

The Role of African American Males  
In the Family

By

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirement for the  
Masters of Science Degree with a Major in  
Marriage and Family Therapy

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

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December 2000

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**Abstract**

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The Role of African American Males in the Family  
(Title)

<u>Marriage and Family Therapy</u>	<u>Dr. Charles Barnard</u>	<u>8/00</u>
(Graduate Major)	(Research Advisor)	(Mon./Year)

American Psychological Association Publication Manual  
(Name of Style Manual used in this study)

This study investigated the roles that exist for African American males in their families. The researcher recognizes that men are only one aspect of the family unit. However, due to the lack of understanding about African American males' roles in the family, it is believed to be necessary to examine these roles separate from the rest of the family unit.

Previous research has attempted to address this issue in various indirect ways. In this study subjects were asked in person about their beliefs regarding the positions they occupied in their families. It was believed that this qualitative group study could get below the surface and reduce the likelihood of assumptions within this study and on the part of readers.

It is an accepted attitude, in the United States, that African American males are the worst fathers, sons and, more generally, those people whose anger is the most unpredictable. In addition, it is believed by many that African American males pose a threat not only to their own family but also to society as a whole. One of the implications of this study is to further suggest that these ideologies have in many ways set standards for African American males. This study will attempt to show that this way of thinking is detrimental to African American males and all those who encounter them.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Completion of this study was not done by the author alone and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people in my life who helped me remember that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

First, my thanks goes to my wife, and partner for over fifteen years, Pam for her support of my education which includes this study. I cannot recall who coined the phrase "behind every strong man there is a strong women", but I agree with it. Pam you are my strength when I am weak.

To my son; Marsean - your presence in my life has been a source of motivation and encouragement. One day if you have children, I hope they make you as proud as you make me.

To Harry G. Ford, my little brother, AKA as BIG OLE HOSS - Thank you for helping me get started on this study. Also for that brotherly support when I needed it the most growing up.

To the rest of my family and friends who have been a tremendous force behind me throughout my life.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Men in the African American Fathers' Group at Rueben Lindh Family services for their willingness to share their stories with me. I have

no doubt that they will be great fathers and role models to their children.

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## CHAPTER I

### A. INTRODUCTION

African American males are often over looked as valuable figures within their families. This researcher believes it is critical to explore the effects that the world has on the African American male and his surroundings. The survival of Black males and their families may depend on the results of such findings.

Some Black males live in male and female structured homes, and are active in the child rearing process. Others live in the home but are more peripheral to their children's lives, while some are involved but reside outside the home. Those children, who seem most vulnerable to these factors both within the family structure, and external to it, are the male children.

All Black families are different, as are the males who populate these families. In addition, there are many variables that may perpetuate the involvement of males in these systems. Some of the reasons may be more tangible, such as a lack of resources, i.e. a job that allows those men to contribute to the family structure. Others might be more emotional or socially driven, such as the loss of self-esteem that evolves from not being able to contribute and provide for their families. And in the case of the



child it is not uncommon that their mothers will have unresolved issues with that child's father that are displaced onto the child, which could have long range affects. This process of displacement is often how male's roles within the family structure get defined.

Unknowingly, Black males in these families often buy into this destructive view of themselves, just as other family members also do. As this happens there is the potential for males to become unattached and rebel against the family, leading to problems at home and in the community.

Growing up, and throughout much of their adult lives, many Black males are rarely validated. They often experience exploitation of their physical and intellectual abilities, by both society and their family. There are certain expectations that Black males cannot live up to and others they choose not to.

### **B. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation between that which is suggested in the literature, and the findings of a qualitative study of African American Males. This study will explore the reality of impacts, and the choices that are available to Black adult males and boys within their family structures

and their communities. The literature viewed is fairly comprehensive dating back as far as 1969 and on up to the present.

The findings of this study may be helpful to a variety of individuals and groups of people. African American males and their families may find this information useful in an effort to break unhealthy cycles that began with previous generations. This information can also be instrumental to clinicians working with African American Males and their families. These groups include marriage and family therapists, social workers, psychologists, and alcohol and drug counselors. It is also a goal to have policy makers and others who are influential regarding decisions that affect African American males utilize these findings.

### **C. Assumptions**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer proof or evidence that might suggest that African American Males are in roles different from what is offered in this study. Unfortunately, the group of males used for this research was confined to adults and no minors were included to provide a broader perspective. However, the group of African American males who were interviewed was asked to

recall their experiences as children in an effort to accommodate for not having minors included in this study.

It is this writer's belief that the topic was sufficiently addressed in the literature reviewed. At the beginning of this study it was assumed that finding useful information for this study would be difficult. Thanks to the similar interests of Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Robert Staples, James Cone, and others new trails for the most part did not have to be blazed.

#### **D. Definition of Terms**

An *African American* is a person of African origin residing in the United States. This term primarily is focused on those people whose ancestors were enslaved and forcefully relocated in the United States. It also represents what is unspoken within the African American family, which is the legacy of slavery. The term African American acknowledges that part of the American experience that White American history has failed to record and recognize to the extent deemed appropriate.

*Black* refers to African Americans and people of African origin. Outside of this study the term Black has also been used when referring to all people of color.

*Case Plan* is a list of things, which could include skills or services an individual or couple need to acquire to reunify and maintain custody of their child or children.

*Family* is all the people living in the same house; a social unit consisting of parents and the children they rear; the children of the same parents; one husband (or wife) and children; people related by marriage or ancestry; relatives; all those claiming descent from a common ancestor; tribe or clan; lineage (Webster's New World Dictionary 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.).

*Folks* are people, which could include a group such as a family.

*Marriage and Family Therapy* is a treatment modality directed at producing change between and among individuals who are married and part of the family system. This is based on systems theory.

*Role* is the part one plays within a social unit such as a family. Grandfather, father, son, brother and the responsibilities that come with that title whether acknowledged, assumed or confirmed, are examples of common family roles.

A *qualitative study* is the process that deals with quality or qualities with the aim of acquiring knowledge by reading or thorough investigation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Growing up Black

From the grim outlook of adolescence to the apathetic view of adulthood, Black males, through the lenses of this country's history can be seen as targets of destruction and exploitation. Some historians believe that the easiest way to destroy the African American family is through the "Black Males". It is traditional that men are seen as the heads of households, and it seems to be logical to conclude that if there is no leader in the home then there is no home. It is a scientific fact that a subject, whether in a lab or on a street, will eventually conform to it's environment when under pressure. In the case of the African American family, targeting the adult male seems to have the outcome of creating a dysfunctional environment. The purpose of such a statement is not to suggest that the majority of Black families in America are dysfunctional, but rather to provide insight from a Black prospective regarding what is proving to be so unsettling to the family unit.

