

“Never actually had a chance”: Toward a social psychology of high risk youth exclusion

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

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University of Alberta

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## Abstract

Former foster youth often experience an array of serious challenges during their young adult years. Problems such as homelessness, school drop-out, and mental health and drug problems have been attributed to the requirement that foster youth lose their supports from child welfare as they approach the legal threshold of adulthood in many North American jurisdictions (i.e., they “age-out” of their eligibility for services as children). In this dissertation, I explore how this process of aging-out specifically leads to such poor outcomes for former foster youth. I also explore how the process of being excluded from supports and resources, that are often seen as necessary for healthy child development at earlier periods in the youths’ lives, affect the development of their capacities to survive on their own.

A social exclusion framework was utilized to explore how multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage, throughout the youth participants’ lives, (e.g., poor youth labour markets, expensive rental accommodations, absence of consistent caregivers and inadequate educational and mental health supports) interacted to prevent former foster youth from being able to develop the life and work skills needed for independent living. The results suggest that not only did such exclusionary events and processes compromise skill development, but they also interfered with the development of feelings of psychological efficacy and agency that would likely have enabled the young people to stay committed to vocational and moral identity roles that they felt represented their “true” selves, such as being a law-abiding student or employee. It would seem that commitment to such identities could have permitted the youth to feel as though they belonged in mainstream society, as opposed to belonging in marginalized subcultures, characterized by illicit drug use and other high risk activities. Case studies of four youth were comprised of extensive biographical information that I obtained through conversational interviews as well as a structured interview (Adult Attachment Interview) and questionnaire (Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale) that yielded in-depth information on adverse childhood events such as abuse.

## Preface

This thesis is an original work by Anju Anand. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Exploring the Social Exclusion of High Risk Youth”, No. 00009069, September 20, 2009.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to especially thank my family, Derek and Suu Kyi, for their unconditional love and acceptance of me, every day and through every challenge.

I would also like to acknowledge my examining committee, particularly Dr. George Buck and Dr. Gretchen Hess. Thank you for your unwavering support and for always demonstrating an open mind and sensitivity to the vulnerable population that is the subject of this dissertation. Dr. Veronica Smith and Dr. David Pederson also expressed a keen interest in the welfare of my young participants and provided invaluable feedback to me. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Jacqueline Pei and Dr. Christina Rinaldi for empowering me to passionately defend my views on how to best meet the complex challenges of supporting high risk youth.

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## Chapter One

### Study Background and Rationale

Social exclusion is a process by which people are cut off from access to community resources (e.g., institutions, services, and public spaces such as quality schools, policing, parks and libraries) and developmental opportunities (e.g., stable family lives, positive peer influences) that most people in society are able to access (Pierson, 2002). Social exclusion is believed to result primarily from having low income, but other factors such as low educational attainment and mental health problems may also serve as contributing factors. In the lives of high risk youth, school expulsion or push out may diminish youths' employability and increase their propensity for socializing with deviant peers. Exclusion from one's family or foster/group home may cause youths to feel that they have been 'thrown away', (Allison, 1993) which in turn may result in more time spent with negative peer models and diminished chances of success in schooling and in jobs. Despite the potential for such serious adverse outcomes, we know little about how high risk youths' subjective experiences of exclusion, with respect to a variety of social contexts since childhood, may have contributed to the challenges that so many of them face as they attempt to transition from depending on street life, child welfare, or other forms of social assistance to developing a mainstream adult identity (i.e., becoming law abiding, economically self-supporting, and otherwise capable of independent living).

To address this knowledge gap about high risk youths' transitions, I departed from much of the existing research on social exclusion by focusing on the lived *social-psychological* experience of exclusion in high risk youths' lives. Most of the previous research on social exclusion has been concerned with analyzing relationships between social structural factors such as socioeconomic status and outcomes such as youth employment rates (Jahnukainen, 2001). Alternatively, studies have been focused on determining pathways from one form of marginalization to another (e.g., how exclusion from paid

labour may lead to social alienation) (Kieselbach, 2003). However, such structural analyses of exclusion do not acknowledge a role for individual agency in their account of youth outcomes, and therefore neglect consideration of psychological factors that may be implicated in individual youths' responses to excluding events. The significance of this limitation can be understood by taking up the latter example of social exclusion research conducted by Kieselbach (i.e., assuming a direct pathway between employment status and the experience of exclusion, particularly the experience of social alienation, in this case). It has been found that unemployment does not invariably lead to the subjective experience of social exclusion in young people. Rather individual differences in how youths cope with unemployment, as well as differences in their mental health status and educational qualifications, have been found to bear on whether or not a particular youth will identify as being excluded as a consequence of being unemployed (Hammer, 2007).

Though a role for individual agency has been recognized in a few of the studies that have examined youths' lived experience of social exclusion (Sanders & Munford, 2007; Thomson, Bell, Holland, Henderson, McGrellis, Sharpe, 2002), differences in agentic responses to exclusion have been attributed solely to youths' differential access to, or appraisal of, social resources that could be used to respond constructively to exclusion. For example, youths may be buffered from the effects of exclusion from jobs if they access informal support networks within their communities (Macdonald & Marsh, 2001). However, other psychological sources of agency, such as positive self-perceptions or coping styles, have not been evaluated as factors that may also influence youths' responses to exclusion. Moreover, though these studies do not appear to be as deterministic as most of the aforementioned structural accounts of exclusion, disadvantaged youths' subjective experiences are still seen as being mostly constrained by their experience of excluding events or processes (e.g., barriers to employment such as criminal histories, low education levels, or racism).

In addition to neglecting consideration of psychological factors that may mediate youths' responses to exclusion, researchers have also largely neglected the psychological impact that social exclusion may have on youth. The psychological impact of social exclusion has been explored through survey research in which researchers examined whether youths identify with *feeling* excluded as a result of their experiencing excluding events. For example, although youths are more likely to indicate that they feel excluded if they experience multiple forms of deprivation (e.g., barriers to employment, schooling, safe neighbourhoods) on the whole, few youths actually feel excluded (Popp & Schels, 2008). However, this finding provides us with limited insight as we might expect that few disadvantaged youth would have had the opportunity to become familiar with the construct of exclusion in their natural environments (Macdonald & March, 2001). Furthermore, in one of the few studies to examine youths' lived experience of exclusion, though youths were observed to mostly attribute their exclusions from school to their own individual agency (e.g., choosing not to alter their habits of school misbehaviour), their stories nevertheless reflect awareness of the effects of multiple exclusions on where they are today, as well as awareness of how their actions and decisions interacted with those of school personnel (Thomson et al, 2002). It would appear then that studies which only seek to identify whether or not youth identify as *feeling* excluded on a questionnaire cannot give us a full understanding of the psychological experience of exclusion. Rather, one must inquire into how youths themselves understand the effects that exclusion may have had on their lives, including their understanding of how and why they responded to excluding events and processes in the way that they did. As Veck (2002) put it:

...the significance of the statement, "You are excluded", rests upon verification of 2 empirical claims: one relational, the other psychological. The first claim requires proof that your relationship to certain economic and social relations is genuinely a marginalized one, one that precludes you from partaking in and enjoying the fruits of these relations. The second claim

rests upon questions about your identity, namely how you interpret and respond to the 'exclusionary pressures' you are placed under. (p.539)

Consequently, in this study, I elicited youths' voices about their experiences of exclusion for the purpose of gaining insight into this more complex relational-psychological or social-psychological understanding of the exclusion experience.

I also departed from the existing literature by applying the concept of social exclusion to 'high risk youth.' While there are many researchers who apply a social exclusion framework to understanding the experiences of economically disadvantaged youth, such as youth in housing projects (McAuley, 2006) and other marginalized youth, such as youth with disabilities (Susinos, 2007), this is the first study to apply the concept to high risk youth. In this study, youth are considered high risk if they meet the following criteria based on the Alberta government's<sup>1</sup> definition of high risk youth: youths whose drug/alcohol use interferes with their daily functioning, whose decisions may jeopardize their safety, who lack healthy adult connections outside of the professional community, and who have experienced multiple residential placements and multi-generational child protection involvement (High Risk Youth Task Force, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> I have adopted the same criteria that Alberta Children's Services (ACS), the provincial ministry responsible for child welfare, uses in their definition of high risk youth, with the exception of their age boundary. ACS targets youths aged fourteen to a maximum of twenty-two years for their service delivery (High Risk Youth Task Force, 2005). Despite the official upper boundary of twenty two years, in practice, most youths who turn eighteen are not eligible for services with ACS, unless the youth has already been a ward of the province and is deemed to still require considerable assistance with developing the life skills needed to live independently. Otherwise, youths must demonstrate that they qualify for adult forms of social assistance, if they are to receive any assistance at all past the age of eighteen. Because I had no reason to impose similar restrictions based on reaching the age of majority for this study, I allowed for high risk youths up to the age of twenty five to be included in my sample. I reasoned that such young people are often still engaged in making the adult transitions that I was interested in. Even among the general youth population, those in their mid- to late twenties are often now considered to be *emerging adults* (Arnett, 2006), as opposed to those who have fully formed their adult identities.

'High risk youth', as defined in this study, does not have a precise referent in the academic literature. Although one could find literature that is relevant to describing these youths' experiences under a number of search terms, such as homeless youth or street-involved youth, for example, high risk youth may also be distinguished from each of these descriptors. Though many, but not all, homeless or street-involved youth experience multiple forms of disadvantage, high risk youth, by definition, experience a cluster of problems which can be linked to their status as youth who are *aging out* of the child welfare system (Stein, 2006). As with Alberta Children's Services, in most jurisdictions youths' eligibility for supports from child welfare decline as they move closer to the age of majority, and often terminate once they become legal adults (Atkinson, 2008). Given limited support from the state or one's family, such youth are "more likely than other young people to be homeless or on the streets, be young parents, have poorer educational qualifications, lower levels of participation in post-16 education, higher levels of unemployment, offending behaviour, and mental health problems"(Stein, 2005, p.423).

It should be noted, however, that not all youths who are aging out of care experience these outcomes. Rather, half of these youth endure such challenges following care (Courtney, Dworsky, Ruth, Havlicek, & Perez, 2007). Given that high risk youth by definition comprise the half that experience negative outcomes in making the transition to adulthood, probably the most relevant referents for such youth in the academic literature are the subsets of aging out youth that have been classified as "survivors" or "victims" (Stein, 2006). Stein observes that in contrast to youth who successfully "move on" with their lives following care, survivors are those who experienced more instability while in care and were more likely to leave care at younger ages. These youth are also more likely to experience instability following their time in care, often involving stints of unemployment and homelessness. However they are called survivors because they pride themselves on having survived such experiences by being self-reliant and tough. In contrast, victims are distinguished by having suffered the worst pre-

care family experiences, and by not having received the kind of care that could help them recover from their early traumas. These youth were most likely to leave care at a young age, following a “breakdown” in their foster home placement or group home placement. Following care, they are not only more likely to be unemployed and homeless than survivors, but also more prone to isolation, loneliness, and mental health difficulties.

Given that inadequate supports during foster care, as well as pre- and post-care, mark the lives of many aging out or high risk youth, the concept of social exclusion appeared to provide a relevant framework for understanding their experiences and outcomes. Previously few studies on this youth population had been grounded in any theoretical or conceptual framework (Stein, 2005). Consequently, most of the literature described youth outcomes, but provided little help in understanding the pathways to such outcomes.

Another way that the current study addressed the need to understand high risk youths’ trajectories was by using a biographical, case-study design to explore their lived experiences of exclusion. Through gathering in-depth information about the life stories of the individual high risk youths that agreed to participate in the study, I was able to learn how each of them understood the chain of life events that had led them to experience many of the adverse outcomes that Stein (2006) had observed in post-care “survivors” and “victims”.

Before I provide a more detailed account of the case study methodology, I will first elaborate further on the rationale for exploring the *social-psychological* experience of exclusion, particularly with respect to the implications that such an analysis has for informing intervention with high risk youth. I will follow this with a description of specific concepts and theories from the developmental psychological literature and clinical psychological literature that I thought might have relevance for understanding the youths’ responses to social exclusion. This additional background information will enable readers to

appreciate the reasons why I selected the specific data collection and analysis methods that I employed in the study. I will then elaborate on these methods in the ensuing section on methodology.

### **Toward a Social-Psychology of Exclusion**

To fully appreciate the importance of exploring the social-psychological experience of social exclusion in high risk youth, it helps to be aware of some of the criticisms and accolades that the construct of social exclusion has generated. Social exclusion is a political concept that originated in France, but subsequently gained popularity throughout the European Union. Tony Blair's New Labour government in the United Kingdom especially embraced the concept. In their definition of social exclusion, Blair's government stressed the relationships between multiple forms of deprivation that tend to co-occur in low income communities. Social exclusion is: "... a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown" (Scottish Office, as cited in Pierson, 2002).

When the concept of social exclusion became imported into academia, it was criticized for lacking a precise operational definition. Social exclusion could be a "slippery 'catch-all' phrase", referring to the myriad ways that people might be socially disadvantaged (Atkinson, as cited in MacDonald & Marsh, 2001). Thus many felt that the concept did not add much value in understanding marginalized groups beyond what had already been captured in analyses of related constructs such as poverty or inequality. However, in more recent academic discussions, the term has been lauded, particularly by commentators from within the discipline of social work. Morris, Barnes and Balloch (2009), for example, value the concept, not only for its ability to capture the multi-dimensional nature of disadvantage, but for its emphasis on *process* rather than status: "Understanding exclusion as a process can enhance solutions which focus on the factors that exclude as well as the consequences of such exclusions"

(p.231). Such a view of exclusion allows that not all individuals will experience the same exclusionary outcomes as a result of living in poverty. Rather the nature of one's experience of exclusion will depend on the specific parties that may be excluding her, and how that exclusion is being registered by its recipient. For example, Canadian aboriginal youth may experience racism in addition to other barriers (e.g., education, employment) that they experience in common with poor white youth; however, the way in which such barriers affect any particular young person, regardless of their ethnicity, will depend on how a variety of individual and micro-social factors interact with the excluding event(s). For example, participation in subcultural youth groups and strong family integration has been found to buffer the effects of being excluded from employment (MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, & Simpson, 2005).

Social workers also noted that such a conceptualization of exclusion could account for why disadvantaged youth often exclude themselves from contact with community services and helping professionals. For example, it was observed that being shut out from supports and acceptance in schools precipitated young women's increasing withdrawal from that environment. An ongoing, reciprocal process of being excluded and self-excluding that had developed for the young women led ultimately to their "actively embracing the identity of outsiders" (Sanders & Munford, 2000, p.17). Thus, social workers have lauded this *process* view of social exclusion, for its recognition of the operation of both structure and agency in the experience of exclusion (Sanders & Munford, 2000).

In contrast, one may see youths' self-exclusion as a highly limited or 'bounded' form of agency, in that social withdrawal is a fairly predictable effect of being excluded. Most people would turn to shunning other people and places that do not want to include them. However, such self-exclusion must also be recognized as the product of conscious deliberation about the interactions that young people may have with youth service providers and other professionals over an extended period of time. Sanders and Munford (2000) observe that the decision to embrace marginal identities that the young

women in the aforementioned study came to make was actually the culmination of a long duration in which they straddled living in the mainstream culture and in marginal contexts such as street life. At a certain point, the young women who decided to leave school did so because they came to perceive their marginal lifestyles as affording them more constructive options for coping with their problems than the possibilities afforded by their schools or home lives. One young woman, for example, found that she received better support for her family problems from talking to her inner city youth peers than she did by talking to her school counsellor. The implication of such study results is that social workers need to understand the positive meanings of marginality that may be held by such young women, so as to avoid engaging with policy and practice that focuses narrowly on controlling deviant behaviour. Practitioners may instead turn their efforts towards finding ways to remove the harmful effects of young women's marginal (and often risky) behaviours without eliminating the "social bonds and integrative characteristics" that co-exist with them (Sanders & Munford, 2000, p.3).

The above discussion of marginalized young women demonstrates that by viewing exclusion as a process, the effects of exclusion can be seen to extend beyond material disadvantage to matters of physical and social well-being, adolescent development, and access to public places, institutions, forms of decision-making and so forth (Morris, Barnes & Balloch, 2009). Understanding the interaction between individuals' agency and structure in such areas enables practitioners to determine practices and actions that may reduce the effects of exclusion, despite the continuation of their clients' economic disadvantage. It has been noted that an exclusively structural analysis of exclusion will result in impotence for practitioners, as it is unlikely that they will be able to create the political changes that are needed to eradicate poverty (Watts, 2001). On the other hand, the risk in overestimating youths' capacity for agency in their negotiation of exclusion is that practitioners come up with "naive solutions which are doomed to failure" (Watts, 2001, p.4). Even the most competent young person may not be

able to surmount the kinds of high risk conditions (e.g., lack of employment, high crime rate) that characterize low income communities.

The fact that even the most skilled youth could not easily demonstrate resilience in impoverished environments is important for understanding why programs aimed at disadvantaged youth have met with modest success at best (Watts, 2001). This is because most programs aimed at improving youths' circumstances exclusively target youth to be the agents responsible for such changes. This situation persists despite service providers' acknowledgement that the problems of aging out youth reflect a mix of structural exclusions, inadequate caregiving, and youths' skills deficits (e.g., problems with cognitive, social and/or daily living skills) (Broad, as cited in Stein, 2005). In addition to the weak results that may be expected from most programs, their focus on youth skill-building may contribute to the "individualisation of social risks" (Gray, 2007, p. 408), that often happens in programs aimed at reducing youth crime. When youth do not succeed in meeting the outcomes of such programs such as finding employment in their impoverished communities, youths' skill deficits are blamed rather than the structural inequalities that underlie the lack of jobs and training opportunities in those communities or the obstacles posed by criminal records and a lack of stable, affordable housing, for example. By failing to acknowledge such socio-economic constraints on young offenders' behaviours, youth are unfairly required to assume personal, moral responsibility for the *social* causes of their offending behaviours. Likewise, if youth attribute their homelessness to individual risk factors such as family violence versus a lack of social housing, undue self-blame may result (Smith, 2005). Against this backdrop of being made to take on more responsibility for one's situation than is warranted, it has been suggested that youths' characteristic disengagement from services and helping professionals would appear to be a rational response as opposed to the 'pathological' response that most practitioners take it to be (Watts, 2001).

By failing to adhere to an analysis that recognizes both structure and agency in youths' experience of exclusion, practitioners may thus inadvertently contribute to youths' self-exclusion.

Understanding how youth interpret and negotiate exclusion then is critical for practitioners who want to avoid functioning as part of the problem for youth. Such understanding is also critical for determining windows of opportunity in individual youths' lives, in which practitioners may help maximize the chances for healthy youth development, in spite of their exclusion. In one of the few studies to inquire about youths' lived experience of school exclusion, youths were observed to experience "critical moments" (Thomson et al., 2002) that had pushed them either toward or away from the outcome of being permanently denied re-entry to school. Analysis of one young man's narrative suggested that, at one point, there came a tipping point for him in which he saw that it had become too late for him to fully take advantage of the learning supports provided by his school. By the time he had realized that these supports were succeeding in helping him with his learning problems, he had already gone too far with respect to identifying as a gangster. As part of developing his deviant reputation in the school, the youth came to 'burn his bridges' with school personnel who had already given him many chances to reform his school behaviour. By understanding how such a young man made sense of his role and that of school personnel in his school exclusion, practitioners may help similar youth become aware of more adaptive options for constructing their identities, especially during critical moments. Likewise, attempting to mitigate the harmful aspects of marginal identities, without losing what youth consider valuable about them (Sanders & Munford, 2000), is another intervention strategy that may follow from understanding youths' lived, *social-psychological* experience of exclusion. Though such intervention efforts may seem trivial in light of the magnitude of challenges that are experienced by high risk young people, they may nevertheless have a substantial impact on youths' lives. Changes in self-perceptions have been found to underlie desistance from criminal behaviours such as gang activity (Barker, 2005).

Youth identity formation is traditionally understood as a both a social and psychological (i.e., psycho-social) developmental task (Erikson, 1968). Despite this, as mentioned previously, the research literature to date does not explicitly acknowledge a role for psychological factors in mediating youths' responses to social exclusion. Individual differences in youths' agency are understood to proceed from their differential access to social resources (Thomson et al., 2002) or differences in their perception of the balance of mainstream versus marginal resources that are available to them (Sanders & Munford, 2000). While assessing the availability of resources from which to develop an adult identity is certainly a critical part of psycho-social identity formation (Erikson, 1968), it is not the entire story. Nor may it be the only aspect of identity development, or psychological development more generally, that might bear on youths' responses to exclusion. Adolescents' developmentally normative quests for autonomy from parents and other authority figures, for example, may also influence their experience of exclusion. Likewise, the impaired attachment and trauma histories that are common to many high risk youth may compound and complicate the 'rational' (Watts, 2001) tendency of youth to disengage with youth services. Though the tensions already described between structure and agency may account for the intense and often contradictory emotions that youths express regarding their exclusions (Veck, 2002), I believe that exploration of psychological factors may provide further insight into such responses. Consequently, in the following section, I will describe theories and concepts from the developmental psychological literature and clinical psychological literature that may be relevant in understanding high risk youths' exclusion.

### **The Psychology of Exclusion**

#### **Attachment and Trauma**

**Attachment.** According to attachment theory, the quality of an individual's early interactions with her primary caregivers has enduring implications for her self-worth, ability to regulate her

emotions, and capacity for developing healthy future relationships (Ogden, 2006). A secure attachment is “the bond of emotional communication” (Schoore, as cited in Ogden, 2006, p.47) between a child and her primary caregivers. This bond is formed when parents and children engage in reciprocal, attuned interactions from which the child derives security, contentment, and comfort. The child internalizes a model of this relationship, which functions as a template for how she will view both herself and others (Bretherton, 1992). The child forms a positive sense of self-worth by having internalized a view of her parents as responsive to her needs and encouraging of her exploratory behaviour. Conversely, a sense of one’s self as not worthy of others’ love and attention will form as a result of internalizing a model of parents as neglectful, rejecting, or interfering with one’s explorations. Similarly, the way in which the child translates the quality of her parenting experiences into mental representations or “internal working models” (Bowlby, as cited in Bretherton & Munholland, 2008) is also used to anticipate how parents and significant others can be expected to behave towards her, which in turn guides her behaviour towards them. Although the child’s early relationships with her parents are considered to be the primary attachment relationships that she draws upon in constructing her working models of self and others, adolescent and adult attachment systems are believed to be informed by both “general and relationship-specific attachment working models” (Bretherton & Munholland, p.115). As the child becomes older, her internal working models expand to reflect her increasing experiences with non-parent figures, such as teachers, friends, or dating partners. Some of these individuals come to be perceived as fulfilling attachment functions, such as providing comfort or inspiring self-confidence.

Given high risk youths’ extensive histories with the child welfare system, it is expected that most high risk youths have experienced disruptions in developing secure attachments to their biological parents or substitute caregivers such as foster parents. Impaired attachment may result from experiencing abuse or neglect at the hands of primary caregivers, being removed from one’s primary

caregiver to live in foster care, and from the common experience of moving between multiple foster/group homes. Thirty to forty percent of aging out youth experienced more than four residential moves and six to ten percent of this group experienced a minimum of ten moves (Stein, 2005).

Children with insecure attachment tend to characteristically distance themselves from others and undervalue relationships (insecure-avoidant), or exhibit an opposite tendency towards enmeshment and dependency on others (insecure-ambivalent). Alternatively, some children engage in contradictory behaviours such as demonstrating both avoidance and proximity-seeking behaviours, either simultaneously or sequentially (disorganized/disoriented) (Ogden, 2006). Stein (2005) suggests that whether former foster youths become victims, survivors, or are able to resiliently “move on” from their time in care may be related to their attachment style. For example, a youth’s tendency to self-exclude may be fostered by an insecure-avoidant style, quite apart from any rational calculation about disengaging from helping professionals. Even if youths do engage with programs or services, their relationships with service providers may be marked by a lack of trust. Bowlby (as cited in Bretherton, 1992) proposed that children with attachment problems may engage in “defensive exclusion”, which involves minimizing one’s needs for attachment to avoid the pain of being rejected by others. Downes (1992) found that youths who had left care had difficulty accepting help, because of past difficulties such as rejection from their birth families. Samuels and Pryce (2008) observe that aging-out youth often pride themselves on having been able to “grow up without parents” (p.1204). Such young people express fear of becoming dependent on others and reject emotional connections with professionals, because they attribute their survival to being extremely self-reliant.

Youth-service provider relationships may also be adversely affected by impaired attachment if attachment problems underlie emotional dysregulation. It is within a secure attachment relationship that children develop the capacity to regulate their emotions in response to stressful situations (Ogden,

2006). They learn to rely on others to be soothed and eventually develop the capacity to self-soothe, as a result of experiencing responsive care-giving. In contrast, youths with attachment problems may exhibit too much emotion or too little emotion, or may alternate between hypo- and hyper-arousal for extended periods. Youths who are prone to low emotional arousal may be “robbed of the opportunity for satisfying social engagement” (Ogden, 2006, p.56) and thus may withdraw from others. Youths prone to high emotional arousal often cling to others to try to derive comfort from them, despite lacking the ability to be easily calmed in such relationships. In view of such emotional tendencies, service providers may find themselves either being dismissed by such young people or unable to calm them, thus limiting their ability to form relationships and problem-solve with them. Attachment problems may therefore predispose high risk youths to poorer coping in response to social exclusion experiences, as well as compound their experiences of exclusion.

At the same time, the instability that youths experience within the care system (i.e., their exclusions from consistent adult caregivers and stable places of residence) mirrors the lack of safety and security that youths experienced in their family lives, thereby contributing to their attachment problems. Youths with attachment problems may “test” adults to see if they will be judged harshly for demonstrating undesirable behaviour. They may even sabotage good outcomes to see if adults will abandon them (Noshpitz, 1994). In such cases, a youth may be seeking to confirm a basic view of herself as unworthy, by acquiring evidence to support her internalized models of unresponsive or punitive caregivers. Youths’ exclusions from consistent and sufficient supports from within the care system are thus likely to be interpreted by them as confirmation that no one values them enough to “stay around for as long as possible to be there for them” (Luckock, Stevens & Young, 2008, p.15). Thus social exclusion may compound attachment difficulties, at the same time that attachment difficulties compound the experience of exclusion.

That said, results from an Edmonton forum on high risk youth suggest that if a youth has a positive relationship with her child welfare caseworker, she tends to view the entire “system” of children’s services positively (High Risk Task Force, 2005). For example, a youth may demonstrate more patience with how “inefficient” (to use the words of one high risk youth) children’s services may be in locating housing for her, if she has a good relationship with her caseworker. Thus the quality of youths’ attachments with service providers may promote less estrangement from helpers and better coping in the face of exclusion.

**Trauma.** As mentioned previously, parental abuse and neglect are primary causes of attachment problems in youth who leave foster care (Dozier & Rutter, 2008). Whether youth characteristically demonstrate hyper- or hypo-arousal, or alternate between such states, may be linked to whether abuse, neglect or both experiences underlie their attachment problems. Hyper-arousal is associated with abuse, hypo-arousal with chronic neglect and alternation between these states is linked to traumatogenic environments that expose children to both abuse and neglect (Ogden, 2006). Moreover, traumatized youth may also exhibit dysregulated emotions if they continue to engage in the defensive responses that enabled them to survive their traumatic experiences, long after the dangers to them have disappeared. Some may be extremely submissive or prone to intense anger or rage at the slightest provocation, as a result of being unable to let go of the immobilizing or mobilizing responses (“fight or flight”) that they made to protect themselves at the time of traumatic events (Ogden, 2006). It has been observed that “such deficits in self-regulation continue to represent an area of significant clinical challenge among trauma impacted youth” (Warner, Spinazzola, Westcott, Gunn & Hodgdon, 2014). Avoiding stimuli associated with the trauma, becoming detached or estranged from others generally, and experiencing a shortened sense of one’s future are other common post-traumatic stress symptoms for young people that may exacerbate current stressors such as being excluded from homes, jobs,

education, and so forth. An Edmonton youth outreach worker commented that high risk youths' intense anger with professionals seems to reflect both their "residual" (W. Kendal, personal communication, January 2010) anger from past trauma and attachment difficulties, as well as their current experiences of being denied adequate financial or housing supports.

Not only might past, unresolved trauma affect youths' responses to exclusion, but youth are also vulnerable to further victimization on account of their exclusions from adequate shelter, employment, and public spaces. Contrary to the popular view of youth as perpetrators of much street crime, street youth are more likely to be criminally victimized than most other populations in Canadian society (Gaetz, 2004). Being without secure shelter means that youth must spend most of their time in public spaces; however, because they are often forcibly removed from locations such as malls, libraries, and parks, this relegates them to more dangerous spaces on the street where they are more likely to come into contact with offending adults and peers (Gaetz, 2004). High risk young people also often reject spending time in overcrowded social service environments (e.g., drop in shelters, soup kitchens), as these contexts too place them at risk for health and safety problems (e.g., exposure to illness and risk of assault from other service users) (Gaetz, 2004). Moreover, exclusion from jobs leads young men to engage in dangerous crimes such as theft and drug dealing in order to survive (Gaetz, 2004). In contrast, young women are much more likely to enter relationships with older men to acquire income and shelter – relationships that put them at risk of sexual exploitation, including prostitution and sexual assault (Gaetz, 2004). Gaetz (2004) concludes that "the vulnerability of street youth to crime is most acutely experienced when multiple dimensions of social exclusion intersect" (p.444).

Robinson (2003) coined the term "compounded social exclusion" (p.1) to capture the experience of having multiple dimensions of social exclusion intersect in one's life. Like Gaetz, she observes that compounded social exclusion precipitates one's vulnerability to a range of crisis events (e.g., sexual

assault, family and random violence) that makes one prone to lose accommodation or move between forms of tenuous housing. However unlike Gaetz, Robinson sees the increased vulnerability to crisis as also being linked to trauma – both the traumatic experiences that often affect individuals before they became homeless as well as the traumas that proceed from homelessness itself. Similarly, Horowitz, Weine and Jekel (1995) coined the term “compounded community trauma” (p.1) to describe how the post-traumatic stress exhibited in urban adolescent girls reflected their “prolonged and repeated exposure to multiple types of community as well as domestic violent events” (p.1). Furthermore, it has been observed that the “CW [child welfare system] itself is ‘systemic trauma’” (Bartlett, Barto, Griffin, Fraser, Hodgdon, Bodian, 2015) referring to the fact that children are often exposed not just to the trauma of parental separation and multiple residential moves within child protective services, but may also be exposed to abuse and neglect in foster homes, group homes and residential treatment facilities, as well as experience case workers and managers who further compound their difficulties by being unaware and insensitive to the effects of trauma on children’s behaviour. Thus in the lived reality of high risk youth, it may be difficult to separate out the harm to youth that comes from pre-existing trauma from within their families and that which stems from current social exclusion.

### **Focal Theory and Emerging Adulthood**

The above discussion suggests that high risk youths’ historical and current experiences of attachment insecurity and trauma may influence the degree and nature of agency that they exercise in response to social exclusion. Focal theory provides yet another possible explanation for why many high risk youth may especially struggle with negotiating the challenges posed by social exclusion. According to focal theory, adolescents’ concerns about different kinds of relationships peak at different ages during the adolescent period (Coleman, as cited in Stein, 2005). For example, at the age of seventeen, one is most likely to be preoccupied by conflicts with one’s parents, whereas fear of being rejected by

peers is most likely to dominate other relationship concerns at age eleven. That said, focal theory allows that even if a certain relationship is not the primary focus of a given youth's age, this does not mean that that relationship could not have considerable significance for the youth in question.

Coleman (1978) suggests that focal theory can reconcile two competing perspectives on the nature of adolescence. One perspective is that the biological, psychological, and social developmental changes that a young person must contend with, while simultaneously facing the pressures to form an identity, accounts for why adolescence is an inherently stressful developmental period. The other perspective is that most young people do not normatively experience "storm and stress" in their adolescence, in the form of either inner turmoil or conflicts with others. According to focal theory, most adolescents are able to maintain their equilibrium most of the time, despite their vulnerability to developmental stressors, because they typically focus on, and attempt to cope with, only one kind of stressor at a time: "Different problems, different relationship issues, come into focus and are tackled at different stages, so that the stresses resulting from the need to adapt to new modes of behavior are rarely concentrated all at one time" (Coleman, p.9). Nevertheless, if an adolescent does have an excessive number of problematic issues to deal with simultaneously, focal theory suggests that poorer psychological adjustment should be expected for that young person. This prediction has been supported empirically: the more problems faced at one time, the greater the risk that young people have been observed to incur, with respect to outcomes such as self-esteem and school performance (Coleman, as cited in Stein, 2005).

High risk youth must often contend with numerous changes simultaneously as a result of having to transition out of the care system. At the same time that many of them must cope with living independently for the first time, they are also expected to navigate further education and/or gaining employment. Some of these young people may also be coping with the challenges associated with being

new parents. In other words, such youths experience an “accelerated and compressed” (Stein, 2006, p.273) transition to adulthood, relative to most of their same age peers, both historically and presently. Present day high risk youths’ accelerated transitions to adulthood may cause even more stress for them than their predecessors may have experienced. Greater stress may result from being excluded from the opportunity to postpone adult responsibilities in the way that their mainstream peers now commonly do. Middle class, mainstream youth now commonly postpone adult milestones, such as parenthood and stable jobs, until their thirties. Such young people tend to spend much of their time during their prolonged moratorium from adult responsibilities in institutions of higher learning (Arnett, 2006). Not only are they thus being afforded greater time and resources for gaining adult job skills and life skills, but they are also provided with developmental opportunities that their less advantaged peers are shut out from. The experience of delaying adulthood or being an “emerging adult” (Arnett, 2006, p.3) permits mainstream youth time to experiment and reflect on the development of their adult identities. In contrast, youth who age out of care are denied the “psychological opportunity and space” (Stein, 2006, p. 274) to deal with the assumption of adult roles over an extended period, thereby increasing the likelihood of poorer adjustment, according to focal theory. Further, few supports are available that acknowledge high risk youths’ simultaneous need to learn parenting skills, basic life skills, and the skills required for entry level jobs, let alone how to simultaneously cope with re-entry to school or the transition to higher education. Thus in contrast to other marginalized groups that may also experience multiple exclusions simultaneously (e.g., homeless adults), high risk youth may experience additional vulnerability to poor outcomes, on account of how social exclusion may affect their development and how developmental factors may influence their responses to exclusion.

## **Autonomy and Identity**

**Autonomy.** Traditional adolescent developmental theories, such as those of Jean Piaget, David Elkind, and Erik Erikson, may also have implications for how high risk youth respond to exclusion. Such theories maintain that adolescents normatively engage in some form of conflict with their parents, in order to gain increasing amounts of autonomy over their lives. One must gain the power to make critical decisions about one's life (e.g., vocational choices, personal values and ideologies) in order to form an adult identity (Erikson, 1968). However, youths' quest for autonomy throughout the adolescent period is not straightforward (Elkind, 1998). It is not unusual for adolescents to experience ambivalence about gaining autonomy, despite clamouring for it in front of others. The degree to which adolescents challenge their parents for autonomy may reflect a number of factors, such as their ability to reason abstractly (Elkind, 1998), cultural differences (Helwig, 2006), and the stage they may occupy in the intrapsychic process (separation-individuation) of differentiating one's self from one's parents (Blos, as cited in Kroger, 2004).

This struggle for autonomy, as well as the ambivalence that commonly surrounds it, may also be mirrored in youth-service provider relationships. For example, de Winter and Noom (2003) observe that although homeless youth complained about being subject to social workers' rigid rules, their behaviour and stories suggested that they did not feel ready to assume complete responsibility over their lives. Youths expressed appreciation at being "bailed out" by social workers when they did make serious mistakes. Likewise Samuels and Pryce (2008) noted that many youths who age out of foster care seem to waver between needs for independence and dependence. For example, youths complained of feeling minimal control and power over their lives while in foster care and voiced concerns about how depending too much on the foster care system could threaten their readiness to become independent adults. However, the same youths also expressed the feeling that they had grown up too fast. They

reported feeling as if they had been “on their own” (Samuels & Pryce, 2008, 1205) since before coming into foster care, on account of having had to look after themselves, siblings, and even their parents. Former foster youths appeared to reconcile these competing thoughts by attributing their resilience to their strong ability to rely on themselves. They came to pride themselves on not needing others’ assistance, despite the fact that many of them continued to have risk factors, which threatened their adult outcomes, such as being young parents. Though the need for autonomy appears to be exaggerated in these young people due to their coping needs, their conflicts with the foster care system may be at least partially rooted in the normative struggles for independence that most youth experience.

**Identity.** In addition to identifying as a self-reliant survivor, there are other ways that high risk youth may become resilient through the construction of their personal and social identities. The achievement of personal identity is associated with better mental health and well being in adulthood, and the ability to succeed at psycho-social developmental tasks as an adult, such as establishing intimate relationships or becoming a parent (Kroger, 2004). Identity formation may be connected with resilience, because the process necessitates that one feels able to plan and be in control of one’s life, as well as have the capacity to reframe adversities (Stein, 2005).

In particular, developing a narrative identity (i.e., integrating one’s past and present autobiographical events in the form of a story, so as to experience a sense of being continuous across time), may especially assist traumatized youth. Narrative identity formation may facilitate a youth’s ability to “process, make meaning, and often to find redemption *in negative experience*” (McLean, 2008). Conversely, failing to achieve narrative self-coherence may contribute to the poor emotional regulation that is commonly seen in youth who have experienced foster care (Luckock, Stevens & Young,

2008). A secure, “autobiographical self” (Luckock et al., p.10) is achieved when the stories youths use to describe their experiences allow them to safely connect to their true feelings and to contain them.

In his book on young men’s experiences of social exclusion, Barker (2005) observes that excluded young men do not automatically turn to gangs for their survival and identity needs. Rather those who have access to alternative social identities (e.g., being a good student or athlete) may be protected from this outcome, provided that such identities are valued and reinforced by male peers, in particular. The ways in which young men experience themselves in relationships (i.e., relational identities) can also play a key role in their resistance to gangs: Young men who did not want to disappoint family members or female partners by becoming involved with gangs were also deterred from joining them. Ungar (2005) observes that high risk youths will not relinquish the “dangerous, delinquent, deviant or disordered” identities that they have constructed, unless they are provided with alternate forms of identity formation that can meet the same needs as their problem behaviours. For one of the youths that Ungar had counselled in his social work practice, “moving out, taking drugs, having sex with her boyfriend, all meant control over her body and eventually her life...She found attachments, recognition, and status as an adult in ways socially determined for young women by a society that limits their choices” (p.5).

From such observations of high risk youth, Ungar suggests that the identities that youths construct from negative resources or destructive opportunities should be considered resilient, as they represent attempts to cope and survive within disadvantaged contexts. For many inner city youths, crime is perceived as an alternative form of work that fulfills many of the same psycho-social functions as legal forms of employment: “enforced activity, social contacts, social identity, and goals and purposes within a time structure” (Watts, 2001, p.162). Likewise, doing the work of a mother may be a legitimate response to job exclusion for high risk young women. Taken together with the previously mentioned

finding of young women who assigned positive meanings to their outsider status when excluded from school (Sanders & Munford, 2000), these findings suggest that how youths make sense of their environments and the possibilities that they afford for identity construction may well influence how they respond to experiences of exclusion. Though assuming such identities pose continuing risks to them, understanding such youths' perspectives can assist professionals in understanding the challenges they face in adapting to their environments. This is especially important for social workers and other service providers whose practises build on "starting where the clients are" (Gilgun & Abrams, 2005). Youth may also construct deviant identities in reaction to adverse family experiences (e.g., parental betrayal or feeling unable to live up to high parental expectations). When youth are unable to integrate such family experiences with the values and personal ideologies that they are selecting for themselves, they may define themselves by what they are not (i.e., by repudiating the values of their families and mainstream society) (Erikson, 1968). Erikson suggests that such negative identity formation can be only a short-term solution for resolving the identity crisis in adolescence as ultimately one's adult identity must be validated by society.

The choices of crime or pregnancy can alternatively be seen as reflecting foreclosed or diffused identities. A youth with a foreclosed identity has accepted the route to adulthood that has been prescribed or sanctioned by her family or community, without engaging in any questioning or experimentation with different adult social roles and values (Marcia, as cited in Kroger, 2004). In Marcia's Identity Status Paradigm, though foreclosure is considered a less mature identity status, than being in a questioning phase regarding adult commitments (the moratorium status) or having made firm commitments to adult roles following the moratorium (the identity achieved status), a foreclosed status may not pose threats to a youth's well being, provided that she is not exposed to other pathways to adulthood or is not open to questioning her adult commitments (Marcia, as cited in Kroger, 2004). For

example, a young mother on a Canadian aboriginal reserve may not experience any threat to her sense of well-being, if having a baby at a young age is accepted by family members and other members of the reserve. However, given that even reserve youth are unlikely to remain sheltered from other perspectives on young motherhood, particularly the dominant cultural view that such youths are perpetrating the cycle of poverty by bearing children themselves, a foreclosed young mother is vulnerable to experiencing distress from having her unexamined reasons for having children at an early age challenged. It has been noted that “the strength of the foreclosure is a rigid, brittle strength, rather like glass; if you push it in one way, it is very strong; if you push at it in a different way, it shatters” (Marcia, as cited in Kroger, p.41).

