitive theory of depression to answer the following questions: How does depression emerge in toxic environments? How do young men experience and express the full range of depression in those environments over time? What was the reciprocal relationship between depression and fatherhood?

With reference to the experience and expression of depression among young African-American men living in low-income urban neighborhoods, who are participating in a job readiness program, the following questions were addressed:

1. How do young men experience and develop relationships in unsafe environments?
2. What strategies have they developed to negotiate unsafe environments and how do those strategies shape their lives over time?
3. How do young men experience and express depressive symptoms and cognitions over time?
4. How do strategies that young men have developed seem to ameliorate or exacerbate young men's experience with depression?

Many of these young men are fathers (Stouthamer-Loeber & Wei, 1998), and little is known about depressive cognitions and symptoms in young African-American fathers in GED programs. Young men may be motivated or daunted by the responsibility of fatherhood, which may buffer or exacerbate depression. The cognitive theory of depression asserts that depression will reciprocally shape the course of fathering and co-parenting for young men.

With reference to the experience of depression among young African-American fathers living in low-income urban neighborhoods, who are participating in a GED program, the following question was addressed:

5. How does depression shape young men's experience of fatherhood, and how does the experience of fatherhood shape well being in young fathers,

potentially buffering from or even exacerbating their mental health concerns?

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Approach

The goal of this research was to learn more about the experience that young men and young fathers have with depression: what it feels like, what triggers depressive symptoms, how they respond to them, what their depressive cognitions are, and more about the reciprocal relationship between identity and depressive cognition. This study utilized a combination of post-positivist and social constructionist paradigm, closer to the epistemological assumptions of objectivism. It is situated on the beliefs of post-positivism as described by qualitative researcher Kerry Daly, “The idea that objective reality exists out there, but this is a reality that is imprecisely apprehendable,” (Daly, 2007, p. 30). Depression has been found in both genders and every cultural group; however the diagnosis of depression is based on symptoms primarily observed in clinical samples of white, middle-class women (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). Depression exists as an objective reality, but the way that it has been researched and diagnosed is inherently problematic, and this study sought to find more information on the nature of depression in two under-researched groups.

The current knowledge of the experience of depression and symptomology expression in other groups, particularly in low-income young men of color, is limited. Most of the available research on prevalence, symptom expression, and cognitive theory has been conducted with an understanding of depression based on individuals with a similar presentation of the illness (Addis, 2008; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). Although the experience of alternate presentations of depression has been written about in the popular press, most notably in books such as *Black Pain*, by Terrie

Williams, and *Noonday Demon*, by Andrew Solomon, there has been very little scientific inquiry into depression as experienced outside of traditional understanding. Further, although there are multiple ethnographic style studies in the fatherhood and transition to parenthood literature, there is nothing that specifically focuses on both depression as a barrier to effective parenting and also the joys of parenthood as a healer of depression. It is the limited understanding and knowledge about the overall experience and impact of depression on young fathers of color that makes it desirable to use the habits and tools of social constructionism, such as interviews to gain a better understanding of how and in what context low-income young African American men experience depression, and what meaning it has in their lives (Daly, 2007).

Phenomenological inquiry and modified grounded theory methodology were used in conducting this research. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on describing the world of sub-groups of the population and so was appropriate for attempting to describe the way that young men – particularly those with multiple risk factors – experienced depression, and then capturing what elements of depression they have assimilated as part of their understanding of the way the world works (Daly, 2007). Modified grounded theory allowed for the use of sensitizing concepts from literature and folk wisdom, such as the concept of possible selves, as part in the inquiry into young men’s unique experience with depression. Further, the goal of grounded theory is to develop concepts or theory that emerge from these data that are applied to advance the understanding of depression overall.

## **Field Sites and Sample**

This study was conducted at the Get Ready program, a job readiness program for young adults located in Baltimore City, Maryland that is currently partnered with two different, but collaborative research projects. Program participants are primarily African American, many of them are young fathers, and approximately 70% exhibit elevated levels of depressive symptoms, as measured by the CES-D (Tandon, Mendelson, Turner, & Byrd, 2008). The program has been chosen by John Hopkins University (JHU) as the pilot location of a mental health intervention and evaluation research project designed to address the needs of program participants. This site has also been chosen for data collection toward a research project at the University of Maryland (UMD) on young men's transition to adulthood. My project focused on depression in young men and young fathers, supported by and informing both the UMD and JHU research projects.

**History of the field site.** The program is one of multiple job readiness programs throughout the country, and is run by the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC). The original program was established in 1999, and it has two locations, serving young adults on both the east and the west sides of Baltimore City. It offers preparation classes for the General Education Development (GED) test, job preparation, counseling, case management, and other services. Most of the program clientele have chosen this program primarily to get their GEDs, but take advantage of other services offered while they are there. Clients took tests during their first week in the program to determine if they were ready for GED classes or pre-GED classes. Classes are run 2 hours a day, twice a day, and

sometimes mental health and health programs are run during a 3<sup>rd</sup> hour that are available for all program participants. Other mental health services are available by referral, but not required (see mental health intervention and evaluation). This is a large program, having served 3,480 since it opened, including many walk-in clients, as well as referrals from partnering social service agencies throughout Baltimore City, which made it ideal for reaching a broad range of participants.

**Mental health intervention and evaluation.** Since its inception, this program has been partnered with the Center for Adolescent Health of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, in an effort to provide innovative, effective mental health services to underprivileged youth, and to evaluate the quality and outcomes of those services. Partners from the Center for Adolescent Health conduct a mental health screen with standard survey instruments, as well as an in depth clinical interview prior to participation in the program. Data are collected using an audio computer assisted self interview (ACASI) system to collect demographic and health information as well as several measures of mental health including the 21 item CES-D. Preliminary data analysis on program participants (n = 454) has revealed that over 50% of clients enroll with mild to moderate levels of depressive symptoms, and between 12 and 19% (men and women, respectively) of clients have elevated levels of depressive symptoms (Tandon et al., 2008).

In response to these relatively high levels of depressive symptoms, JHU researchers have created a multi-tiered mental health intervention, which includes clinical referrals for individuals with the highest levels of depressive symptoms, a peer-led depression prevention program for those with moderate levels of depressive



symptoms, and a range of both clinical and peer led mental health groups for all program participants. Initially program participants were referred to mental health clinicians located on the Johns Hopkins University campus, but evaluators found that follow-up on referrals was low due to the stigma of mental illness and general unfamiliarity with clinicians, and so they brought clinicians to the program site. The peer led intervention was designed by JHU to teach clients with mild to moderate levels of depressive symptoms how to manage depressive behavior and cognitions. Evaluation of all levels of this intervention is ongoing, with follow-up ACASI interviews every 6 months after the initial assessment.

**Young men's transition to adulthood.** This site was also chosen for data collection for a larger project being conducted by researchers at the University of Maryland (UMD) on the intergenerational impact on young men's transition to adulthood, funded by the William T. Grant Foundation. The parent project conducted in-depth life history interviews with young low-income men, at multiple sites in Maryland and Washington, D.C. in order to examine the influence that young men's parents, grandparents, and other family members have on them as they go from adolescence to adulthood, trying to establish their identities, furthering their education, getting jobs, finding partners, and becoming parents. My research proposal was to look specifically at the role of young men's depression in the context of this process.

**Sample stratification.** I recruited young low-income African-American men, between the ages of 18 and 25, both fathers and non-fathers, assuming a probability of experiencing depression, based on the historic demographic profile of program

participants. Most participants in this program have either dropped out of high-school or were expelled, and are attempting to get a general equivalency diploma (GED). Many have also been referred from the criminal justice system. Some just need assistance finding a job. Depression screens conducted at entrance to the program have revealed that over 70% of program participants have mild to high levels of depressive symptoms, and it is probable that many symptoms of depression in this population are not being effectively captured with the current instruments (Tandon et al. 2008). It was also probable that a large percentage of program participants would be fathers.

**Sample recruitment strategies.** The sample for this project consisted of young men and young fathers, ages 18 to 25, drawn from the Get Ready program located on the east side of Baltimore City. Although there was a screen for depression, participants were not limited to those who were symptomatic according to the CES-D, as it is possible that this instrument is not sensitive to all depressive symptoms expressed by this population. It is also possible that due to the stigma associated with mental illness some program participants did not answer the mental health questions truthfully when taking the CES-D. The goal of this proposal was to interview 20 participants without children and 20 participants with children, or to reach data saturation. Data saturation refers to interviewing individuals until it is probable that no new information toward answering the research questions will be revealed (Daly, 2007).

**Limitations of the sample.** The sample selected for this proposal had two major limitations. First, many of the program participants chose to participate in the

program of their own volition, and so many youth of this demographic who are really suffering from mental health issues were not the ones being seen at this program. In order to counter that effect, I recruited participants during the week of enrollment that preceded program participation in order to get information from individuals interested in the program, but possibly unable to sustain a commitment to the program. These individuals might have been suffering from depression.

Second, the ideal research design for examination of development is longitudinal, which was not practical for this proposal. Instead of interviewing young fathers both pre and post fatherhood, I interviewed both fathers and non-fathers in order to get a sense of the benefits and stressors of fatherhood compared to non-fatherhood in a youth with a similar demographic background. When interpreting the data, I was sensitive to comparing the two groups and attributing differences to fatherhood when some differences may have been due to sample selection.

### **Data Collection**

**In-depth interviews.** I conducted in-depth interviews with approximately 40 youth; 20 fathers and 20 non-fathers, and saturation was reached. These interviews were semi-structured, with set up preordained questions, but there was also flexibility to pursue varying lines of inquiry according to the data as they emerged, as is consistent with grounded theory methodology (Daly, 2007). The interview protocol was based on the questions tested in a previous pilot study, questions from other qualitative studies of young fathers, sensitizing concepts from the literature, and the research questions (Meeks, 2007).

The protocol was organized into topic areas relevant to the research questions and guiding theory: identity and sense of self and others; father identity and relationships; life history that led young men to the Get Ready program, and specific challenges, such as difficulty completing school; young men and fathers' experience with specific symptoms of depression, their hopes and goals for the future. Within each area I asked about specific concepts that were identified in both the literature and in the pilot study that included, but were not limited to anger, morning fatigue, masking, depressive cognitions, identity, oppression, fatherhood, and generativity. Open-ended interview questions allowed me to probe about the meaning of depressive cognitions, and environmental cues that triggered both depressive cognitions and symptoms.

**Field observations.** I observed both interviewees and staff at the field site over a period of approximately nine months. This allowed me to notice seasonal changes in program participants' affect, and situational cues that triggered depressive responses in clients. For example, many program participants were on their best behavior for the first few weeks of the program, but further into the program, particularly as participants became fatigued, they were less consistent in their attendance and their performance on site, possibly indicative of depression and subthreshold depression. I also attended occasional staff meetings, where participant behavior was often discussed, and got to know the youth from multiple perspectives.

All field notes were written into memos. There are several types of memos, but three were useful for this research: observational memos, conceptual memos, and reflexive memos. All memos provided a space to record what was happening in the

field outside of the interviews. Observational memos are usually derived directly from field notes and include details about what is seen, heard, and thought while on site (Daly, 2007). Conceptual or theoretical memos provide the researcher with an opportunity to document what they think they see happening in the field, and how it contributes to theory development (Daly, 2007). For example, if I observed a program participant with his head down on the table during orientation, looking tired or disengaged, in a way that may have been reflective of a pattern of fatigue and avoidance, then I tried to be more aware of that potential during the interview, and reflected on it immediately in the post interview memo. Finally, reflexive memos allowed me to periodically record my role in the data collection process, ranging from impact on the sight to emergent insights that I had about the data throughout the process (Daly, 2007). Building on the previous example, it is possible that I may over interpret various incidents, or that my presence causes participants to react in a way that they ordinarily would not. Again, reflexive memos encourage the researcher to document incidents, observations, and feelings so that they may be formally incorporated into the data.

### **Data Management**

Interviews were conducted in a private room on site. They were digitally recorded, and these recordings were transferred to a password protected computer. Identifying information was removed, and pseudonyms were created for participants. Interviews were transcribed by an undergraduate research assistant (UGRA), and the student researcher. Transcribed interviews were transferred into ATLAS/ti Version 6,

which is a software program for qualitative data analysis. It allows for storage, coding, and easy manipulation of qualitative data.

### **Data Analysis**

The first goal of analyzing these data was to develop descriptors of young men's depressive cognitions and symptoms, including the context in which they took place, and the process of mild to severe depressive episodes for young men. The second goal of data analysis was to describe what depressive cognitions mean for both young men and young fathers, how they internalize messages from those around them, including their co-parents, families, friends, and human service professionals. The third goal of data analysis was to further the theoretical understanding of how depression interferes with development in young adulthood; how young fathers express generativity, and what depression does to impede this process. The fourth goal of data analysis was to describe the impact that fatherhood has on depression, in terms of fatherhood as a joyful and possibly redemptive experience for young men.

**Etic perspective.** This research was grounded in sensitizing concepts from the literature, and emphasized the etic perspective, which, "places greater emphasis [than the emic perspective] on the ways in which preexisting theory or empirical findings can shape how researchers orient their own inquiry and make sense of the results," (Daly, p.213, 2007). For example, although I did not directly inquire about the phenomena of masking, I was sensitive to masking theory and the empirical research that supports it. There was evidence that some of the young men engaged in masking behavior. I expected to find flat affect and some anger combined with masking behavior and very few symptoms of depression that would register on a

survey. When young men alluded to masking behavior, for example, extensive marijuana use, I asked them to elaborate on the that behavior, when they did it, why they did it, how it made them feel, and when appropriate a brief history of that behavior.

**Coding.** I utilized modified grounded theory and conducted three waves of coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), according to methodology outlined by Daly (2007). The first wave of data analysis was *open coding*; this involved going through the data line by line and attaching labels to each segment of the data. Labels were created from participants' own language and descriptions or from the literature, entered into the ATLAS system, and attached systematically to the relevant data. The goal of open coding is to break the data down into as many manageable segments as possible. I created as many labels as possible, based on the literature as well as participant experience, some that were consistently relevant to specific areas of the interview protocol, such as home, ethnicity, co-parent perception, history education, hall kid, went off, hopeless, morning fatigue, and self expectations, and some that repeated throughout the interviews, such as depressive language or resilient behavior (for full list, see Appendix B).

The second stage of open coding is to organize the labels into categories. Again, this was done systematically through the ATLAS system. This helped to organize the data into related categories, again, tied to both the major interview areas and across all parts of the interview. I created categories related to sensitizing concepts and the goals of the research, such as anger, negative message, joy of parenting, depressive cognition, and generativity, but I was also aware of emergent

constructs. I utilized a mix of program participant language and my own language based on the literature.

The next phase of data analysis was *axial coding*. Axial coding was conducted to compare and contrast categories, across interviews and within, organizing them into larger groups around a single axis (Daly, 2007). For example, in the category of generativity, across interviews, I expected to find young fathers who were highly generative, and young fathers who had no contact with their children. Within interviews, some young men with depressive symptoms experienced fatherhood as redemptive, or a positive turning point in their lives, and were able to find energy and hope in the process of taking care of and connecting with their children. Some young fathers distanced themselves from their children.

The third phase of data analysis was *selective coding*. Selective coding was carried out in order to identify core themes and possible storylines in the data. For example, in this data set, there was a storyline connecting anger and depression. Many participants identified the two together, so I wrote about them as separate constructs but also discussed where and how they appeared to not just overlap, but function as one phenomenon.

### **Data Quality**

Data quality was ensured by following criteria and strategies outlined by Guba's model of trustworthiness (as cited and discussed by Krefting, 1999). Guba's criteria are common to both quantitative and qualitative research, but have been adapted to allow for the methods of qualitative research. They include: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Guba's model also includes several



methodological strategies to meet these criteria, including: time in the field, time sampling, reflexivity throughout the project, triangulation, member checking, and peer examination (as cited by Krefting, 1989).

**Truth value.** The criterion of truth value is similar to construct validity, in that it seeks to determine if an index of a construct measures the construct that it purports to measure. Truth value asks, “Are these findings true to the experience of the informants, and have they been properly contextualized?” In other words, did the researcher get it right, or did they portray the interviewee’s experience inaccurately, by either misinterpreting them or isolating an event or phrase from the context in which it was given? The researcher must utilize strategies to prevent their own preconceived ideas, or, in the case of modified grounded theory, sensitizing concepts, from unintentionally changing or misinterpreting the data. The qualitative method of determining truth value is to establish credibility. In this research, there was a strong temptation to label multiple behaviors as symptoms of depression, and multiple steps were taken to ensure data were being collected and interpreted accurately.

**Applicability.** Applicability refers to external validity or generalizability; how well the finding can be applied to other settings. Guba (1981) detailed two considerations on applicability of qualitative research findings (as cited in Krefting, 1989). The first is that generalizability is not realistic or relevant to qualitative research, as each data collection site and all participants are unique and the goal of the research is to understand phenomena in a natural setting, not to try to generalize it to all settings.

The second consideration on applicability detailed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is called transferability (as cited in Krefting, 1989). Transferability means that data are not generalizable to all populations, but applicable to similar populations. Lincoln and Guba further state as long as the original researcher has provided sufficient detail and context, then it is the responsibility of other researchers to determine if findings are applicable or transferable to the group they are studying. For this project, the goal was to try and describe depression as it is experienced by young men and young fathers, in order to assist other professionals (practitioners, researchers, and policy makers) who are working with similar populations. The purpose of using qualitative instead of quantitative methods was to understand the meaning that young fathers' ascribed to their experience and the context in which it occurred; some generalizability was lost to that end, but transferability is possible.

**Consistency.** Consistency is referred to as reliability in quantitative research, and refers to the question of whether or not the researcher would consistently get the same findings if the study were conducted in another place or at another time by a different researcher. Lincoln and Guba maintain that this quality of replicability is more desirable in quantitative research, because it assumes a single reality (1985, as cited in Krefting, 1989). However, it is not relevant to qualitative research, which assumes multiple realities, making it more difficult to get the same findings in every research setting.

A better criterion for qualitative data than replicability is dependability, which means that although findings may vary, the researcher can explain the variance. As has been mentioned, it was anticipated that in this project, the level of depressive

symptoms exhibited by participants, as well as the type of depressive cognitions that they were able to access, would fluctuate according to their circumstances over time. As is consistent with qualitative methods, this project sought to document exceptional circumstances, not eliminate them from the dataset, as one would dispose of an outlier in quantitative research. Again, the nature of mental health is that it is most vulnerable to unusual levels of duress, and it is probable that the participants in this study will be dealing with unexpected situations and traumatic experiences on a day to day basis. During my pilot study for this project, I happened to interview a program participant on a day when he had chosen not to attend the funeral of one of his good friends who had been shot. He said that he just didn't want to deal with it, but was markedly subdued in a way that was probably atypical for him. He was able to articulate his daily struggle to get out of bed in a way that he might not have if it had been a better day. Shootings and funerals are not a daily experience for young low-income men of color, but they do mark a boundary of their experience that is important to document.

**Neutrality.** Neutrality refers to a researcher or process that is free from bias. In quantitative research, this is referred to as objectivity. The goal in quantitative research is to remain distant from the data, in order to maintain objectivity and neutrality. However, the qualitative researcher needs proximity to their data in order to ensure data quality, and so their goal is to take steps to ensure the neutrality of the data itself. This quality is called confirmability, and is best achieved by working toward truth value and applicability.

**Strategies.** There are several strategies outlined by Guba (1981) and Krefting (1989) that were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (as cited by Krefting, 1989). These include a prolonged time and varied experience in the field, time sampling, reflexivity throughout the project, triangulation, member checking, and peer examination.

**Time in the field.** I spent a considerable length of time in the field and varied my experience. I spent eight months in the field conducting interviews, and doing field observations of orientations, workshops, and staff meetings. This allowed me to establish rapport with many of the program participants and staff. It also assisted in preventing social desirability. It also allowed me to observe participants in a variety of settings, which assisted with the quality of the observations about participants that I made.

**Time sampling.** I used informal time sampling. Formal time sampling involves constructing a flowchart to ensure that data are being collected at varying times. I conducted interviews and observations on site at different times of the day and the week, as well as over an extended period of time to ensure seasonal variation. As anticipated, the affect and behavior of program participants was sensitive to these variations. Participants were very busy, and it was important to schedule interviews when they had enough time, but also energy. Participants had a number of tests to take and appointments to keep during orientation week; efforts were made to schedule interviews at times most convenient for participants and these times varied quite a bit. Also, GED programs tend to run on a similar schedule to the traditional school model, and there was greater participation and different goals in January and September than

during the summer and over the December holidays. For example, during July and August I interviewed a few young men who planned to attend college in the fall but were looking for help getting a job and just staying busy during the summer months.

**Triangulation and peer debriefing.** Truthfulness was enhanced by triangulation, which is using multiple sources of data, and investigators to help remove bias created from any given source or sole researcher (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989, as cited in Krefting, 1998). Triangulating data involves using multiple sources and methods, and cross-checking them against each other through debriefing and member checking. Data sources included in-depth interviews, field notes, and background information.

Triangulation of investigators was achieved by conducting peer debriefing with two different groups at the program throughout data collection and initial analysis. The first group was comprised of the clinical team at Get Ready, members from the partner project with the Center for Adolescent Health at the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, which is evaluating the mental health intervention that is in place on site, and various Get Ready staff members. The research team from John Hopkins is comprised of trained clinicians and researchers who are familiar with the clientele at the site, in terms of the symptoms of depression that this group is likely to present and the other mental health issues with which they are contending. Debriefing took place at various intervals during data collection at the weekly Healthy Minds at Work meeting. The second group consisted of the instructors and advocates at Get Ready, and initial findings were shared and discussed with this group twice during data collection.

**Background.** Transferability of the data has been enhanced by providing extensive context, and background of the site and participants. Dependability and confirmability have been achieved by adhering to strategies previously outlined, as well as engaging in reflective practice throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**Reflexivity.** I utilized multiple reflexive practices to prevent getting enmeshed in participants' experiences, or becoming so involved that it becomes difficult to separate my own experience from the data. Reflective practices included composing regular memos from field notes and data as data collection took place.

I have also reflected on my own background and experience, and how it has shaped my approach to this project, and may have continued to influence data collection and analysis. My experience as a middle class, white female raised in a tradition of social justice has shaped my approach to this research, interpretation of the literature, and research questions. I have worked in the field for many years with under privileged and under served clients, and many times been frustrated at the many barriers to services that clients experience, both internal and external. I have several years of experience providing direct service to families in substance abuse treatment, which has allowed me some insight to the problems they face and the strengths they bring to intervention efforts. I have also interviewed multiple professionals who work with at-risk youth, which allowed me to acquire in-depth knowledge of the services and systems available to youth, and the history of those systems in the State of Maryland. Finally, I have extensive experience interviewing at-risk youth and arrestees on sensitive topic areas, which should assist me in conducting interviews

with program participants. I have relied on both my experience, the assistance of the research team, and the interviewees themselves for interpretation of the interviews throughout and upon completion of the data coding and project write-up.

## **CHAPTER 4: CONNECTIONS, ABANDONMENT AND UNSAFE ENVIRONMENTS**

Young, low-income, African-American men and fathers from Baltimore City grow up with a range of backgrounds and social connections to interpret; that interpretation shapes the way that they see themselves and the world, and informs their vulnerability to depression and other mental health issues. Young men in this study experienced varying degrees of family connection and support; primarily tenuous connections with educational system, and many types of neighborhoods. Many young men grew up with families strained by poverty and substance abuse, disconnected from peers and teachers at school, in dangerous neighborhoods, with an aggressive and corrosive law enforcement presence in their lives. They often experienced adult relationships as unpredictable, unsafe, or with limited utility and relevance to the challenges that they faced at their schools and in their neighborhoods. There were limited opportunities for them to develop positive peer relationships, and multiple ways in which peer relationships were also unsafe for young men. Finally, neighborhoods in which young men grew up were often unpredictable at best, with limited resources for connection and safety for young men's families of origin and procreation.

The data analyzed for this chapter came from several codes that captured participants' relationships with their parents and families. These included their description of in whose home they lived and who else lived there, their neighborhoods, as well as how they believed others perceived them. Additionally, this data came from the codes resilient and depressive thinking, because often when



participants gave an example of positive thinking that helped them to reframe a negative situation or demonstrate resilience, they attributed that skill or thinking to a positive and close adult in their lives. This person was often one of their parents, but sometimes it was another close adult in the family or a mentor. When they used depressive language, it was often in the context of an experience of abandonment from an important adult or a feeling of isolation. All of the school data came from the initial code for school history, and the subsequent analysis of the multiple themes that emerged from that data. These included their connection with parents, peers, and teachers during that time, and their general sense of the school environment.

Baltimore City, Maryland is a medium size and very diverse city, with approximately 621,000 residents<sup>1</sup>, who are 64% African American, 30% White, 4% Latino, and 2% Asian. However, the city did not elect its first black mayor, Kurt Shmoke, until 1987 (Historic Baltimore, 2010). The median income is \$40,000 a year, and 21% of residents live below the poverty line. The rate of home ownership is 50% versus 68% statewide, but the median value of owner occupied units in Baltimore City is \$69,000 versus \$146,000 statewide. Its long history of crime and substance abuse has inspired film and literature, including the non-fiction book *The Corner, A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* and the HBO series based on that book, *The Wire*, both by David Simon and Ed Burns. Baltimore City has been called the heroin capital of the world, devastating generations of families with the

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<sup>1</sup> Similar to Washington, DC, but one third the size of nearby Philadelphia, population 1,526,000, and much smaller than a large city, such as New York, with a population of 19,466,000. See: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24510.html> , <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html>, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/42/42101.html>, and <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>.

highest number of heroin users per capita in the United States (Yang, 2012). It is also a city of musical tradition, blue collar work and large education complexes, primarily Johns Hopkins University, and struggling with slow but somewhat steady gentrification. The east side of the city, and specifically the neighborhood where the Get Ready program is located, has long stretches of abandoned buildings, and high levels of drug traffic (Dechter, 2006).

All members of the Get Ready program are Baltimore City residents, between the ages of 18 and 22. Most of them are African American. Many of them grew up in or in and out of Baltimore City, and are poor, undereducated, exposed to violence, substance abuse, and have a history with the criminal justice system. However, few of the young men interviewed for this study directly referenced poverty, but instead talked about stressed families, disconnection from the school system, and unsafe and unstable neighborhoods.

### **Families**

Although growing up in Baltimore City, with its many environmental stressors was very challenging, what seemed to be most impactful on young men were their home environments. Young men came from different family backgrounds, ranging from large, extended family households to those raised exclusively in non-kin foster care families. Young men shared what it was like for them to grow up in all different types of households: with two supportive parents or a single parent who was able to provide a secure environment, large extended families, how divorce impacted them, various family traumas over the years, or how they ended up in group homes and foster care.

Many of the young men referenced something in their early childhoods that they thought may have influenced their development, decision making, and behavior. Most often, these events involved the loss of one of their parents in one way or another, whether through divorce, out of state residency, prison, or death. Some of these events might be considered potentially challenging, but navigable, such as divorce, but others would be considered highly traumatic for any child, such as abuse or death. Some young men casually mentioned a family tragedy in the course of making a point about something else, and did not talk about it again during our conversation. But, for some, either single or multiple incidents or events were experienced as trauma, and young men attributed much of their subsequent thinking and actions to these events.

### **Support from Parents and Role Models**

Support from parents and other role models was very important to these young men. For example, Charles was a bright and thoughtful young man, 20 years old, who attended one year at Morehouse College, but could not continue due to limited financial aid after his first year there. Charles talked at length about the support he has always gotten from his mother and the respect that he had for her.

I have a very positive outlook towards myself... although I have...faced some shortcomings... my mother how she brought me up...how she raised me...and she leads by example, that I see hard work. It kinda trickled down to me and I emulate her by continuing to try to succeed or go...push the boundary caps that I can achieve. So I guess I have a pretty positive outlook given the fact that I'm always trying to...I'm not never...content currently with how my life is.

Charles also had an older male cousin who has been both a mentor and a role model to him, and made other options a tangible reality.

I think 'cause I have certain people in my life that expose me to more... I have a cousin on my father's side who graduated from Morehouse and he kind of played the big brother, the uncle, the father role in my life and because he exposed me to so many different things...although he wasn't my father...although he wasn't as much as you would expect a person who figure plays one of my parents...he's my cousin...I still was exposed to things so I kind of knew what was out there rather than what...we all can find.

Charles's cousin was a role model on many levels, ranging from correcting his grammar to demonstrating that young black men can go to college.

Simple things... When I was younger I had bad grammar saying things like "You is" when it's supposed to be "you are." If no one around you is kind of correcting you on small things like that how would you ever know that you have bad grammar?... Small things and also given the fact that he had a college education to kind of explain that "Oh we *can* go to college." And someone that actually has... it's just showing me a path you can take rather than...if I had never had that vision... he presented as a role model... I had a positive role model... I was able to realize that there's other things rather than what I was confined to.

Charles was fortunate to have an older man in his life that he knew, who taught him things he might not have learned otherwise. He was also fortunate to have a mother who supported him and created opportunities for him. Charles grew up in a housing project across the street from the Get Ready program, but his mother got him out of neighborhood schools and programs early and into a magnet school with its own after school programs.

When I was in elementary school I just was a wreck, another normal kid... once I got into middle school and teachers was telling me "Oh he's a smart kid, he does his work" and not that I was smart, I just did my work... that's when I started to realize that maybe there is a difference... the teachers started telling my mother that, and my mother was signing me for programs and having me be around different people... the more I got involved in other things, the less I became involved in my neighborhood..

Charles gradually moved not just his academic life out of the neighborhood, but his social life too, replacing local pick-up basketball with games at the school

recreational center, and hang out time in the neighborhood with after school programs.

Role models, particularly mothers, were important both in demonstrating good life skills and a positive outlook, but also in connecting those things to family life in such a way that these young men appeared to internalize those things as a positive reflection of themselves and their family life. Martin, an 18 year old father, with a 7 month old baby, who was also a high school graduate, preparing to attend Morgan State in the fall, talked about what a happy person he is because of his mother.

I find joy in the littlest stuff. I'll pull a leaf off the tree and I'll be happy that we still have trees that are green. You know? It's just the littlest things that make me...I see somebody on the bus that I don't even know that smiles, and I'll be like, "Somebody found joy in today." And I'll be happy just seeing them smile...

He attributed his positive outlook to his mother, and the way she let him and his siblings know that they were loved and modeled being happy with what they had to him, despite having troubles.

It came a lot from my mother. 'Cause like, we've been through a lot. Like a whole lot. And no matter what she was dealing with...like she could be crying, but as soon as she sees us walk into the room, she'd be smiling. You know? I could know...she'd tell me, like "Yeah I was just crying." But at the same time, when we're around, she's like "Okay, this is a family moment. Everybody be happy because we're together." You know like, take pride in the little stuff that we do there. Like everybody worries, but we don't...

However, despite feeling valued and learning about what was most important in life, Martin also felt the absence of professional role models.

That side of life isn't really shown to us. Like all the doctors and lawyers and teachers, stuff like that. They're there, but you don't really...growing up as a young, black boy you don't really see them. You know? They're not in the neighborhood; they're not on the TV.

This made it very difficult for Martin to feel as though pursuing a professional career was an appropriate choice for him, and not turning his back on the neighborhood.

Some young men were also held in high regard by their family members and romantic partners. Even if they did not buy into the particulars, they understand that, overall, they are appreciated. Drew was a 22 year old young man, who was very focused, and had a 5 year plan for getting his GED and then his bachelor's degree.

My family looks at me like I'm a good kid, like I'm respectful, I have manners... My mom always says I have a certain drive about me; I'm not sure what that means. And uh I have a girlfriend. She loves me. She thinks I'm cool, romantic, and kind, gentle or however females put it. My friends, they think I'm...like I said they think I'm funny, cool person to be around, just well rounded.

Drew elaborated that his mother has thanked him for his positive energy, and for staying out of trouble.

She says thank you for...I was going to give her something for Christmas and she said "Don't give me nothing for Christmas 'cause you're giving me my present year round. Thank you for staying out of trouble" and she says "You've got a certain drive about you and I thank you for that."

He knew that his way of carrying himself and the choices that he made were not just good for him personally, but helpful to his mother and those around him.

### **Absence or Loss of a Parent Relationship**

Poverty and generations of substance abuse have taken their toll on Baltimore City families. Young men felt the loss of happy home environments when parents divorced, missed absent parents, and grieved family members who had died.

Although divorce does not have a negative impact on the development of all children, some children have a very difficult time with it. Andre was a 20 year old young father with a 10 month old baby, whose parents divorced when he was young.

He struggled with the adjustment, which had a negative impact on his school performance.

‘Cause when they was together, I was an A student, an A+. I was ruling the school. My father was taking me to school. I was finishing all of my work in class, staying every class and I stayed in school until school was over, until the bell ring. Probably stayed even a couple minutes later until my father and mother came and got me from the school. And then when they started breaking apart, that’s when I started messing up in school. ‘Cause I was having problems like my mother and father let me go so I was...I’d go to school and I’d be thinking...that’d be on my mind so much I’d just go to class and don’t do nothing. But just a week ago I was coming to class doing all my work and all of that.

Although the school did attempt to keep him engaged, and Andre did some family therapy with his family that was useful, it was still quite difficult for him, and Andre eventually dropped out of school.

So the teacher knew something was wrong with me and he told the principal and the principal got me some help or whatever and then I went and started seeing a therapist... when I was going there for a nice minute, my father would come and my mother would come in there and talk to me... my mother and father would come and I’d get a chance to spend time with my mother and father... But it still was kinda stressful ‘cause on me... ‘cause I was used to seeing them together ... I was used to coming home and being with my mother and father. Used to coming home every day from school...used to leave at home seeing my mother and father together. Taking me to school, coming home, we’d go out to eat or something. And then start our day over again...

The school intervention and therapy was helpful for Andre, but when it stopped, he was still quite sad about the loss of the family with which he grew up.

Similarly, Deon, a 19 year old young man, never knew his father, and felt that absence acutely. Although non residential co-parenting is a common form of parenting, total parent absence may impact children differently, and contrasted with children who either live with or see both of their parents frequently.

Most of [my friends] did [see their dads]. The ones that I rolled with, most of them did. You know you've got the couple that were in my situation but a good majority of them if they didn't know or at least live with him, they talked to him or at least seeing him. I haven't seen him like...he moved to Ohio when I was like one... I didn't talk to him until I was like ten or thirteen. Didn't see him or anything. So I mean but most of my friends they grew up with mother and father. Some of us didn't but the majority of them did...

Deon also went through some hard things, such as being homeless and living in a shelter for a while, and felt like he did not have anyone to talk to about these things.

My friend Eric, he had his mother and father there. Yeah they were just around. They didn't have to be together. They didn't even have to live in the same house. It was just more that they was around. If they had a problem that they wanted to talk to that they could only talk to their father, they had somebody to talk to. You know I only had my mother to talk to and I couldn't talk to my mother about everything... Yeah so you know I just had to find somebody else to talk to. But yeah most of my friends, they know their fathers or he's been around to see them.

Deon did get important guidance from his grandmother, particularly when he got himself into trouble in high school. Deon had a really difficult time, and made some bad choices that got him kicked out of school. However, as he struggled with the consequences of his actions, his grandmother intervened and helped him to see some of the mistakes he was making during a troubling time for him.

I mean she just really convinced me that it wasn't nothing good I was doing. 'Cause I was doing a lot of fighting, I was smoking, I would skip school. And she just you know she just told me if I want to rise above, I hate to say it again but if I want to rise above, you know the typical stereotype then this is what I need to be doing. And this is how I need to be doing it. I just really took all my advice from her. Everything she told me I do as far as school, jobs, girls, anything. I listen to my grandmother for it.

Deon may not have been able to talk to his grandmother about some of the things that were troubling him, but he was able to feel her concern for him, and think about making better choices than his peers.



Most of the young men talked about the loss of at least one family member, most often either a young male or an older matriarchal figure, to whom young men were often quite close. Some young men talked about these experiences extensively, the pain that they experienced around the event, and subsequent fallout. Sometimes deaths were mourned as a sad but normal event. However, sometimes it was much harder for young men to handle, either because the death was particularly tragic, such as a homicide, or because it was someone they were very close to and the young men felt their absence for a long time. Deandre was 18 year old young man who lived with his grandmother during his younger years, because his mother was an undercover narcotics police officer and unable to spend much time at home. Deandre was very sad about the loss of his grandmother, and was embarrassed because he still got emotional about it.

Now don't laugh at me. Like I saw her picture and I started crying... I just I don't know I miss her so much. It still feels like she ain't gone because you know we were so close. Like I was her favorite. She had so many grandkids, so many great-grandkids but it was at the point whereas though as...I was her heart.

Deandre missed his grandmother because of how much she loved him and made him feel special. In contrast, Powell, a 22 year old young man who struggled with many of his family members, also missed his grandmother, but because of the role she played in keeping the family together. He did not just grieve her loss, but her role and presence, and the ongoing impact of that on the family dynamic.

When my grandmother died 'cause it was like the whole family had changed over. Like before...before my grandmother died everybody was like real close. Like I said we wasn't really arguing or none of that. Like everybody gets together, stick and everything. Everything was just right but when my grandmother died it's like the whole family just started falling apart.

His family members started fighting, stopped maintaining care of their homes, and generally, did not act as well as they did when Powell's grandmother was alive, so not only did he grieve for her, but he missed the way that his family used to be.

I still be thinking about that sometimes. If she was still here, they wouldn't be acting like that 'cause my grandmother kept the family together. I mean she'll come in the house and we'll all be together in a three story house. She'll come in the house, we're all in there. She'll look around like it ain't really dirty but it just look like junky, messy, stuff out of place and all. She'll just come in, look around there, next thing you know, all of us upstairs going from the top floor downstairs cleaning up...couldn't eat, couldn't go nowhere, couldn't do nothing until it was done. My grandmother ain't play that. I miss her so much.

He was sad and somewhat depressed around her loss, because of the role that she played in the family, and the implication for change that her passing had.

### **Abuse and Abandonment**

Multiple young men in this study grew up in kinship care, foster care, or spent time living in group homes. Some young men experienced considerable trauma over the course of their lives, either before entering or during their time with the child welfare and juvenile services systems, but most of them found the absence of their parents to be painful and distressing. Aaron was a 20 year old young man, who was also gay, with an extensive mental health history. Aaron grew up in a series of foster care homes, and was angry at not having parents like other kids, and not even looking like his foster parents. Feeling different from other kids also triggered Aaron's anger.

Definitely had a lot of anger... I think I was angry because I think I realized that everybody else had a mom and a dad bringing them to school. And I was catching the yellow bus. Didn't know where the hell my dad and mom was... and then realizing that I was living with two dark skinned parents and I'm so, you know, yellow, so I was like, why do I look weird? You know? I don't look the same as my parents. So I was like...you know I always thought I was different, you know...

He felt that he was different from other kids, and learned that he really was different, and that he had things to be angry about, like losing his mother to AIDS. He also alluded to sex abuse at the age of seven, and figuring out as he got older that he was gay, and trying to deal with all of those things.

But then I started realizing what was going on and where my parents were and found out the drug abuse with my dad and my mom, found out about AIDS and what it is and where it came from and who had it that was a part of my life. You know and in everything else...then I became gay at the age of seven, started doing boys and I was like you know, I didn't know. And then I grew up and I liked it and...and you know now it's a part of me but it's not who I am.

In Aaron's words, "And that's just...it was a lot...it was a lot going on so I was very angry. I was very angry." At the time of the interview, Aaron seemed to have a supportive and nurturing foster family, but he had only lived with them for a few months, and they were all still getting to know each other.

Demetrius was a 21 year old father of a four year old child, and at the Get Ready program hoping to earn his GED, but with an extensive history with the criminal justice system, who appeared to be depressed and resigned to probably not ever taking a different path. He grew up with a mix of nurturance, chaos, neglect and physical abuse, and was exposed to and participated in multiple violent and traumatic events. He talked about hearing stories of his father, who was in prison, and wanting to be like him:

Hearing stories from about my father - that's how it started, wanting to be like my father. Never met him until this year, this year he came home. He's been locked up for twenty years. And I just met him this year but just the stories I heard about him...and me being his son. And I'm not gonna lie, his name kept me safe. His name kept me alive for a lot of stuff I did, the people never did nothing to me 'cause I was his son. It started...Yeah. In our neighborhood and then in prison system... the stories I heard about him, that's what really made me do a lot of stuff out there.

He remembered hearing these stories at a really young age, being taught to fight with other boys, and beating up homeless people.

Like back in the day probably I was...I'm gonna say five. They used to make me and my homeboys fight on the court... every year they make us fight on the basketball court. And we'll fight so that's how it started. Then we would hang out with each other then we will go onking... when you go beat up homeless people... But we was young doing it.

Having his father in prison was exacerbated by exposure to drug dealing in his home and very little supervision. He talked about watching his mother make drugs:

I just seen like my mother used to cook... first time I seen her I thought she was cooking food, but she told us go upstairs, so we all went upstairs and I came back downstairs and I sat on the banister and I watched... That whole smell was irritating my eyes and my eyes kept watering up and I learned it wasn't food... 'cause of the smell... I don't know like sour, onion type smell in your eyes... [My brother] was around for some of it but any chance he could get to leave, he was gone.

Demetrius's mother was only 15 when he was born, and so he was often cared for and abused by his paternal grandmother:

My grandmother on my father's side, she put curlers on my hands. 'Cause I used to play with fire... so she took some curlers, set 'em on the stove, and set 'em on my hands and burned my hands... She's my great-grandma. She burned me. My mother started taking me over there.

I: That's a pretty bad burn. You're twenty-one years old and I can see it.

R: I've had this since I was like three, four...it's been here for a long time.

Demetrius had multiple visible scars, some from his grandmother and others from fights and accidents over the years.

Taye, 18, also with a history of major depression, was in kinship care with his aunt until he was 14 years old, and then he moved into a group home. The absence of supportive family was very painful for Taye.

They put me in a little placement and ever since then they been putting me in group homes and I ain't gonna lie – it been hell there in the streets... Sleeping on a bus-stop, nothing to eat. Sometime nowhere to go... From day one I was never in a household with my mother and my father. Brought up. I just don't feel whole for real for real. I be under a lot of depression sometime, lonely, thinking about certain stuff for real... My mother. My father. My family. Like how things would have been different if things would have been different, if we all was one family like all together.

What seemed to make Taye the most sad, and sometimes triggered his depression, was needing something that in other families, a parent would probably have taken care of, and having to figure that out for himself.

Like when I can't get certain stuff like shoes on my feet, clothes. And it ain't even like I want it; it's just I really need it and I can't get it. It's hurtful for real. Like, group home don't support you. They support you to a certain extent, but there's certain stuff it ain't like that. I'm just speaking for myself, I ain't speaking for nobody else in the group homes. There's certain stuff that I really need and I can't get. It ain't like I want this material. It's that I need this material and I can't get it. You feel me? That just lead me up to going outside doing something dumb, hustling, you feel me. Some crazy stuff like.

The day before our interview, it poured rain all day, the forecast was for snow shortly, and Taye was wearing sneakers. He only had \$65 to spend on clothes that month and had already purchased long underwear and new pair of jeans, so he was going to have to wait another month to get his boots.

Young men were either living in group homes, or had spent some time in one after time in juvenile detention centers talked about the feelings of abandonment and depression that came with living in a group home, and feeling as if no one really cared about them.

### **Schools**

Every day I wake up and I'm excited to go to school ... because no matter what school you go to in Baltimore, something exciting is always going to happen. Whether it's a fight, it's a like a basketball game, something always going to happen every day. So you always...I always woke up ready to go to

school. It's just when I got to school, it was more so "Why are you here?" (Jayson)

School is where young people do most of their child and adolescent developmental work, and is the primary environment in which young people learn to see the world and themselves under the guidance of their instructors at school, through engagement with their peers, and with the support of their families at home. Young men in this study identified several areas in which they had difficulty engaging and connecting with others in the school environment, including their own academic challenges, the overall environment at school, other students, and their teachers. Unfortunately, schools in Baltimore City also have historic low performance rates, for example, the high school graduation rate is 68% versus 84% throughout the rest of the state of Maryland, (US Census). This indicates that in addition to having challenges connecting to others in the school environment, many school children have probably had difficulty achieving childhood developmental milestones, and have a shaky foundation for identity work in adolescence.

### **Barriers to Engagement**

Students attending city schools often encounter environmental factors that put them at risk for academic challenges, which in turn, create barriers to school engagement. Challenges for the young men and fathers in this study, included lead poisoning, attention deficit disorder, and general cognitive delays, and usually started in elementary school.

The combination of any type of academic challenge with alternatives to school readily available was difficult for young men to overcome. Lamont was a 21 year old young man who was exposed to lead as a child, which made it difficult for

him to concentrate on his schoolwork. He was further distracted by his friendship with a peer who was selling drugs.

I'll be honest, I got lead... Like lead paint poisoning. So it was hard for me to focus... And then I seen money... I like that money. I seen money - my homeboy was selling drugs. He was my age. He wasn't going to school. His parents weren't saying nothing. You feeling me? 'Cause they was doing drugs so his parents weren't really saying nothing. I seen him come out with a car. He's fifteen and he's got a car? ... I want that, you feeling me? So I started being with him all the time, making money.

Eventually he learned his lesson:

But come to find out money don't be around forever. I had a couple dollars. It's gone though. I don't got a car or anything, it's gone. Can't keep it. Especially if you ain't got your license and you ain't doing it legit, and you ain't paying insurance. They're gonna take your car. And that's what happened.

Lamont figured out that drug money was high risk and often fleeting, and that he would need to get more education in order to progress, but only after dropping out of school.

Similarly, Deandre was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder after he failed the third and the fourth grade, but only stayed on medication through eighth grade after that. He was on medication only intermittently after his diagnosis, because his mother did not support it, and he did not like the side effects.

I stopped fifth. I stopped it in fifth and I started back in the eighth grade... my mother didn't like the fact that I used medication to be focused... I didn't like it 'cause I didn't like the...the effects that it had... I didn't want to eat and I had headaches all the time. Stuff like that.

He was unable to maintain focus after his ninth grade year of high school.

Ninth grade I did okay. Tenth, eleventh, terrible. Always in the hallways... I was once told that once you start high school, when you get around the high school atmosphere, everything changes up... I really didn't find any classes that were hard to me. They wasn't... it's the atmosphere... the school thing... I'm very intelligent but I just can't sit down. Like I had attention deficit

disorder and I'm not blaming it on it, but I'm just saying it just... I just didn't like sitting still all day. People telling me what to do and stuff like that.

Deandre was smart, but he had a difficult time focusing on his work, and ended up hanging out in hallways and eventually dropping out of school.

### **Disconnection from the Curriculum**

The environment in Baltimore City schools ranged from disorganized to chaotic, and young men did not feel connected to the academic curriculum. They reported chaotic environments both in the classroom and the hallways, as well as not feeling challenged by the coursework or certain about what the purpose of attending class was for them.

Marcus, an 18 year old young man who dropped out of high school and Job Corps, was often tired at school, but also distracted by noise in his classrooms.

Probably was tired too but like a lot of noise and distractions in the class... Distractions in the hallways. Um it was probably like a good five out of ten students that was in there doing their work and I was in there acting up.

Young men were also sensitive to what they perceived as disorganization, reflected in poor hallway management, and repetitive curriculums. Marcus felt that he and other students could do whatever they wanted without getting into trouble. Eventually, he was expelled, he thought for truancy, although he was not certain.

It's a nice school and all; just the organization was messed up... people be running in the halls and all of that. They got security in there, they'll just walk right passed the student in the school and won't say nothing. They just let the student just like do whatever they want but I guess they just let me do whatever I want and I guess they just put me out... I guess because I was missing too many days.

Young men frequently complained of being taught the same thing, which may have been due to disorganization, or it may have been that after chronic absenteeism, many



of these young men got placed in remedial classes. Marcus was hoping that his specialized charter high school would provide him with academic challenges, but found the curriculum to be repetitive.

I just had stopped going after a while because it was the same old stuff every day. Like, they kept teaching the same stuff... like in our school, they're supposed to be teaching like more advanced stuff. Like they was teaching like in the middle between middle school and high school like it was right in between... and some of the stuff I already knew. And I just got sick and tired of it. But I know not to make that mistake again though.

He found some of the repetition to be tiresome, and often skipped classes, until he was expelled. However, he stated that he would not do that again.

It was often difficult for students to re-engage in curriculum after being transferred from another school. After fighting with his mother, being removed from his home, and being put on probation, Jayson moved from a school with a college prep curriculum to a school with an emphasis on trade preparation. He found that he did not like the students, the teachers, or the classes, which he perceived to be repetitive and not challenging.

Once I came home from jail, I actually wanted to go back to school... I took up business and transportation 'cause they got those trades there or whatever... I don't know it was just different... The people I was in school with...like the students was different. They was doing more wild and dumb stuff than when I was in high school. The teachers was stupid. I don't know it's just...me I'm the type of person that if I'm gonna learn something, it's gotta be a challenge. It can't be "Oh I can tell you just as much as you can tell me." 'Cause then I'm not gonna care. I'm just gonna do other stuff and you know to something that interests me. And that's more like what it was. It was more so...but dang I learned this two years ago. Why are you still teaching this? So it wasn't interesting...:

Jayson was ready to start again after spending time in jail, and was disappointed in the lack of focus in the students at his new school.

These young men reported having no real sense of what they were learning and why they should be in school. Terrence was a 20 year old young father who was on the football team when he was in high school, which he enjoyed, but outside of that, had no idea what his purpose in school might be.