This leads to a particular stage on the continuum for Black men in America. Looking at the childhood of a Black male, both from a current and historical view, it is

extremely important that we look at his place in the environment. Author Robert Staples (1982) states, "To be young and Black in urban areas of the United States is to be subjected to all the harshest elements of oppression at the most vulnerable periods of ones life". It is extremely critical that one realizes that Black males in many aspects are forced to deny the qualities that define them as males in this society. Young Blacks are subjected to great amounts of discrimination early on in life. They do not have the privileges that most white males enjoy at the same age. During the era of slavery, by the age of seven Black males were made to work in the fields of their masters. Policies such as this denied Black males of their childhood. By the time males reached puberty they were taken from their families and sold at auctions as property (Staples 1982). While Black adolescents are no longer sold into slavery, many have lost their identity by this time as a result of oppression that exists.

### **B. Religion**

It is critical to understand the self-esteem of the Black male when dealing with the examination of his family life. Throughout their history in this country, religion has been one safe place where Black males could express themselves

in an oppressive society. Not only is religion a form of expression, it was an outlet for the frustrations that daily life offered. In the 1960's the movement for equality emerged from the church. Whether it was Martin Luther King Jr.'s peaceful non-violence or Malcolm X's more forceful approach, these ideas were primarily developed in the religious structures that Blacks emersed themselves in.

The church was critical within the Black male's world and continues to be so yet today. Within most Black churches, or religious organizations Black boys and men experience their first true taste of freedom and power. They are able to look at their communal structure and the world around them and evaluate it through a source that provides many of them with hope, and encouragement to live. Author Nancy Boyd-Franklin (1989) uses a quote by E.F. Frazier that epitomizes the previous statement. He states that the church is "a refuge in a hostile white world". This reflects the importance of the church, within these male's lives.

Black men and boys in many ways are dependent on the church or religion more then their families. Without it, often there is an internal struggle that reminds them that something is missing. For example the drug addict in a treatment center is encouraged to get closer to God in

order to get their life back on track. Drug addicts, as do some Black males, realize that their internal-selves require structure which religion can provide. When the pains of life surface, and society and family members have turned their backs on them, faith in God is what is left. It is this faith that assures these males that they will not be prejudged, as might be the case with many others in their lives.

### **C. War and Equality**

The Black community has always felt the brutal strains that this country has placed on its men. Black men and boys have made strides to overcome the pre and post slavery view that society has about them. Within World War I and II they fought for this country because they believed in the American dream and a new way of life and some felt they did not have a choice and fought anyway. They did so, in spite of the majority view that saw Blacks as outsiders. This was in evidence in the segregated regiments among other things.

Again these Black men and boys did not receive equal treatment in the military structure. Living quarters and over all training was substantially different and was lower in quality for the Black soldiers. However they still



fought with pride for what they believed in, or what they thought was necessary to be accepted as a member of society.

During the Vietnam War "poor" Whites and Blacks were placed on the front lines. They gave their lives for a country that did not see them as equals and in many cases leaving families without their men. Now after the war has gone, it has left the same emptiness that was present before it's arrival.

Military life today and in the past gave many Black males the structure they longed for. Those who were not exposed to religion or strong family supports systems look elsewhere for what they believe to be needed to live happy lives in this society. However, the Black man is still striving for equality, even though unemployment stifles him to the point where he is unable to function as a man in his home. Upon arriving home he was cursed for fighting a war on behalf of a country that did not respect him. He appears to be damned to live the rest of his life wondering and homeless by a system that he fought for.

#### **D. Family Relationships**

The structures of Black families are all uniquely different. However, often, women (i.e. mothers,

grandmothers, aunts, sisters and other females) come together as a unit to raise children to replace the male and female household structure (Giordano & McGoldrick, 1996). This is the result of there being a shortage of Black men (Boyd Franklin, 1989), due to things such as the alarming mortality rate. Moreover, with a structure such as the one described above, which is exclusively female, one might inquire about the need for a man. The unspoken belief of some women who have grown accustomed to this way of life is that men are not needed. Women have independently provided for the needs of their children for so long, it may be difficult to see the value of a man's presence. This describes the disenfranchisement of the Black man within the family system (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Beginning with slavery, Black males were sold from their families. This caused the structure to create alternative means of support for a family's survival.

Initially, Black men were seen as essential parts of the family, during the pre-slavery era. Slave owners recognized the impact that Black males slaves had on their families. They understood the importance of leadership and that Black males could provide that for their families. In understanding how slavery worked, it is clear that the slave owner needed to be solely in a leadership role and

maintain a sense of control over his slaves. It is for this reason that the Black family was separated and sold to different parts of the plantation structures within the South.

Control was essential to the slave owners business. As the owners of people, slaves, they controlled their lives. These slaves were the property of other men and their bodies were treated in that manner. Slaves were forced to bare children by men other than their chosen husbands. So, in essence slaves were used to produce more slaves, which added up to more property for their owners. It is believed that slavery and the demeaning acts which were a part of that process, which included; rape, murder, stealing, and ultimately disrespect for human life, was done to create profit for slave owners. However, what slavery has done for Black males and their families is to create much confusion.

It is a belief that Black women have certainly been affected negatively by slavery. This can be seen in how they relate to their males. Black males and the women in their lives, because of slavery, appear to misuse their bodies in a manner similar to what was practiced during slavery. Men are seen as laborers, the ones who have the strength to provide physically for their families if

allowed. In other cases men's vulnerable emotional state causes them to be used for sexual pleasure by women and discarded. I do not wish to imply that the men are not getting some mutual satisfaction from this arranged interaction or relationship. Yet, his self-esteem has been lowered and damaged by years of misuse of his body and sense of purpose.

Following slavery the Black family began a process of rebuilding what was once a strong Black family. By 1960, a husband maintained 74 percent of all Black families with a wife, while women headed 22 percent, and the remaining 4 percent were families maintained by Black males (Jewell 1988). Twenty-two years later after governmental programs were introduced and expanded, Black families begin to experience dramatic change. "A dramatic increase in the rate of marital dissolution through separation and divorce resulted in the decline of Black husband-wife families and the growth of Black families headed by women". Black men were replaced by welfare. Families receiving welfare were not allowed to have men living in the home. Women and men committed to a relationship had to make choices to lie or separate. Separation and out of wedlock births were other causes of the significant breaks in the family structure. Most low-income Blacks were disillusioned that marital

separation was the means of solving their problems. However, this only amplified their problems.