That said, Marcia’s identity diffusion status can provide a different explanation for the challenges that some high risk young women may encounter after having children, in the absence of having questioned their commitment to motherhood before childbirth. As with youths in the moratorium status, youths who are identity diffused are confused about their identities and fail to make commitments to adult roles (Marcia, as cited in Kroger, 2004). However, diffused youth are distinguished from moratorium youth by their failure to engage in any questioning or reflection regarding such roles. Diffused youths’ failures to engage in questioning regarding adult commitments, such as becoming a parent, can be due to developmental cognitive or social-emotional deficits, and/or may proceed from a lack of access to socio-economic roles with which youths can experiment (Marcia, as cited in Kroger, 2004). A high risk young woman who becomes a mother may have failed to engage in active, conscious deliberation about mothering or other adult roles prior to the birth of her child, due to developmental deficits from impaired attachment or trauma, for example, and/or from having few adult pathways to deliberate about, due to poverty and low academic performance. It is not hard to see how such a young woman might experience considerable ambivalence, resistance, or a feeling of being

“trapped” in her new role as a mother, given such psychological and economic barriers to genuine reflection and choice about parenthood.

Even high risk young mothers who may have engaged in moratorium-type questioning and reflection about having children may still be vulnerable to poor outcomes, on account of the educational and vocational barriers that persist for young mothers. In her ethnography on young, black women in an urban, multiracial high school, Schultz (2001) observed such young women oscillate between competing views on the desirability of having children while they were still young. Youths who were child free often expressed the dominant cultural perspective that having a child would prevent them from achieving their dreams of a middle-class lifestyle. If these same youths later became pregnant during high school, they argued that the need to provide for their babies supplied them with their motivation for persevering with their schooling. Further, youths with or without babies expressed the desire to have their children before their mid-twenties, having attributed their close relationships to their own mothers to their mothers having been young themselves at the time of their births. Unrealistic expectations regarding the ease with which the students could complete post-secondary training and have professional careers, despite their academic struggles and the obstacles posed by young motherhood, were also common: “Some imagined that they could have a child, move past that phase of life and into the next phase that they hoped would include a steady job or career” (Schultz, p.597).

Schultz (2001) suggests that given the shifting and sometimes unrealistic meanings and expectations that the young women had constructed about negotiating young motherhood alongside a successful educational and career path, school personnel should assist such youth in constructing “better” stories: “Schools can give young women opportunities to tell their stories without encountering immediate censorship or silencing and to revise them with guidance and mentoring from adults and peers, so that their stories are more realistic, even transformative and are set in the context of power

relations and economic realities” (p.603). At the same time, Schultz suggests that “if as educators and policy makers we recognize that early childbearing and motherhood *can* be a motivating factor in young women’s lives rather than a source of despair, we can explicitly address students from this understanding and help them plan their lives accordingly” (p.604), as opposed to immediately writing them off as failures. Thus understanding how young mothers interpret and respond to processes of educational exclusion (e.g., discouraging teacher attitudes, inadequate mentoring/guidance, lack of specialized programming or childcare) may help educators to prevent further social and economic marginalization for both the mothers and their children.

In the next section on Methodology, I explain how theories of attachment, trauma, focal theory, emerging adulthood, autonomy, and identity were researched, towards the purpose of gaining an understanding of high risk youths’ experiences of social exclusion.

## **Methodology**

### **Deductive Qualitative Analysis**

The preceding discussion of concepts from the clinical psychological and developmental psychological literature constituted a set of inter-related theories or loose conceptual model that informed the investigation of high risk youths’ lived experience of social exclusion. This model of youths’ responses to exclusion was investigated in accordance with the tenets of Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA) (Gilgun, 2005). DQA challenges the commonly held view among qualitative researchers that theory cannot be tested through the analysis of qualitative data. Because DQA provided a way of testing my conceptual model through the use of qualitative data, I reasoned that DQA had the best potential to contribute to the much needed development of theory which could explain the adverse outcomes that so many high risk youth experience.

I rejected the more commonly accepted Grounded Theory approach to generating theory based on qualitative data because it did not seem to be a good fit for this study. Grounded Theory did not seem appropriate because it would have been dishonest of me to pretend that I am approaching this subject as a blank slate in order to generate theory inductively from participants' responses. The composition of the conceptual model was informed by my clinical work as a psychologist, as well as by my experiences in a community-based research practicum that focused on high risk youth. I also did not wish to try to "bracket" my model of how high risk youths might respond to exclusion, as part of the intent of this study was to investigate ideas that youth service providers use in their own theorizing about the young people they work with. By investigating this set of pre-existing ideas, it was my hope that this research study would prove to be most relevant to informing effective intervention with high risk youth.

I further reasoned that trying to eliminate prior understandings, so as not to bias the interpretation of qualitative data, may make it impossible to examine the possible role of attachment-related trauma and other forms of psychological trauma in high risk youths' subjective experiences of exclusion, given that such highly sensitive topics are not well suited to more impersonal, quantitative methods. Likewise, personalized and in-depth interviewing was required to explore the possible intersections and overlap that may occur with respect to high risk youths' problems with attachment, trauma, identity formation and social exclusion, as suggested by the proposed model. Thus it became clear that qualitative methods of data collection were the most appropriate methods for acquiring a holistic understanding of high risk youths' exclusion, despite the fact that the dominant way of generating theory from qualitative data (Grounded Theory) was not appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Given this reality, I used Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA) to guide my data collection and analysis. Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA) was developed as an alternative approach to Grounded Theory for building theories based on qualitative data (Gilgun, 2005). Consistent with the researcher position that I occupied, with Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA), there is a recognition that “researchers who have developed theoretical models cannot start anew or act as though they don’t already know something about their areas of interest” (Gilgun, p.83). Thus in direct contrast to Grounded Theory, DQA calls for the researcher to begin her study with a conceptual model in mind. The researcher then selects relevant cases and studies them in-depth, with the intention of reformulating her original model. A key part of this process is negative case analysis. Negative case analysis involves actively searching for case information which casts doubt on the assumptions contained in one’s model (Gilgun, 2005).

Negative case analysis serves two functions: development of the researcher’s model and guarding against the exclusion of data that does not fit with her original model. By searching for whole cases that appear to disconfirm one’s model or for negative instances within a particular case, the researcher is provided with information which can facilitate a revision of her original model. The new, reformulated model should be “more closely aligned” (Gilgun, 2005, p.83) with the diverse experiences of her participants. In other words, negative instances prompt researchers to generate concepts for a new model, which can encompass these variations in the study phenomena. Theory is thus “tested” in the DQA approach by examining how well one’s original model fits the newly encountered negative situations. Subsequently, theory is developed by refining, expanding, or even radically revising that model so that it is more responsive to the information that is reflected in the cases. Gilgun (2007) describes negative case analysis as the “search for data that adds additional dimensions or even contradicts researchers’ emerging understandings” (p.10). Negative case analysis guards against the

possibility that the researcher may try to fit the data from her cases into her original model, or fail to observe case information that could contribute to a useful theory, regardless of whether such observations can be related to the original model. In DQA, the role of initial theories is to perform a sensitizing function in that they help the researcher pinpoint relevant aspects of a phenomenon to observe from the study's outset (Gilgun, 2007). However, the negative case approach requires that the theories be held "lightly" by the researcher, since the ultimate objective is to generate a more accurate conceptual framework for the range of cases.

As the above discussion implies, Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA) utilizes both inductive and deductive reasoning processes. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that DQA allows researchers to "approximate induction" (Gilgun, 2007, p.24) in that by treating one's original model as a flexible, temporary framework, it is possible to try to put aside one's point of view to listen to what participants' voices and behaviours could mean within their own contexts. Thus consistent with most qualitative perspectives, DQA allows for researchers to maintain a constructivist viewpoint on reality. The fact that hypotheses are conceived of as tentative guesses about the nature of social relationships is also consistent with a constructivist viewpoint. For example, an initial hypothesis that Gilgun (2007) had derived from an original model for one of her studies was that peer relationships are a protective factor with respect to committing violence. When she encountered a negative case, in which a man with many peers actually used his peer interactions as a facilitative context for gang rape, her new research question became "what kind of values and behaviours do peer groups espouse?" (Gilgun, 2007, p.22). Furthermore, testing of such hypotheses in DQA does not preclude having an emergent research design, as is characteristic of most qualitative approaches. Though the researcher develops a priori codes based on her conceptual model, in order to enter the field with ideas about what she should focus on (i.e., the sensitizing function described above), it is expected that she will change these codes throughout the

study in response to the negative cases. The researcher may find “unanticipated dimensions of these codes, reject some, and formulate new ones” (Gilgun, 2007, p. 30).

In the proposed study, the *a priori* codes will reflect the following themes discussed in the conceptual model: attachment, trauma, focal theory, emerging adulthood, autonomy, and identity. Some hypotheses which guided the content of semi-structured interviews were that youths with more complicated attachment histories and/or evidence of an insecure attachment status from the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996), may be more prone to self-exclusion or estrangement from helping professionals. Alternatively, youths who claim to have a strong attachment to a service provider may demonstrate greater tolerance for and/or better coping with exclusion processes, such as having to wait for adequate housing or drug/alcohol treatment. However, youths who must cope with several stressors related to transitioning to adulthood (e.g., living independently, having to find employment, being a new parent) are more likely to demonstrate poorer coping and adjustment than youth who are dealing with fewer exclusionary challenges. Regarding autonomy, youths who have histories of taking care of siblings and parents may be more prone to reject the notion of needing support from others, preferring to identify as the caregivers themselves. Regarding identity, youths with few relational ties that would serve to deter them from criminal activities may be more likely to perceive crime as meeting their survival and identity needs.

These are just a few examples of hypotheses that stemmed from the preceding literature review entitled *The Psychology of Exclusion*. I explicitly refer to these *a priori* theoretical ideas in the results discussion whenever they proved to be relevant to understanding participants’ experiences. Although none of the *a priori* ideas turned out to be wrong *per se*, my discussion of the results throughout chapters two, three, and four include many instances in which other aspects of the psychological literature, such as the development of a moral identity, turned out to have considerable relevance for

understanding the youths' experiences, apart from the theories that I had identified in the model. Also consistent with Gilgun's idea of negative case analysis was the fact that other non-psychological literature such as sociological and economic theories had to be drawn upon to explain high risk youths' responses to exclusion. There were also ideas from the conceptual model, such as youths' questing for autonomy from authority figures, which turned out to hold little usefulness in understanding the youths' experiences. Such ideas were therefore omitted from the results discussion.

### **Case Studies and Sample**

A case study methodology was selected for the study because case studies are compatible with Deductive Qualitative Analysis (DQA). One may seek to identify negative cases or negative instances of a priori ideas within a particular case, as discussed above, using the case study method. Case studies were also felt to be a good fit for this study because they "concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems" (Merriam, 1988, p.29). Because case studies focus on gaining the perspectives of those being studied, they are likely to yield information that can contribute to program intervention and policy development. For example, case studies may shed light on everyday occurrences that seem puzzling, such as high risk youths' disengagement from services. This method is also used to illuminate processes (as opposed to discrete outcomes), and to render a holistic or highly contextualized account of situations (Merriam, 1988). These aims are relevant for a study on how exclusionary processes may converge and overlap in the context of different youths' life histories to produce a variety of outcomes.

To be considered a case, some kind of single entity needs to be bounded in time and/or space (Merriam, 1988). The bounded system in this study was youths who participated in the High Risk Youth Uncensored program (Uncensored for short). Although defunct now, the Uncensored program consisted of a variety of community workshops that ran from 2010 to 2012. These youth-led workshops

resulted from a collaborative endeavour on the part of community groups and university personnel to support high risk youth to become educators of youth-serving professionals. Facilitators from the community non-profit organization, iHuman Youth Society and the provincial ministry of child welfare (Alberta Children's Services) along with university faculty and students (Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta) assisted high risk youths to develop a curriculum for service providers on how to best meet the needs of young people like themselves. The youths were regarded as having expert knowledge about their lives, and were assisted in communicating their experiences and ideas for system reform, using a variety of artistic mediums such as drama, storytelling, music, and the visual arts.

The reason that youths from Uncensored were selected for study is that the program provided a context for youths' experiences of exclusion to "show itself" (van Manen, 1984, p.41) naturally. Though the words social exclusion had never been used with the youth, through the process of narrating their experiences in the service of curriculum development, they discussed many exclusion experiences in relation to such varied systems as law enforcement, education, and social services. When I had first proposed a study on social exclusion to one of the community facilitators for this project, he observed that "a lot of social exclusion" was being discussed by youths in the Uncensored program.

There are also some practical reasons why the youths from Uncensored were recruited for this study. High risk youth can be difficult to research on account of their transience and disengagement from programming. However, the Uncensored program had proven to be popular amongst many of the high risk youths that had connected with either the iHuman Youth Society (a non-profit organization aimed at engaging marginalized youth in the arts) or the High Risk Youth Unit of Alberta Children's Services (a dedicated child welfare unit for high risk youths exclusively). According to the community and university facilitators, the youths had strong relationships with the facilitators from these agencies. The youth were also provided inducements to participate in the program through the fun and creative activities they were asked to engage in such as drama games, the food that was provided at sessions, and the payments that they received for their work as co-developers of the service provider curriculum. I was also able to develop rapport with many of the youths, given that I interacted with them weekly,

as a result of my employment as the Project Manager for Uncensored. Although I participated in activities with the youth and encouraged and supported youths' efforts in the program, I did not hold any power over them.

(Although I was responsible for ensuring their payments, these payments were provided solely for attendance at the program rather than for any evaluation of their activity).

The total sample was anticipated to be small (up to ten youth), so as to enable the gathering of in-depth information about the youth participants' histories. In total, six youths were recruited: two males, aged twenty one and twenty five, respectively and four females, two of whom were each aged nineteen, with the other two young women being twenty two and twenty three years of age, respectively. The two males identified as aboriginal Canadians, although only their biological mothers are indigenous; each of their fathers is white. The two nineteen year old females also identified as aboriginal; however, in their cases, both of their biological parents are aboriginal. The remaining female participants identified as white, with each of their biological parents also being white Canadians. All of the youths came to participate in the Uncensored program after having been invited to do so by the same youth worker from the iHuman Youth Society. Two of the female youths also had a child welfare case worker through the High Risk Youth Unit.

Although extensive biographical interviews were conducted and analysed (coded) for all six participants, the results of only four of the participants were reported in the results discussion, which spans chapters two, three, and four. The reason that only four of the six youths were ultimately retained was because the data collection process was incomplete for two of the youths. One of the aboriginal males and one of the aboriginal females did not complete the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)<sup>2</sup>, which turned out to be a critical source of information for the analysis, which could not be replaced by any other kind of data collection method. I was unable to administer the AAI to the male youth participant, aged twenty one, on account of his abrupt, unanticipated move to another province. The young man had to move in with family members in the other province, on account of having become homeless, during the duration of my biographical interviews with him. In the case of one of the nineteen year old female youths, I did not invite her to complete the AAI, on account of the fact that she was

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<sup>2</sup> This interview and its purposes are described in detail in the forthcoming section on data collection.

experiencing significant psychological stress and instability, during my biographical interviews with her. Given her level of distress, I did not want to risk compounding her difficulties by requiring her to answer intimate questions about possible traumatic experiences and early parent-child relationships from the AAI, both of which I already knew, from her biographical interviews, could trigger considerable distress for her.

With one exception, the youths that were recruited and retained met my criteria for being a member of the high risk youth population, criteria that was based on the Alberta government's definition of high risk youth: youths whose drug/alcohol use interferes with their daily functioning, whose decisions may jeopardize their safety, who lack healthy adult connections outside of the professional community, and who have experienced multiple residential placements and multi-generational child protection involvement (High Risk Youth Task Force, 2005). The one exception was the young white woman, aged twenty three, who is identified by the pseudonym<sup>3</sup> Carmen in the remaining chapters. Carmen met all of the criteria with the exception of having been formally involved with child protection. Although it appears as though her parents were, at one point, interviewed by a child welfare investigator, no file was ever opened on the family. It was felt that Carmen should nevertheless be included in the sample because she may serve as a possible negative case, from which the trajectories and outcomes of the other youth participants, who were formally involved with child welfare, could be compared. I reasoned that Carmen's experience of having only ever accessed formal supports for herself through non-profit youth serving agencies (and later adult welfare), after she had left her family home while still a young teenager, could be fruitfully juxtaposed with the other youths who had had official involvement with child welfare (i.e., as a foster child or kinship care child or young person living semi-independently, with child welfare status). I thought that the benefits and limitations of having experienced various forms of child welfare involvement might become better illuminated by contrasting such experiences with the experiences of a youth who, despite experiencing many of the same struggles as the other participants had while growing up, lacked the state-sponsored forms of child protection and compensatory parental supports that the others were afforded in various forms and to varying extents, throughout

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<sup>3</sup> The other youth participants are also identified by pseudonyms throughout the dissertation to protect their privacy and the confidentiality of their responses. The plan for this study was approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA EEB) at the University of Alberta.

their young lives. In particular, it was felt that “data that adds additional dimensions” (Gilgun, 2007, p.10) for elucidating the experience of “aging out” of child welfare might be obtained through the inclusion of Carmen in the sample.

### **Data Collection**

**Collection of interviews and questionnaire responses.** The interview and questionnaire data that I gathered from participants can be categorized as belonging to a biographical/narrative methodology. Biographical/narrative approaches allow for inquiry into how youths have experienced exclusion within the context of their individual life histories. Previous research on youth exclusion, for example, involved youths taking part in biographical interviews in which they described their family, school, social, and working biographies (Susinos, 2007). Through such narratives, episodes of exclusion and their impacts were identified.

In the present study, although I was also interested in the aforementioned domains of family, school, friends, and work, I did not explicitly develop a set of common questions to ask participants about with respect to each of these areas. Rather I mostly employed interview methods that are conducive for gathering and exploring life histories in a looser way than conducting structured or even semi-structured interviews. In particular, I invited youths to co-construct genograms, timelines and ecograms with me. Such methods have been used in youth exclusion research (Conolly, 2008) but are also commonly used in psychological counselling and social work settings to gather information about clients’ histories. Conolly (2008) referred to the use of such methods as “the reflexive co-construction of biographies through task-based interviewing” (p.208). She felt that such methods enabled her to understand the lives of the socially excluded young women that she had researched and to understand “what was important to them” (p.208).

As with Conolly’s (2008) adolescent female participants, the youths participating in the current study were invited to draw genograms or family trees, usually as a way of beginning the interview process. I introduced the youths to a simple system of graphically depicting the members of their immediate and extended families (e.g., circles denote female family members; squares denote male family members; horizontal lines crossing through lines connecting circles and squares denote relationship break-ups such as separation or divorce). I was aware that youths in government care might be familiar with this exercise, as a consequence of their having done such tasks

with social workers or counsellors in the past. From my own experience as a counsellor, most of the young people that I had co-constructed genograms with in this way had seemed to experience the task as a non-threatening way to begin to talk about their relationships with different family members. I also thought that genograms would be useful in helping me stay clear about which family members the youths would be referring to in their narratives, especially in the case of the large or blended/reconstituted families that I knew some of the youths, particularly some of the aboriginal participants, belonged to.

For the timelines, I drew a long horizontal line for each youth and suggested that they could demarcate different periods of their lives on it, such as their childhood, adolescence, and young adult years thus far or variations thereof, such as their preschool years, elementary school years, junior/senior high school years, and so forth. For the youths who had spent a lot of time in foster/group care, the timeline was sometimes divided into portions based on the chronology of the different places they had lived in, both before coming into care and afterwards. The timelines provided the youths with a way to communicate what they thought were the most important biographical events in their lives thus far.

The ecograms or eco-maps are another tool that is commonly used in the counselling professions, particularly social work and nursing. Ecograms commonly consist of a series of concentric circles that represent the variety of support systems in an individual's life. The center circle represents the individual client, or in this case, the research participant, with the circles nearer to the centre indicating the people that the participant feels closest to (e.g., boyfriend, parents, best friend). Increasingly more distal circles are used to represent increasingly less intimate systems of supports for that individual, such as school staff or probation officers, for example. The ecogram provided a way for youths to describe the most important relationships in their lives and, in so doing, also pointed to the kinds of supports that youths felt were lacking in their lives. Some of the youths, for example, discussed how their street family members warranted closer positions to them on their ecograms than their actual family members, due to their perceiving a greater level of support for themselves from the former over the latter.

I believe that the three methods: genogram, timeline, and ecogram, both separately and together, provided the youths with comfortable platforms for expressing their thoughts and feelings about the people and events that they considered to be most salient in their life narratives.

Not only did these methods help in identifying the people and events that the youth participants thought were most important (which I followed up by asking further questions specific to the individual participant and their unique circumstances), but it also enabled them to control the content and pace at which they revealed information to me. As with the Uncensored program in which facilitators reinforced the youths' status as experts with respect to their own life stories, I affirmed that the youth participants were in the role of teaching me to teach others (through what I was writing about for my dissertation) about what it was like to have lived their lives. It was emphasized that they could talk about whatever they wanted to in these sessions and also that they could decline to talk about any subject that may arise in the interviews. As such, the total number of interviews conducted with each participant varied in order to accommodate their individual differences and preferences with regard to subject matter; however, each participant did meet with me over the course of several months. The interviews were conducted in a range of settings, based on the youths' preferences about where to meet and their abilities to travel to different locations, given their economic challenges. Often the youth participants met with me in private rooms at the University of Alberta, but it also became necessary to interview them in the more natural settings in which they lived their lives such as their places of residence, shopping malls, or coffee shops and fast food outlets near where they worked and lived. The recorded interview duration on any particular day with any particular youth could also vary considerably, based on their present interests and desires in that moment to share information relevant to the study purposes. As the participants were often experiencing multiple forms of stressors simultaneously, and often had difficulties with regulating their emotions, I needed to be flexible and patient in accommodating their variable states of

readiness with respect to sharing their information. As such I often found it useful to begin our meetings by taking the youths out to eat, which typically relaxed the youths and allowed us a space to continue to develop rapport and familiarity with each other, outside of the actual interview time. Thereafter, if we were not in a suitable place already, we would move to a quiet and confidential setting from which to conduct the interview portion of our meetings. Afterwards, I would often drive the youths to whatever setting they were planning to go next (e.g., home, school, work). These rides not only made it easier on the youths to meet with me due to their challenges in finding money for transit but also provided me with time to ensure that they left our interviews in a relatively calm emotional state, given that emotionally sensitive information about their histories was frequently disclosed during our interviews. Also, because participants were made aware from the outset that that we would need to meet several times in order for me to gather in-depth information about their life histories, I believe this provided them with maximum control over what information they chose to disclose to me and how they chose to disclose it.

I believe that this experience of having maximum control over the telling of their stories, as well as having the opportunity to get to know me as an interviewer over several months was crucial in building a critical level of trust with the youth participants<sup>4</sup>. It was only when I felt confident that they felt very comfortable in relating sensitive information about their lives in the course of our biographical interviews that I proposed to administer a semi-structured interview, the Adult Attachment Interview

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<sup>4</sup> Susinos (2007) points out that beyond listening to the voices of youth to help advance analyses of exclusion, one needs to help amplify their hidden or marginalized stories, in order for their research participation to be truly inclusive. Susinos reminds researchers that marginalized groups have good reason to be wary about the research process, given the little improvement in material circumstances and quality of life that has occurred to them as a result of participating in research. Worse yet, members of marginalized groups may see research as a violation of their experiences.

(AAI)<sup>5</sup> and questionnaire, the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS), that explicitly asked them to answer questions about traumatic experiences, especially attachment-related trauma. (I will describe these methods in the next section). Following the collection of such highly sensitive information, the remainder of the interviews with participants focused on collecting their experiences of having received services through various local youth-serving organizations. The youths were provided with a list of community resources that were categorized by the type of assistance they provided, such as education, health, housing, and so forth. Using this list, I prompted them to tell me about their experiences with such organizations, as another method of probing them for their experiences of being either supported or excluded from supports.

I deliberately sandwiched the administration of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) in between the two time periods in which I conducted the two different forms of biographical interviews (i.e., use of genograms/ecograms/timelines to elicit life narratives versus lists of services to elicit specific experiences of local service provision), so as to ensure that the youth felt safe with me, before answering highly sensitive and potentially upsetting questions in the AAI and TABS. I also decided on this temporal organization to the interviews because the discussion of services provided me with time to meet with participants to discuss information that was unlikely to generate strong emotions. Such final meetings were important because they enabled me to monitor participants for any signs of distress that may have resulted from the AAI or TABS and also to conclude the interviews in a calm, relaxed way.

Before I describe the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) in detail, I wish to mention that the biographical interview formats discussed above were

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<sup>5</sup> Though I administered the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) to my participants, I arranged for the coding of the interviews to be done by an individual who is a certified coder of the AAI.

conductive to “giving voice” to youths’ subjective experiences of exclusion. They allowed for exploration of how high risk youth viewed the influences of their own agency as well as that of structural factors on their experiences. Yet such interviews also allowed for another level of analysis in which I could bring my prior theoretical understandings as a researcher to bear on the youths’ stories. The final account of a participant’s story was generated through my theoretical interpretation of the participant’s life history. Thus “analysing and presenting life history data involves allowing the voice of the respondent to be heard, whilst at the same time, giving vent to the researchers’ own interpretation of these data” (Hubbard, 2000, p.11). If youths did not explain their lives in terms of structural and psychological concepts, this did not mean that their accounts of their lives are inaccurate, but just that they came to different conclusions than I did, as the researcher. Although it may seem as though the researcher maintains the final word on the participant’s story, there is no one privileged and “true” version of events, because “the life history is a reflexive process created by, and within, the relationship between the respondent and the researcher” (Hubbard, 2000, p.10). The researcher’s account must be “grounded in the subjective and negotiated understandings of an empirical reality” (Hubbard, 2000, p.10). Given that the final theoretically-informed accounts by the researcher must encompass the participants’ experiences, such interviews are consistent with the goal of Deductive Qualitative Analysis: generating a more accurate conceptual framework for the range of cases.

The rationale behind supplementing the biographical interviews with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996) and Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003), was because discussion of attachment and trauma may not naturally come up in the youths’ accounts of their life stories. It was felt that not only would these methods help me interpret youths’ experiences through the conceptual lenses of attachment and trauma, but they may also

influence them to make connections themselves between their prior experiences and the ways in which they have responded to exclusion.

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) is a valid instrument for assessing differences in attachment classification in both adults and adolescents (Taylor-Seehafer, Jacobvitz, & Steiker, 2008). It encourages respondents to reflect on how their attachment histories may be relevant to how they make sense of present outcomes and ways of coping. The AAI facilitates exploration of how the individual has experienced attachment relationships and internalized representations of them, by inquiring about one's experiences with parents and how such experiences may have affected them (Hesse, 2008). A trained researcher codes the interviewee's responses based on both the content of her responses and on how she says them.

It must be noted that the terms that are used to describe attachment classifications from the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) differ from those used to describe infant and toddler classifications from the Strange Situation (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978), which is the most common method of assessing attachment in young children. This difference in terminology reflects the fact that coders of the AAI determine individual differences in attachment style based on whether or not an interview can be judged to be coherent, and reflective of a singular strategy for regulating attention and emotions in the course of discussing primary attachment relationships (i.e., biological or surrogate parent relationships). In contrast, individual differences in attachment style in young children is determined from their different modes of responding behaviourally to the Strange Situation, in which a child's parent temporarily leaves her in a unfamiliar environment with a stranger. Despite the differences in method of assessing attachment styles (interview versus behavioural observations), the adult classification categories appear to reflect the same kinds of inferred, internal working model differences that are believed to underlie the behavioural differences in children's responses to being

reunited with their parents in the Strange Situation (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Secure-autonomous is the adult category that corresponds to infant security, insecure-dismissing corresponds to insecure-avoidant, and insecure-preoccupied corresponds to insecure-ambivalent (Hesse, 2008).

To be judged as being secure versus insecure, the interviewee's discussion of attachment experiences must be found to be coherent. Grice's four maxims of conversational discourse (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) are used to evaluate whether the interview demonstrates coherence (Hesse, 2008). An interviewee who provides evidence for her statements (quality), is neither too succinct nor verbose (quantity), provides answers that are relevant to the questions being asked (relation), and avoids psychological jargon and vague, fragmented, or nonsensical speech (manner) during the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), will be regarded as maintaining the kind of coherence that is reflective of secure attachment.

The secure-autonomous, insecure-dismissing, and insecure-preoccupied attachment styles are also described as *organized* forms of attachment, because in the interview transcripts that correspond to these styles, the interviewee can be seen as demonstrating a singular strategy for regulating her attention and emotions in response to recollections of attachment experiences. Analogous to the secure infants' behaviour of balancing comfort-seeking with her mother and exploring her environment, a secure adolescent or adult will "fluidly shift between presenting their attachment-related experiences and responding to the request to evaluate the influences of those experiences" (Hesse, 2008, p.556). In contrast, the responses of dismissing individuals reflect a tendency to focus *away* from past attachment experiences by, for example, claiming not to remember them and/or by idealizing a parent (Hesse 2008). A preoccupied individual's responses reflect a tendency to focus so tenaciously on emotions related to attachment figures that it is difficult for her to provide relevant responses to the AAI questions (Hesse, 2008).

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) also identifies two forms of attachment styles which do not reflect a singular, organized way of discussing attachment experiences. The category of “cannot classify” is assigned to individuals who reflect contradictory strategies in discussing their attachment relationships, such as dismissing one parent while being preoccupied with the other parent (Hesse, 2008). The category of “unresolved/disorganized” reflects “lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse” (Hesse, p.570) when discussing traumatic experiences and/or loss of a significant person in one’s life. For example, unresolved grief is indicated if someone talks about a deceased person in the present tense. Both of these categories are associated with the disorganized/disoriented classification for young children (Hesse, 2008).

The Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003) assesses how a person may relate to herself and to others, based on beliefs that she has formed as a result of trauma and attachment experiences. The TABS is considered to be a reliable and valid measure of constructs that reflect constructivist self-development theory (CSDT) (Varra, Pearlman, Brock & Hodgson, 2008). According to this theory, there are five “need areas” that are affected by trauma: safety, trust, esteem, intimacy and control (Varra et al., 2008). When these areas are affected in an individual, they manifest in disruptions of how one constructs beliefs about one’s self and about relationships. For example, one may no longer feel safe following a traumatic event, and/or may feel uneasy about trusting others. Thus both the TABS and Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) appear to tap into effects of attachment and trauma that may compromise high risk youths’ ability to access help and cope effectively in response to exclusion experiences.

### **Preface to the Results Discussion**

In the following three chapters, I discuss the study findings that were gathered and interpreted through the use of the aforementioned biographical/narrative data collection methods and deductive

qualitative method of data analysis, respectively. For most of the results discussion<sup>6</sup>, I weave various strands of each participant's narrative together with strands from the other participants' narratives based on their common themes, instead of discussing their lives separately in different chapters. In view of this integration of participants' results, I provide brief biographies of the four participants below. The biographies are intended to help orient the reader, from the outset, to the most important biographical events that constituted each youth's story and that differentiated them from the other participants.

### **Biographies**

**Jay.** When I began interviewing Jay, he was twenty-five years old, the oldest of the four study participants and one of the oldest youths who participated in the High Risk Youth Uncensored program. Facilitators of the program considered Jay to be one of the program's success stories, given the significant progress that he had made, in recent years, in leaving his street lifestyle behind him.

As with many of the other high risk youth in the Uncensored program, Jay had an extensive criminal history that began in his early teens. His criminal history also distinguished him from most of his street peers; Jay had gained notoriety on account of having engaged in extremely risky criminal behaviours such as high speed chases from the police. He had also attained a significant degree of prestige and power on the street for his prowess in selling drugs and other criminal activities. Though Jay was not a member of a gang, he had "connections" to high level gang members. His street status also enabled him to gain a crew of people to support him in his drug selling and other exploits. These crew members demonstrated their allegiance to Jay by committing violence on his behalf, usually in the course of collecting on drug debts owed to Jay by his customers. Jay likewise reciprocated loyalty to his crew and other street peers, whom he identified as his street family, through committing violence for

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<sup>6</sup> There are brief vignettes that appear at the beginning of chapter two and a postscript at the end of chapter four, in which I discuss the youths' experiences separately.

them when they needed it. Not surprisingly, such criminal activities frequently resulted in incarceration for Jay and his street family. Though he managed to evade arrest as a young offender, Jay was frequently incarcerated during his early twenties.

Jay traced his movement into street life to difficulties that began early in his home life. His biological parents were chronic intravenous drug users. His parents separated when he was still in his preschool years and his mother subsequently became involved with the man who he came to know as his step-father<sup>7</sup>. Family life was relatively stable for Jay for most of his elementary school years. When he was in grade four or five, his mother separated from his step-father and moved to Alberta, leaving Jay in the care of his step-father in another province. His mother contacted him intermittently during her absence which Jay believes lasted at least a year. Jay recalled being furious at his mother for separating him from his step-father, when she came back to retrieve Jay so he could live with her permanently in Alberta. The separation was particularly hard on him, as he had felt closer to his step-father than his mother.

Jay's separation from his step-father also marked the end to his experience of relative stability in his home life and schooling. Jay's mother had difficulty caring for him on her own, due to her ongoing problems with drug and alcohol abuse. These problems eventually resulted in Jay moving in with his aunt, which became a formal kinship foster home for him, meaning that his aunt received government money for his care. Soon thereafter, Jay was initiated into drug use and drug selling by other members of his extended family. He also began selling drugs in his junior high school, which made him popular amongst his peers. Through his involvement with family members and increasing contact with other youths involved in drugs and crime, Jay eventually became addicted to alcohol and drugs, particularly methamphetamine, and began selling drugs on the street.

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<sup>7</sup> It is unclear if Jay's mother ever married either his biological father or his step-father.

At the same time, Jay was experiencing difficulties living with his aunt, who was repeatedly kicking him out of her home. Consequently, Jay began living with his mother intermittently. However, his mother also began kicking him out of her home, which resulted in his spending more time with his peers, thereby entrenching him further into street life.

After several stints in provincial and federal correctional institutions, Jay was finally able to begin making a transition to living a non-criminal and sober mainstream life. Although he returned to crime many times after his multiple releases from jail, he was finally able to break free from this cycle after obtaining the assistance of an ex-offender re-entry program. In the remaining results chapters, I discuss many other supports that Jay identified as being critical to his transition to mainstream life. I also discuss his many challenges to maintaining his commitment to mainstream life, in spite of those supports.

**Tamara.** When I began interviewing Tamara, she was twenty-two years old. Like many high risk youth, Tamara had an extensive history of drug abuse and criminal activity, which began mostly in her mid-teen years. However, unlike many of her high risk youth peers, Tamara had a much more stable childhood in which she was largely protected from adverse events such as parental drug addiction, poverty-related stressors such as frequent re-location/bad neighborhoods, child welfare involvement, and sexual abuse. Tamara also managed to avoid incarceration as either a young offender or adult offender.

Nevertheless, Tamara suffered early and ongoing childhood neglect. Up until her early adolescence, she was raised by a single mother who worked long hours and frequently left her alone. Tamara was also prone to physical and emotional abuse from her mother who favored coercive methods of parental discipline. Tamara's mother's relationship with her biological father ended when

she was a baby. Her father had also been absent in her life on account of his chronic drug abuse as well as periods of incarceration.

Despite her lack of solid parental relationships, Tamara's home life and schooling remained fairly stable until her mother began dating during Tamara's early teenage years. Tamara felt that her mother no longer had any time for her, a feeling that seemed to intensify after her family became reconstituted through her step-father coming to live with them. Tensions between Tamara and her mother and step-father continued to escalate and eventually culminated in an evening in which Tamara violently assaulted her mother. (Although Tamara was also assaulted that same night by her step-father, only Tamara was charged and taken into police custody, after her step-father had phoned the police to complain about her.)

Tamara was unable to return home due to her mother having obtained a restraining order against her. As she was only fifteen at the time, her inability to return home precipitated her involvement with child welfare. Thereafter Tamara moved through a range of accommodations such as group homes and transitory shelters for young people. Tamara's exposure to the arguably much more troubled young people in these settings caused her to become more seriously involved with drugs than she had before, and to become involved with crime, such as vandalism, fraud, and prostitution. Tamara also cycled through a number of exploitive relationships with older men that included pimps, high level gang members, and more recently, a sugar daddy (a man who provides money or sustenance usually with the expectation of companionship or sexual favours).

At the time of our interviews, Tamara was still struggling to live independently, following the closure of her child welfare file at the age of eighteen. Though she availed herself of the financial support that was available to her as a former ward of the province for her to complete her education, Tamara still did not have enough money to cover all of her living expenses. She also felt stressed by the

demands of her high school upgrading program, which made it difficult for her to simultaneously hold onto a job. In the remaining results chapters, I elaborate on how these stressors, amongst others, put Tamara's goal of transitioning to a mainstream life at risk.

**Maria.** Maria was nineteen years old when I began to interview her. Her history is typical of many high risk youths who first became involved with child welfare when they were very young. Maria entered care in her pre-school years. She shuttled between a variety of residential placements throughout her childhood and adolescence. These included foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centres, transitory youth and adult shelters, and supervised independent living settings. As an adolescent, Maria also often cycled in and out of the young offender centre; she had been convicted of a variety of crimes, some as serious as assault and breaking and entering.

As might be expected from her early entry into care, Maria had longstanding mental health and drug and alcohol problems that could be traced back to early and ongoing family problems. Maria's biological parents were chronic drug users; her mother was an intravenous drug user. Maria's siblings and extended family members also used drugs and alcohol extensively, which often fuelled violence between family members and resulted in parental neglect. Maria also suffered emotional, physical and sexual abuse from members of her nuclear family. These problems were compounded by the abuse and neglect that she experienced in various foster care and group home settings, as well as the sexual exploitation that she experienced on the street.

Paralleling the instability of her childhood and adolescent years, as an adult, Maria continued to struggle with staying in any form of accommodation for very long. She bounced between living with boyfriends, other high risk youth peers, family members, and homeless shelters for adults. She also struggled to find a job and struggled to complete an office assistant diploma program. Given such challenges, Maria's child welfare caseworker arranged for her to continue to be supported by her youth

worker to learn the skills that she needed for living successfully on her own. (At the time of Maria's interviews, such "after-care" support could continue until a youth turned twenty-two, if approved by a child welfare supervisor.) However, Maria no longer received financial support from child welfare but was eligible for, and received, benefits from the provincial government as someone with a permanent intellectual disability. In the results discussion, I will elaborate on how Maria coped with having to begin transitioning out of child welfare supports, while still struggling with learning basic skills for living independently.

**Carmen.** Carmen was twenty-three years old when I began to interview her. As with the other youth participants, her history reflected a mixture of problems with drug use and crime that began mostly in her teen years, following longstanding family problems. In Carmen's case, her family problems consisted mostly of her father's violence towards her mother, violence that was often fuelled by her father's chronic drinking. By the age of ten, Carmen was diagnosed with depression. However, she felt that her mental health worsened when she was placed on antidepressants and her family refused to participate in counselling with her.

Carmen began using illicit drugs in her early teen years. Shortly thereafter, she began running away from home. Although her family gained the attention of child welfare at the time, it appeared that the investigator did not order any intervention for them. After a major fight with her father at the age of fifteen, Carmen left home with no intention of returning. She moved between a variety of accommodations such as family-owned farms (though she lived in a small urban centre, Carmen came from a rural community) and living with boyfriends, until she moved to Edmonton. This move exposed her to more street youth, from which she developed her own street family, that she relied on for both economic and social support. Carmen's contact with these youths further entrenched her into a "drug culture" consisting of heavy drug use and drug selling. As with the other female participants, Carmen

suffered exploitation and abuse from her drug dealing boyfriends and other members of her street family. At one point, she was even taken across the country by a very violent young man who kidnapped her and forced her into marrying him.

At the time of our interviews, Carmen was receiving welfare. Though she now mostly abstained from drug using, she still sometimes used pills “recreationally.” She also refused to sell drugs, although her lack of sufficient money from welfare made her dependent on abusive boyfriends and other peers. Though Carmen received intermittent forms of economic and other kinds of supports from youth workers and counsellors (mostly from non-profit youth serving agencies), she lacked the more consistent adult supports that the other female youths had obtained from child welfare as well as after-care supports such as life skills training or education funding. She also lacked the consistent adult support that Jay received from his ex-offender re-entry program. In the following results discussion, I will discuss how such exclusions from more consistent adult support had in some ways made Carmen more vulnerable than the others to falling back into street life, despite her serious efforts and commitment to changing her life. Carmen also experienced additional challenges on account of a learning disability that was only diagnosed in her early adult years.

## Chapter Two

### **Fast-Tracking to the Mainstream: The Impact of Accelerated and Compressed Transitions**

At the time of their interviews, all four participants were attempting, in various degrees, to integrate into mainstream society, after having been involved in street life. Their movement between street and mainstream cultures is consistent with what has been called an “accelerated and compressed transition” (Stein, 2006, p.273). Not only were the youths each dealing with multiple, simultaneous stressors at several different junctures of their respective transitions from street life to mainstream life, but coping successfully with many of these stressors often required them to learn many new skills and/or acquire a number of resources in a short time frame. Examples of such stressors include: having to completely fend for one’s self following the closing of a child welfare file or a release from jail, completing high school upgrading after having been absent from school for several years, or trying to get a job with little or no prior work experience and no high school diploma. The following vignettes exemplify such accelerated and compressed transitions.

#### **Tamara**

Tamara described how, as she approached her eighteenth birthday, her child welfare caseworker mounted increasing pressure on her to find a way to support herself when she no longer had child welfare funding to rely on. Tamara described feeling “abandoned” by her child welfare caseworker. She thought that she was “being dumped on her ass,” ironically because she was one of very few young people in care whose good behaviour had prevented them from getting kicked out of a supervised apartment setting -- a setting that was supposed to help her make a successful transition to independent living. In contrast to Tamara’s perceived lack of personal readiness to be cut off from child welfare, her caseworker had apparently judged her as capable of such independence, because she had

demonstrated little difficulty with complying with the placement's rules (e.g., no drugs and alcohol or inviting friends to stay over).