...it was the same thing every year. Like the whole ninth grade year it was just the same thing. Football season ended and it was like “Why am I here?” Well I stopped going in the tenth grade in December which was... like a month after football season ended. So that’s what really had me going to school... like you had to go to school to play on...to be on the football team so then after that it was... like that was the only reason I was going. That was my only motivation is because I wanted to play football so after football season it was just like okay whatever I had no reason.

Ideally, participation in sports would help students to connect to school; it was not enough for Terrence. In the off season, he found his class repetitive and the environment tiring.

It was just like...it was so much going on... Like every classroom, every child is just like...like it was just the same thing all day every class it was just the same thing. You get the same results out of every teacher. I wouldn’t say every teacher but most of the teachers.

### **Connection and Disconnection through Peers**

Peer connection and disconnection was important to young men. The former was useful for a few as a means of both getting through school, and getting needed emotional support when young men were unhappy. Peers also created a major barrier and point of disconnection for young men when they felt that they were unsafe due to gang intimidation, bullying, or potential violence.

**Positive peer connections.** Families, friends, and relationships all provided unique supports. A few young men were fortunate enough to have a core group of friends that provided both positive peer pressure to achieve goals, such as graduating from high school, and emotional support in general.

Michael was one of the few young men interviewed who had a high school diploma as well as an energetic presentation. He got into a little bit of trouble in high school, but not much, which he attributed to having a group of friends who had the same goals, including being able to move out of the neighborhood in which they grew up.

Well my friends they're on the same level... same page trying to do something with their life. You know we all came...like we all tired of living around in neighborhoods like...you know that we have to... and going to the city and get more.

However, it is not always easy to find the right peers, and these young men often had just a few friends or just a small circle of friends. Drew, who was focused on his plan, found it was important to choose his friends carefully.

I really watch who I hang around with. I pick my friends wisely and if I feel as though I'm gonna be around trouble, I try not to get into it or be around the person... I have two friends, well now I call them brothers 'cause that's how close we've gotten over the years. And they've been my two friends for like...I believe like eight or nine years and I usually say it's too late to make friends by the spot I put them in.

Charles found he had more in common with his friends at his Baltimore magnet school, populated primarily by kids from the county, not in the city:

You can call it a magnet school. It's predominantly black, but my friends there... they were from Baltimore county, so they kinda... already had a different outlook towards... everyone would view me as though I wasn't from the city just because of how I carried myself so... although it's still a city school... so my peers at the time just always assumed that I was middle class, good upbringing, suburban kind of kid... whereas my neighborhood friends...I just was the guy that just was never around. They'd see me going to school... coming from school...going to the after school program, coming from the after school program. And I never quite fit in in my neighborhood... I guess I just was the stoop kid... never involved too much in the neighborhood...

Being pulled from the neighborhood, and doing different things did not always lead to people saying positive things about Charles, but he learned to filter the things that he heard.

It's either I'm a very nice, young man, very general term, or I'm stuck up... I found out that the negative...the negative comments come from people who are in negative situations. And the positive ones come from people who are in positive situations... I've been realizing... In middle school, kids that put...that I was with in the accelerated courses, they were fun to be around. "He's a nice guy." Guys that were in the regular, "He's a chump. He's a punk. He's stuck up... he's a snob." Things like that. I always find it... and that's followed me...I noticed that in middle school and it just followed me throughout my life.

Although many of the young men in neighborhood were not friends of Charles, he found that having no peers in a dangerous neighborhood actually kept him safer.

Say I'm in day to day life and I see a guy and I'm angry and we almost get into that, I know the type of environment I'm in. Nothing ever ends around here...nothing ever ends. So if we get into a fight, I may lose...I could actually lose the fight. I could come back around here and we could have another altercation, maybe worse and maybe him and couple of his friends, or maybe him and a weapon... and I guess since none of these people are my peers I don't have that peer pressure to actually be...I could walk away from it.

Positive peers were important for school focus and safety, but also for emotional support. Trent, a 20 year old young father, talked about times when he had been down and in a bad space, and the importance of having friends who know how to help you through those times.

Yeah I've felt like that before... I just remember me feeling like...like nothing was making me happy... Just like a second. It was just...Yeah, a second type thing, like I don't know. But people know... like your real friends, they'll know how to cheer you up. I mean like when you're doing that, they'll know what to do.

Not many of the young men were fortunate enough to have peers who supported them or helped them to stay focused, but those who did, understood their value.

**Peer disconnection.** Disconnection from peers at school was extremely high among the young men in this study. Not only were young men disconnected from peers and any support they may have provided, peers often acted as barriers or obstacles to other connections that young men and fathers might have made while in high school. Peers blocked school connection through violence and safety threats, specifically, gang tension and conflict, bullying, and potential conflicts with specific peers. Young men who did not feel threatened on a personal level, often found themselves fatigued by the high levels of violence and conflict overall.

Young men sometimes inadvertently got themselves into dangerous situations that were hard to manage. Nathan tried to be friends with everyone his freshman year of high school, and quickly found out this was a little naïve, and that there were students who were only there to fight each other.

Hanging with the wrong crowd...had a lot of people... like they try to fight me like and it really freaked me out. It was like gang members. Things like that and I was like "I didn't do anything to you guys so why are you wanting to mess with me?"

Nathan really suffered from the experience of not choosing the right peers, and finding himself in confrontational situations that were over his head. He did not know how to handle it, and so, even though he had previously been a good student, he started skipping classes and entire days of school.

So I started school...I think I hooked a whole month... I used to get to the point where it was like my mother would come pick me up...this is after I got to the last high school which was my high school for the rest of my days of high school. Um...she would come pick me up when she got off of work but I didn't go to school so I would...I would wait until the right time, catch a bus back to my school and when the bell ring I walk out like I was there all day... so she didn't know...I didn't have to explain myself to her... things like that...that was a trial period in my life.

Gang members in Nathan's school acted as barrier between him and positive peers, his mother, and any one that could help him with the situation.

Bullies in school preyed upon vulnerable peers. Due to his Aaron's history in the foster care system, he was vulnerable to bullies who made fun of him, and very sensitive to common school jokes about his mother. He had a long history of struggling with bullies and severe depression in high school. He was able to get as far as the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter in his senior year, but felt he could not complete it:

The reason why I you know wasn't able to finish high school is because bullying, pretty much in a nutshell. Peer pressure along with low self esteem and depression was just a terrible combination for me to be in school with people my age and younger who were immature.

Aaron felt like the students were running the school, more even than the principal, and that was when he gave up.

And that's when I was like fuck this I'm done. I'm not coming back. The principal can't even do nothing. The principal is scared to suspend the damn students 'cause he thinks he's gonna get his car shot up. So I'm like what's the purpose of even going to school if you know there's no protection, there's no safety. I just felt...I felt uncomfortable, unsafe.

There was no safe place in the school for Aaron, not even the cafeteria, which he said was so unpredictable that he did not eat his lunch there. He eventually decided that the school was simply too unsafe for him, and dropped out three months before graduation.

It was too much. It was too much. It was too much. I was like fuck this I'm done. Like fuck it I'm done. I'm not going back. And that's when I just never went back... I was in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I was three months away from graduating... I was so damn close. So damn close.

Aaron was not just intimidated by bullying peers, he was frustrated and tired with how much power they had in school, and that no one could control them.

It was the students. It wasn't the teachers. It was some teachers you know but the teachers didn't...didn't make me make my decision. What led to my decision about not going back was the students you know? And seeing what they could do. And seeing what the staff couldn't do. I just...I couldn't take it anymore.

Similar to Aaron's fatigue with the power of bullies in school, Jayson found the overall levels of fighting in his new school as well as gang tension to be frustrating, although he was not personally threatened.

When I was at [former school], there was a little crowd... we all played... We had problems, we talked it out. That's what it was. But I went to [new school] and it was just fight, fight, fight, fight, fight. Every day. "Oh he stepped on my shoe, fight...Oh he took your answers, fight him. Why you looking at me? Fight them." No, that's young. "Oh the teacher's gone, go punch that dude. Didn't he say something about you yesterday?" Yeah that's what that was... They're all some dumb, retarded people. You all fight every day and for one day, they're doing good and you just want to fight... Very disappointing. It made me angry. Like all these people you know? Coming here to do work and have fun or whatever and then just take one person to mess it up.

Gang tension often stemmed from rivalries between well known gangs, such as the Bloods and the Crips (Valdez, 2001). Jayson realized that some of his fatigue of gang tension was heightened by his time in the group home, where he developed antagonism with a member of Blood gang, because most of his family members were in the Crip gang.

I think going to the group homes made me start to dislike certain people and the way people act... Like in the group home, it was this little Blood boy...first when I got there we wasn't cool... I wasn't really into it but most of my whole family is Crips so I ain't gonna say I disliked him...when he found out... when you found out that my family was Crips, he started the get similar type of hatred towards me... So yeah so that played a part when I got back to Baltimore and I went to school and started seeing them and it was more so like... "Them niggas some clowns." Especially if they act like that dude out there. And then when I went to school it was all these little gangbangers and you've gotta watch the way you gotta walk through the school.

Conflict and potential for conflict were tiresome for young men, but also dangerous. Jamaar had a difficult time engaging with any school he attended, and left the last one due to a perceived potential conflict with another student.

Like with a guy from New Orleans. And I just told him like I can't do it you know? ... One of us has got to leave... 'cause I can't sit out here jeopardize myself and we get to a certain extent, somebody gets hurt, and somebody ends up locked up. Not trying to go there... So I'll be like, if I do that, that's going to happen, that's going to happen, that's going to happen. And then I just like...don't do it, won't put myself through it for real.

Jamaar tried to anticipate conflicts with his peers, but his only method for de-escalating a potentially violent situation was avoidance. He had no conflict resolution skills, and did not recruit any adults to assist him.

### **Connection and Disconnection with Teachers**

Very few of the young men in this study experience meaningful connections with their teachers, and disconnection was frequent and took various forms. Often young men thought that teachers did not care, effectively abandoning them in the classroom; some felt rejected, taking teachers' attempts to maintain order in their classrooms personally; and sometimes students were subject to negative judgments from their teachers.

Some instructors excelled at challenging students and keeping them on task, which helped the students form long-term, meaningful connections to the subject matter. Dontae was an 18 year old young father, who said he was trying to change his life after being shot. Dontae had a long history of disconnection and disengagement with school, with one exception: a middle school math teacher who kept him so engaged with the work that this carried into high school. At one point math was the only class he would attend, skipping the rest of them.



I don't really like no classes for real but math... 'Cause when I was in middle school, my math teacher used to always be on me... and she was nice but she didn't play... Like she didn't care what you do as long as you did your work she ain't care. So I just love math. She was always on me... everybody for real... if you didn't do your work, don't talk to her. You can't talk, you can't play, none of that.

She was able to get him to do the work, without judging him or saying anything negative; she just would not interact with students unless the work was finished.

Dontae experienced criticism and rejection from other teachers, and this was ineffective in getting him engaged.

But the other teachers will be like "Oh you didn't do your work? Oh you don't care. Oh he don't care." But her, she stayed on us to make sure we did our work, our homework, and everything. So that's why I really like math.

He was unable to connect with teachers who seemed to judge him. By high school he was cutting classes and skipping school regularly, and teachers questioned him on his absence instead of trying to re-engage him in classroom work.

Like my teachers or something, "Why you didn't come to school today?" or "Why you come to school for only one period?" And I'd be like "I don't know." And I leave.

Sometimes young men had a connection with a teacher, but it was of limited value, because the student could manipulate the teacher. For example, Tony was charming and bright young man, who was waiting for a sentencing date for a drug dealing charge at the time of the interview. When he was in the tenth grade, he was able to convince a teacher that liked him, that a bag of marijuana that she found him with was not his. What could have been a lesson learned for Tony about bringing marijuana to school, was instead a lesson learned on how to manipulate adults.

I was fifteen... teacher caught me in the back with a bag of weed so when she caught me, I just looked at her like "C'mon Miss Wells, you know me. Am I this kind of kid?" 'Cause my history teacher, I had the highest scores in the

class... so she's like "Uh what do you mean?" "You really think this is my type of thing? I just picked it up off the ground! I walked in, I was using the bathroom, I picked it up off the ground, and I was just...I never seen anything like this before." Her face went...she was like... she looked...she was like "I believe you. I believe you."

More frequently, when instructors were ineffective teachers or managed their classrooms poorly, young men felt abandoned and alone in their academic pursuits. Marcus said that most of his teachers only skimmed his homework for completion, not comprehension. He also remembered a math teacher working out a problem on the blackboard without explaining the work to the class.

Some of the teachers, well I'm not gonna say some but most of them... they'll just skim through the work. They won't teach you nothing...like say you put a problem on the board, like a hard problem...it's back when I didn't know fractions. They put an um...fraction problem on the board and I remember that he said, "Can anyone tell me how to do this?" Ain't nobody say nothing so he just went up there and did the problem. He just did it in his own head. He just did it like "That's how you do it."

When instructors were unable to teach or manage their classrooms effectively, young men felt it was because they did not care. Terrence said that because students did not care, then teachers disengaged.

Yeah it was just like the students... they wouldn't care so the teachers wouldn't care. So they would just talk and do whatever they wanted to do. And then the teachers just sit back...I mean it wasn't like people was in there fighting and the teachers wouldn't do nothing but like they was just talking and leave out the classroom, come in the classroom. And the teachers would just sit there like "Oh well I still get paid."

When young men were working hard in the classroom and they felt their teachers were not, they felt alone and then disengaged. Later in the interview, I asked Terrence if he had ever gone through a period when he could not feel good, and he identified high school.

Probably when I was in high school and it was just like...with the teachers it was just no matter what like I come to school every day and like I try my hardest but like it's just like they don't care so that make me feel like okay well whatever. If they don't care, why should I care?

Classroom management also required quite a bit of skill on the part of the instructor. When young men felt they had gotten negative attention from a teacher, they often took it quite personally. For example, Jamaar was a young expectant father, with a tendency toward anxiety, who felt he was unable to make the same connections with teachers that he perceived other students were making.

Like my stress was... trying to like get along with certain teachers. 'Cause when I was in school, honestly teachers have got their pets, they've got their favorites... you feeling me? And then it was always like, I was always one of those types that always get pushed, that gets pushed off. I'm like, "Why are you always pushing me off? You help them out when they need help. You let them use the bathroom when they..." Like you feeling me? That was the only thing in school that really stressed me out.

Jamaar engaged in power struggles and passive aggressive hostilities with his teachers, thinking that they made up lies about him to get him out of the classroom.

Some teachers had try to lie on you, say you're doing this, you're doing that, just to try to get you out of the room. Like me, if I get irritated...like say if like the teacher irritates me, or they throw a little slur, I start picking back. But I pick back in a way that they can't really say nothing, or they can't act towards it, so they get really irritated to the point that they'll probably be like, leave the room, or they'll wait until school is over and probably try to tell the principal that I did this, I did that, so I won't be able to go back to their class. But I'm like, they don't got proof. (Laughs) You know?

Jamaar even had a teacher once say to him, "You'll never be nothing," indicating that teacher had probably lost his or her temper in one of the previously describe exchanges.

Sometimes that level of confrontation with students was a part of the school culture. Jayson found that the instructor environment in his new school was more controlling, and less challenging than his old school:

At [former school], don't get me wrong, it was the same thing, it was just teachers "Oh you do you and I'm gonna do me." At [new school] it was more so with them, "You gonna do what I tell you to do." And no, I don't like that... I can't learn here 'cause I feel like...I don't feel smarter than the teachers but I feel I could compete with them. Even though I probably couldn't, that's just how I felt...

That type of control and confrontation with students caused Jayson to be defensive, and miss out on whatever it was instructors may have been trying to teach.

### **Limited Support for School Engagement from Other Adults**

Parents and other adult caregivers tried to keep young men in school, but adults often had limited leverage with young men, and misinformation about the value of a high school diploma. Young fathers felt they would be more hands on and persistent in helping their own children get through school.

Family members sometimes tried to ensure that young men went to school, but methods of discipline such as withholding games and using physical punishment became less effective as young boys got older. Edward was an 18 year expectant father who started having problems with school engagement at an early age, and dropped out after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He got in trouble from his grandmother for not going to school in elementary school.

I used to not go to school... I just didn't think I should've went to school... I used to think when I was little I used to... like think about like not going and get a beating. And sometimes I wouldn't even go home until like seven o'clock. My grandmother asked me where I've been at and I just tell her I had to stay there for detention. And she'd be like "Stop lying. I called your school and they say you weren't there." And I just tell her the truth like "I didn't go to school." She take my games and stuff from me.

Edward's father also used to try and keep him in school as well, asking about it, and was more effective when he had time to follow up on him.

I go back to the house and my father probably ask me why I'm not in school. I'll tell him I ain't go... And then he like "Are you going to school tomorrow? 'Cause I'll take you." And he'll wake up in the morning and take me to school and I'll be in school... Then I come home from school. He'll ask me, "Did you stay in school all day?" And I'll tell him "Yeah." And he'll be like "Alright. I'm gonna go see if you were in school all day too." Go up and see if I was in school, they'll tell him I was in school all day and then he'll be like... keep going to school and stuff.

Lamont's mother also tried to keep him in school, but she worked and was unable to keep close tabs on him.

My mother would go to work in the morning... she didn't really know what was going on. I just be outside doing what I wanted to do. So she didn't really know. So this went on about two years.

Lamont's mother was reliant upon him to do what was expected of him, when Lamont was ready for this level of responsibility.

Most parents wanted their children to graduate from high school. For example, Marcus's mother wanted him to stay in school, but she did not have a high school diploma herself and may not have been able to assist Marcus.

If I'd have finished high school, it've been very important. Yeah if I'd finished high school, I think my mother would've been very proud of me because I think she... she went through the same process that I'm going through getting my GED and she wants me to have a better life than she had but... I'm trying to make it happen. I'm trying to make it work but it takes time and... I'm gonna make progress and stuff.

Despite his mother's wishes, Marcus dropped out of school, and was trying to get his GED.

Family members were sometimes uncertain how to balance being an ally with a disciplinarian. Monte was a young father, inspired by his 2 year old daughter, but had also smoked marijuana frequently until 4 months prior to the interview. He was living with his father when he stopped going to school, and did not get in any type of trouble for that decision.

I was living with my father. Yeah I was living with my father from the time I got abused up until I was about eighteen... He ain't care. He ain't really say nothing... Well he did sit down and talk to me one time and said that's his fault for being a best friend to me instead of a father. And I think about that every day like what do that really mean? ...I think he was meaning he was just too cool with me. We were more of best friends than father and son.

Terrence's mother also did not disagree with his decision to drop out of school, agreeing with him that he was not learning anything at his school, so he might as well stop going and get a GED instead.

I was living with my mother... she knew I was not going to school and then I actually talking to her about I didn't want to go to school, and I was gonna get my GED at that time, but I was just procrastinating... She wasn't happy about it, but... she knew about the school and how the teachers wouldn't care and so she was just, "I mean if you... you not learning nothing in there anyway, like, basically everything you doing is on your own so..." I wouldn't say she supported it but she wasn't 100% against it.

Some family members had misinformation about the value of a high school diploma versus a GED, and supported young men's decisions to get a GED. Eric was a daily marijuana smoker, who had dropped out of high school just two weeks prior to the interview, and was probably still eligible for graduation in a few months, but thought the Get Ready program might be a better alternative for him. He said that many of his family members thought it was a good idea for him to get a GED instead.

They said there really is nothing different no more. They said it's the same thing. My parents. My cousins. Everybody. That's what I heard from just about everybody that's telling me to go here.

In hindsight, some young men wished they had or could have gotten more support at home. Andre talked about his own young son, and how he would help him to stay in school.

Just study with him. Put more time in like...and teach him to do all the right things. It's not all about outside. Just get the work done first and then outside comes later. And instead of outside and then come back in and then now you're all tired and... you don't want to do your work. Now you're sleeping on top of your homework.

He wished his own parents could have done that for him, but he thought they were so distracted by their divorce that they missed the opportunity to help him. Terrence reflected on what he would tell his son, if he ever went through some of these problems:

I'm praying that he don't. Then if he do I'm just talk to him and let him know like once I did it... I did it and I look back like...like still to this day and I still look back and I still wish I would've just stayed in school and just went to a different school and like it's not a good decision at all.

He thought it would have been helpful to him if either someone in his family or someone that he knew had tried to get him to stay in school.

Just like try to motivate me to stay in school... Well like if some people would've just like... "You need to do this and you need to do that." And I actually know people who were older than me that had dropped out of school, and if they would've told me like it's not easy then I probably would've went back... Like they just didn't say anything like it was just like "Oh well I did it so why can't you do it?"

He thought he would have done things differently if he had gotten better information about his choices from a credible source.

Families had to balance actively supporting young men in their decision to get a GED with enabling them after they chose to drop out of high school, but tried to adjust their level of support to the level of effort they could see young men

expending. Sometimes they decided to help more after young men had children.

Terrence's aunt and father stepped in after he had a baby and provided him with a place to stay and some money so that he could focus.

The last three and a half years I've been procrastinating this G.E.D... it's just trying to work and take care of my son and like just trying not to have other people help me out with things and now it's just like...like my aunt and my father they won't take "No" for an answer. Like "No we're gonna help you out" and so now it's just like I can just like take some pressure off and focus on some things that I need to do.

In addition to the support he received from moving in with his aunt and father two months prior to the interview, and he got peer support from his cousin, who also attended the Get Ready program.

Like the motivation is the same between both my parents and my aunt but like on my mother's side I really don't have nobody around my age that I look at them and my situation. Like on my father's side my cousin, he actually goes here too so it's like...it's just like I'm trying to be better than him and he trying to be better than me so it's just like we pushing each other.

It helped that his father and aunt told him to go to the Get Ready program, and that he already has a cousin in the program.

### **Neighborhoods and Crime**

Young men and fathers in this study talked about growing up in or moving to and from neighborhoods from all across Baltimore City and a few of the surrounding suburbs, including, but not limited to Baltimore County, that ranged from decent or nice neighborhoods to unpredictable and consistently dangerous. However, at the time of the interviews, most of the participants in this study were currently living in the immediate area of the Get Ready program, a neighborhood comprised of boarded up row houses, social service agencies, and local fast food windows, although bordered on the South by Johns Hopkins medical school and new housing. Martin



talked about how difficult it was to make good choices in a city that continued to be damaged by years of poverty and drug addiction.

So like me coming up, I always knew right from wrong and my mother, she trusted me and my brothers 'cause she could tell we were responsible but at the same time, the crowds...it was too overwhelming. Like, you really can't escape it. It's like...it's crazy to say, but it's really like you're against the world because Baltimore's so small in the way that everybody's so out of their minds. It's like everywhere you go, that's the life that everybody's living. Grandma's...like who do you look to?

Martin was close with his mother and knew that she was counting on him, but that was not enough to offset the constant pressure that he felt to engage in Baltimore City street life.

### **Safety and Law Enforcement**

Most young men described the quality of their neighborhood according to the level of crime and noise. None of the young men interviewed talked about their good neighborhoods as being attractive, having public transportation, good schools, or nice parks. For example, Powell, a 22 year old young man who moved between family in the city and the county a few times during middle and high school, focused on security as the basis for a good neighborhood:

Yeah it's a decent neighborhood. It's quiet. It's quiet. Don't really too much going on. Um...nice little place for real. We got a front door, lock and a camera at the front door so we see everybody coming in and out and um can't get in without a key... Pretty nice. That's one spot I did like.

Baltimore neighborhoods could seem safe and calm, but actually be quite dangerous. Vaughn, who lived in the same house with his brother, grandfather, and grandmother, around the corner from where his mother lived with her boyfriend, described his neighborhood as unpredictable, looking quiet one day and then breaking out in violence the next day.

Like you...like you can drive down through the neighborhood. Neighborhood is peaceful, quiet, you see kids playing around. That's...that's like just a temp... when some...when certain people start coming around, that's when it's a chance of something big happening. That same time, that same day something may happen. You never know, no one says something's gonna happen, it just happens. It just...it don't happen every day but time to time it could. Sometimes it does. Sometimes it happens two days in a row in the same neighborhood...

Vaughen himself had been mugged in this neighborhood, and it made him angry, because he tried hard to stay away from trouble, "Wish I could move out... pack my bags and move out. Move to a better place, me and my family, my best friends. But it's not gonna really happen."

Violence and crime in the neighborhood kept most youth on alert and some on edge. They thought about their environment and the best ways to keep themselves safe. Nathan also tried to stay away from criminal activity, but was still affected by the robbery and murder of an older woman in his neighborhood.

It made me kind of nervous to go outside... Like, "I hope nothing else happens while I'm outside but I hope it doesn't happen at all but at least not while I'm outside..." 'Cause you...you didn't see her doing anything bad. You didn't see her have that type of violence where someone would want to kill her. She was just a lonely woman. She had a son who went to school. She went to work. She had a nice house than everybody so we was just like wow she's gone because of somebody who wanted to rob her... but that scared me so that was... it was like... that can happen to anybody.

He was both sad about what happened to her, and concerned that someone who also tried to stay away from violence and crime, like himself, could be murdered in his own neighborhood.

Youth generated rules for themselves about how to stay safe. For example, after his cousin was shot to death, Marcus made a rule to not stay out late.

Like I was never out like twelve or one in the morning. 'Cause my cousin...he had ...passed away... in the morning and I had learned from that not to go out

because I wouldn't want to experience that like right now. So I just told myself like being out like at a certain time, like eleven o'clock, eleven thirty or something...like trouble and plus the police and all that they be outside like jumping on anybody. So I just try to prevent that from happening.

Marcus was careful to get himself inside early in the evenings for his own safety, and to keep his family from losing another young man.

Neighborhoods that were not safe for young men were not safe for their children either. Young fathers were aware of how dangerous the neighborhoods were for their children, and the importance of a general level of cautiousness when taking their children out. Trent had to both check the activity on the street before he could take his child outside to play, and also assess the probability of violence breaking out at various events around town before taking his family.

'Cause you... like say you let your kids go out and play with them. You'll have to see how the neighborhood is first to see what's the things that'll happen. You'll have to pick up a paper and read the guide and see what's going on around there and stuff like that but just knowing Baltimore, you know it's not safe. Nowhere in Baltimore. Anything can happen any time.

High crime levels in neighborhoods meant that there was also a high level of police activity. Young men had quite a lot of contact with law enforcement. Trent also talked about how much police activity has increased over the years, which has decreased social activity outside.

People used to be outside more... hang out on the corner. Police would just ride by. But now if you stand on the corner, police jumping out on you "Oh you're selling drugs? What you doing on the corner?" So you can't really stand on the corner no more. So it's like they're just drying the world out around this...I'm gonna say Baltimore city, they're drying Baltimore city out. They're making it boring now...

However, he did not think this made the city any safer.

It's not safer either. It never was safe... it ain't safe nowhere...nowhere you're at... It's some feeling in you like...you've gotta look around

sometimes right? So it's not safe. It's nowhere you could actually feel like "Oh I'm just...I could just lay here." No, there's no place you could actually do that.

Trent could not think of any time or any place where it was possible to let his guard down and relax.

Being questioned by law enforcement was frequent, and considered routine by most young men. Terrence, who had never been arrested, and was not involved in any criminal activity said, "Yeah, just like walking down the street and [the police will say]... 'Where you going?'" Almost every one of the young men interviewed had been arrested at least once, and many had been arrested multiple times, sometimes just for minor infractions. Nathan talked about being picked up for being out late, "I got stopped one time for a curfew violation. I was underage... They took me home. That's about it. Nothing serious." Cristofer, a young father who was hard on himself in every other area of our interview, did not even consider his old juvenile charge worth discussing.

I don't have no record... Other than traffic... Juvenile record...it was that one time that I was a juvenile.... It wasn't nothing big anyway.

Despite being accustomed to police activity, and even when making an effort to not get involved with crime, it was challenging, and took a toll on young men. Vaughn talked more about how difficult this was living in a high crime neighborhood:

I'm like a good person, like a good boy. Like I try to stay out of trouble. I try to stay as far away from trouble as possible. But it's just like when you live in a neighborhood that has so much trouble, it's just hard... like it's hard to stay away from it. That's why.

The general consensus was that trouble would find you, even if you were not looking for it, and the police were often there when that happened.

## **Transience / Mobility**

Due to high levels of crime in city neighborhoods, and multiple generations of extended families living in or around Baltimore City, it was not uncommon for families to move several times while young men were in school. In addition to a large amount of public housing in Baltimore City, some families owned their own homes or spent some time living in a central family home that was lived in at different times by different family configurations within the same extended family. Small family units within the extended family moved in and out of these central family homes at different times, for various reasons. For example, in Tony's family, his mother moved out of the family home a few times, because she was not happy with the neighborhood, but ended up moving back in when she was unable to pay the rent elsewhere.

We moved from the house and moved back to the same house... We moved a few times... Different reasons... 'cause of rent or whatever ... just got tired of the house. Then we moved back cuz I think my mother just missed the house... We moved the last time and got, the house got robbed, broken into. So she didn't really feel comfortable, but then time go past, she be like, "I miss my old house," so she want to go back.

The family moved back and forth several times, and often in slightly different configurations, depending on which in-laws or extended family members were living with them at the time.

When families moved, youth had to transfer schools, make new friends, and sometimes adjust to a different commute. Antoine's mother moved a few times, and although he liked the different schools, he did not adjust well when his new school was further from his home than his old school.

I went to a lot of schools, two more schools... I went to one school for a year and then transferred when we moved, we moved to somewhere else, so I went to a school closer to my house... I liked the school... Like it's a far ride that's why I probably won't go there... A far ride, a far- it was a long way, that's why I probably wasn't get to school and all that... I had to catch the light rail and all that... it wasn't near my house...

At the same time that he started staying out late with his friends. He found it difficult to get up as early as he needed to get to school on time.

Oh, I got kicked out... I got too many D's... Cause my mother and then lived in the county and I was always late and stuff like that. [Staying out late] hanging out with my homeboys. Yeah I come I come, but I missed too many days. I missed a lot of days, when they dropped me off... That's how they dropped me off because my grades were low, school, I missed a lot of days, I came, I use to come to school but I missed too many days... I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade...

Antoine stayed out late with his friends from his old neighborhood in the city, could not get to school on time at the county school, and ended up being "dropped off" the roles at his new school during his 11<sup>th</sup> grade year of high school.

Moving between the county and the city school systems was more complicated than staying within the city system due to varying course requirements. When Drew's grandmother got sick, his family moved to be closer to her, and he was unable to get the classes and credits that he needed to graduate.

I went to school in the county... and at the time I was taking classes that in the city, I would've been taking in a different year. So when I transferred, the classes they couldn't put me in the same classes I was taking so it'd be basically...half of the classes I was in out the county, they basically cancelled those classes and started me in a different...it's hard to explain... they basically had to wait for a certain time period for me to have the classes that I was taking. So they cancelled those classes and basically when I had gotten to the twelfth grade... I had basically graduated but they forgot all about the three classes I was in... so I had to retake those...

Drew ended up not being able to take his three classes, and was unable to graduate from high school. That is why he created his five year plan for getting his GED and then going to college.

Sometimes when young men started getting in trouble in their city schools, moving to live with a relative in Baltimore County was a family strategy to keep them focused. However, some young men struggled with that transition. Powell moved back and forth between his mother's house in the city, and his sister's house in the county, but eventually had the same problems, and ultimately dropped out in the final transition back to the city.

I was staying my mother and then I was going to school down here [Baltimore City]. I was doing good but... back then like my attitude and all was real low and everything... when I was in the county I was doing better than I was out here... So when I went out there I decided to just stay out there and continue school out there. I was doing good out there getting all mainly As and Bs... honor roll and all that.

Powell was more successful academically at the county school, but he got bored, and moved back into the city. Unfortunately, he did not re-enroll in school when he moved back into the city.

I ain't never been back to school since I came back here... I mean I tried [to get re-enrolled in school] a couple times but it was always something... It was always something that's why I was like I'm gonna go ahead and get my GED instead of not doing nothing at all.

Deon's mother also did not like the crowd that he started hanging out with, and so they moved from Baltimore City to Owings Mills.

My mother had just gotten tired of that place. We moved from the city and we moved all the way to Owings Mills, so I would say it was just more to get away. You know I guess she really didn't want me to be like the people I was growing up and seeing every day. She wanted me to see something different.

This was effective in helping him change crowds, but he found it difficult to fit in with the kids in his new school, and he was never able to become the student that he was before.

When I was in middle school, it was just like...like honestly a transformation... it was a different surrounding from where I came from. And you know my grades slipped a little bit. They slipped a lot actually. And then when I moved again, you know I moved away from all of the people that I... my grades, they never got better. That's why I had started smoking and stuff like that. 'Cause before that I was honor roll every quarter. You know? All that stuff but until then, when I started smoking and all that stuff, it just changed everything.

Deon missed his old friends, started smoking more marijuana, and getting into as much trouble in the county as he had just started to get into in the city.

Many of these young men have lived in Baltimore City their whole lives, but few in the same house or neighborhood, and often they have moved back and forth from the surrounding suburbs at certain points. For a number of reasons, including crime, family, and jobs, they experience a fair amount of transition. Most of the young men in this study had attended several schools, including two or three high schools. Sometimes they changed schools due to a family move, and sometimes due to a disciplinary procedure. In most circumstances, young men talked about encountering a fair amount of red tape, and being, overall, disconnected and fatigued by the process of transferring schools, making new friends, and transitioning to a new neighborhood.

### **Summary**

With few exceptions, young men experienced relationships with family, peers, and other adults as, at best, unpredictable, and at worst, chronically unsafe, at home, school, and neighborhoods. Young men experienced abandonment as early as



infancy and at different points with varying intensity and duration all through the school years. When school and neighborhood environments were unstable and unsafe, young men had a very difficult time developing the peer and adult relationships needed for optimal development.

## **CHAPTER 5: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES TO IDENTITY AND INDEPENDENCE**

The second research question posed in this study was, “What strategies did young men develop to negotiate unsafe environments and how did those strategies shape their lives over time?” The codes analyzed for this chapter were personality, ethnicity, history of racism, perception of others. Further into the chapter, the data came from the codes history of: education, substance abuse, and criminal justice system. Working with a range of assistance from supportive and stressed families, within chaotic school environments, and out of unpredictable, often dangerous neighborhoods, young men were tasked with completing the identity work of adolescence and transitioning into young adulthood. Young men did identity work, using various strategies, primarily avoidance and substance abuse, to navigate the school environment and deal with high levels of contact with law enforcement.

Young men began their identity work having experienced only limited success with previous developmental stages, particularly those involving academic achievement. Most young men worked to develop an identity and image that would keep them respected and safe in the short term in their immediate environments, but did not provide them with a well defined set of long term goals to assist with eventually navigating their way out of negative or dangerous environments.

The identity work and strategies that young men used often either initiated, reinforced, or masked depressive behaviors and symptoms over time, as well as other mental health issues. In order to navigate school and law enforcement, young men utilized a series of avoidance strategies, including self medication with marijuana.

The strategies that young men used were also short term solutions that frequently created as many problems as they solved.

### **Identity Work**

I don't know. Sometimes people look at me as a hood, a ghetto person, but I'm really not - just where I live at. It's not who I am though. (Elon)

The young men and fathers in this study were raised and lived in a range of environments that skewed toward the unsafe and chaotic, such that by the time they had reached adolescence, many of them had not secured their developmental tasks around achievement, and identity proved daunting. This section will consider what young men said specifically about themselves and how they process world in which they live.

In order to think about how these men internalized the world around them, I first considered young men's sense of their own personalities, the salience of race for them, their overall sense of identity, and then their experience with their environment. It was challenging for young men and fathers to talk about themselves, their personalities, and their sense of identity. In order to describe their own personalities, they often juxtaposed themselves against what they considered to be stereotypes of low income African American males. Young men expressed a limited sense of racial identity, and generally talked about racism and oppression in abstract terms.

### **Personality – Keepin' it 100.**

When young men were asked to talk about themselves, there was often a long pause, and it was clear that some of them were doing this for the first time. They had to give this question some thought, but this also helped them to generate unscripted responses that described on a personal level both who they think they are and the

personality traits that they value. Sometimes this was easy for them to answer, “Cool, funny, laid back...” and sometimes more challenging, “I don’t know, quiet.”

I couldn’t describe myself... I mean I could just say like...I couldn’t describe myself. I’d have to tell somebody else to describe me... ‘Cause I don’t know like...I can’t just describe myself... See I couldn’t actually. I mean I could say I’m funny and smart but I can’t actually say like if I’m fun to be around. That’s for somebody else to tell... I think I’m fun. But you might not think I’m fun to be around... (Trent)

For young men, there was integrity to representing themselves with authenticity.

I keep it one hundred... Keep it one hundred means that I keep...you tell the truth, you do honest things, you make an honest living. Or...that’s one thing, an honest living but being honest like...being there when you say you are. Owing what, owing you have to owe. Seeing someone you have to see basically keeping it one hundred. (Vaughen)

Multiple young men described themselves as nice or kind. This was clearly an important personality trait that young men took pride in. However, in order not to appear disingenuous or hypocritical, they would usually qualify that while they would overall describe themselves as nice, there were times when they weren’t nice:

... I mean I’m a kind hearted person. Like but everybody got another side to them. Like if you get me wrong, I could be your worst enemy. But I wouldn’t try to do nothing harmful to you but I wouldn’t be as friendly as I am. Like I probably wouldn’t say nothing to you. So I... I mean people would describe... I would describe myself as a good, kind hearted person. (Lamont)

They also frequently talked about being funny. The ability to make other people laugh was important to them. However, several of them mentioned that this also meant that they enjoyed being the class clown and sometimes got them into trouble at school.

Young men described themselves as respectful, and when they did so, they usually talked about how they were taught, and why it is important. This was an area where young men often contrasted themselves with other people.

I'm respectful 'cause my grandfather would kill me if he heard I wasn't respectful. And I treat women...I'm just a real nice person. I'm a people's person. Drop me off at your house, when you'd come back you'd be like "Oh this my new best friend right here. He's very nice." (Monte)

Despite being unemployed, most of the young men described themselves as hardworking, energetic, and goal oriented. Marcus joked about wishing he had a bigger vocabulary to describe himself, but used focused on his overall reliability:

This is the reason why I should have went to school 'cause of big words that I want to use but...people would describe me as intelligent...helpful, and worthy of getting stuff done. ...you can call me always on time... And I'll get the job done... I'm a reliable person.

Some young men had thought about their vocations, but not many were as fortunate as Elon was, a quiet young man, with a strong sense of himself, and a possible future in carpentry.

I could be a great worker, but I ain't working right now, so I ain't going to say I'm a great worker, but I'm sure I can be. I'm a great student... Getting my GED, probably going to college, I would like to become a carpenter, cuz I'm good with my hands. I think that's what my gift is.

In contrast to their peers who enjoyed engaging others, young men who were quiet often cultivated that trait, and described themselves as calm, cool, chill, collected or laidback. Chill could be combined with funny, but it was sometimes characterized as a survival skill, either inherent or acquired:

I'm laidback. I'm laidback and funny. And I just be chilling. I don't like to let myself...let myself be seen... I like to just sit back and observe... Just sit back and observing. I don't really talk a lot. (Dontae)

Elon also talked about being cool as a strategic identity development. He was intentionally quiet in order to stay safe and be able to focus on his future.

I'm cool. I get along with everybody. I don't got no beef with nobody. I try to handle people, nobody. I'm not a trouble maker. I just like to relax, stay in the house, be cool... Too much trouble out there in the streets. Drugs and all that. Too many people wantin' me to sell drugs and all this crazy stuff. But, I'd rather not, just come to school, try and get a job or something. I ain't part of no gangs or nothing like that. I don't even like gangs...

This early personality and identity development offers a glimpse of whom young men think they are, as well as some insight on how young men start to strategically cultivate certain traits and peer groups to keep themselves safe.

### **Race, Class, & Masculinity**

Young men also talked about their identities as young black men. Comparable to talking about their personalities, most young men had not yet spent a significant amount of time in self reflection on their personal sense of identity or processing how they see themselves relative to other people in the world. They had a range of perspectives on ethnicity, never describing themselves as typical or average young black men, and sometimes contrasting themselves with what they perceived to be a stereotypical young black man.

When asked about identity, most young men only self identified as black if they were prompted. For example, if I asked about identity, and said, "Do you see yourself as a young man, a young black man, a father, son, brother..." they most often responded, "A young man." When I probed and asked if they saw themselves as a black man, they would only sometimes answer yes.

Some of them talked about why they did not identify as or think about being black. Ramon was a 21 year old young father, in love with the mother of his two year

old child, and trying in trying to take care of his small family, identified himself as regular, with similar issues to everyone else.

Regular person... I guess... Just like I act like...we all go through different things...the same things has got different ways of handling it... Like everybody going through the same thing. Everything that's going on. Everybody go through it. Might not be at the same time, might be at different times, but you end up...you all go through it. Anything...anything that goes on... it might or may not have any of that. You feeling me?

**Social Class - Not the Typical Baltimore Male.** Social class was sometimes relevant for young men and fathers, but more often they dismissed differences in background and opportunity. They sometimes identified themselves as being unique, and had a sense of being different from other young men of their same demographic in Baltimore City.

Charles grew up in Baltimore City, but had been gone for the past year, attending a private university out of state. He was not able to continue to pay the tuition, and went to the Get Ready program for assistance with finding employment, and getting back on track with school. He talked here about himself relative to the young men from the Baltimore neighborhood in which he grew up, but also compared them to people that he met while living out of state:

Young, African American male... born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland...I'm not the typical Baltimore male in my age group or demographic... well, not the young, African American stereotype, you know who are interested in quote unquote street life and not really concerned about jobs or career... different aspirations than my peers and I would consider myself different from everybody else there.

Charles gained perspective on his peers in Baltimore City when he went to school out of state, where he met for the first time, large numbers of people like himself, with similar interests, aspirations, and perspectives.

I spent two years away from here going to school in Atlanta, Georgia and ... I found that while not necessarily Baltimore but any urban inner city environment, you know, that has really the same... characteristics of people. May not necessarily be the same location, may not be the same... words, slang, or you know, accents, but the general perspective of how you're supposed to live is the same no matter if that's in Detroit, Atlanta, or Baltimore, if that's an urban community, then it's all necessarily the same.

Charles felt distinctly different from other youth that he grew up around, but Martin talked about feeling torn between two sides of himself. Martin is also from Baltimore City, graduated from a Baltimore City high school and was planning to attend an in-state university shortly after I interviewed him, but grew up much more involved with the Baltimore City street scene and struggled with staying out of trouble.

It's like a double conscience. Like I want to settle, I want to have a regular...like the life they paint for you on TV. Go to work, come home, sleep with your family. At the same time, that's not what I'm used to. That's not what I've seen growing up... I never knew my father, but my mother always had boyfriends... So it was like, being around a bunch of hustlers, people who's always going and getting. Like, how could you?... Half of my brain is saying it's easy to settle. That's what looks easy to me, if I was to go all the way through school, all the way through college, being 100% bookworm... But, in high school I felt like at the same time I was dedicating myself to school, I should dedicate myself to being with my people, being in the streets. So it's like a double conscience. I can't really choose one. I really can't.

Martin was drawn toward the life that he was taught, and knew well, but was also smart enough to understand that hustling and dealing drugs were not going to get him very far.

Young men talked about reflecting different worlds in their speech and clothing. I asked Elon if he thought people's perception of him varied with the situation, and he said it might change with the area, his clothes, and the way he talked.

Yeah, it like depend on where I'm at, what area I'm at, mostly, all the time, what area, certain counties, how people look at me, is you different, cuz of my



jeans cut up at the bottom or something... What I'm wearing, how I walk, how I talk. I can talk proper, but I choose not to. I'm not even going to say I choose not to, it's just, I'm used to hearing slang all day, so, I guess I just talk in slang too... If I go to a job interview, I would definitely switch up the way I talk, the way I dress, but if I'm used to being in the neighborhood all day, just talking to my homeboys... That's just the way it is.

Charles also found it a revelation to learn about code shifting at college, changing speech patterns depending on who one is talking to, he thought he was the only person that did this.

Code shifting is... basically being able to have the same conversational skills... having conversational skills in different environments... See how I'm talking to you? I can express my vocabulary, I can use proper grammar and stuff like that. But if I was to go around my peers and I speak the same way, then they gonna look at me like "Why you talking like that?"... I can basically dumb it down... not dumb it down, but reduce my vocabulary and change my speech patterns so it can be more similar to theirs. And my English professor called it code shifting... I was conscious of it but I never really was aware of it. And no... that kind of means the same thing... I was aware of it, but... I didn't accept it... people do that? Other people do that too?

Differentiation from the environment that they were raised in seemed to be useful for some of the young men, but also stressful. Young men had a lot of coping skills, but many of them talked about their sense of identity and now feeling torn between two worlds. Coming back to Baltimore City, after being away at school was a challenge for Charles.

I came home and I just was so occupied doing other things that I haven't even begin to get back into, you know, how things are in my neighborhood or my surroundings or where I place myself at. And I guess since I'm here now it's more opportunity for me to go to my old neighborhood or do something simple as playing basketball and then just like it's a culture shock to go to [college] and experience so many like minded people, it's like a re-culture shock coming back home it's like wow!

He had a difficult time realizing that nothing had changed for his family and peers since he left, and he was the only one who had grown up.

And these people I haven't seen since I was in like high school and I was fourteen, fifteen and we used to have those little on court scuffles or arguments and even now they're twenty-two, twenty-three, grown men and they still have the same mentality and it's like why do they still think like that? And it just amazes me like...that...that brain...like why do they still think like that? Why is that the case? I guess just I feel like I walk in two worlds sometimes and then seeing the...the difference between the two brings stress.

Awareness of two worlds was painful for young men, but also reminded them of their choices. Young men were aware of challenges in their own families, but also frustrated by what they perceive as bad choices.

Emotionally, when I leave here... I left here, I got on a bus, I caught it down to Canton, I walked to the harbor over to the movies. And I'm so comfortable... those rides I was telling you about, I might get robbed, stabbed... it's not on my mind and I can just be by myself enjoying myself and it's fine. Then... on my way back home I have to pass by these neighborhoods and it's like... just brings so much stress, like the two worlds that I'm in... I guess that's what makes me stressed. Just seeing my family in a terrible situation... just people just perpetuating the problems that we already have rather than trying to fix them... (Charles)

Martin, on the other hand, was not even fully aware of what his choices are, or was too busy reflecting on the way that young African-American men are being reflected by the media to examine his own choices. But he did have a sense that there was more than one environment out there, and he felt pulled in what he perceived to be two different directions; he could not decide where to place himself:

Sometimes I feel like I'm where I need to be. And then it's like the way that society is, I feel like I'm behind... You know 'cause you can't be a lot as a young, black male. Society cashes us as entertainers usually. And that's like as far as the living well aspect goes of life. Like if you want to live good, and you're a young, black male, you should be thinking entertainment, you know, sports, music.

And I mean all that stuff's good, but intellectually... I have my own brain, I like the thoughts that I have. I like expressing myself. I feel like society doesn't really have a place for me to express my thoughts in a way that people want to relate. Like they could relate, like if I wrote a book, somebody out

there would read it and say “I relate,” but what’s the chances of more people reading my book than watching me play basketball or rapping?

Martin felt that he needed to figure out for himself what he wanted to do.

I don’t even feel like it’s selling out. I just feel like it’s if somebody tells you to do something all your life, it’s not your life if you listen to them. You know what I’m saying? Like if I tell you sit down, read this book, turn in this, turn in that. It’s easy to...if you listen to everything everybody tells you. Of course you will succeed. But if you do things your way and you live your own life, that’s hard and that takes more...and everybody’s searching for themselves. You know if you want to find yourself, why not put yourself in difficult situations and see how you turn out?

Martin felt the pull of the neighborhood he was raised in, and the men he was raised around, but Charles found it painful to come back to his neighborhood and see how men treated each other. He felt that a more mature, learned understanding of masculinity had been lost in his neighborhood, and the men that grew up there were just acting the way they thought men should act based on images.

What really sets me off is when I don’t understand why people do certain things... especially when it’s dealing with male to male reaction...I had a professor in school and we did the whole “what it means to be a black man” and... That kind of changed my perspective of every black man that I ever encountered ‘cause it’s like this...it’s the father thing... it’s like every other thing in life.

How can you learn how to play a sport? You have to be taught. How do you, you know learn anything? ...you may you know be able to do it on your own eventually but somewhere along the line, you was taught. You was taught how to read, you was taught how to write, you was taught how to speak. You picked up how to speak but ...I feel as though that same concept applies to being a man. You have to be taught, trained to be a man and when...that’s been gone for generations, then it becomes lost and no one actually know how to be it, they just see an image and they try to live up to that image or what...or those...or what they believe...or what everyone came to like...I felt like everyone came in the huddle and was like “Being a man is this and we all have to be like that, and if you’re not like that, you’re not being a man.”

Charles really struggled with how he thought men were acting, when he thought they did not have to, and could be more.

I was so angry- like almost in tears on that...that basketball game, because I see it in real life ...I heard and read the concepts...I thought about the concepts, conceptually of men, black men trying to live up to that image, but that was my first of actually seeing it in real life... Why try to live up to this thug, gangster? Like it's stupid...it's so stupid. And when I seen other men don't act that way, black men don't act that way... it made me realize that not all of us is like that. But when I come back home and it's like everyone is like that, everyone is walking around with the chest...their chest buffed up. It reminds me of like animals! Like they walk around with their chest puffed up like you know you see a frog making his throat big?...I see it's like very primitive. They walk around with their chest all big and their hands balled up, all they're doing is walking down the street but they're just so macho for no reason! Like why?

Charles did not like the way that he saw men in the neighborhood acting, particularly because it seemed disingenuous and destructive.