### **E. Genocide**

Above and beyond the affects that a war such as Vietnam had on the Black family, is the overcast of the affects of genocide<sup>1</sup> that plague the Black man's world in America. Many people are quick to point the finger at Black men for the high crime rate in America. Black on Black crime is often referred to when discussing crime. How often are people encouraged to examine the concept of Black on Black crime? Most African American communities are mostly Black; there are rarely other ethnic groups to commit crimes against in these settings.

Another critical point to be made is that Black people living in inner cities do not own gun factories in this country yet they exist in the Black community. How is it that guns are made so available in these communities? This would seem to be a more appropriate question, given that guns accounted for more than 95% of the increase in homicide in 1988 for youth and young adults between the

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<sup>1</sup> Genocide is the systematic destruction or extermination of an entire people or group. An example is the Bosnia controversy, which took place between the Serbs and Albanians where the Albanians were being systematically killed and removed from their country by President Yugoslavia in order to purify the country.

ages of fifteen and twenty-four (National Center for Health Statistics 1990).

The issue is not simply about the manufacturing, and selling of guns. Genocide is manifested in many forms. "It is estimated that as many as one-third of young Black men in the inner city have a serious drug problem (Staples, 1982)". Alcohol and drugs are major contributors to the eradication of the Black man in America. When driving into Black neighborhoods one can count several liquor stores in these communities, which adds up to about two stores per three blocks in some areas. However, in most suburban, predominantly white communities, there are hardly any. Maybe one every three or four miles.

What the Black man faces daily in this country is unlikely to be similar to the experience of men of most other ethnic groups. What is even more distressing is that most Black men are not aware of the effects of such things as the large number of liquor stores in their communities. This is the struggle the Black man must endure. He hopes some day the life viewed on television will be his. However, it would appear that his race, gender and geographical location in the community prevents him from living the "American Dream".

Life is a struggle for the Black man. The Black man, to some, appears to be lost, due to the systematic breakdown, as he struggles to define the nature of his being. Some Black men know within themselves that they are by nature good, and as a result exist in their own reality (Davis, 1991).

### **F. Violence**

In many cases, the Black man's reality is extremely violent due to years of oppression. The violence is perpetrated by the notion that the Black man, within his community, has no future. As this happens young Black males begin to buy into such ideas of hopelessness, which leads to violence (Gibbs 1994).

When cornered in this way some Black men begin to act out that violence. They begin to react instinctively, the violence that was taught during slavery. No longer able to bare the position of being victimized. Blacks rebelled against,

"Lynchings and chain gangs replaced beatings and slave labor in the old Confederacy, and Blacks were rendered powerless by their economic dependence and their political disenfranchisement. Again and again, Blacks learned bitter lessons that angry confrontation or even peaceful protest would be met with Klan-like violence or massive armed resistance (Gibbs 1994)."

History has documented well the Black man's attempts to rise above the oppression that holds him down. Once again, his feelings of hopelessness may cause him to let go of the world surrounding him. According to the National Center for Health Statistics 1990, homicide was the leading cause of death for Black males ages fifteen to twenty-four. This group was six times more likely to be murdered than their white male peers were. The over all homicide rate for Black males ages fifteen to twenty four increased from 46.4 per 100,000 to 101.1 per 100,000 in 1988. As a result families once again are left without their men. Where are the adult male role models to teach the small children, males and females the facts of life? Mom and grandma may be there, but who supports them (Boyd-Franklin, 1989)?

### **G. Conformity**

White men do not face the same challenges, nor do they struggle to stay alive as the Black man does. More over there does not appear to be a conspiracy against White men. In fact, due to White men's dominance over other groups of people, there seems to be an unspoken expectation that others follow in his footsteps. More specifically, the Black man is pressured by everyone around him including his



Black partner to meet the expectation of society. It is difficult for the Black woman not to buy into the majority perspective because she does not pose as much of a threat, and is therefore more able to maintain employment.

However, there are clear differences between the Black and White men. The major difference is that Whites oppress Blacks.

#### **H. SUMMARY**

When looking at American society it is clear that Blacks and other groups of people are forced to live like White men. This violates Black men and others the right to act and function as unique and culturally different individuals. It forces them to act out in a more primal and primitive fashion. Each man wants to protect his uniqueness at all cost, even life. Integrity is the dominant force that drives humanity to search out what is important and vital for him and his family's survival.

The Black man is challenged with knowing, or not knowing that there are many factors surrounding his life that impact him or the lives of his family. In a world where everything and everyone seems contrary to you including your family, what are your choices? What is the

proper reaction? The only proper reaction to an abnormal situation is an abnormal response.

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

##### A. Introduction

This research involved a group of African American fathers participating in an African American father's group, to conduct a qualitative study for the purpose of testing the validity of the literature review that was conducted for this study. The questions listed below were provided as stimulus items for the subjects to respond to, as they deemed appropriate.

##### *Questions for Focus Group:*

1. What has your experience as a male been in your family?
2. Can you see any differences or similarities in how you were treated as a child, and now as an adult?
3. What is it like to be an African American male in this society, and is that experience different from the one you have in your family? (How your Family relates to you.)
4. What do you think would be important wisdom to pass on to a son?
5. What wouldn't you pass on to your son and why?

The purpose of these questions was to solicit a response from a group of males who may have experienced some of the issues that this study addresses. In addition, it was not the intent of the group interviewer to lead or elicit a certain response from the participants. Instead, the subjects were encouraged to share their stories, as they deemed appropriate.

### **B. Subjects**

The men participating in this group were in the process of reunifying with their children. All the men in this group were involved, or had been, with the courts to regain custody of their children. Some of these men were either suspected of, or had been found guilty of spousal-abuse or child-abuse and, in some cases both. Other men in the group were involved in order to regain custody of their children after the mother had lost parental rights. In these situations the court is requesting that these men prove themselves to be capable and competent parents.

There were six individuals present who agreed to be subjects in this study. The average size of the group each week is about six. Ages ranged from twenty-five to forty-seven.

The men participating in this group needed to have at least one child. Dads are expected to bring a child with them to the group each week. As a parent child interaction group it is important that children be present so that the group facilitators can provide parenting suggestions to dads as a result of what is observed.