The inadequacy of Tamara's part-time income from a minimum wage retail job, a position that she had struggled to maintain, led her to enroll in an alternative high school so that she could obtain government funding on the basis of being a student. While this funding covered her rent and other necessities when she started living on her own, it was clear that Tamara did not feel ready or motivated to enroll back into school, due to her ongoing difficulties with drug abuse and mental health problems. Tamara had also felt unprepared to obtain an apartment and to set it up on her own. Signing a lease, arranging for cable to be installed, paying bills, and budgeting her money for utilities were all alien to her, because she was not required to be responsible for such tasks in her supervised apartment setting, despite the program's purported goal of preparing youth for independence. In Alberta, such supervised living arrangements for older adolescents are known as Supported Independent Living (SIL). However, the problem of feeling unequipped for independence does not appear to be unique to the Alberta program. Critics of comparable programs in the United States (e.g., SILP or Supervised Independent Living Placement in New York) have charged that the youth are often unable to afford their own apartment and possess few of the life skills needed to maintain their own place, after they leave the supervised setting (Beam, 2013).

### **Maria**

In contrast to Tamara's lack of behavioral problems while in Supported Independent Living (SIL), Maria's difficulties in complying with SIL rules resulted in her child welfare caseworker assuming a 'tough love' approach with her. Maria's caseworker, who had known her and her family since she was a small child, kicked Maria out of her supervised apartment, and told her to fend for herself by staying in emergency shelters. This exclusion was intended as a way of teaching Maria to appreciate the

apartment and other supports that she had received as part of SIL. (Those who laud such programs see them as sparing youth the stress of paying rent or bills, so that they can continue to prepare for independence by going to school or attending programs to assist them with job searching) (Beam, 2013).

Maria believed that her child welfare caseworker's decision was also motivated by Maria's repeated lack of compliance with the rules that had governed several of the placements that her caseworker had arranged for her throughout the years. However, given that Maria had been 'hard to house' for most of her life, due to cognitive and mental health difficulties, and accordingly had never been dealt with in this way by her caseworker in the past, it seems likely that systemic pressure to transition her out of child welfare may have been a factor in this new 'tough love' intervention. While Tamara felt that she had received pressure to exit child welfare because she had demonstrated competence in maintaining her apartment and her job, Maria received similar pressure to have to make it on her own at age seventeen, despite her failure to demonstrate similar competencies. Maria was required to rely on the emergency shelter system, because she lacked employment or any other sources of government funding, such as student financing.

Maria's relegation to the shelter system could well have started her on a pathway to homelessness, especially given her cognitive and mental health challenges, which I will elaborate on later in this chapter. Even worse than homelessness, the decision to kick her out of Supported Independent Living (SIL) could have ended her life. At seventeen, Maria was shocked to find herself in an emergency shelter for homeless adult women, and not just because she was still not old enough to be placed there legally by her child welfare worker. Being relegated to an inner city women's shelter comprised of hard core drug addicts, prostitutes, and severely mentally ill residents caused Maria to feel so desperate about her circumstances that she attempted suicide. Rather than prompting Maria to recognize the error of her previous ways of behaving, she interpreted being left at the emergency

shelter as constituting the ultimate form of rejection from a caseworker that she had considered to be like a mother to her. As in the case of Tamara, Maria's psychological status and her set of practical skills and resources for independence did not seem to be given sufficient consideration in her caseworker's decision-making process<sup>8</sup>.

### **Jay**

Though Jay had also struggled with mental health difficulties, it was much more immediate, practical issues regarding the attainment of basic resources upon being released from jail that would often compromise his re-entry into mainstream society. Jay was always challenged to figure out how he could get support for housing and income upon being released from adult jail. He described a very small window of time during which he had to make progress towards securing a place to live and money to live on, or else he would be forced to return to doing crime in order to survive. For example, Jay pointed out that he would need to be employed in a job for at least three weeks before he could get a first pay cheque. It was also difficult for him to get a job other than performing backbreaking and dangerous manual labour, such as roofing, given his criminal record and lack of a high school diploma. Moreover, though Jay had worked such jobs upon being released from jail in the past, by the time of his last release date, this was no longer an option for him. When he previously quit such jobs to return to his criminal lifestyle, he had taunted his former bosses by bragging about how much more he was earning than them, in his much cushier role as a drug dealer.

Furthermore, each time Jay was released from jail, he had no money or belongings and even lacked government identification, which he needed for enrolling in programs that assisted ex-offenders upon their release. He observed that "you need ID to get [government] ID," referring to the fact that he

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<sup>8</sup> Other possible reasons for the intensity of Tamara's and Maria's feelings of abandonment and rejection from caseworkers are discussed in chapter three.

did not have a way to obtain a copy of his birth certificate and other documents that he needed to apply for government approved identification. (In contrast with federal correctional institutions, provincial correctional facilities, where Jay served most of his time, do not allow offenders to obtain ID.) Obtaining new copies of such documents, which Jay figured must have either got lost or stolen in the chaos and confusion of his drug lifestyle, also required money.

Thus no assistance for obtaining such necessities for his release could be accessed until after Jay was released. Jay had even tried to be admitted into a drug and alcohol treatment program, so that he could go straight from jail to this program which would feed and shelter him for a while, but his lawyer had refused to facilitate this for him. On a few occasions following a release from jail, Jay had tried to live with family members, but he quickly found himself being pulled back by them into the lifestyle that had led him to jail in the first place. In contrast to the aforementioned barriers to getting shelter, food, and legal employment, it had been much easier to rely on friends and family who were enthusiastic about getting him back in the 'game' of drug selling. His friends and family members facilitated his return to drug dealing, by giving him drugs to sell on credit.

Jay broke away from these dead-end options of relying on his family and friends, when he was able to complete a three month program to facilitate his re-entry to society, after his last release date. After his completion of the ex-offender program, Jay was able to get his own apartment with the support of his program workers. He was elated to discover that he could succeed at setting up his utilities and phone service and paying his rent and bills. Like Tamara and Maria, he had never had anyone model this kind of behaviour for him, nor had he received any other instructions on such basic skills for living on his own. Prior to this apartment, Jay had alternated between living in hotels, couch surfing with his street peers, and staying with his mother or other family members.

## **Carmen**

At the time of her interviews with me, Carmen had recently decided to upgrade some of her high school courses, in preparation for university entrance. Like Tamara, Carmen viewed enrolling in upgrading as a back-up plan to ensure that she would have some government funding to live on. Carmen worried that the welfare, (or Income Support, as it is known in Alberta), that she was receiving could be discontinued, as she received pressure from her income support worker to regularly provide medical documentation that explained why she remained incapable of working. (I will elaborate on Carmen's medical needs later in this chapter.) However, her welfare could not be cut off, if she became an upgrading student. Adults in Alberta are eligible for welfare while pursuing education and training that could ultimately lead to employment.

In contrast to Tamara, Carmen was genuinely motivated to be successful at upgrading, rather than enrolling in a program just to obtain money. However, Carmen experienced numerous difficulties with the process of registering for school. She missed application deadlines, had difficulty filling out the application forms, and struggled to understand how to obtain the extra learning supports that she was eligible for (e.g., tutoring), on the basis of her learning disability. Relaying information between her welfare worker and the admissions officer for the upgrading program was also challenging for her. Such organizational and comprehension difficulties were not surprising given her learning disability, and her lack of practise with meeting institutional requirements, as a result of her many years spent in street life. It was also not surprising then that Carmen struggled in the two grade ten level classes that she had enrolled in. In addition to struggling with the academic demands, Carmen struggled to maintain regular attendance in her classes. Though she often cited health difficulties as the reason that she would miss classes or arrive late for them, she also admitted to struggling to wake up in the morning, as she continued to stay up late whenever her boyfriend had the next day off from work. Thus deficits in

organizational skills, work habits, and academic skills combined to make her vulnerable to lose not just her dreams of university, but also the welfare that she had been depending on for her survival.

These vignettes illustrate how high risk youth lack the luxuries of time and supports for learning basic skills for independence, that are afforded to many of their same age peers in the mainstream community. Though many mainstream youth must go to school, work a job, and live independently for the first time, high risk youth are especially taxed by such tasks, because these youth are lacking a foundation of prerequisite skills that are essential to their success in these endeavours. In addition to feeling challenged by setting up an apartment, other common skills deficits include being unable to control their anger, lacking appropriate conversational skills for employers and customers, being unable to advocate for themselves with professionals such as welfare officers, and even struggling to just make appointments and attend them, after years of living in not just unstructured, but chaotic family and street environments. Such basic social skills deficits and life skills deficits appear to be due to having entered into a drug culture at a young age (typically early to middle adolescence), and due to experiencing a variety of early and often chronic adverse family events such as domestic violence, abuse, and neglect.

These exclusions from adequate parental supervision and caregiving, that frequently underlie mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, and learning difficulties, appear to be the factors that most directly compromise their basic skills attainment, relative to their same age mainstream peers. Such underlying mechanisms will be discussed mostly in the third chapter that concerns the youths' childhood experiences. However, the impact of basic skills deficits in areas such as managing anger that most directly pose obstacles to their ability to function independently in mainstream society will be discussed in detail in the following section on identity. The challenges these youths have with transitioning to living in the mainstream are inextricably bound up with these deficits and other

developmental challenges (e.g., developing efficacy beliefs) that interfere with their negotiation of an independent adult identity. The four youths in this study were choosing to get out of the street life at the same time as all youth of a similar age are tasked with negotiating an answer to the question 'Who am I?' Their absence from the mainstream or existence at the margins of mainstream society makes their negotiation of a viable adult identity much harder than it is for the majority of their peers who are already well integrated. As was pointed out earlier, mainstream youth clearly have more time and more support for identity formation during their period of emerging adulthood. However, this research suggests that what is even more important to understanding high risk youths' identity struggles are their histories of lacking prerequisite developmental skills and resources for constructing adult selves, which their mainstream peers tend to possess, as a matter of course.

### **Identity**

Erik Erikson (1968) suggested that personal identity is negotiated through a process of reflection, questioning, and experimentation that ultimately culminates in the capacity to commit to vocational goals, social roles, and personal values that reflect who one *feels* one's self to be. The goals, roles, and values selected must provide what the young person identifies as a personally satisfying answer to the question 'Who am I?' as well provide an answer to this question for other members of society. At the same time that social and vocational commitments provide a pathway to becoming independent from one's parents<sup>9</sup>, the commitments also provide a way to experience a place of belonging in adult society. As mentioned previously, Erikson (1968) said that one's chosen identity must ultimately be validated by mainstream society.

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<sup>9</sup> or other social agents that act as parent substitutes, such as child welfare

Through the process of choosing and committing to a variety of attributes that define one's self, an individual unites her past experiences to her present experiences, and these connections function to guide future behaviour. Erikson (1958) referred to this tying together of one's self through time in his description of Martin Luther's struggle for identity: "As he grows he makes the past part of all future, and every environment as he once experienced it part of the present environment" (p.118). Temporal self-continuity can only be built on one's real past experiences. For example, you cannot be a piano virtuoso if you did not start playing until the age of eighteen, but you could entertain this role as a possible identity, if you played piano from a very young age, won major competitions throughout your youth, and were told by established pianists that you had a good chance of being accepted into a prestigious music school. Thus the process of deciding upon which vocational roles and social roles, and which political values and religious values you will hold, involves reflecting on past interests and capabilities that are reflective of one's present circumstances, as well as reflective of a possible self that has a chance of enduring in the future. By uniting one's self across past, present, and future in this way, one resolves the "paradox of sameness and change" (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003, p.2). By committing to an identity, it is possible for individuals to simultaneously experience themselves as being the same person that persists throughout time, as well as someone that grows and changes in response to new circumstances that arise throughout one's adult development. Though one sets down the roots of one's identity as a young person (McLean, 2008), that identity becomes further refined and somewhat modified in response to new circumstances that we encounter as we age, although such circumstances do not fundamentally alter the selves that we committed to as young adults.

More recent commentators have suggested that self-continuity is a process that can be realized through narrating one's life story (McLean, 2008). As mentioned previously, constructing a story about one's self that defines who one is may be particularly helpful for traumatized youth. By creating a story

of how one's past links up with one's present, and how those connected events can be a springboard for the future that one sees for herself, a youth's biographical narrative can function as a vehicle for integrating painful past events into her current sense of self, thereby allowing her access to feelings that she might have otherwise repressed or denied (Luckock, Stevens & Young, 2008).

Whether achieved through choosing and committing to adult roles or narrating their selves across temporal periods, self-continuity facilitates the experience of self-coherence. It enables individuals to experience their selves as having solidity, based on feeling one's self to be an integrated whole, or as James Marcia (1993) put it, the person with identity feels a "core, a center that is oneself, to which action and experience can be referred," (p.7) rather than a loosely connected set of personality fragments. Though some self-incoherence is normal, a developmental trend is typically seen, across adolescence and young adulthood, towards increasing ability to integrate contradictory information about attributes of the self, such as being both studious and carefree, or capable of both introversion and extraversion (Harter, 1998). This integrative ability, which depends on increasing cognitive maturity across the adolescent period, enables late adolescents/young adults to story themselves in such a way that they do not experience themselves as mindlessly or impulsively reacting in random ways to different situations, but rather as people who reliably respond to events, based on their own mostly stable set of character traits. Of course, the societal demands imposed on young people to select vocational and other adult social roles also requires them to behave in a fairly consistent manner. Being an adult involves being someone that others can count on--someone who is reliable and who can be held accountable for their actions (Chandler et al., 2003).

Given the kind of integrative, cognitive constructions required to enable us to experience ourselves as consistent across time, it is easy to see how the process of storying one's identity has been likened to that of creating a fiction, as opposed to just stringing together consecutive experiences. Given

the greater coherence to the self (and the external world) that is afforded by the way events are constructed and fit together in narratives, it is thought that such 'lies' are "incredibly important to our survival" (Wenders, 1992). Wim Wenders (1992), the filmmaker, explains that "...people's primary requirement is that some kind of coherence be provided. Stories give people the feeling that there's meaning, that there is ultimately an order lurking behind the incredible confusion of appearance and phenomena that surrounds them" (para.9). Storytelling may be particularly necessary when the events of our lives depart from what we ordinarily might expect. Jerome Bruner (1990) suggests that storytelling can assist us in managing 'trouble' in the world. In fact, "it is through this process of making sense of trouble that a storied self begins to emerge" (McLean, 2008, p.1686). Through constructing narrative accounts of their lives, high risk youths' 'lies' about themselves may help them to make sense of their suffering, and facilitate their ability to cope with their many past and present adverse circumstances, many of which may seem highly random and purposeless (e.g., alcohol fueled family violence). It may even be possible to experience a therapeutic feeling of redemption from how one makes sense of one's suffering.

Although it was suspected that the narrative identity process may have relevance for high risk youth, the former identity process of deciding on vocational and social roles also turned out to have much relevance for the youths, despite the common assumption that negotiating an identity via questioning and exploration of career pathways is only relevant for those youth who can *afford* a moratorium from adult responsibilities (e.g., can afford to explore one's self during a university degree or travel experiences, as opposed to needing to be economically self-sufficient). It could even be argued that the process of deciding upon a vocation and taking action on a career plan is even more critical for high risk youth, as this was the participants' only pathway for inclusion into mainstream society, a transition that seemed to be particularly arduous for them, given the lengthy time that they had spent in

marginalized environments and their identification with deviant lifestyles. Their challenges in developing skills and efficacy beliefs that could help them to realistically picture themselves as being successful in certain vocations, or even just in the role of a student, are discussed in detail in the next section entitled Efficacy.

There were also surprises with respect to the narrative process of identity formation. What I did not anticipate was the form that this identity process would take in the high risk youths' lives. I had expected that the youths would grapple with the harms that had been done to them (i.e., their traumas from childhood and from street life), in the ways that they told their stories. And in keeping with the *a priori* codes, each of them did seem to construct themselves as resilient people, albeit in somewhat different ways. They seemed to either see themselves as people who keep up the good fight against becoming 'bad' people, or as people who, having survived traumas and other stressors, became stronger for having had to endure them and find a way to cope with them. Running through Jay's and Maria's accounts of their lives is a thread of struggling to overcome the adversities that had been inflicted on them from being surrounded by a culture of drug use and street life, since they were born. Beginning with their mothers' drug addictions, which set them up to be placed first in foster/kinship care, and then to raise themselves on the street and in correctional facilities, their stories are of fighting to not succumb to becoming the drug-addicted and criminal adult selves that they worried they might be destined for. For Carmen and Tamara, their 'survivor' stories are more about how they used their personal strengths, and/or developed new strengths, to overcome the relatively more circumscribed forms of adversity that occurred in their families (e.g., domestic violence and abuse), and on the streets (e.g., sexual assaults and drug addiction).

That said, all of the youths surprised me by the amount of moral conflict that they had experienced over their own behaviour. The youths, perhaps especially the three females, may have even

experienced more mental suffering as a result of the harm that they caused to others versus the harms that were done to them. The research literature only recently acknowledged that youth with a history of transgressing, such as criminals, appear to need to make meaning of their transgressions, in addition to desisting from such behaviour, in order to develop mainstream identities (McLean, 2008).

As a result of the harms that they had inflicted, each youth seemed to be engaged in a debate with themselves about their character: Were they a good person or a bad person? This debate sometimes involved reflecting on such ontological issues as the fundamental nature of all human beings, and even whether selves are essential properties that are with us from birth, or something that gets constructed through our engagement in a variety of social processes throughout one's life. Those who tended to see their own self as being an essential, innate property tended to also have more resources with which to construct themselves as good people. They tended to see themselves as having been young children who were born basically good, but who became corrupted over time by family and street environments. From this perspective, the positive changes that they were attempting to make to function in mainstream life, and their aspirations to continue to become respectable members of society, could be seen as continuous with some of their 'good' experiences from early childhood, and their essential character as 'innocent' young children. In contrast, those with fewer positive resources from both their childhoods and from their current life circumstances did not seem to hold such beliefs about having an essential self. These youths struggled more when it came to seeing themselves as being different from 'bad' family members (i.e., neglectful, abusing, involved in drugs or other crimes). They also struggled more with decreasing their identification with their own 'bad' behaviour, from both their past histories as well as more recent antisocial conduct that they still sometimes engaged in.

Whether or not a youth seemed to be more or less susceptible to seeing themselves as 'bad', as a result of the narrative processes just described, they all nevertheless grappled with the harms that

they had done to others, as well as to themselves, which challenged their ability to see themselves as belonging to good company. A few of the youths even recalled losing their connection, at times, with their own sense of conscience and/or concern for self and others. Even after the youths had decided to leave street life, the continual lure of 'easy' money that could be obtained through crime, and the confusion that some of them felt over which values they should continue to hold onto after having been involved in street culture, made it challenging for them to stay committed a 'good' mainstream life. Moreover, how much each of the youths identified with being a bad person, because of the emotional pain they felt from their family's mistreatment of them versus how much they felt that they had adopted a 'bad' persona to survive street life, appeared to make a difference to whether they saw themselves as a basically good person or bad person. Another narrative struggle that is related to their confusion about their moral characters concerns their construction of themselves as outsiders -- an identity that appeared to have both adaptive as well as maladaptive functions for their transition to mainstream society. The youths described feelings of alienation, aloneness, and loneliness in a variety of social contexts.

### **Efficacy**

For high risk youth the difficulties of deciding upon a career path involve more than the issue of which vocational roles and social roles could define them personally, and which roles would define them in such a way that their pasts, presents, and futures become unified. Rather the process of deciding upon, and embarking on, a career path for them also necessitates the added complication of deliberating about what sort of adult mainstream lives (if any kind) might be possible for them, in view of their lengthy immersion in marginalized social contexts (e.g., jail, group homes, street life). These non-normative environments caused the youths to struggle with certain prerequisite conditions for

choosing a viable career plan, and struggle with developing their own characteristic way of engaging interpersonally with mainstream peers and older adults.

Although a lack of access to educational opportunities (e.g., languishing for years in young offender centres or residential treatment centres<sup>10</sup> or experiencing multiple school moves as a result of moving from one foster placement to another) can certainly be factors in the aforementioned problem of a lack of prerequisite skills, another major problem in acquiring such skills, especially in an accelerated time frame, concerned their struggles to feel efficacious with respect to their ability to succeed in a number of related domains, such as vocational attainment, academic attainment, social skills, and their capacity for sobriety. Not only is feeling efficacious typically a product of incrementally building the skills that are required in each domain (what Albert Bandura (1977) referred to as developing efficacy expectations based on personal mastery or performance accomplishments), but feeling efficacious in certain domains also sometimes depended on the ability to feel efficacious in other domains, for the youth participants in this study. Jay, for example, could not even begin to entertain the prospect of his completing high school until he had become confident in his ability to maintain his sobriety and maintain a job and his own apartment, following his last release from adult jail.

Being able to choose among mainstream roles thus first depended on the youths' abilities to perceive themselves as efficacious agents who actually had a chance of fulfilling roles that could lead to adult independence. It makes sense then that the youths commonly appeared as though they were confused about what to do because they did not know what they were capable of. As psychologist Karl Weick, (as cited in Grant, 2014) put it, "How can I know who I am until I see what I do?" (para 21).

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<sup>10</sup> Although schooling is legally required for children sixteen and under in such sites, youth workers and social workers report that attendance is often a low priority, and that the quality of the programming varies from centre to centre. For example, youth may be required to work on correspondence courses on their own, or be homeschooled by youth workers.

Attaining mastery of skills (performance accomplishments), observing similar people being successful in a domain (vicarious reinforcement), and being verbally encouraged (verbal persuasion) are the chief<sup>11</sup> methods by which most people come to experience a sense of efficacy in any given domain (Bandura, 1977). These sources of efficacy have been rare experiences in the histories of many high risk youth, and remained elusive for some of the study participants, even as they attempted to pursue the mainstream roles that they had selected for themselves. Moreover, for three of the four youths, deficits in self-efficacy appeared to interact with structural conditions, particularly the conditions under which they received some form of government assistance which they relied on (e.g., disability benefits, student grants). These interactions resulted in adverse consequences with respect to their ability to choose and pursue schooling and jobs, and could have even been life-threatening in the case of one of the youths. In the following section, I will discuss challenges that the youths demonstrated regarding vocational efficacy and academic efficacy. I will then discuss their challenges with respect to developing efficacy in regards to interacting appropriately in mainstream contexts, and their efficacy challenges with respect to becoming sober and staying sober.

**Vocational and academic efficacy.** The research literature suggests that of all possible sources of efficacy beliefs, performance accomplishments produce the strongest sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Vocational efficacy can thus be assumed to largely reflect one's prior success in attaining employment and performing well in jobs. The youths' histories varied considerably with respect to their prior involvement in legal forms of employment. As we will continue to see in the remainder of the results discussion, Carmen and Tamara had more resources in their backgrounds upon which they could

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<sup>11</sup> By chief methods, I mean what people perceive to be the most dependable sources of efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1977) suggested that emotional/physiological arousal is also a source of efficacy information, but this kind of information tends to be perceived as a much less dependable (and therefore weaker) source of information about one's capabilities relative to the three other sources of efficacy beliefs mentioned here.

build their identities, which included more experience in legitimate employment settings, than either Jay or Maria. Beginning around the age of fifteen, Tamara and Carmen began to hold part-time service sector jobs in settings such as restaurants and fast food outlets. In contrast, Jay had worked only occasionally at manual labour jobs, such as roofing, during stints when he was released from adult jail. Upon his final release from jail at the age of twenty one, he struggled with developing job skills for the first time in his life. When I had finished interviewing Maria at the age of twenty, she still possessed no paid work experience, despite having actively sought work in shopping malls and other settings, since she was an early adolescent. Maria was also discouraged that no paid work had ever resulted from the many times that she had worked as a volunteer, which she had done in the hopes of developing skills and impressing potential employers.

In keeping with the literature on self-efficacy, it appears that Carmen's and Tamara's work histories made them somewhat more prone to being able to conceive of themselves as people who could make a living for themselves in a non-criminal way. However, another possible source of personal mastery efficacy for some of the youths came from their involvement in the arts. Carmen and Maria discussed the success that they each felt they had achieved in artistic pursuits, such as acting, painting, and creative writing. Each of them had begun to construct an identity as an artist, as a result of their involvement in these areas; however, a lack of payment or significant public recognition for most of their artistic labours appeared to prevent them from feeling confident enough to pursue further training or even job opportunities in the arts, despite their professed passion for such work.

Of all the youths, Jay's narrative conforms most to Bandura's (1977) theorizing about the development of self-efficacy. Jay's efficacy with respect to being able to hold some form of non-criminal employment was developed through an incremental process of being able to not just hold onto his first job, at a meat-packing plant, for increasing lengths of time, but also by experiencing confidence from

the fact that he eventually performed that job so well that he could capably train others to do it -- a critical accomplishment that was recognized and supported by his employer. However, even prior to being able to experience mastery of his job skills, Jay needed to build the confidence and skills to approach employers for a job. Not only had he never been for a formal job interview, but he had no employment history or skills that he could put on his resume, nor did he have employer references. He could not draw upon his previous roofing experiences because of how he had taunted his former bosses when he decided to return to drug-dealing rather than work for them. Jay described how his workers from the ex-offender re-entry program had anticipated such obstacles. They pushed Jay to attain certificates for workplace health and safety and related pre-employment skills, in order for him to have something to put on his resume and talk about at an interview. Jay also described how his workers had provided him with practical support in the way of driving him around the city to drop off job applications, encouragement to persevere with his job search, and coaching on how to talk to potential employers; the latter being especially difficult for Jay, not only because of his lack of experience in this area, but because he would have to admit to his criminal record and be prepared to be rejected often on this account. Thus the process of building his efficacy for gaining employment really began with his receiving considerable practical support and verbal persuasion (i.e., Bandura's term for other people's expression of confidence in one's abilities), from which Jay was eventually able to be successful in his interview at the meat-packing plant. Once he had secured the job, he began the process of becoming increasingly skilled at it, and as mentioned above, was ultimately asked to train others in the job.

Though Jay was able to learn the skills for this job relatively quickly, he did experience interpersonal challenges with his employer. (I will elaborate on these challenges later in this chapter.) His success at his first job was also dependent on his ability to maintain his sobriety, following completion of a treatment program that his workers from the ex-offender re-entry program had advised

him to complete. Jay further recognized that his success in a job, and later at school, also depended on his ability to live a structured life, which included being able to do things such as get up early each morning and attend appointments on time. While taking drugs and living a street lifestyle, Jay had very little capacity for, or little need for “practising” (Beam, 2013) structure. A lack of practise with structured routines appears to leave youth with a lack of confidence that they can adhere to what other people consider to be normal daily routines of waking in the morning, completing a number of tasks during the day, and going to sleep at night. (As program manager of the Uncensored program for high risk youth, it was necessary to set the program time for as late as 4:30 PM, not just to accommodate school schedules, but because many of the high risk youths felt incapable of being ready to leave their homes prior to the late afternoon.)

It also bears mentioning that Jay had a motivation for vocational attainment which the other youth participants lacked. He was ineligible for any form of long-term government assistance -- a fact which had to have fuelled his motivation to succeed at being self-reliant. As mentioned previously, Jay discussed how, upon his previous releases from adult jail, he had had no support from which to access shelter, food, or money, which quickly led him back to selling drugs. However, he received temporary support while he was enrolled in the re-entry program for ex-offenders. While completing this program, Jay was required to live in a residence for aboriginal young people who were at risk for homelessness. Food and some other necessities, such as hygiene products, were provided to residents. Thereafter, he availed himself of the only support from welfare that he was eligible for: Income Support provided him with the money for a deposit and first month’s rent on an apartment, but they were only willing to do this for him one time. Jay moved into his own apartment, following his completion of a month-long residential treatment program for drug and alcohol abuse, which he attended after his three month-long ex-offender re-entry program.

Jay's workers pushed him to complete the treatment program, before he embarked on a job and apartment search. Prior to the treatment program, Jay had not fully accepted that sobriety was a crucial prerequisite to his being able to hold both a job and an apartment, given his own lack of experience with sobriety and jobs, as well as that of his family members and friends. Of the community of people he was surrounded by as a youth, he commented that "no one was doing anything productive," referring to their lack of experience with either educational success or occupational success. Thus Jay lacked successful models that he could identify with. Such models could have equipped him with another important source of efficacy, beyond his own attainment of skills. Bandura's (1977) concept of vicarious reinforcement suggests that by watching models be rewarded for the completion of some behaviour, the observer will expect to be rewarded similarly, following her own imitation of the model's behavior. Close family members and friends are often the most effective models in encouraging imitation, because the observer is more likely to identify with someone who is similar to her, as she will interpret their similarity as even more reason to infer that she will be rewarded for the same behaviour. Conversely, sober people who are not that similar to one's self are unlikely to serve as effective models for sobriety. Regarding education (although this could equally have been said about sobriety or any other objective), Carl Hart (2013), an African-American neuroscientist who grew up in an impoverished community in Miami, observed that hearing people "saying 'You gotta get that education' if you have no experience (even vicarious) with its beneficial effects, will not carry much conviction"(p.42).

Similar to the development of his vocational efficacy beliefs, Jay gained academic efficacy by achieving incremental successes in his high school upgrading courses. Once again, this process actually started with his re-entry program workers' practical support and emotional support for Jay to pursue academic upgrading. Once Jay had demonstrated that he could remain stable in his employment, one of his workers suggested to him that he should consider completing his high school diploma. Jay

interpreted this suggestion as a vote of confidence in his abilities to succeed at school. It appears that this type of verbal persuasion was critical to both his enrollment in an upgrading program and his ultimate completion of the program. Jay often said that his workers “believed in him before he could believe in himself,” which provided him with a crucial spark of motivation to get back on a pathway towards school completion.

Though Jay said that he had always harboured a dream of completing high school, and had even taken steps towards this objective while in jail, he was never able to stay fully committed to this goal on his own. Jay mentioned that one of his release dates prevented him from being able to finish some of the exams for the courses he took while he was in jail, and that he never followed up with taking the exams in the community thereafter. At the point in time at which Jay’s worker approached him about returning to school, Jay and his worker could have regarded his success at his job and at being sober as ensuring that he had developed at least some of the prerequisite life skills (e.g., the ability to adhere to structured routines and respect authority) that he would need to be successful at school. However, Jay admitted that despite his own dreams of school, he would have never pursued upgrading on his own, if it were not for his worker’s confidence in him.

As he completed his courses, Jay’s teachers provided him with evidence of his growing mastery, in the form of increasingly better grades over time. They also provided him with praise and encouragement to persevere with his work, which Jay had identified as being critical to his eventually developing faith in his own abilities. He had especially formed a supportive relationship with his English teacher, who not only affirmed his abilities as a writer, but encouraged him to write about his own experiences in street life. This teacher’s interest in his former life helped him to accept that his street life experiences and his recovery process was information that others would be interested in learning about. As such, she became an important witness to his narrative identity development. “Caregivers who offer

continuity in relationships, witnessing the child's powerful performance of identity across different settings of school, home, and community, will help the child sustain resilience in more than one part of his/her life" (Ungar, 2005, p.4).

Michael Ungar (2005), who has worked extensively with high risk youth as a social worker and family therapist, suggests that a youth like Jay could develop confidence in the new, mainstream person he is transforming himself into, through being able to persuade others of his transformation: "As others recognize us, so too do we better recognize ourselves as powerful" (p.7). Jay mentioned that at the same time that he was required to write a journal for his English class, he had also kept a personal journal for himself, in which he would write about his "self-battles." Jay would chronicle his battle with himself to resist returning to crime to make 'easy' money, and his battle to not relapse with alcohol and drugs. He said that one day he "accidentally" gave his English teacher his personal journal. This was how his teacher came to know about his street life experiences, and how he was endeavouring to change himself for the better.<sup>12</sup>

Early on in his upgrading efforts, Jay also notably demonstrated success at mathematics, which provided an important source of efficacy along the way to his experiencing success in English class. His mathematics performance helped him to see relatively quickly that his hard work at school would be rewarded. Math classes were a better vehicle for this lesson about hard work paying off, than his other subjects, because it did not depend heavily on language skills. At first, Jay felt insecure in classes like English and Social Studies. He was unsure of his abilities to write, read aloud, and give presentations. Given his gaps in schooling, his impoverished home life, and the years that he spent communicating in a

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<sup>12</sup> Jay said that his "self-battles" persisted well after he had made a commitment to a sober, noncriminal lifestyle. I will elaborate about these "pulls" on his behaviour in the next chapter.

street dialect, it is not surprising that Jay felt more nervous about such activities, as they could expose his lack of practice with language skills, in front of his teachers and peers.

It seemed that in both the vocational domain and the academic domain, the verbal persuasion that Jay had received pushed him to initiate his efforts and to persist with them, while the success that he had received for his efforts prompted him to develop mastery efficacy, as well as invited further verbal persuasion from both his re-entry program workers and his teachers. While both job success and school success were important to Jay, his success at schooling signified to him that he had a real chance of becoming someone who could be recognized as a successful person within mainstream life, rather than someone who was relegated to eke out a living doing menial labour. Though upon leaving jail for the last time Jay was very uncertain about what his future would be like, he began to have dreams of becoming involved in some form of business, after his program workers convinced him that he did possess transferable work skills. His workers informed him that his success at drug dealing was achieved by using skills that are also applicable in legitimate businesses (e.g., working all hours of the day and night, always looking for new “turf” or customers), leading Jay to wonder if he might be able to replace his drug selling with selling real estate someday. This better future came to be perceived by Jay as being much more within his reach, once he began acquiring academic skills and a sense of efficacy about them, through his upgrading program. His hope for that different, better future further provided him with a strong motivation to work hard and persevere with academic difficulties.

The feedback that Jay received from his teachers also helped him to form the adaptive motivational belief that as long as he tried his best at any given task he could call himself successful. This focus on effort in defining success reflects what Carol Dweck (1986) referred to as a learning goal orientation: Such students are more concerned with improving their knowledge and skills rather than outperforming others. This orientation, which has been associated with greater effort and perseverance

in the face of difficulties than placing an exclusive premium on grades (Dweck, 1986), appears to be a product of the fact that Jay's teachers made him see that his grades invariably improved with more study time and practice of the skills he was learning. If higher grades eventually come as a result of sustained hard work, then it was reasonable to think that as long as he put forth his best effort, he could already count himself a success. Dweck observed that students with a learning goal orientation will demonstrate greater persistence with learning challenges and even seek challenges that foster learning, regardless of whether their own efficacy beliefs are strong or weak. It is reasonable to think that Jay may have been particularly bolstered by this kind of verbal persuasion on the part of his teachers, before he started to develop personal mastery efficacy as a result of the increasingly good grades that he gradually began to achieve. However, despite the motivational push that a learning goal orientation seemed to give him during his upgrading, Jay expressed that had he not ultimately been successful in completing his high school, he would have returned to his former life on the streets. (I will later discuss the reason for this vulnerability to returning to street life.)

Maria's experience of building skills and efficacy diverged sharply from Jay's. Maria was provided with the kinds of vocational assistance that appear to be typically provided to youth in the child welfare system. These supports are mostly job readiness programs, where youth are trained in such skills as completing a resume or punching a time card.<sup>13</sup> Maria felt that these basic skills programs did not go far enough, meaning that she needed help in landing interviews and developing work skills that were in demand by employers. When she did the aforementioned volunteer work at the encouragement of her child welfare caseworkers, she mostly cleaned people's homes or did yard work. Maria lacked the kind of personalized support that Jay's workers had provided to him, with respect to

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<sup>13</sup> Tamara was offered similar assistance, as were other child welfare youths that I knew who had lived in Supported Independent Living (SIL) placements.

acquiring pre-employment certificates (e.g., workplace health and safety) and receiving hands-on support with applying for and interviewing for jobs.

The fact that Maria was constantly eligible for government funding (as a youth in child welfare and later as an adult with provincially allocated disability benefits) made the need for acquiring a job much less pressing than for Jay. Maria received a monthly assured income for adults with severe disabilities, on the basis of her scoring very poorly on an IQ test. This assessment was conducted during her last stint at the young offender centre when she was seventeen. Presumably, the assessment was conducted as part of efforts that her child welfare caseworker may have been engaging in to support Maria's transitions out of the child welfare system and youth justice system, respectively. Maria's learning challenges placed restrictions on the kinds of employment that her child welfare caseworkers and youth workers<sup>14</sup> could help her to obtain. At one point, she was referred by one of her workers<sup>15</sup> to an agency that assisted people with disabilities with gaining competitive employment. However, when Maria was required to talk about her job goals in front of a group of other new clients who had much more obvious mental and/or physical disabilities than she did, she expressed that she wanted to become a writer. Though being a writer was the career that she most desired for herself, she admitted that she had purposely identified this particular goal at that time to distinguish herself from the other new clients who had expressed much more modest career ambitions. Maria later recognized that it would have been better to have said something like she wanted to work in a store, knowing that this might have been a more practical objective for the agency, but at the time she felt so embarrassed to be

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to her child welfare caseworker, Maria had youth workers who would see her on a more frequent basis than her child welfare caseworker would. These youth workers were contracted by her child welfare caseworker. The youth workers who supervised her SIL placements also worked for community agencies that held contracts with child welfare.

<sup>15</sup> It was unclear if this worker was a child welfare caseworker or one of the youth workers whom Maria was assigned through child welfare, as discussed in the last footnote.

associated with the other clients that she left that first session, never to return. Unfortunately, her worker never inquired into her reasons for failing to return to the agency, and informed Maria that her quitting the disability agency program meant that she was “on her own now,” with respect to looking for a job.

The inference that Maria’s worker likely drew from her quitting the disability agency (i.e., that she was just resistant to having to get a job) is particularly unfortunate in my view, because relative to the other young women in this study, Maria seemed to express the most desire to have a job and also to go to school. Having an identity as a worker and/or as a student would have enabled her to not just explore possible mainstream roles, but even more fundamentally these identities would have allowed her to be recognized as someone ‘normal’ or intellectually competent enough to fulfill those roles. Though both Jay and Maria questioned what they were capable of doing as regards jobs and schooling, Maria’s questioning of her abilities stemmed not just from her prior experiences in these areas, but from her results on the aforementioned psychological assessment. Her IQ score fell in the range that is indicative of mental retardation/intellectual disability, although this diagnosis was not actually made, presumably due to lacking norm-referenced information about her levels of adaptive functioning (i.e., daily living skills, communication skills, functional literacy and numeracy, etc.), in a regular environment. (As an educational psychologist myself, I perceived Maria’s daily living skills, literacy skills, and reflective capacity to be much higher than what would be expected from her extremely low IQ score. That said, I would still say that significant learning and comprehension problems were apparent in her everyday presentation, which likely reflected a mixture of cognitive difficulties and a lack of educational opportunities. Her schooling was highly sporadic, due to moving constantly from one foster placement to another, and due to having child welfare caseworkers who were not especially concerned about her

school attendance. I will elaborate on her caseworkers' attitudes towards schooling later in this chapter.)

Maria's desire to be employed in almost any kind of job, or to be a student of some kind, stemmed from her not wanting to endure the stigmatization and shame that she had experienced as a result of her receiving assistance for an intellectual disability. Just as Jay might have developed the most motivation from having observed the success of similar models from his own social network, Maria was most sensitive to the comments that her own siblings and other family members made about her qualifying for disability benefits. Henry Stack Sullivan (1955) said that the fear of ostracism is the "fear of being accepted by no one of those whom one must have as models for learning how to be human" (p.261). Maria said that she could not understand why her family made fun of her given that they had never worked themselves and "only had babies for money", referring to having more children so as to qualify for more welfare. Though not qualifying for disability may have enabled her to experience greater acceptance by her family members, Maria's urge to belong with them could have compromised her mainstream goals if she had emulated their characteristic ways of obtaining money (i.e., by having babies for welfare or by committing crimes). (I will later discuss how, at one point, Maria became vulnerable to initiating a career as an adult criminal, in part, as a way for her to feel closer to her mother.)

Fortunately, other models of learning "how to be human" (Sullivan, 1955, p.261), or just 'normal' as Maria might have put it, were salient for Maria, which sustained her interest in her mainstream goals. Maria spoke often of wanting a job or of going to school and even of being able to do both, because she had observed that other people her age were able to do both. She felt the need that other youth who have been in child welfare feel (Samuels & Pryce, 2008), which is the need to achieve independence from the child welfare system as soon as one turns eighteen. Maria appeared to feel this

way more for the reason that she felt that she should be capable of being independent by eighteen, rather than not wanting to be controlled any longer by the “system”, as some former foster youths have expressed (Samuels & Pryce). That said, being able to conform socially meant even more than fitting in with other youth her age, or proving her competence to herself and others. Maria expressed that she wanted to be “that girl who goes to school”, meaning a young person who does the ‘right’ things that are expected from her, from other ‘good’ people like her social workers<sup>16</sup> (I will elaborate on Maria’s struggles to identify as a good person in the next chapter.) Thus even more than being able to be self-supporting in mainstream society or have serious career prospects like Jay, Maria experienced the seemingly even more formidable task for her of trying to establish herself as a ‘normal’ and ‘good’ young person, by trying to “take hold of some kind of a life<sup>17</sup>” (Miller, as cited in Erikson, 1959, p.97), however that could occur for her.

Despite what she had said at the agency that facilitated employment for disabled people, Maria would have been content to have worked even in a very low skilled job. She wondered why she and other aboriginal youth could not be hired as a group to do things like clean up a mall’s food court. Maria indicated that she believed that employers have been racist towards her, as they expressed more interest in her aboriginal friends who could ‘pass’ as white. When prospective employers such as store owners asked about the ethnicity of her and her friends<sup>18</sup>, her whiter looking friends, who falsely

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<sup>16</sup> I am referring to both the influence of her child welfare caseworkers and her youth workers when I talk about Maria’s social workers.

<sup>17</sup> Erikson cited this line from a character in Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman* to illustrate his concept of identity diffusion, which I discussed in chapter one. Maria’s experiences conform with Erikson’s view that both developmental deficits and a lack of access to socio-economic roles can contribute to identity diffusion (I expand on the latter reason for identity diffusion in the following paragraphs.)