I read so much about it and it's so like primitive it's like they don't want to feel vulnerable. They don't want to feel weak. They don't want to feel like someone can take advantage of them... they overcompensating for something that I feel like... all of them are putting on an act. None of them are being their actual self and you can see it. If I was to go out here and go to some guy, accidentally bump into him and he's with his friends. His friends will be like "You gonna let him do that?" He might not have even had a problem, he may say "Oh you cool, don't worry about it." But because his friend said "You gonna let him do that?" And all of a sudden he's like "Oh I have to live up to this image... I can't let him intimidate me, then my friends gonna laugh at me" ... now it's an altercation... the primitive part is the whole...the chest poufing and the fists and I'm like why are you doing all that?

I asked him if he saw that at all as a survival skill.

But I don't see it in other people... Like alright like you see dogs walk past each other and they like bark at each other. And that's what I feel like that's what happens. When you see two um...ignorant young men walking past each other, and they do like the little mugging, looking each other up and down. It's like...I feel like it's the same...the same thing that the dogs are doing. And we are human. We're not no animals, so why are we acting like that? And that...and when I see those type of reactions, that makes me really mad 'cause it's...it's 'cause I kinda understand it now, that makes me mad. That adds fuel to the fire.

Altogether, it was painful for Charles and Martic to witness and consider the contrast between black men in the neighborhoods in which they grew up and black men they had or would encounter at their respective universities away from home.

### **Oppression – No Point in Keeping It**

Much of the literature describes the impact of racism on depression in black men, and so I asked youth about their experience with racism, discrimination, and oppression. This was a challenging area, because young black men may not have been comfortable discussing their views in this area with a white interviewer. During this part of the interview, when young men did refer to white people, they often apologized, even if they were not saying anything negative. Also, some of these youth simply did not seem accustomed to using that framework for filtering or describing the experiences they had.

Young men were reluctant to label behavior racist unless it was overt, and then were thoughtful about their reaction to it. Racism was most often described as a random isolated incident with a white person or persons using the n word. Most young men could remember these moments, but reported not thinking much of them for a few different reasons, but most often because they chose not to be affected by the negative behavior of individuals who had no impactful or continued presence in their lives. Either they genuinely were not affected by the incident or they talked through it with someone who helped them to process it. Darius, a 22 year old young father of a 2 year old little girl, was yelled at once with a racial slur, and chose to ignore it, because he did not think the other person merited his temper.

There was this one time I was going...I was on my way to work, I was working at Wendy's and we were at the light. I forgot something happened

and this Caucasian guy, like he was yelling out the window. He was like “Nigger!” Or whatever...and I couldn’t...I couldn’t hear everything he was saying because he was driving, but I know he was racist... I mean... it didn’t really faze me. People are gonna act the way they want to act, you know like, I try not to let other people’s actions bring me out of my character. So yeah, I mean it really didn’t matter as long as you don’t put your hands on me, I’m cool...I’m good...good with that.

Character and safety were important to young men and fathers, and most did not describe engaging in confrontations rashly.

Although many of the young men had racially mixed peer groups, some of them had more limited interaction with people who were not African American.

Charles remembered experiencing racism for the first time when he was 18 and then began developing more awareness of racism around him.

The first overtly...overt racial I’ve had happen to me, spring break in Atlanta. We were driving down to Miami, and we were driving through (inaudible town name) Georgia...was southern on the Georgia-Florida border and we’re at McDonald’s. And I went into the McDonald’s and asked for a chicken nugget meal and he said “Oh we’re out of nuggets” and a little girl, she was white, she came up and asked for the...directly after me, he said, “Sure, let me make those right now.” And he went...and he went and made her the nuggets and he told me that they were out of nuggets. And that was the first... I wasn’t as much offended, but that made me more aware of it. It took me eighteen years to find that.

Much like racism, young men talked about not really knowing when they were being discriminated against or being comfortable calling it that, because they were not sure, and chose to not spend a lot of time thinking about situations that they felt they could not control. Some young men talked about discrimination with employment, but most often they talked about interaction with the police.

Young men talked about a high level of interaction with the police, and many of them were aware that they had been the victims of racial profiling, but I often had to probe to get them to talk about it, not because they were uncomfortable, but

because it was so common and they had become accustomed to not talking about it.

Lamont felt that it would be guessing to comment on discrimination, except with the police.

I don't know. I think it's so much...it's probably speculating. You feel me? Stereotyping...I don't know though. 'Cause I never had no one do that for real but like the police...police do it a lot. Like they'll see me walking, just 'cause I dress like drug dealers, they might think I sell drugs. I don't even sell drugs...

Young men were often hesitant to describe other people's actions as discriminatory, even the police. Andre said this was because he could not be sure of what they were thinking:

I don't know 'cause I don't really...I don't really know what could be on their mind when they pulling us over. I don't know if they're pulling us over just because or pulling us over 'cause they think we're doing something wrong or they got a cue that we're doing something wrong. "Let's pull them over just to check."

At this age, they had short work histories and not much experience with discrimination at the workplace. Also, most employers require online applications, and youth rarely get jobs through face to face contact and interviews. However, some have a sense of what can happen. Dean thought he had been discriminated once looking for a job at a Seven Eleven, but it was just a feeling.

It was something small when I was in Seven Eleven and I asked them was they hiring, and the way he said no, he was saying it like no, no. Like he's not hiring me basically. That was the only time where I felt as though, oh you only hire them type of people. But I ain't feel he was being racist, I hope... Yeah it's kind of sort of but I ain't really know for sure if it was. The way he said, "No, no, no we're not hiring" like he made that face like "I'm hiring but I'm just not gonna hire you." Kind of. That made me feel a little uncomfortable.

I asked him then what he did with that uncomfortable feeling, and he said, “I just let it go away... ‘Cause like I don’t like to stress over stuff so I just like to let it go. Like ain’t nothing happen right there. There ain’t no point in just keeping it.”

Drew talked about getting a job, but also seeing a white man who was improperly dressed for the interview get the same job, and dealing with those feelings:

I was always taught that I could walk into a job with a suit and a tie and I would have a good chance of getting the job. And a young white man could walk in a job with sweat pants and a white t-shirt and he would have the same opportunity as me. And I believe that’s true because similar situations have happened...

Many young men agreed that you need to stay focused on doing your best, and believed that they could do anything to which they set their minds.

I just believe that’s how life works and you can’t change that, but me personally, I always have to stay on top of everything I do... It’s not right but it’s life. It’s something you can live through, something you can move past... By like I said just staying on top of my business. I can’t worry about anybody else’s business but mine. You know what I’m saying? So that same guy that got the job, I mean he might have came in and wasn’t dressed as I was but at the same time I still got the job too so that was a blessing... maybe it’s ‘cause he’s Caucasian. I don’t know, it’s life. (Drew)

Finally, many young men used a similar strategy of positive attitude to combat oppression, although many were not familiar with the specific word, and did not have a strong sense of it. Often, when I asked them about oppression, they did not know what it meant. Once it was defined, they did not recall having any experience with it. Exchanges similar to the following happened frequently around the words oppressed and oppression:

I: Do you think of yourself as being oppressed? R: Depressed? I: Oppressed.  
R: Oppressed meaning what? I: Disadvantaged because you’re a young black



man in the world. R: Hmm...hmm that's a good question. I don't feel like that. I: No? R: No. (Michael)

However, many young men had specific methods for living with oppression. Even young men who initially did not know what the word meant, when it was explained to them, could talk about how to not get upset about it.

I feel as though you can be anything you want to be no matter your skin complexion. I mean it does seem as though it is harder for a black person to come up other than a white person but I don't look at it from that point of view. I look at it from how much work and how much effort you put into your work. You know?... Because I mean you can't go in life thinking "Oh just because I'm black I can't come up so I might as well not do nothing." I mean you have to have a positive mind. (Michael)

It was important to some young men to reject the concept of oppression altogether, because they felt it limited critical thinking and personal empowerment.

I don't feel as though I'm oppressed. I feel like people think just because they're black, they're oppressed. They're lazy. They just want to have an excuse for them not being able...for them not doing what they've gotta do. I have pride... and all that... Like...this is the thing in the black community too like...vote for a black guy. Like what Obama got...Obama...just vote for Obama just 'cause he's a black guy. Boxing matches, a black guy...football team with a black quarterback. Things like that. Just 'cause they're black. That's just the way we're raised. Go with your people... that's probably coming from black oppression. (Tony)

Young men felt strongly that they could do whatever they wanted, despite the challenges that they had faced up to this point.

As of right now I feel as though there's so much opportunity out there just with these computers and all that, as long as you can know about it. Nobody be able to say that they...that they oppressed. Like I can understand if somebody doesn't have the access to 'em...that situation at home is preventing them from...that nobody is there to help...to help encourage them or things like that but I feel as though...being my age, I could do whatever I want right now. (Tony)

Altogether, although some young men had reflected extensively on themselves, their race, and the world around them, most young men and fathers were

just beginning to do identity work. Most did not know themselves well yet, nor did they have a strong sense of themselves in the world or how they were impacted by the world outside of their neighborhoods.

### **Navigating School**

During the years that young people are supposed to be getting to know themselves, and testing various identities, based on skills developed as children, young men and fathers in this study were developing strategies just for getting through school, including pushing themselves but often engaging in several types of avoidant behavior. All of these strategies were effective as coping mechanisms, and some helped young men get through high school and graduate, but others led to young men dropping out of school. Avoidant behavior was rarely used as a onetime strategy to get through a stressful moment, but usually became a pattern for young men, possibly due to underlying depression or other mental health issues, or causing depression to emerge as they found themselves increasingly unable to do their adolescent job of going to class in order to graduate from high school.

### **Pushing Themselves**

Young men did many things to get all the way through high school, both pushing themselves and getting pushed by others. Some young men had specific goals and energy to keep them focused. One wanted to be a nurse, another just knew he wanted to go to college, and another had goals to be a leader in the community. Michael, who struggled to stay focused enough to graduate from high school, used his goals to help him:

Because I didn't... Like I don't want to have to go, "Oh so I have to get my GED" It was just gonna be like alright if I didn't get my high school diploma

now, then it's just like I can't move on with my life. I can't go on to you know go to college and major in being a nurse and stuff like that. It was really holding me back so I needed to get out. I needed to get through that.

He also made a point of waking up early to do things he did not want to, in order to get them out of the way for the day. When I asked Michael to describe a bad day for me, he said this:

Well, a bad day would probably consist of me waking up early because I have to do something and I really don't want to do it but I have to do it anyway. So that kind of starts off...or if I don't eat in the morning. You know, simple or small things like that.

Martin was also very high energy, but enjoyed the classroom environment more:

I'm very eager to learn. Um, as a student I'm very dedicated. I like...I like to push myself. Um, I really like...overall if there's a word to describe...that I would know how to put it in one word, but I just love challenges. So whatever's gonna give me more drive.

Deon was still enrolled in community college, but he decided to take a break, because he was worn out for multiple reasons.

I just thought with school...when I took that big break, it made me want to go to school and want to do good...you know forcing myself to go... it wasn't...it wasn't going to do anything but you know make me downslide. 'Cause... I really don't like school... I don't like it but I do it. It gives me a headache. Homework it kills me... I have a short attention span...I can't focus on homework for that long. Like me focusing on homework for like a half an hour, sitting there, especially if I'm stuck on something or if I don't get it, it'll give me a major headache. And it made me just...you know I wouldn't want to do it at all after that... I got tired.

Many young men engaged in avoidant behavior, and some at multiple points in their lives. They used avoidance most often at school, to deal with stress and confrontation, and sometimes just to stave off boredom.

## **Class Clowns and Hall Kids**

Many young men took on the role of class clown, and had limited interest in anything besides socializing and having fun at school.

Robert liked going to class and doing the work, but he also liked the attention and fun of making other people laugh. He was not allowed to stay in class due to clowning.

I had got put out... they said my behavior or something like that. I did my work, just I get distracted easily... Just getting into trouble... like to make people laugh... probably like beginning of class, I go to class and my teacher's out of the class like they have the marker board up, the job you've gotta do our work assignment, I might erase it. Stuff like that... Just a goof... People will laugh. Well some people wouldn't want to do the work...

Many young men found they had trouble with goofing around and then either getting in trouble with the instructor or getting into fights with other young men.

Robert got upset and left when he felt that he was not the only one causing trouble, but the only one getting disciplined.

I stay in school and I probably get tired of the teacher or something or the students in the class and I might leave out and go home...

Say [other students] are doing little stupid stuff and he not saying nothing to them, but if I'm doing stuff like that, he'll say something to me... That'll make me mad, like he's treating me different than what he's doing when them, so I'll end up leaving... If they're doing little things and they're not getting fussed out on or trouble about it and I do... that's gonna make me mad.

Jayson did not fight much at all, although he was disruptive.

I honestly think... if I went and tried to get back in high school, if it wasn't like no age cap, I think any high school I went to would let me back... I was a problem child but I wasn't a problem child... if I got in trouble, it was more so... oh he's just being the funny guy. It wasn't like "Oh, he's always fighting. He's getting smart with the teachers." It was more "Oh he wants to keep cracking on this dude." Or it was more "He wants to keep making jokes" or "He wants to keep yelling the answers out." I was just a little clown in school.

Dontae hated school, he always wanted to goof around, and he was not sure why.

I always get things done. I don't be having time to wait... I get [school work] done sometimes... Not all the time but most of the time... Some days I'll just be bored, so why not do it? I do it and then I leave... When it's done, but it's easy ... See I was always the class clown. Wouldn't care about none of that. And then I hate school... It's not me. I can't do it. I don't know why... I do but I'm just...I don't know, crazy... That's just how I felt about school.

Class clowns often got either put out of the classroom, or found a way to get out after they were finished goofing off. However, they enjoyed the social aspect of school, so they would often end up hanging out in the hallway when they were not in class.

Students either got asked to leave the classroom because they were being disruptive, or they would ask to use the bathroom when they got bored, and not return to class. Jordan sometimes got into fights in the hallways, but usually found a change of pace and respite there. His mother called him a hallway kid.

'Cause I was a hallway kid at that so that just made it bad on myself... Staying in the hallways all the time. Like class clown. Get put out of class and just be roaming the hallway. That's all I did and then they see me in the hallway all the time and then... fight. That's why I got put out 'cause I already had a bad rep... It's just after a while I just wanna, like, if I ask to use the bathroom, I won't come back. I just stay in the hallways... Once I get into the hallways, it's just like a whole other side that's... let's just stay out here. School about to let out anyways. So I just chill in the hallway until the bell rings.

I: Do you call yourself a hallway kid? Where did you come up with that name?

R: My mother... it was to the point that she couldn't do nothing about it. I was just a hallway kid. Like I guess it's been...being in the hallway...she'll bring me back, I'll be right back in the hallway...Yeah I mean I liked it...I liked all the teachers 'cause I'm goofy and they...I make 'em laugh so they...they be cool. I do...I do partial of my work. I just go in the hallway.

Monte liked hanging out in the hallways as well. He started smoking, became adversarial with his teachers, and failed a class. That was so demoralizing that he dropped out.

Hanging in the hallways. That's when I started smoking cigarettes and being disrespectful to the teachers. And then... I failed. It was like, I stopped going to school. But it woke me up though, like if I wouldn't have been hanging with them and started disrespecting my teachers and wanting to do this and that, I probably would have graduated. ... I was just like "Dang. First time failing. I'm done." It was like I had... the negative mind back then.... Chasing girls. Just wanting to keep up with the Joneses as my grandmother would say. And it got me nowhere.

Dontae did not like to hang out in the halls all day, but skipped the classes he did not like, and tried to show up for the ones that he did like.

'Cause I was going to class but I wasn't doing nothing. Sometimes I stayed out in the hall, sometimes I didn't... But when it came to math time, I was in math class... I went, but I did some work, but a lot I really didn't do... I did make the decision sometimes. I'll go to class for like twenty minutes then leave...not even twenty...I probably go for a half an hour and kill time and then leave to go to the hallways and stuff. I ain't never just go to school and stay in the hallways the whole day. I went to all my classes but I never stayed in the hallways...

### **Cutting**

Many young men avoided the classroom, sometimes skipping the whole day, showing up for a few classes and then leaving, or leaving in the middle of class to hang out in the halls.

Dontae shifted from skipping some of his classes to cutting entire days when he did not feel like going to school.

They be like "Boy you're crazy. Boy you funny. You talented." But I just don't use it sometimes... I mean it's nothing that cool. I know how to play football. I was a big football player. But I just ain't...never keep my grades up. And I know how to play basketball, but I just ain't gonna keep my grades up... I love school but I just didn't like some of the classes that I had so I just...you know so sometimes I just didn't go to school. Sometimes I just

didn't feel like doing work... Some days I would just be like "Oh I don't feel like it." And I really didn't do it. I just didn't go....

Sometimes he only showed up for math class, and then left for the rest of the day.

I always thought about it like...I wake up like "I don't feel like going." And I wouldn't go. I mean I probably would go. I probably would go to one class. And that was math 'cause I love math. And then probably leave for something. Teachers say something but I didn't care. 'Cause I don't care about what they say.

Dontae was a talented athlete, and he enjoyed some of his classes, but it was not enough to keep him in school when he was done for the day, or get him there when he did not feel like going.

Andre just stopped going to school, as part of a repeating pattern of fatigue and avoidance for him. Sometimes he made up a reason not to show up and sometimes he made up a reason that he needed to go home, but his teachers were concerned that this was out of character for him.

Yeah I just don't go...I just don't go to school... I tell my mother I don't feel good or something just to not go to school... Some days I went to school and I had gotten a reason for them to send me home so I won't be there and...but they knew I wasn't doing nothing wrong, like trying to start fights or nothing or wasn't disrespecting nobody. They knew something was going...something was wrong at home. So they called my mother asking and then my mother started letting them know all the details why I've been messing up in school and all that.

Marcus would show up for a few classes, but rarely made it through a full day of school.

I go to my classes. Like I go to like my first and second class and then probably go to my third one but not my last one. I'll probably leave and go home or something and like after that...that'll probably like be my day. I'll probably just go to the library or something. After that, that's just my day... 'Cause there's a lot of people like...like when you get off of work, like you be ready to get off of work? Like you'll be ready to get off there so fast that you can't wait. That's how...I guess that's how it was with my last period class. Like I couldn't wait to get out of school.

Lamont did all of the above.

No I was going to school but I wasn't going to school like I was supposed to and doing what I was supposed to and doing what I was supposed to in school. I would go to school and leave early. Some days I wouldn't go. Some days I wouldn't go to class, I would roam the hallways.

Deandre talked about having very little interest in going to school, when he had the option of being in the streets.

Yeah like I don't...I don't know maybe...I was in a rush to grow up so bad. I used to skip school and all that. And at this time, this is when...when I was out there in the streets and stuff so I didn't really...school wasn't on my agenda.

### **Dropping Out**

Eventually young men stopped showing up to school altogether, either dropping out to hustle full time or pursue a better option. Vaughn talked about dropping out due to high stress levels in school, which he reported came from multiple sources, but primarily his ex-girlfriend, his job as a janitor at school, and confrontations with his instructors.

I tried to ask my teacher for help... Teacher came over there and slam her hand on the desk. Say "Why you not doing your work?" I say "I don't know how to do it. Can you help me?" She said "Yeah give me a minute." All of the other students...I'm sitting there waiting and I'm like okay never mind I'm just going to keep doing what I was...sitting... Then she comes back... I'm fussing. I'm fussing at her, she's fussing at me. And I...I let her get the best of me because she's the teacher and I'm supposed to respect the teacher ... But if I...if I need help or something I'm gonna come to you 100% all the time. I want you to ask me questions and ask me and ask me for their help. And she didn't want to...well she wanted to but she had other students and students were talking ... and I couldn't think. I couldn't keep my mind on one thing I wanted to do.

Vaughn decided that he could not handle all of the stress he was feeling.

I said, "Honestly I can't put up with it," you know what I mean? I will stay because I had a lot of friends then. I had a lot of teachers that liked me and I had a lot of friends that I liked but I left not 'cause I wanted to leave just because I had to. 'Cause I couldn't even go on to the next grade with all that



stress building up. If I had to stay there I would've had more stress than leaving. And after I left, I feel like I feel better about everything now.

Marcus did not do his homework, and regretted not trying harder.

I mean I got homework and I did it but sometimes I got homework and I didn't do it. I guess that was it...what he was trying to say... sometimes I think it was probably my peers or something like my peers in school. They'll probably like influence me like...like "We don't do homework. Homework's for suckers." Or something I don't know something like that. So like I do my homework. Like it's nothing to do my work 'cause that's all that you've got to do is go back and look for the answer or something. And like that's why I said I wish I could've...um go back and do school again 'cause school is really easy if you really realize it. That's just an easy education and you can learn and it'll help you out in life and stuff. So I wish I could go back.

Edward woke up with the intention of going to school, but often cut school and hung out with his friends instead of going to class.

Why I be...like I get up in the morning, I leave out my house... going to school but when I see somebody that's not going to school, I'll go with them instead of going to school. And if I see somebody that goes to my school that's going to school, I'll go with them. And 'cause the focus on not going to school is 'cause I'm gonna have more fun than in school. And when I go to school, it's like I do all my work. There ain't nothing else to do. You know and I can't get focused.

He was also avoidant at the Get Ready program.

I just been to orientation. Then I just totally... had no...no birth certificate or social security card. That's why I ain't come back.

Edward knew he did not have his identification paperwork, but he did not ask anyone at the center to help him with his situation. Instead of asking for help, he just did not come back. He told staff at the Get Ready program that he did not have the required documentation and showed his copies, but did not let anyone know that he would be unable to produce the required originals the next day.

I showed her the copies of my birth certificate and my social security card. She said you need the real copy and she just told me and then I went in the room, and sat down, and after it was over, I left. And she just told me that,

“Bring your stuff tomorrow” and I know I ain’t have it so why come back and tell her that I got it when I don’t?

He did not think to ask staff if he could bring in later in the week or at another time.

### **Doing Something Positive**

Young men often dropped out of school after some type of trigger event, with a plan to do something else that they thought would be a better option. Trigger events were not usually insurmountable obstacles, but functioned as the proverbial straw breaking the camel’s back, ranging from very tangible events, such as pregnancy to intangible events, such as uncertainty about passing a grade or a general level of stress. They often made decisions and took actions that seemed rational to them, but were based on limited information and understanding of their choices and the consequences associated with each route. Young men usually made the choice to drop out of high school with the misapprehension that their plan would be a less stressful, more expedient route to financial security, when in fact, it was always the opposite. They had no understanding of the current economy or purpose and functionality of alternatives to high school diplomas. Most importantly, most did not have a good sense of why they were dropping out, and thus whether or not their plan was actually a good solution to the problem.

In some cases, young men’s girlfriends got pregnant, and young fathers thought they should drop out of high school right away to get a job. Trent dropped out of school when his girlfriend got pregnant, to take care of her instead of trying to finish.

Because like she couldn’t do certain things and wouldn’t no one be there to help. Like she’ll have cramps and she’ll be in a lot of pain so I just stayed there just in case anything went wrong. So I just stayed with her... as I was

about to start back up she had the baby. So I had to stop to help with that. And they dropped me off the roll... So I just decided that I should just come here and get a GED.

She was not feeling well, and he wanted to be there for her, but had he sought out or taken the advice of an adult, he might have realized that the best thing he could do for his girlfriend and baby would be to finish school and increase his employability.

Interestingly, Trent's mom was a nurse, so it was surprising that she did not offer them more guidance on how to handle the cramps and any possible emergencies with the pregnancy while still going to school.

Once young men had children, they found it challenging to make the time get their GEDs. Terrence thought there was too much going on at school, and that a GED would be a better option for him than staying.

I really don't even...I really don't even know like I was just young, wanted to get out of there.

Then his girlfriend got pregnant, and he had to focus on supporting his family.

Yeah I left there and went to Sears and...and then that's when my son came in the picture. I had to like think about him and try to...this was when he was...you know like planning for a baby so you gotta save money and...so then I was just like...like it was...that wasn't even on my mind. Getting a G.E.D. wasn't...just like seeing the money and just knowing I got a child on the way.

Again, trying to complete one's education while working and supporting a family is a much more challenging and stressful situation than most high school environments.

Several young men dropped out of school to get jobs, because they did not like the school environment and they were ready to work and become independent.

Again, they might have made better choices if they had more information on the economy or the long term career opportunities at their high school jobs. They left

school in order to make money and feel better about themselves, but instead either could not get a job at all, or worked at a series of dead end and temporary positions. Terrence talked about dropping out of school, because there was too much going on there, and then got a series of jobs.

I got a job at McDonald's after that... It was okay for a while... Then like ever since then I've just been getting jobs. Like I worked at a warehouse. I worked at K-Mart, Sears...um...a couple other places but it's like they...without a high school diploma or G.E.D. it's like they don't wanna give you the right amount of money you deserve and stuff like that.

Sean had his high school diploma, but his family had wanted him to go to college and he chose trade school for carpentry instead. He could not even get a job at Home Depot.

Like the only job I know that ain't phony is like the jobs on Craig's List. Like they tell you a job like I go over to Home Depot. I filled out so many applications like...like three applications for Home Depot, two of 'em for Lowe's and they kept on saying like Lowe's hiring right here, Home Depot hiring right there, right there, right there. And I filled out applications like and I got a trade like I can work in like lumber...lumber part, any of that. Like why am I not getting a job?

I don't get interviews, calls back, I didn't get nothing. Like I don't even know...it don't even seem like they got my application or nothing.

Clearly, choosing work over school seemed rational to these young men, but it ended up leaving them feeling frustrated, bored, and bad about themselves.

Similarly, Tariq decided to leave the group home he was in because they wanted him to attend counseling sessions after school when he had practice for sports. Ironically, he said that the people at the group home did not care about his education and extracurricular activities, and yet when he left he dropped out of school to get a job.

I tried [to stay in school] but it didn't work out because like I said the people at the group home, they wanted me to adhere and do something, they had a certain time and you know I had practice after school and it was kinda hard to do both of them at the same time. And I told them that but you said you have to be here but what about the things that I enjoy doing at school? You know? I ain't got time for it. You know so that's when I just dropped out of school and started working.

He left the group home to reduce his immediate stress, and that was effective as a short term plan.

It's stressful but it's more relief that you have than having somebody that's telling you to do this, do that and you know I understand we was children, but...and we was following directions at the group home but like I said what about the curriculums and what I you know my education what I like doing? They didn't even care about that... I said alright and left there that day.

Many young men thought that Job Corps would be a better option when they found themselves struggling with the traditional high school format. Marcus dropped out of school early when he thought he might have failed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

I was on my way to the eleventh. But I didn't know if I passed or failed or not. Or I guess I just lost my confidence and then just stopped going.

Instead of researching his options, he left school, and tried Job Corps, only to find out that he would need to take three more classes than he would have if he had stayed in school. Job Corps also offered both high school diplomas and GEDs, but Marcus did not have the patience to try for either.

You can get either... I say the high school diploma is better to take but... I couldn't take my G.E.D. over there because the next test was like a week after I left... I wasn't gonna be able to take it on the next test... So that was gonna be another two or three more months. And then you have to wait on the G.E.D. test scores and all that. So I just told myself, "Man I'm just gonna go home and do something positive and get my life back straight."

However, finding out that he was not going to be able to take his GED exam as quickly as he thought just provided Marcus for the justification, not the reason, to

leave the program. He decided to leave there and join the Get Ready program, but it is uncertain whether Get Ready will be able to expedite his path toward a GED or if the timeframe will be the same as Job Corps.

What was going through my mind was... 'cause I ain't gonna lie, like I've been wanting to leave there 'cause the program's been like that for years. You know?... I heard it's been worse than that back in the day... I was just thinking you come home, 'cause my cousin goes here and he told me all about this program and all of that. So I said alright. I gave this program a call before I left like a couple days before I left and they just told me to come by... So that was what I was thinking... just come in here and signing up.

Often, once in Job Corps, young men ran into the same problems that they had in high school. Lamont talked about being unable to walk away from a situation in which he was clearly provoked, but was not dangerous:

Like this was recently. I was in Job Corps. I got sent home 'cause someone took...I was in culinary arts class and this dude took...threw a muffin at me. Like he threw a muffin at me, I let it slide. Like the first time I let it slide. He hit a girl in the head. So I asked him like why did you throw the muffin at me? He got smart with me and hit me with another one. So I hit him. I hit him but when I hit him, I caught myself 'cause I snapped like...I wasn't supposed to do that so once I hit him, I grabbed him. I could've hit him again but I didn't. I just grabbed him, let him know like see you can't...you feeling me? What's the problem? Why would you do that? You feeling me? Now if I hit you again I'd be wrong.

He has not been allowed to return to Job Corps since then, so he decided to come to the Get Ready program.

I was doing good up there, just that one setback. It was...it was a test and I failed. It was a test. That's all it was...I mean but when I hit him, I got kind of a heavy hand. I hit him right here. There was a lump right there. I mean I apologized and everything but they wasn't...they wasn't going for it.

Young men left high school craving independence and then chose an even more structured alternative. Nathan tried Job Corps after dropping out of college, but he did not like the atmosphere at all, and left there as well.

It felt like jail to me. An upscale jail if that's possible... I guess it's building life skills but I didn't like it as far as telling me when I got to go to sleep and telling me when I got to get up ... It was also far away from home again... and the thing was everything that they offer, I could've gotten back home and stayed and still do what I love to do like as far as singing in my choirs. And still be home... So that didn't work out. But I didn't know what to do so I came home.

Eric had just stopped going to high school just a few weeks prior to the interview and decided to get his GED instead of graduating from high school. He was not sure what his standing was at the high school, but he thought he just had a few more months before graduating. However, he did not want to do it, and thought getting a GED was a better option.

Well it's...not that long ago. It was just for like...like last week, two weeks ago.. Yeah I was still in school.

I: What's today? Today's March something...so this is your twelfth grade year? You're gonna graduate in two months?

R: I'm graduating.

Most young men regretted the choice they made to leave school, as well as not getting their GEDs right away. They talked about the lessons that they learned. It took a few jobs for Edward to realize that he was not ever going to get paid well as a high school dropout.

Then like ever since then I've just been getting jobs. Like I worked at a warehouse. I worked at K-Mart, Sears...um...a couple other places but it's like they...without a high school diploma or GED it's like they don't wanna give you the right amount of money you deserve and stuff like that.

Young men also regretted procrastinating getting their GEDs after they left high school. Terrence talked about what he did on days when he did not go to school.

Yeah pretty much hanging out with friends, working, or just doing nothing, sitting around the house... at that time it did seem like a good thing to do but now when you look back on it I shouldn't have been out here. I should've been got my G.E.D.

Young men realized after the fact and years later that they would have been wiser to stay in school, but have a good understanding of the mechanisms and triggers underlying their decision to leave school, and also did not recognize the larger pattern of avoidance as a coping mechanism with limited utility and often negative consequences.

### **Substance Use**

Another strategy that young men and fathers used to mitigate the effects of unsafe and unpredictable environments was substance use that ranged from recreational to self-medicating. Almost all young men used marijuana, and many young men consumed alcohol and cigarettes throughout adolescence, starting in early adolescence. An identity and subculture of casual and frequent marijuana use was readily available to young men through family and peer networks. Young men talked about a range of effects, which often included stress reduction, distress relief, and anger management. Marijuana use impacted their ability to graduate from high school and their employment status. Although smoking marijuana seemed to be an effective form of stress reduction for young men, it also reduced their motivation levels and ability to develop effective coping skills that produced long-term solutions to problems and stressors in their lives.

### **Identity and Subculture of Marijuana Use**

Marijuana was easily available to young men, through both family members and peers, and a familiar subculture to them. Most young men became curious about



marijuana at a young age; as pre-adolescents, they sometimes stole it from an older family member or bluffed experience to get older boys to share it with them. Once youth determined that they enjoyed the effects, most had easy access to as much marijuana as they wanted to use as often as they wanted to use it.

Edward started smoking when he was nine years old. He found some of his father's marijuana, tried it, and liked it right away.

'Cause one time I was in my room, this was when me and my father was sharing a room... So my father went outside and he had left a little wrap where you put the weed and stuff so it was already wrapped up and the weed was already wrapped up in it so I just took it. There wasn't nobody there but me so I just hit it one time. And then my head was spinning. And it made me feel so good. I liked it that way and then I just started smoking.

Edward learned that he liked the effects of marijuana at age nine. By the time of the interview, Edward smoked every day, more times than he could count.

Young men smoked most often with other male family members, usually cousins, but also fathers and uncles. Edward never bought it; he smoked it most when he played video games with his cousin's baby's father.

I go smoke with him or something. Or he'll call me like, "Do you want to smoke and play a game?" I'll be like "Yeah I ain't doing nothing else." Me and my homeboys will go up there and smoke and play a game... The 360. The video game.

Many young men smoked with close family members or knew enough family members that smoked that they considered this to be part of the family identity and process. For some of them, this allowed them to have access to marijuana at a young age, as well as a high level of reinforcement for smoking. Eric was introduced to marijuana by his cousins, and he smoked as often as he could.

Well weed almost every day... Any time I get a chance... Throughout the day... I smoke ...this morning... just about every day... [That started]

probably like two years ago. About seventeen... I don't know. My cousins got me started on it.

Eric started smoking every day about a year ago. He can smoke in his father's house and with anyone on that side of the family, but not in his mother's house. Like many moms, "She wants me to stop but at the same time she knows I do it." On the day that I spoke with him, he had just had a fight with his dad that morning.

I got kicked out. I was hot. I was thinking to myself, my father made me mad. What can I do to cheer me up? Go to my cousin's house, and he had some weed, so I just rolled a blunt and put a smile on my face.

I: You ever have times when you think "We had that big fight but I see what he was... what was happening there"? R: Yeah a couple times. And I always forget when I go back and then the same thing happens again.

Getting high helped Eric get over the fight with his dad, but also meant that they would probably have the same fight again, because they did not actually resolve anything.

Marcus also talked about not just having multiple family members who smoked, but said that it had been in the family for years, the way that some people might reference a family bible or holiday tradition.

Smoking has been in my family... for like years... like almost everybody in my family smokes weed. Almost everybody. The only people that don't smoke weed in family is like the elderly and the um... like the church... the church members of my family.

Almost all the men on Lamont's father's side of the family smoked marijuana. He started smoking and selling marijuana that he stole from his uncle in middle school.

My grandfather was a smoker for real... On my father's side. I never really got anything from him though. My uncle's one thing... and I was staying with my grandmother 'cause like when I was in middle school, I stayed with my grandmother too for about a year... And I would stay in my room. One day I

came home from school and my uncle...he must have stashed his weed in my closet. So I smelled it... So I took some bags... I didn't start smoking yet. I took a couple bags and I went to school and sold it. That's where I started selling drugs.

Lamont started selling his uncle's marijuana and continued for a long time. He eventually started smoking it too with whoever bought it.

Anyways he found out. He told my grandmother... and she telling him like "No that boy didn't take none of your drugs. You shouldn't have had it anyways but I know he ain't take it 'cause he don't do nothing." ... Once I started selling it, whoever I sold it to, my homeboy, he smoked it with me. That's when I got hooked right there. Started smoking...I'd come to the school in the morning... up already with my bags that I'm ready to sell, already got them rolled up. That's how it was with me.

Lamont smoked before school almost every day, and his other grandparents only stopped recently due to health concerns.

'Cause my grandma was smoking for years... my grandma I stay with now. Her and my grandfather they were smoking for years. Like she don't do it now though because my grandfather had cancer. But he beat it though. He beat cancer so I guess that was a wake up call. They just stopped doing it.

Young men also went outside of their families to find peers who smoked.

Monte lived with his dad, but his dad did not know that Monte was using drugs for a long time.

Well he ain't know. Ain't nobody know. Like I said I was hanging out with the wrong people... But he eventually found out when I was seventeen. And he had a problem with it but like he say, "You know when you're outside, I don't know what you doing but just for me, just don't bring it in my house or do it around my house." So I respected him and I didn't do none of it.

It was actually difficult for Monte to understand why he smoked marijuana himself when his dad did not.

Sometimes young men got involved with marijuana at a young age through their peers. Tony pretended he had smoked it before, so that the “cool kids” would let him smoke for the first time on his birthday.

Got on the bus in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They like... “Yo man it’s your birthday.” And I was like “Oh yeah let me hit that.” ...acting like I already smoked. Just trying to be cool with them so then when I did smoke...I didn’t even get high the first time I smoked. First two or three times I smoked I didn’t get high. Until one day I say, “I think I’ll just smoke.” I’ll tell you I was so high that I was hallucinating. Like I started having memories from when I was little about the Power Rangers and everything. I was so high. Like it didn’t make no sense, I was high until the next day. The next day. I just kept doing it, I liked it... it made me laugh.

The availability of marijuana through family and peer networks may have prompted early curiosity or interest in the subculture of marijuana, and may have also facilitated early use. Early marijuana use may have also been inadvertently encouraged due to the lack of social stigma, if not moderate levels of social acceptance in young men’s immediate family and social circles.

### **Marijuana Use Over Time**

Young men had extensive histories with marijuana use, some starting as young as nine years old, and some as late as eighteen. Although some young men only smoked once or twice a week, many went through periods when they smoked several times a day, every day.

Often young men started smoking infrequently, but by the time they were sixteen or seventeen, they were smoking every day. Sean started smoking when he was 13, and by 18, he was smoking every day, sometimes multiple times a day.

If you was to take all the days that I didn’t smoke weed, it’d probably only add up to a month. So out of all the years I’ve been smoking, I only missed a month of smoking. (Monte).

How old young men were when they started and how often they smoked depended on whether or not they had easy access to free marijuana, or if it was something they had to purchase. Young men who sold marijuana had access to quite a bit, and talked about it in terms of its street value, and not what they actually spent. For example, Dontae smoked 4 or 5 times a day, about \$50 worth every day, although he claimed not to smoke on school days. Conversely, Marcus said that he started smoking when he was sixteen and then probably smoked every other day, because of the cost, “Like every other day ‘cause I didn’t used have the money to get it so I used to like save up so I can get it or something.”

As Tony got older, he started smoking more frequently, and getting arrested, he could no longer recall the details of that progression.

I came home, and then I got locked up again... for a while. I was just like... I just was like... like the whole time was a blur... From like sixteen... was a blur. Lot of weed, lot of drinks, lot of... I just can’t remember a lot.

Some young men minimized their current drug use, but detailed a pattern of frequent smoking. Lamont said that the last time he smoked was three days ago, but went on to say that he smoked as much as possible, and sometimes needed it to help him sleep.

I ain’t gonna lie to you. I’m trying to slow down though. I’m trying to stop honestly... Probably like every day... Probably about once or twice [a day]... Most of the time at night... Or in the evening. I don’t know I think like I’ve been smoking for a long time so you know at night time if you used to smoking at night, you gonna have to smoke at night to go to sleep. That’s how it be sometimes. Majority of the time I just go to sleep anyways. Fall asleep, get tired. But that’s how it be sometimes. Some nights, sleepless nights. Like I’ve gotta get up and smoke something and go to sleep honestly.

Jayson said that he smoked “enough” and agreed that it was all day, every day, but when I asked him if he smoked in the morning, he said no.

No I don't smoke in the morning. I feel that if I smoke in the morning, it could ruin my day because you never know what's going to happen during that day... It could be...I could be...say I smoke and you know I'm high or whatever and I just so happen to run into a police officer and he talking to me real serious but I'm high so I'm goofy and I get locked up. That...me smoking earlier just ruined my day.

Although Jayson was somewhat cautious and tried not to smoke in the morning, he did start smoking at some point during most days.

Some young men had just recently quit smoking, after many years of use.

Monte quit after ten years of smoking.

It was hard because I was smoking since I was twelve... Yeah I was smoking since I was twelve. So if I'd have still been smoking that means I'd have been smoking for ten years but I left it alone. Why? Because you can't...all jobs they don't play about that.

Conversely, some young men had tried smoking but did so relatively infrequently. Maurice started smoking when he was eighteen, because he was curious, but never ended up smoking very often, "I don't know. I was following people to be curious, the big boys... How often would I say? I don't know probably...um...two days out of the week."

### **Self Medication, Masking, and Dependence**

Marijuana was used strategically by young men and fathers with the intent of reducing stress and anger, relieving depression, increasing focus, but also to block and mask painful emotions, and not to generate long-term solutions and coping skills for the problems that caused those feelings. Often, young men who claimed strategic use of marijuana described multiple uses for the drug and levels of use that meet the DSM-IV criteria for dependence (APA, 2000). Additionally, many of the issues that young men claim to use marijuana to help are also considered to be symptoms of

withdrawal from marijuana, such as restlessness, irritability, depression, and insomnia.

Stress prevention and reduction was one of the main reasons that most young men smoked marijuana. Marijuana helped Vaughn relax, not just when he was high, but he felt that it helped make his problems disappear when he was no longer high.

Marijuana seems like a kind of one that relaxes your mind ... it massages my brain. People will... people that uses it... some people abuse it... but to me it seems like it helps you relaxes your mind... that's why I smoke it sometimes 'cause it relaxes me. Like I can smoke a blunt, sit back and all my problems or worries I have start to dial down real slow. I can feel it. Because how I felt that day and how I feel now. I feel different. And once the highness goes away, I feel not like a new person but I feel like something really took all of my problems away... It seems like it takes my problems away.

Vaughn said that marijuana took his problems away, but most young men said that the problems came back; if not right away, then whenever they were triggered again.

Marijuana was usually not seen as a long term solution to problems, but an effective short-term fix. Jayson was very intentional in using the drug to deal with his stress. He thought it was helpful for him, even though he knew the problems would return.

I do smoke... if I'm stressed out I smoke... Like I don't smoke with a crowd of people. I smoke by myself... So if I'm stressed out... I'm not even gonna go fussing, I'm just gonna go smoke. Even though, like we had the talk in the room the other day, they said it's just temporary, but that temporary helps out a lot.

Jayson's stress was often caused by irritation with his peers, but he knew that the Get Ready Center prohibited smoking marijuana at the center or coming to the center high, so he planned to smoke when he got home.

Like they said you can't smoke while you're here. They didn't say can't smoke when you go home so I'm gonna have to just put up with whatever goes on and then go and *take that stress reliever*... like everybody looks at

weed as a bad thing but I look at weed as like medicine. Like you know if you get a headache, what you going to do? You're going to pop a pill like some type of medicine. That's what I think I'm doing, smoke some weed. Like you know how you...your pain reliever? That's my stress reliever... It works a lot. It works a lot.

Young men and fathers were very aware of the physiological effects of marijuana, and how they could use that to self medicate anything that they referred to as stress.

Trent thought smoking weed made it easier for him to handle his emotions and work throughout the day.

It keeps you calm and it helps you manage out through the... manage out the day... if your day not going good, then you can smoke and it'll help you like mellow everything out...it's like a muscle relaxer...

Anger management overlapped with stress management, and young men found that marijuana was useful for both. Similarly to Jayson, Trent frequently used marijuana to soothe himself when he was upset or irritated with other people.

Like you get in an argument and then you can smoke some weed and then it'll help you like just calm down. Like if you get in a real bad argument, you can smoke, it'll help you calm down and forget about thing and make you laugh and it'll help you forget a lot of stuff.

He gave an example of how it helped him calm down after an argument with his baby's mother.

Me and my baby mother argued, then I left, smoked some weed, and I calmed down... I don't even remember. Just a simple...that's what I'm saying like it was just a little argument so you just go, and then you smoke a bit and come back and you'll be alright. You won't even be thinking about it more or less. It's that person that's gonna bring it back up or I don't know.

Trent smoked immediately to help himself calm down or feel better.

Many young men smoked at the end of the day to help themselves get over anything that made them angry throughout the day. Ramon liked smoking marijuana



at night to relax if he was angry about something, or he drank and smoked cigarettes if he was out.

I like smoking at night... Yeah at the end of the day...smoke. Sometimes I may smoke in the middle of the day but I'd rather smoke at night when I'm in the house just chilling and then I smoke. 'Cause when I smoke I'm chill and calm and I'm just laid back... Yeah like if I go out, I might smoke, drink, chill for real... I smoke cigarettes too so if I have an attitude about something I just won't chill right. I don't want an attitude.

He said that he got upset at little things, and has learned to keep his temper under control, but not to resolve conflict or actually get past whatever has bothered him.

Hmm...the little things. Like I got a temper problem. Sometimes I just let it out, sometimes I don't. Like I learned how to just not let it out so I just keep my mouth shut for real. Just keep them...keep it right here until probably no more. Or it just leaves my mind. Learn how to handle...handle situations... It will come up one day... Yeah well I smoke it away.

Instead, he smoked to make the feelings of irritation and anger recede.

In addition to self-medicating, men are thought to mask depression and other psychic distress by intentionally hiding their feelings or preventing negative emotions with the assistance of drugs and alcohol. Men in this study did both, and masking was well documented.

Some masking was intentional. Jordan did not want other people knowing what he was feeling, and smoked marijuana to ensure this.

Nobody ever knows when I'm down, nobody. You would never ever know when I'm down...That's when I smoke.

Jordan also got high when he got tired of listening to his family argue; he would slip outside to be by himself and smoke.

Like everybody has family problems, arguing. 'Cause it's just family, mothers, brothers, sisters. I just go out back and just smoke. Don't pay nobody no mind. Go play my game, go outside, go do something. Just get away for a little bit. They'll call and they'll call.

He liked to just isolate and smoke by himself for a while.

Sometimes young men prevented feelings of depression and stress by smoking marijuana in the morning or as soon as stressful situations occurred. Eric liked to smoke when he woke up in the morning, and again when he was stressed or just at the end of the day.

I guess it makes me happy is all... It won't put me through stress... Parents yelling. Not at me but just yelling... I don't know. Get my day started. Wake up and put a smile on my face... I mean when I do feel stressed out, that's when I smoke. Other than that... I smoke. I mean I don't know if I smoke to help my feelings but at the end of the day after I smoke, it makes me happy.

Eric was focused on making sure that he had marijuana and enjoying it, and not thinking about why this was or other things that he might be feeling.

I: So, when you're depressed, what does that feel like? R: Sad. Mad. I don't know. I: What usually makes you depressed? R: Not having no weed.

Similarly, when Jason got high to alleviate feelings of anger, he had to get high again in the morning so that he would not remember that he was angry. Jayson would still be mad at whoever or whatever the next day, unless he got high again.

I'm still gonna be mad. See it's a temporary solution. Now if I smoke in the morning before I see you, I'll come in here and just smile all day. You'll probably be like "Oh maybe he forgot." Probably just smile and just sit...

He did not get over the anger, but being high allowed him to smile, instead of acting on his anger.

Young men also got high to mask feelings of stress and depression coming from depressive self-talk. After Deon was expelled from school, he continued to smoke marijuana to both mask his feelings of disappointment in himself from others, but also to keep himself from feeling hopeless about his situation.

I guess it was more of a cover up... It was just a cover up um... I stress myself out a lot. That's from being hard on myself. But you know from the situation I was in... couldn't go to school anymore. You know me and my mother wasn't on good terms. You know stuff like that... that's what I was looking for. Just you know to get away from reality for a while. That was only times I would stop thinking about "Man I can't even go to school no more." Stuff like that. That was my getaway.

For a time, Deon smoked to get away from real life, including his own self-judgment, instead of processing the available lessons, and making better decisions.

Signs of dependence on marijuana are often subtle, and young men in this study usually identified those signs as positive features of the drug, not as possible symptoms of dependence. For example, both Jayson and Kadim, habitual users, felt that marijuana helped them to focus, and did not consider that being unable to focus without the drug indicated possible addiction. Smoking relieved negative restless energy for Jayson, and allowed him to spend time with the people he loved, instead of hanging out with his friends trying to make money or have fun.

Alright I'm gonna tell you two average days. On an average day when I don't smoke, wake up, shower, get dressed, tell my mother I love her, leave out, go down the hill... street somewhere... this is on the day I don't smoke. Go chill with my homeboys, I'm broke, we need some money, find something to go make some money. Could be bad, could be good.

Alright on a day I smoke, same thing all the way up to me going down the hill. If I smoke, I'm gonna go see my daughter first 'cause that's the thing on my mind. After that, probably go see my grandmother or something. I don't know but it just seems like when I smoke, just all the important stuff matter to me more than what I want to do right then and there. That's just how I feel.

Jayson found himself more irritable and impulsive on days that he did not smoke, but did not consider this to be indicative of any type of dependence on marijuana.

Additionally, Jayson suffered from insomnia, which he attributed to all of the time he spent in group homes, where sleeping hard was not a good idea.

... that's been since the group home days. I was too scared to go around them boys 'cause I didn't know them. Then I just developed a habit. Like yeah I just got... three hours but they might steal my stuff, they might play a prank on me but yeah. So yeah I definitely see that. Getting locked up...that's where that developed. You've always gotta be on point.

A few years later, it was still difficult for him to sleep at night, and marijuana sometime helped with that.

I think I've got insomnia... I can't never sleep. I sleep for probably three hours and it be like I slept for nine. I be fully refreshed in my head but my body be so tired. Like I'm so tired right now but I feel alright though... You know what I think? I think I need to see a doctor and get prescribed some medical marijuana that'll make me go to sleep for insomnia. 'Cause marijuana make me go to sleep sometimes. You smoke enough... 'cause it makes you light headed.

Insomnia is also a possible symptom of dependence on marijuana, but Jayson thought about marijuana as a medication for insomnia. Trent also changed his perception of the drug over time, and did not recognize this might be due to a developing dependence.

At first I just did it for the feeling just 'cause it was like a different feeling, but now I do it 'cause it actually helps you.

The ability to get thing done when they were high eliminated any negative associations young men had with drug use. Kadim was able to accomplish a lot when he was high, including getting himself to the Get Ready Center and signing up for the GED program.

I don't consider being high, being a junkie so like mostly when I'm feeling myself, it's like nothing can stop me 'cause when I'm high, I get a lot of shit done, a lot. Stuff that...like right now, I was high one day and was like yeah I'm coming out here.