Food is available at each meeting and the group participants are responsible for preparing meals for their children and other group members. Once again this is an opportunity for the group coordinators to observe the dads while they are performing multi-tasks, cooking and parenting. For example parents are reminded that children need to stay a safe distance from the stove.

Dads are encouraged to interact with their children. In an effort to foster parent child interaction, the group provides structured music time. A music therapist facilitates the music activities each week. These activities are tailored each week to the ages of the children. It is important that the dads in the group understand that children have different needs at their different stages of development.

Many of the children involved in the group with their fathers' are acquainted with the music therapist through Reuben Lindh's multicultural preschool. This is one of

many services the agency offers to a diverse range of clients throughout the Minneapolis and surrounding communities. It is Reuben Lindh's Mission to support and nurture families in the context of their culture. As an agency, Reuben Lindh has serviced the community for thirty years.

Some of the services Reuben Lindh offers are; groups for both men and women, parenting skills for parents newly recovering from drugs and or alcohol, parenting skills for developmentally delayed adults, housing resources, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, individual and family therapy. All of these services combined offer a process, coined "wraparound", that increases families' chances for reaching their goals of desired changes.

It was explained to the subjects that the interview would be audio taped and that they had rights pertaining to this study. The interview was conducted in a circle with all subjects facing each other. Each subject was given the option to discontinue participation in the study at any time. It was also explained that their participation in the study was voluntary. It was also explained that any information collected would be held in the strictest of confidence and that subjects would not be identified by name in the study. No subjects declined to participate.

Subjects were asked to sign a consent form indicating their understanding of the study's intent to be used to investigate the role of African American males in the family.

### **C. Limitations**

Influential elements that may have influenced the outcome of this study were factors such as: all subjects except one was ordered to participate in this group as a part of their case plan to reunify with their children; participants in this group were not voluntarily seeking out the group; subjects are all from the Midwest; subjects were all adults; and, education level was fairly low for these subjects. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine these variables more closely to determine the influence they might have on the findings.

## **Chapter 4**

### **A. Results**

This study was conducted in an attempt to explore the roles African American Males hold in their families. For the purpose of reaching the objective of this study the author reviewed literature which addressed the roles of African American males in the family system. The literature search focused on males and their families within the context of their social/societal environment. To further research this topic, as part of this qualitative study, a group of six male subjects' perceptions were solicited. Several similarities seemed to exist between what was suggested in the literature reviewed and the subjects' responses.

First, it is worthy of mention to note that the subjects' collective life experiences seemed to be overwhelmingly similar. In the introduction it was stated that all Black families are different just as the males who populate these families are. Yet the results of this study suggest that these males have much more in common than some might have predicted. In fact as the subjects gave their answers to the questions they appeared surprised at each other's responses. For example most of the subjects



expressed the belief that there were different family expectations placed on them in contrast to others.

### **B. Expectations**

In many of the subjects' home's they were the oldest males. Holding the honor of being the oldest male often meant being a father figure to siblings. It meant being a representation of "dad". For some it also meant having to learn what it means to be a Black male alone without the guidance of an older male. For Respondent #3 it had a different meaning, but one that seems to capture the essence of what was the experience for most of the men in the study.

Respondent #3: My role was as the oldest child. My father passed when I was five and pretty much until I was teenager I figured that I was the "headhuncho" because I was the oldest.

Interviewer: When you say headhuncho what do you mean?

Respondent #3: Well I did not finish high school because I went to work to help put income in the home and help support my mom (Appendix A, P.2).

This idea of supporting mom was very common among the group of subjects. Each of the subjects had nothing but positive words to say about their parents. At times, from analysis of the dialogue, I could tell that the roles were reversed. For instance, in the case of Respondent #3 and his mother, it was difficult to determine who was taking care of whom? Does the child take care of the parent or does the parent take care of the child?

The subjects spoke of expectations in a couple of different ways. There were responsibilities they had assumed because someone such as, mother, aunt or grandmother had pointed out to them what was expected of them. These were often the roles that men would typically assume in families.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you were head of the household. Not the head of the household but the man of the house.

Respondent #3: Yes.

Interviewer: Was that something that was expected of you, or did you just figure, that I need to do this?

Respondent #3: Well I wanted to do that for my mom.

Interviewer: Okay, but your mom...

Respondent: She didn't ask me to do that.

The discussion continued and the subjects discussed how difficult it was to know why they did things in their families. However they seemed to conclude that their mothers' usually had a role in decisions they made. One of the Subjects gave an example of how he would earn money by cutting grass, shoveling snow and doing odd jobs. He went on to say that he did not think his mother asked him to but he remembers giving her some of the money. This was his way of providing for his family, and it seems as though he was meeting expectations that were unspoken.

### **C. Role Models**

Based on experiencing and hearing the subject's stories in this study, it is clear that many of them lacked clarity in their experiences growing up. The father's in this study reflected on their childhoods, remembering both their early memories of eagerness and later memories of confusion around what seemed to be expectations for some of them to take care of younger brothers, and in one case, a cousin. As stated earlier these men were in most cases the oldest males in their homes. There were no father figures present for long periods of time in their homes that they could recall.

Once again, the author will use the voice of respondent #3 to convey the essence of what these men reported. Respondent 3 stated, "I was the male of the household, except my little brother, but it was like I took over the role" (Appendix A, p.3). This respondent and others report that it felt strange to be in a house of adult women and feeling the pressure to raise other young males in the home. These were homes that they were not structurally in charge of.

While boys at the time, these men appeared afraid. Afraid because, " I didn't have a dad there, I am the only one". Between the age of fifteen and sixteen respondent 3 expressed that women were out working and he was the one taking care of the boys. When he was old enough to work respondent 3 states that the boys came to him for money and he contributed to bills in the house. He had reluctantly become a father figure and role model both to the younger males living with him and the women in the home.

Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin's statement noted earlier, that women love their daughters and raise their sons, came to mind here. I am touched by the notion that girls seem regarded as more precious than their brothers and that they desire, require, more love and affection. In addition, it is apparent to this writer that respondent 3 had been

parentified in some ways. I also wonder if he was being raised to replace his father or at least unconsciously create a father figure in the home. Unfortunately, respondent 3 had no appropriate or direct role modeling or guidance on how to be effective in this forced role.