<sup>18</sup> Maria was shocked when I told her that it was against the law (i.e., the Alberta’s Human Rights Act) for prospective employers to inquire about her ethnicity, except in those cases where someone’s race may be relevant to the job qualifications. It appeared that employers routinely asked this question of her and her friends.

identified themselves as being white, were the only ones who would get called back for an interview or a job offer, according to Maria. Although her experience of racism in these contexts cannot be verified, problems with aboriginal youth employment have been well documented, especially for those who lack a high school diploma. According to Statistics Canada:

One-quarter of working-age Aboriginal people are youths aged 15 to 24, and many of them are unemployed. While the unemployment rate for young non-Aboriginal people was already high at 11.0%, it was even higher for young Métis (14.9%) and for young North American Indians living off-reserve (18.7%)... While unemployment is high among young Aboriginal people without high school, those who have completed high school are more successful in finding a job. The unemployment rate for young Aboriginal people was half as high among those with high school completion or some post-secondary (12.2%) as among those who had no high school diploma (24.1%).

As is the case with workers in the [25-54] age group, education enables young Aboriginal people to reduce the gaps separating them from their non-Aboriginal counterparts in the labour market. The employment rate for young Aboriginal people who had completed high school was 64.1%, a rate comparable to that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (65.9%). On the other hand, the employment rate of young Aboriginal people without a high school diploma was 35.2%, or 8.1 percentage points below that of non-Aboriginal people. (2007, section 1.3.1)

The employment challenges for aboriginal youth without a high school diploma may reflect racism, in the form of a preference for white applicants, as Maria suggested. Or it may reflect a preference on the part of employers to recruit temporary foreign workers for their available positions. A preference for temporary foreign workers exists among many Canadian employers because of the advantages that such workers pose for employers. Many foreign workers have few legal options to

protect themselves if an employer is mistreating them, because they lack the same protections that Canadian citizens/immigrants are afforded under provincial labour laws (CBC News, 2015). Closed work permits (tying a worker to a specific employer), language barriers, and an often inaccessible complaint system also make temporary foreign workers more vulnerable to employer abuse (CBC News, 2015). Critics of the federal government's temporary foreign workers' program have argued that young Canadians have been displaced by temporary foreign workers, in sectors such as food service, which traditionally had been one of the largest markets for youth labour (CBC News, 2014). Young aboriginals may even be disproportionately harmed by the reliance of food service employers on temporary foreign workers. Though aboriginal youth and non-aboriginal youth predominantly work in food service, retail, and accommodation (Statistics Canada, 2007), the fewer number of aboriginal youth without a high school diploma, who by virtue of their lack of an education would not be eligible for jobs in other better paying sectors, are the ones who would be most likely to suffer as a result of employers' preferences for temporary foreign workers. It is possible then that even if Maria had been able to receive the kind of individualized support that Jay's workers had provided to him for his job search, she may have still faced considerable structural challenges in becoming employed, especially given her lack of a high school diploma. (Jay too encountered employers who would not hire him because of his lack of a high school diploma, although he did not state that he felt that his race was a barrier to his being employed. That said, the labourer job that he performed in the meat-packing plant was not a service job in which race may be more of an employment barrier, due to racism and/or a preference for temporary foreign workers.)

Maria's comment about why a number of aboriginal youth could not be hired to work as a cleaning crew also suggests that she would have welcomed being placed in a job, (with similar youth rather than those with more obvious disabilities), rather than compete for one. This raises the problem

of a lack of sheltered employment opportunities, given the trend across the last three decades towards supporting competitive employment for people with disabilities (Dale, 2010). Though she may have still required disability benefits to supplement such job earnings, Maria would have had some role from which she could have constructed a vocational identity, thereby reducing the degree of difference that she felt existed between her and her same age peers.

Though sheltered employment may not have completely obviated her concerns about stigmatization, being hired in a setting that employed other similar youth, irrespective of whether they had disabilities, would have likely reduced such concerns. In fact, her comment about aboriginal youth being part of a work crew suggests that she would have been more comfortable with being provided with sheltered employment on the basis of her ethnicity, rather than her disability. Basing access to sheltered opportunities on the condition of aboriginal ethnicity could be a reasonable solution for counteracting some of the reasons (e.g., racism, lack of education) why aboriginal youth become excluded from employment. If such sheltered employment were called a youth apprenticeship, stigmatization would not likely be an issue for Maria.

Regarding her schooling experiences, like Jay, Maria had also tried to complete an upgrading program, following her last release from the young offender centre. However, given her cognitive and behavioural difficulties, it was not surprising that this effort was unsuccessful. At one point during the course of our interviews, Maria enrolled in an office assistant program which did not require a high school diploma as a prerequisite for enrollment. However, difficulties in sustaining attention and comprehending the material in certain courses caused her to ultimately be unsuccessful at that endeavour too. Thus having never had the opportunity to perform jobs that require even very rudimentary skills, nor being able to succeed at either academic upgrading or a brief vocational program left Maria without sources of personal mastery efficacy for mainstream employment.

Although her workers and her friends provided praise for her talents in the arts, Maria noted that her “fear” of not knowing what to say to the people who would be auditioning her often prevented her from attending casting calls for acting jobs. Like Jay, she acknowledged that not being consistently required to adhere to certain structured routines, such as school attendance, interfered with her pursuing her goals for herself. She recalled that her child welfare caseworker stopped pushing her to attend school around the age of thirteen, but that she now thought that if she had just kept going to school, it would have become a “habit” for her. She was also aware that her habit of being verbally aggressive with people who gave her “attitude” could make it difficult for her to work in a customer service role. (I will elaborate on Maria’s anger control problems in the next chapter.) Like Jay then, problems with social skills and structure were also partly responsible for her lack of success in both vocational and academic domains. The fact that she and her workers knew that she could always rely on her disability benefits for her physical survival probably also made it easier for Maria to be more relaxed about all of her efforts, especially during times when she was surrounded by similar peers and family members who were, as Jay put it about his own social network, also not engaged in anything “productive” (i.e., involved in crime and misuse of drugs and alcohol).

That said, Maria was very concerned about being dependent on government assistance long-term. She talked about voluntarily getting off of her disability benefits, as she wondered whether she needed to “learn things the hard way”, referring to having no other option but to have to work for a living. She was clearly influenced by the messages that her social workers had given her over the years, which encouraged her to not be like her family members, who relied on welfare and/or crime to support themselves and their children. Moreover, as mentioned previously, although Maria was already over eighteen, she had voluntarily agreed with her child welfare caseworker that she would continue to work with her youth worker on developing the skills that she needed to become an independent adult. In

contrast to Tamara's experience of being "dumped" by child welfare at the age of eighteen, Maria was offered the option of retaining her child welfare status until the maximum age of twenty two, because her worker still saw a need for such transitional support.

I want to emphasize that although Maria could rely on her disability benefits, she was never happy about it. The monetary amount was always insufficient: Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) in Alberta provides monthly incomes to single adults that are well below the "poverty line", as defined by the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO)<sup>19</sup> that is calculated by Statistics Canada (2015). Maria's low income pushed her to rely on boyfriends for additional money or goods. She also tried to save money on rent by living with other high risk friends and family. But more than that, Maria felt an acute sense of personal shame from having to rely on government assistance. Even when I would not be asking her about the subject of benefits, she would say repeatedly to me and almost apologetically, that she did not want to receive benefits, but that she had to do so "for just a bit longer", referring to her continuing struggles to grasp onto some way of constructing a self that was 'normal' and 'good', which for her involved being independent from assistance.

Thus while it may have appeared to others, who did not know her circumstances, that Maria was not yet serious about changing her life and finding a place for herself within mainstream society, this was certainly not the case. Rather her lack of consistent activity, as regards jobs or schooling, reflected her considerable personal and structural barriers. She spoke about the serious efforts that she had expended looking for jobs (e.g., she had applied to every store within a very large urban mall and

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<sup>19</sup> At the time of Maria's interviews with me, people on AISH could receive a maximum monthly income of \$1188. A subsequent increase of \$400 came into effect shortly after Alison Redford became the new Conservative premier in 2012. On a yearly basis, this increase meant that an individual on AISH can make up to \$19,056 per year (from \$14,256 per year). However, the increase still did not bring AISH into line with the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) for a single person living in a metropolitan area with a population of a half million or more. The LICO for such an individual was calculated to be \$19,597 (Statistics Canada, 2015).

responded to many online job advertisements). She also often talked about her long-term goals to be a successful writer or actor. Despite her intentions and best efforts, and even if her workers had tried to provide her with personalized assistance similar to what Jay had received, Maria would have still required far more coaching to get a job and maintain it, in view of her greater social skills deficits. And she would have still have been more restricted with respect to the number and type of jobs that she could reasonably have aimed for, in view of her learning deficits. Hence Maria's inability to diligently pursue an identity pathway that was actually viable for her can be attributed to both her deficits in skills and efficacy, as well as structural conditions that went beyond a lack of personalized help with job searching and pre-employment training (i.e., the lack of non-competitive and suitable jobs for her ability level, the safety net of her disability benefits, the distraction of partying with similarly "unproductive" peers and family members).

For Tamara, a lack of success and confidence in vocational and academic domains also interacted with structural conditions, in her struggles to commit to a mainstream identity. However, this occurred in a somewhat different way than it had for Maria. Unlike Jay and Maria's significant difficulties in obtaining employment, Tamara had worked her first job as a restaurant hostess at the age of fifteen, while she still lived at home. She had also managed to complete some of her grade eleven coursework, before she entered the care of child welfare. Unlike Jay and Maria, Tamara had grown up surrounded by people who had always been employed. Many of her family members were employed in businesses or had become professionals of some kind. Her own employment history and the modelling provided by her family appeared to equip her with confidence that she would also be able to be a competent employee and become economically self-sufficient, one day. However, despite this initial advantage, Tamara did not possess the personal motivations that Jay and Maria had for trying to construct a mainstream identity. As mentioned previously, after years of not working during her street life, Tamara

felt compelled to look for a job only when her child welfare caseworker had started to put pressure on her to find a different way of funding herself, before her file with them was closed.

In contrast to Jay and Maria, Tamara did not require any special assistance in finding a job. However, once she began a retail job at a mall kiosk, she experienced challenges with interacting with both her co-workers and her customers. (I will elaborate on these challenges later.) As mentioned previously, Tamara felt that she was still struggling with mental health problems, at the time that she was hired. She had also only been sober for a short time, when she had obtained this job. At one point, following a relapse after using methamphetamine with her boyfriend, Tamara missed several days of work and was consequently fired. Though she managed to convince her supervisor to rehire her, she was scheduled for far fewer hours than what she had been given initially. Given her lack of hours at work, and the impending closure of her child welfare file, the only choice she had for supporting herself was to receive financial assistance, as a student enrolled in high school upgrading classes. Tamara deliberately enrolled in an alternative school that would provide her with considerable leniency regarding her attendance and behaviour, because she knew that she was not mentally stable enough to comply with all of the rules of a regular classroom setting. Though she knew then that she would eventually want to complete high school, at the time, she was only motivated to do “the bare minimum” of school work that was required in order for her to continue to receive her student funding: “I wasn’t going to high school for absolutely nothing, but I was taking it leisurely, seeing like the least work I could do, how many days I could skip and still get a thousand [dollars] a month.”

Though Tamara had completed more of her high school credits, while she still in a regular high school program, than any of the other youth in this study, her efficacy beliefs regarding school were still quite shaky at the time of her enrollment in the alternative school. It appears that her lack of academic confidence could be attributed to her then mental health issues. According to Bandura (1977), somatic

sensations and emotional states (i.e., arousal) are also factors in how someone judges their capabilities, apart from other efficacy sources such as performance accomplishments or verbal persuasion. Feelings of stress or low mood signal vulnerability to poor performance. Tamara recalled that she had very little capacity to concentrate on her schoolwork, and was unable to sit still for long periods of time. She was also prone to emotional outbursts, and otherwise acting erratically. For example, she said that she was struggling to get rid of mannerisms, such as “walking weird, like someone on drugs,” which apparently involved swinging her arms in an odd way. She recalled that she would “freak out lots [and] yell at people lots.” As she put it, she was still “acting crazy” at the time. Tamara attributed these problems to having been sober for only a matter of months at the time. She experienced depression, which she had attributed to withdrawal from the drugs that she had been taking. Tamara was therefore glad to be in an alternative school that tolerated students with such problems, and that provided flexibility regarding how long she could take to complete certain courses. Though Tamara took a few classes that were taught by teachers, she was also required to take a number of courses by correspondence, with teachers of those subjects providing her with individual assistance, whenever they could. (The school did not employ enough teachers to provide full classes for those few students who were over eighteen, and who were pursuing the academic stream. There was low demand for such courses, given that most of the students were academically at-risk.)

Although Tamara had been initially content with this school situation, during the course of our interviews, she wondered whether she had stayed at the alternative school for longer than she should have, given that she no longer had the same level of behavioural problems. At the time of our interviews, Tamara had been mostly sober for four to five years. She now both wanted to, and needed to, finish high school, so that the student funding that she was being granted as a result of being a former foster youth, would not run out before she was able to finish the post-secondary training that

she had decided upon. Tamara had decided to become a medical laboratory technician, which requires two and a half years of post-secondary studies. Advancing Futures, a bursary program for former foster youth in Alberta, would provide funding for a total of sixty months of upgrading and/or post-secondary studies, so she was aware that she was under a time pressure to complete all of her education.

Though Tamara knew that she needed more teacher support to be successful in her grade twelve courses, she was afraid to go to a school with regular classes again, because she was worried about having to be more accountable with respect to attendance and completion of assignments, as well as worried about coping with the faster pace of regular classroom activities, relative to those she had become accustomed to at the alternative school. As Tamara put it, she would have “to go from no structure and not getting help to total structure.” In other words, the longer she stayed in the alternative school environment, the less sure she became of her ability to succeed in a regular school environment again, despite having been successful in regular classes just a few years ago. Thus initially mental health issues, and later a lack of classroom structure and demands for student accountability in her educational environment, prompted her to question her academic capabilities. Moreover, Tamara commented that other people, like her mother, did not understand how hard it was for her to just get up in the morning to go to school, as she had had no one pushing her to do anything from the time that she had left home at the age of fifteen. Like Maria, whose child welfare caseworker did not push her to attend school once she had become a teenager, Tamara had experienced no real demands from her child welfare caseworker during all the time that she was in care – that is, until her eighteenth birthday was on the horizon.

However, after receiving encouragement from a boyfriend who was attending a college that had an accelerated high school upgrading program, she decided to enroll in that program.<sup>20</sup> Tamara had also reasoned that by then, “[her] brain had recovered” sufficiently from her previous drug use. She believed that she no longer needed antidepressant medication to address the depression that had resulted from her withdrawal from drugs, so there was now no reason that she could not be successful in a regular classroom, as she had been before. She commented that “It would be just like at (name of the regular high school). Like I did fine.” Thus, current verbal persuasion, emotional stability, and her readiness to see her past mastery experiences at regular school as relevant to her present learning needs allowed her to commit to a more rigorous program of study, that was more likely to prepare her for her post-secondary plans.

Unfortunately, Tamara’s academic efficacy did not return in time to keep her from making a dangerous decision about how to support herself, during the summer after she had enrolled in the alternative school. Her student funding covered her living expenses only for the months that she was enrolled in classes, which made her vulnerable to losing her apartment in the summer, as she had not been able to find a job that could cover all her rent and living expenses for July and August. Though Tamara had the option of enrolling in summer courses which would have maintained her funding, she did not think that she could successfully complete a grade twelve course in six weeks, given the very slow pace that she had been working at until then: Her struggle to complete two grade eleven courses in one academic year at the alternative school had caused her to drop one of the classes. Tamara told me that she could not have afforded to take the risk of failing a summer class, because a failure could have

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<sup>20</sup> Students who succeeded in this condensed, eight month-long, academic high school curriculum were purported to have attained an equivalent level of skills and knowledge to those who had completed the regular academic stream of high school courses, which usually takes three years. Both Tamara and Jay completed this upgrading program, albeit at different times.

threatened her funding. Tamara's understanding of the conditions of her funding was that a student would only be allowed to fail a few times, after which they would lose their funding permanently. Given her comments, I presumed that she had already experienced a few failures. Also, as mentioned previously, Tamara was under pressure to complete both her high school requirements and two and a half years of post-secondary studies at a technical college, within the sixty month time frame that was allotted by her bursary. Consequently, Tamara turned to prostitution to cover her rent and living expenses for July and August.

Her pimp provided her with fourteen hundred dollars upfront, which was enough to pay her rent for two months, on the condition that he now "owned" her, meaning that if she ever wanted to stop working for him, she would have to pay him fifteen thousand dollars, in exchange for her freedom. Tamara did not take what her pimp had said seriously at the time, as she had never before agreed to engage in street prostitution for a pimp. (She had had some sexual encounters in exchange for money in the past.) However, Tamara took his threats seriously when he began to assault her. Tamara was severely beaten and required hospitalization on two occasions. She recalled one assault which took place in a house with witnesses present, but no one had intervened to help her. On another occasion, she was left in a field after being beaten unconscious. She suspected that her pimp beat her that time too, but her post-assault amnesia and lack of witnesses prevented her from being sure that it was him who had attacked her. However, Tamara did tell the police about the former assault, after being urged to do so by the staff members that she had confided in, when she returned to the alternative school. Her pimp was jailed for having assaulted her as well as another young woman. His jail sentence was what enabled Tamara to finally escape him.

It would appear then that the conditions of her student funding, her lack of an ability to find a job, and her lack of efficacy for schooling had combined to push Tamara into the situation of resorting to

prostitution for money. Tamara did not feel that she had any other option. None of her family members were willing to help her with money. Moving back to her mother's home was not feasible, given her mother's fears about being physically hurt by Tamara again. Tamara felt desperate to not lose the home and belongings which she had finally been able to acquire, after having stopped her constant movement from one placement to another, which occurred for much of the time that she had spent in care. Unfortunately, she misjudged what her involvement with her pimp, and with prostitution, would ultimately cost her. It should also be noted that Tamara's difficulty with finding summer employment was not that unusual, and should not be seen as just a reflection of her lack of skills. As mentioned previously, the unemployment rate for non-aboriginal youth was also high, and the preference to employ temporary foreign workers reduced job opportunities for all Canadian young people.

Carmen's choices also appear to have been constrained by the terms of her government assistance, the lack of youth employment opportunities, and a lack of personal efficacy beliefs, as regards both jobs and schooling. Like Jay and Maria, Carmen's attempts to move into mainstream vocational and academic roles was a product of her genuine interest in leaving the street lifestyle, rather than being compelled to do so, as in the case of Tamara. Carmen communicated her desire to become sober and to quit selling drugs to a youth worker at a non-profit agency for high risk youth. She recalled that she felt unsure of what she was capable of doing to support herself, at the time that she had decided to quit the drug scene. Unlike Jay and Maria, she had worked at a fast food outlet, and as a parking attendant, when she had lived with her parents. Having worked previously, Carmen did not discount the possibility of finding another job.

However, similar to Tamara, her lack of certainty about being able to be employed again was due to longstanding mental health problems (i.e., depression and anxiety). Carmen also suffered from severe gastrointestinal problems, and believed herself to be addicted to MDMA (ecstasy), among other

synthetic psychoactive drugs. Like Tamara, she implied that her state of mind was too 'messed up' at the time for her to know how she could proceed with leaving street life: "At that point, I wasn't really sure at all what to do. I was just lost." The only thing that she was clear about, at the time, was her desire to stop using drugs and to stop selling them. It appeared that both her somatic problems and her emotional problems had an adverse effect on her efficacy beliefs, as Bandura (1977) would predict. She acknowledged that she was "kind of still able to work", but felt that [she] "was barely keeping it together" in regards to her psychological stability. Given her problems with her mental health and her physical health, her youth worker from the high risk agency counselled her to go on welfare: "...got on Income Support 'cos my grandpa was dying and my stomach got worse and everything got way too intense."

However, her receipt of welfare did not turn out to be just a temporary measure that afforded her some time to become more stable and to find a job or other means of support. Rather, because her eligibility for welfare was on the grounds of having medical problems that impeded her ability to work, Carmen was still receiving welfare at the time that I had interviewed her, which was over a year since she had become sober. Carmen had medical documentation of her gastrointestinal problems. She said that she thought that as long as she continued to get updates from her doctor that attested to her ongoing health problems that she could not get kicked off of her medically-based welfare. Nevertheless, she felt pressure from her Income Support worker to find a job, which caused her to worry about her assistance being discontinued.

Throughout the course of interviewing Carmen, it was always unclear to me whether she believed that she continued to be incapable of working due to her health problems, or whether she was unwilling to risk losing the safety net that this assistance provided to her, in case she was not able to support herself with a job. Similar to Tamara, with respect to her fears about changing school

environments, it appeared as though the longer that Carmen stayed on welfare, the less confident she grew about her ability to ever get a job again. The length of time that she had spent drug dealing, and her inability to be successful in high school, also appeared to have contributed to that fear. When she was in grade ten and struggling to complete her final exams, Carmen reasoned that being a drug dealer would be a good career plan for her, as she had started selling methamphetamine in her high school by then. Though she felt that her own drug use had interfered with her performance on her grade ten exams, Carmen acknowledged that she had, nevertheless, been finding her school work to be challenging. Given these school frustrations and the simultaneous difficulties that she was experiencing at home, the choice of leaving home and school, and supporting herself with drug dealing, seemed to be an obvious one: "I thought I was going to be a career drug dealer. That would be a fine career choice. Never go back to school again." She prided herself on her success in this area, noting that drug selling was one of very few ways that someone could "make something out of nothing." (Jay had explained to me that sometimes people would "cuff" or lend you drugs, to get you started at selling, with the agreement that they could be paid later on.) Given her lack of a high school education, limited employment skills, and a history of perceived success in drug dealing, it is easy to see how Carmen could have lacked confidence that she could get a job that could pay her enough to live on. It is also easy to see how she could have failed to perceive that she had abilities, academic or otherwise, that she could have developed with training, towards a mainstream career goal.

Carmen also presumably had little incentive to explore whether she could get any job, in the hopes of later advancing to a better paying one, given the amount of income that she was receiving from welfare. The six hundred dollars per month that she received may be more than what she could earn each month, from working in many low skilled, part-time jobs. The number of hours that can be assigned to any given employee can vary considerably in such jobs. At the time of the youths' interviews

(2010-2011), the minimum wage in Alberta was the second lowest rate of all provinces at \$9.40 per hour.<sup>21</sup> If a part-time worker was lucky enough to be assigned the average number of weekly hours for part-time workers in Canada (i.e., 17 hours) (Statistics Canada, 2006), she would earn only \$640.00 per month -- just forty dollars more than what Carmen was guaranteed each month on welfare. If Carmen declared any employment income to welfare, she would have received additional pressure from her worker to get off assistance, as any demonstration of work would have been taken as evidence that her medical problems no longer impeded her ability to work.

Carmen appeared to be caught in what economists have called “moral hazard” (Gladwell, 2005). Moral hazard occurs when there is financial incentive to do things that are considered socially undesirable. Governments often provide low amounts of assistance as a disincentive to stay on welfare, thereby avoiding moral hazard. However, given the poor labour market for young, unskilled workers, the unintended consequence of Carmen’s government assistance, particularly given the dependence of her assistance on her medical problems, was to discourage Carmen from even trying to find work: “Yeah, cuz I only get six hundred a month. And I’m not expected to work. And they’re not doing anything else to help me...And if I do get a job or bring in receipts or anything like that, they’re gonna be like, “Oh you can work! Get the fuck out there.” Carmen observed that the people who received ‘regular’<sup>22</sup> welfare were not similarly penalized for trying to augment their income with casual work or part-time work, whenever they could: “The people who can have a job that are on Income Support making the same

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<sup>21</sup> Based on this minimum wage, a full time hourly worker in Alberta earning minimum wage will earn a total of \$376.00 per week and approximately \$19,552.00 per year (based on an 8-hour work day and a 260-day work year). Recall that the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) for such a single person at that time was calculated to be \$19,597 (Statistics Canada, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Regular’ welfare recipients are encouraged to work because they do not have significant barriers to employment, such as medical conditions. They may require welfare because they are searching for a job, working but not earning enough to survive, or they may be temporarily unable to work. These recipients receive slightly less money (around a hundred dollars less), than those who are deemed to have barriers to employment.

amount of money as me, can like work, once they find [a job]. And they can find like odd jobs and stuff, and like cash in the money or tell Income Support they need extra money, but I don't have that option." Ironically then it was that which gave her the most protection from being pushed off of welfare (i.e., the medical basis for her welfare), that restricted her from being like other welfare recipients, who were eligible for more supports to facilitate their long-term employment: Not only could 'regular' welfare recipients keep their earnings from casual employment, but they were also eligible to receive what Carmen had called "extra money", referring to such benefits as security deposits for renting apartments or money for bus passes.

Carmen depended on her boyfriend, and the small monthly honorarium that she received from the Uncensored program for high risk youth, to get things that she could not afford on her meagre welfare payments. She also felt compelled to live with her boyfriend, because she could not afford to pay rent on her own place, or even afford to live with roommates, without quickly using up all of her money. This was, by far, not an adequate solution to her money troubles, as her boyfriend tended to be abusive towards her, both physically and emotionally. Carmen's dependency on him therefore contributed to more serious problems for her than it had solved.

Prior to living with her boyfriend, she was often relegated to living with roommates in dangerous areas of the city. Some of her former roommates and landlords exploited her for more rent money than she had initially agreed to pay them. One of her former roommates, who agreed to store her belongings for free while she moved to another place, pressured her for sexual favours, every time she returned to retrieve some of her things. Carmen sold marijuana on the street, to pay the extra money that her roommates and/or landlords extorted from her. At this point, Carmen had already decided to stop selling any 'harder' drugs than marijuana. She could have made much more money, by selling the ecstasy and ketamine that she used to sell in nightclubs, where the risk of her getting

arrested was also much lower than the risk for her selling on the street. However, her conscience would no longer permit her to sell synthetic drugs, because of their potential for seriously harming or killing someone. Carmen's lack of adequate monetary assistance for her needs thus pushed her into circumstances in which she had to stay involved with exploitive street peers/adults and with crime: "Landlady ended up stealing a bunch of my shit and she charged me way too much for rent and like she'd act super nice to your face, and then as soon as you weren't around, she'd be fucking you over...she fucking opened a whole shit load of my mail for my GST cheques and demanded that I give her a bunch of the money."

When Carmen had first started to receive welfare, Income Support had apparently paid for her rent on her own apartment. However, she lost this apartment after a former boyfriend assaulted her and took her to Eastern Canada, against her will. When she returned to Edmonton, she was unable to get this level of assistance from Income Support again.<sup>23</sup> Upon her return to Edmonton, Carmen alternated between her aforementioned stints with various roommates and "couch surfing" (i.e., staying on the couches of friends, often in exchange for money, housework, or marijuana). At that time, she supplied the address of one of her friends to Income Support, so that she could receive her welfare cheques there, because if she had had no fixed address, her assistance would have been reduced to three hundred dollars. Carmen explained that Income Support workers will only give you three hundred dollars, because they assume you can get by with that amount, if you have no rent to pay. When I expressed incredulity over the idea that homeless people were being seen as having less needs than those who had shelter, Carmen replied that the attitude of such workers is that the homeless welfare

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<sup>23</sup> It was unclear why Income Support had previously paid Carmen's rent on her own apartment. Their current policy is to give recipients an allowance for essential needs such as food and clothing, and to provide an allowance for shelter, if the recipients have a residence of some kind, as explained on the next page. However, the amount provided for shelter is well below rental costs for a bachelor suite located anywhere in Edmonton.

recipients only use the money to buy drugs anyway. (I did verify Carmen's claim about homeless people being ineligible for money for rent. According to the Alberta Works policy manual (2012), minimal support for housing is provided to only those applicants who currently live in social housing or in private housing. For example, a shelter allowance of one hundred and twenty dollars is provided to those who reside in social housing, over and above one's "core essential" allowance for food and other necessities. The core essential allowance can range from approximately three hundred dollars to five hundred dollars for a single adult, depending on the kind of welfare assistance that one qualifies for.)

Although the above account may make it seem as though structural factors such as the terms of her welfare, and a lack of well paid, low skilled jobs were mostly responsible for keeping Carmen from trying to re-enter the workforce, the ongoing role played by her lack of solid efficacy beliefs should not be underestimated. In addition to her lack of confidence regarding low skilled jobs and schooling, Carmen's feelings of efficacy with respect to her artistic endeavours were relatively new. She said that she now believed that she had abilities, thanks to her involvement in an arts-oriented, non-profit agency for high risk youth. According to Carmen, "Art saved [her] life," meaning that once she had discovered that visual art and drama were activities that she both enjoyed and was good at, she felt that she had something to give to the world. Carmen said that this realization had even kept her from committing suicide.<sup>24</sup> However, despite these new and strong convictions about her life's purpose, Carmen also appeared to be highly susceptible to doubting her own artistic abilities. She often talked about how her father did not value her strengths in the arts, because she could not make a living from such work. Though she vehemently resisted her father's criticisms by telling him about how she had once sold one

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<sup>24</sup> Her ability to counter her suicidal feelings with this realization is consistent with psychologist, Thomas Joiner's (2010) theory of suicide. Joiner suggests that one of the psychological states that appear to contribute to a desire for suicide is the perception that one is a burden to others, as opposed to being someone who contributes something useful to society.

of her paintings for eight hundred dollars, she admitted that she had to work hard to not allow his negative comments to affect her commitment to the arts. The relative lack of monetary success that she had received overall for her artwork, and the fact that her positive feedback came mostly from youth workers at the arts-oriented agency, whose job it was to encourage all youth to be involved in the arts, may have also played a role in her lack of certainty regarding her talents.

This lack of certainty was also reflected in the choices that she had made in regards to improving her education. As mentioned previously, Carmen had decided that she wanted to upgrade her education, not just to secure her welfare support but in order to qualify for admittance to a college or university. Though she had originally intended to upgrade her high school academic skills, with the intention of ultimately studying fine arts, she backed away from her initial interest in a two year college diploma in this area, after she learned more about its competitive admissions process (i.e., having others judge a portfolio of your artwork). Missing the deadline for acceptance to the next September admission to this program was also probably a factor in her decision to set her sights instead on pursuing a general Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) program, following her academic upgrading. However, the fact that she identified anthropology as her intended major, even though she was aware that she could have also studied visual arts in the B.A. program, suggested that despite her passion for the arts, Carmen did not feel secure enough in her abilities to pursue this vocational pathway through further schooling. (It was unlikely that anthropology was selected because of her much greater interest in this subject, as Carmen seemed to only have a passing knowledge of the field.)

Though Carmen decided to enroll in an upgrading program, she admitted that this had not been an easy decision to make, given her past experiences with school failure. As mentioned above, Carmen had little reason to think that she could advance her circumstances through school, because of her difficulties in grade ten. Her academic efficacy took a further blow two years ago when she failed to be

successful in the first upgrading program that she had enrolled in when she was twenty-one. Despite the fact that receiving student funding from Income Support would have provided her with a more reliable source of income and a slightly greater income than her medically-based welfare, Carmen did not immediately turn to this option. She indicated that it had been difficult to take the risk of failing again. Recalling her problems with registering in her current upgrading program, particularly her struggles in navigating between the demands of her Income Support worker and the demands of the school's admissions officer, Carmen commented that she felt that they were "pushing [her] around and making it harder for [her]. It's already hard enough to like come up to the decision that I want to go back to school. And to make it realistic seems like the fucking hardest thing in the world."

That said, seeing another former high risk youth be successful in his upgrading efforts ("Yeah, so name of youth kind of motivated me to try and go back to school with how well he was doing"), and receiving encouragement and registration assistance from workers at a youth employment centre, had helped Carmen shore up her confidence to try schooling once more. Nevertheless, one would imagine that Carmen's academic efficacy beliefs would still be fairly shaky, given that the modelling of similar others (vicarious reinforcement) and verbal persuasion does not provide one with as strong a sense of efficacy as that provided by the actual attainment of academic skills (personal mastery) (Bandura, 1977). Put another way, observing similar models being successful, and/or being persuaded of one's abilities by others, were not likely to be enough to help Carmen completely surmount the damage that had already been done to her academic efficacy by her history of failure.

It appeared then that Carmen lacked solid efficacy beliefs with respect to both academics and the arts. Nevertheless, Carmen had begun to identify as an artist, which appeared to fulfill some important functions for her. Carmen's increasing identification as an artist brought continuity to herself. Her artist identity united her current interests and involvement in the arts with her past involvement in

extracurricular art classes as a child, and with her identification with her maternal grandfather, who had been a successful artist during his lifetime. Carmen's grandfather was also important to her because he had been one of only a few relatives that she had ever felt close to in her family. (Carmen noted that her grandfather was the only person in her family who had gone out to look for her, after she had run away from home for the last time, at the age of fifteen.) Her decisions to become sober and to pursue art were, in part, motivated by a desire to honour his memory: "He's done so much for me."

Carmen had also felt a sense of belonging amongst other youths who engaged in the arts and, as mentioned previously, had received praise and encouragement from workers at the arts-oriented youth agency. The feeling of efficacy that she had begun to develop in the arts also contributed to her motivation to become sober and to look for alternatives to drug selling. According to Carmen, the arts-oriented youth agency helped her "focus on all the shit I can do, cos' I can do a lot. Cos' I had like no self-esteem [before], that's why I was selling drugs." "Cuz I knew I was doing good at name of agency, so that's when I got my own apartment, cleaned up, proved my parents wrong, those assholes." (Carmen was referring to her parents' lack of confidence in her artistic abilities.) However, it was unclear how committed she would remain to this identity in the future, because she possessed no firm plan on how to further develop her skills, presumably due to her lack of strong feelings of efficacy, and the difficulty that artists have generally with making money from their artistic pursuits. Carmen wished that she could make money by writing her own theatre scenes and acting, which she had been lauded for at the arts-oriented program for high risk youth. She also repeatedly spoke of having received a public speaking award in grade seven, which she cited as further proof of her talent for being on a stage. When Carmen would make such remarks, it felt like she was trying desperately to grasp onto "some kind of a life" for herself (Miller, as cited in Erikson, 1959, p.97) via her artwork, despite the foundation for this life still seeming very shaky.

In addition to facilitating self-continuity, belonging, and the motivation to change her lifestyle, Carmen's artist identity accommodated aspects of her current lifestyle. However, these lifestyle aspects functioned to impede her transition into mainstream society. In Carmen's view, being an artist allowed her to not have to get up each morning for a full day of work. Like the other youth participants, Carmen struggled with being able to comply with structured daily routines. She acknowledged preferring the time flexibility that being an artist allows for: She was able to do her artwork on her own schedule. The fact that art openings occurred in the evenings was viewed as being further conducive to Carmen's preference for rising and working later in the day. Carmen also attributed her difficulty with living a more structured life to her gastrointestinal problems. She explained her need to accommodate her health problems as follows: "You're not waking up at 9 AM and having to get to work in an hour, but you're gonna have to puke for three hours. It's why I smoke so much pot. Cuz then I can eat and I can take my meds." Flexible hours thus accommodated both her stomach problems and the heavy marijuana use that she engaged in to treat this problem. I would add that Carmen's desire to be around for her boyfriend, whenever he was not working, was also conveniently accommodated by having a more "free" schedule, than a full-time job would allow for.

It is also possible that her artist identity may have allowed her to feel comfortable with receiving government assistance, given that few artists can afford to support themselves exclusively from their art or performance activities. In fact, in direct contrast to Maria, Carmen welcomed the idea of receiving disability benefits. She had even started the process of applying for the same kind of benefits as Maria received (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped or AISH), in the hope that she might qualify for them, on the basis of her physical and/or mental health problems. Carmen reasoned that the greater amount of money that she would receive from disability benefits would better facilitate her goal of improving herself through school, and would lessen her dependency on others who could exploit her.

(As mentioned previously, AISH recipients received a maximum monthly allowance of \$1188 -- nearly twice the amount that Carmen received from welfare.) Though she was aware that such benefits were for people whose problems constituted a permanent disability, she felt that she was being unfairly exempt from this assistance, as she had observed people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) use their AISH money for drinking and drugs, whereas she would use such money to support her constructive goal of an education. To be clear, Carmen did not see herself as needing these benefits indefinitely. Rather, she just felt that she should be able to qualify for such assistance, given her intention of using such funds towards a 'good' cause.

Given the negative effect that her receipt of welfare appeared to have had on her confidence for being employed, one might predict that receiving permanent disability benefits would further reinforce her lack of vocational efficacy, and perhaps reinforce her problems with her physical health and mental health as well. Carmen could come to truly believe that she would never be able to work again. As mentioned previously, it was unclear, when I interviewed her, whether she really believed that her health problems were too serious for her to be able to work, or whether she had just gotten in the habit of telling everyone that this was the case, because she needed the safety net that welfare provided for her. Carmen even told her boyfriend and her parents that her psychological difficulties made it too difficult for her to work. Again, it was hard to gauge whether she was saying this because they, like her welfare worker, pushed her to find a job, or whether it was because she truly believed this story, or came to believe it, after telling it to others, over and over. (Later in this chapter, I will discuss how Tamara came to believe the lies that she had told her child welfare worker about having more troubles than she actually did, in order to get more help from her worker.)

Carmen's inability to access timely help for her mental health problems and her physical health problems must have also made it difficult for her to gauge what she was truly capable of, in terms of

employment. Unlike Tamara who felt that her serotonin levels had been restored through the use of antidepressants by the time that she had felt ready to take on the challenge of an accelerated upgrading program, Carmen had not received any mental health assistance. Though Carmen had been seeing a counsellor when I first began interviewing her, this assistance was intermittent, and was obtained at a youth serving agency that was not known to employ mental health therapists with advanced degrees. Thus it was unclear how much greater Carmen's functioning could have been, if she had received ongoing help from a qualified mental health professional. Though she had been referred to a gastroenterologist, she was told that she would have to wait several months to be seen by this specialist.

In the absence of professional help, Carmen may have constructed an identity as an artist/student, who required some kind of medically warranted government assistance as a kind of necessary story or 'fiction' that enabled her survival. Though such an identity dealt with the 'trouble' that she experienced on many fronts from her unemployment (e.g., having a reason to resist her boyfriend's demands that she contribute more money towards their rent and resist earning potentially less than her welfare income in a part-time job) this solution may have actually done more to harm, or at least significantly delay, her ability to find a viable place for herself in mainstream society. That said, for Carmen this still tenuous identity probably felt to her as though she had come a very long way from her street lifestyle. Having a reliable, non-criminal source of income from Income Support also likely protected her from experiencing even more mistreatment from people like her boyfriend and her former roommates/landlords, than if she had no money of her own.

Unfortunately, there was no way to know whether providing Carmen with more government assistance, that did not carry with it an incentive for her to be sick, may have helped her to feel free to investigate what she was truly capable of doing and becoming, vocation-wise. Put another way, if

Carmen were to be given more welfare money and not have her assistance threatened if she tried to get a job, would she try to find work again? Her shaky efficacy beliefs, lack of 'practice' (Beam, 2013) with structure, and a bad youth labour market might still impede her from embarking on a job search, as might her continuing problems with her physical and mental health.

Carmen clearly felt that when she had initially started to receive welfare, "it gave [her] a chance to just like focus on [herself] and try and fix [herself] up." It enabled her to "focus on [her] art more, which made [her] more passionate about doing it." In addition to discovering a possible vocational identity for herself, having youth workers who supported her in "chasing her dreams" of being an artist also "helped save [her] life." This worker feedback was in direct contrast to that provided by her father who would "shit on [her] dream and make [her] wanna go kill [her]self after." (I will discuss more about why Carmen reacted so extremely to her father's criticism, in the next chapter.)

It appeared then that Carmen viewed being on welfare and being an artist as good strategies for helping her to get out of street life, in the same way that Tamara regarded the leniency of her alternative school as an important transitional support for leaving street life. However, unlike Tamara who could move on from this support after it had started to hold her progress back, Carmen's lack of efficacy, lack of skills, and lack of alternatives for noncriminal sources of money limited her ability to transition further into the mainstream. Of course, as noted above, welfare may have also protected her from possibly even greater harm, than if she were not to have received it at all, or if she were to have gotten cut off from it, in the absence of a non-criminal alternative for getting money. Tamara commented that in retrospect, she probably should have been pushed, albeit with much more support from her child welfare caseworker, to have gotten a job and to have gone back to school, even sooner than she had done so. She suggested that being given child welfare funding without any expectations being placed on her for years probably "enabled" her drug use. However, she also made it clear that had

she been pushed towards independence, when she had been experiencing even greater mental health and substance use problems just a little while earlier, that such a push would have been catastrophic for her. Both of these young women's experiences with government assistance therefore speak to the difficulties in avoiding moral hazard for youth who experience multiple kinds of barriers to employment.

**Social skills efficacy.** In addition to their struggles to believe in their vocational and academic abilities, the youths were also simultaneously stressed by their lack of confidence about how they should behave in both workplace environments and school environments. As mentioned previously, mental health problems and substance use problems caused Carmen and Tamara to have troubles behaving normally, when they first left street life. The length of time that they had spent with their street peers doing drugs also created social deficits. Tamara said that she had missed out on learning how to have normal conversations with people her own age because "No one's talking when they're high. [They're] just [doing] weird stuff or sex." ("Weird stuff" referred to compulsive, repetitive behaviors that are common with amphetamine use, such as picking at one's hair or skin, arranging objects in a row, singing or humming, etc.)