Additionally, Kadim needed to stay focused on the positive things in his life, and when he was quiet it was very easy for him to get depressed and uncomfortable.

Like right now I could smoke... So good things that I keep trying to keep seeing: my own apartment is gonna come, my own apartment. Just keep saying, and that's why I keep speaking on it. But when I just keep quiet for a minute, that's when the depression keeps knocking on my door. Sometimes I let it in, sometimes I just say go away. But right now, it's just I'm talking to you so me talking about it it's like...this shit gonna kick in. And it's like oh shit I'm gonna get irritated. And when I get irritated I get slow. Like ... I feel like somebody doing this...I just sleep it away.

For Kadim, just talking about how he felt triggered depression, irritation, and slowed him down.

Irritated. And people say that I get angrier. Like angrier but it's not anger... I don't like it. It's not angry, I just don't like it. If it was you, you'd be doing the same thing. So it's not anger.

He generally tried to fight off feelings of depression, but sometimes it was too much work.

'Cause that shit be getting too bothering. Like damn yo. Sometimes you just give in. I know a couple of times where your husband, you didn't want to have it, he just gave in. Like that. The example is depression knocking on your door. You don't want to open the door, but say fine what the fuck do you want. But you open it and there you go.

However, Kadim found those feelings to be too much to deal with, and would then get high. When he did "open the door," to depression, he found it intolerable, and used marijuana to escape the feelings. He described it as, "Painful. Just irritating and then I just get high and just go away."

### **Cycle with School and Work**

Marijuana use at varying levels, over time, for multiple reasons, not only decreased the probability that young men would graduate from high school and impacted their eligibility for certain jobs, but during the process sometimes changed their early sense of identity. Many young men slowly lost interest in school as they became more interested in getting high, gradually shifting from recreational use with

friends to getting high by themselves in the mornings and throughout the day. Additionally, many young men were caught with marijuana on them, and were suspended or expelled as a consequence, sometimes changing the direction in which their lives were previously headed.

Some young men got high in the morning, before they went to school, either for social reasons, or because they thought it helped them to focus. Jayson was so irritated and uncomfortable when he was not high that smoking helped him to relax and focus in the classroom, although it also contributed to him clowning around in class.

...but when you smoke, it makes you more focused though. Well it makes me more focused. I used to smoke before I went to school but that was different though. 'Cause I knew that the only way I was gonna...that's why I used to play so much. I used to be high but it used to make me focused.

Other young men got high before school to socialize, even though they sometimes knew it was not a good idea. Tyler started smoking marijuana in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, which he got from a friend of his cousin's at the basketball courts.

Get up in the morning, you meet up with the person. You know I get up probably ask if you're meeting before you go to school, walk to school or something. We all go to the same school so that person just be like "Yo I got some grass"... I tell them... I don't wanna do that... You know and you might hit it a couple times. Not too much... You go to school.

Even though he was quiet and did his work, by eighth grade, he had started failing some of his classes. Tyler got arrested for coming to school high or possibly for being with other kids who actually had marijuana on them at school.

I went to a county school so...you go to school and you know you go in the door and the officer's right there. You go in the door and you've gotta swipe your card. Before you swipe your card, he'll be right there and smelled it. But we're all together though you know? We're all talking and having fun

laughing before we went in there. And then he grabbed us as a group and locked us up, took us to the precinct.

Tyler said that he was young then, and knew more now, but the last time he was at the Get Ready program, he says that he had to drop the program, because he got arrested and locked up for hanging out around people with marijuana again.

Eric got high when he woke up in the morning, and then decided whether or not he would go to school. He had also made a decision to drop out of school just a few weeks prior to the interview, just before the last quarter of his senior year of high school.

Sometimes I feel like going. Sometimes I don't but I end up going anyway... I want to stay home but there ain't nothing to do so...

Throughout the course of the interview he slowly revealed that his attendance had been sporadic this year, and he had been getting high almost every morning.

He was not alone in finding that smoking started recreationally but quickly became the center of his activities. Tony's decision to smoke escalated into criminal activities, and that contributed to his dropping out of school.

Like once you start smoking, you start liking it. Wanna get high all the time. Wanna hang with the people who get high. And once you start hanging with people who get high, that's when you get people doing other things. Now you with them all the time so you do things that they do all the time and then next...I guess it's like a process. Like one day...one day you just smoking, next you just hanging instead of going to school. Then you got no money... Can't just walk around... everybody...

However, even though Tony described the process of slowly dropping out, he says he was aware of the choices that he was making.

It's not like a track. It's like a decision. You decide the company that you keep. And it's your choice but like I made the choice...but I wasn't raised that way... Like I had a wonderful childhood. Like I got everything I always wanted... my mother always used to have the best like Christmas and

things... Never had no lights out, never been evicted... lived in a good neighborhood. Like we always lived north of Baltimore suburbs.

Tony had a mother who provided well for him and the example of his mother's boyfriend who went to work every day, however, he identified with his biological father, who was in the streets.

For some reason I always like looked up...to the thugs. It was always that life that fascinated me. Fast cars, fast girls, fast money. It's always fascinated...videos, the things in the movies, and all that... my father was in the streets... my mother she had a boyfriend and her boyfriend...you could say he was my stepfather ... he wasn't into that. Like I watched him go to work everyday suit and tie and all that but I always thought he was a (*inaudible, 0:12:52.3*).

Tony was enamored with the gangster lifestyle, but did not understand why, when he thought he should have known better.

It was very clear for some young men that when they started smoking marijuana, they changed, and sometimes dramatically. Deon was an honor student, but started smoking marijuana and doing other things, and that changed an honor student in grade school to one who was expelled from the Maryland school system his freshmen year of high school.

When I was in middle school... it was a different surrounding from where I came from. And you know my grades slipped a little bit. They slipped a lot actually. And then when I moved again, you know I moved away from all of the people that I...it took me years to be like...my grades, they never got better. That's why I had started smoking and stuff like that. 'Cause before that I was honor roll every quarter. You know? All that stuff but until then, when I started smoking and all that stuff, it just changed everything.

Deon got arrested for marijuana possession twice during his ninth grade year, once at his original high school and then again at an alternative school.

What was I thinking when I got in trouble? I wasn't thinking at all you know? I wanted to smoke. My friends they wanted to smoke too... we just all had the idea that we would leave and come back and we never made it back to school



‘cause we got locked up on the way back. Well actually it was on school property when we got locked up...

Since both of these schools were in the state of Maryland, he was unable to return, and decided to pursue his GED instead.

You know it was just an average day, didn't want to be in school, didn't like the people I was going to school with. Just making poor choices. I would rather chill with my friends all day and do other stuff than do what was needed I guess... the guys I got in trouble with, they were in school, we were in the same class, same grade. You know? It was just more like we had the same mentality, you know? It was always... I always had a problem some way, somewhere, somehow.

He got sent to the Board of Education and they decided to send him to an alternative school for a period of time before he would be allowed to return to his regular school.

That's where I was at... it was a school but it was more of a jail school to say the least. That's what it was to me... They had a dog at the door. You couldn't leave. You know they had dogs at the door. Police was there all the time, security. I guess I was just there with all... all the other crazy people that went there.

Deon repeated the same mistake in alternative school that he had made in regular school, and deciding to get his GED.

I would've said I learned something if I had completed it but no not really 'cause I got put out of there to for the same reason... Well actually it was more of... I was smoking that morning, went to school with some friends, we was... 'cause the guy I had got put out of [regular high school] with, they sent us to the same school. We lived in the same apartments, we had the same bus stop, everything. So you know we're still smoking together and all that stuff and I just go to school and I had dropped one of the things... a bag on the floor. And he came and got me. And that was when I couldn't go to any schools in state and it was just a better solution to just get my GED.

Often young men continued to have the same problems with marijuana while they pursued their GEDs that they had in high school. Monte started the Get Ready program, but then got in with a crowd there that wanted to cut classes and get high.

Yeah the only reason why I came [last winter] because I had a girlfriend. She was staying with me and my father and she was like “Baby we need to do something. Let’s go to school.” So I say “It’s a school down the street ...” But like I was saying to myself, if she wouldn’t have come, I wouldn’t have come. So it’s like she encouraged me. Like she was my backbone. She and...she completed it. And I was the stupid one to stop coming... ‘Cause I wanted to be with everybody else. See she had her head on straight. I don’t think mine was on straight.

Monte said this was because smoking marijuana was his only coping mechanism when he was angry, but it did not help him stay motivated to complete his work on his GED

What held me back was that smoking. That’s what really held me back. Smoking weed. I mean ‘cause like you said when I got angry or mad what did I do? I smoked weed... it’s just one way...it wasn’t helping me get on the right track. And it’s not gonna help me get on the right track, smoking.

However, other young men wanted assistance in staying away from marijuana while at the Get Ready Program, so that they could stay focused on getting their GEDs. Lamont liked to smoke but did not want to come to the Get Ready program high, and was pretty private about that side of himself. He was interested in any services around substance abuse that the Get Ready program had to offer, and planned to attend an information session the next day.

I don’t want them to meet that side of me. That’s why I’m just coming here tomorrow for that substance abuse...I’m just trying to be positive. Like even if you do smoke weed, you feeling me? As long as you do it in your own terms, then it’s not a problem and it’s not bothering anyone else, I think it should be your business. Like whatever you do, you feeling me? Like whatever you do but like that’s why...I look at this as a place of business. There ain’t no point in me coming here all high up looking silly. You feeling me? Everybody...that’s when you get attention...everybody notice you.

Drug use also impacted young men’s employment prospects, but only a few had started thinking about this. Some mentioned it casually during the interview as a

reason for quitting, but most did not, although almost every young man at the Get Ready program was actively looking for a job.

Not many young men talked about the impact of past drug use on future employment prospects, except Cristofer. He wanted to go into law enforcement, but his history of smoking marijuana prevented him from doing that.

It was a question on the test saying the last time you smoked marijuana and I was honest but their requirement was two years, and I told them one year, and that was the truth, but I couldn't take the test because they pulled me the list saying, "You answered this question honestly but, our requirement is two years." And ever since then I never went back to even try. So...now I'm twenty two years old now. And I'm trying again... I haven't smoked weed in about three years.

In contrast, Ramon interviewed for a job recently, but he may fail the drug test, because he is still smoking marijuana regularly. He had no plans to stop using drugs, but was thinking about trying to use an agent to mask any drug residue in his system.

I mean, they got something up there for that... I forgot what it's called. There's like something you drink to clean... Yeah I probably won't do it as much as I do it now, but I mean it's cool being like "Let's chill." They should legalize that.

Overall, young men's use of marijuana at school got them arrested and suspended from school with frequency. Their pre-occupation with getting high also often dominated their choices, how they used their time, and how they saw themselves.

### **Strategies to Deal with Law Enforcement**

In addition to encountering police at school, young men and fathers were routinely pulled over or stopped when walking by the police in their own neighborhoods and other places they went. Young men had to make decisions about

whether or not to participate in criminal behavior, develop strategies for not getting caught up in other situations, and then also develop strategies for handling it when they were stopped or arrested.

### **No Option But to Take That Tunnel**

Low income and high crime neighborhoods had high levels of police presence, and there were frequent interactions between law enforcement and young men and fathers. Somewhat paradoxically, young men had to get used to the probability of an unpredicted run-in with police, and made conscious decisions not to get upset about it. However, this was something they had to learn, and it was not always intuitive.

Charles was upset the first time he ran into the police as a grown man, having recently returned from his first year of college. He was playing basketball with his cousin when the housing project police interrupted the game to see their ID's and make sure they were there to play basketball and not sell drugs.

...in the housing project...we call them knockers, but they're real name is like Plain School Police and basically they were just enforcers. When they came through like everybody...no matter what you was doing, everyone ran, they cleared.

He was not happy about it, and let the officers know, while his cousin, who did not want any trouble, was more cooperative.

I had an attitude so when he sorta stopped playing basketball, I looked at him and I kept playing. So he came over there, he threw the basketball up out of the basketball court and ... I was kinda just giving him a real stern look and he said "What, you got a problem? You got an attitude?" ... I didn't respond but I was just like giving him like real... I can't even describe how the... the vibe I was getting. I wasn't cooperating as much and he was like "Oh you eighteen, you definitely can go down now." And um my cousin on the other hand he was like "Yes sir, yes sir. Here's my ID, is that, is that..."

His mother talked to him about it, and she tried to get him to think about the way his actions and behavior may have impacted the situation.

She basically told me “Well, although you may be doing something, you gotta think about the way you was acting.”

It was a struggle for Charles, but he has thought about the job that the police have to do, and learned to accept the way that they do it, but in the process has had to buy-in to the idea most of the youth in the projects are breaking the law most of the time.

...sometimes I feel bad I have that type of view because it was like I have to understand why they're so aggressive, why they're so like just being assholes because how my peers interact with them...if your job is... a foot cop on... controlling the projects, you already...you so used to a certain type of behavior. If there's this one person acts...is genuinely not committing crimes, then that's just an outlier 'cause nine times out of ten... I am just trying to perpetrate like playing basketball when I'm actually selling drugs, that I see all the time so that was my first interaction.

He also talked about being pulled over multiple times, and again, attributed that to the way the police have to behave in certain neighborhoods.

I knew the neighborhood so I already knew the type of area I was in so when I got pulled over I was like “Oh they probably think I'm trying to buy drugs, selling drugs.” And they did the whole routine. Got me out of the car, patted me down, checked the car... And that happens like I guess once every two months...just driving those neighborhoods. That happens...

Charles had gotten used to getting pulled over for no reason on a regular basis, and he attributed it to driving in bad neighborhoods.

Other people that I know, they... just angry about it and that's why I say I feel bad because I'm like well, I get where they come from. Bad neighborhood, it's just... I kinda just accept it for what it is rather than trying to be like you know all aggressive about it.

...I mean then I just realize that's how it is. You can't blame someone for being over cautious. I mean they're just police, they're policing. They're trying and it...and that way they just trying to promote safety and get drug dealers and such off the street. And if you get profiled in the process it's just...I guess it's just a sacrifice or...

He compartmentalized his experience to rough Baltimore City neighborhoods.

Just walking this neighborhood, it's always a possibility that I might get robbed. I might you know get hassled or see somebody that back in middle school that I had an argument with who wants...it's just because it's just part of your daily life, it's not even a concern anymore.

He also recognized that he had limited energy, and chose not to use it here.

So you know if it's raining, just bring an umbrella. You don't even think about it, so it's a problem; it's just how things are... once I tried to always think about it... "Why is it like that...why is it like that? Why?" It gives unnecessary stress. Just accept it for what it is and it's easy to go on your day, day-to-day life. As long as you do your part hopefully everything works out. That's just the...I try to avoid it as much as possible, stay out of trouble, and go on with my day.

For the most part, young men tried to steer clear of law enforcement, but some situations made this impossible, such as with self defense. It was easier for young men to disentangle themselves without being charged if they had no previous police record. Vaughn tried to stay away from the police, but had to defend himself against another young man with a baseball bat, was so afraid that he almost killed the other person, and was arrested for it.

Yeah big fight...police came and put me behind bars but I wasn't in the system... I said well I'm behind bars, what I got a record now? And the man say, "You don't have a record... You just being put back here to calm down." ... Cause he... 'cause like if you hit somebody in the back that's where their spine at. And somebody messes that spine up you're gonna be paralyzed and I wasn't trying to be paralyzed. I'm not trying to be paralyzed... I mean 'cause to see someone paralyzed that makes me feel some kind of way inside.

So criminal justice system...I try to stay away from the criminal when possible 'cause I know if I get locked up or put behind bars for a long time, that's gonna mess up my career. And the kind of career I want, you can't have no criminal record.

When young men were set up or caught up, they had to learn to be very smart, or possibly get charged with crimes that they did not commit. Jamaar found a bag of

stolen property on the street once, and the police claimed that they had a video of him stealing it.

Me and my uncle and my friend was walking down town. This is when we had that serious snowstorm. And we found this bag that was sitting out there. Found a bag, and all you know straight out of the blue all of the police came out of nowhere. So I'm looking like, "What's going on?" So the police open the bag, and there's a pair of prison keys and a camera and all this other stuff was in this bag. And I'm looking like, "Was this a set up or something?" 'Cause I'm looking at it and I'm like, prison keys, camera, flashlight.

It took him some time to realize that since he had not actually committed a crime, then this could not be true.

So they kept saying "You all just want to take breaking and entering?..." And I'm looking at the cop like, "What are you talking about?" We didn't know anything he was talking about. So they probably thought we were just a bunch of little dumb kids running up to no good. So I'm in the court room and I'm looking. And in my head...no actually I was sitting in the cell. I'm like, they got this on tape. I'm telling them, "They got us on tape! They got us on tape!" Like, and then I thought about it, "Hold up, they've got us on tape doing what?" You know? So trial date came, I talked to my lawyer and they were like, "They said you got us on tape. Can we see the tape?" They can't. "No, I want to see the tape." They couldn't ever find the tape. Found out there was never any tape. Found out we never did anything. So I was like, "Hold up. So they just basically just tried to find a little bonus or something. It was around Christmas, as a matter of fact, it was Christmas, December the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Jamaar called the experience crazy, but realized how important it was to be able to think clearly through that type of situation.

And I was like, "Man that's crazy!" Like they still trying to get us to sit with a judge presenting to them. "Yeah you all could've been sitting for six years." And I'm like, aw man. But my mind does operate the way it does. If I wasn't thinking, I would've probably been sitting for a long time. And I wouldn't have been able to do it. 'Cause that little bit of time in there when I was in central booking, I saw some crazy stuff. And I'm not fit to talk about it.

Jamaar's mother helped him to put the situation into perspective, so that he would have the where withal and the skills to handle all types of people and situations. This helped him let go of the situation, but also developed a new anxiety for him.

It felt like I was being picked on but then my mother told me, “Things happen. You’ve got some ignorant people out here that do ignorant things. And then you’ve got kind people. And there’s some ignorance that you’ve just got to let go.” You feeling me? ‘Cause it comes and goes.

Jamaar decided to take his mother’s advice, and let it go, but sometimes he thought about what he would do if that ever happened again. He said that he just treated it like something he had to do.

Say one time you walk through a tunnel and something jumps out on you. But then you’ve got to go through a tunnel again to get somewhere else and you’ll be like...if I walk through that it’ll happen again, but you have no option but to take that tunnel, so you’re like, “Alright I’m just going to go there and then I know what to do next...this time. You feeling me? I remember my mistakes from last time.

However, in general, he tried not let it bother him on a daily basis, because he had friends and family members who were police officers. He just tried to be cautious.

### **Not Interested in What the Jails Have to Offer**

Some young men had to learn that they did not want to get involved with the criminal justice system after a few encounters with law enforcement. However, they had to learn to navigate the system in order to get out and stay out.

Being charged for a minor offense or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time was somewhat common. Drew was arrested for hanging out with some friends smoking marijuana at school, and had not realized that he could be arrested for just being around other people breaking the law. “With the system I just...I know a little bit about it and how it works and things you should and shouldn’t do but that’s about it.” He was charged as an adult, but the commissioner let him go.

Well I was eighteen so I was charged as an adult so I basically had to sit in there until I was able to see the commissioner and then I had talked to the commissioner and she basically was like “Well you gotta watch the crowd that you hang around” and I told her she’s right, ‘cause like I said I don’t usually



get into trouble, or hang around trouble. So she did a lot, “You’re a good kid. I see you’re a good kid. So I’ll let you go.” And she let me go home and ever since then I haven’t gotten into trouble.

Drew thought everything happened for a reason, and decided that this was supposed to teach him to stay out of trouble, “I seen what the jails have to offer and I’m not interested in anything.”

...It was just a little lesson well learned... I wish I didn’t have to go through it but like I said everything happens for a reason so it won’t happen again... At the time I was angry ‘cause I had just kept...I was so stressed on the fact that I got arrested and I didn’t have anything. But once I learned how the system works and you can’t be around trouble to not get in trouble then I just was like okay that’s smart. I see how it works. So this is what I’ll do next time.

He did not get upset about being arrested, and tried to learn a lesson from the whole experience.

Sometimes young men were arrested for things they did do, but young men learned the crime was not worth doing. Michael was arrested for buying a car for \$50 from a drug addict, driving without a license, and he regretted it. He realized that it was not a smart choice and learned not to do that kind of thing again.

I mean actually they taught me a lesson: Don’t do that. Don’t do dumb things that put you in a situation you don’t want to be in. You have to live and learn from a lot of experiences like that’s the only way to get stronger.

He realized his own mistake, but also joked that his uncle had some words for him as well.

Learning both not to break the law, but also, how to not draw the attention of the police even when they were not doing anything wrong was important. A common strategy that young men learned was to stay inside most of the time; that it was not worth it to hang outside. Lamont learned this lesson after being made to lie face down on the sidewalk in the rain by the police. He did not think that was right.

Before that, I would be outside. I wasn't doing nothing, but I be outside. The police see you outside, they gonna come tell you "Go in the house." All this and that like the police, one day they really had me laid out on the ground and it was raining. So I'm telling them like, I'm a man just like you, you feeling me? I ain't do nothing wrong... why do I gotta lie face flat on this wet ground you feeling me? I'm mad, I'm not gonna lay here. So I stood up. So they got mad but it wasn't nothing they could do. You feeling me?

Turning eighteen was often when young men started to think more carefully about the consequences of their actions. Lamont talked about being arrested after this birthday, and realizing that he really did not want to be in jail.

Tell you the truth, it was making me think like when I was...when I was a juvenile I got arrested a couple times. When I turned eighteen, I got arrested once for failure to obey...failure to obey... Which is not really a big charge, you feeling me? They just walk you through. I got down there and seen them bars and those kids... I can't do that. That ain't for me. That's for the birds. You know what I mean?

For some young men, being arrested changed the way they see the world. Lamont talked about the effect that being arrested had on him, but also what he has heard from family friends that have been arrested.

'Cause I mean like being arrested isn't no joke for real. Sitting in the back... waiting to ride through the city looking at everybody. That ain't cool...There ain't nothing...nothing good came out of it. So you...ain't nothing good gonna come out of sitting around waiting on stuff.

Being arrested scared Lamont enough that he was willing to challenge the police the next time he was stopped by them. Lamont was caught in a car with a friend who was driving without a license, but he bluffed his way out of the situation.

So we get up and get out the car. Saw the police and we start walking. Police come at me like "Y'all wasn't just in that car?" "I don't know what you talking about officer." "Like I seen you in that car." "I don't know what you talking about. You've gotta prove it. You can't just say you seen me in that car. You seen him run off, you start chasing him. So you didn't see us jump out the car and get to walking." So there wasn't really nothing he could do...too much they could do. But that's how I look at it. If I know I ain't do nothing wrong, I shouldn't get in no trouble for it for real.

Lamont has not had any run-ins with law enforcement recently because he has learned not to hang out with his peers, but to associate with his uncle or no one.

Alright well recently, I haven't really been getting bothered by them. Like the past three or four months I haven't really been getting bothered by them. But like that's 'cause I...I stay to myself right now... with myself or with my uncle.

Sometimes young men plead guilty for a crime they did not commit, because they got tired of the court process. Powell was improperly arrested for a drug charge, lost patience with the process and plead guilty to the charge, in order, he thought, to be finished with the court system. However, he came to regret that choice as he realized how busy he would be on probation. He was so busy trying to make his probation officer (P.O.) and urinalysis appointments that he did not make it to his disability appointments.

I was working and I was supposed to have been getting... disability for my back but I never got that, then I never made it to my last appointment. I think it was my last one or two appointments. 'Cause I was so caught up like I was doing this at first. I was uh still visiting my P.O. every two days a week, during urine analysis, doing the drug program. And that was it, I was taking my G.E.D., seeing my P.O., doing urine analysis, doing the drug program and working.

Powell thought he was being set up for failure with multiple requirements on his schedule, and his probation officer was not willing to make any changes. However, he was able to advocate for himself with the judge, and get a little room in his schedule.

I pulled the judge up... He like ask her [Powell's probation officer], "So what you been doing? How you been doing?" Like "Yeah he's been doing... he been doing...staying out of trouble he ain't been really going to the G.E.D. program like that. Or he misses one or two days of power recovery. This and this and that." So the judge is like "What's going on Mr. (*respondent's name*)?" I say "Judge," I say, "I'm not trying to be smart. I'm not trying to get on nobody's case. But I tried to sit down with my P.O. three or four times and

I tell her about this. I'm trying to get my G.E.D 'cause y'all want me to do that. It was court ordered that I get my G.E.D. So I'm trying to get my G.E.D. I have to come and see her or she going to violate me. I have to do urine analysis. And then I don't do that, I go in the...I was working."

The judge was actually very understanding, and gave Powell an opportunity.

So he's like "Well that is a lot." And I asked...I say "Well is it any way I could do the program now and cut the G.E.D. until later or do the G.E.D. now and cut the program until later." He's like "You know what? I like how you broke it down and explained it to me and let me know exactly how everything was. So you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna give you a chance. I was like "What's that?" He said "I'm gonna put everything in your hands. I trust you. I hope you're gonna get it down. 'Cause I hope you wouldn't...you feel me...let my word go like that." I'm like "No. No. What is it?" He said "I'm gonna let you out of here today. I don't want to see you again until your probation is over with. Just have everything done." I said "That's all I needed. Thank you."

Powell was empowered by the judge's confidence in his ability to manage his schedule, and stay out of trouble for the rest of his probation.

### **School to Prison Pipeline**

Heavily policed neighborhoods and chaotic school environments contributed to the "school to prison pipeline," although this took many forms. All young men interviewed had some experience with law enforcement. For some, the interaction was for a brief time in their lives, and for others, it was either a significant derailment for an otherwise promising young man or a protracted process that started early for young men. Jayson talked about how he felt that being arrested and going to juvenile detention took his life off course when he could have had much better outcomes.

I was...I wasn't doing excellent but I was doing good. 'Cause you know you gotta do good to stay on the sports team. I was doing good. I ain't gonna lie I actually had some John Hopkins University scouts coming looking at me playing lacrosse and I don't know. That's why I was so mad at my mom for like... "You really just messed my life up." I don't know what it would've been like now. I probably could've been in college playing lacrosse or I'd

probably have taken something else up. But I know I'd be in college right now though. (Jayson).

Tyler started having real trouble in the eighth grade, with attendance and suspensions, and making bad friends, but he was not getting into trouble yet.

However, he did get arrested in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and was pulled out of school. He was supposed to be eligible for a GED program, but some type of red tape got in the way.

[The ninth grade] That's when I was locked up. I went to school... they say I don't need to take classes... I wasn't over there that long... I came back... I was going to just... I was in this program called... I forgot the name... it was when I was locked up... Forgot the name of it. Hand in Hand... They were supposed to set me up with some GED programs ... but they said that... they said that I need to wait until I go to court...

The combination of young men smoking marijuana and going to school got them into quite a bit of trouble. Tyler talked about being arrested for possession of marijuana, missing his court date, being arrested again for missing his court date and being charged with trespassing because he was at school, getting locked up for a few weeks each time he was arrested, and still trying to attend classes. He repeated variations on this cycle a few times, due to either having weed himself or being around someone else with weed.

I didn't go to court so they got me for trespassing... On the property at school... And then I went to court and they found out that I had a warrant... So I sat two weeks over there. So then I was going to school but I kept getting locked up... I just kept getting locked up all the time so you know I just get locked up at school, weed, just kept getting locked up with weed... Like if I'm around somebody and they've got weed, they get locked up, they'll just lock all of us up. Just kept getting locked up.

The consequences did not seem that severe to him at the time. He was arrested but went home after two weeks.

Oh first time...no I came home at two weeks though. At two weeks like at first I got out, I came home. But then I got locked up again and they had the

warrant and I got locked up for the weed... I couldn't go home so I did thirty days. Then I came home.

He also continued to have other problems at school, such as fighting.

Yeah I got in fights. Um...I got in fights. Yeah I mean not like that though. Probably once in a while I'd fight somebody. I was usually in class doing my work. I just kept getting locked up so they kicked me out the school and then I started getting older. So yeah... You lose track of time...

He had even been at the Get Ready program once before, and that was interrupted by going to detention, but, "I got locked up... Weed." I asked him, "So this weed is always around?"

I wouldn't even be having the weed! That's what I'm saying. I be around people with...doing weed...and they just lock all of us up... I was only sixteen... Last time I got locked up I was eighteen...

The consequences for having marijuana at school were fairly high. Deon started getting in trouble for fighting in middle school, and he thought that record followed him to high school.

Well I mean...Yeah I think it was more in my middle school. 'Cause in middle school you know they always used to tell me what you do here, doesn't leave when you're leaving middle school. It follows you to high school. We put all that on your record. We give them references and I was a...I was (*inaudible, 0:43:29.9*) middle school...fighting.

He remembered that he started having real problems the first year of high school.

Ninth grade...both of them happened in ninth grade yeah...you know it was just an average day, didn't want to be in school, didn't like the people I was going to school with. Just making poor choices. I would rather chill with my friends all day and do other stuff than do what was needed I guess... actually the guys I got in trouble with, they were in school, we were in the same class, same grade. You know? It was just more like we had the same mentality, you know? It was always...I always had a problem some way, somewhere, somehow. You know? Whether it's inside, family, you know? So...

Deon got suspended for having marijuana at school, and had to go to an alternative school, where he found more trouble.

They sent me...I had um...got sent to the Board of Education. I had to go to... Alternative Center for about two...two or three quarters and then I would be able to return back to my regular school and if I had gotten into any type of trouble there... Yeah they sent me to uh...um...I got banned...I mean suspended to the Board of Education and then I was expelled from the first quarter to the third quarter and I could only go to Catonsville Alternative Center. That's where I was at and it was more...it was a school but it was more of a jail school to say the least. That's what it was to me... They had a dog at the door. You couldn't leave. You know they had dogs at the door. Police was there all the time, security. I guess I was just there with all...all the other crazy people that went there..:

In that environment, Deon made similar bad choices, brought marijuana to school again, and was expelled from the Maryland school system.

I would've said I learned something if I had completed it but no not really 'cause I got put out of there to for the same reason... Well actually it was more of...I was smoking that morning, went to school with some friends, we was... 'cause the guy I had got put out of Owings Mills High School with, they sent us to the same school. We lived in the same apartments, we had the same bus stop, everything. So you know we're still smoking together and all that stuff and I just go to school and I had dropped one of the things...a bag on the floor. And he came and got me.

After getting some guidance from his grandmother, Deon did decide to get his GED right away after his last dismissal.

Robert's story was much shorter.

I just stopped going... It ain't something I wanted to do, it just happened. 'Cause I had...I had got locked up and then I couldn't go back to school 'cause I was too old... I was like seventeen... For uh...having a bag of weed in school?

Demetrius talked about the combination of school problems, arrests for marijuana, and young fatherhood.

And when I got back here it just got worse 'cause I got locked up for that warrant that I had and it just started in and out, in and out, in and out. (*Inaudible*, 0:05:29.6) we lost contact but we still was talking. She was still...I don't think she had the baby yet when I first got out there. She was still pregnant and we was talking. She came down and visited me. (*Inaudible*, 0:05:41.3) came and visited me. She went back. And then (*inaudible*,

0:05:45.4) I got locked up for like six months. And I came home. I came home and stayed home for three or four months. I think I was seventeen. Summer time, 2008. I got locked up again. 2008 I was seventeen. I got locked up again, three months and came home. I got... I went to school. I hurried up and got in school. I went to um... (*Inaudible, 0:06:17.9*). I went there and I got put out of there for fighting a teacher. I don't know (*inaudible, 0:06:27.3*). (Demetrius).

Many of the young men had a history of multiple arrests for marijuana possession. For many of them, their history with law enforcement was a series of arrests, warrants, missed court dates, short periods being locked up, and sporadic stretches of probation.

Many young men were on probation, and were very careful not to smoke because they were being dropped. Deandre's mother was a police officer, so he was even more careful about not smoking, because he knew his probation officer.

Yeah because she grew up with my mother and she knows my mother so she knows me like personally. And I've never... I've never seen that case before. Like somebody knows their probation officer... it's part of my... it's court order so she don't... I really don't get a urine analysis but if it was chosen to be done by the judge, and that's what she (*inaudible, 0:41:16.7*) get me one. Stuff like that.

Jordan also had a history of multiple arrests.

[I have been] Arrested for weed. That's about it. Just weed... Three times... First two times... well the... yeah the first two times I didn't like... I knew I had... the first time I didn't like know I had one on me because it was like... like wasn't even enough for like a joint and they still arrested me for it. It wasn't even enough for a joint. And then the second time they got me. I had this... just got a bag and they pulled me over, searched me, and asked me whether did I have any drugs. I told them no but then after I while I knew they were about to search me... search me so I was like okay yeah I do. About to go to the spot so I might as well tell them look right there... Third time I was in wrong place, wrong time... I was at somebody's house and then they... the house raid and they found marijuana rolled. A lot of weed and... wrong place, wrong time. I got caught up.



He did not get upset when he got arrested, because he was in jail for just one day.

I mean I didn't really care about like...that I was in there 'cause I'm in there now. I can't get out. Like so like I might as well (*inaudible, 0:33:39.3*) get upset...get me mad. Just hope that I can get out... I be out the next day... I made a day far inside the jail to see how it really is. (*Inaudible, 0:35:35.0*) be in the bull pen for what twelve hours or fourteen hours and get released.

However he was on probation, and was finding it to be a lot of work to manage probation, take care of his daughter, and get his GED. However, despite all of that, because his probation officer was not making him do regular drops, he was still smoking marijuana.

I mean I consider that...like that's fine... Oh she [my probation officer] don't know. I just gotta go see her Tuesday and Thursday and go finger print on Wednesday.

I asked him what would happen if he were picked up with weed on him, and he was completely aware of the risk that he was taking, but must have thought it was worth the risk.

I go to jail. I don't come home. Violation of probation...Yeah whatever time that you had on probation you just have to finish it out in jail. That's how it is.

Other young men had been arrested before, but it had been a few years since they smoked weed. Antoine talked about his history with marijuana and the criminal justice system.

I've been In trouble one time when I was younger... I got caught with uh... I was smoking weed, I got caught smoking weed... yeah I got arrested... a couple of hours [in jail]... I was alright, I was good... I drink sometimes when I go out, I don't drink like that... I don't smoke weed now, I got arrested like a couple of years ago... that was a couple of years ago I got arrested...

Some young men quit while they are on probation, and through any subsequent programs that they are involved in, and then start again. Dontae said that

he was in some type of rehab program for 2 or 3 years, but started smoking weed almost as soon as he completed it.

Probably smoked about a couple months after I got off. 'Cause I was still scared... I'm scared I'm gonna be too high... I don't even remember when I got off. I know I just got off though. About last year. Yeah last year.

At the time of the interview, Dontae was still on probation, and getting high a few times a week.

### **Summary**

Against a background of often limited or irrelevant adult support and negative peer connections, chaotic schools and dangerous neighborhoods, young men did identity work and developed strategies to negotiate unsafe environments that either reinforced or began depressive behaviors and symptoms. They frequently utilized avoidance, isolation, and self-medication in attempts to develop and maintain a sense of personal integrity and safety. The avoidant strategies that young men used as short-term solutions became less effective as they contributed to long-term problems. In school, young men avoid classroom work and problems class clowning, but then cut classes, eventually dropping out of school altogether. Young men also utilized avoidant strategies and isolation to keep from interaction with the police. Most, however, were either arrested repeatedly for marijuana related charges, or engaged in high levels of other criminal activity.

## **CHAPTER 6: DEPRESSION AND ANGER OVER TIME**

### **Introduction**

Many young men in this study had histories of perceived abandonment and rejection that made them vulnerable to depression, possibly due to negative core beliefs or maladaptive strategies developed throughout childhood and adolescence. Young men and fathers experienced multiple episodes of major depression, minor depression, and dysthymia; and they expressed distress through depressive language and attributions, as well as through strategies that were developed to navigate unsafe environments and offset emotional distress, such as avoidance and anger. However, strategies that were utilized often provided short term relief from emotional distress, but often triggered or exacerbated depressive symptoms and cycles.

The primary codes utilized for this chapter were the codes for depressive symptoms discussed through as a result of direct inquiry during the interview as well as referenced indirectly by young men and fathers and identified as possible symptoms of depression. Additionally, codes for depressive language and depressive behavior were utilized for this chapter. Some symptoms, language, and behaviors were referenced so frequently by young men and fathers, such as hopelessness, avoidance, and anger, that an attempt was made to consider that behavior not just when it was reference in relation to diagnosed depression, but across interviews to get a better understanding of the variation in context and expression, but also the possible spectrum of depressive experience.

The experience of depression included multiple episodes of major and minor depression, most often with symptoms of sadness, and characterized by fear and

anger. Minor depression was never described as such, but sometimes as feeling down or less severe feelings of unhappiness. Alongside depressive symptoms was evidence of anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Often, young men chose to disclose their feelings to a single trusted confidant or no one at all, and when they were not experiencing their most severe symptoms, were usually stoic and determined to have a positive attitude.

Expression of depression varied with awareness and attitude, but even when young men were circumspect with their feelings, they often revealed negative thought processes, with themes related to depression and other types of emotional distress. Having a positive attitude was so important and prevalent that young men intentionally concealed many negative feelings, both from others and sometimes themselves. However, young men used depressive language and expressed hopelessness, internalized negative messages and incorporated them into their identities.

Strategies that young men developed over time provided them short term relief from emotional distress, but often triggered or exacerbated depressive symptoms and cycles. Young men developed maladaptive strategies, such as avoidance, and to a certain extent, anger, throughout childhood and adolescence, but often were unable to curtail those strategies as they became increasingly ineffective and self-defeating. Instead, young men either continued with failed strategies or attributed negative consequences to personal character flaws. Anger was also closely associated with depression for some young men, particularly in childhood, but not for others.

## **Experience of Depression and Emotional Distress**

There are multiple types of depressive disorders, including minor depression, dysthymia, and major depression, and many individuals suffer from combinations of disorders that express differently over time, sometimes starting quite early in life. For example, it is not uncommon for people to have what is known as double depression, which is having dysthymic disorder with episodes of major depression. In the general population, very few individuals will suffer from just one form of depressive disorder, as episodes of minor depression or periods of dysthymia make it much more likely that an individual will later experience at least one episode of major depression. Approximately one quarter of the young men and fathers in this study reported a history of diagnosed major depression or symptoms consistent with major depression, and another quarter talked about a cycle of psychiatric distress over time. Some of them were generally happy, but were prone to both minor and major depressive episodes at different times in their lives.

### **History of Diagnosed Depression**

Several young men in this study had a history of diagnosed depression, and could recall suffering from depression at multiple points in their lives. Young men and fathers talked about depression triggered a variety of stressors, such as school transition or unemployment, and most often associated with isolation or anger. All young men had repeating patterns of depressive cognitions, interfacing with how they saw themselves over time.

It was not unusual for young men to experience depressive thinking or an episode of major depression transitioning to middle school or high school, and then

minor depression and depressive thinking periodically through adolescence and young adulthood. Nathan described experiencing his first episode of major depression during his freshman year of high school. He had been looking forward to high school, and when it turned out to be a different experience than he had imagined it would be, he had a hard time managing his feelings of disappointment.

I was going through a lot starting in high school and family and friends and everything. It just made me depressed. And just everything didn't turn out how I thought it would be like. Like high school I thought high school would be so fun and so "Yeah it's high school!"

On a typical day felt like when Nathan was depressed, he did not want to be around other people, and tried to isolate.

It was kind of normal but I wasn't myself. Like myself, anybody will tell you, "[Nathan] is so funny," or, "He's always happy." I was down when I started school... Um...I didn't want to be around people.

It was like I didn't...I didn't want to be around a big group of people. I would... hook school and be home by myself all day. Or I would leave the school and I'd be with my best friend. And...or my best friends and one of my other friends who we were really close...and it would be just us three and we'd just be there...and I was actually okay there. I'm still...I was still depressed but I didn't show it to them but I was okay with that.

Nathan experienced feelings of constant sadness. Fortunately, Nathan was close with his aunt, and she encouraged him to get some therapy to help.

I kept feeling sad all the time and I told my aunt. Me and her are kind of close so I don't really talk to nobody else and she got me signed up for a therapist. Nobody else knew. Until my biological mother had to sign the paperwork. She said "Why you going to a therapist?" But I didn't tell her. Didn't want her to know. I didn't tell nobody. But my aunt just made me, kind of say, I wanted to go to therapist. 'Cause I thought it was sad that a fourteen year old...like, why am I, this age should be happy.

He had thoughts of suicide, and so his therapist had him hospitalized. Hospitalization was frightening, but he learned that he was not alone.

I was always sad. I actually did think about committing suicide at that age... and I told my therapist that so they sent me to some type of center where I had to stay for a week. That was an experience... 'cause I was there and I was actually there with people who actually tried to kill themselves. I didn't try, I just said I thought about it and I got sent there but I was actually there with people who actually... I seen cut on their wrists and that... it made me think like "Okay they can live and they tried." So they must have been worse off than me and if they are dealing with it, I can deal with whatever I'm going through.

The hospitalization was overwhelming, but did spur him to work with his therapist to feel better.

And I went to him and I started talking to him and he made me write journals. Write things down... and it... it worked. Especially after being in that place for week. I was so scared... I really was, it was creepy there...

Depression is often experienced episodically, with periods of minor depression, and more intense times of major depression. Nathan recalled his first and most acute episode of major depression with ease, but could not remember all of the details surrounding the resolution of the depression or termination of therapy.

...I ended up getting a therapist and I forgot what happened... I don't know. And I stopped going but he was okay... That was the most major time I could remember 'cause a lot took place at that age... as far as like family issues, school issues, personal issues with myself.

He changed schools more than once and worked on his attitude. Nathan talked about isolating himself for most of his ninth grade year to avoid trouble in his new school, and ended up not meeting anyone or making any new friends

... school wasn't the best for me my first year, I had to move from like three different schools... I wanted to be everybody's friend and be cool with everyone. And it didn't work out that way...

Nathan came through that episode of major depression, but also described several subsequent episodes which included depressive thought processes as well as avoidant behavior and possible minor depression. Nathan described situations in which he started something, found he did not enjoy it, and then stopped, or that he did enjoy it, but some element of it was problematic enough to trigger avoidance in him. For example, as an adolescent, Nathan signed up for modeling classes with another friend of his.

...when I was younger I...wanted to go to go to modeling school and my mother paid for it and I quit. ...There's a lot of stuff...

I don't know, I had a ride every week where you had to go. I actually enjoyed it. But I think...I don't know. I guess, nobody really said nothing to me. I wasn't as skinny or as little as everyone else. I was more muscular built. I'm kind of more built than everybody else there but um...of course they were gonna give me some criticism 'cause they say that's how the modeling profession is 'cause they're gonna criticize you for everything...

Nathan knew that knew intuitively after starting the classes that he did not have the body type for professional modeling work, but was unable to connect that to his desire to quit, or reframe it as a learning experience.

I was aware of that, but I really don't know why I actually say I wanted to quit. Like I think I don't know if I got...I'm pretty sure it's something but I know like... I got tired of doing it, and my mom was like, 'Well I'm not gonna continue to pay for it if you don't want to go.' So I stopped that ...

He did not recognize perfectionism and avoidance are often a part of the depressive cycle, and that it was normal to quit doing something that one does not like.

I don't know. I don't know if I'm afraid of failure. I...I don't wanna...I don't like failing at things... I don't like failing at things. I don't wanna start something...and I do have a habit of quitting things I start. And I don't wanna pay to go to school again and then quit. So I'm scared to start school because I'm afraid I'm gonna quit. Because of just my past and how I know I quit some things...



He internalized depressive cognitions and symptoms as identity, called himself a quitter, and selectively reframed other things that he did not continue with that lense, “Started school the first time, I quit. Started Job Corps, I quit.”

Some young men were not diagnosed with major depression until young adulthood, although they may have been dealing with it for many years. Cristofer was 22 years old, and sought treatment for the first time last year, although he said that he had been suffering from what he described as depression, and according to DSM-IV criteria, might be considered minor depression, characterized by anger and sadness, since he was a child. I asked him how he got involved with outpatient treatment, and he said he was feeling suicidal.

Because going through depression, and I’m having thoughts about suicide and things like that in my mind.

He was hospitalized for several days and then started getting outpatient services, getting treatment from a therapist and a psychiatrist.

Well like I set two appointments, one for the therapist, one for the actual doctors who prescribe my medicine... Zoloft... I just found it. Like, I took like a year. I just stop taking it, and I just started feeling depressed. I just started two weeks ago.

Cristofer stopped seeing his doctors and taking the medication, because he was busy, and started feeling better, but returned to outpatient treatment two weeks prior to the interview, and was taking anti-depressants again.

Got back in the mood... I thought everything was going well. But just when my mood was every day was still the same, I just stopped.

Cristofer described feeling like he was not doing what he wanted to be doing, and that he was not doing anything for a better future.

When I get in the moment, I feel on the ground. Like... I have nothing to look up to, I have nobody to look up to. And I think about the future and when I get there, I still don't want to be where I'm at now. You know? I think about a lot of things and it just brings me down when I think about it, because I'm not doing nothing for it now, so you know, that's what's really bringing me down.

This sense of disappointment in himself was surprising, and in keeping with the cognitive theory of depression. Cristofer had a high school diploma, and was taking classes at the local community college, and so to an observer, looked as if he was doing exactly what he should be doing at that age. Cristofer said that he did nothing when he was feeling down, "If I'm feeling down, I don't do nothing. Only nothing, just stay in the house." However, he did go to class, and showed up at work when he was employed.

Although Cristofer realized in hindsight that he has suffered from depression his whole life, it was hard for him to recognize, because there were many times when he was happy: playing sports, graduating from high school, or working and taking care of his son.

Well I guess with me... like when I was in high school, when I was on the football team or baseball team, that's what I wanted to do. You know? But I go... twelfth grade...I didn't play because my grades weren't good. So I got a job working at FedEx and I felt good about myself 'cause I was going to school, I was working. And graduated really felt good. I just got to just...me being employed that makes me...gonna make me happy. Really makes me happy 'cause like I said I wanted the best for myself and for [my son]. That's all I want.

When Cristofer's sense of identity as an athlete and then a provider were being reinforced by positive events in his life he was happy. When those things were threatened, he was unable to attribute negative events to external and unstable causes. For example, he said what triggered the thinking and the mood was stress from his relationship with the mother of his 2 year old son, and not having a job. However,

when he described that scenario, what seemed to be most upsetting to him was the assumption that he and his partner would never be able to get ahead of their bills.

Basically... it's just relationship and job... like really a lot, 'cause the reason why I stopped going 'cause I did have a job, it wasn't stable, but I did have a job and you know, still we're still struggling but we still have money to do little things when...go out and things like that, pay some bills. But now I'm back to payin' nothing. Back to square one, all over again.

Cristofer had a cycle of depression that seemed to have been steadily gaining momentum ever since childhood, but was hard for him to recognize as depression until feelings of sadness and suicidality shifted from episodes triggered by anger to an unrelenting mood.

Taye also had a history of major depression associated with anger, but grounded in abandonment. He was medicated for a full year at age 15, shortly after he moved from foster care with his aunt to a group home. He described depression for himself as anger, but quiet anger.

And when I get depressed like for real for real I don't be on no ready to hurt somebody or hurt myself. I just be going through it for real. I be angry. And like if somebody, you feel me, step in between that when I be thinking about what I be thinking about and bother me in my little zone, I just get . . . I don't know how to explain it.

However, as painful as depression was for Taye, he tried to keep it to himself, even when he was angry.

I never really, I never really physically hurt nobody off of the depression. The thoughts I be have'n, I never hurt nobody, nothing like that.

It was important to him to be stoic, and he thought of himself as getting through a war.

That's why I be like, I'm a soldier, for real for real. And even though the struggle that I'm in, I still maintain. A lot of people like say for instance prime example me right here, you would have never knew half of the stuff that you

knew right now unless I open up and told you, right or wrong, that's how I feel that. A lot of people don't even know my situation.

Even though he knew he had been through some difficult things, he tried hard to have a positive attitude, be grateful, and stay focused.

A lot of people situation way worse than mine for real for real. I can't really complain I just thank got that he wake me up each and every day, I see another day for real for real. I'm blessed for that. And as the day go on I'm just trying to better myself any way I can. I'm trying to find a job. I'm trying to complete this GED, that's my main focus as of right now for real for real.

It was easy to see why Taye needed to be focused on the positive things in his life, because when he did not, he was susceptible to briefer moments of depression, although he was not sure what triggered them.

It's just sometimes like I'm just in the house laying down on the bed or something, thinking about different stuff and I think about my mother and my sisters and them like. Damn, why me for real for real? I get real upset for real for real. You know I just come around it. But just offa me just thinking about certain stuff for real for real I can get real depressed. Real mad. Angry. Then I just calm down all of the sudden. Then I just calm down.

He also talked about wanting to achieve his goals in order to feel complete.

Sometimes I don't feel whole. I said that before. I don't always feel whole for real for real. Sometimes I get over it. And some days it just takes over me for real for real. But like I said though--

He talked about this feeling in a little more detail, but did not connect it with depression.

I just had me down, like I don't feel like doing nothing. I don't feel like being bugged. I probably just stay in my room all day. Come out just to eat. You feel me? Just sleep in all day. It don't happen to me too often. That don't happen too often. But sometimes it do happen. I feel down.

These feelings were triggered by situations where he needed money or specific assistance from his parents, and he re-lived his early experiences of abandonment and rejection.

Like I ain't got no money... I ain't gonna say money rule everything but you ain't got no money, you feel me, you ain't got nothing. So a certain day... I had needed my ID when I came home... I ain't had no money. And I was talking to this manager and she's like, "Bring your ID in, down at McDonalds on Calvert Street... and we can talk from there." And I wanted to get my ID that week and I couldn't get it til the following week, till my mother had sent the money. Cuz my mother live in South Carolina. And my father, he live up here, but I barely, barely know him...