As suggested in the literature review it is because of experiences similar to the ones listed above which are believed to cause Black males to feel alone, and misunderstood by their families and society. Furthermore, it is confusing to this writer, and most certainly it has been for the subjects of this study, to identify that this lack of support often begins in their homes. It is these experiences, and many like them, that have shaped the lives of these subjects and many Black males like them in this society.

Respondent 2 does a good job of summing up what these home experiences seemed to mean for most of the males in this study, as well as what the literature suggested is the experience for many Black males. "We have to live and learn what works, going to school, getting a job and getting there on time. We had to learn that shit! You know it seemed like my whole male life, most everything I got I had to learn" (Appendix A, p.5). As this subject spoke I felt the pain that he was experiencing as he

remembered growing up alone without the benefit of an adult male model as "teacher". After trying to meet and fulfill all the expectations of his mother and other women in his life, he stated that he still had to learn and be penalized for his mistakes. It all seems to boil down to "trial and error" in the end, and taking a look in the prison system anyone can see that black males are making more errors than any other group in this Country.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **A. Summary**

This study was conducted in order to investigate the roles that exist for African American males in their families. By completing this study one of the researcher's primary goals was to increase the understanding of how African American male's roles are impacted through interaction between family and society. It is believed that these interactions are both conscious and unconscious. So much so, that even African American males have bought into the negative images of themselves. These images include unrealistic expectations and stereotypes regarding what it means to be a provider, a member of their families and society. In an attempt to accomplish the goal identified, this researcher solicited the participation of a group of Black men at Rueben Lindh Family Services of Minneapolis, Minnesota. These men were fathers and in most cases new fathers. So it seemed important to get their perspective on African American males roles in their families. As a result they were encouraged to tell their stories as it related to the evaluation of roles they assumed.

The data, which is a combination of the stories of the Rueben Lindh fathers and a literature review, indicates that there was a significant connection between African American males' roles in their families and in society. The research shows that due to Black male's lack of being properly nurtured and acknowledged as important, they are in large numbers unable to rise up to the standards that are set for them. Unable and unwilling in some cases to reach their potential and instead accept the forced positions that their family and society set for them.

### **B. Conclusion**

After careful consideration of both the stories of the subjects involved in this study and the literature review, there appear to be a number of factors that affect Black males roles in their families. It is clear to the researcher that an *oppression cycle* is largely a part of what has contributed to the Black males' role confusion in the past, and certainly in the future, if it is not attended to. This oppression seems to date back to this country's practice of slavery. It was during this time that slaves were taught and forced to relinquish the control of their greatest asset over to their captors.



This was a time during American history when Black's identities were stolen from them. The institution of slavery literally and figuratively raped Black people and used them as tools of profit. Men, women, and children were not considered as people but rather as property. As property, Blacks were sold on the slave market. Men and women were sold in relation to their strength and their ability to produce large numbers of strong babies. The more babies a slave could produce the more he or she was worth.

In the process of producing more slaves for the slave owner, in the eyes of the slaves they were creating families that would not be their own. Families were sold and separated for various reasons, but mostly for profit. Still, the slave owner seemed to recognize the importance of establishing hierarchy or structure in these family systems. It was to this resolve that families were also separated. A family could not be a family if all the players were not clearly identified structurally.

Moreover, slave owners still seemed to understand the importance of leadership in these systems. Slave owners physically raped female slaves for pleasure, yes. However, their sexual acts seem to represent more than simply gratifying themselves sexually. This writer is suggesting

that it is critical to recognize that the relationship these slave owners forced on Black women modeled for them and their children what a male's roles in the family was.

Anger was definitely strongly suggested in the results of this study. As a result of years of oppression Black males have developed anger that in many cases is extremely stifling, devastating and crippling to the point that it prevents them from reaching their unidentified potential. Their anger stems from years of *oppression, isolation, loneliness, and no positive male role-models/teachers*. This has culminated in years of trial and error as a primary way of learning how to be male. People, in their worldview, have identified and acknowledged primarily the Black male's errors. It is these actions that create and cause more anger in the Black male. It has created a sense of hopelessness within him. As a result, most of America's prisons are filled with Black males, young and old, whose spirits have been broken. Years ago Black men were only considered to be three-fifths of a person. Today they still fight the impact of that legislation and the feelings and motives behind it.

In addition, Affirmative Action was created to be a means for Black males and other minorities to rise above discrimination and provide them with opportunities that

they might not receive otherwise due to a system that was created without recognizing the strengths that they possess. Unfortunately, it has stifled the Black man's ability to once again be acknowledged or affirmed for what he has contributed to society. It is argued that they get hired simply because they are Black not because they are in most cases the most qualified person for the job. Yet, when the anger surfaces as a result, again they are labeled. He appears justifiably angry for accomplishing what is the American dream and having his labor go unvalued, which is not the case for his White counterpart.

### ***C. Recommendations***

In conclusion, it was suggested that slave owners (Caucasian men), modeled to the Black family what male's roles in a family should be. This was done in the manner in which children were conceived between a female slave and her owner, and then later the slave owner abandoned the mother and her child. This taught women among other things, that they did not need men. The suggestion is profound enough that it warrants further study to determine other significance this factor may have on the African American family. Furthermore, it might be intriguing to learn how this role, that slave owners maintained with

slaves, impacted their own families and how these interactions further shaped the lives of African Americans in this country.

Due to the fact that the subject group in this study consisted of a disproportionate number of first-born children, it is recommended that there be a replication of this study with a more representative population. It is believed that younger males may have different experiences from first-born or only children males because of their ordinal position. From the findings of this study it is difficult to identify how those differences might influence the result of this study.

Lastly, it is recommended that clinicians develop an understanding of the African American family structure when working with Black males. Understanding the structure of a Black male's family as a child may be crucial to a real understanding. It is likely that whatever their experience is, it will influence the client's life in some manner. Consideration of these factors could greatly increase the client's chances of producing their desired change.

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## Appendix A

Interviewer: **Today is April 26, 2000 and we are here at Rueben Lindh Family Services.**

There are seven African American Men present. The topic is the role that African American males play in their families.

1. What has your experience as a male been in your family?

Respondent #1:

My experience as a male has been from a father aspect that his son's footsteps should be better than his, and his example should be to lead his children in a straight and narrow path. Teach his son the morals that he learned and even more. A father expects more from his children.

Respondent #2

But we have to give them something so that they can be better.

Respondent #1

Yes, I am going to give them time. My father gave me time. The best thing my father gave me was the understanding about certain things that happen. You know that there are certain things that you can change and certain things that you can't change. There are certain things that you can ask God for help on and certain things you have to experience.