Tamara said that she especially did not know how to talk to females, having made no close girlfriends during her street life. Rather, she only knew how to be someone's girlfriend. Tamara's anxiety about how to behave with other young women prompted her to often act like a "bitch": "If I don't know how to talk to you nicely, then it's easier to be mean to you." I would add that her acting like a "bitch" probably helped her to escape the pressure of behaving according to female social norms that she did not understand, because the other women would have left her alone in response to her bitchiness. Tamara said that she still does not know "girl code", referring to the social norms that regulate female friendships. She suggested that there should be a "Big Sister" kind of program for "older people" like her, because no one teaches such skills. She recalled that she even had to learn about what was

acceptable among women at the strip club that she had once worked at, such as whether it was okay to sleep with someone's ex-boyfriend. Tamara sensed that there were similar things that she was probably getting wrong amongst young women in even more mainstream social environments than a strip club.

Tamara would also sometimes decline invitations to socialize with mainstream peers, because she lacked practice with normative social experiences, "like [going] to a mall or concert." She would decline such opportunities "cos' [she didn't] know how to hang out with guys or girls." Tamara remarked "People always wanna hang out with me, but I never do [hang out with them]—[it] creates lots of anxiety for me." While staying on her own may have taken care of her social anxiety, it would have also impeded her opportunities to learn how she should behave, vis a vis her mainstream peers. When Tamara first started attending the alternative school, she participated in a program that paired high risk youth with university students. From this program, she learned that university students also had problems in their personal backgrounds, which helped her to see that she could find acceptance amongst mainstream peers. Unfortunately, this program did not give her sufficient time with mainstream peers, to order to reduce her social anxiety for the long-term.

It appeared that Tamara's anxiety may have also been fuelled by her feeling that she had to 'tone' down her real self, in order to fit into mainstream environments. She could not be "outrageous and swear and talk about sex and weird things" at her job in the mall kiosk, for example. At school, she knew that other students saw her as being opinionated; however, she felt entitled to have strong views about subjects that she had had first-hand experience with, such as drug abuse and poverty. Her problems of being socially unskilled and alienated may have also been accompanied by a reduction in the feeling of reward that she was capable of deriving from social interactions. As social psychologist John Cacioppo (2008) explains, "If I cannot read others accurately, I cannot pick up the nuances, and I cannot intuit my way to win-win solutions for the greater good. My obtuseness will lead to my not being

seen as an agreeable partner. Because of my own responses, as well as the responses I elicit from others, I may become dissatisfied with my social interactions, because I will not be getting the feelings of reward others receive” (p.217).

Cacioppo (2008) further observed that the diminishment of feelings of social reward can push one “toward an often off putting response, governed by parts of the brain associated with addiction” (p.217). At one point, when Tamara felt very compelled to become involved with a young man who was sure to get her back into trouble with drugs and other risky behaviours, she made the following observation about herself: “I probably do want to walk around a park [as an example of a “normal” social activity], but it’s boring, kind of. Like there’s part of me that wants to walk around the park, but then there’s part of me that wants to date name of young man.” I will later elaborate on how Tamara felt that such risky men were “addictive” to her in the same way that drugs had been.

In Jay’s case, it was what he knew already -- that is, the values that he held during his street life - that interfered with his ability to make friends in his high school upgrading program. Jay’s descriptions of his interactions with the other young men with whom he worked to deal drugs suggested that they were all mostly engaged in fulfilling stereotypical roles with respect to one another, such as providing protection for one another, or collecting drug debts for their friends. Loyalty to one’s ‘street family’ was the value that drove such behaviours. Jay had strongly internalized this value. His difficulties in making friends in his upgrading program proceeded from his not being able to accept that he did not have to offer his complete allegiance to someone in order to call them a friend, as he had done during his street life. This principle of absolute loyalty meant to Jay that he would have to always be there for his friends, supporting them without question. However, he could not see how he could be such a friend to any of his school peers, as he could not tolerate their drug and alcohol use, without risking his own sobriety.

Jay's counsellor<sup>25</sup> at the time helped him to understand that he could just have "school friends." In this conception of friendship, it would be okay for Jay to just be friendly with his classmates while at school, where everyone was sober, but not see such people outside of this context. The idea of having friends in select contexts only, as opposed to being loyal to them in all circumstances, was revolutionary for Jay. Consequently, he opened himself up to friendships at school that he otherwise would have rejected, given all that he felt that he had to lose by this point (i.e., his sobriety and the possibility of a high school diploma). Previously, Jay would have even compromised the safety of his own family members to maintain his loyalty to his street family. He had even identified his continuing sense of loyalty to his street family as the thing that was most likely to make him vulnerable to sabotaging his mainstream goals for himself. Fortunately, one of the workers from his ex-offender re-entry program helped him to consider whether he needed to be "loyal to himself first." This reframing of the value of loyalty helped him to put his own interests before those of his former street peers.

Though Carmen and Maria did not speak about how their social skills may have been adversely affected by the years that they had spent with other youths and adults who did drugs, it is clear that Jay and Tamara regretted their longstanding and exclusive involvement with other street youth. That said, though they felt behind their mainstream peers in regards to their social proficiency, they also, in some ways, felt more advanced than them. Tamara, for example, talked about how she regretted having wasted so much time in street life, which she felt had delayed her, both socially and academically, relative to her same age mainstream peers. At the same time, Tamara believed that some of her difficulties in relating to her school peers came from her being unfairly viewed as arrogant, for knowing about things that most other young people her age are still innocent about. Her classmates also

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<sup>25</sup> Jay was referred to a mental health therapist by his ex-offender re-entry program workers, around the time that he began his upgrading program. His workers anticipated that he would experience social challenges upon his return to school.

disbelieved her when she talked about her past experiences in street life, because some of her stories, though true, sounded like something that could have only happened in the movies. When some of the other young women at her school asked her why she was so leery about some guy, Tamara would reply, "You don't know what I've been through," or say that she knows "from experience," because to relay more than that would have betrayed a sordid past that she feared would repel the other young women. Jay said that he had experienced so much in his street life, that it felt to him as though he had lived for at least forty years. Like Tamara, he was aware that his street experiences could not be shared in the new mainstream environments that he was attempting to navigate.

Not knowing what to say or how to say it caused Tamara to retreat into her relationship with her then boyfriend. She recalled that when she first became sober, she did not bother to meet new people, because she had a boyfriend with whom she spent every minute of the day. Having a boyfriend also kept Carmen from making new friends. She would not stay after her classes to get to know her fellow classmates in her upgrading program, because she wanted to be around for her boyfriend, when he was not at work. Though Carmen and Tamara indicated that they had preferred the company of their boyfriends, given their challenges with peer interactions (I will later discuss Carmen's historical challenges in this area), their sense of being socially isolated may have made them less inclined to meet new people: Ironically, being socially isolated can make one less accepting of potential new friends. (Cacioppo, 2008).

Nevertheless, the youths could not always cope with their social anxiety by retreating into relationships that felt safer to them. For Tamara and Jay, the challenge of having to come up with something appropriate to say to others was met by constructing 'normal' lives for themselves -- in a hurry. Tamara had invented a life for herself, based on what she heard the other young women at her workplace talk about. By listening to her co-workers at the mall kiosk, she learned about normal things

to talk about such as boyfriend problems. Tamara said that her philosophy in constructing this life for herself was “Just fake it ‘til you make it.” When I asked her whether that meant that she had to lie about herself until she gained more legitimate experiences of her own that she could share with others, Tamara replied that “Maybe they are not lies, maybe it’s just hopes I have for myself one day.” Her comment made me realize that this fictitious life that she had constructed for her social survival provided her with not only an acceptable past and present life to share with others at that moment, but perhaps even more importantly gave her a vision of a future, mainstream Tamara that she could see herself becoming one day—in other words, the “lies” may have been propelling her into her future identity. Tamara had even found a way to get advice for herself for problems that she was too afraid to broach with the ‘good’ girls at work. She would solicit her co-workers’ advice for her own problems, under the cover that she was trying to gather ideas to help a friend of hers. At the time of our interviews, however, Tamara no longer felt much need to engage in such strategies. She acknowledged that that it was now easier for her to be honest about her life, because she could talk about being in school with other young people. Tamara also acknowledged that she had had to figure out what her interests were outside of street life, as part of constructing a new, mainstream self.

Jay too spoke of the challenge of identifying mainstream interests for himself, and of identifying acceptable experiences that he could share with others. Initially, Jay felt that he had nothing to say to his fellow classmates in his upgrading program: “They had stuff [e.g., interests, hobbies]. I lacked all of it.” However, when other students discovered that he was good at mathematics, they asked Jay to tutor them, which gave him a basis for interacting with his fellow students. I was surprised when both Jay and Tamara told me that rather than being frustrated by their challenges in relating with mainstream peers, they were just grateful for the few mainstream friends that they had managed to acquire early on. I had wondered about the effect on them of having to hide their real histories. Tamara replied that she was

used to hiding something, having “something always bottled up”, (presumably things that she could not share with her mother or with her child welfare caseworkers), so she did not find it that that stressful to play a role in order to have friends. Jay struggled more with finding friends of a similar age that he could go out with, because of his personal requirement that they be sober. However, he said that he did not care as much about having other young people as friends, as long as he had “support”, referring to his re-entry program workers and other professionals who appeared to step into the gap that was left by Jay’s street family.

Nevertheless, I continued to wonder whether these identities, which had to cover up Jay’s and Tamara’s past histories, would be sufficient for them to meet their intimacy needs in the long run. Recent research suggests that those disadvantaged youth who demonstrate the most resilience, as regards schooling and jobs, surprisingly tend to have worse mental health and physical health outcomes relative to their less resilient peers (Miller, Chen, & Brody, 2014). The authors of these studies ask:

What is it about upward mobility that undermines the health of these young Americans?

***...Many feel socially isolated and disconnected from peers from different backgrounds [my emphasis].*** They may encounter racism and discrimination.

Some young people respond to the pressure by doubling down on character strengths that have served them well, cultivating an even more determined persistence to succeed. This strategy, however, can backfire when it comes to health. Behaving diligently all of the time leaves people feeling exhausted and sapped of willpower. Worn out from having their noses to the grindstone all the time, they may let their health fall by the wayside, neglecting sleep and exercise, and like many of us, overindulging in comfort foods. (Miller et al., 2014)

However, it may also be that the physiological and psychological effects of loneliness take their toll eventually, even if one can convince oneself that they have enough support, in spite of always

having to “bottle something up.” Loneliness is “on par with high blood pressure, obesity, lack of exercise, or smoking as a risk factor for illness and early death” (Cacioppo, 2008, p.93). Apart from being worn out from exhibiting too much self-control<sup>26</sup>, the diminishment of executive control (promoting poor decision making and risk taking) and/or lowering of self-esteem that accompanies loneliness may also be responsible for the aforementioned neglect of good health habits (Cacioppo).

Jay seemed to have come up with a way of resolving the problem of being unable to integrate his past life into his present one. By assuming a recovering addict identity, who gives back to society by sharing his story of personal reform with people who could be helped by it (e.g., by giving talks to youth in group homes or drug treatment facilities), he was able to honestly integrate his past life with the mainstream person that he was becoming. This may well be why he could say that he was content with having professionals as his supports, given that it was his English teacher and his workers from the ex-offender re-entry program that had been performing the critical function of bearing witness to this real identity transformation. Their recognition of what Jay was going through may have allowed him to *feel* less emotionally isolated. It is unclear if just having sober peers to hang out with would have been able to sufficiently address the loneliness that can come from feeling so different from the other people around you.

Although Tamara did not similarly integrate her past into her life narrative, her “lies” about herself may, as mentioned previously, have fulfilled the adaptive function of propelling her into the future self that she aspired to be. Focusing on this aspirational self may have been more important to her in transitioning to a mainstream identity at that point, than thinking about a past that she was trying

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<sup>26</sup> Although only Jay may have been observed to be really putting his ‘nose to the grindstone’ among the youth participants, all of them would have been exerting more self-control than was usual for themselves, by just showing up at their upgrading programs and trying to do their schoolwork, in view of their being very unaccustomed to structure and their unsuccessful learning histories.

to leave behind her. Moreover, Tamara also saw her lies about herself as being transitional support, to be abandoned when she no longer needed them: Recall her philosophy of “fake it ‘til you make it.”

Despite their potentially adaptive ways of narrating their identities to deal with their social differences, both Jay and Tamara clearly felt out of place in their new social contexts. Jay indicated that he had felt alien in his workplace, and had felt especially so at school. He agreed with my observation that he sounded like someone who had arrived on a different planet, who had to figure out everything about he should behave in his new surroundings. Tamara’s feelings of social alienation, however, appeared to have been more circumscribed. As described above, she was more anxious about knowing how to interact with her peers, rather than feeling globally confused about how to behave in schools, jobs, and other middle class environments. This difference likely reflected Tamara’s greater cultural capital, as she appeared to have been more experienced with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills, which can help one to be successful in middle class environments. While Tamara and Carmen grew up in mostly middle class neighborhoods, with little disruption occurring to their schooling or family residence until their adolescent years, Jay’s pre-teen years and Maria’s pre-teen years were marked by considerable family instability, residential upheaval, and poverty.

Carmen and Maria had also expressed a feeling of not belonging in their school environments, but they did not describe this in the same way as Jay and Tamara had. Rather, they tended to blame others for their feelings of not fitting in. Maria, for example, expressed that that she believed that her English teacher, in the upgrading program that she had once enrolled in, was homophobic. She suspected that her poor marks in her English course reflected her teacher’s lack of acceptance of Maria’s lesbian sexuality. When Maria later failed to be successful in her office assistant program, she recalled what she had described as racist attitudes towards aboriginals, on the part of the college’s

administrator. The administrator had apparently expressed that he loved aboriginal students, but that he saw so few of them actually being able to complete their program of studies.

Carmen partly attributed her lack of success in her first upgrading attempt to a lack of fit between herself and the majority of the students. Her fellow students were mostly new immigrants, who spoke in languages other than English with one another. She said that she felt like “the minority.” Moreover, even amongst members of her own ethnicity at that school, Carmen identified reasons for not fitting in: “The ones that were white—they’re just so like clique-y and they remind me of kids in high school who’d harass me, so it just brought up a lot of bad feelings, like it wasn’t a positive learning area.”

Because Maria and Carmen were unsuccessful in their school efforts, it made sense that they would try to locate something outside of themselves to blame for this outcome, in order to spare their own feelings about themselves, and to save face in front of others. However, they did not just blame other people. They blamed others on the basis that they were made to *feel* unwelcome or out of place, which is what they felt had most compromised their chances of being successful. Perhaps Maria and Carmen chose such targets to blame, because they might do a better job of deflecting questions about their abilities, than if they had, perhaps, blamed a lack of help at school, or the quality of the teaching. However, it may also be that they may have felt even more strongly than Tamara and Jay did, that they truly did not belong in school, because they could not cope with the academic demands. After all, if you are able to at least do the work at school, you would feel that you had some right to belong there, even if you felt yourself to be a social misfit in every other way.

Although it is possible that their feelings of not belonging did compromise their academic performance, it should be noted that Tamara was also a racial minority in her predominantly aboriginal alternative school and her predominantly aboriginal upgrading program. Moreover, it could be argued

that Jay may have been even more likely than the others to have *felt* like an outcast at school, given the number of social occasions that he had to pass on, to avoid being with peers who were drinking. Despite these exclusionary circumstances, it appeared that Jay and Tamara still had a greater sense that they could belong in their school environments.

Their greater academic efficacy may have influenced Jay and Tamara to have an internal locus of control (a tendency to attribute their own success or failure to personal, dispositional qualities, such as effort or ability) (Rotter, 1990). An internal locus of control could have been what inclined them towards seeing themselves as individuals who were struggling to fit into school environments, due to their own social deficits. In contrast, Carmen and Maria appeared to demonstrate an external locus of control (a tendency to attribute their own success or failure to situational factors such as an unwelcoming atmosphere or a teacher's bias against them) (Rotter, 1990). Though such external attributions for their failures may serve the purpose of deflecting questions about their academic abilities, it may also be that Maria and Carmen may have consciously or unconsciously reversed the cause and effect of their academic difficulties. They may have developed an external locus of control (the real effect) as a result of their histories of school failure (the real cause). Youths with learning problems are more likely to have an external locus of control (Hallahan, Gajar, Chen, & Carver, 1978). It is understandable that such youths would be less likely to feel in control of their lives than academically successful ones.

However, having an external locus of control could also have been at least partly responsible for their most recent academic struggles, apart from their lack of abilities, given that such an orientation results in more motivational problems such as less effort, less perseverance with difficult tasks, and problems with help seeking. Such problems have been described as "learned helplessness" (Seligman, as cited in Hiroto, 1974, p.187). When Maria encountered difficulty with the accounting module of her office assistant program, she was very resistant to the idea that she could salvage her performance in

this area, by getting help from her teachers or from other people whom she knew had studied accounting.

That said, it should be noted that feeling unwelcome, by itself, can ultimately lead to external attributions for one's failures. Cacioppo (2008) explains that if you are socially connected, you will tend to attribute your successes to your own action and your failures to bad luck, but "when we feel socially isolated and depressed, we tend to reverse this useful illusion and turn even small errors into catastrophes -- at least in our own minds. Meanwhile, we use the same everyday cognitive shortcuts [blaming something in the situation] to try and barricade ourselves against criticism and responsibility for our screw ups" (p.29). Both Carmen and Maria acknowledged that they could have tried harder while in school. For example, Maria admitted to writing poetry on Facebook while she should have been working on the modules of her office assistant program. Carmen admitted that she was "not serious" the first time that she had tried upgrading, and was using drugs 'heavier' than marijuana more frequently at the time. At the same time, however, they also blamed their own lack of effort and focus on being in environments that they did not feel were supportive of them.

In sum then, a history of school failure could promote an external locus of control that leads to less effort being expended on one's current academic program, and attributions of failure to situational factors, like feeling unwelcome at school, which can also be used to justify one's low effort. That said, a feeling of being socially isolated or lonely has also been linked, on its own, to a passive coping style which manifests itself in learned helpless types of behaviors, such as low effort and low persistence (Cacioppo, 2008). Carmen and Maria (as well as Tamara) had longstanding problems with making friends at school, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. One would especially expect that Maria and Carmen would have had more reason to remember their interactions with their teachers, throughout the years, as being unsupportive, and perhaps even punitive or shaming, given their history of learning

challenges. Thus in one form or another, it seems likely that both real and/or perceived social alienation at school, as well as learning difficulties, were likely involved in Maria's and Carmen's lack of academic success.

One problem that all of the youths shared, in regards to their being able to demonstrate the social competence that they needed for mainstream life, were difficulties with regulating their anger. Tamara and Jay recognized that their workplaces required them to inhibit displays of anger; nevertheless, they struggled with this demand. Tamara, for example, spoke of knowing that she was supposed to "bite her lip" rather than lash out in anger, but said that she could not do it all the time. She recalled that her co-workers at her mall kiosk job "saw what was up", referring to her inability to repress her feelings. Tamara remarked "I told people how it fucking was -- customers too." Tamara was also fired from her job at the strip club, after she yelled at her boss. She was angry because he had told her to talk to everybody in the room, even though she had already done so. Likewise, Jay had assumed that he could challenge his boss, if he knew he was "in the right" about some issue.

As mentioned previously, Maria had also worried that she might lash out at customers if she ever held a customer service role. Like Tamara and Jay, she often lost control of her anger due to having problems with authority. She recalled having "mouthed off" to her Supported Independent Living (SIL) landlord, when they had had a dispute about the number of friends that she could have over to her basement suite: "[I would] act like my mother and shit—ordered [the] landlord back upstairs." Maria explained that she followed the model of her mother and other family members "[who are] rank and wild and say what's on their mind. They don't give a crap who you are." It appeared that she was especially sensitive about anyone who gave her "attitude" (i.e., acted in a way that implied that they were better than Maria and/or could wield power over her). I will elaborate on how Maria repeatedly clashed with staff in group homes and other settings over this issue in chapter five.

As Maria's history of aggressing against people who gave her "attitude" suggests, apart from lacking knowledge on how to deal effectively with authority figures, the youths' problems with anger regulation stemmed from having had too much practise with displaying anger in their street lives. In their street lives, it was socially acceptable to be a "bitch" or to beat people up, in order to establish power and control over others. For example, it was important for those selling drugs, like Jay and Carmen, to act tough, so that people would not take advantage of them. Jay and his street family also had to be aggressive, in order to maintain their status or "reputation" on the street. Though Maria and Tamara had never been drug dealers, their beating up people had afforded them powerful identities at school, in group homes, and on the street. Tamara acknowledged that it had been "cool" to beat people up. During her early to mid-teen years, Maria had adopted the persona of "a real hardcore fucking butch dyke," which made it more acceptable for her to fight boys in the schoolyard. Her ability to get her way by aggressing against staff and other youths in group homes gave her such a heady sense of power that by the age of sixteen, she recalled thinking, "I'm gonna take over the world!"

Getting angry was also a way for the youth to vent their frustrations, especially if they were on a drug like methamphetamine. Tamara remarked "I freaked out lots...I did hurt people, like I would hit people if somebody looked at me on the bus." It should be noted that such drug fuelled aggression was not described as either being compulsive or impulsive. Though drugs may have inclined them more to "freak out," Tamara and Maria both spoke about having curtailed their assaults on others when they turned eighteen, to avoid being convicted as adults. It appeared that drugs facilitated aggression when negative consequences were assessed as not being too likely or too serious *and* when feelings of anger were already present. Carmen suggested that methamphetamine had amplified her feelings of anger, which in turn, resulted in her engaging in more severe physical and verbal aggression against her father than she thinks she would have done if she had been sober.

Furthermore, getting angry had been the youths' most common way of solving interpersonal problems. Another component to Tamara's social anxiety was that she did not know how to negotiate the clashes of opinion that would come up between her and her classmates. Knowing that she could not lash out at her classmates at school, she withdrew from them in frustration: "I don't wanna talk to them."

Not only did the youths have trouble with knowing how to handle situations differently, but they also had trouble knowing when it was even appropriate to be angry with someone else, within mainstream contexts. For example, Jay was confused about the intent of one of his classmates when she had flicked a pencil at him at school. Though his initial reaction was to feel angry at her, Jay could not figure out if he had just cause for being angry. He was confused about whether this action was intended to get his attention in a joking way, or if it was a mean-spirited way to make fun of him in front of others. Jay's difficulty in reading the social cues in this situation appeared to reflect a social information processing deficit, which has been observed in other disadvantaged male minority adolescents (Graham, Hudley & Williams, 1992). His initial response of anger reflected a "hostile attribution bias" (Dodge, Price, Bachorowski, & Newman, 1990, p.385) meaning that he was prone to perceive a hostile intent behind behaviours that may not have actually posed any threat to him. Because aggression is so much a part of the lifestyle and self-definition of street youths, it was likely hard for Jay to not be predisposed to seeing threats, in neutral or even benign situations. Jay said that he was not accustomed to people being so light-hearted in mainstream life, given that anger and aggression had dominated his street life interactions.

In addition to problems with social processing, problems with anger reflected maladaptive ways of processing and regulating other emotions, such as feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and boredom. As mentioned previously, Tamara would resort to acting like a "bitch", when she was anxious about how to

interact with other young women. On the other hand, Carmen observed that when her self-confidence improved, as a result of being involved with the arts-oriented youth agency, she became more composed in the way that she approached stressful situations. Though she had been stressed about being homeless and couch-surfing at the time, circumstances which would have normally caused her to be “freaking out more and overreacting”, she was instead “a lot more calm about it and trying to deal with it in a positive way.” Maria admitted to intentionally getting angry, when her time to leave a residential placement, like a group home, was getting closer. When she was no longer subjected to a structured routine in such settings, because she was only going to be there for a few more days, she would “act out” (e.g., call staff names, “act like a shithead”) because she was bored. (Other childhood reasons for the youths’ difficulties with regulating their anger, such as experiencing abuse, will be discussed in the next chapter.)

It has been suggested that the street cultural norms of power, control, and aggression may have been a collective response to having experienced abuse, poverty, and other related stressors (Tough 2011). This may occur through interactions between the physiological changes that occur to traumatized individuals and the social systems in which they take part. Nadine Burke, a pediatrician in an inner city clinic in San Francisco, explains that

You can trace the pathology [i.e., the development of habitual aggressive responses] as it moves from the molecular level to the social level. You have a girl who grows up in a household where there’s domestic violence, or some kind of horrible arguing between her parents. That triggers her fight-or-flight response, which affects the way the hormone receptors in her brain develop, and as she grows up her stress-regulation system goes off track. Maybe she overreacts to confrontation, or maybe it’s the opposite – that she does not recognize risky situations, and feels comfortable only around a lot of drama. So she ends up with a partner who’s abusive. Then

the pathology moves from the individual level to the household level, because that partner beats their kids, and then their son goes to a school where ten out of thirty kids are experiencing the same thing. Those kids create a classroom of hitting, of fighting – not just for the ten kids but for all thirty. Then those kids get a little older, and they’re teenagers, and they behave violently, and then they beat *their* kids. And it’s just accepted. It becomes a cultural norm.<sup>27</sup> (as cited in Tough, 2011, p.30)

**Sobriety efficacy.** The preceding discussions of vocational/academic efficacy and social skills efficacy indicated that the main ways that Jay developed his efficacy beliefs were through his becoming increasingly more proficient in his skills over time, and by having others recognize, and further encourage, his skills development. Efficacy, in turn, would have contributed to the development of a fundamental sense that he could exert control over his environment. Bandura (2001) considers self-efficacy to be the most important mechanism of personal agency, which he defines as “the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one’s actions” (p.10). Efficacy enables one to become future-oriented: One believes that she is capable of realizing goals that she has set for herself, in areas in which she possesses efficacy. It makes sense for such a person to be motivated to apply their efforts towards goal-oriented behaviour. Efficacy also underlies efforts to monitor one’s progress towards goals, and to adjust the kind and amount of goal-oriented behaviours that one engages in, based on whether one perceives one’s self to be either making progress or not making progress towards one’s goals (i.e., self-regulation) (Bandura, 2001).

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<sup>27</sup> Burke (as cited in Tough, 2011) points out that this is how people, including African Americans, come to erroneously believe that black people beat their kids as a cultural parenting practice when in fact this family violence originated with individual physiological responses to trauma that give rise to a violent social culture in the family and elsewhere in the community, as described above.

In contrast to how Jay had acquired his other efficacy beliefs, it was actually his acceptance of his lack of control over his drug and alcohol consumption that was the key to his becoming sober and to his maintaining his sobriety. Jay was the only one of the youth participants who had wholeheartedly embraced the philosophy of total abstinence, which characterizes popular twelve-step fellowship groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Jay accepted the ideology of such groups, which chiefly involves the belief that addicts are powerless to control their use of drugs or alcohol. This belief motivated him to commit to the concomitant belief in the need for addicts to completely abstain from drugs and alcohol. Jay came to these conclusions following his participation in the drug and alcohol treatment program that his workers from the ex-offender re-entry program had recommended. This thirty day residential program was based on the tenets of twelve step groups. It encouraged ongoing participation in fellowship meetings within participants' local communities, as follow up support to their treatment program.

By giving up the idea that he has control over his drug and alcohol consumption, Jay ultimately was able to gain control over his misuse of drugs and alcohol. This belief in his powerlessness was the umbrella under which Jay began to implement strategies to ensure that he would keep away from using drugs and alcohol, which included the previously discussed strategy of staying away from anyone else (e.g., fellow classmates) who used drugs or alcohol. Jay's efficacy in his capacity to become sober then developed as a result of his successful implementation of such strategies. As with the development of his other efficacy beliefs, Jay grew increasingly confident about his ability to stay sober from observing his success at keeping away from drugs and alcohol for longer and longer periods. He commented that just as his confidence in his academic abilities had grown over time, seeing that he could stay sober for first a duration of thirty days, then sixty days, then ninety days, and so forth, gave him confidence that

he could have a future as a sober person. Previous to his participation in treatment, he was not able to make it past two days of abstaining from drugs and alcohol on his own.

Despite his eventual, incremental progress in this area, Jay had doubts initially about the need for him to remain completely sober in the long term, as well as doubts about his capacity to even get sober in the first place. He had decided to comply with his workers' recommendation for treatment, based mostly on his trust that they were steering him in the right direction for continuing his successful transition into a mainstream life. However, Jay had not internalized any rationale from his workers about why sobriety was necessary for him to meet his mainstream goals for himself. At the time, he recalled questioning in his own mind whether it would be worth it for him to become sober. That is, what kind of payoff in mainstream life could he expect as a result of becoming sober? Even if Jay could have been convinced of the necessity of giving up the pleasures of drugs and alcohol for mainstream success, he still wondered whether the pleasure he would derive from mainstream success would be worth giving up the pleasures of drugs and alcohol. This questioning makes sense when one considers that Jay had no experience with sober models amongst his family and friends. His doubts about being able to become sober make sense, given his track record of only being able to abstain for two days on his own, and the fact that he had been using drugs since he was thirteen. These doubts about becoming sober were reinforced when he saw people like himself leave treatment early on in the program.

Jay's initial reluctance about being in treatment was transformed by the fact that his girlfriend at the time betrayed the promise that they had made to each another to complete treatment. Jay's girlfriend had been attending a different treatment program at the same time that Jay was attending his program. When he received news of her leaving her program, Jay was challenged to consider whether he truly wanted to continue to get sober for himself, now that the dream that he and his girlfriend had shared about starting their relationship over as sober people was gone. Though one might imagine that

seeing other people like himself leave treatment, including his girlfriend, might tip the scales towards his own leaving of the program, Jay's commitment to sobriety was actually strengthened by his girlfriend's quitting. He discovered that he did want to achieve sobriety for himself, regardless of whether his girlfriend became sober.

It appeared that Jay's anger over his girlfriend's betrayal, along with his acceptance of the tenets of the twelve step program, together fuelled his now certain conviction that he wanted to complete treatment for himself. According to Jay, the twelve step philosophy stresses the idea that one should be motivated to quit drugs/alcohol for one's own self, rather than for someone else's wishes or needs. Jay's treatment program also stressed that the road to recovery is often a "solo road", because the person who commits to sobriety must be prepared to leave behind those people who do not support them in their sobriety. This includes anyone who could make Jay vulnerable to using again. As Jay learned more about these ideas, he started to see his girlfriend as just one of many other people that he would have to "sacrifice," if he was to become sober for himself.

The idea that he needed to exclude others from his life fit with other thoughts about how to be successful in mainstream society that Jay had already begun to entertain. For example, he was aware that he was constantly being pulled back into the street lifestyle, because of the company (i.e., street peers) that he still kept at that time. Also, despite his initial misgivings about his need for drug/alcohol treatment, it appeared as though deep down he had already accepted that sobriety would be an important part of his committing to a mainstream life. This was reflected by the fact that when he made the decision to go to treatment, he also decided to stop living a 'double life'. (I will later discuss how Jay straddled the world of street life and the world in which he was trying to reform himself, for some time, before he finally gave up his involvement with criminal activities entirely.)

Jay's trust in his ex-offender re-entry program workers, and his positive view of the programs that they had exposed him to, had likely also primed him to accept that drug/alcohol treatment might have something good to offer him. He said that he had noticed that when he used his own brain that it would get him into trouble, whereas he did better when he followed his workers' suggestions for him. His workers had earned his trust by proving that they knew what it would take to make Jay successful in mainstream life. This was what had influenced Jay to agree to treatment, without being fully convinced of its value initially.

The relative ease with which Jay accepted the need for abstinence was not shared by the other youths. Carmen and Tamara especially did not accept the twelve step philosophy of requiring abstinence. They did not agree with the belief that addicts are powerless over their consumption, because they rejected the idea of addiction as being a life-long disease that controls the behavior of those afflicted with it. Rather they saw themselves as having more much personal control over their use of drugs, even if they did relapse from time to time. Rather than being compulsively driven by physiological cravings, these young women maintained that they could quit or reduce their use of drugs, even without professional assistance. Carmen, for example, prided herself on her ability to quit drugs on her own: "Yeah, I quit meth[amphetamine] on my own. I quit crack on my own. [I] lasted four days in name of treatment program for E [ecstasy] and K [ketamine] and coke, and then I just walked myself to my apartment and quit." Tamara expressed indignation at the presumption of powerlessness that is made by twelve step groups. She insisted that no drug could control her mind, because her "own brain" (i.e., her mental willpower) is stronger than any physical craving. Consequently, she rejected the idea that people with problematic drug use are going to be addicts forever due to their incurable disease.

Tamara said that her belief about herself as being too mentally strong to be enslaved to a drug came from a former boyfriend of hers who would not accept her then claim that she could not stop

using drugs, on account of her addiction. This boyfriend challenged her to see that she had a choice in her destiny, by saying things like, "Are you gonna be a bum your whole life? Nobody controls you. Police don't control you, if you don't do anything wrong." This boyfriend would apparently goad her into recognizing the extent of her willpower with respect to resisting drugs by insinuating that she was weak. Being provoked to respond angrily ("I'm not weak. Fuck you!") likely helped to reinforce the idea that Tamara possessed more control over her drug use than she had previously believed. Tamara's then boyfriend also refused to allow her to manipulate him by blaming him if she relapsed -- another measure that would have forced Tamara to accept personal responsibility for her drug use.

This philosophy of having personal control and responsibility due to her mental strength was also reinforced by her mother's attitude towards drug use. Tamara's mother was unwavering in her view that addictions were a "crutch", which people were capable of freeing themselves from, just as she herself had once managed to be successful in quitting smoking. Tamara's mother's thoughts about drug use were consistent with her overall orientation to life, which stressed personal responsibility for one's circumstances above all else. For example, Tamara's mother was unsympathetic to the idea of people needing government assistance if they are unemployed. She also refused to believe that there was such a thing as mental illness, believing instead that people invoked psychological disorders to escape taking responsibility for their problems. These views were in sharp contrast to those of Tamara's biological father, who did subscribe to the disease model of addiction, and had invoked this model to explain his own problems with drug use. However, Tamara had had little interaction with her biological father over the years, because her parents broke up when she was a baby, and her father was incarcerated for long periods of time, due to crimes that were related to his drug use. Tamara has continued to not have a relationship with her father, as she resented him for missing out on so much of her childhood, on account of his being in jail.

The philosophy espoused by Tamara's boyfriend and her mother appeared to resonate with Tamara's view of herself as someone who is strong and powerful. She explained her resistance to drug and alcohol fellowship groups as follows: "I'm not fucking powerless to anything. I could rule the fucking world if I wanted. People are weak if they let something control them." Tamara further explained that her boyfriend's perspective made such a big impact on her "because [her] whole life was a big lie." She was referring to having lied extensively to her child welfare caseworkers about having had more serious difficulties than she had actually had, in order to acquire more resources for herself, such as better options for residential placements. (I will elaborate on Tamara's lying for more resources in the next chapter.)

Tamara's boyfriend's messages about her having more control over her life resonated with her, especially at that time, because she had started to believe her own lies. His messages woke Tamara up to the realization that she was not "broken" like so many of her peers in the "system" were. Though she had serious problem in her family life, she had not, after all, been a person who had gone through experiences like being raped every day. However, after having told countless stories to her child welfare caseworkers that imitated those of the "broken" youths that surrounded her, Tamara appeared to lose sight of the truth of her own experiences, until her boyfriend had confronted her about having more personal power than she realized. Deep down she knew herself to be someone who was truly strong and in control of herself, in contrast to the lies that she had been telling.

Though Tamara saw her philosophy of relying on her willpower as being most responsible for her sobriety, she also noted that the timing of her boyfriend's messages coincided with her child welfare caseworker's plans to close her file. Tamara's boyfriend's messages also coincided with Tamara having used up all the connections she had for getting drugs. Tamara could no longer buy drugs from anyone, because she had run away from a biker boyfriend, who had been keeping her captive. This former

boyfriend controlled the supply to many other drug dealers who were then instructed to not sell to her. Tamara's best friend also now refused to buy drugs for her. Thus having her drug supply cut off, being cut off from child welfare funding, and having a boyfriend who did not accept her claim that she could not control her drug use had together pushed Tamara to grapple with how she could become sober, before she accepted the philosophy of drug use that was espoused by her then boyfriend and her mother. Having a boyfriend had also kept her busy and gave her something to look forward to "otherwise [she would have been] depressed coming off drugs." During this time, Tamara also chose to see herself as someone who was making a choice to become sober for her own future plans of finishing her schooling – a choice which may have taken some of the sting out of being effectively forced to give up drugs, before she had actually wanted to stop using them herself. Tamara maintained that no one gets serious about giving up drugs "until [they] burn [their] bridges" somehow with respect to being able to access drugs.

Carmen had also identified as being a strong person. She talked about her personal strength as being a product of her having survived highly traumatic experiences, like being assaulted and kidnapped by a man who took her to Eastern Canada. Recalling that incident, she commented that "at least I know [that] put into a life and death situation in that kind of condition, I survive. Just kind of empowering. I'm definitely not a weak person." She believed that she survived that incident because of her "street sense" and "everything [she's] gone through [in her] life that's made [her] a stronger person [referring to having endured many stressors in her home life and on the street]." She remarked, "If I didn't have that [strength] to keep me alive, I'd be dead."

It appeared that both Carmen's mother and Tamara's mother had also inculcated in each young woman a sense that they should be strong and not dependent on other people, especially men. This message appeared to be a product of their mothers' experiences of being in abusive relationships. Of

her mother, Carmen commented that “she had no choice but to be dependent on my dad... [because she was pregnant with Carmen at the age of nineteen.] I always wondered why she like pushed me so hard to be like a really strong female and [have a] career. Never depend on a guy.” Although they themselves had also been victimized by men, Carmen and Tamara were especially sensitive about being thought of as weak. Carmen remarked, “I survive a lot and I’m a very strong person. No one in the world can tell me I’m weak.” Tamara especially wanted me to be clear about the fact that when she takes money or other gifts from men, she is the one who is always in control of the relationship.

Carmen and Tamara appeared to have maintained their beliefs in their personal strength, in spite of their own victimization, because they attributed their victimization to having witnessed their mothers accept abusive treatment from their male partners. Carmen and Tamara each speculated that they must have learned to be attracted to abusive boyfriends from witnessing their mothers’ relationships with men. This attribution implies that their own, previous mistakes with men were due to bad modelling, as opposed to having a truly weak character. Moreover as mentioned above, Carmen felt that her ability to survive getting involved with highly dangerous men had helped to make her a strong person.

Given this valuing of their inner strength, it was not surprising that Tamara wanted me to emphasize that her philosophy on addictions was the thing that had most helped her to get sober, irrespective of all of the other aforementioned factors that had also pushed her into giving up drugs.<sup>28</sup> Though she had attended a thirty day treatment program like the one that Jay had attended, she did not

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<sup>28</sup> Tamara was emphatic that I discuss her philosophy about self-control in my dissertation, so that others could learn from it.

find anything that was said there to be of much value to her.<sup>29</sup> Given her emphasis on personal control, she did not view having a relapse as something that would threaten all of the gains that she had been making in her transition to a mainstream life. A relapse would not destroy her, as it was just a temporary lapse in self-control that she could quickly set right again. Since becoming sober, Tamara had taken cocaine, and on one occasion, she had even taken methamphetamine again. These incidents confirmed for her that she could have an occasional relapse without being pulled down a slippery slope into problematic drug use again. Jay, in contrast, had perceived a potential relapse as something that would lead him to quickly and invariably spiral back down to negative outcomes such as going back to jail.

Like Tamara, Carmen was also not concerned about relapses. In fact, she still took pills at times, although in a much lower amount and much less frequently than she had in the past. Though she admitted to having been “fiendy” (i.e., compulsive) about her drug use in the past, she was confident that her occasional use would not become problematic in this way again. Like Tamara, she said that she could “do a line [of cocaine] and not go hard core.” Carmen explained that she could now regulate her consumption because she knew how to moderate her use: “Yeah I’m not gonna turn one pill into thirty pills. If I just say ‘Ok, I can taste but not indulge, I’ll be ok’. It’s like doing one line of coke and not a whole gram. One pill and not like five.” She drew a distinction between recreational use of drugs and abuse of drugs: “There’s drug abuse and there’s drug using. You know? There’s a very, very thick line between the two.” Carmen also felt that she could regulate her use because she knew what signs to watch for her in herself, with respect to becoming “fiendy.” She said that she still would occasionally take ecstasy but when she felt the desire to take more than one pill, she stopped herself: “As soon as I feel like that

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<sup>29</sup> Tamara described treatment as being a good place for someone who needed to “get away” for a while, because no demands are placed on you during your stay, other than attending group counselling. She said that if someone were homeless, she would recommend treatment to them as a place to stay for a while.

addiction creeping up on me, I just have to stop. It's ok if it's just recreational, but as soon as it's past that and [I] really start using, [I] shouldn't be touching it."

While Carmen's comments above suggest the ease at which one can become addicted, as defined by experiencing cravings for drugs, the other youths spoke even less about their cravings as being a driver of their drug use. Tamara dismissed the power that is often ascribed to such cravings, by saying that she had learned somewhere that cravings only last for about six minutes anyway. Jay acknowledged that he had never found it hard to resist taking drugs while in prison, despite the fact that it would not have been hard for him to have obtained them while in jail. Though Maria had talked about cravings, and had even experienced a craving while telling me about one of the first times that she had done crack, she was easily distracted from the craving, when I deliberately changed the topic of our conversation.

The relative insignificance of cravings as a motivator for the youths' drug use makes sense when one considers the other experiences that had allowed Carmen and Tamara to feel in control of their drug use. Carmen pointed out that if she was not experiencing a great deal of stress or emotional pain, and that if she had other activities that gave her pleasure (i.e., alternative reinforcers, as behaviorist psychologists would put it), then she felt little compulsion to do drugs: "If my life's doing good [like] I have no like stresses or real reason to fucking do it and I have positive out[side] things I can do instead, like why the fuck am I gonna do it? There's no point." Self-control was also facilitated by thinking about the aversive consequences of their drug use. Carmen said that drugs had "enough [of a negative effect on her life] to the point where the idea of drugs disgust [her]." She became especially unhappy with herself whenever she would let her desire to use drugs get out of check: "Yeah, once I'm not really being myself anymore and I'm turning into drug dealer Carmen [to support her drug use], then I just shy away from the drugs."