But I couldn't get my ID and I just felt so – I was mad. And then from that situation it just led, I didn't want to – just lead me to think about my mother and father and think about how things could have been different if they was here. Would I be going through this situation as of right now if they was here?

That was just one example of a time that Taye needed help with something that ordinarily one's parents might handle.

Often, young men's depression was experienced as raw, angry pain, rather than quiet sadness. The best example of this was Aaron, who was moved from home to home in the foster care system and systematically bullied in school:

I know what the fuck pain is. People could look at me and say "I understand. I know where you've been." Like, "No bitch. You don't. You have no fucking idea." You have no fucking idea. That's a burner for me. You know for someone to say, "I know what you've been through." Bitch please, get the fuck...that makes me want to...that makes me wanna just...just go somewhere. You have no idea who the hell I am. Period...You know to know that so many sick people out there...and to know that so many sick people did so many sick things to me and I know what pain is.

Despite everything that Aaron had been through, what triggered his rages, as well as feelings of hopelessness, was feeling unsafe in school. He tried to isolate himself from other students with crazy rages.

I used to be hopeless in high school. You know 'cause it was like I always thought...I always woke up like "Alright I'm gonna go to school. I'm gonna do this work. My teachers are gonna you know make sure I'm safe. Students ain't gonna bother me today 'cause they're seeing what I did on Friday." You know and they didn't care what I did on Friday 'cause they know they could do something better on Monday.

Unfortunately, the rages did not work, and he ended up feeling even more unsafe and alone.

That's when I began to get hopeless is when, you know, my zap outs and, you know, my craziness wasn't enough to scare off, you know, the vultures. It wasn't enough to scare 'em off so that's when I was "Okay you know it's no purpose in going back." Those kids ain't never gonna let me finish. Teachers ain't gonna help me finish. And I was going through a lot of mental issues whereas though no therapist really understood. They just thought they knew and that's what pissed me off and why I didn't go back to therapy.

Aaron did not really connect the rage with his depression, although he acknowledged that he thought some of the sadness of depression would always be with him.

As far as depression, yeah that's...that's been a part of my life. And it probably will always be a part of my life... it's not erased right now you know? But I'm definitely working on it. It's not erased though. You know I do get sad. I do cry myself to sleep sometimes. And that's why I smoke cigarettes. You know but I don't get depressed that often. I don't ever get into the point whereas though I'm like (*makes sad noise*) you know? I don't get that way anymore. I might get you know down a little bit, might get sad a little bit but I ain't...I ain't fittin' to cry and cut myself. To hell with that.

Aaron was not depressed at the time of interview; he was feeling positive, energized, and determined, but he acknowledged the nature of depression for him was that he would always be vulnerable to it – he was just determined not to hurt himself anymore when he was sad or angry.

### **I Just Don't Tell Nobody**

There were multiple young men who were either unable to articulate feelings of depression or chose not to talk about them. However, sadness or a depressed mood

observed by an outsider can also indicate depression, and there were several young men who did not say they were depressed, but appeared distressed, talked about histories of despair, and admitted sadness and hopelessness when asked.

Tony was sad and talked about disappointment with himself and fear about his future after pleading guilty to a criminal charge that would now be on his record.

I mean it's upsetting. It's upsetting but I made the decision right there in the court room. I dealt with it right there... it's called copping out. That's what you call it, copping out... pleading guilty for something that you know you probably could be copped out. It's like *(long pause)*...it's like quitting. It's like backing down from a fight, not taking it to trial, makes you feel bad at first but then you get over it once you out of jail, once you home... at least I'm home.

He felt like he had quit, and at first he acted as if he was fine with that, because it meant that he got to go home. But his expression during that conversation was so sad, that I asked him about it, and he said that he was actually upset that it would now follow him as a permanent mark on his record. He also used negative distortion to characterize the event, stating that he messed his "whole" life up, not just a part of it, or that the impact would be felt for a limited period of time.

I: How do you feel about having to deal with it? R: Like dealing with it.

I: I don't know. I see you talking about it and your eyes get a little bit sad.

R: Yeah 'cause I mean it's on my record like... what can I do now? It's nothing I can do now. Like messed my whole life all up...so...so that's why you could say I'm here. I messed my life up.

Additionally, assigning stability, his whole life, to a negative event, being convicted for a crime, left him feeling hopeless and sad.

Depression is often comorbid with other mental illnesses that sometimes even mask the depression itself. One of the reasons that Tony did not talk about the

sadness was probably his stress and high levels of anxiety about his sentencing date in a few weeks. Tony also talked about possible symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, including insomnia that seemed to be caused by nightmares.

I have nightmares, and at night, like, I never get too much sleep. I'm so... I forgot what it's like to really sleep 'cause all those years I was drinking, I wasn't sleeping, I was passed out. And then now since I'm sober, and I'm really falling asleep, I don't like my dreams. I be havin' dreams every night, having dreams like I'm in gun fights, having a dream I was in a knife fight, dream something happened to my mother, dream something happened to my grandmother, every last night. Recently I had a dream it was the end of the world, four horsemen came down, it was crazy, crazy. So I don't even want to go to sleep like that. Like I go to sleep like two or three in the morning and I be up by six.

The nightmares interfered with Tony's sleep and could have contributed to feelings of depression and fatigue as well.

Criminal behavior was sometimes avoidant and masked depression as well.

Demetrius was in a gang, and had an extensive criminal history, and again, had to be asked not about what he was saying, but the look on his face when he was saying it. Most of the time, he was so busy and involved with the gang that he was completely removed from his family, but when he did go home, he found that he missed them and was envious of the path he saw other family members taking.

I: I hear you saying that you've been through a lot of stuff... a lot of stuff... I know you've been sad about it, I can see it in your face. Have you ever felt hopeless or depressed about it?

R: I don't know about being depressed but hopeless yeah I've been hopeless... Like when I was a gang member, and I was gangbanging... I be out there with the people that's in the gang with me and I wouldn't care, I be, "This is what it is... we're out here, this is what we're doing, this is who I am." When I go home, and I see my cousins and my brothers and my sisters and they're doing good, I want to do good too. I want to 'cause I want my mother to be happy and I want her to be happy for me. And I want to make her happy but I never do it so I feel like "What the fuck" I really am gonna be (*inaudible*, 0:47:36.6), but it's what it is so I get mad and I leave out. And I



just say “Fuck it man, this is what it is.” And I give up like all the dreams I have, I give up. All of them. Who even cares about them anymore? School, nothing.

As Demetrius found that the gang member identity he had taken on was not what he really wanted because rest of his family is not involved in that life and did not approve, he began to feel hopeless. He used all or nothing language when he described “never” being able to make to his mother happy, and said that he gave up on “all” of his dreams. This made him feel hopeless, because he attributed his disappointment and anger to stable and internal causes.

Demetrius also started to become preoccupied with thoughts about death, and to a certain extent the inevitability of his own death. He talked about getting shot, and remembering knowing it was going to happen during the time period beforehand.

I remember one time I really thought I was gonna die right?... Because like it was a lot of beef in our neighborhood, and it was a lot of lies going around about a lot of people and it just...it felt like I was about to go like it was my time. Because the situations I was putting in and a lot of predicaments I had, it wasn't good.

He had a dream about getting shot two days before it happened.

I had a dream about it... I was just sitting in the car and I was sitting back... and I looked. I was the only one in the back seat and I just looked and I see there was two people in the front, two in the back. I'm just look like “What the fuck? What the fuck about to happen?” Soon as I see it, we stepped off, and I got shot up around me. I got shot four times. But I only got shot in my leg and the first few times he shot me... I pushed up and I reached and he shot me again and then my homeboy grabbed me and kept shooting.

This was not an irrational fear, but his treatment of the situation as inevitable could be considered by some to be a distortion of reality, and just as much a reflection of his own depression, anxiety, and PTSD, as the reality of the situation. When he was not dreaming, he was walking around on edge.

Something wasn't feeling in my stomach like...like I knew something was about to happen... I was at my aunt's house... and I'm just around my family and I just felt sad though. Like I just felt real sad like I'm about to leave and this is the last time being with my family.

I went upstairs to go to sleep and my mother told me I was crying in my sleep. I woke up and I had tears on my face... I didn't dream though... But she woke me up 'cause she said I was crying in my sleep. And that whole day I just felt like "Damn what the fuck." I just kept saying "What the fuck, what's about to happen?" I couldn't shake the feeling that something was about to happen to me. It was just... it was just covering my whole body... you know how you get the shivers or something? It was just like that and I couldn't shake it. I was just annoyed. I was annoyed and I was nervous as I've ever been in my life... I stopped having my little cousins walk with me and everything. I stopped having them around me. I just couldn't shake the feeling that something was about to happen. And then I got shot and I got shot out. I got shot out.

It is easy to dismiss Demetrius's description of the day as a natural and inevitable response to a violent lifestyle, but also easy to see how the anxiety and depression may have been paralyzing him and preventing him from possibly taking steps to protect himself or disarm the situation.

In addition to prolonged feelings of sadness and cycles of hopelessness, depression was described as a much shorter period of intense despair. In contrast to Nathan and Cristofer, who had prolonged periods of feeling suicidal, Vaughen talked about feeling suicidal and almost taking his own life just six months prior to our interview.

One time I been depressed... had a gun locked and loaded about to pull the trigger, but I stopped and I thought...I had a gun in my hand ready to pull the trigger quick. I really thought about it like if I left...if I took my life right now, what kind of person would I be?

Although the moment was intense, and seemed to pass quickly, pressures from school, work, his romantic life and peers happened over time, but coalesced in a short period. Vaughen had a job working part time as a janitor at his school, which seemed

convenient and smart, but when he had problems, he had no place to go to get away from them.

School and work. School and work... Like working there and being a student there and having a girl that I liked there... teachers bugging me, the principal's bugging me. That kind of shook me up, and me and my grandparents we had a little argument and they kind of got involved in it, and my friend fighting... One of my friends beat the crap out of one of my friends so we actually all was friends but he just beat the crap out of him. And we couldn't...he's complaining to me like "Man are you gonna be his friend or my friend?" ... Just because y'all fight doesn't mean I shouldn't be his friend.

Vaughen was so conflicted and pressured in several areas at once that he could not generate a good solution to his problems.

That's what kind of triggered my mind and I couldn't think. My brain couldn't...I couldn't think right after. I couldn't think correctly. I was too...I was too clogged with all the problems I had. And I say you know what, I'm going to take the easy way out. Loaded the gun up, put it to my head. I said, you know what? I'm not gonna pull this trigger. 'Cause I know I can get better. I can get through this without a bullet. I can really get through this. Put that gun down and I go back to normal, put that gun way over there.

Vaughen got through the actual moment of despair with belief in himself, and a recognition that his thinking was distorted in that moment, but he was still stressed by the incident. However, he did not share the details of it with anyone, he just told a friend that he was having a bad day. The friend must have known that something serious was going on with Vaughen, because he told him to pray.

And how I got that off my mind? Next day I went out to eat with my family. I was quiet. And my friend asked me what was wrong...I told him I was having a bad day. That's the only thing I told him. He told me I was going to be alright. And he told me to just pray. And I prayed.

At the time of the interview, Vaughen summarized what may or may not have been years of stress, into a single moment of passing despair, which he then dealt with by praying.

There were several other depressive symptoms that young men talked about, both young men with a previous diagnosis or who appeared to meet the criteria for major depression, but also young men who appeared to meet criteria for minor depression, dysthymia, or who expressed general psychiatric distress through intense anger or violence.

Having a positive attitude and disposition was very important to most of the young men, and as a result, many of them tried to keep any negative feelings to themselves. They tried to maintain a positive attitude and show a positive disposition, but when asked directly about hopelessness, sometimes they talked about it. Vaughn was fairly positive overall, but when I asked him about hopelessness, he said he felt hopeless every day; he just tried not to let it get to him.

I felt hopeless when um...well I still do feel that a little bit, but I don't let it get to me, like make me do something crazy. Like mentally every day I feel hopeless I just don't show it...or I just don't tell nobody but I'll tell you. I feel hopeless.

Monte could not identify feelings of depression because he projected a happy image by always smiling. When I asked Monte if he ever felt hopeless or depressed, he could not answer, because he kept those feelings concealed.

Hm...I can't really say... 'cause I'm always smiling. That's one thing somebody can't say. I'm always smiling. Wherever...if I'm having a bad day or not, you won't never know 'cause I'm smiling.

Monte went on to say that he might look happy on the outside, but felt stressed and unhappy on the inside, particularly with his current busy schedule.

I can look like I'm happy...I can be happy, but inside it's hot. I've gotta take care of my daughter. She wake up in the middle of the night and then I wake up and go see my PO then when she want me to go look for a job then I gotta do this and I gotta do that. I just be tired. So I...like a...like an average adult that work two or three jobs. That's how I consider myself but I'm not

working. So...but I'm taking care of my responsibilities but...except for that main key...that work. My main (*inaudible, 0:34:51.2*) GED first, then work. But I would like to work and GED 'cause I got a family to take care of too.

Similarly, Antoine talked about always smiling, whether he was happy or not.

When everything is going right, that's when I gonna be happy, I'll smile, but I'ma smile anyway when I feel or not, when I feeling good on the inside, everything is going right, my family good, everything...

Part of what made this particularly poignant, is that Antoine could not remember the last time he actually felt happy.

I: Do you remember the last time you felt like really good, really happy really content? Can you tell me about that? R: Happy? Content? I: Do you remember a particular day or event? R: Not really, for real, I don't know like, I can't really tell you, I would have to really really think about it. I don't know.

Many young men said that they never felt hopeless or depressed, although some were unable to identify those feelings even for themselves. Even when young men were sad, they might just seem a little down.

I mean, if I'm sad, I don't really bring tears to my eyes. I'm just depressed. My head's down. (Eric)

Major depressive episodes were characterized in these young men with sadness that they either talked about or was visible in their expressions, and they would usually articulate when asked. Depressive episodes were triggered frequently by fear, and sometimes anger. Descriptions of depressive episodes were also often strewn with descriptors of signs of comorbid anxiety and PTSD.

### **Expression of Depression and Emotional Distress**

Young men and young fathers who were unwilling or unable to identify and label depression and other distress often expressed emotional pain through depressive thinking and behavior. Two areas of the cognitive model of depression that emerged

consistently in this data were young men's tendencies to use depressive language reflecting common distortions and their experience of hopelessness through depressive attributions.

### **The Cognitive Model**

Depressive cognitions in young men included cognitive distortions, similar to those outlined by Dr. Burns, but also many stories of hopelessness, laid out over time, with young men's degree of sadness related both to attribution, and probable post-traumatic stress disorder. Some examples of depressive language are cognitive distortion. They are called cognitive distortions, because they are thoughts that individuals express about themselves, others, or the world that are based on the truth, but either exaggerated or filtered in such a way the perspective is removed and the remaining thought is negative. However, cognitive distortions can be subtle, and they are thought to be based on individuals' core beliefs or schemas. Young men did not use a lot of depressive language, but some did, and often in conjunction with another depressive symptom, both with minor and major depression. Young men used should and could language, all or nothing language, and some used an attributional style that may have been depressive as well.

**Depressive language.** Multiple young men used "should language," which means they describe things that they think they should be doing or situations in which they should be, when this is not necessarily the case. Sean exhibited symptoms of minor depression, and used should language around having a place of his own and a car, particularly a car, because he wanted one, and thought he should have one,

because his cousin did. Researchers might also call this entitlement, a sub-construct known to be related to depression.

I think I *should* have my own spot and I *should* have my own car, like I *should* have more ... like my little cousin... he got a whip even though he lives with his mama but he still got a whip. Like, I don't even got my permit. Like I don't even ever go take the test or nothing and that's something I've been procrastinating on, my permit.

Sean, like many young men, thought that he should have certain things, such as a car and his own place, based on his age, but not really on what might be realistic for a young man with no job. Many young men attached should language to employment, and how their judgment of where they should be developmentally.

I feel like I *should* be...I *should* be doing better like for my age. I just...I just was living by myself like before January now I'm living with my aunt. I need my own spot. I need to be my own person yeah.

Often young men used the word could as a variation on should. This was very subtle, but was notable for Nathan because he had a history of major depression. Nathan talked about how he could be doing better, because he believed himself to be capable of anything, but he did not specify anything in particular, which set him up for failure.

I'm not doing as much as I probably *could*, but as far as who I've grown up to be and what I've been taught... so far in my life, I'm okay with myself... As far as like my potential or...more...where I could be further in my life. Not saying it's going to be so much greater... but I just could be doing more... Knowing my potential...I know I'm capable of...what I can do...I'm really capable of doing whatever I put my mind to it's just the fact that I haven't made myself more...pushing myself enough to go get the things I want out of my life so far.

Taken at face value, it seemed like a positive message, to keep pushing himself, but leaving it open ended, with no specific goals, also meant that Nathan had the potential to let himself down, almost every day.

Cognitive distortions or negative cognitions are theorized to be based on core beliefs that individuals hold. Nathan was informally adopted by a family friend when he was an infant, and he talked about feeling like that meant he was not good enough, and wanting recognition from others all the time.

I guess when I was younger I probably can remember thinking that I wasn't good enough for my mother to keep me so I guess... whoever's around me they've got to see that I'm good enough. I guess that's something that I have to deal with. But I guess I just wanted people to see me as like...I'm good enough - he's okay. Things like that. I think seek acceptance maybe from people that matter in my life. 'Cause... I wouldn't even care but as far as like family and friends, I just want them to accept me for who I am and things like that so...

Nathan wanted to be valued and to know that he was special to the people who were special to him, and he connected that at an early age to the idea that he had to do or be something special. Young men got the idea that they could do anything from school, church, and the older people in their lives. Nathan said that he had heard it from multiple sources.

From school or church or wherever may be. Just growing up I heard it a lot. "You can do anything you want to do as long as you stick your mind to it," Grandma say. Or Aunts or old...it's normally elderly people who tell you ... "You can do anything you want to do when you grow up." Or something like that... and I believe it so yeah.

But then I asked him why he believed it to be true, and his examples were not from his immediate experience or the people around him, but television:

I seen some things I do where people, like, not even people that I know, but stories I see on TV...person wanted to do something and they accomplished it. All they did was put their minds on it and work hard enough for it, but that's why I think I believe it. 'Cause I see some proof so yeah I think it's possible...if it's possible for them, why should I be any different? So...yeah.

Nathan said that he was inspired by people and things that he saw on television, but it seemed to actually discourage him, and made him feel that he was not doing enough.



He stated that there was more that he could be doing in every area of his life: school, work, and family.

I mean I'm not doing everything I could possibly be doing... Well there's school or working or ... or even just being more of a family person or just being an all around better person. Just doing things that I need to do for me, my family...being there for my family, being a good family person, working, school, getting an education just living life the right way as you want to... the right way.

When Nathan talked about the right way, he did not have a clear idea of what that meant. He talked about trying to follow society's rules in order to live up to an undefined ideal, but also seemed somewhat conscious of not wanting to do just what society dictates. He was unable to clarify exactly what he should be doing, but he summarized by stating that he was not doing it.

'Cause there not been proved any right way but just living life the way maybe society tells you to live it? Not really following society's rules but as far as like job and family and being a family man and doing work, going out making money, supporting yourself and your family whether it's like your wife or kids, or mother or father. Something like that so as far as that I'm not doing that to my full potential.

Now the list of things he could be doing has gotten much longer, and the standard as "societal" as judged by television, at best, ambiguous, and at worst, unrealistically high. And yet Nathan has not just used this standard as a positive message, but as a means of judging himself when he used the word could.

In contrast, Martin used the things he saw on television as an alternative vision to the life in which he grew up. He saw different lifestyles as choices, which may or may not have been accurate, but he did not feel bad about himself when he did not always pursue the "sitcom" life.

Like I want to settle, I want to have a regular...like the life they paint for you on TV. Go to work, come home, sleep with your family. At the same time,

that's not what I'm used to. That's not what I've seen growing up. I'm used to you know, I never knew my father, but my mother always had boyfriends. So the guys that would come in, even when they would come in, they were in and out you know? And I knew they were selling drugs, they weren't just coming and leaving to hurt my mother's feelings. It was what they needed to do to provide for us... So it was like, being around a bunch of hustlers, people who's always going and getting...

Martin talked multiple times about the challenge of trying to live in two worlds, but he did not impose those constraints on himself.

Should language was not always explicit; sometimes it was implied, reflecting the contrast between personal expectations and reality. Tony and I talked about how he liked to write rap songs sometimes about stressful situations he has been in and violence that he has seen, and I asked if he had ever thought about that as a career path. He said yes, but then surprised me by talking about being disappointed in his aspirations to be a rapper, and opportunities that he felt he squandered as a kid.

I wanted to be a rapper... That's it. That's it. That's all I wanted to be and it's terrible 'cause I had so much other stuff around me. I'd have been places and everything. Like my mother took me to Disney World... I had Make-a-Wish foundation 'cause of my Crohn's disease... Cleveland, Rock N Roll Hall of Fame... all the wrestlers and all of that - when I was younger wrestling was my thing. I've been places. I haven't just lived in the city. I've been in the county, I've been around... and everything. So it's crazy that that's all I ever wanted to be...

I: I still see like a look on your face like it's a little bit sad. R: It is sad! It is sad. It is 'cause I'm not proud of it. I'm not proud of it but I'm just trying to be truthful. It just is what it is.

It seemed natural to me that a kid growing up in the city might have had dreams of a rapper, but Tony was in a dark place the day of the interview, and this was clearly reflected in his disappointment in himself, and his ideas that he "should" have wanted or aspired to something else for himself.

Classic all or nothing language is to say that you are the worst at something, when you might only be limited at it. Young men in this study engaged in several variations that usually involved extreme language such as “always” or “nothing” accompanied by a depressive affect and symptoms, such as fatigue or anger. For example, when Powell moved from the county to the city, he was supposed to transfer back into the city schools. I asked him about this and he stated, “I mean I tried a couple times but *it was always something*.” Always something refers to a few negotiable obstacles, that would be inherent in a school transfer, but Powell’s use of it is an indicator that he found the process to be insurmountable and exhausting in the moment. He used this type of language when he uses the word everything about anger as well:

As far as like my anger and all. Like I used to hold *everything* in. I was never really the type to get mad and take it out or this and this and this and that. I just like *hold it all in* and it like build up. Then I start realizing that’s not good ‘cause sometimes I spaz on other people ‘cause I got so much in me.

He could have said that he held *some* things in, but instead he says he held everything, which seems like quite a bit more work. He talked about how much work it was:

Like it’s a lot of things that used to tip me off...like for one, I don’t like people talking to me any kind of way ‘cause I don’t talk to people in any kind of way. I respect them... for example like if we was sitting here talking and you said something that disrespected me or something that I wouldn’t say back is disrespect, I probably be like... And I just take it in. And eventually it all adds up and keeps add and adding up and I just spaz.

Powell used similar language when he said he “doesn’t play *none*” of that, and he would not “allow” certain things. He talked more about the type of things that got him upset, and used the word none to describe what level of disrespect he could

tolerate, towards him personally, or just in general. Then he used the word allow, another word that set him up for an intolerable situation.

I mean it's a lot of things people like to say... I look at stuff a lot different like how people treat females and talk around their mothers...people's parents and kids and all, like, *I don't play none of that*...people cussing at people's kids and hitting whatever...You feeling me? Like I was never the type that would sit around and *just allow it*. I wouldn't just sit around and *allow* it. Like somebody cussing at somebody's child or something I get mad, probably say something to them. Then we get into it or something...

Young men were required to be more mature and patient than some of the teachers and administrators in their schools before they had learned to deal with their emotions.

I had gotten suspended once out there...the teacher got into it 'cause uh...somebody was in the class was playing... They said something... teacher come over there and then this and that or whatever. So I'm... I don't have nothing, I ain't messing with you...this and that. So I'm going to my locker...this was at the end of the day, I'm going to my locker. As soon as my locker, I stick my hand in, like he push the door shut and I pulled my hand back. And after that me and him got into an altercation or whatever. And after that I ended up getting suspended for ten days then I had to go up to the school board, came back.

Powell told the story of repeated suspensions from school, and despite having worked on his anger quite a bit since then, still used depressive language:

I was just like...*I ain't putting up with that*... Me and the teacher. I mean 'cause my attitude did used to be bad but like I used to hold a lot in and control myself instead of letting it out I used to hold everything in. And that's when I got fed up with it...

Powell also used all or nothing language when he talked about breaking away from his family, and coming to terms with independence.

'Cause one thing about it I already know, *ain't nothing free...ain't nothing free*. I don't care if you family or what. Like nowadays, *ain't nothing free*. *Ain't nothing free*, family or not. They raised you. They had you but at the end of the day, they still want their money. Still got stuff to do. So I can respect that and I do help him out but eventually a person gets tired of all that. Not

saying I get tired of helping you pay bills or do this or nothing but like same stuff over and over.

Powell found his family to be tiring and was working hard to become independent.

Young men and fathers also frequently used all or nothing language when they were feeling hopeless. Cristofer described how he felt when he was depressed. In addition to feeling hopeless, he used extreme language to describe his feelings.

Just hopeless, I keep thinking about like, *nothing* going on. I'm here for *nothing*. I'm always down, crying. And just feeling like *nobody*.

Part of feeling hopeless and depressed for young men, and in general, was the belief that distortions and exaggerations reflected in depressive language were true, when, in fact, Cristofer had a lot going on and an easily discernible purpose and direction.

**Hopelessness.** Young men often expressed feelings of hopelessness due to both misattribution and depressive cognitive distortions. There were areas in which almost every young man expressed hopelessness, such as unemployment, and there were others that were reflective of a deep level of despair, such as feeling trapped in a gang.

Although unemployment was common – every young man interviewed for this study was unemployed at the time of the interview – many young men found it not just discouraging, but it made them feel hopeless. Young men who said that they felt hopeless about unemployment often used depressive cognitions to describe the process and how it made them feel about themselves. For example, Vaughn talked about feeling hopeless on a regular basis due to his unemployment, and how he felt as if he was taking advantage of his parents, and not doing his part.

Because alright I'm eighteen years old, about to be nineteen in December. I apply every day myself a job. I put in applications... every day break my

neck. My parents they be giving no spare change to you know help me get to where I need to be or sometimes they can't do it and I still love 'em for that 'cause I don't like to look down on my parents all the time. I don't like to get money from them... I'm at that age now that I'm supposed to things for myself... I can't do everything by myself but some things I got to do on myself like make my own money. Like I got to go out here and get a job, my own money and take care of myself.

Vaughen felt that due to his age, he “should” have been employed and able to take care of himself, and although this was a common sentiment, it was notable because Vaughen had also talked about suicide.

It feels as though I'm not doing everything I'm supposed to be doing. Like right now I'm supposed to be working, making my money. Making money...I'm supposed to be taking care...pride in my own self just about. Like my parents are the ones that like say they just basically...they supporting me living...like they put shelter over my head and they put clothes on my body. Which I know that's a good thing...it just makes it feel like I free loads off of them. That's why.

Given the cyclical nature of depression, it is concerning that Vaughen had distorted view of his employment situation, and could not take pride in the fact that he was trying to get his GED and trying to get a job, and would probably be successful with both of these things.

Similarly, Jayson said that not having a job that made him feel hopeless and depressed, and specifically because of the dynamic between him and his mother.

When you can't get another job and you got...when you can't get no job and you're being harassed about helping out around the house. That's when you feel hopeless.

Jayson knew that as long as he did not have a job, he would be dependent upon his mother, which meant that at minimum, he had to meet her expectations around household chores, and after meeting those, he would also have to contribute financially.

See my mother, she don't play. If she be like, she need help with that bill and you don't got that money on time, you're gone. You're gone. And that's how...that's when I feel hopeless. 'Cause I be like "Oh I'm back on the streets again." Then you know sometimes she'll be like "Well I'm gonna give you another thirty days and see what you can come up with."

Jayson's well founded fear of not being allowed to live at his mother's house, despite his efforts to get a job, made him feel that he might be able to control where he lived or if he would have a place to live at all, and that contributed to feelings of hopelessness.

Now I know...but I think that time... 'cause she's been pressing up on me a little bit too much. That's why I'm at [Get Ready] Baltimore, hoping that they help me get a job fast even if it's at a fast food restaurant.

He was hoping that the Get Ready program will be able to help him find a job, because, so far, he has been unsuccessful on his own.

I be trying. Filling out the apps, filling, calling 'em, calling 'em. They never call me back... Hopefully my advocates...that's what they're here for... Work something out.

His mom was trying to support him while he got his GED, by allowing him to live with her, despite their historically contentious relationship:

Yeah that's what I told her. I'm just here to get my GED and then I'm gone. And she was like "Oh well you're bettering yourself so I can help you with this."

However, she still needed help paying the bills.

Yeah she gave me a little space but just 'cause I'm working on my GED doesn't meant that those bills are going to get help... like I said the first time I quit school, she left it alone 'cause I started working. You know there was money coming in but now there's no money coming in. Even though I'm bettering myself, she already giving me food and shelter, so she's like "I don't gotta offer you nothing else. You've got a roof. I can buy you some clothes. But I can't help you no more."

Although Jayson said he this was the only area that made him feel hopeless, he also said that he felt that way every day.

I: They have mental health people here too... is that the only time you, like, get depressed or feel hopeless? R: Yeah pretty much. I: That ever happen before? R: It happens like every other day.

It is important to note that feeling hopeless, although, Jayson characterized it as a mild feeling, was something that he experienced every day. Additionally, he had felt that way in the past, in reference to when he went to jail, and was transferred to a new school when he went home. Although he tried to adjust, taking business classes, and trying to make a plan for himself, he had clearly not recovered from how he felt that his life had been derailed.

And my old school wasn't even good! It was just I didn't know nothing they was teaching me. And when I went there in to [new school], everything they were teaching me, I learned years ago...

I just gave up... I don't know I just felt like it was the end of the world... Instead of seeing time spent in juvenile detention as an unfortunate, but common misstep, Jayson distorted it and characterized it as "the end of the world," which made him feel hopeless. He was not able to find and connect with students and teachers with whom he connected, and was angry at being in a less intellectually challenging environment. Furthermore, because he felt hopeless, he stopped trying to achieve his goals.

Young men also experience hopelessness around chronic or terminal health conditions, such as being HIV positive. Kadim used to feel hopeless and depressed over his HIV status, because other people said that he was dying, and he believed them. He said he probably would have committed suicide.



So how about this, if this was 2004... I would've been killed myself. You would've heard about me on the news. I would've made sure let it be known... I would've tried to hung myself, carved HIV on my chest, and say why I did it... carved HIV on my chest.

Consistent with cognitive theory of internal versus external locus of control, which posits that individuals with a high internal locus of control will be less prone to depression than individuals with a high external locus of control, Kadim only felt hopeless and depressed when he was ready to quit; it was very important for him to maintain belief in himself, or internal locus of control.

I'm only depressed when I actually give up on myself and I start to get to thinking. That's what my grandmother told me. Just stop thinking of weird things... Like it gets to the point where I can't breathe 'cause I'm thinking I'm dead and I'm in a coffin and it's like...it's to the point where I stop breathing.

When he was depressed he felt sorry for himself, and struggled with a lot of anger toward the person from whom he contracted the virus.

Why me? Why does this HIV got me? Like damn this bitch who gave it to me, I wish that bitch would just die...

Like, damn I forgive her, then it turns out I don't, then I do, then I don't, then I do, then it be like...then the next thing... they better kill me 'cause if not I'm gonna beat the shit out of her.

He either found himself getting more and more angry, or he found a way to cope with his feelings, sometimes with marijuana, and sometimes with art.

Or I just do it the other way, go get some marijuana, smoke, and go sleep on it. Or ... go first get my grass first, go get my little table, get my sketchpad, and angry art is the best art. Just like makeup sex is the best sex, angry art is the best art. Why? 'Cause any idea comes to your mind, you make it. Whatever it is, it's there... you stop thinking about that 'cause it's ugly, but if you draw something that's angry and it turns out to be good, keep that on your mind 'cause it's like, that's what just happened in your mind so that's what's going on.

He handles his anger much better now than he used to. He never has a hard time getting out of bed anymore.

Oh no. Not like that. Never more. Not like it used to be. When I first got it, you could ask my grandma, I was a big ass baby. “Grandma come do this for me. Grandma do this.” Now it’s like, yeah fuck that. He gave it to me for a reason, I’m gonna use it to my best ability.

Once he was able to understand that he could live with HIV for a long time, and that it might even make him eligible for programs to which he otherwise would not have access, such as housing, he did not get hopeless about it.

As I’m taken my witness. Whatever don’t kill me makes me stronger. And I found out that HIV don’t kill you, AIDS kills you. So HIV, I can live to be 130, so therefore I will use HIV... as in... benefits. If I’m gonna die, disability came through, got my own apartment. Cool, that’s what HIV gave me. You get a job, cool. Find research, get cured of HIV, go back to living my life like I wanted to. And that’s my plan.

He said that he no longer got depressed, “I don’t get like that no more. The way I’m thinking... keep thinking about good stuff.” However, he still engaged in reckless behavior, particularly for a young father. He often slept outside, in the grass, claiming he enjoyed it. I asked him if he thought that was safe.

It doesn’t matter if it’s safe. If it’s my time to go, it’s my time to go. I don’t think ‘cause of that way. I look at it as if just enjoying the moment.

Kadim claimed that he no longer got depressed, and he did have some positive self dialogue, but was also still impulsive, without considering the consequences of his sometimes reckless behavior for him or his children.

Exposure to violence, criminal behavior, and gang life also often left young men feeling hopeless, frequently at multiple points throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Demetrius recalled witnessing a homicide when he was just seven years old, and thought of that as the beginning of his own wrong choices.

The first shooting I seen... I was seven years old... just out of my house ... you hear the shooting. [My grandmother] run outside. The boy's dead on our stoop. And she tell me... 'cause he was dead. She tells me to go get a sheet... I got real close and I seen him dead. And I looked at him and I was like "Damn..." I was like damn what'd you do? And after tha... it just started... falling in place for me the wrong way for me I ain't gonna lie.

He started engaging in delinquent behavior early, and by the time he was in middle school, an age when some young men started acting badly and committing crimes, he was no longer testing boundaries, but solidifying that lifestyle.

Leaving out late night, throwing bottles at cars, then it started escalating more and more and more...Middle school, it really got bad.

My mother is like fifteen years older than me. So she was young. She was out in the clubs leaving us in the house by ourselves. Like my brother he used to cry all the time, so that used to make me mad. So I was used to just being with him while he's crying, so that made me mad. That's what made me start leaving out the house. I'd just leave out and just hang with my homeboys on the street. I'd be out there all night, all night.

I was young. By the age of thirteen, I had a curfew of three o'clock in the morning. I ain't really have no curfew. She used to tell me stay in the house but I used to leave... I was gone... Like from eleven to seven in the morning and she'll come in and go straight to sleep. And I go to school and never come back. So she rarely seen me. So she just started leaving food in the microwave...

Demetrius recounted multiple stories of both being exposed to violence, the hurt and anger that it caused him, and then engaging in violence as an outlet for his anger. He was only twelve years old when he tried to shoot someone in retribution for beating up his brother and cousin. He was very sad when he told the story, trying to recall his perspective at that age.

Long story short, they chased my brother and my cousin, and my cousin ran to my brother. They banged up my brother, bust his head open. So I ain't know. I just happened to call over my grandma's or something...it made me cry, right, I was mad because that's my big brother. I was mad so one day it just...like I said it all...it all just fell in place the wrong way.

Someone spent the night at Demetrius' house and was sleeping in the living room with his gun next to him.

As soon as I seen the gun, my brother popped in my head, so I walking over there by him ... he didn't wake up ... I took his gun ...

Demetrius' brother was staying at his grandmother's house, so Demetrius went to see him. His brother tried to calm him down, but Demetrius was determined to defend his brother, even though he had no plan, did not really know who had beaten his brother up, and had never even held a gun before, much less shot one.

And I went over there... So I pulled the gun out and he was like "What you doing with that? What you doing with that yo?" I said "Chill yo I got you. I got you." He's like "Chill yo, chill, chill." And I'm like "No, chill, no I got you." Some dude... I don't even know if these were the dudes that banged them. I swear I don't. I don't even think they was. They were just out front.

I was twelve years old, my brother was thirteen. So before I went out there, I was scared to shit. I was scared. I was terrified. I ain't never held no gun... so I said "Yo, I can't... I don't know what the fuck..." I always think of this to this day, I swear to god.

Demetrius walked outside and started shooting at some men hanging out in front of his grandmother's house. He shot several times, ran, and shot a few more times, but he did not think anyone got hurt.

I walked to probably like three steps... lifted the gun up and the dude seen it and I started shooting and they start running, and I start shooting, shooting. I ran to my grandmother's, ran to the back door... I ran to the set alley split and they ran past and I started shooting again, boom, boom, boom. And I ran in the house, ran in the house... I don't think nobody got hit though. I don't think nobody got hit.

Although no one was hurt, Demetrius noted that at that point, "it was over."

Demetrius outlined a steady escalation in gang violence and hopelessness, occasionally highlighting important moments and turning points. He knew the "thug" identity that he was developing, and did not feel as though he could stop it.

Like it was over... Everything. I went to middle school... And I went to middle school and met up with I swear... all of the kids that used to get in trouble in elementary school, in that middle school... we was all in the same... we all were the same type of thug, stealing cars... and the dude ... he was a... at that time he was the best... he could steal any guy's car ever I swear.

Every day in middle school we had a different stolen car getting chased before we go to school. Crash... I've been in like four or five accidents. Crashing and crashing... Middle school was... that was the turning point. I just stopped... I stopped being (*inaudible, 0:35:08.5*). My mother said was... she said it was um... she said it was um a "Don't give a fuck" attitude. I just gave up and started gangbanging.

The sadness and trauma was on his face as he told these stories.

I: That's a lot of stuff and I see your face change when you talk about it.

'Cause I see a lot of people and a lot of cruddy stuff though. I've seen brothers kill brothers over that gang. Cousins kill cousins... I ain't never kill my brother in no gang. I couldn't do it. I couldn't do that to my mother. But I seen people do it. I seen them kill their brothers.

Demetrius talked about feeling stagnant.

Last time it happened to me... probably when I recently just came home. I just came home and I stopped going on little job hunting with my brother and that and I started going back to the street and I started seeing like everybody's got little jobs and everybody's doing good in school. My sister just got (*inaudible, 0:53:18.6*). My brother, he about to be a C.O. Everybody's doing good but me, I'm... I'm still stuck in the same spot... Doing the same stuff I did before I got locked up.

Although Demetrius was no longer selling drugs, he was still carried the identity of a gang member, and was hanging out with the same group.

I'm not selling drugs but I'm out there. Even if you're like... I'm... like the police in the district already know who I am so even if I'm not out there selling drugs, they'll lock me up anyways.

He wanted to do something else with his life, but did not actually think that he would change.

I see myself doing the same thing. Like I always told myself. I said, before like...I always want...at least I want to be say (*inaudible, 0:55:08.0*) I get killed or I wind up doing thirty, forty years of my life in jail. I want to at least say I at least tried to something right... they can't say I didn't try or nothing. I wanna say at least I tried. Maybe it's not meant for me. I look at everybody...I look at like...everybody's got reasons for being here. My reason's probably just different from people.

Unlike many other member of the Get Ready Program, Demetrius had no confidence in his ability to get his GED or change his life, but it was clear that he was not happy and wanted something different.

### **Avoidance**

Avoidant behavior emerged in several areas as a coping mechanism or style, but also as a pattern of behavior that was sometimes subtle but could gain momentum and quickly create more problems than it solved. Although avoidance can be an effective tool in certain contexts, when used exclusively, in isolation, with limited awareness, and repetitively, it often functioned as part of a depressive cycle, and increased instead of decreased levels of depression and comorbid anxiety.

**Isolation.** Isolating was often a part of avoidant patterns in young men, as it was a common response to external stressors, ranging from minor aggravations, such as a small family fight to chronic situations, such as gang violence. Isolation was problematic for young men, because although it helped in the short term, either because it kept them safe or assisted with stress relief, it also cut young men off from individuals who might have been supportive of them and helped them develop solutions to their problems.

Nathan isolated in partial response to a threat, which may have triggered or exacerbated an episode of major depression, because he isolated himself from both

potentially dangerous peers as well as positive peers. He wanted to make a lot of friends at his old school, he got into a bad situation with gang members, and it scared him. When he transferred schools, he was no longer confident in his ability to make the right friends, and he isolated from everyone.

So when I got to the new school I stayed to myself so much to myself that no one remembers that I was there... like when I got to twelfth grade and we talk about 9<sup>th</sup> grade and things, "Were you here ninth grade?" And I was like "Yeah I was."... I stayed to myself, I did my work. And I just observed... I don't know how I just came out like that... how they don't remember I was there. Like, "Y'all don't remember I was there?" They like, "No."... So, I had to deal with that... People was like, "Oh hey, how are you, what's your name?" Like they just met you, like, "You should know who I am." But, that was then...

Nathan was so avoidant and isolated that people did not remember meeting him or taking classes with him, which was also stressful for a young man who was actually gregarious and social. Additionally, Nathan was unable to use his first few years of high school for the identity work that he was ready to do; instead, he was focused on safety.

Isolation was instinctive, and effective as a partial stress reliever, but, dependent upon the type of stressor, not necessarily the best use of young men's time. For example, Tony had an impending sentencing hearing, an outcome that Tony was extremely fearful about and had thought that he had no control over. He went to his room alone, listened to music and played on his computer.

Just nobody knocks on my door ... Got my music so I'm okay... like when I'm in the house I don't usually watch TV... computer, turn the music on. I sit there and I might play solitaire, just listen to music and think and play solitaire. Go on Facebook. Turn the music on, that's what I do too, I listen to music, all day long... just listen to music all day. Nobody will bother...nobody will bother me. I be okay.

Tony isolated, but only emerged from isolation just okay, and with no solutions to the problem. He could have used that time to quiet his thoughts enough to form a plan, recruited advocates to write letters to the judge, thought about who should speak for him, gathered his supporters, and *then* spent time coming to terms with a possible prison sentence. He spent that time soothing anxiety, but not building his internal locus of control, which in the long run, made him more vulnerable to depression and poor choices to self-medicate and build an identity with which he was not actually happy.

**Prolonged avoidance.** In addition to acute stressors, young men and fathers used avoidance unconsciously and repeatedly over time. They often prolonged the necessity of the avoidance, because they did not the time and space they created to consciously create solutions to the problems or situations that were the initial stressors. Thus, they emerged from moments and periods of avoidance with a more externalized locus of control, not internalized, which not only contributed to a depressive cycle, but reinforced their tendency to both need and use avoidance in a non-productive manner.

The stress of day to day living, although rarely acknowledged explicitly, had a cumulative effect on young men, and they needed to be alone. Charles used avoidance in multiple scenarios, sometimes as a permanent means of dealing with a problem, but often as a way of putting problems off until he had a more direct approach ready. Like many other young men in this study, he had gotten used to the high levels of contact with law enforcement, but he was one of the few young men to recognize how burdensome that became over time.



Yeah, like even though I adjusted to getting pulled over, or walking and having to pass nearby what's happening, in the back...I guess consciously it doesn't affect me, but subconsciously, it takes a toll. And that toll really is just me just wanting to avoid everything like just get away from everything.

Everyone needs to escape daily stress from time to time, but Charles was one of the few young men in this study to understand and articulate how often he used avoidance as an intentional coping method for problems he felt that he could not solve. For example, Charles' father struggled with drug addiction, and sometimes it was better for Charles to ignore his calls. However, he also was sometimes too tired to take the city bus where he needed to go, and took taxis, despite the expense. Charles described both of these events as the same type of behavior, without recognizing that the former was healthy boundary setting, and, although, sad, necessary for both him and his father, and not something that was avoidant, but not allowing his father's disease to become his own. The latter behavior of taking a taxi, might actually have been draining him, because he thought it was wasteful, and did not process it as important self-soothing behavior.

'Cause that's usually how I just deal with a problem...well a problem like those 'cause it's kinda out of my control. I just avoid it...avoid it as much as so I won't have to deal with it like...if say for instance my father's calling me and I know he's not doing well, I'm going to ignore the phone call. Or... say if I have to come here... Instead of me just doing it by my own or like catching a bus here or walking, I'll just get a taxi. Taking the money, just pay the taxi... Pay the taxi back home...it's a waste of like \$30, but at least I don't have to worry about that.

For Charles, it was better to ignore his father's phone call, because he knew he could not help him. However, he also spent \$30 on a taxi, because he did not want to use the emotional resources he thought were required just to ride the bus through poor city neighborhoods.

Catching the bus kinda, it gives you like a diorama of everything I don't like. It's like I come from my neighborhood it's decent, decent, decent, and then when we get closer it gets less decent. Come through this neighborhood and it's like really? ... People on the bus changes drastically, and it's like a lady dragging her kid on the bus and a kid has a snotty nose and he has a cold, I'm like "Why are you doing this?" Or it's like, you know, three young black guys come on the bus, a loud ruckus playing music on their phone and it's like "Aw, really?" It's just those things... I don't think I feel like dealing with that today, so ... I caught a taxi here.

He took taxis so he did not have to deal with other people on the bus, and when he did have to deal with them, much like Tony, he isolated with music and tried to suppress his feelings.

I take my phone and put in my ear buds. That's how I cope with... it's playing music... I don't think I ever actually cope with it... it comes...it's already happened, nothing I can do about it. I just learn to deal...not cope... just ignore it. I never really dealt with it. I never really come to a solution. It's just...it's there but it's suppressed. That's what it is, I suppress it rather than cope with it.

Charles suppressed his feelings about being on a Baltimore City bus, instead of possibly processing the depression and anxiety as a natural response to fear that the identity he had constructed for himself might no longer be attainable. He was not happy with the "looking glass self" and he had no clear route to achieving his "possible self" in that moment.

I'm in Baltimore, I'm not doing what I want to do. And I'm trying to do it but it's not working out... it's like nearly almost every morning; it's like "Oh my god..." I see... that skyline like "Oh I'm in Baltimore...back to the stagnation." I'm back to this way of life... it takes me to you know to get up and to just keep pushing forward. That takes a lot 'cause it's really hard... Especially when you're trying. I see if I wasn't trying, like "Alright forget it I don't care." And I know the consequences of that type of thinking. I see the consequences of that type of thinking.

Keeping himself motivated and taking action steps was quite a bit of work. Charles alluded to a previous history of moderate fatigue and stress when he said that school

helped him get out of bed in the morning, and when he did not have that, he just had to keep taking steps to move forward and get back to his goals. It was clear that his mother was happy that Charles was participating in the Get Ready program, but it was not where he wanted to be, as he could not see exactly how it would help him to get back on track, but he was willing to give it a try.

It's cool... if coming here I'm impressing my mother, but I'm not... I'm not impressing myself right now because I'm not doing what I want to do... that's what it is. I'm waking up every morning realizing I'm not doing what I want to do. However, I know you can't do what you want to do if you don't work towards doing it... I have that optimism to work towards something is how I get past that in the morning or whenever I wake up.

Charles had moments of hopelessness when he was unable to achieve his goals, and these failures made him feel depressed, sometimes set him back for what felt like too long to him. He also did not necessarily accept his failures, but just suppressed the painful feelings that came with them.

When I'm really like doing my all to accomplish a goal and I just fail. And I get stuck on it... it takes me a couple days, maybe a week or two to really get back to what... where I was before that happened... that would be a level of depression for days until I could come pick it back up on my bootstraps and keep going at it...

I deal with it in the same way, it just takes a whole lot longer. Eventually I would be able to suppress it. Eventually I would be able to you know kind of ignore it and keep going. But it would be too long... especially like something that's very important I'm very adamant about it... and if I fail at that then... well if it doesn't work out and I can't control it that would make me really sad.

The amount of time it took him to process setbacks varied with the importance of what he was trying to do. He was attending Morehouse College during the previous school year, found out over the summer that he would be unable to continue there due

to the cost, and was not even able to tell people the truth about it at first. It took him several weeks to just accept the truth and let people know.

I'm okay until I think about it and when I think about it, it destroys... I could be excited and happy and then when I think about it, it's like... I go back there, it makes me really sad.

Charles had a pattern of avoidant behavior that was effective in helping him put one foot in front of the other, but with no outlet or method for dealing with his feelings, sometimes they caught up with him anyway and slowed him down and depressed him for longer periods of time.

In contrast to Charles, who moved slowly through painful situations, other young men impulsively avoided aversive feelings, with no long-term plan to cope with or improve the situation. For example, when Nathan, who was hospitalized for depression in high school, went away to college, he encountered some challenges, and dropped out rather quickly. He was homesick, could not afford all of his books, did not show up for class one week, went home one weekend, and did not return. Nathan was good at generating enthusiasm for an experience, but then was often not prepared for handling natural setbacks and avoiding traps. He got excited to go, went shopping with his mom, and thought it would be smooth sailing.

Thought I'm set. Perfect, ready for college life. I don't know what happened when I got there... It was exciting 'cause it was something new... I was so excited like "I'm in college. I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna join everything. All the clubs and committees."

First, Nathan was unprepared for the cost of textbooks, and instead of discussing it with the instructor, he stopped going to the class. He also did not formally drop the class, he just stopped showing up.

I stopped going to one of my classes... the teacher said that if you don't have a book you don't pass, so I knew I was gonna fail that because I didn't have enough money to get the book... I didn't actually talk to the teacher 'cause it was extra early and I didn't want to go. So I don't know why I did that but I didn't go.

As is common for first year college students, when they are unprepared for homesickness, they go home too often, and do not get to know anyone at school.

Nathan had a birthday, and decided to go home to a girlfriend's house to celebrate his birthday.