Respondent #2

What was your role coming up as a Black man?

Respondent #1

My role?

Respondent #2

Let me help you a little bit. My role, from as long as I can remember, was that I was expected to be independent. So, what was your role when you were coming up?

I was expected to go to the grocery store, because they did not send girls to the store especially in the evening. I was expected not to cry, to be strong, to be

tough, then you are going to be okay. What ever happens I am expected to suffer the consequences. But I don't know if this was the result of being raised by a single parent, but I was expected to be pretty much independent. Go to school, go play, get ready. I was expected to do what my parents said.

Interviewer:

So are you saying that you feel like there were certain expectations that may have been different for you as a male from those of females?

Respondent #2

Of course, of course, like I said I was expected to be independent, but my sister was not expected to be independent or to, you know, do certain things. She could question, she could wine, she could cry, she could probably say she didn't want to do it. More or less take care of her self and do what she needs to do. Mom is out here working trying to take care of the house so I was expected do what I was suppose to do, be a good tough boy.

Interviewer: How about other folks?

Respondent #3

My role was as the oldest child. My father passed when I was five and pretty much until I was a teenage I figured that I was the headhuncho because I was the oldest.

Interviewer: When you say headhuncho what do you mean?

Respondent #3

Well I did not finish school because I went to work to help put income in the home and help support my mom.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you were the head of the household. Not the head of the household but the man of the house.

Respondent #3

Yes.

Interviewer: Was that something that was expected of you, or did you just figure: that I need to do this?



Respondent #3

Well I wanted to do that for my mom.

Interviewer: Okay, but your mom...

Respondent #3

She didn't ask me to do that.

Interviewer: Thanks

Respondent #2

You know, at an early age, Larry (Interviewer) it is hard to tell if we do it because we wanted to do it or because we were expected to do it. But, I just did stuff, like clean the house.

Interviewer: So it was hard to tell if it was an expectation of somebody else or if you just did something you felt like doing.

Respondent #1

Now like (respondent number 2) said I use to always have a way of earning money, shoveling snow, cutting grass, raking leaves and I would always give it to my mom.

Interviewer: Okay, how about you.

Respondent #3

The way I look at it is that I grew up in a single parent household cause my mom and dad was divorced. At the age of seven to fourteen he was teaching me to be independent, but I'd say in the wrong way. There is a certain way to teach a child, like the children we have now. The way we teach them to be independent is totally different from the way we were raised. My dad was a little more harsh on me cause he was from the South so I think his parents were strict so he used some of that on me. Then my mom got custody and when I was fourteen I moved in with her. There was no man there. I lived in a house with nothing but women. I was the male of the household, except my little brother, but it was like I took over the role. It was my mom and my aunt's house. They were the heads of the house but I was like the man of the house.

Interviewer: How was that for you?

Respondent #3

Strange, because in a house with nothing but women. Nothing against my mother, but I was in a house with nothing but women and there was no male role model there. I didn't have a dad there; I am the only one there. I actually had to play dad to my brother and my cousin. My aunt was at work and my mother was at work, I was the one taking care of them. And when I reached about 15-16, they didn't have money, they came to me because I had a job. I was trying to help my mom and them to pay the bills and stuff like that. It's kind of hard when you know you are 15-16 years old and you are in a house full of women and you are the only male in there. My little brother did not understand what it was like.

Respondent #2

You know the bad thing about this is when we are in this position this is all we know. We don't know how it is with a man in the household, so it was all trial and error. I did not see a man get up everyday and a man bring his work check home to buy food, pay bills. So it was trial and errors for us if we learned that at all. And as far as me learning growing up and learning to be independent that meant that I did not get many hugs and kisses. So I had to teach myself to give that to my children and my female companion. Because I just did not get it. There was a lot of trial and error. I had to learn from my mistakes.

Interviewer: So are you saying that, as a male, it was not always clear what you should be doing?

Respondent #2

No, never. It was trial and error.

Interviewer: Trial and error! Even though people had certain expectations for you? (No answer...)

Respondent #3

It's hard to explain to a teacher that my dads' out of town so there's nothing I can do. But like I said, being in a household of women is totally different things because you know you are a man and there is always that expected role even though women are there. You know my mom use to tell me, "why don't you help your brother with this and that", and I would try to tell her,

I am not his dad. I didn't have a dad so how can I be put in the role of being a father to my brother when really at times I didn't have a dad around. It's kind of hard to fulfill that role of being a male.

Respondent #2

Can you read the question again so that some of the other guys can answer?

Interviewer: Yes. What has your experience as a male been in your family? Any that haven't answered.

Respondent #4

What's your name again? Okay mine has been like (respondent #2), I was supposed to be independent. No hugs, no kisses. I had to learn to give affection. My father, no father in the house. I come from a single parent home. It was like his.

Respondent #2

We have to live and learn what's working, going to school, getting a job and going there on time. We had to learn that shit. You know it seemed like my whole male life, most everything I get I had to learn. But you know when you asked the question, What was the role in the family or what it is? What is it or what was it?

Interviewer:

What has it been?

Respondent #2

Because you know somewhere along the line I got put in different positions in the family; responsible one, the one who takes care of others, the rational one, the one you didn't mess with, the one who would support you, the one who would be there. So, my role has changed a few times.

Interviewer:

Let me just make sure I get to everybody here. Did you want to say something?

Respondent #5

(It was difficult to understand this person)

Respondent #2

Iron your shirt, wash your cloths, everything, cook.

Respondent #5  
Go to the store.

Respondent #6  
I still do it now.

Respondent #2  
But you know when I was a little guy, I use to complain that this is girls work and mom would explain to me. She did help me, by explaining to me how to wash the dishes and clean up. So she did help me; I am not complaining.

Interviewer:  
Do you want to say something?

Respondent # 2  
Do you remember the question?

Yes

Respondent #2  
Just read it one more time.

Interviewer:  
What has your experience as a male been?

Respondent #6  
As a boy I did not have a father. So my brother tried to play the father. We stayed into it.

Interviewer:  
You and your brother stayed into it?

Respondent #6  
Yeah.

Interviewer:  
All right... Let me move on to the next question, if you all don't mind. We are a little pressed for time.

2. Can you see any differences or similarities in how you were treated as a child and now how you are treated as an adult?

Respondent # 1  
Oh hell yeah.

Other respondents:  
Laughter

Respondent #2  
By our family or society?

Interviewer:  
Both or however you interpret the question?