Similarly, in explaining to me why relapse should not be considered a big deal, Tamara pointed out that people relapse all the time, whether it is with drugs or other things that they are addicted to. To make this point, she asked me, “Are you ever on a diet and need a piece of cake?” Given the similarity she drew between relapsing with drugs and feeling compelled to eat ‘forbidden’ foods, her reasoning that “you are only afraid of relapse if you can’t control yourself”, after having giving in to the compulsion, made sense.

Tamara’s likening of a drug relapse to ‘relapsing’ on a diet did not seem like she was deliberately underplaying a compulsion to use drugs. Rather, recent research has demonstrated that similar regions of the brain appear to be involved in the experience of cravings and rewards for drugs like cocaine and for high glycemic foods (foods that contain a high amount of added sugar or refined carbohydrates) (Macdonald, Francis, Gowland, Hardman, & Halford, 2013). Although such research is typically interpreted as suggesting that junk food could be as addictive as cocaine, it could also be that cocaine may be as addictive as junk food. The latter interpretation, however, does not fit with the popular view that addicts are driven to use substances like cocaine in a highly compulsive way, which affords them very little control over their behaviour.

In keeping with the research linking cocaine with high glycemic foods (Macdonald et al., 2013), Tamara and Carmen did not appear to see drugs as being that different in their addictive potential from other behaviors that they had felt drawn to engage in, as a way of coping with their emotions. Carmen, for example, described her urge to cut herself when she is emotionally distressed as “the only addiction” that she now had. She said that though she tries to resist cutting, she can still give into the urge to do so, even though she felt that she “should be able to kinda stop it better.” Her reason for still sometimes giving into the urge to cut was that she “[doesn’t] have drugs as a crutch or anything” right now. That said, for the most part, Carmen now feels that she has “way more healthier things that make [her]

happy and feel better, so she just tries to do [those things] -- just try and distract myself [with] poetry [and] art," rather than self-injure. Thus the presence of alternative reinforcers made it possible for Carmen to resist cutting in the same way that they helped her to resist using drugs.

Similarly, Tamara drew upon the language of addiction when she described her attraction to men who could put her at risk for physical harm, by assaulting her and/or by getting her to be involved with drugs and crime again. In describing her desire for one such young man, she had talked about her potential for "relapsing" by dating him. Like Carmen with respect to cutting, Tamara said that she knew that she should not go in that direction, but felt that she was "probably" going to do it anyway. Thus though she felt compelled, she was still aware that she was making a choice to "go all the way to the bottom" by getting involved with this young man, as she typically did when she felt pulled by such circumstances. She said that she knew that she should try to "climb" her way back up instead, but that that was not likely to happen. Later, Tamara admitted to feeling compelled to date such men on account of her loneliness and her inability to sustain a relationship with a more 'normal' mainstream boyfriend (i.e., a lack of alternative reinforcers).

Given that their lived experience of addiction had more to do with emotional coping than physical cravings, Tamara and Carmen knew that they could regulate their drug use if they really chose to do so. Obviously the presence of alternative reinforcers made the choice to not use drugs or to not give into other risky behaviors more likely. Of course, they could not have even seen themselves as capable of making such choices, if they had not already been predisposed to view themselves as strong, powerful agents who could regulate how much they used. As such, Carmen and Tamara appeared to have an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1990) with respect to their drug use. In contrast, Jay's external locus of control (Rotter, 1990) was demonstrated through his belief that he is powerless to control his consumption of drugs and alcohol. In comparing Jay with Carmen and Tamara, it is easy to see why

twelve step groups have been criticized for not allowing room for personal agency (Laudet, 2013).

However, given that Jay likened the incremental process of how he gained confidence in his ability to be sober to how he developed his academic and vocational efficacy beliefs, this may have kept him from seeing his lack of choice about abstinence as a disempowering experience. Jay may have also seen himself as a particularly strong person for being able to successfully engage in such strategies as cutting non-sober people out of his life.

Rather than voice ideas about being personally strong enough to resist being held hostage to her addictions, Maria, like Jay, appeared to have a basic commitment to the philosophy of abstinence. Like Jay, her adoption of this stance was informed by the input of her social workers and other professionals. Her commitment to becoming sober appeared to have been especially informed by the relationship that she had developed with one guard, in particular, that she had come to know during her stints in the young offender centre. Even greater than the trust that Jay had placed in his ex-offender re-entry program workers was the love that Maria appeared to have developed for this guard. Maria became so attached to the guard that she asked her repeatedly if she would adopt her. In an apparent attempt to influence Maria's behaviour when she got out of jail, the guard told Maria that although she cared about her, she did not think that she could include Maria amongst those whom she thought of as her friends, because she could not be friends with people who used drugs. As soon as Maria heard this, she resolved on the spot to give up her use of drugs, in order to please the guard and stay connected to her. Though Maria had developed attachments to other professionals such as youth workers and counsellors, throughout her years in care, it was her relationship with this particular guard that had affected her the most. During our interviews, Maria often spoke about hoping to see this woman again someday. Maria still struggled with the fact that their relationship had to come to an end, when she had left the young offender centre for the last time.

Maria's relational motivation for her sobriety was consistent with the desire that she had expressed to be the 'good' girl that did the 'right' things, thereby earning the approval of her 'good' social workers and other professionals. (I will elaborate on this desire in the next chapter.) Though Maria had treated the sobriety commitment that she had made to the young offender centre guard seriously, there were times that she had nevertheless relapsed by using crack. On these occasions, Maria felt terrible for betraying her commitment. She worried about whether her former guard would see her as a bad person who was unworthy of her friendship, if she knew that Maria had given in to using drugs again.

Though Maria beat herself up over using crack, she was much more accepting of using alcohol and marijuana, as were Tamara and Carmen. Thus only Jay defined sobriety as abstaining from all drugs and alcohol, at all times. However, Maria was more aligned with Jay with respect to the fact that her main strategy for avoiding relapses was excluding people from her life. By staying away from people who could tempt them back into using, Jay and Maria sought to change their environments, rather than rely on their own willpower. For example, because Maria was aware that she could easily be pulled into using crack when she visited her friends on her reserve, she made deliberate plans to 'hook up' with a girl that she had liked for a long time, to keep herself distracted when her friends would be using. In contrast, although Tamara admitted that it would be stupid for her to be around certain people that she knew who used methamphetamine, she was mostly confident that she could deal with the temptation to use by telling herself things to reduce her interest in the drug (e.g., that the craving is going to pass in a few minutes).

As the reader will continue to see repeatedly in the next section on moral identity, Carmen and Tamara harbored beliefs about themselves that were continuous with their past and present resources. These beliefs (e.g., being strong) and resources (e.g., sober friends and family) helped them to view

themselves as being capable of getting back on the 'right' and 'good' path, as many times as they needed to, in the event of relapses or other factors that could lead them astray from their mainstream goals. On the other hand, Jay and Maria were often taxed with the strategy of cutting off from friends and family in their environments, because most, if not all, of their friends and family members had serious problems with drugs and alcohol.

Jay and Maria sensed that they would be inevitably trapped by their environments, if they did not self-exclude from most of their social networks. Although self-excluding initially may have helped Jay get over the loss of his girlfriend while in treatment, excluding from almost everyone he knew did make it harder for him to experience sobriety as rewarding and motivating. Instead of the positive reinforcement for sobriety that Carmen and Tamara could experience from many of their family and friends, Jay talked of his loneliness and of "how [he] still [doesn't] have [his] family," despite all the sacrifices that he made to become sober. Likewise, Maria spoke about her ambivalence with respect to cutting off from her family and friends. She wistfully observed that there were some people that she just could not let go of. Thus mainstream goals carried a bigger price for Jay and Maria than for Carmen and Tamara. This observation is consistent with the aforementioned research finding that success often compromises the physical health and mental health of the most disadvantaged resilient youth (Miller et al, 2014). Poor aboriginal Canadian youth such as Jay and Maria may be more likely to lack successful models to encourage them, support them, and help them feel less alone.

The requirement to abstain from all drugs and alcohol, and the concomitant strategy of excluding from others to achieve sobriety were only a few of the reasons that total abstinence was rejected by the three female participants. The absence of other young people like themselves in fellowship meetings and treatment programs also appeared to have played a role in the young women's disinterest in abstinence. Maria and Tamara spoke of having a difficult time meeting other 'suitable'

young people at Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), respectively. Maria said that there was no one at AA meetings that was in her age group. Similar to what Tamara had expressed about her treatment program, she felt that the topics being discussed in such meetings did not relate to her life, and would probably have no relevance for her future either: “[It] wasn’t me or something I felt I would even need ever?” None of the young women felt that they could relate to the older addicts, whom they characterized as being much more derelict and destitute than themselves. They could not relate to the stories that these older adults told of how their lives had been utterly destroyed by addictions. The few younger adults who did attend these meetings appeared to have serious mental health problems of their own, and therefore were not stable people for the young women to befriend. As an example, Tamara had told me about having dated one young man whom she had met at an NA meeting. She said that he had gotten her pregnant and stole her belongings. Tamara had allowed this boyfriend to stay with her for a short time, because he was homeless.

It is interesting that Jay did not speak of feeling out of place in such meetings, given that he also did not identify with the hard-core drug users who frequented inner city drop-in centers and homeless shelters. It may be that Jay was more motivated to comply with twelve step programming because of his greater motivation for educational success and career success, relative to the young women participants. Jay was eager to do whatever he and his ex-offender re-entry program workers thought could help him best accomplish his mainstream career goals. On the other hand, the young women in this study appeared to be more motivated by social goals. They were more concerned about missing out on friendships and concerned about being seen as social misfits, given how pervasive alcohol and marijuana use is.

None of the young women worried about their alcohol or marijuana use turning into a serious problem for them in the long-term. Though Maria sometimes asked me if I thought she was “partying

too much”, and would decide to quit or slow down her consumption when she felt it was getting excessive, she also said, “It’s not like I wanna be sober forever.” She meant that she saw her periods of excess drinking as being short-term problems that she could manage, rather than something that would limit her behaviour in the future. Similarly, Tamara regarded her past problems with drug use as a time-limited problem of her youth. She therefore contended that she will always drink alcohol. Carmen appeared to feel the same way about marijuana. She pointed out that she hardly knows of anyone who has not smoked marijuana.

The young women’s views about being able to moderate their consumption of alcohol and marijuana, (and Tamara and Carmen’s views about relapse), are consistent with a harm reduction philosophy of drug and alcohol use. Professionals who espouse a harm reduction philosophy rather than abstinence encourage addicts to moderate their consumption by helping them become more aware of, and informed about, the kinds of health risks that they may be incurring from their substance use (University of Ottawa, n.d., para.5). Harm reductionists thus focus on increasing the safety of the user, by adopting a gradual approach to improving health behaviors. Problems with drugs are viewed as being on a continuum, so categorical judgments of people’s use of drugs as good or bad are inappropriate: “It tries not to stigmatize users and allows them to address the underlying problem in their own time” (University of Ottawa, n.d., para. 5).

Despite the congruence of the harm reduction philosophy with the young women’s views, they did not appear to be influenced by harm reduction professionals. Rather, their social concerns were clearly of paramount importance to them.<sup>30</sup> In addition to being concerned about not fitting in socially, they interpreted their use of drugs for coping with negative emotions as normative social behaviour.

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<sup>30</sup> Tamara’s workers from a dedicated child welfare unit for high risk youth had officially adopted the harm reduction philosophy to guide their practice. However, Tamara did not indicate that she was influenced by her caseworkers in this regard, nor had she ever spoken to them about harm reduction.

While Jay had interpreted his use of drugs to escape the pain that he felt in his family as something that indicated a serious problem with substance use<sup>31</sup>, Maria felt that the kind of excessive drinking that she would engage in after a break-up should be considered a “normal” kind of “depressive drinking”, because lots of people she knows do this.

Moreover, all of the youths would make choices about which drugs they would consume, based on their group membership and social standing. Though all of the youths identified as belonging to a “high risk” group, Tamara perceived methamphetamine users to be smarter than those who used crack, for example, because users of the former tended to engage in ‘higher level’ crimes such as credit card fraud, as opposed to street level drug dealing, to get money for their drug use. Though Jay had used both crack and methamphetamine amongst other drugs, he drew the line for himself at intravenous (IV) drug use. He felt so embarrassed by the head-nodding behaviour of one of his former girlfriends, who was an intravenous drug user, that he resisted having her visit his family, despite their own extensive use and dealing of illicit drugs.

Another reason that Carmen and Tamara may have found little value in attending a formal treatment program was because they failed to identify with the other youth participants in these programs. As white Canadian youths, they did not relate to the content of the programming which drew heavily from aboriginal spirituality and traditions. There were also no other users that had come from a rave drug scene like Carmen had. Just as Carmen had felt uncomfortable about being a “minority” in her first high school upgrading program, she described feeling so socially anxious about being around the users of other drugs such as heroin that she quit the program after being there for only a few days.

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<sup>31</sup> I will elaborate on Jay’s use of drugs for coping with his family in the next chapter.

The harm reduction stance has been controversial, primarily because it has been seen by opponents as condoning and encouraging illicit behaviours (Poulin, 2006). For young people, the issue is even more contentious, as youths are perceived to be less capable of autonomous decision-making with respect to drug use (Poulin). Developmental changes that occur to the brain during adolescence and young adulthood influence their capacity for rational judgment and impulse control (Steinberg, 2008). Moreover, due to limited life experience, “youth themselves may not recognize or acknowledge some issues to be risks or problems. The notion of compromising one’s future academic or career opportunities, for example, is a subtle problem recognized by adults, but not necessarily by youth” (Poulin, p.3).

On the other hand, street youth tend to be at very high risk for harm from “blood borne infections such as HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, participation in the sex trade, pregnancy, victimization, physical abuse, participation in criminal activities, drug overdose and suicide,” (James, 2007, p.16) all of which can be tied to their much greater consumption of substances than mainstream youth. It has been argued that their different patterns of consumption and their different health risks make harm reduction both a more acceptable and warranted response for the high risk youth population (James, 2007).

Leaving aside the developmental debate about whether high risk youth should be guided by harm reduction efforts or abstinence efforts, the fact that ninety percent of drug users are able to control their consumption so as to not allow it to significantly impair their functioning (Hart, 2013) suggests that for most youths, addiction will not be a life-long problem, as the female youth participants of this study had already appeared to surmise. That said, supporting harm reduction for the ‘wrong youth’, that is, one who has the potential to belong to the ten percent of problematic users, could cause greater problems for them. Although harm reductionists recognize that people who become chronic

addicts often have characteristics such as underlying, persistent mental health problems, it is possible that the gradual approach to reducing consumption may put the ‘wrong youth’ at greater risk for poor outcomes, by potentially delaying their access to mental health treatment and drug abuse treatment. Due to mental health difficulties and being of a young age, the ‘wrong youth’ may be especially incapable of recognizing her potential for serious and chronic substance abuse, especially given how pervasive substance use is amongst all young people and high risk youth, in particular. Such a youth may deny or minimize the need for drug treatment and mental health treatment. If they are aware of their mental health difficulties, and their use of drugs to cope with them, they may feel that their means of coping are adequate and normative. I worried that Carmen may be one of these youth.

Despite the occasional relapses of Tamara and Maria, it was Carmen who, at the time of our interviews, appeared to have the most potential to become dependent on marijuana. She relied heavily on daily marijuana use to cope with her gastrointestinal problems, and to cope with her problems with anxiety<sup>32</sup>: “Weed [is] really hard [to go without] for days where my stomach’s bad.” Carmen learned that she had a longstanding problem with anxiety, when she had a severe panic attack that was induced by her use of ecstasy and other pills. This caused her to recall that she had experienced similar problems in her childhood. Although the childhood attacks were more “mild” in severity than the drug-induced one, she recalled being confused about such experiences: “Like what the fuck is going on with me?”

Carmen felt that she had no other recourse than to treat her anxiety with marijuana, because her doctor would not diagnosis her as having anxiety while she continued to use marijuana, presumably because anxiety could be a symptom of her marijuana use (Crippa, Zuardi, Martin-Santos, Bhattacharyya, Atakan, McGuire, & Fusar-Poli, 2009). Her doctor may have also been concerned about

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<sup>32</sup> Carmen’s gastrointestinal problems may also be a symptom of her anxiety or at least a contributing factor to her anxiety. She said that her stomach problems worsened when she felt stressed.

potential interactions between prescription drugs for anxiety and marijuana. Nevertheless, Carmen said that she would have refused anti-anxiety medication such as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), on account of having had a bad reaction to the Paxil that she had been prescribed for depression when she was ten (Carmen reported feeling suicidal, and believed that she had started cutting herself, after she had begun taking Paxil.) Though her current doctor had once prescribed her Ativan (a benzodiazepine) for anxiety, she recalled finishing the bottle in one week, because of the high physical addiction potential for such drugs.

Moreover, Carmen felt that marijuana was harmless. Like many other young people, she assumed that because marijuana was a natural substance that it was a healthier alternative to psychotropic drugs. Carmen had been seeing a counsellor, though as mentioned previously, it was unlikely that her counsellor's background included significant mental health training, nor could Carmen have afforded such qualified assistance on her own. Her doctor never referred her for treatment by a publicly funded psychologist, such as those employed by hospitals, and even if she had qualified for such help, she would have likely been placed on a long waitlist for services.

All that said, it is still hard to know whether Carmen's daily, heavy use of marijuana for self-medication purposes would eventually place her in that ten percent of the population that would go on to struggle with chronic addiction throughout their adult years. It is unclear if Carmen's self-medicating and her inability to get adequate professional help are the factors that are most responsible for her continuing drug use. It is possible that other factors, such as lacking alternative reinforcers that are typically associated with identity formation in young adulthood (e.g., success at educational/vocational roles or intimate relationships) are just as influential, if not more influential, in maintaining her marijuana use.

At the time of our interviews, Carmen was using marijuana, often both before and after her upgrading classes. While this consumption likely adversely affected her school performance, Carmen did not feel that way. Carmen believed that it was not necessary to be sober in order to be productive, because she had been very productive in a series of youth workshops to learn filmmaking, when she was “getting off E [ecstasy] and [she] was like drinking every day.” She therefore saw “no reason why [she] couldn’t do both [use substances and work on something] at the same time. When I questioned her about whether schoolwork may be different than filmmaking, she admitted that using drugs “really wears on you after awhile and you can’t do it for too long.” But “you can be a moderate drug addict and go to school, [just] not a severe one.” She had apparently developed this belief by seeing that other “moderate” consumers were able to function at school. Though some of these users may well have been able to pass their courses, it did not occur to Carmen that her learning disability would make it difficult enough for her to succeed in her courses when she was sober, let alone high.

Despite Carmen’s beliefs about her schooling, I wondered whether she continued her use of marijuana, in part, as a way to protect her self-esteem, in the event that she failed to be successful at upgrading once again. Though she had partly attributed her previous failure at upgrading, and her difficulties with passing her grade ten exams to her “heavier” drug use at the time (i.e., methamphetamine rather than marijuana), she had also admitted to having always struggled in mathematics and English classes. When Tamara was still attending her alternative school for upgrading, she admitted to feeling much more pressure to be successful than when she had been doing drugs. People (e.g., her mother) now expected more from her: “If you fail you can’t blame it on the drugs [because] you are sober.” As mentioned previously, I had suspected that Carmen and Maria may have been trying to deflect questions about their academic abilities by blaming their problems with schooling

on not feeling welcome in their school environments. Thus it was hard to know much Carmen's struggles with academics may have played a role in her continuing to use marijuana.

Not only might drug use be something that protects her self-esteem, but it is also something that high risk youth do, because they have nothing else to do. Hart (2013) observed that youth and adults in impoverished communities use drugs to occupy their time, when they are shut out of opportunities for success in schools and jobs. Likewise, Carmen said that she had increased her drug use after failing at upgrading previously, because she felt she had no reason anymore to be curtailing her use, now that she no longer had school to go to. Moreover, drug using and drug dealing had allowed her to become popular amongst her peers for the first time when she was in high school. Thereafter it allowed her to find a place of belonging for herself amongst other drug using youth, and even older addicts. (I will elaborate on Carmen's feelings of inclusion amongst other drug users in the next chapter.) She even credited methamphetamine with helping her to develop social confidence. Carmen said that she would never have spoken up amongst her peers, prior to her use of the drug. Thus Carmen's drug use fulfilled several different functions (social, vocational, academic) for her, besides self-medicating her health problems.

Jay similarly admitted that drugs had provided him with his only means of survival through dealing, and with the only friends that he had, during his street life. He recalled that he would also do drugs to cope with his despair over not having any options for getting out of the street lifestyle. Jay said that he would "turn up the tunes" on the car he was driving and just "smoke up." As mentioned previously, James Marcia (1993) suggested that one reason that young people might fail to engage with the process of identity formation is because they lack any societal options to explore. The finding that such *identity diffused* youth experience the most hopelessness (Selles et al., as cited in Kroger, 2004),

relative to youth who find some way to engage with societal options for their identities, fits with Jay's experience.

Thus contrary to popular thinking about high risk youth, their use of drugs may reflect their lack of viable opportunities for themselves, rather than being the cause of their failure to pursue careers. It seems reasonable that Maria's partying with her friends and family may have been a habit that she fell into, because she lacked many opportunities to audition for acting roles. Maria's partying may have also been a way for her to escape having to face her fears about not being successful at such work, rather than distracting her from engaging with such opportunities. Avoidance of having to test out your abilities is similar to the idea of protecting your self-esteem with the knowledge that you were using drugs, in the event of school failure. The idea that that the youths may have relied on drugs, in one way or another, to escape their own fears of failure, and others' coming to know of their possible failures, makes sense in light of their problems with academic efficacy and vocational efficacy.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of drug use being fuelled by a lack of societal options for mainstream success (or possibly even a perceived lack of options, in view of the youths' struggles with efficacy) is supported by applied research with drug addicts. Drug treatment programs that use contingency management, which

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<sup>33</sup> "Minority group adolescents growing up in poverty with unemployed, alcoholic fathers who identify with the category "disadvantaged" often accept their semantic assignment because it protects them from the pain of disappointment should efforts to better their condition fail. Humans find uncertainty so unpleasant that they are willing to live with an undesirable conception of self if it absorbs some of the tensions generated by not knowing what they should do" (Kagan, 2007, p.175-176). Maria may have been especially sensitive to her college administrator's remark about aboriginal students typically failing their courses because "membership in a cultural category is more likely to prepare individuals for vicarious emotions when other members of the category, alive or dead, are noted for a praiseworthy or distasteful action or characteristic" (Kagan, p.174). Given the prevailing racial stereotypes about aboriginal Canadians as being drunk, lazy recipients of government handouts, it would not be surprising if Maria and Jay felt more prone to feelings of shame or anxiety, in relation to not achieving academically or vocationally, as a result of their aboriginal ethnicity. Despite such negative feelings, by retaining their identification with burdensome ideas about one's cultural membership, Maria and Jay may have experienced a diminishment of the "response uncertainty surrounding vocational and marital choices" (p.175) that the minority group adolescents cited above also experienced. Continuing to use drugs and alcohol amongst other aboriginal community members might therefore provide protection for one's self-esteem and a solution to the adolescent/young adult identity crisis for Jay and Maria.

offers rewards for doing a task such as data entry, have been shown to be more effective in encouraging abstinence from cocaine and opioids, than treatment programs that do not facilitate rewards for performing a valued job skill (Hart, 2013). The idea that addicts would be more motivated to give up drugs when offered the chance to be paid for their work might help further explain Carmen's conflict over her artwork. Though Carmen was clearly more willing to give up drugs once she had found a purpose for her life in making art, she was still conflicted about this identity choice. As mentioned previously, apart from her efficacy struggles in this area, she was well aware of the difficulty of any artist being able to make a living entirely from the proceeds of their artwork. Thus although she was now more aware of the dangers of drug dealing than she was when she was fifteen, she still wished that dealing could be a viable career option for her. She lamented that the two things that she considered herself to be good at (drug dealing and art) did not provide her with easier ways to make a living.

Also the biggest reason that the youths identified for their use of drugs -- to cope emotionally -- could have been addressed by providing them with other coping options. I have already discussed how Carmen could not access adequate psychological help. Apart from counselling, she said that she would have chosen a different method of dealing with her anxiety than marijuana, such as yoga, but "weed" was more readily available and more cost effective: "Yeah, like I could much easier buy a gram of weed [for] ten dollars. It'll last me longer than one yoga class will. That's only gonna make me feel better for one night. I can buy a gram of weed. I'll make it last like three days." Tamara noted that high risk youth are more often pushed towards taking psychotropic drugs because they are cheaper and faster to obtain than therapy. However, she thought that it was stupid for physicians to prescribe such drugs to people who were already prone to addictions.

In addition to lacking less risky options such as yoga and psychotherapy, high risk youth lack natural supports in their environment to help them cope with their problems. Apart from underlying

mental health problems, other significant risk factors for pathological drug use are unmet social needs, and difficulties relating with other people (Hart, 2013). Youth who are more connected to family members, peers, and schooling are much less likely to become addicted to drugs (Hart). In the case of these four youths, drugs were used both to deal with the pain of family problems and to deal with the pain of having no one to turn to for help with dealing with those problems. Carmen explained that she had started using drugs “cuz [her] parents were useless,” referring to their inability to stop fighting with each other and pay attention to the harm they were causing to their children. “Then I was using to make up for no one being able to support me, and the only friend I had was in my pocket.” (I will elaborate on the youths’ use of drugs to regulate their emotions about their families and on their social alienation in childhood, in the next chapter.)

Thus having other options for careers and having other options for coping with emotions may have reduced all of the youths’ potential for developing serious problems with drug use. The fact that none of them had experienced ongoing obstacles to transitioning to mainstream life on account of relapses of heavy drug use, and the relative ease with which they were able to get sober from drugs that are thought to be highly physiologically addictive (e.g., methamphetamine, cocaine) also suggests that physical withdrawal symptoms and cravings might not have been the biggest factors in maintaining their drug use. While Jay mostly attributed his sobriety to his thirty day treatment program, Tamara, Carmen, and Maria were able to mostly become sober on their own. Though Carmen spoke of having friends who brought her groceries for a month, and who supported her through some of her withdrawal symptoms such as feeling feverish, she was still clear that her willpower was what had really got her to become sober: “I just said ‘Fuck it. I’m not doing this shit anymore’. And just mentally prepared myself. Just like you have to do with anything you quit. Motivate yourself enough like in your head and everything.”

Likewise, although Tamara experienced depression as part of her withdrawal from drugs, for which she took antidepressants, she was adamant that her philosophy of self-control was most responsible for her sobriety. That Maria had attributed her sobriety to the promise that she had made to her former prison guard also suggests that cravings and withdrawal did not constantly overwhelm her. Rather factors unrelated to physical dependence appeared to be more likely drivers of the youths' drug use. These experiences suggest that although becoming sober and developing sobriety efficacy was important to the participants, debate over the different pathways (e.g., harm reduction versus abstinence) that youth may take in becoming confident that drug use will not overtake their lives again may not even be needed. The challenges of becoming sober may have been obviated, if they had been provided with other options for meeting their vocational, social, and emotional needs in the first place.

## Chapter Three

### **Moral Identity**

One has a moral identity to the extent that moral notions, such as being good, being just, compassionate, or fair, are judged to be central, essential, and important to one's self understanding. One has a moral identity when one strives to keep faith with identity-defining moral commitments, and when moral claims stake out the very terms of reference for the sort of person one claims to be. (Lapseley & Stey, 2014, p.86).

The above quote describes Augusto Blasi's (as cited in Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009) Self Model of moral action. Blasi suggests that two processes must occur for an agent to become motivated to take some course of moral action. After a moral judgment is made, the agent must evaluate whether acting in accordance with her moral judgment is necessary for her self-understanding: "Are moral notions so central to my identity that failing to act, or indulging in excusing rationalizations, is to undermine what is core to my personhood?" (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009) It follows that if one were to engage in actions that are understood to be contrary to the 'core' of one's personhood, one would expect conflict within one's self. The four youth participants in this study appeared to struggle with the question of whether their 'bad' actions, that were either committed during their street lives or committed during their transitions to mainstream living, confirmed that their selves were truly bad. The youths tended to be not be as vulnerable to concluding that they had bad moral characters, if there was consistency between their actions and 'good' moral processes (e.g., attending to their conscience, staying 'true' to their values) -- processes that they held to be self-defining. They appeared to be most vulnerable to defining themselves as bad, when they strayed from such 'good' moral processes and/or felt that their actions were the inevitable consequence of having inherited a 'bad' destiny, as a result of having been born into 'bad' families and communities. Though each youth experienced different factors that worked against

their being able to construct 'good' selves that could unify their past and present experiences, all of them exerted considerable effort in trying to narrate such good characters for themselves. They appeared to meet with varying degrees of success in this task, due to a number of factors that are discussed below.

### **Storying Moral Selves**

Antonio Damasio (as cited in Apter, 2012) suggests that one has both a core self and an autobiographical self. Similar to Blasi's<sup>34</sup> notion of there being a 'core' to one's personhood, Damasio describes the core self as being like a film that runs continually inside of us. Our awareness of watching the film is what enables us to experience ourselves as persisting through time: "this is what we feel, what we remember, who we are, and how we have changed" (Damasio, as cited in Apter, 2012, p.82). The autobiographical self, on the other hand, is the story that you tell about yourself to others or the story that others tell about you. This more public form of self is held to be at greater risk for distortion or denial: Either on our own or by hearing the stories told by others, we may develop false stories about who we are. If one becomes attached to such a false story, they will experience incongruity between what they think they want or should be and what they really feel and know to be true about themselves deep down (i.e., in their core self). The sense of incongruity or disconnect between these two forms of self often prompts one to revise how one has constructed her autobiographical self.

By her own admission, Tamara had constructed a false autobiographical self when she had lied to her child welfare caseworkers and group home staff about having more problems than she actually had. Tamara explained that she had lied because no one would have done anything for her based on the fact that she was just a homeless youth. According to Tamara, the other girls she had observed who

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<sup>34</sup> Or similar to Erik Erikson's and James Marcia's definitions of identity as being an inner core that is the source of one's agency and that provides one with a sense of internal consistency (self-continuity and self-coherence).

were engaged in prostitution and more serious drug use than herself received much more attention from workers at shelters and group homes and were eligible for better residential placements (i.e., homes with fewer beds or ones that provided the girls with their own rooms, more staff, and better food). Though Tamara eventually became involved in some of the same higher risk behaviours that she had observed other girls engaging in, she initially made up stories about engaging with such risks herself, so as to elicit the attention, sympathy, and material resources of her group home workers and child welfare caseworkers. (I will discuss the psychological reasons why Tamara likely became especially prone to believing her own lies, later in this chapter.)

Despite the advantages that Tamara felt that she derived from these lies, her former boyfriend's perspective about her having control over her drug use resonated deeply with her, as I discussed in the last chapter. To use Damasio's (as cited in Apter, 2012) language, hearing her boyfriend's message of self-control had caused her to experience incongruity between her false autobiographical self (i.e., a helpless victim of drug addiction and prostitution) and the strong, agentic core self that she knew herself to truly be. Her boyfriend's philosophy helped her to make salient her true and good core self, which prompted her to recognize and declare her then autobiographical self as false. This revision in her autobiographical self assisted her in making her transition to mainstream life. As mentioned previously, Tamara had identified her new philosophy of self-control as being the most important factor in her becoming sober.

Tamara and Carmen also had other past and present resources, which supported their process of returning to what they had each perceived to be their true, good selves. As mentioned previously, unlike Jay and Maria, they each had family and friends who encouraged their sobriety. Another helpful resource was their seeming belief that they each possessed an essential, good self. Tamara implied that she was born good, or at least must have been a 'blank slate' at birth, when she mused that "no one is

born a psychopath”, in the context of discussing how youths come to develop their high risk lifestyles. Carmen implied that her mother’s teachings on moral values that she had experienced from an early age may have been the root of her basically good self: “Yeah, my mom’s a lot like me in that way. She’s got a pretty high moral code. I think she raised me right.” The young women’s movement into street life reflected their having become “lost” or estranged by varying degrees from this truly, good essence to themselves. For example, Carmen was proud that she had not lost herself completely in the street lifestyle, which she felt had made her different from most of her street peers. Though she wrestled with her conscience about having sold ‘harder’ drugs than marijuana, losing herself completely would have involved completely betraying her morals by becoming a prostitute.

Although Tamara had engaged in prostitution, she was nevertheless able to reconnect to her true, good self, by returning to God. Tamara interpreted her ‘bad’ behavior in street life as her having strayed from God, by ignoring her conscience and values. She spoke about her soul becoming lost in this way: “To get your soul to stay, you can’t ignore that inner voice inside. You must honour it and do good, not bad, otherwise your soul will leave you.” She explained that when high risk youths talk about becoming lost, they are referring to no longer caring about the future or themselves or other people, because their soul has left them, following their repeated failure to heed what their conscience has been telling them. According to Tamara, one’s soul is one’s inner life, which can become lost or destroyed by not living according to one’s values: “If you say to people that I’m this [someone good] and then you know [do something bad], that’s like, it just takes part of your insides away.”

Like Carmen then, Tamara appeared to feel that she could undermine her true good ‘core’ self, by failing to be faithful to her values and her conscience which served to remind her of those values: “You lose your soul when you stop listening to it. It no longer is a source to guide you [to do good].” Given that she viewed her soul as a “gift” from God, it seems likely that Tamara saw herself as having

been born good. She also described some of her personal attributes as being gifts from God that she knew that she should be grateful for and not squander: "I'm incredibly smart and super pretty and like a million people would die to be in my shoes."

At the time of our interviews, it appeared that Tamara felt a need to revise her current autobiographical self to reflect her return to God. Her need for revision appeared to be prompted by her feelings of guilt over her 'bad' behaviours during street life. For example, she worried about "spiting God" by "killing all these babies", presumably referring to having had abortions. Tamara commented that she wanted to have "found some serenity because I've committed fraud and stolen, but don't want to die knowing I didn't do anything else."

Tamara resisted seeing herself as a bad person because she never intended to cheat other people: "Screwing people was not part of the plan." Rather, she explained that the crimes she engaged in were an outlet for her anger: "Because somebody hurt me so bad, I'm gonna hurt somebody else so bad." Tamara believed that she had changed from being a "happy kid to not happy" because of her "anger [regarding her family situation] and drugs." Thus in her view, Tamara strayed from God because her bad behaviours were responses to the pain she had felt as a result of her family life, not because she was truly a "mean person." She made it clear that she now regretted the harm that she had caused to other people: "I don't wanna hurt anybody. I don't even like to see people fighting no more."

For both Tamara and Carmen, the idea that someone could become "lost" in street life appeared to be a way that they could make sense of the identity confusion that was triggered in them, when they did things that caused them to feel ashamed, given the disconnect between their 'bad' behaviour and their true, good selves. Instead of furthering this schism within herself, Tamara recognized that her return to God could help her cope better with her emotional struggles at that time. This obviated her need to engage in bad behaviours as a coping mechanism, thereby allowing her to

preserve her sense of herself as a good person. Tamara saw her faith in God as something that could help her cope with the loneliness and insecurity that was driving her to get involved with the previously mentioned young man whom she knew was sure to get her into trouble again. She said that she had to “give up her security” that she was seeking from this young man and instead “have faith” in God. Tamara remarked that she felt vulnerable to dating this young man “because you want other people [to make you feel good], but really you only need yourself. Because anything somebody else can do for me? I can do for myself...I can tell me I’m pretty.”

Tamara said that she gets rewarded from God when she prays and does the right things, but God causes her to relapse when she is being bad, and he does this so she’ll come back to him and be the good Tamara again. Her comments are reminiscent of the biblical parable of the prodigal son, which suggests that God will graciously welcome sinners back into His fold, as long as they demonstrate contrition. Tamara pointed to “all the [good] things that are happening for [her]” as evidence that God is now protecting her from bad outcomes, because she is “doing good, saying sorry, and having faith.”

Narrating yourself as somebody who does not betray the values that she feels are most self-defining (as in Carmen’s case) or narrating yourself as somebody who can return to being good through faith in God and good actions(as in Tamara’s case) appeared to assist both young women in making their respective transitions to mainstream lives. Such ways of constructing their identities appeared to strengthen their resolve to continue to do ‘good’ in the future. For example, once Tamara came to identify her intellect as being a gift from God, she became intent on succeeding in her schooling. In spite of her numerous suicide attempts in the past, she became critical of atheists because she presumed that they would not value their lives to the extent that she now did, since they would not feel the same gratitude towards God for their lives that she now did for her own life.

**The role of childhood and family resources.** Other ways that Carmen and Tamara found to see themselves as good people also protected them from seeing their bad behaviours as a reflection of their true moral characters, and protected them from seeing their bad behaviours as part of 'bad' lives that they may have been destined for. Recall that Carmen and Tamara seemed to trace the source of their 'goodness' to their births (being 'born good') or to early childhood experiences. Tamara was exposed to religion early in her life through summer bible camps that members of her extended family had been involved in establishing: "I just knew it [God] was already there from when I was little, but I ignored it for like a long time."

Other early childhood memories also appeared to be a resource for Tamara to construct her fundamentally good self. Tamara recalled that her mother described her as a happy little kid; she was apparently one of the "cute girls in the pink dresses." When her mother compared her memories of this very young Tamara with the teenaged and young adult Tamara that she struggled with, she would ask Tamara, "What happened to you?" Tamara replied that she was always a nice person: "I was a nice person, just drugs make you messed up." Thus Tamara could predicate her construction of her good self on memories of her younger self as happy and innocent. She could resist any suggestion of fundamental 'badness' to her character, by suggesting that drug use had destroyed her 'niceness' in her teen years.

Like Tamara, Jay described his younger pre-drug abusing self as a "kid with a smile on his face." However, in contrast to Tamara, this memory is not one that he and his mother recollected together, nor did there appear to be any other witnesses of this younger Jay. Rather, it seemed as though Jay imagined that he must have been a happy, innocent kind of kid, before his mother was able to increasingly exert her bad influence on his life as he became older. Jay's other recollections of his pre-school life with his mother and with his biological father were of abuse and neglect. Given that these memories were corroborated by people other than his mother, such as his biological father and the

adult children of his mother's friends, such recollections cast doubt on Jay's assumption that he started out as a happy, carefree child. Reminiscing with one's mother, particularly as a young child, has been demonstrated to assist children in learning how to create more elaborated and coherent autobiographical narratives (Fivush, 2011). Thus as regards resources for developing 'good' self-continuity, Jay may have been deprived of not just positive memories, but also deprived of the experience of just sharing memories with his mother, whether they be positive or negative in content.

Carmen also appeared to have a weaker basis for constructing her good self from her early childhood memories. Despite recalling that her mother raised her with good morals, her early memories were mostly not happy ones: "My earliest memories are my mom crying and being smashed into walls and fucked up shit like that. Either that or my dad abusing me. Yeah, my dad's a winner."

Likewise, whether she was recalling her early life with her biological mother, or recalling her experiences with some of her first foster parents, Maria's early memories were traumatic. Maria described her earliest memory of her life with her biological mother as that of her mother gathering her and all of her other children around her to inform them that they were going into foster care, because she was going to commit suicide. (Although Maria's mother did not end up killing herself, she followed through with surrendering all of her children to child welfare. Maria was four years old at the time.) Maria recalled foster parents who would not let her leave the dinner table to use the washroom. After she could no longer keep herself from urinating on the kitchen floor, she was forced by her foster parents to mop up the urine with her hair.

Despite the overall paucity of positive, early family memories amongst the youths, the young women could each locate activities that they had engaged in during their childhoods that had equipped them with valuable skills and/or that had made them feel strong and capable. Tamara, for example, had played water polo competitively since she was a young child. She recalled being such a "tough" player

that none of the other girls would “mess with her.” Tamara recalled having to take a few buses on her own to get to her daily practices. She had even contemplated training for the Olympics; Tamara said that her “whole life” had been about water polo, until her mother stopped paying for her to be involved in the sport by her mid-teen years.

Carmen similarly spoke of being involved in Tae Kwon Do for many years. She pointed to her training in this martial art as the source of the physical strength and skills that she had drawn upon to survive some of her traumas from street life. Carmen said that her “legs are strong cos ‘of it, got a lot of muscles in these legs.” This physical strength allowed her to “fight back a little when he [the man who kidnapped her] was like hard core beating on [her].” Tae Kwon Do had also taught her coping skills. Carmen learned the difference between “passive, aggressive, and assertive” ways of responding to interpersonal conflicts, and learned to not impulsively react to situations, but instead “look at all your options” before responding. The importance of being “prepared for something bad to happen so you can protect yourself” was also impressed upon her.

As mentioned previously, Carmen also talked about having taken extracurricular art classes as a child, and about having won a public speaking award in grade seven, both of which she seemed to regard as providing validation of her choice to be an artist/performer. Likewise, Maria recalled that she had loved performing on a stage, since she was a young child. She appeared to view her participation in a summer drama program that had paid her for her performances as validation of her abilities in this area. Maria observed that the acting that she had done for this program was the only thing that she had ever been paid to do.

Such childhood experiences of competency and strength appear to have been drawn upon by the young women in the construction of their ‘good’ (i.e., moral) mainstream identities. They seemed to imply that being competent was linked to one’s capacity for being morally good, similar to how Tamara

and Jay had linked their recollections of themselves as happy young children to being 'good' children. However unlike the young women, Jay failed to have anything in his childhood that he could point to as a source of his strength or capabilities. Although he did acknowledge that his older cousins' habit of roughhousing with him had helped him become "tough", which therefore primed him for survival in street life, Jay lacked a mainstream skill from his childhood past, that he or others could validate. This may be another reason why Jay felt so alienated from his peers in his high school upgrading program initially. Jay differed from his school peers, who had their own interests and talents to speak of, not only because of the length of time that Jay had spent in street life, but because his impoverished childhood with his drug addicted mother did not provide him with the opportunities to explore skills<sup>35</sup> that Tamara, Carmen, and even Maria (thanks to the aforementioned summer recreational opportunities that were facilitated by child welfare) had experienced. Although Jay's stepfather provided Jay and his mother with a relatively stable, middle class lifestyle for part of his childhood, his preschool years and late elementary school years onward were spent mostly with his mother. (Jay's biological father left the family when Jay was very young.)