My birthday came up and I didn't really want anything done on my birthday... I was actually turning eighteen so that was like of age I can go to the clubs now or go partying something like that. But...and I didn't really do it with anybody I didn't know...

He went home, stayed a couple of extra days, which turned into an extra week, and finally he withdrew.

It made me feel bad and that was one of the times that I actually regret not staying. 'Cause I started having fun but I came home... but I had started having fun when I was there. I started getting some friends. Me and my roommate was really close and... I think I should have stayed but I think that I had a loan and now I gotta pay it back.

It was never his intention to drop out of college, but once he left, he immediately got a notice for his loan, and did not know how to get back. He told this story not as a common lesson learned about going away to college, but to explain why he described himself as a quitter. He did not recognize that he had a tendency toward avoidant behavior, partially as part of a depressive pattern of behavior, as well as undeveloped problem solving skills; and he labeled himself a quitter, when actually he had an energetic and pleasant presentation.

Young men frequently repeated similar cycles of unidentified and prolonged avoidance when they started taking GED classes at the Get Ready program that both

contributed to their overall levels of fatigue and dramatically slowed their progress toward acquiring their GEDs. Robert had gone to Get Ready previously, January of 2011, but said he left because he was babysitting his sister's kids too much.

I think it was because I...me babysitting too much. I was babysitting too much my sister's kids... Yeah and I wasn't calling telling them I was late. It was me being tired after the night of babysitting.

It was somewhat understandable that Robert wanted to help his sister, and made that a priority over getting enough rest for school. However, instead of re-enrolling in classes at the Get Ready program right away, he took a long break before coming back one year later in February of 2012. He said he was not ready to come straight back to the Get Ready program.

I probably wasn't...I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready... I just knew I wasn't ready to sit down... like I was still in school. I just had to get adjusted to that. Honestly, I have to get my knowledge back where it was before I even straight jump into school again. I want to make sure my brain is where it needs to be at so when I do come back, I would just be on...I would be sharp. I'd be ready to work... I had to get ready for it. I wasn't ready to wake up early in the morning again doing all the processes. I had to get used to it.

Patterns of avoidance that morphed into, or were perhaps caused by, periods of minor depression, could last a long time, and were difficult for young men to break on their own. I asked Robert how long he thought it should take for him to get ready to re-enroll, and he said, "I would probably say a couple weeks, a couple weeks for me." It actually took Robert a year total to get back to the Get Ready program. I noted this to him, and asked him what he was doing and what happened in January that made him decide to finally re-enroll.

What was I doing? I don't even remember... I was just preparing for school. That's why I came back. I had to make sure that I was ready... Well 'cause I turned a new age, this is a new year, and I know what I have to do now to succeed and I make the same mistakes I made last year.

Robert was unable to get himself re-enrolled for an entire year, and finally was able to use the New Year as a mechanism to get started again.

**Fatigue.** Often avoidance and fatigue cycled together – young men knew that they had to get up in the morning, but would do something else during what should have been sleeping hours and then found that they were too tired to get up in the morning. Similarly, many of the young men stayed out late at night during high school, but were not just tired in the mornings, they were tired of school altogether.

For some young men, fatigue seemed to be part of a larger pattern. Antoine was very tired during the interview, and also seemed to have a somewhat disorganized sleep schedule. I asked him how many hours of sleep he was able to get at night, “Hmm trying to get a lot of sleep when I be in the house at times.” Antoine was also one of many young men who said that he wanted to graduate from high school, but found himself unable to get there, and could not really articulate a reason why not, other than sometimes he just did not want to go.

Just not wanting to go to school... I don't know, I don't know, I just didn't want to go... It was just too far a ride and sometimes I didn't feel like it wanting to go... I went 2 weeks without going, I go on and off but I won't go every day every day... It made me feel like I was going to school, I'm gonna go to school when I want to, then I will go but when I don't I don't... Won't no reason- I just didn't feel like it sometimes, sometimes I felt like it... That's what I was mainly do- staying out late and I didn't feel like getting up that morning, that's why I didn't go to school... I went to school every time I came in the house on time, I went to school... I wanted to get through school, that's why I messed up, that's why I'm here.

Part of the cycle of fatigue and avoidance was peer pressure from friends to stay out and cut class, marked by eventually dropping out altogether. For example, Darius was tired in the morning from staying out late at night, but also tired of going to school in general.

I made it to the eleventh grade... I don't know I just got tired... Peer pressure, I could say that's what happened now in high school... I just stopped going. I didn't feel like getting up in the morning. Staying out late at night, I just stopped going...

Darius did not go to class unless he felt like it. In hindsight, Darius seemed surprised that he did not really try to fight that feeling or put more effort in getting through school. It was never his plan to drop out, and he looked back on it with regret.

I didn't want to go no more... I used to cut class or whatever, then I would stay home, then I stopped going... I mean, cut class nine times out of ten, either I don't like the teacher or it was maybe a lesson I didn't understand... or just didn't feel like going to class. Sometimes you know, like...you get that feeling. "I don't feel like going to class." ...I didn't have no...like effort. I didn't put no effort into it...towards it like now. I wasn't try to put no effort into it, I was just like "man forget it."... that was crazy.

As with other young men and fathers, it was difficult for Darius to identify any single reason for not going to school, but he named several obstacles that he realized in hindsight were easily surmountable.

Late nights with friends were not the only reason that young men missed school. Marcus was very similar, but he was not staying out late with friends, and his mother wanted him to get to school. He sometimes stayed up late watching television, but he could not really explain why he decided not to go to class.

Sometimes I probably just have a feeling like early in the morning I just wake up. This was back when I was going to school. I just wake up in the morning and just look at my phone and like "Damn I've gotta get up and go to school." And I don't feel like it. And I just have a feeling like I don't gotta go to school. I guess 'cause I be so tired. I don't know why but I like going to sleep late and sometimes I go to sleep early but it depends on how I'm feeling that day or that night... I don't know why I make the decisions I make. I don't know.



Very few of these young men had given much thought to why they did not fight through fatigue to get to school, and were genuinely not sure why they did not go to school.

It was fairly common for young men to not want to get out of bed in the morning, and some of them were tired all the time. Deandre had a really difficult time with it, “I hate waking up.” I asked if that was because he stayed out late or because he just did not like getting up in the morning, “A little bit of both.”

Like when I wake up, I will wake up for like five seconds and I’ll just roll over and fall right back to sleep. I’ll see who text my phone and then I’ll just go back to sleep... Yeah when I need to I usually set my alarm and I put my phone by my ear ‘cause it’s the only thing that can wake me up. Or my grandma...I’ll tell my grandmother like the day before, ‘cause my grandmother gets up very, very early. So when she gets up she usually wakes me up around that time.

He said that other people noticed as well, and that he was tired all the time, even when he was not out late.

Everybody used to say, “You always eating and then going to sleep...” I don’t know why though ‘cause I used to be very sleepy and I didn’t even have to go out and I would just be sleepy. But you know...

Deandre’s family did some therapy to help him with school, which seemed to help, but he was never able to understand why he did not want to go to school.

It was to the point whereas though we had to get a family therapist... and it felt like... everything I did in school, I excelled in but I just did not feel like doing it for some reason. I just did not feel like doing it at all. And I don’t know what...I ain’t ever understood that. I just didn’t feel like going.

Like for instance... I would... take the test, I would pass the test, but like homework and stuff like that I would not do. Just because... I don’t know it just seemed like it was taking time for nothing. I don’t know, I just never did like stuff like that... I felt like I already knew it so I just figured why do it if I already knew it. I don’t know.

Deandre was completely disinterested in doing homework or any school things that required outside work. At the same time, he was hanging outside and hustling after school every day, which may contribute to that cycle.

Similarly, Maurice slowly stopped going to school because he did not want to be there, even though his mother was encouraging him to go, "School just wasn't...it isn't for me... my mom she was working so...so most of the time she would think I was in school." Initially, Maurice said that he never had a hard time getting out of bed. But then he admitted that sometimes it was a problem for him.

Only time I had problems getting out of bed was in the morning. When I'm waking up that's when I have a hard time 'cause I set my alarm and it'll wake me up but when I look at it and I be setting it for early times and I look at it like this is too early, and I lay back down and I wake up and it'd be past time supposed to wake up.

When young men were this tired, not having easy transportation was sometimes an insurmountable barrier. Antoine talked about not having a lot of buses to get to school, "I was showing up to school I wasn't in the area so a lot of buses and I just didn't feel it at the time."

The city actually closed down Dontae's school, so he had to choose another to complete. The new school was far away, and he decided not to go.

They closed the side I was going to down so it wasn't...I was in the 11<sup>th</sup>, so there wasn't no finishing 'cause they closed down. They sent me to another school but I didn't go... 'Cause I wasn't going all the way over there... I was tired of being in alternative schools. 'Cause I wanted to go to a normal school and play football... I didn't to play for them. And I didn't want to go to their school either so I just ain't go... 'Cause it was over West and I don't...I didn't feel like it. So I ain't go. And I was living on the east so I'm not getting no earlier in the morning to catch the bus over there for nothing so...I just ain't go. I stopped going.

I don't really like getting up early in the morning so if I get up and I'm real tired and I don't feel like going, I'm not going to go. I'm gonna come here

'cause it's only around the corner. It's only gonna take me like five minutes to walk here so I don't care.

Dontae simply did not like getting up in the mornings, but did think he would be able to make it to the 9am class at the Get Ready program.

I don't really like getting up early in the morning so if I get up and I'm real tired and I don't feel like going, I'm not going to go. I'm gonna come here 'cause it's only around the corner. It's only gonna take me like five minutes to walk here so I don't care... And then around here you get two classes 9 to 12 or from 2 to 5. So that's better. I can do that schedule. 'Cause I just be waking up like 12... 9 to 12, I can do that. I can do that. So that way I can sleep from 12... I can sleep from like 12 or 11 at night and then go outside for a little bit...

He recognized that the traditional morning start of the school day was challenging for him, but he thought his proximity to the Get Ready program was going to help him make it to classes there.

Similarly, Eric moved during high school as well, but he chose not to transfer, and had a difficult time getting back to his old school. Eric had just dropped out of school, because, among other reasons, it was too far away.

I just stopped going. It was too far... No it's not because we moved. It's just I gotta get up at like seven o'clock and I'm not a morning person. And it's just a long travel... I mean it was like far... depending on how the traffic is downtown but it was like probably like an hour and a half ride, if that... 'Cause I live all the way on the east side on Cold Spring... I don't know. It's just... I was already in that school so... I don't know. I know it was dumb though.

It depends on... depending on how I feel... Well I never did like it though. But um it was alright I mean. I went to school... I was known... An okay student. I could be better. I could've done better... I don't know. I just heard about this program. The school was too far... So I just came here.

Again, he was completely clear on why he stopped going to classes, since he was a popular student with friends, but he used should and could language to describe his grades. He was unable to articulate his fatigue and general unhappiness with the

school environment, but able to identify the Get Ready program as possibly being more accessible to him.

### **Anger**

Most of the young men in this study contended with high levels of anger and violence, presenting no single unifying narrative, but several ways in which they experienced and processed anger, varying over the course of their lives. Young men's anger ranged from a pattern that they associated with depression starting in early childhood to a strategic, calculated response to threats in their environments, and varied according to context and cognitive style. Some young men experienced anger and shame starting in childhood; for some, anger at home was part of adolescent rebellion; and many talked about fighting with peers, which was sometimes a continuation of childhood rage, or a reflection of adolescent turmoil, and sometimes it was just fighting.

### **Anger and Depression in Childhood**

Anger in childhood was often linked to young men's descriptions of depression and depressive thinking, but also other expressions of distress. Young men were abandoned and ashamed of their anger as young boys, and worked to repress, process, or strategically incorporate anger into a "tough guy" identity. Anger patterns varied with cognitive process, filters, and attributions.

Depressive language was evident when anger was linked to depression in childhood, particularly the use of all or nothing filters. Cristofer expressed anger through temper fits, rages, and fighting, and felt a lot of shame about that.

I've been having depression since then, for long...for basically my whole life... I was angry. And always tantrums. Fighting. And afterwards I'd feel down about what I did and break down... Break down and cry.

He attributed his anger to an internal cause, "I was angry," versus recalling being angry at a particular person or event. He also described both his depression and anger as global and stable, with the phrase his "whole life" and described his anger as "always tantrums." He seemed to have few coping mechanisms when he broke down. He tried to shake it off, and apologized, but did not really understand why he acted the way that he did, nor did anyone try to help him process his feelings, because others involved were still upset and angry.

I just act like it ain't happening... I feel like I try to talk, but you know you just act like...like you ain't just did what you did, but you know I apologize and stuff... I'm still upset but you know I'm still being you know apologetic of the situation. Sometimes when I do...when I do I just can't to nobody 'cause they still upset too... I get upset with myself. "Stop crying" and be like "Why...why are we doing this? Why I did that?"

He did not understand why he was out of control when he was angry, and he had no one help him understand that anger is normal, and to help him develop methods for controlling his temper.

Anger was also linked to early feelings of abandonment, and specifically, feeling different from other kids, which sometimes created chronic anger and irritability in children. Deon never knew his father as a child, and he felt abandoned and alone, and described a persistent sense of anger.

When I was younger, I was looking at a lot of my friends like, you know, why did everybody else know their fathers and I didn't know my father? I never met him. Talked to him on the phone a couple times when I was younger, ten, you know. But it was just like a chip on my shoulder, you know? I don't know - people used to talk about they had a bad day, I was like... "You had a bad day? I had a bad day." I've been thinking about this all

day, and I just wasn't very friendly at all. Like people would say hi to me and I wouldn't even respond. And I was always angry, always.

Deon distinctly recalled that he was depressed during that time, and how that was linked to a sense of hopelessness and a lot of fighting. He also used used global attribution or all or nothing language when he described getting suspended "all the time."

Yeah I was depressed... I was depressed before. I would say definitely in middle school... depression and you know the hopelessness I felt in middle school, which made me start smoking in the early high school years. I couldn't stay in school for anything. Like I got suspended all the time for being you know belligerent, fighting, whatever it was... I don't know, I thought I was in charge.

It was not uncommon for young men who were feeling sad or abandoned to cover those feelings by fighting with other kids, and trying to establish a tough guy identity.

To be honest, I just thought I was tougher than everybody else. That's all it was. Fighting to prove that I was tougher than other people. Like I couldn't go to school on Wednesdays for my whole seventh grade year 'cause that was the day I got suspended. Like it was a point in time when I guess I got suspended maybe a couple Wednesdays in a row. And I couldn't go to school on Wednesdays. I would say that was definitely...that's why...I just thought I was tougher than everybody.

Deon established not just a tough guy identity, but the toughest guy, possibly as a defense mechanism against feelings of abandonment and isolation.

Feeling angry and losing control was an isolating and shameful experience for boys, but not expressing that anger was also damaging. Powell remembered getting his feelings hurt and getting angry, but not saying anything about it. He also use a depressive style with the phrases, "always the type" and "always the one" attributing his angry feelings to an internal and stable cause, himself.

I would let people get me mad 'cause I was always the type like...I was always the one that cared or felt bad... basically like ain't really say nothing

back. It's like everything was just like good about me and like how can I put it? Things like...and like I cared too much or something...like I wasn't tough enough or something.

But then as I started getting older, I started realizing and looking at it like well this is me, that's not them. That's how I want to be.

He also revealed that being "tough" should serve to protect one from being too vulnerable, although that did not help Deon. Powell felt that he used to get angry fairly easily, and as a child, he felt bad about that, but learned to feel better about it as an adult, perhaps because he was more in control of his anger.

Cognitive style and support during angry moments and outbursts impacted how young men remembered childhood anger. Jamaar described losing his temper with his sister.

Like I remember one time like my sister sprinkled water on me and I instantly spazzed out. Like it was like an irritating feeling... It's just like... when you don't want to be bothered and someone keeps bothering you. Then you snap, but it's just like when I snap...it's like, it be kind of hard for me to get back to normal.

Jamaar did not describe himself as angry, but talked about a temper in childhood that sounded out of control, and he either experienced no remorse around it, or was just disconnected from those feelings.

I used to like, my anger...like I used to be real mad, and then for some reason I used to turn my anger into joy. Like I used to have fun destroying things, getting mad. Like my mother used to get terrified, like "What is wrong with this kid?" Like I used to sit there and laugh like...and they'll be like, "What are you laughing for?" And then I just stay to myself and...like my mother she used to get mad like when I was young around thirteen. I used to scream real loud. And then just spaz out. Like I remember a couple times I did it and I used to spaz for no reason.

Even though Jamaar's mother did not know how to help him in those moments, his grandmother was always good at calming him down.

I don't know it's just like...it's like she's got that stronger mind, vibe like...I don't know how she does it. I don't. It's just like she can do it. Like I could be at the house, spazzing. When I was young I used to spaz heavy, pick up the table, like the coffee table up and flip it over, throw the stand, throw the lamps. I used to do so much crazy stuff when I was young, and then all my mother had to do is call my grandmother up here on the phone. And I get on the phone and then she's like "Baby, what are you doing?" "Oh, nothing Grandma, nothing Grandma." Like it was a straight instant shutdown. Like Grandma never hit me, never nothing, it was just like, we was just this coolness. Like that was my best friend like...it was like nobody had that impact on me.

Unlike Cristofer, Deon, and Powell, Jamaar had an adult, his grandmother, who was able to connect with him, and bring him out of his anger, although he did not know how.

### **Emergent Independence and Safety in Adolescence**

Young men continued to have a difficult time with anger in adolescence, both with their families at home, with teachers at school, and with their peers in multiple environments. Anger at home with family was typically about young men trying to assert their independence from their parents and siblings. Anger with peers involved safety and establishing boundaries – it was often unavoidable, but sometimes heightened by young men's depression and other emotional distress.

#### **Conflict at Home and School.**

Conflict at home is a natural part of being a teenager and adolescence, but had severe consequences for young men and fathers when depressive thinking or substance abuse exacerbated tension and conflict.

Arguments may be a part of growing up, but some of these situations got out of control and were dangerous, for young men and their families. Jayson had a history of anger with his mother, which eventually led to violence, and him being



removed from his home. Jayson attributed most of his depression and anger to this fight and the consequences. It is not possible to know if depression was related to early childhood anger for him, but that he had always had a difficult time getting along with his mother and siblings.

Me and my mother don't really get along... We never got along... That's when I caught my first charge... My first charge I ever got in my juvenile life... One day me and my mom got into a fight and I got locked up and I guess they just made an example out of me and gave me juvenile life.

They had a fight, which Jayson did not think was very serious, but the police were called, and they ended up in court. Jayson minimized his own responsibility for the fight, and blamed his younger sister.

Alright I'm gonna tell you the root of all evil in my house. My little sister... it started with her. 'Cause I had... we ain't have no computer and I used to have... like a lot of people used to look out for me and one of my mother's friends bought me a desktop, a little nice desktop. And I ain't gonna lie, I was kind of stingy with it 'cause it was mine and I never had no computer. So I wouldn't let my sister on it and my mother didn't like that so she told me that I couldn't use her internet service no more 'cause she was paying for it and she told me that I couldn't plug it up to her... I couldn't use her electricity. So that's basically where it started...

They had not had other physical fights before, but had a pattern of increasing hostility. Jayson said, "So it was bound to happen."

'Cause she came and smacked me in my head 'cause I wouldn't shut up... 'cause it's mine and I should be use to what I want and you know? I pushed her... no, I told her don't hit me no more and she smacked me in my face and I pushed her. Then just tussling. Then my little sister was hitting me. I guess... I don't know... I think my little brother called the police.

He was unable to get his anger under control, and even though no one was hurt, the judge sent him to a juvenile detention center. When Jayson described the fight, and the sentencing, it was clear that much of his anger stems from believing that his

actions merited the arrest or subsequent sentence, particularly since he had not been arrested prior and did not identify himself as a criminal.

It wasn't even serious. It was just... what I told her... I just told her I hated her when I was in the court room. And I guess... it was a female judge and I guess she just took it to heart... it was in the moment and I was just mad that she got me locked up. 'Cause I ain't never, ever been locked up. Ever since then I've just been getting locked up back and forth, back and forth for stupid stuff. But I ain't gonna lie, I kinda felt that she messed up my life a little bit 'cause I was doing good in school playing lacrosse. And after that, everything just went downhill. So I just felt she kinda ruined it for me.

Technically I didn't ever hit her. I think it was more... her calling the police, that she said she wasn't hurting me while she wasn't hitting me. I just kept pushing her. Like I ain't gonna punch her...

Jayson consistently minimized the violence of the situation, and instead of expressing remorse, he was still angry with his mother who got him into jail, and off track.

With this incident, and with others that he related throughout the interview, it was clear that although Jayson did not blame himself for what happened, he also did not identify his own ability to control or de-escalate the situation and keep himself out of further trouble.

Depression and substance abuse can stymie the already challenging process of adolescents becoming independent, and make it a very unproductive time for young men and families. Eric was still in the middle of a contentious relationship with his parents, and struggled with his anger around money issues with them. For example, sometimes they told him they would give him money or offer to pay him for odd jobs, and then not follow up, or they gave him less money than they said they would.

Well my father, he promised me money that he never gives to me. My mother, she like plays with my money. That's what makes me mad and depressed... she plays with me... she promised me a couple dollars in my pocket and she never gave it to me... she like plays with it and my father just don't give me my money... Like she'll give me half now and then wait until like some other

time to give me the other half and I just expected the whole bill... 'Cause she says that if she gives me all the money I'm gonna run out on her.

This used to frustrate him, "'Cause I want my money all in one day.'" Eric had a fight with his mother about this recently and lost his temper.

I just start flipping out... Last time that happened was...let's see...Sunday... my mom came home and she spent my money at the flowers... I know I'm not supposed to disrespect my mother, but at the same time, at that point I was mad 'cause she was playing with my money... She came back there, and she started fussing at me. I fussed at her back, slammed the door a couple times... 'Cause I was trying to knock on the door to get back in the house... she opened the door and started fussing some more. And then she started crying. I started crying. Then I made up with her.

Eric and his mother stopped fighting, but did not resolve the cause of the conflict.

Adolescence was also a time that young men sometimes had confrontations with teachers at school. Robert said that people got on his nerves, but he did not have much of a temper. He did have a problem with getting irritated in high school, and was easily triggered by a perception that he was being treated unfairly.

I probably get tired of the teacher or something or the students in the class and I might leave out and go home... Say they're doing little stupid stuff and he not saying nothing to them, but if I'm doing stuff like that, he'll say something to me. I feel like that would make me...that'll make me mad like he's treating me different than what he's doing when them so I'll end up leaving... Because if I'm...if they're doing little things and they're not getting fussed out on or trouble about it and I do, that's...that's gonna make me mad... that the person's not being fair.

Powell had a difficult time with his anger in middle school, and had a confrontation with a teacher. He used depressive language, "I ain't putting up with that," which may indicate the role that depression plays in anger regulation and expression with these young men.

Me and the teacher got into it 'cause uh...somebody was in the class was playing ... teacher come over there and then this and that or whatever... So I'm going to my locker...this was at the end of the day, I'm going to my

locker. As soon as my locker, I stick my hand in, like he push the door shut and I pulled my hand back. And after that me and him got into an altercation or whatever. And after that I ended up getting suspended for ten days then I had to go up to the school board, came back. I was just like...I ain't putting up with that.

He knew that he might have been provoked or antagonized in some way, and found it challenging to accept that his response was found unacceptable by the school administration. He did not say, "I don't want to deal with that," but, "I am not putting up with that," which is very final, all or nothing language, and put him in a position where his only options were fight or flight.

I mean 'cause my attitude did used to be bad but like I used to hold a lot in and control myself instead of letting it out I used to hold everything in. And that's when I got fed up with it.

It was not completely clear what he meant by getting fed up, whether he was referencing the fight with the teacher, or his decision not to return to school. Powell knew he had anger management issues, but perhaps not how closely they were linked to his identity and self esteem.

### **Violence and Anger with Peers - I Just Plucked the Boy.**

Adolescence is challenging for all youth, but it is also a dangerous time for low-income males in an urban environment, and again, depression did not make it any better. Most young men had a history of fighting with their peers. Often young men felt they had to respond when provoked by a peer, but some young men talked about being generally angry toward others. This often resulted in their either being removed from a school due to fighting, or removing themselves from a school due to the threat of future violence.

In neighborhoods with drug markets and gang territories, young boys learned to be careful about where they were as they grew up into young men. Dean found it stressful to anticipate confrontations with other young men that he saw on the streets that he never thought about when he was younger.

A lot of stuff don't get under my skin, but it just be people mainly males 'cause I don't like the way people carry stuff these days... Like people be trying to play... I don't deal with it... I see it like as I got older.

'Cause you know when I was younger everything was fine, you can do this and do that. You can walk down any block but when you get older there's certain stuff you can't do. You can't walk down the street not knowing somebody or something like that...

When young men got old enough to hustle and sell drugs, they also became potential targets in the turf battles for the drug market. Dean gave an example of running into six guys on the street last year, and not being able to avoid a fight with them.

Like for example... I was on Pennsylvania Avenue and this was last year in December and I was walking down by myself. It was probably like six guys... So I was walking down the street and one of the boys say, "Where you from kid?" And that's when you know we got into it but the police came before anything. And he told us to go our separate ways. Today people are always smart with their mouths.

He said that young men had to establish and maintain personal boundaries.

I wouldn't say prove themselves but I'd say this is more the age when you've gotta stand up for yourself like a lot. 'Cause I don't gotta prove myself to nobody.

Dean considered fighting to be work, but necessary for safety.

Like I don't really like fighting because I be in the gym. It's kind of like school you know? Like when you're in school all day and you're doing work and then when you go home for homework, you're like "I did all that work in school I don't want to do no more work." So it's like I do all that fighting in the gym I don't want to fight when I'm at home, so I just be nice to everybody. But most people take your kindness for weakness and look at you being kind and nice or like he's a punk and we can run over top of him.

Dean found this to be tiring, but accepted it, and did not feel bad about occasions when he felt he had to defend himself.

However, sometimes young men who were already suffering from depression then felt even worse about themselves when they engaged in violence. Cristofer thought that fighting was necessary, but none the less, held himself to a seemingly unreasonable standard that he should not fight.

When I'm fighting, it's like I've gotta hurt them before they hurt me. And afterwards, I just... Most of the time I don't mess with nobody. I don't start anything. Everything always comes to me. So it's like I can't avoid it because I don't want to feel like I'm a punk or anything. It's going to continue. People are gonna continue to mess with you anyways.

Most of the young men that I talked with were in agreement that a certain amount of fighting is required, and many did it as a preventive measure against future violence, but Cristofer used language that indicated resignation and hopelessness when he said, "It's going to continue." This may have lent itself to the depressive cycle for him, because when I asked him why he was upset with himself, he said, "Sometimes I just don't love myself. 'Cause I always put more pressure on myself."

Some young men responded to personal bullying with explosive anger and rage. Aaron had confrontations with his peers over things that seem minor, but it was important to him to let people know what his boundaries were.

Back then what would have had to make me do that is at my young and dumb age, it would be you know somebody saying something about my mother. Dumb shit. Like you don't even know my mother. So nowadays that doesn't bother me but back then it very much did and I had to be put in handcuffs that one time. Somebody said "Your mother's a bitch." And I said "Okay well you're gonna die today."

Although Aaron responded to the taunt about his mother with a threat, he was actually not much of a fighter and ended up getting beaten.

So you know and I got in a fight for that so. And you know things that would have to you know if somebody actually said something about my mother it would lead to me wanting to hurt them and if I got beat up, then at the end of the fight that's because they talked about my mom, they beat me up, a lot of my students, my peers, seen me get beat up and my mom talked about. Now they think I'm a bitch. You know, other people's judgment that took a toll and that people thought I was a little bitch for real 'cause I got beat up you know and my mother was talked about and I didn't do shit about it.

He did not win the fight, but he was humiliated, angry, and felt that he had to re-establish boundaries to keep himself safe, so he went into uncontrollable rages.

So at that point you know I would begin to destroy property, breaking windows, throwing chairs through principal's office. I'm talking about destroying entire school buildings, classrooms, everything, computers, desktops, desks, you know I punched holes in walls at young ages. You know created massive, massive damage, damage. I'm talking about thousands of dollars worth of damage. I've destroyed public schools with my bare hands and chairs and stuff like that and staplers and anything I could get my damn hands on. Any god damn thing I can get my hands on. I don't care if it was a phone, a pen, a mouse, it don't matter. I've destroyed personal cell phones, I've destroyed personal laptops, I've ripped open purses and dumped stuff out. I've...I've destroyed so many things...

Aaron knew that he was not in control during these episodes.

And that...that's what definitely they had to put the handcuffs on me. They was like "Okay this little mother fucker's wild. We've gotta lock him up." But I've never been convicted of a charge. So you know that ... 'cause I wasn't you know I was committing crimes but I wasn't really committing crimes. I was crazy as fuck. You know I was destroying shit.

Unfortunately, although this strategy might have kept Aaron safe, it also destroyed any positive peer relationships he had managed to establish.

When I came back, nobody fucked with me. I ain't had no friends, all my friends disappeared and that hurt too. I was angry about that. But then all of my enemies, you know they ain't fuck with me no more. They was like "Okay this little nigga's crazy, we ain't fucking with him for real." So you know my enemies finally left me alone in the eleventh grade year but then you know my friends left me too and you know...even though I ain't had no enemies, I was...I was still angry. My friends had left and I was pissed at that point. I was like alright cool, you know my enemies are like fuck me, alright well fuck them too. So and then my friends was like fuck me and I was like oh wow you

know? It was like oh, you know and that bring out the depression and then the anger. You know the loneliness, you know and you know I had some guilt thinking it was my fault.

Although, Aaron was not charged with any crimes, he was also not given any assistance to help him understand his own behavior or prevent future incidents. This created a cycle of loneliness, depression, anger, and further destruction.

So then I was like you know then I zapped out again in school in the eleventh grade year... zapped out consists of fucking up public schools... Major destruction of property yeah that's zapping out. Zapping out also consists of getting restrained you know? ... Injections, horse tranquilizers. That's what zapping out consisted of for me.

Aaron called his rages zapping out, and referenced being tranquilized and medicated during that period, indicating removed he was from the experience.

Similarly, Dontae developed hair trigger aggression in the face of stress and threats from his peers. In contrast to Aaron, Dontae usually won his fights, and had no remorse for them.

I used to get mad a lot. I had a little attitude. But I don't know, it was really stress. Well I never stress for real... I just... I get mad easily.

It used to be that just about anything could make him angry, although he said he has grown out of a lot of that.

Anything! Like... saying something to me that I don't like. Anything. I go off. Well I don't go off, I might control myself but... Fight a lot... Bust people's windows...

He said that other people would describe him as crazy, because he did not try to restrain himself or stay out of fights ever.

'Cause I just don't care... I don't care if somebody make me mad or something. I just go and do something to them. I just don't care... Like somebody comes walking past me, I might say something or something look at me wrong, I'm gonna say something. I just don't care about the next person's feelings. That's just how I am. I don't know why. But they say I'm



crazy, I'm funny, and really I'm a nice person for real. But I can get crazy when I gotta get crazy. But other than that I'm just funny and crazy.

Dontae said the last time he acted crazy, he was sitting outside by himself, got a warning that someone was looking for him, and very quickly assessed that if he ran from the situation, it would just come back again.

These two girls walked past me... I used to talk to one of them... So they walked down the street. So the girl's cousin walked up the street and was like, "Get off the step 'cause they gonna try to bang you or something, something, something." But I was outside by myself, so I was like "No, I ain't gettin' off no step. This is my hood. I ain't gonna live like that." Boys came up the street, "Come here get off the step, let me talk to you." And I'm like "No, whatever you gotta say, you talk to me right here about it." So... the girls they're from hood to. They be like "Come out here, come over here." They trying to bait... "Man, I'm not going nowhere. I'm not running from nothing, nobody... I'm not going to start."

He was calculating in setting his own terms for the fight, and then beating up the boy he thought was making the threat.

So the boys were around the corner... I walked around the corner too... so when they walked up the street, I was standing out front... I just plucked the boy. And next thing you know, everybody else from my girlfriend's house came outside. Well it was only a couple boys in there, they came outside and he beat up the other boy while I beat up one boy. And that was it.

He decided to get out ahead of the fight, and instead of engaging in any type of pre-fight verbal confrontation, he "plucked," one of the boys, meaning that he hit him with no warning at all.

Much of the fighting that young men did took place in schools, and they were often suspended, expelled, or transferred as a consequence. Jordan was careful with what he said and how he interacted with other people, but he did not allow other people to pick on him.

I got put out of Baltimore City Schools... Fighting... Funny, goofy, playing too much. And I just always got into fights when I was in school... like I was

saying this before like if you...if you like too fresh with people like they be getting to hate so they pick with you and I didn't like it. I ain't let you pick on me. I might be funny, goofy, play all the time, but I ain't gonna let you pick on me. We gonna fight. And that's how I carry it. I mean... I ain't gonna hit you. Now that you hit...you touched me first. And once you touch me that's it for you. I'm gonna do what I got to do.

When one young man got into a fight, often, all of his friends got into the fight too, and Jordan was eventually expelled.

They have his boys and like I know a lot of people so if they see me fighting they not gonna let me fight by myself. So it'd just be one big fight and then multiple others got put out when I got put out of Baltimore City schools.

He was unable to walk away from a fight, but shook it off fairly easily after the fact, stating, "I be angry at that moment of the fight but after the fight I would laugh. Like that guy's crazy..."

Some young men had a difficult time staying out of other people's fights.

Jamaar had a difficult time when he saw something like bullying.

Like when I was at school, I got to be calm because...like say if I'm going into the school or something or I'm in class and I just see somebody keep picking on somebody, I'll look at them. And then like later on... the bully try to come and be my friend... and then when I push them away and they get mad at me for pushing them away, I snap on them and let 'em know they aren't my cup of tea. Like, "I don't like dealing with you." ...if they just keep coming around... it's trouble.

Jamaar felt like he had to stand up, not just for himself, but for his friends too.

It's always been that way, even at school. When I'm with my friends, like if I feel as though my friends are being pushed on or something like that, I'll be like... "Man we all gotta stand up. Like don't let them push you around, you've gotta stand up." And then I'll sit there and just watch like, I'll stand there... But then when it gets to a certain extent, I can't take it anymore and then I'll step in.

Jamaar talked about how he made a point to step in when he thought his friends were threatened, but that he usually tried to de-escalate the situation, such that not only

would a fight be prevented in the moment, but that potential participants were then able to walk away from the situation not harboring grudges that could potentially be problematic for Jamaar at a later time.

Yeah when somebody picks on my friend or something. “Man, what are you doing? Chill!” Like it’s like this bull come out of me. And then like I don’t get into any fights or beef with them. They just look at me like, “Oh.” Like some people don’t say that for real. And I’ll be like...it’ll be like I’ll be calm coming at them... I’ll break it down like, “What do you want to get into it with me for?”

Like and then if they keep coming, then I’ll protect myself. Then afterwards...then they’ll get in their mind like, “All he was doing was probably looking out for his friend and all that.” And I never ever put myself in a predicament where I walk the street... I never went through that. Like the people like that actually went through events with, like I went through certain stages with...like I see them on the street and they’ll just be like “Oh what’s up?” There’s all respect and I never went around looking for trouble and none of that. I just chill and stay to myself.

However, eventually, he was unable to maintain this strategy, switched school multiple times, and ultimately felt as though the threat of a potential conflict at school was not worth the risk of going. He finally got into a job training program called Civic Works, but got into another fight there and had to leave.

After [former school], I did Civic Works. Civics Work, I lost that one because me and brother was in there, and we were down in the workshop, and this guy was down there and he just kept nagging, nagging, nagging, nagging, nagging at my brother. And then my brother, he just like...being like yeah, ignore him. But then it came out of his mouth and said something about our father. And then I told Greg, I’m like, “You don’t even know our father.” ... And he started threatening him, and then I looked at him like, “Where did all threats come from? He isn’t saying anything to you, why are you threatening him?” And then it just elevated from there.

### **Anger in Young Adulthood**

By young adulthood, young men either continued in angry confrontations with their peers or they tried to grow out of them. Lamont tried to grow out of his anger,

but it still got the best of him during an incident at Job Corps, when another student threw a couple of muffins at him. Lamont ended the exchange by hitting him. He tried to regain his composure after he lost his temper, but Job Corps sent him home anyway.

This was recently. I was in Job Corps. I got sent home 'cause someone took...I was in culinary arts class and this dude took...threw a muffin at me. Like he threw a muffin at me, I let it slide. Like the first time I let it slide. He hit a girl in the head. So I asked him like why did you throw the muffin at me? He got smart with me and hit me with another one. So I hit him. I hit him but when I hit him, I caught myself 'cause I snapped like...I wasn't supposed to do that so once I hit him, I grabbed him. I could've hit him again but I didn't. I just grabbed him, let him know like see you can't...you feeling me? What's the problem? Why would you do that? You feeling me? Now if I hit you again I'd be wrong. But they still sent me home though.

Since he will not be able to return to the program for another year, he decided to try and get his GED through the Get Ready program instead, but he talked about the Job Corps incident as a failed test.

I've only been home about two months since August. But I don't know. I've been calling up there...calling up there. I don't think they'll let me come back. I gotta reapply in a year. I'm not even waiting around, that's why I came down here to do this before I get in some trouble. I stay (*inaudible*, 0:05:23.3). I was doing good in Job Corps. I was doing good up there, just that one setback. It was...it was a test and I failed. It was a test. That's all it was.

However, it seems as though he understands what he did and the consequences.

I mean but when I hit him, I got kind of a heavy hand. I hit him right here. There was a lump right there. I mean I apologized and everything but they wasn't...they wasn't going for it.

Kadim also described fighting with peers in a job corps type of program before he finally made some changes. He framed it in the context of an ongoing rivalry between DC and Baltimore within this particular program.

DC and Baltimore don't like each other. So kids in DC played a nice practical joke that I will not stand for. Christopher Reeves would not stand for it... I go hop in the shower, come back, so therefore I've got my towel on. So in the barracks you come in with your towel on shirt off, socks off. I walk in my room, I see this homosexual on my bed. So I was like... "Yo, what are you doing in my bed." He says "Bitch this is my bed. Get the fuck out." So mind you I hadn't changed yet, still mentality from back in the day. I snapped. I snapped like a toothpick breaking. It was just like that. He was a cool fight though 'cause actually got some hits in... So...that's that... I only had one month to go left.

Many young men managed to stop fighting by the time they were young adults. Surprisingly, Dontae did not fight anymore.

I don't need to trip like that. Like nowadays if you look at it, people are gonna hate you on regardless, and then by me being (*inaudible*, 0:36:48.9) I still got (*inaudible*, 0:36:49.8). I don't need...I be trying to let them see (*inaudible*, 0:36:53.6) 'cause I ain't fighting no more. I'm giving that up. Alright well naturally I (*inaudible*, 0:37:00.4) so I'm just looking at it like I'm getting too old to be doing anything. So that's why I don't do nothing. I just laugh. And just...and do work. I laugh (*inaudible*, 0:37:12.8). That's all I do now because I'm getting too old to do anything else. (Dontae)

One of the signatures of young men's anger when they had other depressive symptoms was the staying power of that anger. I asked Jayson if he thought he had an anger problem.

Just...I'm gonna say this, when I do get angry, it's hard for me to calm down. But I'm not no angry person. I'm real kind, care about people's feelings. It's just when I feel crossed or you know taken advantage of, it's kinda hard to calm me back down 'cause what would you call...I guess it's hard for me to let things go so I guess that's it.

Jayson talked about how it was difficult for him to let go of his anger.

Yeah that and it's hard to let it go. Like alright it could be (*inaudible*, 0:07:17.2). I'll probably get to fussing with somebody in here. Nine times out of ten, I'll probably get put out 'cause I wouldn't let it go 'cause that's just the person I am... But I ain't saying that I'm gonna come back and try to harm them or nothing but I would always think like...you know I'm not gonna give you no fives, we not cool, you go your way and I go my way.

Darius was really aware of the need to keep control over his own emotions and not cede them to others.

I mean you could, you just gotta think like...I don't want. Like if you, say I do something and I make you mad right by me doing something, then by reality, I've got power over you. 'Cause I'm controlling how you feel. I don't like anybody having power over me so I try not to, you know, get angry over other people's actions and stuff like that. Or anything about not letting anything have control over how I act or feel but me. You know? So yeah...

Dean really worked hard to deal with his anger.

My worst self? It's like when somebody gets under my skin like making me mad 'cause even though everything that goes on in my life, in our house and all that, I'm the type of person where like I ain't gonna trip about it. I ain't gonna show you that I'm mad or nothing like that. I just go on but that stuff just builds up. So just on the strength of me holding it in, and not showing it, like it's still there and it builds up. So like when somebody like gets under my skin or doing something to make me mad, like all of it comes out on them. So like I'll probably overreact to something so small... a lot built up. So you could do something small to make me mad but I'd overdo it just 'cause I've got a lot of tension built up. But it's not because of you or about you. It's just tension that I have.

Aaron thought that a lot of his anger came from low self-esteem and a feeling of rejection, and so he works hard now to make sure that he does feel good about himself, often using clothing to construct an image with which he is comfortable.

Knowing what makes me that way? Well I found out a long time ago what made me that way. What made me...what made me zap out was like I said my low self esteem you know and embarrassment, like rejection. You know things like that. You know anything that's got to do me, not looking as good as other people in the room. You know? Which is probably why I dress the way I do now because nowadays I dress like a millionaire, look like I'm balling, look like I'm you know should be in a music video somewhere 'cause I'm cute as hell, look like I should be a model on the front of GQ Magazine. So that's why I do that nowadays because you know I couldn't handle the embarrassment when I was younger. And I didn't really notice that until just now as to why I dress like that and why I put my hair the way I do and...but even still I like the way I dress. I...like this is my style. You know this is what I be feeling when I wake up...

Some young men used their adolescent years to take inventory of previous missteps, and start to make course corrections, but struggled with continued conflict with family members, and felt they had no choice, but to keep detaching from the family. This was probably healthy, but left them feeling somewhat isolated and angry. Powell talked about being antagonized or not supported by various family members and feeling as if they were not supporting his efforts to date and become an independent person – he often felt alienated by his family. He talked about hanging out with a girl for a little while before bringing her home to meet his family.

Then eventually, I finally brought her around, tried to you know introduce her to everybody. And they was just like “That’s where you been? That’s who’s getting all your money?” And this and that “Boy, she’s this...she’s that...” I just look at them tripping.

I’m trying to get my GED... like I’m on the right track and they want me come back or try to bring it back or something. I don’t know what it is but that’s just how I look at it.

He has worked hard to stop letting his hurt feelings get the best of him, and sometimes the things that used to make him angry motivated him toward independence.

Say for instance... my brother would ask me for a cigarette and I tell him no. Then somebody from Adam and Eve would come around and ask me for a cigarette and I probably give them one. Then he gets mad at me ‘cause I didn’t give him one but I gave them one. But the whole time it’s... I’m starting to do y’all like how you all used to do me.

But at the same time it’s not as a get back, it’s to help you learn and you feeling me? Prepare yourself for more. ‘Cause that’s how they used to do me but you learn from it. Like if I wanted something, I couldn’t get it. I’d get mad or something. But now it motivates me to do more to get it ‘cause I know I need this, I want this. Ain’t nobody just gonna give it to you, I have to get it myself. So it motivates you more...

He talked about conflict with another brother, and communicating to his brother and himself that he did not need his family to accomplish his goals.

But like I told him, I don't care what y'all do... I'm still young. I've got a future ahead of me and all of that. Like I've got a lot going for myself. I could be by myself and be alright. 'Cause I really don't need nobody. And after all these years like everything that I had seen, went through, or learned or experienced or whatever...like I learned from it help me prepare myself for on my own or whatever.

Powell felt slighted and abandoned by his family on a regular basis, but tried to use those hurt feelings to move away from them, and become independent. Powell talked further about his anger, but it was clear that he has learned that the best way to control his temper is to limit interaction with other people.

As far as like my anger and all. Like I used to hold everything in. I was never really the type to get mad and take it out or this and this and this and that. I just like hold it all in and it like build up. Then I start realizing that's not good 'cause sometimes I spaz on other people 'cause I got so much in me. So I mean other than that I just try to stay to myself and keep up and do better.

Overall, Lamont said that he used to get in fights as a kid, due to a friend, but he seemed to think this was not a problem for him anymore.

I mean that's the only fight I've been in recently. I've been in fights when I was younger. I mean I used to fight a lot. Used to get into trouble but it was more so my friend. He would keep me in trouble for real. I had to learn to leave him alone and do my own thing so I stay out of trouble now.

Lamont also has very little tolerance for disrespect.

I'm trying to think what sets me off. Probably...I don't really like disrespectful people too much. Like if I see you disrespect your elders, I'm not like...I'm not gonna jump or anything but I might tell you like you're a kid, that's somebody's mother or that's somebody's father. "What if that was your mother?" I might see younger people on the bus disrespecting somebody...I don't...but I don't really get too angry no more. No I don't get too angry. I know how to control that.

## Summary



Many young men described major depression, with sadness or a depressed mood as a defining feature. When young men did talk about feeling depressed or going through a period of depression, they usually talked about feeling sad. They also usually talked about more than one episode or another pronounced symptom of depression. Some used depressive language, many expressed distress through anger, some talked about fatigue, hopelessness, and sadness over time. Most of those young men also described a depressive cycle over time, with signs of major depression in early childhood, and evidence of more than one major or minor depressive episode over the course of their lives, as well as possible dysthymia. There were also young men who described minor depression, experiencing sometimes debilitating depressive symptoms, such as morning fatigue. Many young men dealt with anger and violence, with varying degrees of intensity over the course of their lives, and some related this directly to their depression and others did not. Overall, anger in childhood was triggered by feelings of abandonment and isolation, rooted in early childhood, but starting to really culminate just before adolescence as little boys started to form early identities. Anger was most clearly linked with feelings of depression when it was a shaming and isolating experience for boys.

## **CHAPTER 7: FATHERING**

Approximately one half the young men in this study, discussed in all of the previous chapters, were also young fathers. Young fathers were shaped by both the strategies that they developed to survive unpredictable environments, as well as by depressive language, thinking, and behavior over time. Fatherhood itself also

impacted the well being of young men; giving them a new opportunity for identity, the responsibility of taking care of their child, and the joy of fatherhood.

The twenty young fathers and expectant fathers in this study were asked additional questions about their experience that were coded and used in this chapter. The father codes included: co-parent relationship, co-parent perception, the perception of others related to their fathering skills and behavior, and the type of father they thought they were.

The need for connection and the strategy of avoidance that young men developed in unpredictable environments shaped their relationships with romantic partners and their paths to becoming a young father. Young couples, often in long term relationships, usually determined together that either wanted to have a child or would not prevent themselves from getting pregnant. However, after having the child, avoidant strategies that both young men and women had developed over time, made it more challenging to remain romantically committed.

Depressive should language and anger were also challenging for young men, with anger taking a direct and immediate toll on the co-parent relationship and should language possibly eroding young fathers' self confidence over time. However, young fathers also had a strong sense of fatherhood as a turning point and an opportunity to become more grounded in responsible behavior and become an adult. Overall, they were often more ambitious, hopeful, and joyful than their non-parent peers.

### **Becoming a Young Father**

Anything's possible. I like kids... I think babies is like a second you. It's like looking at yourself. I like kids, and I like looking at my son. So you never know, anything's possible. That's why you get yourself in that good position, so if they do come, I won't have to struggle with this... (Ramon)

Most young fathers were happy to learn they were going to be fathers. Although there was no single story of family planning, and young men had a range of experiences, both planned and unplanned pregnancies as well as terminations, most were pleased when they found out they were going to have a child. In general, young fathers wanted children because they felt they had good partners, having a child seemed developmentally appropriate to them as they were becoming young men and moving away from adolescence, the experience of fatherhood is grounding, they saw themselves reflected in their children, and they enjoyed children.

Many young fathers were ambivalent about birth control, and most were usually excited and happy when they found out they were having a baby. Many of these young men were in long term relationships with the mothers of their children. For example, Cristofer did not plan to have a child, but he and his partner of four years did not use birth control, but he was excited when he found out they were pregnant. Similarly, Antoine and his girlfriend never used birth control, and were together for three years before they got pregnant.

However, very few of these young men were still romantic partners with the mothers of their children at the time of the interview. The relationships were either stressed by the arrival of the baby, or were already ending when the couple got pregnant. Terrence was with the mother of his child for about a year and a half before they got pregnant, and they stayed together until he was about three months old. He was not sure what happened to their relationship, "I don't even really know. It was just so much... it was just like a bunch of arguments... It's okay now. We try not to

fuss.” Darius did not plan to have a baby when his girlfriend got pregnant; in fact they had already broken up when he found out.

It was crazy, because when my son was born, me and his mother had just stopped seeing each other when he was born... I didn't even know. We didn't even know... We had ended everything and she called me like “Yeah, you know I'm pregnant or whatever.” I was like “Dang.” But I always was there to take care of my son.

Marcus and his girlfriend had a miscarriage, and he was not trying to get pregnant again, “Not until I get my life situated.” However, they were not using birth control. He was sad about the loss of the first baby, and seemed to be okay with the possibility that they could get pregnant.

I'm hoping not to have children until like I get a job, like a wealthy job or something... But I guess like... 'cause I really wanted my... daughter that was a miscarriage... the doctor had said that she had lost oxygen or something. I was very sad about that.

He planned to get his GED as quickly as possible, and get a job, so that he would be able to take care of his girlfriend and any children they might have, and he seemed to like that idea.

I'm gonna try to work through the program as fast as I can... Just try to look harder for a job. And... do anything I can to... feed my girlfriend and feed my kids or something. Yeah feed my family.