Respondent #1  
Well, I say when I was growing up my momma would say, "you ain't got no opinion". Whatever I say you shouldn't challenge. That's the rule my mom had.

Respondent # 2  
Cause you talk-an back.

Respondent #1  
You all know I'm Southern and Southern people, your moral was you didn't disrespect mom and dad. Your opinion was getting smart.

Respondent # 4  
And sarcastic.

Respondent # 1  
And in different areas they say; well you have an opinion. I am trying to tell you this, but if you in the wrong, you gotten smart. I look at my self now, you know, I say to my self you know you did some stuff that was wrong. But I mean you didn't play with us, she even said I didn't believe in playing with children. My dad, now he was more the interactive one. My role with my mom was you no different then the girls.

Interviewer:  
So as a child you felt that your opinion did not matter? It was not important? How do you feel now as an adult?

Respondent # 1  
As an adult?

Interviewer:  
Yes.

Respondent # 1  
I grow on the morals that my mom gave me.

Interviewer:  
Do you feel like that's changed?

Respondent #1  
Yea, I mean it's a lot of stuff my mom did that prepared me for a lot of stuff. Like my mother, grandmother and my father always told me to learn how to take care of your self. If you don't get married your morals will stay with you, and to this day I am cooking, and cleaning is something I do regularly. You know, and then they say don't be afraid to stand up for your self. If the situation calls for you being a man about it, be a man. Don't just let nobody do to you and hurt you. You know, and I kind of stuck with that one. I mean it's a lot of stuff my parents have said that I did not choose to do. And you know I am the first to graduate out of my mom's four children. I had my own apartment, did not have any children. I guess they looked at me and said \*\*\*\*\* is going to make it, he ain't got no children and ain't got nothing. I guess they look for me to just be the big time of the family. I guess that's what they look to me as.

Interviewer:  
I am not sure if you have answered if there are differences in how you were treated then and how your family treats you now. Do you feel like they still listen to you or not?

Respondent #1  
Yea, she listened to me. Me and my mom, I say growing up were not all that close, but as I got older the similarities that me and my mom have drawn closer, we interact more, we joke more, and she is there for me emotionally. I am there for her emotionally and financially if I can, whenever she needs the help. Then I see things different then I do know. After I got older, I got a little wiser. A lot of the stuff she did

after time she doesn't do the same things anymore, it's different.

Interviewer:

Okay, so you all changed? You changed she changed?

Respondent #1

Yea.

Interviewer:

Those changes, it seems like you are saying that she listened to you differently as an adult then she did when you were a child.

Respondent #1

Yea, because I was an adult. I can speak to my mom. I won't lash out at her cause she's still my mom. She has been my age and I ain't been hers.

Interviewer: Right!

Respondent #1

So I speak to her and let her know, you know, that wasn't right and you wrong about that. And say I understand you saying something from your experience and saying something that try to prepare me for a bad outcome or a good outcome. But you know I'm gonna listen, but I 'm also got to experience a lot of things for myself too. Now when I am wrong, you know I am going to tell you, you know you were right about that but I just had to see for my self.

Respondent #2

You know I am surprised that I am still alive today. But umm, my mom taught us how to keep things clean and I still live in a clean house. One thing that is different now is my opinion, and my family values, my manhood.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is \*\*\*\*\*.

Respondent #2

My opinion?

Interviewer: Yea, why do you think it's valued now verses when you were a child?

Respondent #2

Well I think it's because age, maturity or maybe they do see how I live my life or address issues. I try to do that in rational ways different from old behaviors.

Respondent #3

The difference between when I was young and now is that when I was young I liked hanging out, staying out late, this that and that. Mom was always on my case about; "you need to do that or this, this, that and the other". Now that I am older, I've actually accomplished something in my life. Like when I was young I always thought no one cared, but when I was doing bad everybody cared. Now I am a better person, like they really don't care. Like take for example my brother he is the misfit of the family so everyone cares about him. But me it don't really matter, so I can tell the difference between when I was young and now that I have gotten older. When I was younger, hanging out, mom would always call "how you doing, this, that and the other, when you all coming to visit me?" Now its like, I'll see you when I see you. If you come over you come over, if you don't, I am not even worried.

Respondent #2

You know there is one thing I missed, and then I am going to let someone else in, and so what I know I'm taking a risk. One of the things that's similar now today as when I was a little boy? When I was younger I might have been angry for different reasons. But now you know I am real mature and I can't do the same stuff. But the anger is still there from a kid to now.

Interviewers: How about you other guys? Do you have anything you want to share related to the topic? Can you see any differences or similarities in how you were treated as a child and as an adult?

Respondent #1

I do!

Interviewer: Hold up, I want to make sure we get everybody, because we are running out of time.

Respondent #4

Yea, practicality, between then and now?

Interviewer: Right!



Respondent #4

Well my mom is deceased now.  
That's why it's kind of hard for me.

Respondent #5

Yea, me too.

Respondent # 2

Well you know one thing I was thinking \*\*\*\*\* is how things are different now. When I was a little boy the White man would always look over my head. Now the White man has to look at me in my face.

Group Laughter

Respondent #2

Or the teachers, White authorities want to say something wasn't true now it gets a little deeper. Now they want to call me Mr.\*\*\*\*\*. Then they wanted to rub my head and say come on little boy you want a nickel.

Group Laughter

Respondent #1

I think that is true; especially what you said about growing up in the school. Teachers look like they have lost all that now. Which, which it varies from situation to situation.

Respondent #2

You know when we were boys the teachers were scared of us. Now that we are grown, I mean when we were growing up we were scared of the teachers, now they are scared of us.

Respondent #1

And another thing I use to hate was when my momma was more towards the girls then she was towards the boys. Cause we had to be in shit, before the sun go down and the girls they run away doing this and all that. And the one thing I use to hate, that use to piss me off, and I use to cry in some people's face, but I broke all that shit up cause ain't no use to crying and doing this and that. Hell, now sometimes I can't even get my self to cry. The one thing I use to hate is that she would be so hard on the boys, the boys only do this, the boys only do

that, they gonna go fuck and get babies but then the girls are the ones that end up being the first ones to get pregnant. We don't end up having babies until we are in our twenties.

Respondent #2

Well, what about this guys? You know a lot of us were raised to be so tough when we were little, but now that we are older we are not allowed to show those feelings and we are kind of hard-core.

Interviewer: Have you all ever heard the term, "love our daughters but raise our sons?"