Jay's failure to have 'good' abilities and other resources, which he could point to, from his childhood or adolescence, appeared to have implications for his moral identity. Later in this chapter, I will elaborate on how Jay felt that his capacity for behaving morally was tied to his evaluation of whether or not he could 'afford' to act in ways that were honest and good. That is, would the skills and abilities that he had acquired through his high school upgrading and mainstream jobs be sufficient on their own to enable him to survive economically? To the extent that this was possible (i.e., he would not have to 'dip' into illicit ways of making money), it appeared that Jay could afford to be 'good', otherwise

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<sup>35</sup> I will elaborate on all of the youths' experiences of neglect, later in this chapter and in the next chapter.

like many other people in poverty, he would have to survive by doing whatever he needed to do to make a living.

In contrast, although Carmen was the only other youth who also had to worry about relying primarily on herself to survive economically, due to her very meagre welfare income<sup>36</sup>, she did not tie her moral behaviour to her income level. Carmen drew the line at prostitution and stealing from other people,<sup>37</sup> in order to survive. She insisted that no matter how bad things got with respect to money, “there’s always a way to survive and still be true to yourself.” Carmen’s early resource of her mother’s moral instructions, and perhaps her life lessons from Tae Kwon Do, may have caused her to not see her moral behaviour as something that was invariably linked to her need for money. Her middle-class upbringing likely had also not encouraged her to think of morality as something that she could either afford or not afford. Instead, it seemed that Carmen felt that she could not afford the psychological cost to herself of becoming ‘lost’, that she had feared would happen if she betrayed her core values.

Another ‘good’ resource for moral identity development that Carmen and Tamara possessed, (and which Jay and Maria did not), was the fact that they belonged to families that included many upstanding and successful people. Tamara saw herself as being part of her family’s legacy of producing such kinds of people: There are “doctors and stuff in her family.” Apart from her drug addicted father, no one else in her family “did anything bad.” As mentioned previously, Carmen identified with her maternal grandfather who had been a successful artist. She observed that this grandfather had also been known as someone who “did a lot” for her mother’s hometown. I already mentioned that Carmen attributed her strong conscience to the influence of her mother. Although Carmen’s father had had

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<sup>36</sup> Although the funding that Tamara and Maria received from Advancing Futures and AISH respectively was far from adequate, it was sufficient to cover their most basic food and shelter costs.

<sup>37</sup> Carmen justified her stealing from stores when she was hungry and desperate for food: “But that’s stealing from a big corporation. Like no one’s really gonna cry over that. But I would never steal from a person.”

problems with addictions, and had even been incarcerated for a short time due to crime that was committed under the influence of alcohol, he became a responsible professional, after Carmen's mother threatened to leave him, if he did not provide for her and their very young children at the time.

In contrast, Jay could not derive a sense that he too could be a successful and good person, from identifying as a member of his family. As mentioned previously, neither Jay's family members nor Maria's family members could be described as "productive", with respect to completing an education or working non-criminal jobs. However, Jay located a different inspiration for becoming good and successful. Through his experiences with incremental efficacy building, he learned that to stay motivated to achieve his mainstream goals, he needed to "believe in himself." Jay suggested that the biggest reason why high risk youth fail to exert sufficient effort towards their goals is because they fail to believe that they possess the attributes needed for success, in view of their own histories of failure and those of the people who surround them. By "believing in himself", Jay was basically espousing the ideal of the 'self-made' man: "the guy who triumphs through sheer persistence and unending grit" (Hart, 2013 p.112). This narrative about himself probably also reinforced his self-exclusion from others: Sobriety and success in schooling and jobs were facilitated by his withdrawing from peers and family members who were not "productive." Jay observed that the advantage of not having friends in his high school upgrading program was that he could devote almost all of his time to studying.

The problem with relying on 'believing in yourself' (as opposed to believing that you come from a long line of good people and/or that you have always been fundamentally good) is that it can be a very hard-won battle. The multiple disadvantages from belonging to families and communities like those of Jay's and Maria's do not allow for many easily accessible starting points for developing efficacy in academics and other skills. If Jay had not enrolled in the ex-offender re-entry program, it is highly doubtful that he would have been able to set himself up with the opportunities to become the "self-

made” man that he came to believe in. Jay lacked the bases for self-confidence that Carmen’s family and Tamara’s family appeared to provide to them. Rather, he and Maria experienced the opposite; they lacked confidence that their lives could turn out any differently than that of their family members. The ‘badness’ that characterized close family members, especially their parents, added to their sense that they were destined to follow similarly bad trajectories in their lives.

Instead of finding evidence of basic goodness in his early family experiences or in his positive personal attributes since childhood, Jay suggested that his badness was so rooted in his family’s legacy of bad behaviors that it was “in his blood.” Jay was suggesting that he could not escape having his fate be determined by his family. Commenting on how he, at one point, had even sold drugs to his own mother, Jay said, “That’s my life from selling. That’s a crack head and that’s just her son that’s a dealer.” Alternating between anger and resignation in his voice, he was suggesting that no other outcomes could reasonably be expected from someone whose mother was a “junkie”; he was bad because his mother was bad. It was unclear if Jay’s reference to his “blood” implied that he thought that he had come from ‘bad’ genes. However, it was certainly the case that he attributed his bad character to his lack of maternal caregiving. He angrily recalled that when he had sold drugs to his mother on the street, his mother had acted “like a straight jonesing crack head”, as opposed to behaving in any way like a mother ought to have done in relation to her own child.

Similarly, Maria implied that she had evil family roots. She actually used the word evil to describe her mother, and referred to her biological dad as “Lucifer” (I later learned that Maria perceived him as the devil, because he had sexually abused her and her sisters.) Unlike Jay, Maria had been encouraged by her social workers, throughout her life, to be different from her parents and siblings who had failed to deviate from lifestyles that were characterized by crime and addictions. However, despite having other good role models in her life, Maria nevertheless struggled constantly to resist the bad

trajectory that all her family members had travelled. Though, like Jay, she had faulted her mother for failing to care of her and her siblings due to her drug addiction, Maria also accepted her mother's message that she and her siblings were bad children. When her mother convened her and her siblings to tell them that she was surrendering them to child welfare because of her plans for suicide, she also told them that she could no longer handle looking after them, because they were all "bad." Maria's mother was apparently referring to the numerous behaviour problems that Maria and her siblings had each exhibited from a young age. Maria's subsequent sensitivity to being rejected by foster parents and group home workers, because of their supposed inability to "handle" her behaviour, makes perfect sense in light of this history with her mother. (I will elaborate on this point later in this chapter.)

While Jay's and Maria's comments suggest that they had felt that their respective moral characters and life destinies had been determined by their mothers' parenting failures and an intrinsic 'badness' to themselves that they seemed to inherit somehow from their families, this was not the case for Tamara and Carmen. Though like Jay and Maria, they had attributed their involvement in a 'bad' street lifestyle to their not having been "nurtured properly" (Tamara's words), and worried about lacking their parents' support (emotional and financial) to succeed in their mainstream goals, Tamara and Carmen still appeared to feel that, given their other past and present resources, they either had, or could acquire, the 'right' stuff that they needed in order to succeed in mainstream life.

This was, in part, due to the influence of other people in their family. As though she might have been responding to Jay's comments, Tamara said that she "didn't come to be a drug addict. Like I wasn't born to be a drug addict." [Unlike other youth who have] "a bunch of fucked up people in their family. Then it's like, "Oh well, why change? You know?" Rather, as mentioned previously, Tamara identified with the rest of her successful family, even though she was not yet successful. Part of her motivation to become a good person was because she was "tired of being an embarrassment to her family." Her

family expected more from her: “Nobody else is a fucking drug addict. Everybody [in my family are] retired doctors or lawyers or government workers.” She said that she came from “old German people”, of whom “no one has failed [to succeed in life] and [she] won’t either.”

Because Jay and Maria were unable to draw inspiration for change from within their environments, they appeared to be forced to make do with the drug lifestyle that their families had initiated them into, beginning when they were very young. Jay had no choice but to comply with the adults in his family who were engaged in drug using and drug selling, especially once his aunt had become his kinship foster mother. It would have been impossible for Jay to have said no to her requests that he deliver drugs to her customers on his bicycle when he was still in his early teen years.

However, having no choice in this situation did not prevent Jay from enjoying this task. Jay recalled that he enjoyed the feelings of independence and excitement that he had experienced, first from delivering drugs for his aunt, and later from engaging in his own “wheeling and dealing.” The excitement that he would later feel each time he was released from adult jail and got back into drug dealing with his street family was also a by-product of having to make do with this method of making money, because there was no alternative for him. Likewise, when Jay finally committed to cleaning up his life after his last stint in jail, he had to stay with the aunt who had first gotten him into drug dealing because he had no place else to go. Thus ever since he became a teenager, having to make do with drug dealing was a practical necessity for Jay, a situation that was clearly made more tolerable by the various forms of reinforcement (money, excitement, independence) that he received from his involvement in dealing.

At the same time, there was also an emotional imperative; Jay wanted to belong in his new family with his aunt, whom he regarded as being a mother figure, and he wanted to ‘fit in’ with his cousins. It was thus not surprising that he was happy to be introduced to smoking marijuana by one of

his cousins, and happy to later be introduced to smoking crack cocaine, by another one of his aunts. Given the complete lack of positive influences in his new family, following his mother's surrendering of his care, it was not surprising that Jay implied that he had felt trapped in a bad family destiny, despite his eagerness to belong with his aunt and cousins, and the popularity that he was gaining at his junior high school at the time for selling drugs. Ungar (2005) says that youth develop resilient identities from the resources they have available to them: "When these resources are scarce, children and youth turn to problem behaviours to find a powerful way to assert a preferred identity as a survivor" (p.4). Thus despite the fact that Jay talked about leaving school and surrounding himself with 'bad' street peers and family members, these actions can hardly be considered to be truly 'free' choices in support of the development of a 'bad' identity. Rather they were just the best ways for Jay to make the most out of a bad situation for himself.

Likewise, Maria often spoke of wishing that she had a family. By this, she was referring to having people that she could reliably count on for support, both emotionally and financially. As mentioned previously, Maria's disability income was sufficient to cover only the most basic food and shelter costs. Consequently, she would often try to keep as much money as she could for herself, by sharing rent and food with other high risk family members or friends. Her cognitive difficulties also made it hard for her to budget for all of her monthly needs and for her to strictly adhere to her budget. Thus as with Jay, Maria often had no choice but to stay with family members who made her vulnerable to resuming her drug use or getting into trouble with the law. She especially viewed staying with her mother as her last resort, given that her mother's drug use had previously triggered relapses in her. Maria also found it difficult to stay with her siblings, because they had repeatedly drawn her into conflicts between them that, when fuelled by everyone's heavy drinking, had often resulted in police attention.

These problems with staying with her family were not new. In fact, throughout her adolescence, Maria had actively resisted the prospect of staying with her family when she was in-between foster placements and stints at the young offender centre. Maria was well aware of her potential for being pulled into trouble by her family, which conflicted with her desire to be a 'good' girl who did the 'right' kinds of things, such go to school and have a job. In desiring to be a good girl, I believe that Maria had wanted to avoid creating any more trouble for herself. However, I also believe that she had wanted to earn the approval of her social workers and other professionals, especially her beloved guard at the young offender centre who had motivated her to become sober. Their approval seemed to validate the possibility of a different moral character or identity for Maria, one that she embraced: As Maria put it, the guard had "seen something in me." Having someone else see her potential for being good was enough to convince Maria that sobriety was "where my life was supposed to be." Ironically, Maria had even once gone so far as to argue with a youth court judge, in the hopes of receiving a longer sentence in the young offender centre. That way she could continue to enjoy her relationships with the guards and avoid having to stay with her family "on the outside." (Maria was successful in lengthening her sentence.)

In addition to often having to rely on her 'bad' family, due to having no other options, Maria also experienced the emotional imperative that Jay did -- that is, the need to feel as though she belonged in her family. Despite the fact that she had only lived with her mother sporadically as a child, and despite her vulnerability to relapse whenever she stayed with her as an adolescent/young adult, Maria revealed a latent longing to be recognized as her mother's daughter, when she qualified for her mother's "wall of shame." The "wall of shame" referred to a collection of family photographs that occupied Maria's mother's bedroom wall. Family members qualified for placement on the wall by having been incarcerated as an adult. Maria inadvertently found herself in trouble with the law as an adult, when she

was caught pawning stolen merchandise for a friend. (Maria's friend did not tell her that the merchandise was stolen.)

Despite her lack of awareness of having committed fraud, Maria was ashamed that she had committed this crime. Her social workers apparently had to reassure her that they knew that she was no longer the same kind of person that she was when she was much younger (i.e., someone who recklessly committed crimes). However, despite her wanting to be acknowledged for the different, mainstream person that she was trying to be, Maria acknowledged that being in adult jail had felt like an "adventure" to her. Though she had been trying to avoid doing anything illegal as an adult to avoid getting a criminal record, when she had actually landed in adult jail, she admitted that the experience was not entirely bad, because it had made her feel closer to her mother and other family members who had preceded her on her mother's wall. Maria happily recalled how her mother had laughed and joked with her, upon hearing about her incarceration. According to Maria, her mother never expected to see Maria on her wall. It seemed that Maria had felt some pride in defying this expectation, despite her also having felt ashamed about her conviction.

Thus both Jay and Maria experienced considerable difficulty extricating themselves from their families, in order to be good. However, for Tamara and Carmen, being good involved embracing some of what they had left behind in their families when they had entered into street life. The fact that the latter two youths could experience continuity with some of their past family experiences in order to be good implies that their family lives were not as comprehensively bad as those experienced by Jay and Maria. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Carmen and Tamara talked about how their having left their family homes as teenagers likely caused them to experience more problems through their involvement with street peers and with drugs, than if they had stayed with their families. Carmen reflected that, in retrospect, running away from her family problems had worsened her relationships

with her parents, and had caused her to develop worse problems with drug addiction and the many people who had exploited her, while she was on the street. Similarly, although Tamara had had to leave her home due to her mother's restraining order against her, she suggested that most of the problems that she and other high risk youth experienced can be explained just by looking at the bad company they kept. In contrast, though street peers and drugs had also brought trouble for Jay and Maria, becoming good appeared to depend, just as much, if not more, on their separating from, and becoming different from, their 'bad' families, at the same time that they depended on them, for both their emotional and physical survival.

**The role of cultural/economic communities.** Lacking childhood and family resources to construct one's self as good may have been especially problematic for Jay and Maria for another reason. I mentioned previously that a seeming belief in an essential good self might have protected Tamara and Carmen from forming the idea that they were destined to live a bad life. Such a belief in an essential self was found to be common amongst "culturally mainstream [i.e., white] Canadian youth" (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallette, 2003).<sup>38</sup> Chandler et al. suggest that for these youth, their selves can be compared to an onion -- although they develop more layers to themselves as they mature, they see themselves as having always been essentially the same 'core' person, deep down. The authors call this way of achieving self-continuity an "essentialist" strategy. They contrast this with the "narrative" strategy of self-continuity that was utilized by over seventy percent of the Canadian aboriginal youth in their research. What Chandler et al. refer to as a narrative strategy is effectively the same process of narrative identity development that I described in the previous chapter: Achieving self-continuity by

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<sup>38</sup> Eighty percent of the white Canadian youth exhibited the essentialist strategy of self-continuity in the research by Chandler et al. (2003).

creating a story of how one's past links up with one's present, and how those connected events can be a springboard for the future that one sees for one's self.

Although all the youth in this study appeared to engage in different forms of narrative self-construction as regards their moral identities, only the white youths, Tamara and Carmen, had also reflected an essentialist strategy of self-continuity. As I have already described, having such a 'core' foundation to one's self is advantageous on its own, but when coupled with positive childhood resources such as being part of a legacy of good and successful people, this appeared to support Carmen's and Tamara's narratives of reclaiming the basically good selves that they had become temporarily estranged from during their street lives. On the other hand, Jay and Maria lacked both an ontological basis for possessing an enduring good self that persisted throughout their personal histories, as well as lacked the same level of childhood and family resources that appeared to help Carmen and Tamara build on their stories of having a good essential foundation to themselves.

Though Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol & Hallette (2003) deny that either the essentialist strategy or the narrative strategy is superior for achieving self-continuity, it would appear that when aboriginal youth select a narrative strategy, *and* lack the past and present resources to stitch together the various experiences of their life in the form of a story that could help propel them into a good future, it is then that aboriginal youth like Maria and Jay may be at a disadvantage with respect to their moral identity development. Lalonde (2005) suggests that youths' preferences for different strategies for self-continuity may be rooted in cultural differences: "Where contemporary Western culture routinely sees truth as hidden beneath an obscuring surface and where hidden essences need to be separated from mere appearances, Aboriginal cultures see a need for interpretation and the creation of meaning" (p.63). Having good resources for narrative self-construction would appear to be more essential for the latter "metaphysics of potentiality and actuality" (Polkinghorne, as cited in Lalonde, 2005) that has been

associated with aboriginal peoples, than the former “metaphysics of substance” (Polkinghorne, as cited in Lalonde) that is associated with white Europeans.

In addition to not being able to lay claim to the ‘right’ stuff from their families for becoming good and successful, Jay and Maria lacked access to other resources which could facilitate change for their futures. This lack of resources and their beliefs about how long they would continue to be involved in street life appeared to add to their sense that they were destined for bad lives. When Jay was involved in street life, he predicted that he would suffer a fatal overdose by the age of sixty, if he was lucky. The unlucky alternative would be that he would be languishing in jail on decades-long criminal sentences, thereby ensuring that he would never be released. Jay had envisioned such dismal futures for himself, not only because he lacked any family or community supports, but because he lacked the kinds of prospects that come from having things like a clean criminal record, clean driving abstract, a high school diploma, and mainstream job skills/work experience. There were also the immediate survival challenges that Jay had to contend with, each time that he was released from prison. In the vignette in the previous chapter, which illustrated Jay’s “accelerated and compressed” transition, I described how he experienced multiple, intersecting barriers, such as having a small window of time for getting ID, housing, and a job, before he would be forced to return to doing crime in order to survive. Of street life and its seemingly inevitable consequences of either death or lifetime imprisonment, Jay said, “This life was handed to me”, again implying that he felt that he was predestined for such bad outcomes, given the ways his family had groomed.

The words hopelessness or despair appear to only partially capture how Jay spoke about his state of mind, when he contemplated his future. These words do not seem to reflect his subjective reality as well as Richard Wagamese’s (2013) term “ennui” does. Aboriginal writer Wagamese defined ennui as “something about a ton heavier and a lot deadlier than boredom. It means a lifelong sort of

tiredness. It means lassitude, an unrelenting feeling of nothingness. It means you give up trying, dreaming, or seeing yourself doing something better .... It's the deeply ingrained belief that there is nothing else possible and that no one sees us or cares about us anyway" (para 1 & para 9). Wagamese used the term ennui to describe a mentality that one acquires from living on a reserve. Although Jay never lived on a reserve, he was, nevertheless, subjected to the same lack of economic prospects that many aboriginal people, both urban and reserve, have experienced. More specifically, Wagamese attributed ennui to the Indian Act and the consequent "welfare mentality" (para 9) (i.e., acceptance of relying on government assistance) and intergenerational poverty and isolation that it had encouraged.

Jay and Tamara, however, suggested that the feeling of ennui was not unique to aboriginals; they had observed youths from many other ethnic groups who reflected this attitude as they carried out criminal careers, due to having no other options. That said, only Jay and Maria in this study had experienced intergenerational poverty in their families, which had led to long term dependence on government assistance and involvement with crime. Although Tamara's family and Carmen's family experienced some periods of economic struggle (such as when both of their mothers were without male partners for a time when their children were young), both Carmen and Tamara could be described as having left middle class homes. By her own account, Carmen's family could have even been described as affluent. In addition to these socio-economic differences, Carmen's family and Tamara's family were also well integrated socially, in that the families consisted of upstanding professionals who were known for their contributions to the community.

Despite the fact that high risk youth come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and that low income and low social participation may contribute more to a sense of ennui than cultural influences, all of the youth participants still observed that a sense of going nowhere was much more pervasive amongst high risk aboriginal youth. In fact, Carmen and Tamara expressed resentment over seeing so

many resources being allocated to only aboriginal youth (e.g., group home placements, high school upgrading or post-secondary educational funding), with few such youths seeming to take advantage of these opportunities.

Maria acknowledged that she “talked big” about her dreams, but often did not do anything to actualize them, sometimes due to laziness or being forgetful (especially when distracted by peers), and sometimes due to profound anxiety about having an acting audition. Not surprisingly, given her lack of success with schools or jobs, her anxiety was based on a lack of efficacy, as discussed previously. Recall too that Jay felt that high risk youths’ failures to believe in themselves were responsible for their failures to apply sufficient effort to their goals. One might assume that not availing one’s self of all available opportunities to become successful might also have been attributed to youths’ lack of belief in themselves. Jay himself had to work hard at shoring up his motivation for changing his life upon his last release from jail, because he had little basis for feeling confident that he would be able to surmount all of his barriers, despite availing himself of the support of his ex-offender re-entry program that time. It makes sense that a lack of confidence could be a mechanism by which chronic poverty and welfare dependence exerts its effects on families and children, manifesting in individuals’ experiences of ennui. Lacking confidence in his ability to change his circumstances in view of his maternal family’s longstanding economic problems (and related struggles such as mental health and addictions problems) (low internal locus of control) may further explain Jay’s sense of being trapped in a life that was, as he described it, “handed to him” (high external locus of control), perhaps even more than an “objective” lack of prospects for himself did. Reflecting on his success in his high school upgrading program, Jay exclaimed, “A junkie does not get those grades!” His success at school forced him to redefine his identity. He had distinguished himself from the long line of drug addicts in his family by becoming someone who was capable of accomplishing much more than he had ever thought possible.

The more diffuse<sup>39</sup> attitude of ennui may also function to mask self-doubt, so as to prevent feelings of shame. In a community in which ennui permeates, it would be folly for people to try to change their bleak circumstances. No one is exposed as a failure, because no one ever tries to be a success. This would imply that high risk aboriginal youth may not even be in a position to use the additional government resources that have been allocated to them, to address their structural barriers to mainstream success.

Vern Saddleback (as cited in Stolte, 2011, p.A5), a band councillor from Maskwacis, Alberta, suggests that the high levels of drug abuse and suicide in that wealthy reserve community has less to do with poverty per se than the effects of social isolation and exclusion. Drawing upon Emile Durkheim's writings about the relationship between suicide and social anomie, Saddleback suggests that the influx of wealth into the "closed system" (p.A5) of the reserves, in which there existed few possibilities for people to become self-determining by way of getting an education, having a career, and owning property, was something that reserve members could not cope with<sup>40</sup>. Saddleback contends that the oil and gas royalty cheques that members of the reserves received from 1971 to 1997 had "paid a generation of parents to go to sleep"<sup>41</sup> (p.A5), meaning that it fuelled their existing problems with ennui, and the substance abuse, suicide, and violence that seems to come in its wake.

This implies that the problem for high risk young aboriginals may not be a lack of wealth per se, but conditions that are often, though not always, associated with poverty, such as 'welfare mentality',

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<sup>39</sup> as opposed to hopelessness or despair

<sup>40</sup> Saddleback (as cited in Stolte, 2011, p.A5) commented that he includes the following quote from Durkheim in presentations that he gives to the Maskwacis community: "When there is extreme amounts of wealth introduced to a closed system, men are more inclined to kill themselves."

<sup>41</sup>Of the parents on the reserve, Saddleback (as cited in Stolte, 2011, p.A5) continued to say: "We paid them to go snort as much coke up your nose, go drink as much as you want, buy all the vehicles you want. We paid for a generation of bad parenting."

ennui, lack of education, lack of economic opportunities, and lack of adequate parental care. These conditions appear to prevent young aboriginals from becoming efficacious agents who *feel* as though they can choose their own destinies, by engaging with options for mainstream identities that may actually be viable for them. Abhijit Banerjee (as cited in Aitkenhead, 2012), an economist, explains why people who are poor (or, as I have suggested, are affected by multiple exclusionary barriers, regardless of access to wealth) are mistakenly thought to have more intrinsically based problems with impulse control: “If you happen to be mostly depressed about the state of your life, I don’t know whether you feel like doing impulse control.<sup>42</sup> If you are like me and you see that you have a bunch of ambitions that you actually think you have a reasonable chance of realising in life, you may be very different in terms of your willingness to give up that almond croissant. But if I feel that everything I’ve hoped for never worked, then what I am restraining myself for? ... It may well be that a substantial part of the reason why the poor look as if they’re making worse decisions is because they don’t care enough, and they don’t care enough because they really, probably rightly, see that their chance of getting somewhere different are minimal” (para 11).

Thus problems with agency and efficacy may have arisen from disadvantaged aboriginals’ mostly accurate evaluation of their social circumstances. Though there may be educational funding that is not available to non-aboriginals, and some provincial child welfare resources that are exclusively reserved for aboriginal youth, when such assistance is placed against a backdrop of multi-generational barriers to inclusion in mainstream society, such additional resources are a mere drop in the bucket, that many

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<sup>42</sup> Banerjee (as cited in Aitkenhead, 2012) conceded that levels of cortisol, a stress hormone implicated in poor impulse control, are often found to be disproportionately high in members of poor populations; however, he points out that “it’s worth emphasising that part of impulse control is will... The problem may be partly neurological, but it is also circumstantial” (para 10).

youth would still not be in the position to access, because of their lack of confidence regarding their ability to remediate their skills, stay sober, obtain criminal records pardons, and so forth.

Though Jay had underestimated his academic potential on account of having been a “junkie”, it was extremely fortunate that he had been able to surmount his educational gaps over the eight month period in which he completed the condensed high school curriculum that constituted his high school upgrading program. If his educational gaps had been more severe, it is very possible that he would not have been able to successfully avail himself of the opportunity that upgrading presented for building his efficacy in the academic domain. He may have failed to take advantage of opportunities that could have helped him in other domains too. Recall that Jay’s efficacy in academics was developed after he became successful at working a job, and successful in becoming sober; these successes had facilitated his becoming open to his ex-offender re-entry program worker’s suggestion that he complete high school upgrading. Moreover, because he became successful at work by listening to his program workers, Jay came to trust that his workers were steering him in the right direction for success generally. He therefore took their advice even when he had misgivings about certain courses of action, like going to drug and alcohol treatment. This suggests that youths’ receptivity to taking up opportunities for success requires not only that they are aware of the opportunity, but that they come to see that they could be successful by availing themselves of it, on account of having enjoyed previous success, in the same or another related domain. The youth may also have to achieve success in a hurry, given the condensed nature of high school upgrading programs and/or limited teacher support for students who are over the age of eighteen.

It would appear then that the additional government assistance that aboriginal youth may be allocated for assisting them with their transition to the mainstream (e.g., adult educational funding<sup>43</sup>) may just be coming too late for many of them. This may be especially the case for school-aged, aboriginal youth who are living on reserves, as these youth are estimated to receive around eight thousand educational dollars less than other youth who live off-reserve, given the federal government's underfunding of reserve schools.<sup>44</sup> (McMahon, 2014). Social work professor, Cindy Blackstock (2010) has similarly observed that the federal government discriminates against children on reserves by spending twenty two percent less money per child on child welfare services than provincial governments spend for those who live off the reserve. Though these kinds of funding inequities did not apply to Jay, they did apply to Maria, who lived both on and off the reserve, even when she was in care. (In fact, the child welfare caseworker that Maria had for most of her life was based on her reserve.)

Nevertheless, both Jay and Maria mostly differed from their non-aboriginal peers by experiencing the disadvantages that come from living in families that are constantly stressed by poverty. In a naturalistic, quasi-experimental study targeting poor American Indian children on a North Carolina reservation (Costello, Erkanli, Copeland & Angold, 2010), when casino profits were given

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<sup>43</sup> Many aboriginal youth, including Jay, are also often not eligible for adult educational funding under the Indian Act, because they lack legal status as Indians. However, even aboriginal youth who do have legal status, such as Maria, are often denied this funding by the leaders of their reserves. Maria told me that she could not access such funding for herself, because she did not belong to the 'right' family. Apparently only youth from certain favoured families on the reserve actually receive this funding, given that reserve leaders are the ones who receive this money directly from the federal government, which they, in turn, pass on to eligible youth, as they personally see fit. Youths whom I know to belong to other aboriginal reserves corroborated Maria's observations.

<sup>44</sup> Although the size of the gap between federal government spending and provincial government spending on schools continues to be debated due to differences in provincial governments' per-pupil spending, economist, Don Drummond (as cited in McMahon, 2014), suggested that the difference was as large as eight thousand dollars per student in Ontario.

directly to their parents to spend in whatever way they thought best, child outcomes such as emotional and behaviour problems were seen to improve in all children as they aged, with the exception of those aged fourteen years or older when the cash supplements began. The better outcomes for the younger children were presumed to be due to their parents' use of the money to cope better with the chronic strain of poverty. This was felt by parents and children alike to have improved the quality of parenting on the reserve, in particular, the parents' ability to supervise their children was rated higher following the infusion of the cash supplements. The supplements eased the stress of sporadic, typically weather-related unemployment amongst this particular set of low-income parents, as opposed to being enough to replace parental incomes, whereas in the aforementioned Maskwacis reserve community, parents were largely unemployed and remained this way, when they received their much more considerable supplements due to oil and gas revenue. It could be that the North Carolina parents were not as inflicted with the same level of ennui, due to having been more involved in the labour force. Nevertheless, the children who were fourteen years or older when their families first began to receive the supplements did not demonstrate improvements in outcomes. Although it is not possible to determine whether it was the fact of their older age that had influenced their lack of improvement or whether their lack of improvement had stemmed from not being able to experience as many years of benefit from the supplement as their younger peers, in a newspaper article on the study, it appeared that the study's lead author (Costello, as cited in Velasquez-Manoff, 2014, para. 9) felt that the latter mechanism was more likely. The money may have come to the parents too late for them to have been able to make a difference to the teenagers' already established 'bad' trajectories.

**Community membership moderates degree of risk-taking.** It would not be surprising then if, by their mid-teens, the North Carolina reservation youth were already resigning themselves to having to make do with limited future prospects, as we saw with Jay and Maria. In contrast, Tamara was always

confident that the risk behavior that she was engaging in was time-limited. In order to protect the better future that she anticipated for herself, she tried to exercise care to avoid experiencing permanent consequences from her risky behaviour, such as getting a criminal record. Tamara was even concerned about going to jail as a young offender. Even though she would not receive a permanent record from offenses committed as a minor, she did not want to have to experience the humiliation of having to later explain to others that she had been away serving time: "Where were you for four years? Oh, what were you in jail for? It's embarrassing!" She did not want her criminal behaviour to become a 'real' part of her identity, by having to go to either youth jail or adult jail. It would appear then that Tamara's concerns were motivated by her sense of belonging (or wanting to belong again) to her 'good' community. In addition to avoiding incarceration, she was avoiding attending family reunions, so as not to have to explain why she differed from the other young people in her family, who were on their way to becoming successful professionals. Tamara also did not want to identify with her biological father, whose incarceration "changed [their] relationship forever." As mentioned previously, Tamara's father missed out on so much of her life, even failing to call her on several of her childhood birthdays, on account of having been in jail.

To avoid getting into trouble with the police, Tamara and her best friend would confer, before they would go out, about what they would say to the police if they got caught with drugs. Tamara explained that their caution was due to their recognizing even then that they were only temporarily engaging in risky behaviours to cope with their painful family lives: "...just temporarily dealing with a situation that we needed to deal with and we didn't know any other way to deal with it." She observed that "it was just like a hard part in [her] life." Consequently, neither Tamara nor her friend was intending to "throw" their lives away: "We both knew that we're not gonna be like, obviously name of best friend

didn't throw away her life. I didn't throw away my life. We both knew that this isn't what we're gonna do."

Tamara and her best friend also refused to take certain illicit drugs, so as to not cause themselves permanent health consequences. For example, they declined to take lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) because they thought (albeit incorrectly) that it "stays in your fucking spinal tap fluid forever." Similarly, Carmen tried to minimize negative consequences from her drug-taking, by putting sugar in bottled water so that she and her friends "[wouldn't] get [too] fucked up" from ketamine. According to Carmen, sugar water brings you down from ketamine in a more "moderated" way, reducing impairments in depth perception and sense of balance.

Tamara and Carmen actively distinguished between risks that could result in serious long-term consequences and those that they felt they could get away with. For example, although some risks such as partying heavily could have delayed her from graduating, Tamara said "you can always restart a school year...everything comes down to money [referring to high school upgrading costs]. I will find fucking money wherever I need to find it...but you can't get rid of something in your body that is not gonna leave [referring to LSD]."

It appeared then that Tamara weighed the potential consequences of her risk taking against her interest in protecting her future dreams from becoming irrevocably messed up. Because these future dreams included having a husband and children someday, she limited her risk behaviour to activities that would not be as likely to jeopardize those outcomes. For example, she said that she did not engage in as much risky sexual behaviour as some of her former co-workers at an escort agency did, because she did not want to risk becoming HIV-positive. Of her work at the escort agency and other forms of prostitution, she commented that "money fuels my world (now) but it's not always going to."

Carmen, on the other hand, had refused to consider prostitution, even as a temporary option for money that she needed in order to survive. She observed that young women who engage in prostitution, because they are desperate for money or drugs, are “just living in the moment. This is how they are going to get meth for now, whereas I’ll look at every other option and be like, ‘Oh well. This is how I can do it and be true to myself.’” Thus just as Tamara resisted ruining her health for future gratification, Carmen resisted violating her moral integrity. I previously mentioned the importance that Carmen placed on not ‘losing’ herself by betraying the values that were most important to her: “I didn’t degrade my morals, which is really unique, because most people do.” “I’m really proud of myself that I never did. I never sold my body. I never stole from anyone.” Carmen’s ability to hold on to her values, despite often being in a precarious money situation, thus became another source of inner strength for her.

Even when Carmen engaged in drug dealing, which she appeared to view as a much lesser evil than prostitution, she was still plagued by her conscience. Unlike the guys around her who enjoyed feeling like a “big baller” for selling drugs, Carmen said, “I don’t feel I’m a great person because I’m a drug dealer. I feel like a piece of shit.” Carmen was referring to the possibility of someone being harmed by the drugs that she sold. Even when she decided to sell only marijuana, “just to make ends meet”, she said that it was really “drawing” (i.e., draining) on her. Similarly, Tamara’s religious faith moderated her prostitution. Just as she worried about “spiting God” by having abortions, she also worried about doing so by going too far in her sexual risk taking. Tamara thought that God had spared her thus far from becoming HIV-positive, but she was uncertain that she would continue to receive God’s grace, if she continued to do very ‘bad’ things.

Carmen was also careful about her guarding her future, because she had faith in her capability to survive in ways that would not compromise her dignity. Consistent with the aforementioned “onion”

kind of essential self that Lalonde (2005) associated with Euro-Canadians, her longstanding beliefs in her good 'core' personal attributes were what enabled her to feel confident about always being able to find an alternative to prostitution: "I've always known that I'm really intelligent and I'm really resourceful, so if there's a way to do something without harming myself in any way, I'm gonna choose that option."

Carmen and Tamara also resisted the idea of having children to receive welfare. Carmen likened having babies just for the welfare money to prostitution: It would be as degrading for her to use her body in this way, as it would be for her to engage in prostitution. Moreover, both young women expressed faith in their future potential for making money, which made the permanent solution of having children, exclusively for the purpose of addressing their current money problems, seem ridiculous to them. Tamara regarded the predominantly aboriginal young women who seemed to commonly adopt this strategy as being "desperate." She suggested that aboriginal young women choose this strategy because "they are not going anywhere." They "were never going to do anything with their lives anyway, except be on welfare and have somebody's babies." In contrast, Tamara saw herself as possessing much greater future potential. Like Jay, she viewed upgrading her high school education as her first step towards a successful mainstream career. As mentioned previously, Tamara was intending to enroll in post-secondary studies to become a medical laboratory technician.

Likewise, Carmen suggested that the focus of young aboriginal women should be on developing their own identities, which should include the development of vocational skills to be able to support their own children, without having to rely on government assistance: "Yeah, they need to figure out who they are, like not make little people." Carmen invoked her own experience of having observed her mother struggle economically, as the reason for her beliefs. According to Carmen, her mother [had] "to be a welfare mom [for] a little bit and like work real hard and go without meals to make sure me and my

brother like ate and I'd never put my kids through that." Consequently, Carmen had resolved to "never resort to being a welfare mom ever."

Ironically, Tamara's belief in her future potential (and quite possibly her need to see others as believing in her potential) appeared to underlie her greater tolerance for some forms of prostitution. For most of the duration of our interviews, the main way in which Tamara engaged in prostitution was by having a 'sugar daddy'. She viewed this option as being more acceptable than other forms of prostitution, because of how she evaluated its future dividends. Her sugar daddy gave her money and other 'gifts' for the express purpose of supporting her education. That Tamara had truly accepted her sugar daddy's definition of himself as her benefactor, as opposed to his being merely another "john", was revealed by her guilt about having accepted his gifts, during times that she had let her "schoolwork slide."

Her perception of her sugar daddy as facilitating her future dreams for herself appeared to protect her from feeling the same level of shame that she had appeared to feel in conjunction with the other forms of prostitution that she had engaged in (e.g., streetwalking, working as an escort). Tamara said that she would have to buy something nice for herself, to try to forget that she had just done something "disgusting" with a client, in such circumstances. However, with her sugar daddy, the relationship was not always sexual, and it provided her with social and economic forms of reinforcement for her to work hard at school. It appeared that Tamara needed such encouragement, as she did not receive much from her mother or from her teachers at school. When she expressed her need to "constantly" hear from others that she was doing a good job, in order to sustain her academic motivation, Tamara was told by her teachers and her mother that she would have to learn to give herself that kind of reinforcement. It appeared that the end goal of receiving her high school education helped her to justify the means of having a sugar daddy, which, in any case, did not seem to be as 'bad'

to her as other forms of prostitution. McLean (2008) observed that “mitigating the impact of a transgression may preserve a positive sense of self” (p.1697) This suggests that Tamara also clearly struggled over her moral integrity in regards to prostitution, despite her only citing health reasons for why she curbed her sexual risk-taking while working as an escort.

Despite the contribution that Tamara’s focus on the future may have played in her acceptance of her relationship with her sugar daddy, for the most part, the faith that Carmen and Tamara had each placed in their better futures appeared to facilitate the development of good moral character, by inhibiting or moderating some forms of risk taking. Seeing risk taking as time-limited (i.e., something engaged in just as a temporary coping method, or for some other short-term gain, provided that it does not expose them to permanent bad consequences) also likely helped them to see themselves as being essentially good; it supports the idea that their involvement in street life was just a matter of their having temporarily strayed from their true, good selves.

Just as Jay’s and Maria’s backgrounds had informed their propensity for believing that they were destined for bad outcomes, Carmen’s and Tamara’s desires to protect their futures were grounded in their past resources, particularly their middle class background. Resisting the stigma of jail, desiring an intact, two-parent family for one’s children, and resisting compromising one’s body or moral integrity for money are all values reflective of their upbringing in middle class homes that were relatively stable in terms of family composition (Carmen’s parents remained married and Tamara’s mother married her one serious partner, apart from Tamara’s father, when Tamara was a teenager). As mentioned previously, Carmen’s desire to safeguard her moral integrity, and Tamara’s concerns about spiting god, reflected the early moral training that they had received courtesy of their families.

In contrast, recall Maria’s and Jay’s attitudes of acceptance and resignation in regards to their jail sentences. Not only did their experiences in their families (e.g., Maria’s mother’s “wall of shame”)

contribute to such attitudes, but such experiences were normative within their peer groups: One in three young offenders in custody today are aboriginal (McMahon, 2014). As such, Maria and Jay did not express the same concerns over being stigmatized by their criminal records. Their mothers were single parents, who frequently changed their live-in partners. Jay had once implied that his mother exchanged sex for money. As mentioned previously, it was not uncommon for aboriginal women, such as those who belonged to Maria's family, to have a baby to receive welfare or to have additional children to increase one's welfare cheque. In addition to accepting these outcomes, all of which can be linked to their impoverished backgrounds, Jay and Maria were bereft of any serious efforts on the part of their families to provide them with moral training. Apart from Jay's stepfather who had tried to impart a few moral guidelines to him before his mother took him back (I will elaborate on this later in this chapter), Jay was left on his own. Likewise, when I asked Maria if her mother had ever tried to transmit any teachings to her about aboriginal culture and spirituality or about moral values in general, Maria replied bitterly that her mother had not even been able to raise her, meaning that she could not even provide the most basic parental care, let alone impart any kind of moral guidance.

Carmen's and Tamara's belief in their own personal power and responsibility with respect to drug and alcohol use is also congruent with their view that their high risk lifestyle need not continue indefinitely. The young women felt that they could choose to stop using drugs and exit the lifestyle at any time. They also knew that they could count on close family and friends to encourage them in this endeavour. In contrast, for Jay and Maria, they struggled to avoid everyone they knew in their 'bad' environments, to avoid being trapped forever in the addictions that had taken over the lives of so many of the people around them, including their mothers. Taken together with all of the preceding evidence in support of their propensity to view their futures as being inevitably bad, Maria and Jay can be seen as constantly struggling to resist their "birthright" of bad influences (economic, social, and moral), which

would seem to be a much less agentic way of experiencing yourself, than feeling capable of 'freely' choosing your way back to a fundamentally good self.