Dominic also did not plan to get pregnant, but was happy about the idea of a baby as a reason to make changes in his life. They did not use birth control, and he admitted that he actually wanted to get pregnant, “I think I wanted it. I wanted a baby...”

We knew what was gonna happen... I was happy... Get right for real. Get on my feet... I'm still working. I ain't doing nothing else but just working... cause I wanted a baby... I don't know. I don't. It's crazy. I was happy.

Andre and his girlfriend talked about having a baby, but did not talk about using condoms when his girlfriend's doctor recommended that she stop taking birth control pills.

We had a talk about it and then just found out it happened... She was on birth control... Her doctor told her she had to get off of birth control 'cause it was in her system too much 'cause she was taking it every day and then every year so her system for a little bit and then I guess when it finally cleared out of her system, she got pregnant.

I asked Andre if he told her he was ready to have a baby, and he said, "She was. She was ready once she finished school and everything."

There were young fathers who wanted to have a baby and planned it with their partners. Jamaar was expecting his first child, but his partner's second child. The positive impact that co-parenting her other child had on their relationship and him was what got him excited to have a biological child with her.

What made us very planted like when we met up, and she had a son and I'm like, "Wow, when I was growing up I always wanted to have a son." And I'm like, alright I'm going to take this opportunity, this being my first child, he was still a baby though. So when I took him in, it was like, me and him got to know each other. And then I was like, it's kind of fun, 'cause like when I was... as I go around him, he stays around me. It's like, he'll watch me, watch what I do, and then when something's wrong, he'll come to me. It was like he was looking up to me. He'll be get cautious about some things and he'll come running to me and his mother and it was like, like I'm looking at him and I'm like wow, it's cool!

Jordan planned to have a baby with his girlfriend, and he was nervous during the pregnancy, but really happy when the baby was born.

I was happy... I mean like I couldn't jump for joy 'cause anything could happen... I do that when the birthday comes.

Jayson talked about planning to have a child because of his fears that he might not live much longer.

I don't know. It was sort of kind of like this. We planned it and it didn't happen then it popped up. But that was when I was working though. So it was something new... 'cause then I was more into that... I don't know how long I'm gonna be here so I just want something to leave behind 'cause I was just coming home from jail. I told you I was locked back up and forth and stuff like that so I might as well have this baby and just leave something behind just in case something tragic do happen. I get locked up, you know, and get hurt or something like that. Yeah so that was more why I had that baby.

Young men were open to birth control, but not confident about it or committed. Ramon talked about the need to be prepared to have a child at any time. At the same time, Ramon talked about making sure that his cousin was using condoms when he thought he was going to get a girl pregnant before he was ready to be exclusive with her.

So I'm sitting here talking to him... my little cousin told me that shorty was asking him, wishing he would give her a baby and all that. So you feeling me? I've been giving him a bag full of condoms, 'cause you know, at a young age... I gave him a bag of condoms or whatever 'cause he was doing work. He had more than one girl 'cause at a young age, you start with more than one girl so you can have certain ones you can pick from... and he was doing her wrong and all that, I had to talk to him and like "No, what's up, you better chill... Shorty ain't right"... I'm trying to put him on his feet and let him know.

However, condoms were just one form of birth control that young fathers used, and a couple of them got pregnant while using them.

I think she planned this. I'm not sure but she wasn't taking no pills or nothing... I was wearing a condom...

Despite using birth control and not wanting to have a child, Trent was still happy to have his daughter.

Right now it makes me feel good. At first I didn't want her. I didn't like it. But right now I feel good that I have her and I'm glad she's here. So... At first I didn't want no children. I wanted to get out of school first and get a good job and then have a child. But that ain't go as planned.

More than one young father had terminated another pregnancy. They attributed their decisions to terminate the pregnancies primarily to concerns about having children with more than one woman at that time. Jamaar chose to terminate a pregnancy with another woman, either because of her personality or just the friction that would have created with his girlfriend.

‘Cause one time, I actually went out and messed around, ended up getting somebody else pregnant. We ended up getting an abortion with that one though. And I’m like, I can’t do it. I can’t do it. ‘Cause that would’ve been a lot of drama. A lot of problems.

Jayson also terminated a pregnancy with a non-exclusive girlfriend. Initially they were trying to get pregnant, because Jayson had a job, but when he lost his job, they did not start using birth control again.

Well I ain’t gonna lie ‘cause at first we did try. When I had my job, we tried and then from there we just wasn’t never using condoms no more and then it just so happened that like I think like two months ago... and then we went to Planned Parenthood and they gave her the little sonogram and it turned out she was pregnant and they asked her does she want to keep it. I was thinking to myself like ... I can’t go through that. Now if I’d had a job it would’ve been different. I, you know, just can’t take care of that responsibility.

He was clearly still conflicted about it, and talked about his feelings, “I don’t know. It kind of hurt ‘cause now I kinda want the baby and now it’s gone.”

### **Co-parent Relationship**

Most young fathers had been with the mothers of their children for a few years before they got pregnant, but at the time of the interview, they had strained, no longer romantic, but functional relationships with their co-parents. Overall, most of their relationships were serious and based on multiple year commitments, but also at a point where many first serious romantic relationships are breaking apart. Most young

parents were not together romantically anymore, but had a respect for each other and were each active in co-parenting their child.

Some of these young relationships had fairly mature underpinnings, with couples who were trying to build a family together, and work out problems as they came along, something that many young fathers did not have a lot of practice doing. For example, Jordan was living with his mother, his baby's mother, and their eight month old daughter. They have been together four years. Jordan did not like talking about his problems, but said that his proximity to his co-parent forced him to talk to her, "Other than my baby's mother yeah because she sleeps with me so I have to talk through our issues."

Similarly, Andre was still with the mother of his son, and they had been together for five or six years. He stated that he was hoping they would be moving in together in a month or so, although he was not sure how, "I don't know we're just going to work together and try." He was also hoping they would get married eventually. They fought, but tried to work through their disagreements.

We fuss a lot but we try ... Just try to talk like some normal people and not outrageous, cussing, trying to have simple conversations to try and get everything back right. And talk about what we could've did to make it better.

I complimented him on their ability to do that, and asked him if he thought it was a skill, or just normal, "I'm not sure. I just think it's normal... We both play a part in it."

Many young couples were still romantic, but struggling with the tasks of young relationships; pursuit of self-actualization within the context of a committed relationship, and compromising on ideas of what it means to be a family. For



example, Martin and his partner had been together two years, but still lived with their respective parents, and were both planning to attend Morgan State in the fall. Martin wanted to pursue some type of career in activism or politics, and thought it would be difficult to be dedicated to both career and marriage, although he thought he would be able to be there for his son.

I would like to marry her and do the family thing. But I feel like...like I was saying like all the pressure that's on me, everybody's saying that I have go much going...I really I feel like I would cheat everybody else. And it's kind of serious what I go through...

I feel like she'll hold me back from a lot. Like I'll always be a father to my son, like even if I do what I'm going to do, why not have him there so he'll learn everything that I didn't know when I was trying to...I just feel like in relationships you've gotta...it'd be selfish of me to expect that she wants that type of life for her, like Obama and them?

Similarly, Jamaar was also still with his girlfriend although they did not live together, but his goal was to eventually be able to support them as a family.

And it's just like we've both been through a lot and she said she can't see herself without me and I say I can't see myself without her. But we have our up and downs though, but then we get it back on track. We've been together for almost three years.

Jamaar was not interested in marriage, but he thought they were committed to each other.

No, I'm not sure about marriage yet 'cause that's a big commitment. That's big. Like man...that's a big commitment... I see some people that rush it...that got married wishing they didn't get married. And I'm like oh man, I don't want that to be man.... I don't want that to be me. I'll probably get married when I'm about, I'll be in my 30s. I'll be in my 30s (*laughs*) when I get married.

Young co-parents thought about who should be making money, who had childcare responsibilities, how much free time each parent got, and how they should

be spending that time. Tyler described himself as off and on with his baby's mother, and they had been together just eight months when she found out she was pregnant.

It's on and off for real. We're still in a relationship but you know, she had her times she just wanted to be with the baby by herself, just took the baby... good relationship. Nothing wrong with it.

They did not live together, because she was fairly independent, and he thought she wanted him to stay home with their baby while she worked.

Hell no she doesn't live with me... She lives by herself... So like the baby stays with her...stays with her. So I go over there and we see each other and stay there.

Sometimes we don't see eye to eye. We just don't see eye to eye and get into arguments. She wants me to do stuff that I don't want to do... You know sometimes like now I'm like, God I can't always be up under her and the baby. I go out there you know? Trying to provide... She don't understand - she got money and just want to depend on her money.

I'm always around but like she wants...she wants...basically she wants me to sit and raise the baby while she goes and makes money. That's what it sounds like.

However, Tyler did not like this idea.

No I want my own... Yeah but I mean I've done it a couple times but baby can't just live off of your check... No, let me do something.

Tyler thought that she loved him and that helped them to get along well. They tended to disagree about how often he should watch the baby so that she could go out socially as well as work.

She wants to go party. Well most of the time it's probably when she wants...well she goes to work most of the time... for the baby to go for real, my mother will watch her or somebody will watch her. But she... she might want to go around the street, go and have fun you know?

So I've watched the baby a couple times but you're not gonna make that a habit... So when I get my own money, and take my baby and we can just go and have fun. If we want to just sit in the house ... giving us money to go have fun or something.

However, he said that she gave him money to take their daughter out.

She gives me money. She gives me money sometimes, a couple dollars... Some days are better [than others]. I mean we always have a good time... I'm you know I give her that to her for real. I understand.

Young co-parents sometimes had to come to terms with infidelity and decide what that was going to mean for their relationships. Jamaar talked about cheating on his girlfriend and dealing with the consequences of that.

I was like, I can't do that. So we got that back on...we just recently got that back on track... And I know that's a lot we got to still clean up now. A lot to clean up...

I don't call her in a long time she probably thinks I'm out messing around... But I call her on a daily basis. I call her when she's at work. I tell her I don't want to call her, but she'll text me telling me to call and I'll tell her, "No." And she'll be like, "Why, what are you doing?" And I'm like, "I'm not doing anything, I don't want to disturb you while you're at work."

Antoine was with his daughter's mother, but they broke up, and he was with someone else at the time of the interview, although they were "going through something." He saw his daughter every week, and got along well with her mother. He was in love with her when they were together, but they had problems.

We get along real good, love my baby mama... Things didn't work out with us or whatever problems we had to separate... I loved her.

They had problems getting along, and he saw other women while he was with her.

Big- big problems... and some other females... I might of cheated a couple of times.

Young men sometimes fell in love, but were too immature to think about the long term consequences of their actions. I asked Antoine why he cheated on the woman that he said he was in love with, and he said, "(inaudible sounds-0:09:15.8) new faces?" Then I asked him if it was worth it.

No, not when I look at it like that... I could of had fun, it ain't really worth me messing up... I'm just saying

I: it seems like you had a little bit on the line - like this woman and a baby

R: yeah yeah, that's what I'm saying

Monte had a good relationship with the mother of his child, but they were no longer together because she cheated on him, although they had been together four or five years.

We get along very good though. Like she can call me any time, ask me to get some Pampers, or anything, I get it for her. She don't cuss me out. She don't fight on me. I don't cuss her out or fight on her or nothing. We got a real nice bond.

Well let's just say she did the C word on me. She cheated... It hurt but I told her we just needed some time apart for her to get her mind right. 'Cause I don't do the cheating... 'cause I don't want nobody to cheat on me. It hurts. I know. It hurts. So I try not to do it.

He was still thinking he wanted to get married at some point, "We're supposed to get married. We still talk about it. So we're working on that stage." Monte also talked about how much he has grown up.

I'm still learning. And things did change like I grew up more. I'm more mature now. I ain't young minded like I used to be. My daughter's what matured me up. Like my baby mama, she used to be young minded. She wanted to run the streets, be in this dude's face, that dude's face. But as soon as the baby got here it's like she turned into a mother and I turned into a father. All the stuff we used to do, we just cut it out. Like once you got a child, the fun gotta stop. You gotta be there for your child.

Ramon did not have a good relationship with the mother of his child, "Can't deal with her." They were together for two years before she got pregnant, but then she went through some family trauma, and Ramon thought it changed her. He tried to help her work through some of those issues, but felt that she was too promiscuous for him to maintain a committed relationship with her.

Somebody that sleeps with more than one guy? Within one month? They're a freak. And she wasn't like that at first, but after her father...her mother died, that month... sometime before I met her, and then I met her whatever...we were messing with each other for like... two years, two, three years...two years, then she got pregnant.

Then she got pregnant ... after she had the baby, my son...I'd say probably about two, two, three months later, her brother died. Her brother died... That's when she went bonkers... Yeah, that's when she went crazy. Started talking to this guy, this guy, doing that guy. You know me? I ain't trying to cuff a girl that...you know what I mean? I'm not that type of person. Just looking for like...I'm normal. I wouldn't even say I'm normal, but a lot of people know me, and I know a lot of people, so that'll make me look bad. Bad enough than my baby's mother. I got a reputation basically... It's like people know me and who I am...stuff like that.

He tried to talk to her about the things he was hearing about her, but she denied it, and he decided to break things off.

So I tried to work it out...tried to talk to her. Let her know like, "The stuff you're doing ain't cool." So she tried to deny, and then I keep hearing stuff, you feeling me? And then I could see it happening. Like for one instance...a lot of times they try to be nice to you, offer you to eat and all that. So she was rushing me...she was rushing me! After we eat, you know so we can hurry up and leave so she can go out with her home girls and do what they do. So like alright, boom.

Quite a few couples simply did not get along, and so they tried not to fight with each other while co-parenting amicably. Terrence was no longer with his baby's mother, but said that their relationship was "okay now. We try not to fuss." She was somewhat critical of him, but he tried to avoid arguing with here.

It's just like... we have our ups and downs but like most of the time it be ups but it's always something that's just like... one time she asked me to get his haircut, and for some reason she didn't like the haircut. Everybody else in her house liked the haircut but she just didn't like it so like she said "I asked you to do one simple thing and you can't do it right." So then I'm just like...we get to arguing or whatever and...but I just smoke a cigarette and just ease the stress away... I just try to avoid [fights] as much as I can... It was...it was like a mutual agreement like we just couldn't be with each other anymore.

## **Impact of Anger and Depression on Co-parent Relationship**

Dominic was also only sometimes romantically involved with his child's mother, because they also had a difficult time getting along, and he found this to be somewhat depressing.

Definitely that gets me down. I don't know but I think... Sometimes when I'm wrong... ..no it gets on my nerves yeah. Yeah it do, it is like a depression... Just little stuff. Little stuff I guess.

They were living together with his aunt, and his girlfriend moved out, but they still have daily contact.

No I see her every day. She always comes to my house. Just drops my daughter off or something like that... No we don't fight. Right now we...we're cool right now... I think it's 'cause we've been together so long.

Jayson was no longer with the mother of his child, said that they got along well. However, that was not always the case.

I ain't gonna lie, it's kinda cool. I know I can count on her. If my mom were to put me out... I mean she's got a boyfriend but I ain't gonna lie, she don't play that putting her boyfriend before her baby's father. So like I come first for everything with her... I think that's why she take me off of child support now.

He felt like she did that to support him, but sometimes, he thought his baby's mother was disingenuous with him, because of her boyfriend, and he did not like that at all.

You wanna know the number one thing that sets me off when I'm angry? Phoniness... Phoniness just grinds my gears... I just hate a phony person. I think I've just been around phoniness so much that it just...it's just...just can't take it at all.

My baby mother. Yeah we're talking on the phone everything going cool, everything going cool, it's this, this, and that. I get to her house, her boyfriend there and it's a whole different story now that he's in the picture. If I'm drunk, I might start spilling the beans... So yeah it's phoniness though. Like phoniness will make me fight somebody. 'Cause when you act phony...

I asked him if they fought about that type of thing, and he said no, although he had before.

No I wouldn't fight... I have before though. I went to jail for it... That was my first adult charge. I'm pretty sure next time I go to jail for another domestic violence...I got one from my mother, and from my baby mother. I'm pretty sure they're going to smash me like "You've got problems with females." They don't be that though. It just be... that's just what be happening at the moment.

He described his temper, but said he no longer had bad moments.

It's like a real slow build up... Like before it builds up I go. So real slow... Anybody say anything to me, you know little things, 'cause I get it all the time you know as far as "He ain't shit" and you know it don't bother me 'cause I know I'm something. I know I'm gonna be something so it really don't bother me.

Not no more. I used to. I just found little things you know to deal with it like I eat. I walk...take my walk you know just things I found to you know calm my nerves... Go air it out. Take a walk. I got to take my walk.

I asked him how he knew he was something.

My daughter. The way she looks at me. You know she looks up to me so it makes me feel you know and good that I do have you know...know that somebody's looking up to me you know? She looks to see how daddy is. You know so she waits for me to come home at night when I get off of work. So it's like ain't nothing that can really put down.

Kadim had a very complicated and negative relationship with the mother of his two children.

My personal life, with my baby's mother. Me it feels like I'm raising three kids. I'm not gonna lie. She...I love her dearly, I do anything for her, it's just that I want her to see things through my eyes now.

Very bad issues but if I give up on her, it's like damn I'm doing what everybody else did but at the same time, I can't keep blaming myself 'cause she don't want to get right. But every time I tell her she gets...she say "You're just trying to control my life." Like "No you just don't get it. You're bad for the past two years wasting my life... But I chose to stay here with this girl who's making my life a living hell...."

He had shared custody of their older child with his grandmother, because the baby's mother lost her parental rights. He described her and the situation.

Cuckoo for Coco Puffs, baby mother... They stripped her rights. All of that. I was...trying to tell you... this girl...we would not be sitting here right now. Like that's all...it's crazy because I mean we went to court, I'm in the back seat...I'm not...they didn't even know I was there. They didn't...nobody done showed up. I showed up just listening to how they talking about how bad of a mother she is and I still didn't get ... get right? So they was like what's the father doing? Everybody got quiet. The only thing I heard was, "Well he works at a nursing home. He's doing what's right." That's my grandmother saying that. They say "Well where is he at now." And I'm like "Shit, right here." They was like "You got custody."... He was like "You got custody. All that." And I took it from there.

However, after all of that happened, they had sex again and she got pregnant again.

December 25<sup>th</sup> it was a party, we had sex because she told me she was on Depo. So I said fine, let's do it. The whole time, she lied ...

Not the only stuff like that happen in movies. I didn't know that shit was real... That's another eighteen years added onto the trauma that I had to the previous eighteen years that I had with her... We still...we never been together. We haven't been together since 2010. Boyfriend, girlfriend...we never was a couple. It was just a thing...Told you. It's weird.

Sometimes the co-parent relationship was impacted indirectly by anger and depressive behavior from both partners, and sometimes it was more direct and discernible, as with Cristofer. Cristofer and his partner had recently broken up after being together for four years, and he was still fairly heartbroken about it. They shared custody of their three year old son informally, and his son stayed with him frequently. He thought part of the reason they had broken up was due to financial stress and him not working.

Like, I don't want to say financially wise, but that's what I thought it was. And...after a while, we just split apart.



He described his search for a job as, “nothing happening,” which was particularly stressful, because he wanted so much for his child.

It’s just nothing happening for me. I think about the future all the time, because I want it better for him, you know. I want him to have a career and retire and you know and have college funds for him and stuff like that but right now I just can’t. So...and I’m trying, I was trying, but it just...nothing working for me.

Anger has always been a part of depression for Cristofer, and this may have been part of why they broke up. They were still not on great terms, and fought quite a bit, despite talking every day.

Little things like you know, she had an attitude and I have an attitude, and we both clash heads. And it was just not healthy at all, we’ll just put it like that. And it just, it hurt me more now, ‘cause I really still want to be with her, but she doesn’t want to be with me.

Sometimes when they fought, it was physical, and that is also why they do not live together now.

Wrestling and grabbing each other. You know, I never physically punched her or anything like that. She physically punches me, and one time I shoved her and she sprung up at me. She did spring at me.

Now? We don’t live with each other so we don’t really get close to each other but we do talk. But when we do talk on the phone it still bothers us about what happened. I really don’t want to hear about it anymore. I told her, I apologized. I was remorseful about the situation but it’s just...I still don’t want it to be in my head ...

Cristofer’s anger and depression were triggered by the relationship, and then his shame about getting angry just made the depression worse.

I get mad and I do something and then I feel really bad afterwards. And trying to make up for what I did but it’s just...sometimes it doesn’t work out.... I throw things...what triggers me? Well...going back to the relationship. But that’s the only thing when like I was really...had a real hot temper.

He and his co-parent both know how to bring out the worst in each other.

She knows how to push the button. You know? She has an attitude, and I tried to talk to her like “What’s wrong?” “Get the F out of my face.” Like “Leave me the F alone.” So I’m like...like where is this coming from? So...then I’ll get angry because she knows what button to push and I throw little things. It’s like...I throw little things like I’ll throw a penny. I’ll throw a penny or something out her. Or a toy car or something and then it just...that just escalates it more and so...

After they fought, Cristofer experience shame, remorse, and depression over what he thought was out of control behavior.

And then afterwards I’m feeling down low again. Feeling like depression... Because I feel that I take it to an extreme. Like... Throwing things like...that’s something kids do. That’s childish. But I just feel mad, that’s what I do. And I feel down about it and...

I buy a pack of cigarettes or something. That’s what really got me started smoking. I’m trying to quit. Trying to quit now but I’ve been through a lot with her.

Cristofer usually apologized for his behavior during the fight, but he and his partner were still in disagreement around whatever issue started the fight in the first place. Sometimes his partner was tired of hearing apologies. Not only was Cristofer still somewhat angry about the issue, he used depressive language to characterize the fights, making it to see why he got so frustrated and depressed during the fight itself. It did not matter what they were fighting about, he characterized the conflict as global and stable, and the fight was one of self preservation over the source, internal or external.

It depends on the situation. Whether she’ll be like, “We’re tired of hearing apologies. Every time you do something you always apologize. I’m tired of hearing it.” Even though I really do be really apologetic... at the same time I don’t trigger the...the situation all the time. She does things too but she’s always right and I don’t say all females are like that. But we *never* gonna be right. I’m *never* gonna be right. I’m *always* gonna be wrong even when I’m right so...

## Father Responsibility

### Being a Provider

Every young father talked about the importance of providing for his child, and being able to buy him or her all of the things that they might need.

For example, Jordan said that his baby's mother saw him as a good father, because he was able to buy his child everything she needed and he played with her, "She got to see me as a good one 'cause I buy everything. I get her everything she needs. I play with her..."

Conversely, Terrence said the worst thing about being a dad was not being able to do everything for his son.

Not being able to do everything that you want to do for your child. Like you wanna keep him in the newest clothes and have him you know just like everything you always wanted to have you want them to have. So not being able to do everything like that is...that's kind of toughest thing.

Some young men realized that they did not want any more children, because they were so expensive, and they did not want to make the sacrifices they knew they would. Dontae thought everything was too much.

Everything... Kids expensive. Everything... Clothes. When they get older, shoes. Like she might like expensive stuff like I do. So I mean...then she's the only child so we gotta spoil her... And if I'm expensive and the baby's expensive, that ain't gonna work. So I'm having no more kids.

Similarly, Jayson was stressed being a father because of money.

Stressed out... It's too much that comes with this. Babies cost a lot of money, man... Like every other week, my baby mother be calling me. No I'm gonna say every like three weeks, she'll be calling me talking about pampers and wipes and...and pacifiers and bottles and cups and baths and clothes and shoes and money to get places and go to doctor's appointments with her. And she wants to go to this place and that place with the baby and this new thing came up that she don't got for the baby and I'm like "No that's too much." And it be stressful because she wants all of this stuff but I can never get my daughter what I want to though.

It was hard for Jayson to enjoy buying things for his daughter because of the stress of not having a job, and the sometimes contentious relationship he had with her mother.

However, young men took a lot of pride in their children and being able to take care of them. For example, Tyler also was proud of his daughter, and proud of himself for being there to take care of his family, although it has been hard for him with no job.

I mean it's...I'm proud of it. I'm proud of my daughter. It's you know it's hard but... you've gotta make the best out of it you know? You've gotta support for the baby and you know she's taken care of well though, she's taken care of well. I mean it's hard though you know? You know I don't have a job, so you know, gotta really try to support for her. I'm still with my baby's mother... she has a job. So she's really the one taking care of her. Dollars here and there I give it to her you know. Couple of dollars.

For some young men, taking care of their children was redemptive. As a child who grew up in kinship care, it was very important to Tariq that be able to care care of his child.

I mean, just now, just taking care of mine. I don't want to make the mistakes my parents made you know with my child. You know? So just be a better person that's all.

Some young men talked about doing whatever it took even when they were not working. Kadim knew he had to be the one to make sure they had everything they needed.

Everything they need I got it. I make my way to get it. If I can't get it that day, I'll try my best... Washing cars, trying to do housekeeping, any of those smallest jobs I do, I'll do it...

Some young men had perspective on what the baby actually needed versus everything, and these same young men were also able to accept help when it was

offered. Monte talked about how it was stressful to be unemployed when his daughter was born and all of the things that she needs.

The stressful part is when she was first born. Gotta get up every night... And not having a job when she was first born... you gotta worry about Pampers, clothes, shoes. Then you gotta worry about yourself. So that was a little stressful. Then I had...I was always taught not to ask people. I was you know taught to get it on my own but I asked a couple people for help. It wasn't no problem 'cause they know I'm a nice person.

### **Becoming More Prepared for Employment**

Some young men talked about the need to be prepared for a baby even when they did not have one. It was difficult for them to learn that there are few jobs for young men without a GED – often they were prepared to work in order to support a family and then found that they needed to go back for the GED in order to do that.

Having a child sometimes gave young fathers permission to focus on their futures. Ramon talked about the need to walk away from stressful situations in order to focus on getting his GED and getting a job, in order to be prepared for children financially.

So...that's why I'm moving forward, you know what I mean? Leaving the stress alone, I don't need none of that. You feeling me? So I can move forward...put myself in a better position so I can get my own house...get my car back...get my...get my...you know what I mean? Get my money back. And start to do right for us, like kid...my kid and all that. And you never know, your kid...you know popping up out of...you feeling me? So you gotta be prepared.

Similarly, Terrence talked about dropping out of school, having a few different jobs, but procrastinating getting his GED, and then finding out that he was going to have a child.

Yeah I got a job at McDonald's after that... It was okay for a while... Then like ever since then I've just been getting jobs. Like I worked at a warehouse. I worked at K-Mart, Sears...um...a couple other places but it's like

they...without a high school diploma or G.E.D. it's like they don't wanna give you the right amount of money you deserve and stuff like that...Yeah I left there and went to Sears and...and then that's when my son came in the picture. I had to like think about him and try to...this was when he was...you know like planning for a baby so you gotta save money and...so then I was just like...like it was...that wasn't even on my mind. Getting a G.E.D. wasn't...just like seeing the money and just knowing I got a child on the way.

It took Terrence a few jobs to realize that he might want to more education to improve his prospects for more permanent employment. He lost another job at White Marsh Mall after the warehouse, when the store where he was working was temporarily closed down. I asked if he could get a job there, now that it was reopened, and he said, "I haven't tried... Just focusing on my G.E.D. right now."

Terrence had tried to take care of his son and get his GED on his own, but had gotten more support, and was learning to accept help in order to stay focused on school.

I don't like...it's just trying to work and take care of my son and like just trying not to have other people help me out with things and now it's just like...like my aunt and my father they won't take "No" for an answer. Like "No we're gonna help you out" and so now it's just like I can just like take some pressure off and focus on some things that I need to do.

Terrence found it was much easier to focus on getting his GED with family support.

Some young men had a vision for their families in the future, but knew they needed to get started. Tyler talked about getting prepared for a more stable and financially secure future.

Better like from where I'm at now. I need to improve on what I'm doing so by the time I'm you know, the years go by in the future, I'll be prepared. I'll have money and already have a career plan and all the good stuff, you know a house or apartment. Something you know?... (*Inaudible, 0:20:06.4*) just you know, chill, (*inaudible, 0:20:10.3*) money. Just all of it's gotta be good you know? I just want to be proud of my daughter and you know she'll go to school and get good grades. (*Inaudible, 0:20:28.2*) that's why I've gotta start now. That's why I'm doing.

Although Trent will feel better when he has his GED and a job.

I feel best about myself when everything's situated and done. Like when I get a job, get out my own... It's nothing for me to feel best about. Well me taking my daughter out I feel best about that but right now I can't feel proud about my...proud of myself about nothing right now because just...I don't have nothing going right now. I'm here trying to take a G.E.D. instead of having a high school diploma and I'm working on and off. It's not a solid job. So I can't...can't say I'm proud about myself.

A good day to me if it...if I could go out here and get a job. That's a good day to me. Somebody else probably be out...a good day is the weather or something like that. But a good day to me is I go out and I get a job in...if I get my high school diploma, that'll be a good day. But after that, then I'll be able to say I'm proud of myself. Until then I can't actually say that.

Edward was sure, however, that he needed to get his GED to get a job.

Dominic also talked about wanting to be there financially for his children, and how that was hard because he also needed to get his GED.

It means a lot like um...I want to be there for my daughter (*inaudible*, 0:03:56.5) so especially when (*inaudible*, 0:03:57.6). I want to provide for her. So I keep myself right... It's just getting hard 'cause I'm not working now. (*Inaudible*, 0:04:21.9) fourteen, if not fourteen, sixteen.

Monte talked about his baby's mother being pretty well established and how that made him want to get his GED.

Oh she got her own place now and she got two jobs. She got a nice little car. She still calls me and everything. We still spend time together but I told her I don't want no girlfriend until I get my head on straight. 'Cause (*inaudible*, 0:50:23.1) a female don't want no dumb dude.

### **Time to Be a Man**

Becoming a father meant becoming a man for many young men, which also meant giving up adolescent behavior. For example, Darius felt it was time to make changes in his life, get his GED, and get a job. And he equated it with being a man.

No I mean it's the season. Seasons for everything. You know? That season is over now. Now this season. I just feel it. And nine times out of ten, I be right

about stuff. You know so like yeah it's time...it's time to be a man now. That was kid stuff, so it's time to be a man now, gotta be man stuff.

I had the right mindset before I been here. Before I been came here. But what brought me back here? Like now...I'm getting older and I want something, you know, accomplished, you know like college, high school and stuff like that so I can encourage my kid to do the same. Just early at the right time. I chose to play at the wrong time, so...

Fatherhood brought welcome change to young men, that they seemed ready to make. Antoine, who did not get happy or excited about much, said one of his favorite things about being a dad was how it made you a man to take care of your responsibilities.

Favorite things about being a dad? I would say it made a man, taking care of responsibilities... it makes me take my responsibilities serious.

However, in a challenging economy, this was also stressful on young men. Antoine had been trying hard to get a job, with no success. He handled the stress of it, "Day by day, day by day." I asked him how it felt to take care of his responsibilities, and he said again, "I don't know... like a man." He tried to stay focused on the job search, and not stress over unemployment.

How do I feel umm? I said I don't get mad or crazy, I don't do none of that, I'm just saying I take it day by day... I be mad, when I can't get it, that's why I want to get a job cause I need to buy her stuff, I need to put more applications in and stuff like that, so she can get what she want.

The hard work of being a father was something that most young men enjoyed.

Trent also defined taking care of his child as being a man, it made him feel good.

I mean I feel good. I ain't gonna die so...hey...it's just, right now (*inaudible*, 0:29:06.3). I gotta do what I gotta do as a man... it ain't gonna break me or nothing like that...Yeah it's some work...You gotta put in work. It's not easy either.



## Turning Points

Fatherhood helped young men to grow up and become responsible, but also to make the specific choices required. It changed the parameters and definitions of manhood in such a way that youth could focus on the long term consequences of their behavior, and choose to take the path that would most likely keep them present for their children for many years to come.

Fatherhood helped young men to resist both peer and sibling pressure. For example, Jordan had to make different choices from his brother to not be on the streets anymore.

Like... smoking and all that. But he was like out there smoking and selling drugs. In and out of jail so like I said I couldn't do it. I had a child and settled down... The streets are real tough. And I just decided to change... I don't want to be a burden. I want to be here to see my child go to high school, college.

Jordan realized that in addition to needing to take care of and be there for his child through young adulthood, the decision not to take care of himself would make him a burden on his child.

Children gave young men a reason to stay focused as they saw themselves reflected in their eyes. Monte said that not just thought's of his daughter kept him from making bad choices or engaging in negative behavior, but imagining what she would say to him helped him to stay on track.

What not think about nothing negative? Because I got a daughter so I think about her all the time. Like if I'm...if I'm not thinking about her what would I be over here doing? Probably just smoking weed or selling drugs or something. So before I even think about doing that, I think about her. And I picture her face in my head like "Daddy what are you doing? You shouldn't be doing that. You should be here for me." So that's why I don't think negative. She make me think positive.

Monte thought his daughter saved his life just by helping stay away from drug users and dealers.

‘Cause if I didn’t have...if I ain’t have my daughter, I think I’d have been dead. I hate to say I think I’d have been dead because of the people I was hanging with before I had my daughter. Hanging with people that smoke weed and sell drugs and people always getting their doors kicked in. And police watching me even if I’m not doing nothing they watching me. So my daughter changed my life.

Also, being with his daughter has kept Monte from putting himself into dangerous situations.

You know as long as she with me or I’m going to see her, I don’t really be worrying about going outside. ‘Cause I know if I go outside and she want to go with me, I don’t go places where it’s violent or bad at. I just take her to go see everybody we know. She go in the house, and I go in the house.

Monte was very careful not to put her in dangerous situations, which meant no hanging outside, but going inside with her.

Becoming a father was not always an instant turning point for young men, but sometimes just an important part of the equation. Dontae had a daughter, but it took getting shot for him to decide to change his life.

Well it’s both really ‘cause after I had my daughter, I wasn’t doing nothing. And then I was still out there but I wasn’t doing nothing, then I got shot. So that’s what really made me say “Well I keep on being out here and not doing nothing, no point in being out here ‘cause I’m not doing nothing.” So I just stay in here and I’m just chillin. I’m not coming out there like I used to. If I ain’t know you’re doing nothing, but I go outside here and there but I’m still not doing nothing. I just go outside.

Dontae was pulling away from street life incrementally, first playing a less active role in the drug trade, and then going inside altogether. Although, it was hard to ascertain during the interview if he had stopped dealing drugs entirely, or just shifted some of the more visible parts of the business to his nephews.

Dontae was not the only young man to make more changes in theory than in reality. Kadim talked about how being a father made him feel joyful, and how it was a turning point for him, but not an instant one.

Joyful, delighted, accomplished. Got more jobs...a serious job now. Don't take life for granted no more... before I had these kids, I'd go out there do dumb and reckless stuff.

I had a [vision]: My grandmother passed away. And I was homeless. My kid was in foster care... So I was like fuck it I don't want that. That was scary...

However, Kadim still seemed to engage in a fair amount of reckless behavior, sleeping outside, and having another baby with a woman that he describes as, "Cuckoo for cocoa puffs."

Using the space that parenthood created for them, allowed young men to make changes, which then positively reinforced themselves. Trent was able to get on the right track for his daughter, and it made him feel good about himself.

I feel good about myself now I'm on the right track, doing the right things with myself, trying to better myself for my daughter. I feel good about myself right now.

Fatherhood was also an emotional turning point for young men, allowing them to focus on their own parenthood, and less on the past and continued failures of their own parents. Tariq had to stop thinking about anger toward his own mother, in order to stay focused on his future.

I mean she's there but you know she's not more like a mother... Like she gives us money and all the stuff like that if we need it but... like now that I'm grown, I don't look for my mother to do a lot for me then like...from when I was just young. You understand what I'm saying? So now I just...I really can't think about my past and how my past was. I just try to make it better for the future.

Having a child motivated young men to improve themselves. Terrence talked about how being a father made him want to do more with himself.

It makes me feel like...like I got a...like I...it just pushes me to want to do more and more things with myself to better him... it's a good thing... Like come here and get a job. Just like try to see myself as like I gotta try to you know help him out and grow and...and just like things like that.

Terrence talked about how watching his son learn and grow made him want to work toward his son's future.

It made me feel good like just like him learning... learning so many things as such a young age is like...it make me feel real good like...that's why it makes me like want to better myself so he can have a brighter future. Like even though right now like even where I'm at right now he would have a pretty good future but you want him to be the best.

Watching his son grow and learn motivated Terrence to not get complacent, but to keep taking positive next steps toward a better future.

The physical tasks of taking care of a child were enjoyable for many young fathers. Darius enjoyed being a father so much that he said he would take custody of his child if possible or necessary, with no assistance from his mother.

I'm a good father. Like good father, destined to be a great father. You know, like right now, I love my son, I'd do anything for him. You know like...f she didn't...she wouldn't even have to get him, I would keep my son. Like if it came to it. She wouldn't have to worry about nothing, I wouldn't ask her for nothing. Like no child support, no nothing. Like I just want my son. You know?...that's how I feel.

Darius really liked being around his son and being responsible for him.

Kadim also did many of the caretaking tasks, ranging from changing diapers to taking out the trash, and although he was mildly resentful, he was good at it.

I'm cool with that. Especially the reason why I got kicked out of my old house when me and my baby mother were living together, uh...every night I work from three to eleven... .. long ass bus where I come in the house make bottles, change pampers, take out of the trash. Shit this should already be

done. So I'm pretty good...I got...when I say I have all of this stuff down on this side of the brain, and we don't even use that side is straight. I got everything down pat. Like everything.

Monte realized his purpose, "Well mine is to take care of my daughter and make sure that my career gets straight." Tyler also had a stronger sense of those things since he became a parent, and now he has to take care of someone besides himself.

Yeah so it's not all about me now... I'm okay. I've had my time where I...buy myself some clothes or something. She got it, then that's when I can spend money on me. So that's how I carry it...

### **More Than Money / Around for the Long Term**

Young men planned to be responsible fathers over time, and not just when their children were babies. Darius had a strong sense of wanting to be a good father for his child for a long time, from childhood through college.

I mean you...you...you...I mean everybody's a good father when their kids are small, 'cause like it's a lot of stuff to do, but it's not that much to do, but when they get older, that's when the greatness comes out because they're in school, and you know it's like you have to talk to them and lead them in a right way, you know what I mean? So it's more work when they...after years come to pass, you know? I'm going to be great. Now you know, 'cause like yeah my son going to be finish school, went to college and stuff like that, you know, better achievements, you know turns a good father into a great father. You know, how you raise your kid.

Jordan talked about how important it was to him to be there for his child, and to set a good example.

Being a father. Being there for my child... most... fathers that are not there so I always tell myself that I'll be there for mine. You know what I mean?

The kid sees how they parents are, they'll want to grow up to be like their parents. So you gotta set an example for your child or for her to make a better life.

Jordan had multiple goals.

Better life, get my G.E.D., become a cook... Go to college and take my trade that I want to do... There are opportunities open for everybody. You just gotta achieve yourself to that goal.

I asked him what was going to help him achieve his goals, and he said, "My daughter. That's the main key, my daughter." He was very aware of what her life might be like if he was not able to achieve his goals.

'Cause I want her to do right. I don't want her to do wrong... I don't want her to be like that... I don't want her living from house to house. I don't want it like that. I just want life success I always do. There'll always be a downfall once in a while but hey, make it over the speed bump.

Monte talked about how does being a father made him feel motivated to work and set a good example for his daughter.

Good. Excellent. 'Cause I know...now that I know that I got a child, it makes me want to work and do what I'm supposed to do to make sure her career be good when she gets older. 'Cause if she grows up not seeing me do nothing, just...she gonna think it's good for her not to do nothing. Always said I ain't gonna be too strict on my child. The only way I'm gonna be strict on is school. That's the only thing I'm gonna care about is school and boys.

Sometimes young fathers faced significant challenges. Tariq's daughter had cerebral palsy, and so he had a strong sense of needing to set her up to be taken care of when he was gone.

Setting goals and careers for myself. Like I said, to move on with life, really want to make it good for my daughter...you know make sure she's alright when I do leave this earth 'cause you know everybody has an expiration date so that's one thing I just don't like to worry when I do leave this earth that's all. You know?

Tariq said that when he sees his daughter happy he knows he is doing his job as a parent.

Well pretty much like my daughter, she's got cerebral palsy so she's not up to the functions that other kids are doing so me seeing her you know interacting with kids, picking up toys, you know talking, she's smiling. That made me

feel very good. You know and to see her happy like that you know makes me feel that I was doing what I'm supposed to be doing as a father.

He had an excellent sense of her growth and current limitations.

Well it's just her head movement. You know she can't really hold her head up. And she's working on her legs, like her legs...she wants to walk you know she puts pressure on her legs but you know as far as that she's...she's kinda a long way you know from when she was born.

However, he was not sure what her future would hold, as she had liver disease and got several types of therapy right now.

### **Fears**

Young men did have some fears about being able to stay on track in the future

I asked Monte what he thought would help him to be successful, and he had some fears.

Staying on track and my daughter... I just want my daughter you know how...you know...nowadays you know you got kids out here doing the background on their parents to see if they really finished school, what type of trouble they got into. So if my daughter was to do that, I want her to be like "Well my father did get himself on track and he made sure I had a good life." So I don't want her to see I was in jail or deceased or see why I got deceased or none of that. If she do a background on me, it's gonna be a good history. That's all I want, for her to be like "Oh I want to be like my father then. He had a good history."

Jamaar's only concern about being a father was over whether or not he would be able to support his partner financially because of the tough job market, "Society's just a little hard right now."

Monte also worried that something might happen to him, and that would not be able to be there for his daughter.

My only fear is dying before she really get to know who I am. That's my only fear. Or me not getting to see her go to school on her first day. Or her really having a conversation with me. That's my biggest fear. Not being around when it's time for that.

Demetrius had regrets about being only seventeen when his daughter was born.

It's hard. It's a good feeling but it's hard 'cause by me being young I kept going in and out of juvenile jail so I was...I was there but I really wasn't. I really wasn't there though.

'Cause I kept like...she was born in Albany, New York. And I see her...she comes down here and sees me but I be in and out of juvenile...I was in and out of juvenile jails. I don't know. In and out. So I rarely seen her.... I've rarely seen her but she know who mother and them are. She knows who I am but I don't think she really quite understands who I am though.

Demetrius talked about being connected to her, despite his perception that she did not really know who he was.

I do feel connected to her but I don't think she's connected to me. She don't really understand who I am to her. She just sees me around a lot. She knows I'm her father but I don't think she really understands the concept. Like she knows who her mother is. She don't know who I am on that level of a mother 'cause I wasn't really there.

Andre had a lot of confidence in his ability to handle the challenges of fatherhood.

It's complicated but I still hang in there 'cause it's my first baby so I hang in there 'cause I don't want to put all this stress on his mother. So I stick in there as much as I can.

When I asked him about challenges, he said, "It ain't even challenging yet. It hasn't been no challenge yet."

### **Depressive Affect and Cognitions**

Depression impacted young fathers in very subtle ways at this point in their children's development, but flat affect and absolute language even when talking about children stood out. For example, Antoine had a flat affect throughout the interview, even when he talked about his daughter, which was surprising. He



could not name any of his favorite things about her, but he did say that she cried for other people, but stopped crying when he picked her up. He talked about a few details, like she was walking quite a bit. He said he was really happy about having her, but then could not identify anything about her that made him smile.

Dontae tried to describe himself as a father, and his description what they did together was marked by absolute language, “Nothing much. I don’t do nothing for real. It’s just me. I don’t do nothing.” He thought she was funny.

She crazy... She just goofy like her father. Just like me, she’s goofy. She’s something. She’s just crazy just like me... ‘Cause I don’t know when I just...when I just look at her and she’ll just start smiling and laughing. If anybody...and when somebody gets close to her she just puts her hands up on her face like “Get away from her.” I think that’s funny... she crazy. That’s the only thing she do for real. She be trying to talk.

He clearly loved his daughter, but he could not describe his favorite memory of her yet, “Not really. Not yet anyway... so far nothing yet. Every day is the same thing.”

### **Joyfulness**

Young fathers talked about a range of things that delighted and frightened them about their children and being a parent, and sometimes those things seemed to be obviously impacted by depression and sometimes that impact was more subtle or nonexistent. Becoming a parent definitely expanded the worldviews of these young men in ways that they had not anticipated. Their experiences included enjoyment of their children, the ways that their children could turn their moods around, their feelings about the future, challenges of being a parent, and times when depression seemed to block them from feelings.

## Connecting with Children

Jamaar enjoyed getting to know his girlfriend's son, and forming a connection with him.

So when I took him in, it was like, me and him got to know each other. And then I was like, it's kind of fun, 'cause like when I was...as I go around him, he stays around me. It's like, he'll watch me, watch what I do, and then when something's wrong, he'll come to me. It was like he was looking up to me. He'll be get cautious about some things and he'll come running to me and his mother and it was like, like I'm looking at him and I'm like wow, it's cool! Like...so and it's like I'll always be there for him. And he gets anxiety when he's not around me and I'm not his bio...he knows his biological...but he gets anxiety when he's not around me. And I get the same thing when I'm not around him. And everybody looks at it like, "how do you all do that?"

Darius was proud that he had a son when he was twenty, and proud of his son in particular, describing him as smart and funny.

Oh, I was happy. Like...happy like...just you know? I made a life. Or knowing that you can make something like that? Make me feel...make me feel proud. I had my son when I was twenty.

Like my son's smart and funny. You know like...just makes me proud you know? Being a father period, you know what I mean, just being a father... Yeah, she didn't make him by herself. So yeah...I was happy.

Terrence talked about his favorite memories of his son.

There's so many of them. Like his birthday every year, the day he was born I think that was the best... He was born the day of the baby shower. He was actually born a month early so it was kind of scary at first 'cause like the whole process it was like...they had to hurry up and get him out 'cause she...she was having a seizure and...so like they had to hurry up and get him out and it was just like...it was just everything seemed so rushed but now it's like okay. And his first steps...first time he talked...it's...it's a lot of good memories.

Monte prioritized keeping his daughter safe, and giving her a sense that she was being taken care of by her dad.

It make me feel good like a parent. Knowing that she's on my chest, she's safe. She's with her father. Every time I think or talk about her it make me smile.

He talked about his favorite memory.

How she just run to me and be smiling like "Dada!" Make you want to cry a little bit. Or when she's talking to you, you don't know...you don't understand what she's saying but it's like she's trying to hold a conversation with you. The words just be coming out any kind of way but you know she trying to talk to you. That's what makes me feel good.

Andre said being a father made him feel wonderful, and talked about his favorite memory of his son.

Um...when I first saw my son... I was just looking at him 'cause he was so little and now I'm looking at him now and he's big and he's walking now. And I don't know it's just hard like it just seems like it went by so fast...And I just remember...it just feels like yesterday, last week when he was just so small.

He said that the best thing about being a father was all of the little things.

Best thing about being a father is making bottles, putting the baby to sleep. Um...playing with him. Showing him love.

I asked Tyler how he felt about himself as a young black father and when he felt most that way.

Proud... Times when I'm with my daughter... You know just seeing her smile, and taking care of her, and holding her. You know? ... Yes I feel proud but it's hard, but I'm proud.

Tyler talked about what kind of a father he thought he was and how his daughter inspired him.

Good father... 'Cause um...I feel proud of my daughter and she makes me proud so I'm gonna make her proud... Make her smile, happy, you know?

## Feeling Better

Young fathers talked about how children both made them want to change their lives and get serious, but also how their children helped them to do that, whether they helped them feel less angry or just cheered them up when they were blue.

Trent talked about what being a young man and young father meant to him.

I mean...it means a lot to still be here... Like by everybody around here by the things that've happened...the things that happen in my neighborhood. I'm glad to see I'm still out here, still alive.

I asked him if he was in a lot of dangerous situations, and he said no, but talked about the general uncertainty of life, "Anything could happen just walking down the street."

I noted that was not how I would describe my life, and he tried to clarify for me that now that he has a child, he has a much better sense of things. I think that is true of parenting, it eliminates a lot of youthful bravado somehow.

No I'm saying like it's just...like by me having a daughter now, I take my life serious, than I did at first. So that's why I'm glad I'm still here.

Andre talked about how his son made him feel better when he was angry or upset.

Like now I'm gonna say now 'cause of my son like if I'm irritated or something I can just go play with my son and he'll make me smile. And at least I know I ain't down no more, feeling angry (*inaudible*, 0:05:00.7) and smile and (*inaudible*, 0:05:02.0) with him and get everything off my mind and it's like it's a new day.

Tariq said that he is much better at managing his anger now because of his daughter.

Anybody say anything to me, you know little things, 'cause I get it all the time you know as far as "He ain't shit" and you know it don't bother me 'cause I know I'm something. I know I'm gonna be something so it really don't bother me.

I: Where do you get that from? ... That you know you're something?

My daughter. The way she looks at me. You know she looks up to me so it makes me feel you know and good that I do have you know...know that somebody's looking up to me you know? She looks to see how daddy is. You know so she waits for me to come home at night when I get off of work. So it's like ain't nothing that can really put (*inaudible, 0:34:41.2*).

Jayson said that he was not sure how being a father made him feel, but her arrival calmed him down quite a bit.

I just look and I just got a daughter. But I ain't gonna lie, when my daughter came, it made me calm down a lot... I don't know. 'Cause I just got a baby girl for real...I feel like I...now if I had a son, I'd probably be worse 'cause you know your son, you've gotta show him, you've gotta let him know what it is, you've gotta teach him about the streets. So I think I'll be way worse. I thank God...well not God. Allah. I think Allah gave me a daughter for a reason, to help me slow down.

But when I'm around my daughter, it makes me feel good. It makes me...I don't know. I can honestly say that's one time I'm always happy when I'm around my daughter... I don't know. It's just...I don't know. I just look at her and be happy. I don't know how to explain it.