Respondent#1

I ain't ever heard that.

Group laughter

Respondent#2

\*\*Difficult to understand his response.

Respondent #1

But my father was compassionate he told me in a compassionate way, "know there are things in life that are going to hurt you". The one thing that sticks in my mind until this day, it took a while for me to kind of really understand what he was trying to say, but he told me something that really made sense. He said "let me tell you something son, I've been through the good times and the bad and there is one thing I want you to remember", and I laughed. He told me to "be cautious of whatever you do in life especially towards a women, cause ain't nothing in this world that can hurt you more then a women". I laughed and said yea right, but when that situation happened the past became the present and it kind of opened up my eyes that I always respect women. But it opened up my eyes that the things I tell I am telling you from experience, and I am telling you because I love you. And I want you to do different in a relationship with your family then I did with your mom.

Respondent # 2

That's the difference between being older because now we can understand what our parents and grandparents were trying to tell us. It really makes a difference being older.

Respondent #1  
Big difference!

Respondent # 2  
When we were younger you hear all this stuff and you think I don't know what they are saying. So it makes a big difference. We should go on Larry.

Interviewer: Yea.

3.What is it like to be an African American male in this society, and is that experience different from the one you have in your family? What I am trying to get at is how your family relates to you.

Respondent #1  
This is a good topic. One thing related to how my family relates to me, for which I am blessed very blessed, that is color barriers. My mom always told me "we don't give a rat's ass who you're dating as long as they are treating you right". But a lot of times I see people asking questions. Why you dating that person; why you dating that person? I don't know how it is yours, I can only speak for my self I mean it's a lot of obstacles date people of any color, so I am not just going to say White.

Respondent #2  
So your family supported the things you did?

Respondent #1  
Yes they did.

Respondent #2  
A lot of people in society don't support that.

Respondent#1  
A lot of people in society don't support people dating out of their race. You got some ignorant races but I always trust in myself and my mom trust in me. She drilled into me that you should not judge no man, because if you judge anybody you got to start deep within your self first. I don't care who you're dating or who you're seeing, if you're happy I am still going to claim you and accept her because she has not done any wrong to me. Mother told me that it doesn't matter what color or race

a person is, if the person is going to do you wrong they going to do wrong regardless of what color they are.

Respondent#2

Family supports and in society you're on your own.

Interviewer: So family supports and in society you're on your own.

Respondent#2

In society you're on your own. (Difficult to understand responses.)

Interviewer: We have about ten minutes left, so I am going to ask everybody to keep answers brief so we can get through question three. The third question is; what is it like to be an African American male in this society, and is that experience different from the one you have in your family?

Respondent#4

Well for me, my family isn't here. My mom died from cancer six years ago in Detroit. I had support from the family but if you are African American you're on a totem pole.

Interviewer: You feel like that in society?

Respondent#4

Yes.

Interviewer: So that's how you feel about society not your family?

Respondent#4

Correct.

Interviewer: The next question is:

4. What do you think would be important wisdom to pass on to a son?

Respondent#1

The best wisdom I can give is to respect other people no matter what they have done to you. They are still a

human being, respect them and show some courtesy. I am not saying let them hurt you, but be considerate because now days people would rather run you over then say get out of the way.

Group member  
They sure will.

Respondent#1  
Don't be afraid to love someone who has done wrong to you. Don't be ashamed to admit you did wrong and I won't hold it against you.

Interviewer: So what about other folks? What do you think would be good wisdom to pass on to a son or daughter?

Respondent#3  
Basically, it's like he was saying. Have respect for others.

Respondent#4  
The same thing he said, which is to have respect.

Respondent#2  
And even though we don't have no spirituality you still hear the word God coming out of our mouths. Mine would be, and I said it a minute ago, I would tell all Black boys and all Black girls to live and learn. Don't be mad about it and cry because you are suspended or you went to prison, you live God damned it, now you know.

Group Laughter

Respondent#2  
It sounds funny. But you know we can be mad about shit that happens to us in our whole life. We lived it and experienced it and now I am suppose to know. If I was told, as a little boy I'd be sharp, but you know I carried anger with me for so many years because stuff happened to me and that was my fault. But you live and learn, you hear me?

Respondent #5  
I'd say keep their heads up and always be strong. No matter what situation they're in. If a schoolteacher

tells them they are not doing something right they should always keep their head up.

Respondent#2

Listen up, because here is another one. We need to start telling our kids that they can be anything they want as long as they keep a plan and goal. If you have a plan and goal you are bound to get there. If you practice, practice, practice long enough you can play any damned instrument. If I keep playing the guitar for five years you damned right I am going to be a good guitar player. The same thing goes for a goal and plan, if I keep at it I am bound to get there and son you can be anything. You want to be the president or a doctor. You damned right you can be a good doctor, cause you got twenty year to prepare, why wouldn't you be? Let's go ahead Larry.

Interviewer: Last question, you guys are doing fine.  
5. What wouldn't you want to pass on to your son or daughter and why?

Respondent#1

Don't let anyone force your actions to get you out of control. Don't let people control you and don't trust people if you are not certain of their motives.

Interviewer: So you are saying that it is important for you to lead so that they don't excuses about...

Respondent#1

Let me say this, always look forward to failing in life first. If you succeed good, but failure will lead to more success.

Group member

What was the question again?

Interviewer: What wouldn't you pass on to your son or daughter and why?

Respondent#5

Negative influence. As a parent you know you see your child they're doing fine, help them keep their self-confidence. Don't say, well you failed today so you will probably fail the next test too. Give them that wisdom and courage so that on the next test they will have the

confidence to pass it. If you start young with the negativity that's what they will grow up with.

Interviewer: So, you want to stay away from the negativity.

Respondent#5

I mean it's like being near a group. Just because this person over here made a mistake he don't need all that put on him. But you can still say, hey man what you did is wrong and here is how you can correct it and it's the same way with your child.

Respondent#6

Be a leader and not a follower, make your own suggestions.

Interviewer: Anything you want to say?

Respondent#4

Don't follow the wrong crowd. Stay with the good people so if anything wrong happens you weren't a part of it.

This was the end of the questions and the interview. The interview ended abruptly because the subjects needed to leave because their transportation from group to home was waiting outside. The group appeared to answer the questions to the best of their ability and understanding. It is difficult at times to understand what some of the subjects were saying because of slang mixed with southern accents. Overall the subjects seemed comfortable with the questions and some of the discussion even appeared somewhat therapeutic for them.