Kadim talked more about how having children changed him.

Of course. Come on now I told you. Changed my life around. Got this... 'Cause each time I see them, it doesn't matter if I'm mad at the world, I look at them and I'm straight... glad we've got technology like this 'cause I look at the phone, I see my son smiling. I'm straight from there.

Cristofer talked about how being around his son made him feel good when he was feeling down.

Being with my son will make me feel much better I know. He used to come over with that smile and we run around. That really motivates me more, but for myself, I really don't ever ask for that.

Jordan also talked about how holding his daughter made him feel better.

Whenever I feel down I just grab my daughter. That's what makes me happy... Like last week. I was upset. Then I just grabbed my daughter and sat on the steps and just talked to her. And I just be fine after that. I'll still be mad

towards whoever I was talking to but to me like saying everything out loud then I understand it more...

I asked what she did, "Nothing. Just looking at me, smiling. Just a little baby."

Monte talked about how just talking to his daughter motivated him just by talking.

Like what...what keep me from it and get me motivated? I call and talk to my daughter. Even though I don't understand what she saying, it's just jibber jabber. But just...it feels good to hear her voice.

Tyler also talked about being able to talk to his daughter and hang out with her.

Best thing about being a father? Having someone that you can just talk to, your daughter. Just play with her, you know? Seeing her grow, all are good things.

### **Hopefulness and the Future**

Most young men were confident and hopeful about the future. For example, Martin was confident that he would be able to be the kind of father that he wanted to be for his son, and did not foresee any obstacles.

Monte said that his daughter made him feel like his best self.

Waking up to see a new day... Every morning. And thanking God to let me shut my eyes at night to go to sleep. But I could say the very best feeling is my daughter, my child. And me doing what I got to do now, that's the real good feeling. Like every morning I wake up about 7:30 before my grandmother leave out. And I be anxious to get to school. Or get up here. 'Cause it...I mean... I'm ready to start my career off.

Tariq talked about wanting to improve himself for his daughter's future as well.

Setting goals and careers for myself. Like I said, to move on with life, really want to make it good for my daughter...you know make sure she's alright when I do leave this earth 'cause you know everybody has an expiration date

so that's one thing I just don't like to worry when I do leave this earth that's all. You know?

Right that's my worry. No that's my biggest worry. Like I said, that's why I'm here for the YO program for pretty much to move and pursue my career in the right way. You know? Like I say prolong anything, prolong is when I was a child. Now that I'm an adult it's really hit me in the back you know? So it's here. And you know so you just gotta deal with it.

I asked Trent if he had any fears or worries about his future or his children's future.

Yeah. Sometimes not all the time though... Like sometimes I just wonder like...like what will she be when she grows up? I think about her being older and me being older like that and...like what we have. Will we be living in a big mansion or just a little apartment? Or I just be thinking about certain stuff how we'll be financially. Like I think sometimes I think about a lot of stuff but it be rarely I think about the future. I just think about right now.

Trent talked about wanting to be close to his daughter as she gets older.

I'm hoping I'll be the one she can just tell to and tell me secrets and stuff like instead of going to the mother.

Jayson hoped that his daughter would be proud of him in the future.

I don't know. I just hope I'm a father she's gonna talk about to her friends you know? I don't want her to be like what my father...yeah my father just...I want her to be something like "Yeah my father, he do this and this and he do this or he own this and this and this. My father always come see me, and always come dropping off money." ...'Cause I didn't get to say that about my father.

It was important to him to make her feel good and to be a better father than his own dad was. Young men sometimes did not come out and just talk about the things that hurt them over time, but let them out indirectly, as Jayson did here, talking about how his father disappointed him. It seemed small, but might have been related to the anger and hurt he seemed to be carrying around with him.

Yeah it's gonna make me feel good. It's gonna make her feel good 'cause you know she...it's probably the relationship she's gonna want. And it's gonna

make me feel good 'cause it's gonna let me know that I was better than what my father was.

However, he did not let on to having any fears about the future when he was asked directly.

I think it's gonna be good. I think if I turn my life around now, by the time she gets a little older, we'll be all gravy... That's why I gotta work hard. I can't get a job... That's why I gotta get my G.E.D.

Tyler was concerned that he needed to be in a better place as she got older than he was at the time of the interview.

Better like from where I'm at now. I need to improve on what I'm doing so by the time I'm you know, the years go by in the future, I'll be prepared. I'll have money and already have a career plan and all the good stuff, you know a house or apartment. Something you know?

Tyler talked about what he wanted to be like as a parent in the future.

Just you know, chill... Just all of it's gotta be good you know? I just want to be proud of my daughter and you know she'll go to school and get good grades... that's why I've gotta start now.

### **Summary**

Fatherhood is a normative and positive experience for most young men, but it is not easy, particularly for young men who are less likely to have enough education or skills to find employment in the current job market, are more likely to have been involved with the criminal justice system, and have more risk factors for a range of moderate to severe mental health challenges. Half of the young men in this study were also fathers, which most perceived to be a positive and important role, with significant responsibilities that they were trying to meet. However, their experience of fatherhood and approach to co-parenting was influenced by previously developed strategies and habits for managing stressful environments and situations.



Young fathers enjoyed and loved their children, but often used depressive should language in reference to their roles as providers. Young fathers also struggled with anger and challenges with their co-parent relationship. Many young fathers thought of fatherhood as a turning point and were working toward becoming more mature and being able to fully provide for their children.

## **CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION**

### **Research Contributions**

This study advances knowledge of the context, process, and content of young, low income African-American men and fathers experience with depression.

Specifically, this study tells us much more about:

1. areas of abandonment, connection, and the lack of safety that young men identify in their environment;
2. young's men's use of avoidance, isolation and self medication as coping mechanisms and navigational strategies;
3. their range of depressive symptoms and experience of depression;
4. the dynamics of anger with depression over the course of their lives; and
5. the relationship between fathering and mental health.

The most recent qualitative research on depression in men, using a sample of 15 middle aged, middle class white men, outlined a cycle of depression with initial triggers, early symptoms, externalizations of depression, and maladaptive coping strategies (Chuick, et.al., 2009). This research adds to the understanding of how exposure to family and other environmental toxins can develop vulnerability to depression in young men by interfering with early development, but also articulates a range of triggers for low-income African-American men, and adds to the understanding of early symptom experience and presentation, as well as maladaptive coping in this population.

## **Abandonment, Connection, and Safety**

This study tells us much more about the environmental context of young men at risk for depression; specifically their families, relationships within the school environment, and threats to safety within their neighborhoods. Young men had range of family backgrounds, including strong connections with supportive parents and other adult family members, more vulnerable families with the absence or loss of a parent relationship, and finally, severely fractured families, where children went through perceived periods of complete abandonment. As children and adolescents, young men then tried to form meaningful connections with peers and adults at school, often with very limited success, and not in an academic context. This is consistent with the most recent studies of the pathway between family conflict and high levels of depressive symptoms, suggesting it is mediated by interpersonal peer stress (Auerbach & Ho 2012). Finally, the neighborhoods in which young men grew up contained a number of safety threats, both in the form of violence from gangs and drug trade, but also in the form of law enforcement and aggressive policing. This research furthers the work of John Rich identifying toxic neighborhoods and their impact on young men, and builds upon it by highlighting the role of adults within these environments (parents, teachers, law enforcement) whose responsibility it is to work together to create safe and nurturing environments for children and young people (Rich, 2009).

The level of nurturance, informed guidance, and genuine support that young men experienced in their homes was varied, and quite a few young men came from households with compromised or non-existent support systems. Young men from

what appeared to be highly nurturing households readily identified the ways that their parents and adult family members helped them build solid developmental foundations, and continued to offer firm but supportive guidance through challenges that presented during adolescence and transition to young adulthood. In most of the other families, parents were less successful in protecting their children from adult and environmental stressors, and ensuring that children felt safe and secure. This is consistent with the most recent research connecting early inferential styles to cognitive vulnerability to depression in children (Cohen, Young & Abela, 2012).

For example both Charles and Deon were raised by single mothers, with minimal contact with their fathers, but this impacted them in different ways. Charles' mother created a secure and nurturing environment, which Charles recognized in how she always managed to always pay the bills, got him enrolled in a magnet school as early as possible, and taught him how to be resilient in the face of setbacks. Deon, on the other hand, experienced extreme insecurity reflected through his memories of having to move into a homeless shelter during the vulnerable period of transition to adolescence, being transferred to a county middle school with none of his friends, and feeling as though he had no one to talk to at home about these challenges who really understood them from his perspective.

Finally, several young men in this study grew up in foster care or group homes, some beginning in infancy and others at various childhood intervals up to midway through adolescence. Absence of nurturing parents fostered varying degrees of insecurity and often feelings of abandonment in young boys and adolescents, dependent upon their home environments. Most of the young men raised in some

form of kinship care described successful elementary school experiences, but had high levels of insecurity or anger that either began or surfaced during transition to adolescence. Similarly, those who moved from family homes to group homes during adolescence described little to no engagement or connectivity to nurturing and supportive adults, either at home or in school. They were both least likely to have supportive peer relationships, and most likely to be either completely isolated from any peers or to have sought peer relationships and adult guidance through gang members and gang activity. Research recently focused on the extensive needs of foster care youth has suggested more mentoring (Williams, 2011).

Young men tried and frequently failed to connect with school through peers and instructors. The process of disengagement from school began with slow alienation from teachers, other adults, and academically focused peers. Adults at home had limited skill in helping boys connect to the school environment, and became increasingly ineffective as boys grew into adolescents. Teachers who were charmed by and nurturing with exuberant boys, even boys with academic challenges, became exasperated with and intolerant of adolescents just starting to get into real trouble with peers and the law. By the time young men reached high school, many of them were quite sensitive to rebuke from instructors. Finally, very few young men were successful in recruiting and retaining a like-minded peer support group, focused on academic engagement and success. Young men were often either bullied and threatened by peers, or sought out peers with similar tendencies toward externalized behavior.

Neighborhoods that young men grew up in were rarely the nurturing and stimulating communities desirable for optimal youth development, but much more frequently dangerous areas with high levels of police presence and frequent use and distribution of illegal drugs. It was necessary for youth to assess the level of threat posed to them both every time they were outside of their homes and be alert for changes in that threat level that often came with no warning. Young fathers had to also perform this function for their children. Young men also experienced alienation within their communities through law enforcement, whose frequent presence was also unpredictable, disruptive, and never perceived as increasing security or providing safety in neighborhoods.

### **Avoidance, Isolation, and Self Medication**

This study also revealed that with very limited to no adult support or positive peer connection, young men did identity work frequently utilizing avoidance, isolation, and self-medication as means to developing and maintaining a sense of personal integrity and safety amidst chaotic schools and dangerous neighborhoods. Young men used a series of decreasingly effective avoidant strategies, including high levels of marijuana use, to navigate challenging areas with home, school, and law enforcement.

Important findings included young men and fathers' high levels of engagement in a series of escalating avoidant strategies at school, combined with high levels of sensitivity and irritability, implicating the development of subsyndromal depression as an overlooked factor in the process of school dropout. In school, almost all of the young men outlined a clear progression from strategies to avoid

challenges within the classroom and engage more adult connection, such as class clowning, to cutting classes as academics became even more challenging and relationships with adults and peers more strained. Eventually, this strategy led to young men dropping out of school. Although there is agreement in the literature on school dropout that the process may be more relevant to prevention than individual predictors or indices of risk, most of the research is still focused on identifying factors such as absenteeism versus consideration of those factors from a developmental perspective or process. There has also been very little consideration of the role of the developing of mental health challenges along pathways to sub-optimal outcomes for youth, with high school dropout as just one example of one of those outcomes.

Most of the young men interviewed for this study had a history of marijuana use, and this study provided new information on a range of marijuana use and multiple processes, including initiation, escalation, self-medication, and cessation. Levels of use ranged from occasional, experimental use in the past to smoking marijuana several times a day at the time of the interview. Young men talked at length about their intentional use of marijuana toward the reduction of multiple types of emotional distress, and the effectiveness of marijuana use as short and long term self medication. Although there is a growing body of research on the school to prison pipeline, this study provides detail on how young men are thinking about marijuana use when they come to school high, bring marijuana to school, or other ways in which marijuana use contributes to the school to prison process.

All of the young men in the study had some type of interaction with the criminal justice system, and this study provided new data on how young men

perceived those interactions in terms of a safety and well being framework for young people, as well as an additional environmental stressor to be managed. About one quarter of young men utilized avoidant strategies and isolation to keep from interaction with the police. Another half got into a cycle around marijuana with law enforcement. The final quarter had substantial criminal histories, and had incorporated some level of criminal or gang persona into their identities, but were trying to disengage from criminal behavior.

### **Range of Depressive Symptoms and Experience of Depression**

This study contributes several important findings to the understanding of depression in general, in men, and in young, low income African-American men and fathers. First, it provides a detailed description of a range of depressive experiences for young, low-income African-American men over time. Second, it provides examples of the cognitive process of depression and support for the cognitive model of depression in young men. Finally, it adds to the current research on individuals who do not talk about feelings of depression, and in particular, men who do not talk about emotional distress.

Approximately one quarter of the young men in this study discussed either a previous diagnosis of depression or experiences that were clear indicators of major depression, according to DSM-IV criteria. This study details how their experience of depression interfaces with the DSM IV – TR criteria for diagnosis of major depression and dysthymia as well as possible minor depression and the depressive cycle over the course of childhood, adolescence and transition to young adulthood.



Additionally, those young men described the specific context in which depressive episodes occurred as well as possible triggers. Young men detailed sadness, fear, isolation, and suicidal impulses often related to feelings of hopelessness around personal safety or unmanageable stress.

Another half of the young men in the study described symptoms of depression more consistent with dysthymia or minor depression, the cyclical expression of those symptoms over time and in context, as well as some of the cognitive elements associated with the experience of dysthymic or minor depression. These young men often described themselves as cool, or low-key, but were unable to articulate things that made them happy or unhappy; consistent with recent research suppression of all emotions with depression (Beblo, et. al, 2012).

Given that this research reveals not only the possible high prevalence of minor depression in this demographic group, but also expressed reticence to talk about depression and distress, the finding on the multiple ways in which young men did talk about themselves and process events that are consistent with the cognitive model of depression are important. Young men and fathers with a history of major depression consistently used depressive language and attributions with no realization that they were doing so or how that impacted their depressive experience. Similarly, young men and fathers who did not identify a history of diagnosed major depression, but exhibited symptoms of minor depression during the interview, also used depressive language, with no knowledge of how this might be related to their overall energy levels or ability to negotiate obstacle to their goals.

## **Dynamics of Anger and Depression over the Life Course**

This study added considerably to our understanding of anger and depression. First, several young men with histories of diagnosed major depression described anger and depression as indistinguishable from each other, starting in childhood, which is consistent with the clinical literature on depression. Second, there were several young men who did not have diagnosed histories of major depression, but described anger experiences similar in nature to the anger described by the aforementioned young men. These other young men did not meet the criteria for major depression, but did have several other symptoms of depression, again suggesting that extreme anger should be considered possible criteria for major and minor depression. Many young men did not describe discernible episodes of depression that were easily distinguishable from how they usually felt and functioned, but did say that they had been dealing with anger and depression their whole lives, suggesting the nature of depression may be much more syndromal than episodic with the likelihood of anger episodes increasing or decreasing level of other depressive symptoms; not necessarily including or precluding the sadness or depressed mood that are considered to be essential criteria for a diagnosis of major depression.

Many of the young men contended with multiple anger triggers both at home and with their peers, with their inability to defuse confrontations placing themselves and others in potentially dangerous situations. Young men either learned to avoid confrontations or contended with increased anger and violence over time.

## **Relationship between Fathering and Mental Health**

This study added to what is known about young, low-income African American fathers by describing how depression shapes young men's experience of fatherhood, and how the experience of fatherhood shapes well being in young fathers, potentially buffering from or even exacerbating their mental health concerns.

This study revealed that depression appears to impact fatherhood through the co-parent relationship, both directly with anger and despair taking a toll on relationships, but indirectly as well, when young fathers were unable to directly problem solve, but utilized avoidant coping instead. Additionally, although young fathers in this study were motivated by their children to complete their GEDs and make changes in their lives, there was some indication that young men and young fathers had signed up for the Get Ready program in the past, and depression may have interfered with their ability to complete it.

Fatherhood appeared to have a considerable positive impact on young fathers' mental health and well being. Fatherhood provided young men with an opportunity for identity development. Young men considered assuming the responsibilities of fatherhood, including providing for and caring for one's family akin to becoming a man. Additionally, fatherhood allowed young men to redefine themselves, making any changes or course corrections that they deemed desirable and necessary to being a good parent.

In previous chapters, it became evident that young men engaged the strategies of avoidance and self-medication to navigate challenges, both of which may have changed for young fathers. Almost every young father talked about being motivated

by their child to do the work that they had not done in high school as well as stay out of trouble. Fathers also talked at length about how good being a parent made them feel in general, and more specifically, how their children had the power to change their moods and days from bad to good. Father often intentionally sought their children out for that positive effect.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Findings from this study add to of a number of prominent concepts in the literature of research and program intervention with men and dangerous communities. These include avoidance, the association between anger and depression, and the dynamics of young fatherhood. Young men used a range of avoidant strategies that were counterproductive and reciprocal, if not causal in the depressive cycle. Specifically, young men isolated themselves from family, peers, and romantic partners at different times. Finally, young men self medicated with a variety of substances, but most often marijuana. Anger was identified as synonymous with young men's concept of depression, and expressed as a symptom of depression at early ages. Young men recognized fatherhood as a developmental milestone and probable turning point in their lives.

### **Avoidance and Conflict**

Young men used a range of avoidant strategies, motivated by self preservation and a natural progression towards independence. However avoidant strategies were decreasingly effective, counterproductive, and reciprocal with the depressive cycle. Young men described themselves as "chill" and outline multiple situations in which

they were avoidant. However, the choice to engage in avoidant behavior was context dependent, and it is doubtful that young men would characterize themselves that way.

Additionally, young men self medicated extensively, and frequently in such a way that depression would appear masked. Masked depression is a popular explanation for the gap in prevalence of depression between men and women. However, it has been difficult to gain empirical support for this theory, as it is a challenge to know whether or not individuals are experiencing depression when using substances. The young men in this study clearly articulate their intention in using marijuana primarily to reduce stress produced by work, school, and family conflict, and often to make themselves feel better when they are down or depressed, lending a great deal of support to masking theory.

### **Anger and Depression**

Anger was identified as synonymous with some young men's concept of depression, and expressed as a symptom of depression at early ages. Anger is often described as a symptom of depression, or a trait, but not much is known yet about the dynamics of anger in a single flare up and over time. Young men describe in great detail the cycle between anger and depressive cognitions, against the context of abandonment and unsafe environments. Young men describe anger as the primary way in which they experience depression over the course of their lives, and particularly when they were children.

### **Dynamics of Young Fatherhood**

Young men recognized fatherhood as a developmental milestone and probable turning point in their lives. Fatherhood was moderately intentional and experienced

as an opportunity for renewed identity development. Although depression probably contributed to relationship strain between co-parents, except for in a few instances, it did not seem to have a direct impact on the relationship between father and child. Much has been written about how fatherhood allows young men to experience generativity at the young age. Not as much has been considered in terms of the positive impact of fatherhood on filling in poorly achieved development in the areas of industry and identity development.

### **Methodological Contributions**

This study drew from a pool of young men at risk for depression in order to learn more about the full spectrum of young men's depressive experience, but did not screen for depression. Most studies of depression use a screening tool, such as the CES-D, or a structured interview to determine who suffers from depression and to what degree. In order to consider the full range of men's experience of depression, I expanded the pool to include young men who might not complete a depressive screening instrument accurately, and or who experience depression in such a way that might not be captured well by the current instruments. I intentionally chose not to look at available CES-D data on the participants in this study in order to not be distracted or biased by their scores, but to remain focused on the experiences they described without juxtaposing them against their scores. It allowed me to conduct the interviews free of bias and to do the analysis the same way. It was a successful approach for learning more about young men's experiences with depression, anger, and particularly masking over time and in context. Also, not using the interview time

to make a differential diagnosis meant that we could talk at length about processes, such as avoidance and impairment.

I also used modified grounded theory talk about young men's experiences which allowed me to explore a set of ideas, but remain open to young men's actuality. This meant I could ask about their experience with concepts that they probably would not have introduced, such as oppression and depression.

Finally, recording and transcribing the interviews, and conducting the analysis over time allowed words to emerge, and picture of depression to become much clearer. Young men were often very private about depression – they really did keep it quiet, and they kept their overall tone optimistic and light, so reading their words months later made it much easier to see and hopefully reduce bias.

### **Implications for Practice**

Best practices have been developed within multiple areas that address many of the findings in this study, but in most instances those practices have not been consistently implemented with fidelity as part of a integrated, comprehensive system of service delivery targeting optimal development for at risk children, families, and communities. There are specific practice implications for: the relationships and environments in which young men and fathers become most vulnerable to depression; maladaptive elements of identity development strategies that youth utilize; the full range of depression and other emotional distress that young men and fathers experience and express; and the specific implications of depression for young, low-income, African-American fathers.

## **Relationships and Environments Associated with Depression**

In order to address findings in the areas of abandonment, connection, and danger that young men identified in their environment, previously developed best practices should be utilized consistently and implemented with fidelity. For example, there are many excellent parenting education classes, but these classes should focus on teaching caregivers with identified diminished capacity to both provide stable environments and to nurture, guide and protect their children effectively. Many parents of young children still have a limited understanding of how to nurture their children without thinking they are spoiling them, helping develop secure attachment from which children are able to develop true independence, and most importantly, how to create a stable environment for children, even within the context of limited resources.

Similarly, multiple programs have been developed that focus on families during the transitional middle school years, but none of the youth in this study who talked about struggling during that time, recalled participating in a program like that. Parents and caregivers in this study were challenged in the area of nurturing their preteens and teenagers, particularly as youth weather hormone shifts, test boundaries, and are exposed to increasing levels of environmental risk. It was also difficult to nurture and guide teenagers in institutionalized settings, such as group homes, when those teenagers have histories of abandonment and externalized behavior problems. Schools that have higher percentages of vulnerable populations should, as standard practice, have programs that families and teachers can utilize to better connect with and support vulnerable students.



Additionally, teachers and all front-line staff need support and coaching toward best practice in the classroom and other arenas that help them connect with and engage challenging youth without compromising quality of education and the learning environment. Innovative approaches to education, such as expeditionary learning, should be considered for engaging young children who are less academically inclined. All children need to be involved in team learning in the classroom so that they can develop skills that will keep them engaged with the learning process over time. Working with middle school students and older youth may require more training to de-escalate situations of frustration and possible violence without alienating youth.

Finally, community mechanisms and institutions should be developed and reinforced to support safe communities with networks that protect young people living there. For example, law enforcement as part of the community policing model could shift position from “catching criminals” focused reduction of gun violence for all members of that community, such as in the Ceasefire model outlined by David Kennedy in his book *Don't Shoot: One Man, A Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America*. The current juvenile justice model does much toward providing family centered rehabilitative services for youth, but the focus is still on ensuring that youth are safe to be returned to family and communities, and not that family and communities are safe for youth. One could plausibly argue that the former leads to the latter, but there is much in this research that indicates that dangerous communities are shaping unsafe youth, that they are making choices and forming their identities in response to unpredictable and dangerous environments.

## **Maladaptive Identity Development**

More consideration needs to be given to adolescent identity work, both building a foundation for that work developmentally, and creating opportunities for culturally relevant identity work. It is well known that a well developed sense of ethnic identity is an important protective factor for young people; programs and schools should, again, consistently work with vulnerable African-American youth to develop their sense of positive ethnic and gender identity.

It also became evident from this study that practice needs to be developed around teaching young people to effectively approach problem solving skills and how to take better care of themselves. Young people need to learn how to use avoidance as a temporary technique, but only that, and the importance of follow up skills to solve problems. Additionally, much more information on marijuana needs to be made available to youth at much younger ages, with consideration for the fact that many young people have family members that smoke marijuana, and most of them do not think of it as an addictive or harmful drug, and very few of them are aware of or concerned about the ways in which marijuana might have a negative impact on their lives.

## **Full Range of Depression and Emotional Distress**

There are multiple implications for improving access to and treatment of depression, including: increasing education around and implementation of best practice on cognitive behavioral therapy for depression; increasing awareness of the cyclical nature of the full range of depression across stakeholders; continued work on culturally competent prevention and intervention for depression; and better practice

developed around anger, particularly the intersection between anger and depressive cognitions.

None of the young men who had been treated for depression in the past or currently were aware of cognitive behavioral therapy for depression, nor did they have any awareness of their use of depressive language and attributions. More practitioners and consumers need to be aware of the most effective treatments for depression, including cognitive behavioral therapy. Increasing awareness of the cyclical and escalating nature of depressive symptoms is also needed. Many people think of depression as something that one has or does not have, and are not familiar with triggers, or the ongoing need for self care and awareness. Finally, school counselors, social workers, and probation officers with regular access to children and youth need to be able to spot early signs and symptoms of depression.

Although culturally competent prevention and intervention programs for depression have been developed, more work is needed to improve existing programs and identify the essential elements for replication with successful outcomes. It was also clear from this research that young men often associated depression with anger, as well as using depressive language when describing incidents involving anger. Anger and violence are complex issues, particularly for low-income young men, and the current practice of referring young people to anger management classes does not seem to be adequately addressing the challenges they face. For example, excessive anger should be noticed and intervened upon as a possible part of the depressive experience or cycle.

## **Healthy Relationships and Young Fathers**

Practitioners who work with young fathers, either in dedicated programs or just in populations with high percentages of young fathers, should consider young father's vulnerability to depression. Practitioners should consider the implications of depression on the co-parent relationship, but also how to take advantage of young father's newly found motivation and bond with their child.

### **Implications for Policy**

Policy should be enacted to facilitate teaching parents to nurture, teachers to connect and communities to protect across education, child welfare, and juvenile services, possibly using block grants to encourage cooperation across systems. Young men in this study came into contact with multiple systems that could have intervened at an earlier age.

Policy needs to consider young people's apparent tendency to use avoidance, isolation and self medication as coping mechanisms and navigational strategies, and not exacerbate these tendencies with systemic approaches such as "corner sweeping" police tactics and pushing students out of school. Policy also needs to support the development and implementation of effective substance abuse prevention and intervention programs. Additionally, instead of further developing "zero tolerance" policies, agencies need to continue working together to identify and intervene effectively depression at early ages and across the spectrum of depression and anger expression.

Fathering policy should be targeted to where young fathers are in terms of mental health, helping young men take advantage of the motivation that comes from

early parenting, and the turning point, actualizing their dreams, and working on the co-parent relationship. This policy should support young fathers across systems, starting in education, concentrated in labor and fatherhood programs, and not separating young fathers from their children as a method of coercion.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Most of the limitations of this study presented more as advantages and disadvantages. One limitation of this study was that it was a single interview, not very long, and at a specific moment in these young men's lives – the week that they were starting a GED program. The study was also conducted with a specific sub-population, and may have limited generalizability.

For this study, I was only able to speak with young men once, and was limited to what they were willing and able to share during that time. This forced me to stay focused on what young men identified as most salient during the interview process. This sometimes did not leave enough time for young men to detail everything that was brought up or may have been relevant. Particularly in the area of background, young men often had very complex living situations, school histories, and criminal justice histories, and there was often only enough time to discuss a small portion of this and to probe for clarity.

This also meant that the interview was sometimes centered on what was most pressing for young men in the moment. One of the young men I spoke to had had a substantial argument with his father that morning, which seemed to have the effect of flattening his affect throughout the interview – it was evident that he was still somewhat angry and had not resolved some of the issues raised during the argument.

However, this was also advantageous, because, particularly with an emotion like anger, it was challenging for some of the young men to access how they really felt and processed when they were angry, where as this young man had no choice but to present the world as he perceived it when he was upset.

I also had to report just what I was able to get to know about young men in a single interview, and of course, impressions and understanding of individuals usually changes and grows quite a bit over time. Again, this was both an advantage and disadvantage. It allowed me to see the world and the young men themselves only as they were able to describe it, with very little time for me to form my own impressions based on other cues and knowledge. For example, what I learned about young men's personalities was based entirely what they told me, which could, in actuality be very different from the way that most people perceive them or how other would describe them. This also limited my understanding of young men's patterns of thinking and behavior over time to what they were willing and able to recall in a single interview. Their impressions of repeated challenges that were presented to them and their own behavior in pressing moments may not have been the same. Although often young men were quite insightful, this was a particular risk with young men at risk for depression, which is known to be caused and exacerbated by cognitive distortions. Some of those distortions were easy enough to spot in a single interview, and I reported them. However, what was more challenging was to get at the core beliefs that supported those distortions, and it felt somewhat presumptuous to report, even when young men were fairly clear in identifying them. Additionally, addiction is marked by denial, and many of the young men in this study reported high levels of

marijuana use, but did not identify the negative impact this may have had on their lives.

One of the biggest challenges of this study was the point at which young men were interviewed. Young men were interviewed during their first week of enrollment at the YO Center. It was sometimes difficult for them to access feelings of depression at a moment when they had every reason to feel hopeful about their ability to create a positive future for themselves. This study conducted with the same group of young men, six months later, when a large percentage of them have already stopped showing up for classes, would undoubtedly catch young men feeling less optimistic. However, this did have the effect of creating a somewhat stark contrast when young men did present as depressed.

The study was also conducted with a specific sub-population, and may have limited generalizability. This was a group of low income African American men, all of whom had some contact with the criminal justice system, most of whom had been arrested, but few of whom had records. These young men all needed assistance with finding a job, and most needed to start by getting their GEDs in order to become more employable. Most were not in gangs, but also did not have access to upwardly mobile peer groups.

### **Conclusion**

This study advances knowledge of the context, process, and content of young, low income African-American men and fathers experience with depression. Specifically, this study tells us much more about the overall context of men's depression, both in communities with higher percentages of depression and in

general. Although men's depression is often considered within the framework of gender identity and elements thought to be most relevant to men, such as work, this study reminds researchers of the importance of stable and nurturing family environments, schools that do not exacerbate mental health vulnerabilities but maximize students' abilities to achieve their developmental milestones, and communities that are safe and nurturing for all members.

This study outlines probable connections between early abandonment and vulnerability to the development of depressive episodes and syndrome as early as elementary school. It also highlights the narrative of abandonment and rejection that men develop with reference to parents and teachers along their developmental path, and the need for an invulnerable identity to be created. This helps create possible explanations for high levels of anger and violence seen in young men that further the cycle of depression and perpetuate unsafe communities. It also creates the possibility for much more proactive prevention and intervention work than is currently done at the law enforcement and community level, as well as a possible change in paradigm for juvenile services.

This research furthers understanding of masking theory in men, making it fairly clear in this sample, and creating an avenue to explore masking with other populations. One of the challenges of identifying masking has been to create longitudinal studies that could identify depression prior to substance abuse, with the assumption that depression is effectively medicated away once substance abuse begins. However, this study reveals that although it is true, young men who smoke a



lot of marijuana do effectively self medicate, many of them were aware that they were doing it, and transparent about their intentions.

This study revealed a great deal about men's expression of symptoms at a level easily identifiable as major depression, depression along the rest of the continuum, as well as how symptom levels fluctuated over time, and men's intent to cover and suppress feelings of depression. Several young men in this study noted that depression was something they would not ordinarily discuss, but that they would make an exception for this interview. Young men expressed depression not just as a sad or depressed mood, but often expressed intense distress through anger, and around violence in which they had participated and witnessed. The latter were far less likely to have received any type of treatment in their lives.

Young men made a clear connection between anger and depression, particularly those most vulnerable to depression, possibly due to a tendency to attribute anger to internal causes. Young men with anger that seemed to follow the cyclical patterns of depression, without any remorse or grief, tended to attribute the cause of their anger and behavior to external sources.

Finally the implications for men's mental health, is that fatherhood has positive impact, and this can probably be generalized to men's physical health as well if positioned within a framework of responsibility. Men appeared to be very aware that in order to care of their children for many years they would have to take care of themselves as well.



## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

### **Identity & Looking Glass Self:**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How would you describe yourself to someone who didn't know you? Use as many descriptors as you can. Prompts: man, young man, kid, black man, student, worker, brother, son, father?
2. What does it mean to you to be a \_\_\_\_\_? Does it depend on the situation?
3. How do you feel about yourself as a \_\_\_\_\_?
4. What do you think other people think of you? Prompts: friends, romantic partners, family, instructors, employers, strangers?

### **Stressors & hopes:**

5. What brings you to Program \*\*\*\*\* ?
6. Why did you leave school? Tell me about that. In your opinion, was the experience fair, unfair, or both?
7. How has been your experience here so far? How are things going outside of here?
8. Have you had any experience with the criminal justice system? Prompts: been convicted for a crime, arrested and let go, just hassled by the police?
9. How did you feel about it?
10. Did it change the way you see the world? Yourself? Tell me how.

### **Symptoms of depression & masking:**

11. Have there ever been times in your life when you have felt hopeless or depressed? Tell me about that: Do you remember what caused it?
12. Stressed out? The blues?
13. Do you ever feel hopeless or depressed now? Can you tell me about that?
14. What do you do when you feel that way?
15. Do you ever have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning or getting where you need to go?
16. What do you do when you feel that way?
17. Do you ever get or feel angry? What sets you off or gets on your nerves? How do you handle it? Can you tell me about what happens when you lose it? Can you tell me about what happens when you keep it to yourself?

### **Possible Selves**

18. What are you hoping to get out of the program?
19. What are your goals for yourself? Short term? Long term?
20. What is going to help you succeed in achieving those goals?

**Fathers:**

21. Having a child is a big event, can you tell me about it? Did you plan it? What did you think when you found out you were going to have a baby? What was it like when you had your baby?
22. How is the relationship between you and your child's mother?
23. What kind of a father do you think you are? What role do you have in parenting your child?
24. How do you think others see you as a father? Prompts: co-parent, intimate partner, family, instructors, doctors, strangers?
25. What are you worried you will be like as a father in the future?
26. What do you hope you will be like as a father in the future?
27. What might get in your way?
28. What will help you be the best father you can be?

## Appendix B: Open and Axial Coding

Protocol Areas & Codes	Definition, includes any description or discussion of:	Ch.
<b>Identity</b>		
<i>home</i>	where they live	4
<i>personality</i>	themselves	5
<i>ethnicity</i>	themselves as black	5
<i>best self</i>	when they feel their best	4, 5
<i>other perception</i>	how they think other's perceive them or think about them	4, 5
<b>Fathers</b>		
<i>co-parent relationship</i>	relationship with co-parent	7
<i>co-parent perception</i>	co-parent's perception of them as a father	7
<i>father other</i>	other's perception of them as a father	7
<i>father type</i>	the type of father they think they are and the role they play in co-parenting	7
<i>father joy and fear</i>	enjoyment of fatherhood, fear & worries, hopes & dreams	7
<b>Life History</b>		
<i>history racism</i>	experience of racism or oppression, overlaps with ethnicity	4, 5
<i>history education</i>	school, truancy, movement	5, 6
<i>history employment</i>	jobs, working, unemployment	5, 6
<i>history crime</i>	criminal activity, being arrested, involvement with the police	5, 6
<i>history substance use</i>	substance use	5
<b>Symptoms of depression</b>		
<i>worst self</i>	how they feel on their worst days	6
<i>hopeless</i>	when they are stressed out	6
<i>anger</i>	anger	6
<i>fatigue</i>	fatigue	6
<i>other depression symptoms</i>	other symptoms	6
<b>Resilience and Distress</b>		
<i>resilient behavior</i>	resilient behavior and coping skills	4
<i>resilient thinking</i>	resilient thinking, positive messages, lessons learned	4
<i>depressive symptoms</i>	depressive symptoms such as self medication, fatigue/lethargy	6

<i>depressive language</i>	depressive language that they use, filters that they use to interpret situations and messages, and any should language	6
<i>depressive behavior</i>	depressive behavior, such as avoidance or isolation	6

**Possible Selves**

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<i>self expectations</i>	their expectations of themselves	6
<i>other expectations</i>	other peoples' expectations of them	4, 5
<i>opportunities</i>	the opportunities that they think are available to them	6
<i>help</i>	what they think may help them with their goals	6

## Appendix C: Sample

The following are brief descriptors of the young men and fathers who participated in this research project. These descriptors are meant to serve a quick reference for the readers of this work, and are not meant to fully summarize my impressions of how young men and fathers represented themselves throughout the interview.

Additionally, although young men and fathers were remarkably candid and forthcoming during the time they spoke to me, and transcribed interviews for this project ranged between 20 and 40 pages each, they represent conversations and perspectives from a single point in time, and were shaped by the events occurring in young men's lives at the time of the interview.

**Michael** is a high-energy young man, attending community college for nursing, and looking for a job. Although he has had a few missteps along the way, he has a supportive family and a positive peer group that helped him focus on graduating from high school.

**Martin** is 18 years old, and the father of an 18 month old little girl, with his girlfriend of a few years. They do not live together, but are still romantic, and receive support from both of their families. They will both be attending Morgan State in the fall. He is very high energy, but struggles with a "dual consciousness" of race and class.

**Drew** is a 20 year old young man, who is very focused and positive. He has a 5 year plan for getting his GED and then his bachelor's degree. Although he had some challenges and probably some misinformation in high school, he was not worried about it, as long as he can pursue college.

**Dominic** is a 21 year old young father with a 2 year old daughter, but is on and off with the mother of his child. He is trying to get his GED and get a job, but gets a lot of support from his own mother. He was very quiet and low key, but did get mildly depressed when he fought with his girlfriend, so much so that after the baby was born, and they started fighting more, she moved out. However, she still brings the his daughter over almost every day.

**Charles** is a thoughtful young man, 20 years old, who attended one year at Morehouse College, but could not continue due to limited financial aid after his first year there. Charles' dad has struggled for many years with drug addiction, but he was raised by his mom, who taught him how to be resilient in the face of setbacks, and made sure that Charles did not attend city schools, but attended magnet schools in middle and high school. He also had an uncle who mentored him, and encouraged him to go to Morehouse. Charles is bright and determined young man, with many insights on race and class, but frequently slowed down and fatigued by a tendency to suppress his feelings, and limited skills for processing and coping with frustration and fear.

**Sean** is an 18 year old young man, who was raised in formal kinship care with his aunt since the age of 6. Sean graduated from high school, but did not want to go to college, because he thought he would party too much, and went to trade school instead. He is currently trying to find work as a carpenter. He had a history of daily marijuana use, although he claimed to not currently be smoking due to concerns about drug testing while he was job searching. He has a girlfriend, but fights with her, and does not want to start a family any time soon. He talked about being harassed and “jumped out on” by the police frequently. Sean used should language around housing and employment, and seemed moderately stressed and very tired during our interview.

**Lamont** is a 21 year old young man, who recently moved in with his grandparents, both to help them out and gain a little independence for himself. He suffered from lead poisoning as a child, had a difficult time focusing in school, and for a while sold drugs, and hung out with other people who did as well. However, after witnessing the murder of a close friend he decided to get out of that life. He went to Job Corps, but was recently dismissed for fighting with another student. Lamont has been through some trauma, but he works hard to stay positive, although it is often challenging.

**Powell** moved between family in the county and the city a few times during adolescence, and did not get re-enrolled in school after the last transition. He was successfully struggling quite a bit to outgrow negativity from his family, but frequently depressive language and often expressed fatigue.

**Deandre** is a bright young man, but was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder in grade school and repeated both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades. He always felt that he was intelligent, but did not like doing homework. Although his mother was a police officer, Andre lived with his grandmother when he was younger, and said he learned how to hustle and sell drugs from his father’s side of the family. Andre never liked doing homework or going to school, and started cutting classes and skipping when he was 14, in order to make money for the things he wanted. He became so involved with dealing drugs that he could not live at home, but his mother eventually found him, and he decided to pursue his GED. Deandre used to smoke marijuana every day, but was on probation, and not smoking at the time of the interview.

**Marcus** is an 18 year old young man , with symptoms of mild depression. Because he lost a cousin to homicide, Marcus made it a point to not stay out too late at night, but he had a lot of fatigue in high school and found it difficult to get to class despite his desire to get a high school diploma. He tried Job Corps, but became frustrated with the requirements, so he decided to pursue his GED. Marcus has also been smoking marijuana since he was 15, most people in his family do as well, and still smoked frequently at the time of the interview. Marcus also had a serious girlfriend, and although he did not want to start a family yet, they had plans to probably do so in the future. Marcus had days when he did get depressed and down, particularly when e was arrested, but tried avoid things that triggered depression and conflict.



**Jamaar** is a 20 year old expectant father, who did not live with his pregnant girlfriend, but hoped to be able to take care of her and the baby. He is a social father to her 2 year old son with a previous boyfriend, and so close to his girlfriend's son that they decided to start their own family. Jamaar had positive disposition, but tendency toward anxiety, and a history of conflict in both school and Job Corps.

**Ramon** is a 21 year old young father, and is no longer with the mother of his child, but is in love with his current girlfriend, who has been with him through a lot. He is focused on getting his GED, but also smokes marijuana every day. Ramon is energetic, and thinks that he made a bad choice in high school to hang with the wrong crowd, but is trying to make better choices now. Ramon had a lot on his mind, and thought that depression was something that he dealt with and everyone dealt with, but he chose to ignore it.

**Darius** called himself a king in training, because his step-father called him that. He grew up with both the example of his hard working step-father who went to work every day, and his biological father who struggled with drugs and employment. Darius was not sure why he did not make more effort to stick with school, and hard time sticking with things, but wanted to get his GED to break what he called a "cycle of nothingness" from his biological father's side of the family.

**Antoine** was a 20 year old young father with discernible fatigue and flat affect during the interview. Antoine had similar fatigue during high school, and dropped out but felt that he would be more successful with his GED. He had a serious girlfriend, but they fought a lot, and he had been in love with the mother of his child prior to that.

**Terrence** is a 20 year old father with a three year old son. He was in a committed relationship with the mother of his son, but they have been on and off since shortly after the birth of the baby, when the relationship got more challenging. He tries to avoid fights with her. Although he played football, Terrence had a difficult time connecting with his teachers, found his school environment to be chaotic, and dropped out of school. He has had several jobs since then, and is trying to support his child, but has had a difficult time finding secure employment.

**Jordan** is a 19 year old young father, who lives in his mother's house with his own 8 month old child and her mother. He struggled to get to class in high school, and his mother called him a "hall kid." He dropped out of high school, but is clear that he wants to get his GED and be able to support his partner and child in a home of their own. He likes to make other people laugh.

**Monte** is a 22 year old young father, who got in with the wrong crowd in high school, but was motivated to get his GED, inspired to change his life by his 2 year old daughter. He was not with her mother at the time of the interview, but was hoping to work out their difficulties so that they could someday get married. Monte lived in a tough neighborhood, and worried that he might be killed for a jacket or sneakers before his daughter got to know him. He also had a history of physical abuse and

neglect as a child that he stated he was past, but seemed as though it would be difficult to process easily. He also smoked marijuana frequently until 4 months prior to the interview, and seemed to not miss it, but it did help him deal with stress for many years prior.

**Edward** is a young expectant father, who dropped out of school early, in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. His anecdotes during the interview were engaging, but it was hard to follow events according to the timeline he presented. Edward said that he had been close to his family, and had gotten good grades in school, but both of those things changed when he started getting involved with drugs and the criminal justice system. At times in his life, he has been a frequent marijuana user, but at the time of the interview, he was on probation for drug charges, and not smoking. Edward was hoping to complete his GED, but still engaged in a lot of avoidant behavior.

**Tyler** is a proud young father, and trying to take care of his daughter, but did not always agree with the mother of his child about who should be taking care of the family financially, and who should carry the primary caretaking responsibilities. Currently, his baby's mother has a job, and she would like him to do more childcare, but Tyler wants to be able to earn an income as well, and they disagree about how much time she should have to socialize without the baby. Tyler also had a long history with marijuana and law enforcement.

**Trent** dropped out of high school to take care of his girlfriend when she got pregnant and was not feeling well. However, he also had a history of drug dealing and hustling. He felt that he handled himself well but that, in general, the streets of Baltimore City were unsafe for him and his family. Trent used a lot of depressive language around his lack of employment. It was hard for him to feel good, and he smoked marijuana frequently.

**Tony** is 21 year old young man, who was waiting for sentencing for drug dealing at the time of the interview. Tony expressed symptoms of major depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress syndrome. He also had Crohn's disease. Tony grew up well taken care of by his mother and step-father, but was always more attracted to the street scene. He had a lot of regret and sadness about that at the time of the interview. He was tired and pre-occupied with his upcoming court date.

**Aaron** is one of the most expressive of the young men. Aaron grew up in a series of foster care homes, and alluded to significant trauma as a child and adolescent. He struggled to fit in at school, was bullied, and used to go into destructive rages to keep himself safe at school. He had a history of major depression, and other mental health issues, but currently in a supportive foster home, and had a very positive attitude about getting his GED and his future in general.

**Robert** is a 21 year old young man, with a long history of avoidance, fatigue, and possible depression. He stopped going to school, because there were many days when he did not feel like going or have the energy to go. He enrolled in classes at the

Get Ready program over a year prior to our interview, and attended for a while, but often was late for class or missed class, because he had been babysitting for his sister the night before. It took him a year to get re-enrolled.

**Deon** is 21 years old, and trying to make better choices for himself. Deon went through tough times in middle school when lived in a homeless shelter with his mom for a while. He never knew his father, and felt that absence acutely; he was often angry and defensive.

**Eric** is a daily marijuana smoker, who had dropped out of high school just two weeks prior to the interview. He was probably still eligible for graduation, but had such a difficult time getting to school that he thought the Get Ready program might be a better alternative for him. Eric had a difficult time dealing with conflict with both of his parents, and often smoked marijuana to help manage stress and unhappiness.

**Maurice** is a 19 year old quiet young man. He struggled with avoidance during his school years, and ended up dropping out. Maurice struggled a little bit with morning fatigue and conflict in his home. He had a hard time keeping a regular job, but is happiest when he is able to give his mother some money.

**Cristofer** is a 22 year old young father, with a history of major depression, who was actually being treated for major depression at the time of the interview. In addition to being angry and sad, Cristofer used a lot of depressive language, stating that he felt like nothing and that he was doing nothing, despite being a high school graduate, who had just completed his second semester at community college. Cristofer's depression was most often triggered by fights with the mother of his child, with whom he had just recently broken up.

**Dontae** is a young father with a long history of violence and drug dealing, who was trying to change his life. Dontae was recently shot, and wanted to make changes. He had a difficult time getting to school, but thought he would be able to get to the Get Ready program, because it was closer and more flexible. It was not clear if Dontae had actually stopped selling drugs, or just redistributed certain elements of the business to his younger cousins.

**Jayson** is a young father, with intermittent anger issues and possible depression. Jayson had a history of conflict with his mother, and was sent to a juvenile detention center when he was 14 after a fight with her. Jayson was in detention centers and group homes until he was 18, and felt that his whole life was derailed by the first incident. He was still angry about it at the time of the interview. He was hoping to get his GED through the Get Ready program, but was still smoking marijuana with frequency.

**Kadim** is a young father of 2, with a complicated relationship with the mother of his children. Kadim is HIV positive, and went through depression related to his original diagnosis, but has since then become more positive.

**Demetrius** is a 20 year old man with an extensive history of childhood abuse and neglect, and then with the criminal justice system. Demetrius has also been involved with gangs since middle school. He appeared to be depressed, with post-traumatic stress syndrome, and hopeless resignation that although he was going to try the Get Ready program, he was not confident that he would actually be able to change his life.

**Nathen** is a 19 year old young man with a history of major depression, and at the time of the interview, a lot of depressive language, and strong tendency toward avoidance. Nathen tried to be positive, but referred to himself as a quitter, when he actually just did not have great problem solving skills.

**Vaughen** is an 18 year old young man who lived with his grandparents, and was trying to get his GED. Vaughen was a janitor at his high school, and dropped out when it became too much for him to keep up with his coursework, and handle breaking up with his girlfriend. Vaughen talked about suppressing negative feelings, and describe one incident of coming close to suicide.

**Dean** lost his mom in 2005, and met his father, who is from Nigeria, at her funeral. He moved in with his aunt and that was okay for a few years, but is not a good situation for him now. Her adult children have moved back into the home and Dean is ready to move out.

**Andre** is a young father, trying to take care of his son. Andre's parents divorced when he was young, and he did not adjust well, which had a negative impact on his school performance. He had a difficult time getting motivating and attending school after the divorce, so he was trying to get his GED at the Get Ready program in order to take care of his son.

**Tariq** is a very mature young father, whose daughter had cerebral palsy. He was raised by his grandmother, but stopped getting along well with her and was moved to a group home in early adolescence. As a young father he is very focused on the care of his child and her progress. He wants to marry his daughter's mother.

**Elon** is an even tempered young man, although he sometimes fought with his girlfriend. He was very conscious of race and social class. He is hoping to be a carpenter, but struggling to find a job. He also had a difficult time finding a program that he could complete to get his GED.

**Malik** is a young man with a very positive attitude. His goal is to figure out a way to make money, so that he can retire early. However, he was unable to say exactly how he was going to do that, given his lack of GED.

**Taye** was in kinship care with his aunt until he was 14 years old, and then he moved into a group home. Although his aunt did not spend all of the money she received for

Taye on his needs, he regretted moving out. Life in group homes was hard on Taye, he often slept in the street, was depressed and on medication, and frequently grieved the absence of his biological family. However, Taye was determined to get through it, and called himself a soldier.

**Tyrone** was a young expectant father, living in the basement of his mother's house with his baby's mother. He wanted to move out, particularly because his mom and his sister come down to smoke in the basement. He felt like he had a problem with anger.

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