***Adolescent-limited and life-course persistent risk-taking.*** The differences between the two pairs of youths (Carmen and Tamara versus Jay and Maria) conform to a distinction that Terri Moffitt (1993) had observed in youth who became involved with crime during their adolescence. Moffitt distinguished between an adolescent-limited trajectory of antisocial behaviour and a life-course-persistent trajectory of antisocial behavior. Carmen and Tamara's more privileged background, in terms of family, community and economic resources, is consistent with the former trajectory, which would predict that most of the young women's involvement with antisocial behaviors would cease when they began to make the transition to adulthood. Youths who engage in such behaviours for only the duration of their adolescence typically experienced peer rewards from imitating antisocial youth models, such as the social rewards that Carmen and Tamara received from their street peers, upon leaving home. Unlike their life-course-persistent peers, adolescent-limited antisocial youth tend to desist from aggressive behaviours by young adulthood because they evaluate the future "commitment costs" (Moffitt, 1993, p. 690) to crime and other forms of delinquency as being too high. Often, this motivational analysis is influenced by the youths' consideration of their possession of personal resources for changing their futures.

In contrast, Jay and Maria would be predicted to be more at-risk for continuing their antisocial behaviour throughout their lives, on account of not only their longer-term exposure to criminogenic environments and their lack of positive resources, courtesy of their family members, but also because of their greater neuropsychological vulnerability, on account of their biological parents' problems with addictions. As Moffitt (1993) put it, "the juxtaposition of a vulnerable and difficult infant with an adverse rearing context initiates risk for the life-course-persistent pattern of antisocial behavior. The

ensuing process is a transactional one in which the challenge of coping with a difficult child evokes a chain of failed parent-child encounters” (p. 682).

Even children with subtle, subclinical forms of neuropsychological damage (as manifested in attention problems, impulsivity, slowness in learning new things, etc.), which are more common in the presentation of children born to mothers who abuse drugs and alcohol than severe developmental disabilities or disorders, are more likely to be at risk for a long-term criminal career, given the unsupportive parental and economic environments that they are more likely to encounter: “Vulnerable infants are disproportionately found in environments that will not be ameliorative because many sources of neural maldevelopment co-occur with family disadvantage or deviance” (Moffitt, 1993 p.681)

While Maria’s cognitive deficits were formally assessed as being extremely low, it is likely that Jay experienced more subtle forms of neuropsychological impairment, on the level of a learning and/or attention disorder. He recalled struggling with academic learning during junior high. Jay also recalled being severely humiliated by one of his junior high teachers, which appeared to lessen his commitment to schooling, in advance of his leaving school in grade ten. In grade ten, Jay failed to return to school permanently, after either being suspended or expelled for fighting other students. Such problems are common in students with learning and behavioral disabilities.

Although the fathers of Carmen and Tamara had had problems with addiction, these young women were unlikely to have incurred the same level of vulnerability to neuropsychological problems as Jay and Maria, given that their mothers were much less likely to have used drugs and alcohol in their pregnancies. That said, Carmen’s learning disability may have been a factor in the greater interpersonal difficulties that she experienced at school and with her parents, from a young age. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on all of the youths’ childhood experiences of unsupportive parenting, which led to a “chain of failed parent-child encounters” (Moffitt, 1993, p.682) for each of them. Nevertheless, both

Carmen and Tamara were likely protected from worse outcomes by the greater stability of their middle class homes. Despite the abuse and neglect within their homes, their non-addicted and non-impooverished mothers, as their primary caregivers, still exhibited much greater overall parenting competence on a daily basis, than that experienced by Jay and Maria.

***Narrating transformation: Recovery, redemption, and coping.*** Despite lacking the family, community, and economic resources which appeared to help Carmen and Tamara narrate their selves as being basically good throughout their histories (including their temporarily bad period of street life), Jay reflected a different way of achieving 'good' self-continuity. As mentioned previously, Jay came to define himself as a recovering addict. This recovery identity appeared to help him understand himself as someone who transformed a bad past into something good for both his present life and for his future. Through his own hard work and the support and opportunities that he received from witnesses to his identity transformation, such as his ex-offender re-entry program workers and his teachers, he was able to uncover his true, capable self, which had been obscured by his false belief in his 'bad' destiny. All the suffering that he had endured and had caused others to endure during his street life could be redeemed by becoming someone who could serve as a model to other youths about how to extricate one's self from street life by believing in one's self. Dan McAdams (2008) suggests that such a redemptive story of the self facilitates both idealism and mental health.

Also, as mentioned previously, Jay's story of how he transformed from a deviant and delinquent to being a person in recovery who is rebuilding an honest, good life for himself afforded him a way to acknowledge his past to others. As McLean (2008) observes, "*Voice* is given to those people who have personal narratives that match the canonical narrative, as their experiences are both socially accepted and assumed" (p.1695). Not only are redemptive stories socially accepted, but McAdams (2008) asserts that redemptive stories are beloved in American society.

In addition to the journaling that he did, Jay was also very active in constructing and delivering autobiographical presentations that explained how he had changed his life, which he delivered to audiences comprised mostly of other at-risk and high risk young people. Jay also told me that he had agreed to be part of this research study, because he saw it as being yet another opportunity for him to tell his story and thereby reflect on his life in order to make more sense of it. McLean (2008) observed that the degree to which people are able to “process, make meaning, and often to find redemption, in *negative experiences*” (p.1692) predicts positive well-being.

The process of sharing his story with others likely also promoted Jay’s identity development. “Sharing stories not only allows others to help to construct the story but also moves the story into the external world for validation” (McLean, 2008, p.1691). In providing this validation, Jay’s ex-offender re-entry program workers and his English teacher likely affirmed his developing individuality and identity as a person who belonged in the mainstream. Jay saw these identity witnesses as being like a surrogate family which he distinguished from his ‘real’ family. For example, Jay was especially stung by the lack of support for becoming sober that he had received from one of his younger cousins, upon his completion of his treatment program. He also recalled how his step-father had denigrated the eagle feather which Jay had received from one of his program workers (an aboriginal elder) in recognition of the hard work that he had done on himself to become sober. In contrast, Jay’s surrogate family of professionals may have helped compensate for his lack of positive family resources both in the present and in the past. The reader will recall that there were no witnesses to support Jay’s recollection of himself as being an innocent, carefree young child. Lacking parents to scaffold the narratives that he constructed as a child may have adversely affected the development of his capacity for constructing an elaborate and coherent narrative identity, let alone a morally good one. However, his program workers and his

teachers may have served as a corrective for that early experience by listening with interest to his story of how he was developing his mainstream identity.

Despite the advantages of Jay's redemptive self-construction, there can be problems when this kind of narrative no longer works for the individual -- it could be that his capacity for working hard, that Jay came to place so much faith in, may not always deliver its expected reward, for example. This occurred when Jay started university and became overwhelmed by the demands of a full-time course load. The reader will recall that Jay needed to feel that he had a real shot at becoming someone who could be regarded as a success in mainstream life, which he believed would happen through success in education; otherwise he would go back to drug dealing. The reason for this vulnerability to returning to street life was because in street life, he could be assured of a powerful identity. Jay was not a small-time drug dealer. Rather he had very high status on the street, on account of being more successful in drug dealing and other criminal enterprises, than most other young men who participate in this lifestyle. Contrary to popular belief, most young men tend to not make much more money through drug dealing than they would have if they had been working in low wage, service-sector jobs, such as fast food restaurants (Hart, 2013). However, Jay's exceptional success in street life made him evaluate that it would not be worth it for him to pursue a mainstream identity, if this meant that he would be relegated to the economic margins of mainstream life, as people who lack an education commonly find themselves.

This is why Jay was determined to exert his best effort and to exploit all possible opportunities for getting help with his studies, when he was completing his high school upgrading. It makes sense then that following his upgrading, he placed the same premium on completing university, regarding a degree as key to maximizing his chances at mainstream success. Thus despite the risks of the street lifestyle (death and jail sentences) over which he had constantly stressed, he did not feel that living a poor, sober

life would be worth the loss of the high status, power, and wealth that he had achieved in street life and was confident that he could get back, if he so desired.

Jay may have evaluated that a sober life, without the prospect of being able to achieve economic success, would not be enough for him, because he had not experienced sobriety for very long time when he had completed his high school upgrading and started university. In fact, the coordinator of his upgrading program had made an exception for Jay by allowing him to enroll in the program, despite the fact he did not meet the admissions criterion of being sober for at least one year. Fortunately, by the time that he had dropped out of his first year of university, he had accumulated many happy memories that were only made possible for him because of his sobriety. For example, in addition to completing high school, he had re-established his relationship with his grandparents and had a sober girlfriend for the first time.

These joys that came from living an ordinary sober life likely helped him to reframe his dropping out of university. With the support of one of his ex-offender re-entry program workers, he came to think of his high school graduation as the accomplishment of the 'true' dream that he had always had for himself. Jay came to regard this graduation as the event that definitively gave "closure" to his street life; there was no way that he could now conceive of risking the meaningful relationships and freedom from threats of jail or death that came from living a non-criminal, sober lifestyle. Jay was also now willing to see his high school diploma as something that could serve as a stepping stone to perhaps more modest, yet still highly prized goals for himself, such as completing a post-secondary diploma in addictions counselling.

It was fortunate then that Jay could demonstrate flexibility in his narrative; otherwise, the naiveté implicit in his redemptive belief that hard work will always result in success left him vulnerable to returning to street life, when this belief turned out to be wrong. Moreover, not everyone (e.g.,

prospective employers) may be as accepting of Jay's transformative story as his program workers, teachers, and other troubled youth were. Jay's story may not be as universally accepted as other redemptive life narratives, on account of the transgressions that it requires him to speak of. McLean (2008) notes that "what makes transgressions more intriguing is that, as life experiences, they have qualities that make them ripe for meaning making, namely negative emotion, but we do not appear to have a master narrative for them, given that they are not told" (p.1697). In view of the paucity of research on the consequences of stories that are told about transgressions, it is impossible to know how much Jay could safely disclose about his transgressions, as he continued his transition to mainstream life. This raises questions about how adaptive his form of a redemptive narrative will continue to be for him in the long run.

Maria also actively engaged in narrating her life, although this did not take the form of a redemptive story. As mentioned previously, Maria wished to become a writer. Her writing took the form of poetry and fictional stories, which were often based on her own experiences of loneliness and depression, including ways that she had found the strength to cope with such experiences (e.g., positive self talk, reminding herself that she is not alone, working hard to resist 'bad' impulses). Thus as with Jay's journal writing, Maria's writing afforded her ways of safely connecting to painful feelings, and of working through them. Through sharing stories with her social workers, Maria was also provided with validation of her personal strength and capacity for reflecting on her longstanding struggles with drugs, alcohol, and childhood abuse. In keeping with the finding that aboriginal youth may be more inclined to adopt a narrative strategy to self-continuity (Chandler et al., 2003), both Jay and Maria had kept personal journals for many years, of their own accord.

Despite the fact that Maria's sharing of her writing was usually well received by her social workers and other supporters, she was also exposed to the kind of danger that McLean (2008) hinted

might be in store for people who publicly share their transgressive stories. At one point, Maria had agreed to speak about her experiences of sexual abuse and prostitution on a television commercial that promoted the work of an agency that supports childhood survivors of abuse. Afterwards, she worried that she may have exposed too much of herself, despite knowing that the commercial was for a good cause. Similarly, even after she had known me for several months and had shared many intimate experiences, Maria still found it difficult to talk about prostitution and sexual abuse for this research. At times, Maria would, of her own accord, suggest that we talk about her involvement in prostitution, but then would become distracted by something else, either something in the environment or a different train of thought that she had just had. When we did finally speak about these subjects, it was because they had come up in the context of talking about other things. Even then, such experiences were clearly very difficult for her to talk about, apparently due to feelings of shame. For example, she described herself as having been a “whore” for having engaged in prostitution when she was younger (i.e., her early to mid-teen years), despite her being aware of the relationship that exists between childhood sexual abuse and prostitution.

Maria’s vacillation between wanting to speak and then getting easily distracted may also reflect unresolved trauma (i.e., reflect her need to distract herself from the activation of traumatic memories). It may be that trauma and shame are responsible, at least in part, for the lack of master narratives that McLean (2008) suggests constrains the telling of transgressive stories. Wittgenstein (as cited in Biletzki & Matar, 2014) said “What we cannot talk of, we must pass over in silence” (para. 7). Though Wittgenstein was speaking about the limitations that are inherently placed on one’s thoughts by whether there exists the words to express what one is thinking, his words could also be taken as reflecting the experience of a trauma survivor who responds to the chaos and confusion involved in the experience of the terrifying event by repressing that event, or at least trying to distract one’s self from it,

by failing to speak of it. Not only is 'passing over' such events a form of coping with them, but as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, unresolved trauma, by definition, cannot be articulated coherently by the survivor. The inability of individuals to speak of such experiences, and to be understood by others, would thus ensure that dominant cultural narratives to help understand them from the perspective of those who were victimized are never created in the culture. Shame for 'allowing' one's self to be victimized or for not being 'tough' enough to remain unaffected by the trauma would also reinforce the silence of survivors. By thus limiting the kinds of stories, including the language which one possesses to talk about such experiences (e.g., to Maria, a woman who prostitutes is equivalent to a whore and nothing else), the process of achieving 'good' self-continuity via narrating one's past is put into jeopardy. For Jay and Maria then, the lack of socially acceptable ways to talk about their respective pasts seems to hold their identities in a kind of limbo: Their past experiences keep threatening to define them, even as they actively struggled to give their own meanings to them, through their writings and other public presentations.

***Grappling/failing to grapple with harmful transgressions.*** Despite their advantages with respect to being able to story themselves as good people throughout their histories, this did not prevent Carmen and Tamara from having to grapple with the harmful things that they had done, during their street lives. Though they could see themselves as having temporarily gone astray from their truly good selves, they could not just cast aside their bad behaviour, any more than Jay or Maria could. Their inability in many cases to redress the harms that they had committed as perpetrators of violence or other wrongdoings made it tough for them to see themselves as good, despite their ability to marshal their many positive resources towards the construction of good selves.

In fact, the harms that each of the youths had perpetrated had created self-contradiction in each of them, at a time that they were driven by social and cognitive developments to construct self-

coherence. It seemed that they were each effectively asking themselves, “Who am I if I did (or even still do) these bad things?” At the same time that they were each struggling in different ways to construct themselves as good, they were plagued by self-doubts that came from their previous, and even sometimes current, involvement with bad behaviour. As noted in the Introduction, making sense of the unexpected ‘trouble’ that has entered one’s life is often the starting point for developing a storied self (Bruner, 1990). It would make sense that the aforementioned efforts to story their selves as good -- through redemptive stories, stories of their good coping efforts, or stories which position them as being rooted in good histories and fundamentally good selves – emerged in response to their need to grapple with their self-contradictions. Maria wrote a poem, that was well received by her social workers, entitled “Devillish [sic] Play” which described her then struggle to resist the temptation of drugs and other ‘evils’, just as Jay wrote in his English class journals of his “self-battles” regarding not falling back into his old lifestyle. As I had previously mentioned in regards to Tamara’s feeling that she had become temporarily estranged from God and from her soul, identity confusion can be triggered by doing things that induce feelings of shame.

Some of the youths’ moral identity struggles, particularly Jay’s and Tamara’s, were complicated by another issue. There were periods during their street lives, and even afterwards, when they appeared to stop caring about morality or even about people altogether, including what may happen to their own selves. Recall that Tamara described this situation as losing one’s soul. It seems likely that becoming “lost” in this way was also what Carmen had been most trying to resist. She commented that she had thought that she had become lost, just prior to having made her decision to leave street life. However, she realized later that she had not hit the bottom that youths who can be said to be lost do, as this bottom is reached by compromising one’s core values. It is not surprising then that these periods of failing to care about anything or anyone coincided with times during which the youth had felt most

confused about their identities. Feeling lost or identity confused likely explains why these periods were also ones in which the youth were most willing to engage in risks that could have resulted in serious injury or even death, for others or themselves.

*Making sense of bad behaviour and returning to God.* Tamara's struggle to resist being defined by her bad actions was evident in her statements which disavowed any bad intentions towards people whom she may have hurt. Recall that Tamara did not intend to "screw" people, by cheating them and stealing from them, through fraud or property theft. She also did not want to hurt people by assaulting them. Remorse was reflected in her concern about dying before she had a chance to do good things, which was the only way that she could redress her previous behaviour, so as to find some "serenity" for herself now. Understanding her bad behavior as an outlet for her emotional pain, and as an outcome of her becoming estranged from God, also likely helped her to distance her 'true' self from these past harms, thereby allowing her to reconnect and identify with the good character that she had always believed herself to be deep down.

Maria had likewise attributed some of her harmful actions to the emotional pain she had felt as a result of her family. She also seemed to attribute some of the pain she had caused others to having become estranged from God, in a sense. However, these explanations did not appear to provide her with the solace that Tamara appeared to receive from being able to create distance between herself and her past behavior. Rather, in speaking particularly about acts of seemingly indiscriminate violence that she had perpetrated, Maria seemed to struggle to attribute these events to the aforementioned causes. When she did finally make these attributions, her identification of such causes did not assure her of her good character. Rather this may have reinforced her concerns about being "evil" and perhaps, irrevocably "broken."

Although Maria could sometimes recall feeling legitimately provoked by residents and staff in group homes and treatment centres<sup>45</sup>, she often could not recall a precise reason for why she had physically attacked somebody<sup>46</sup>. She recalled recently discussing one such incident with her brother who had observed her assault a fellow youth resident in a group home where he and Maria had once resided. Maria's brother asked her why she had seemed to become enraged by where the resident had chosen to sit in the room, which was the apparent provocation for Maria's assault on her. Maria reflected that she did not herself understand why this had bothered her, given that the other girl had not taken the seat where she had been sitting, or had otherwise bothered her. She concluded that the anger that drove her to attack others for no 'real' reason must be from the abuse that she had experienced as a child. Maria was tearful when she said this, though her voice was also raised from anger. The idea that trauma could have incited her to such violence was not a comforting explanation it seemed, because Maria was still obviously grappling with feeling intense anger as a result of the abuse, regardless of whether or not her unresolved feelings about the abuse were the actual trigger for her unprovoked assaults. At another point, Maria had asked me, "Will I be broken forever?" She was worried that she may have been irrevocably damaged by her experiences of childhood abuse. In contrast, recall that Tamara's understanding of herself as not having become "broken", by the abuse that so many other high risk youths had suffered, helped her to see that she had more power to become sober and otherwise change her life than she had previously realized.

Maria also believed that spiritual influences could explain why she had committed some of her most violent assaults on others. When she recalled a particularly brutal attack that she had once

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<sup>45</sup> I will elaborate on this in the chapter five.

<sup>46</sup> In contrast, Tamara had committed only one assault that she could not explain. She assumed that she must have assaulted that person, while under the influence of drugs.

perpetrated on a girl at summer camp, she emphatically insisted that she had not meant to hurt this other little girl. With no other explanation for what may have provoked the assault, she wondered whether she may have been possessed by an evil spirit at the time. The reader will recall that Maria expressed anxiety over having been born from 'evil' parents. She further believed that an uncle of hers had literally sold his soul to the devil. Her poem "Devillish [sic] Play" implied that she had felt compelled to do bad things, such as relapse with drugs, as a result of having been tempted to do so by the devil. Maria also had longstanding interests in occult and paranormal subjects such as witchcraft and aliens, which may have also played a role in her attributing her harmful behaviors to the influence of evil. This understanding likely reinforced a sense of being intrinsically bad, and perhaps reinforced a sense of being powerless over her actions as well.

The different interpretations that Maria and Tamara appeared to make of their bad behaviour, despite their common attributions to emotional pain and straying from God, again reflect their differences with respect to resources for narrative self-construction. Tamara's lack of childhood trauma and her ability to conceive of herself as coming from 'good' rather than 'evil' people appeared to protect the development of her moral identity and sense of agency, whereas Maria's identity and agency was jeopardized by her lack of such protective resources. (Recall that there were also inter-connections between the evil that Maria sensed in her life, her family, and her experience of childhood abuse: her father, whom she had referred to as Lucifer, and her brother had both sexually abused her as a child.)

Nevertheless, Maria, like Tamara, believed that her faith in God offered her a way back from being a person that hurts other people and herself. Like Tamara, she credited God with having protected her from becoming HIV-positive, given all the men that she had had unprotected sex with in her past. She interpreted her HIV-negative status as an opportunity that God was giving her to respect herself and

love herself. Maria also observed that attending church made her feel “lighter”, and as though she was in the presence of God.

Unfortunately God did not serve as a consistent source of motivation for Maria and Tamara to be good. This was because God did not appear to be salient in their thinking much of the time, perhaps due to the largely secular nature of the company that each young woman kept (e.g., Maria’s social workers tended to laugh at her indulgently when she talked about God). It has been observed that “Evangelical preachers often preach as if they are teaching people to keep God constantly in mind, because it is so easy not to pray, to let God’s presence slip away. But when it works people experience God as alive” (Luhmann, 2014).

On the other hand, it has also been observed that trauma can keep God alive (Sharp, 2013). Victims of trauma may be more often reminded of God, if they viewed God as having been the reason that they survived their traumatic circumstances. Each time that Tamara ‘tempted fate’ by having sex with strangers or by leaving her belongings with people she barely knew, only to find that no harm had come to her or her things, her faith in God was continually renewed: “What more proof of God do you need?” Though the extent to which God could remain salient for them may be open to question, the fact that Maria and Tamara each perceived their faith in God as a potential way for them to become a better person made evident the self-conflicts that they experienced: Were they really intrinsically bad people who were driven to do evil things or were they merely wayward people who, if they returned to their connection with a protective loving God, could stop hurting others and themselves, and perhaps be redeemed? These young women might have also felt driven to keep God ‘alive’ in order to not feel so alone and unsupported as a survivor of intensely painful experiences that cannot be easily shared with others. Shane Sharp (2013), a sociologist who researched victims of interpersonal violence commented: “From the dozens of interviews I conducted with victims from a variety of denominational backgrounds,

I learned that God was one of the few consistent sources of comfort, strength and hope for these people.”

*Downplaying the harm done and staying in control.* In contrast, Carmen appeared to be somewhat less tormented by the harms that she had caused to others. This was likely because she had less reason to feel shame, as a result of her efforts to not compromise her core values. Recall that Carmen was scrupulous about not stealing from individuals, and had resisted selling drugs that could pose serious harm to others.<sup>47</sup> She had never perpetrated violence on another person. Of course, she also protected herself from the harms that Tamara and Maria worried about in regards to their involvement in prostitution. That said, it appeared that Carmen experienced moral self-conflict from the more subtle ways that she put herself at risk of harm from men.

As discussed earlier, both Carmen and Tamara prided themselves on being strong people. However, Carmen’s conviction about herself as strong appeared to waver when we discussed her dating relationships, both past and present. Though she admitted to having allowed boyfriends’ to “walk all over” her in the past, Carmen would say that she was determined to not make that mistake again. Nevertheless, she admitted to being emotionally dependent on her current boyfriend, as it was “comfortable” to turn to him when she needed someone, despite the fact that he had repeatedly cheated on her. Consistent with her history of social difficulties, Carmen had few other people that she could turn to for support. Her desire to be available whenever her boyfriend was not working prevented her from making friends with her fellow students from her high school upgrading program. Carmen also tolerated her boyfriend’s mistreatment, because she perceived him as being better to her than her previous boyfriends had been. In fact, one way that she had dealt with the emotional, physical, and

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<sup>47</sup> Though she did not feel great about selling marijuana either, she reasoned that this was a “natural” herb that may be helping other people medicinally, just as it helped her to manage her anxiety.

sexual abuse that she had suffered from previous boyfriends was to treat other men as the “whores for a change”: “Sure sometimes I’d hustle guys and use them for sex and treat them like the whore, but that kind of made me feel a bit better too, cos’ a lot of guys have done that to me. It was kind of my payback on the male gender.”

Carmen was also concerned about being economically dependent on the young men that she dated. In addition to resisting explicit acts of prostitution, Carmen resisted thinking of herself as a “bag chaser”: someone who was only with a guy because he could provide her with drugs or other material goods. In contrast, Carmen expressed that she had always cared about the young men whom she dated. Nevertheless, she recalled being “happier” when she did not have a boyfriend, though she was “broker and suffered [economically] a lot more”, because as she put it, “Whenever I had stuff, I know it was just me who got it for me.” She admitted to staying with her current boyfriend, in part, to eat his food, do her laundry, and to have someone to pay for their dates and other things (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes) that she could not afford by herself.

Hence though it was clearly comforting for Carmen to know that she had never sold herself in prostitution, her experiences of exploitive situations with men, both as a victim and as a perpetrator, had caused her to experience self-conflict. She continued to insist that she knew it was bad to be in the “depend [economically] on your boyfriend position”, because she should know that, as she put it, “I’m there because I want to be, not because I have to be.” Thus it appeared that Carmen questioned whether her own behaviour might be closer to the bag chasing behaviour that she had criticized. She also confessed to cheating on her current boyfriend, even though she had railed against his cheating with respect to her.

Carmen’s selection of emotional self-regulation strategies may have helped her cope with her moral self-conflict. In contrast to solving her moral problem by leaving her boyfriend, cheating on him

and treating men as the “whores” could be seen as more passive and indirect strategies for coping with the dissonance that she experienced by staying with her boyfriend. Such strategies may have helped reduce the frustration that Carmen likely experienced from not just her boyfriend’s betrayals, but from the issue of feeling powerless to act in accordance with her professed values. Put another way, these vengeful strategies may have helped her compensate for, or take the sting out of, the fact that she was compromising herself.

Carmen may have been similarly motivated to perceive herself as doing the right thing when she elected to act calmly and rationally in response to hearing of her boyfriend’s infidelities. Carmen said that when other boyfriends had cheated on her, she had “acted like the hysterical girlfriend before and it didn’t get [her] anywhere.” She further observed that she had seen her mother “smashing the fuck out of everything” when problems arose with her father, which only seemed to make things worse in their relationship. Thus it appeared that her fear that she may lose her boyfriend if she reacted in such a volatile way had inspired her to calmly discuss with him how he could go about rebuilding trust with her. She prided herself on her cool and collected response to him, reasoning that such calmness on her part reflected greater maturity and rationality than she had been capable of previously.

Maria and Tamara also appeared to engage in some of the same kinds of passive emotion regulation strategies. They had each similarly discussed how they had failed to feel bad for using men, either sexually or economically. This was especially the case when Tamara and Maria talked about their involvement with sugar daddies. It may be that seeing themselves as the victimizer, or at least the person who is in control in such relationships, may have given them an important illusion of control, even as they have recognized deep down that they were not the ones who were truly calling the shots. For example, Tamara insisted that she was always the one who was in control of her relationship with her sugar daddy. She spoke angrily about how she could hypothetically wreck his life by exposing his

relationship with her to his family. Her anger appeared to arise in reaction to her contemplating the economic power that he holds with respect to her.

The illusion of control appeared to also be maintained by how sugar daddies explain their roles as the harmless benefactors and supporters of young women. Like Tamara, Maria denied that she had had to do very much sexually, if anything at all, in exchange for the gifts and money that she had received from sugar daddies. Maria explained that since many of the sugar daddies are professionals like lawyers, they can afford to give gifts to young women, just because they like doing so, and they “won’t ask for more [sexually] unless you are a hooker.” Nevertheless Maria admitted that she would only call her sugar daddies when she was desperate for money (although they usually called her). Though like Tamara, she contended that she had never felt forced to do anything with any of her sugar daddies, she had still felt pressure from inside of herself to give something back to them: Of one initial encounter with a sugar daddy, Maria commented, “I just wanted to kiss him, just to get it off my chest.” Thus both the prospect of a more restricted range of sexual favours that are required of them (if any), and the rationale that the sugar daddy provides for his gift giving (i.e., just enjoying buying gifts or otherwise benefiting young women), helped the young women differentiate themselves from prostitutes. As such, they could resist experiencing the powerlessness that attends more explicit forms of prostitution (i.e., street walking, working as an escort).

Though helping young women maintain an illusion of control in such relationships may have helped to maintain the relationships for sugar daddies, differentiating one’s self from being a “bag chaser” or a prostitute probably also helped the young women in this study to preserve their sense of themselves as being both good and strong, despite their submission to exploitive relationships with men. It may even be that Carmen’s repeated protestations about her inner strength reflected her need to resist identifying with the kinds of economic and emotional dependency that had forced her mother

to endure her father's abuse. It was in the context of having drawn a link between her own experiences with men and her mother's experiences with her father that Carmen had commented that she now knows why her mother had always talked to her about being strong and not having to depend on anyone else.

*Rationalizing violence.* Jay appeared to grapple with his moral transgressions in a different way than the young women did. In contrast to the young women, Jay did not appear to be pricked by his conscience nor was he pushed into self-conflict by violating a set of personal morals or his connection with God. Nevertheless Jay did write about experiencing "self-battles" in his journal entries to his English teacher, over resisting opportunities to move back into street life, and he did speak about how his transition to mainstream life required him to "work on" his "morality and honesty." However, it appears that his motivation for grappling with these self-conflicts more reflected his concern about avoiding negative consequences for himself (e.g., returning to jail), rather than dealing with his remorse over having hurt others or himself. Carmen suggested a reason why personal conscience did not seem to motivate young male drug dealers to give up selling, as it did in her case. Carmen suggested that the young men tended to be more invested in the high status and power that they could achieve from taking big risks in order to be more profitable with their selling (i.e., becoming a "big baller"), whereas she felt like "shit" for risking people's lives through her drug dealing.

Jay's experience appeared to lend some credence to Carmen's observations. Jay clearly placed a high premium on his drug dealing skills, and on the high status and reputation that accompanied his success on the street. However, though he acknowledged the personal benefits that defending his reputation through violence had brought him, he emphasized that he had felt powerless to have done otherwise. He maintained that anyone who was trapped in street life in the way that he had been (i.e., "like a dog trapped in a corner", on account of having no other means of survival) would have felt

similarly compelled to commit violence. Failing to stand up for himself in jail by resisting violence in that context would have likewise led to his business getting “screwed” by his rivals on the outside. Jay was also scared to not uphold his reputation through violence, for fear of the physical and social repercussions to himself if he revealed any weakness. Other young men in street life, as well as in more normative social contexts, have similarly observed that you have “to act pissed off or shut down” (Brown, 2012, p.96) to cover up any sign that you might be scared. Brene Brown, social worker, explains that male gender socialization entails that men learn that they can never be afraid or show fear. Men will respond with anger or completely turn off emotionally in response to fear-provoking stimuli, thereby masking underlying feelings of shame or inadequacy.

Moreover, Jay observed that you could not stop the violence through your own inaction anyway, given that other people were willing to do it for you. Because of his reputation, other people wanted to demonstrate their loyalty towards him: “[It’s like] a ripple effect. Your bro<sup>48</sup> who is loyal to you will commit violence for you.” Jay explained that the violence was the price that these other people were willing to pay to be part of his “crew”, given his success in dealing. He contended that the conventions governing street life also implied that those who became victims of the violence should have known that they “had it coming. They [knew] the rules.” Moreover, his efforts to defend his reputation afforded his mother protection when she landed in jail on a drug-related offense. Given the very public life that Jay’s mother had led on the street as a “junkie”, she was apparently vulnerable to being mistreated in jail. In fact, Jay feared that she could have been in more danger than most men who become incarcerated, given that female offenders reportedly treat one another more harshly than male offenders do. Jay was also able to downplay the harms that he had perpetrated by pointing to what

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<sup>48</sup> “bro” means street brother

other people had done on the street. Being able to point to the even more serious harm that was inflicted by the “bigger guys” (e.g., members of the Hells Angels and other similar gangs), Jay admitted, had also made him feel that what he was doing was not so bad.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned rationales for violence, other factors appeared to conspire to make it easy for Jay to find a solution for his identity formation in street life, thereby increasing his motivation for accepting its violence. The way that Jay tells his story of how he became involved with street life was that it was a good way for him to meet his needs, at least early on in his street life involvement, because it had provided him with not only a means of economic survival but also status, acceptance and belonging, at the same time that he was being pushed out of his family. Jay was also likely to be especially vulnerable to doing whatever he needed to do to gain peer approval, because any teenager’s social life is experienced as a life and death matter to them, in view of social-cognitive developments such as the imaginary audience (Elkind, 1998) (i.e., imagining that you are the centre of everyone else’s focus and attention, especially that of your peers) and neurological developments such as a “remodelling of the dopaminergic system” (Steinberg, 2008, p.6) and “proliferation of receptors for oxytocin” (Steinberg, 2008, p.10) which together increase adolescents’ responsivity to rewarding stimuli, especially the social approval of one’s peers (Steinberg). Moreover, in street life, or even in just low income communities generally, concerns about peer status amongst young people are “even more exaggerated because there are so few other available sources of status, dignity, and respect” (Hart, 2013, p.105). Carl Hart, the neuroscientist who grew up in an impoverished neighborhood in Miami,

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<sup>49</sup>When asked to provide examples of the kind of violence that he and his peers engaged in while collecting drug debts, Jay described tying victim to chairs and repeatedly attacking them. They might also steal their victims’ belongings, after breaking into their homes. Though Jay did not elaborate on his use of guns, he mentioned keeping them under his bed when he was a teenager and also carrying them in vehicles. Jay did not describe the kind of violence that the “bigger guys” had engaged in.

recalled failing to register the distress that he and his teenage friends must have caused to a stranger whom they had aimed a gun at, as a prank. Hart recalled that his concerns at the time “were entirely focused on the respect of [his] peers and whatever was necessary to maintain [his] status” (p.105). Likewise, at one point, Jay even viewed members of his own family (his aunt and his cousin) as people that he would be willing to “sacrifice” in order to demonstrate his allegiance to his street family.

*Nothing left to lose: failing to care about self or others.* I already discussed how much such loyalty or allegiance had meant to Jay, and how much it could have cost him with respect to integrating into mainstream life, if he had continued to adhere to this street norm. The conflict that Jay described between feeling loyal to his street peers and learning to be loyal to himself (as his ex-offender re-entry worker put it) becomes even more understandable, when one takes into account that Jay likely felt that his physical survival was even more intimately bound up with his social survival, than the preceding discussion suggests. It has been observed that young men who engage in potentially fatal interactions on the street often do so over ‘slights’ to their honor (Wilson & Daly, 1985), rather than drugs or money, which is in keeping with the importance of social concerns to adolescents, as discussed above. Rather than having irrational overreactions, the young men “may be acting as shrewd calculators of the probable costs and benefits of alternative courses of action” (Wilson & Daly, p.70), before they avenge such social slights. For example, they may weigh the possible risks of loss of reputation and status from being labelled a coward and the risks of injury and death against possible benefits such as impressing women, and the low likelihood (less than 10%) (Hart, 2013) of being sentenced for homicide or even manslaughter, if they are regarded as acting in self-defence. This kind of cost-benefit analysis implies that the young men who engage in such violence are ones who have assessed that they have little to lose (i.e., few resources and limited future prospects), just like Jay.

It is therefore not surprising that Jay saw his participation in violence as being truly unavoidable during his street life -- a fact which likely protected him from feeling moral conflict about his victims. Nevertheless, as he reflected on his thinking at the time, he was dismayed that he had failed to feel self-conflict, even with respect to the possibility of hurting his own aunt and cousin. At the time, however, Jay's steadily deteriorating family life could have contributed to a sense of his having little left to lose. Not only had the aforementioned aunt (his kinship foster mother) kicked him out of her house on Christmas Eve, but Jay identified his mother's kicking him out of her home, for the last time, as the event that had pushed him into committing a spree of crimes, involving extremely risky behaviours, as regards his own safety and the safety of others. His mother's rejection of him caused him to no longer "[give] a fuck about life", meaning that he no longer felt that he had any reason to inhibit his risk behaviours<sup>50</sup>. Jay had also credited his methamphetamine use with making him become "callous" to his feelings for others, and for making him a "stranger to [his own] self." It seems likely that his drug use reinforced his pre-existing feelings of estrangement from self and others, which, in turn, facilitated his unrestrained risk taking.<sup>51</sup> Psychoactive drugs "can only modify bodily processes and capabilities already present" (Hart, 2013, p. 317) in an individual, as opposed to compelling social behaviour.

Unlike the young women who appeared to need to downplay their willingness to accept exploitive sexual relationships in order to ease their moral self-conflict and preserve their 'good' identities, Jay's violence and his lack of remorse for it did not cause him to experience self-contradiction,

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<sup>50</sup> African- American author James Baldwin (1963) once wrote that "The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose" (p.76).

<sup>51</sup> It is possible that apathy and anhedonia, which are depressive symptoms that can be experienced from the withdrawal of methamphetamine and cocaine (Leventhal et al., 2010) may have contributed to Jay's feelings of estrangement. It remains unclear if the anhedonia-stimulant relationship that has been reported in the literature is a causal one (i.e., stimulant use or withdrawal causes the anhedonia) or if anhedonic individuals are more prone to self-medicate with stimulants (Leventhal et al).

even as he transitioned to the mainstream. Despite his reflection on his callousness towards his family members (Jay also expressed dismay at his failure to care about his mother's suicide attempt at the time), Jay still did not appear to be plagued by his conscience over the harm that he had caused to others. He appeared to split his experience of himself into two entities: there was his 'old' street life and what he had to do to survive within those circumstances, and his 'new' mainstream life, which now required him to desist from harmful behaviours, to ensure his survival in a different context.

This experience of his self is consistent with Jay's redemptive narrative as someone who, though bad in the past, was actively working to transform himself into someone who is good. As mentioned previously, Jay regarded the skills and knowledge that he was gaining through his high school upgrading and his first 'real' jobs as key to his being able to "afford" to be good (i.e. to not have to maintain some involvement in crime in order to survive economically). Jay said that he was only able to begin to resume caring about himself and other people, when he began to work on developing a mainstream identity (i.e., thinking about his interests, values, and possible competencies) with the support of his workers from the ex-offender re-entry program. Such support apparently allowed him to entertain the prospect of being able to survive in a way that did not compel him to harm others, thereby paving the way to become a person that could "afford" to care about people again, including himself. Put another way, he was on his way to becoming someone who could someday assess that he had too much to lose by engaging in potentially fatal violence.

*Getting lost in emotional pain and risky coping strategies.* Tamara also went through a period in which she had stopped caring about what happened to herself and anyone else. Rather than this period occurring in the thick of her street life, it occurred when she was just beginning to transition to mainstream life. Recall that many factors had conspired to push Tamara towards leaving street life (e.g., losing child welfare support, having only sober friends, having no one who would sell drugs to her

anymore) even though she herself did not yet feel motivated to make that change. As such, in many respects, Tamara was just going through the motions of becoming a good, mainstream person, when she had re-enrolled in school and worked at her job in the mall, despite how these efforts may have appeared to others, such as her mother and her child welfare caseworker. It must have been perplexing to such individuals that this period was punctuated by suicide attempts from Tamara. It was only after her last suicide attempt, which occurred four years after she had become sober, that she discovered that she did want to have a future, and that she did not want to hurt others again, by making any further threats of suicide.

Tamara's numerous suicide attempts apparently had resulted from an intense need to assuage feelings of desperation. This desperation was a product of her perception that she had been rejected or abandoned by the people whom she had felt closest to, such as her ex-boyfriend and her best girlfriend. For example, she attempted suicide when she learned that her ex-boyfriend had gotten himself a new girlfriend. She also attempted suicide when she felt threatened that her best friend was distancing herself from her. (Tamara's best friend was apparently trying to get away from Tamara, because she could no longer tolerate the extreme risks that Tamara had worked her way up to (e.g., dating a Hells Angels member).

It appeared that Tamara's chronic insecurity about her closest relationships would culminate to produce episodes of extreme anxiety, when she was confronted by the kinds of aforementioned situations in which she perceived that she was being rejected or abandoned. In this state of anguish, she did not care whether she lived or died, or cared about how her behaviour was affecting anyone else. Her apathy and emotional dysregulation was thus similar to that described by Jay. Also like Jay, she traced her lack of concern for anyone or anything to her "rejecting" relationship with her mother. Despite her commitment to staying alive, (that she had only made four months prior to our interviews), Tamara

admitted that she had continued to fantasize about her funeral, which included musing about questions, such as “Does anyone love me? Would anyone miss me?” Her doubts that her friends and family did truly care about her (“Everyone’s a liar.”) had made her “want to call everyone’s bluff.” This distrust of others appeared to be rooted in her doubts about her relationship with her mother. Tamara struggled with the fact that her mother had told her that if Tamara did die, she would be sad, but that she would eventually move on with her life. Tamara said that she recognized that her mother had made this comment to stress to her that the person that she would be hurting the most by killing herself would be herself. However, it appeared that this comment had the effect of stoking her fears about not being loved by her mother, rather than helping to deter her suicidal thoughts.

A sense of apathy towards what might have happened to her also appeared to characterize Carmen’s reflections about her suicide attempts. Rather than experience the relief that many individuals come to feel after a failed suicide attempt, Carmen only appeared to reject suicide attempts as being as a good solution to her problems on account of the discomfort and aggravation that she would typically experience as a result of being hospitalized after an overdose. Discomfort came from getting her stomach pumped and aggravation came from having to argue with psychiatrists to convince them that she should be released from the hospital: “I don’t want to go through that anymore so [I] might as well focus on the future, not shittiness now.” Thus rather than expressing a firm commitment towards staying alive, Carmen appeared to still not be sure whether it was better that she had survived rather than died. This stance appeared to reflect the ongoing suffering that she experienced as a result of unresolved family and street trauma, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter.

Like Tamara, the immediate antecedents for all of Carmen's suicide attempts were events that had caused her to perceive that she had been rejected by the people whom she felt closest to<sup>52</sup>. The reader will also recall that Maria's last suicide attempt was similarly triggered by her perception of being rejected by her child welfare caseworker, whom she had regarded as being a mother figure in her life. Maria indicated that experiences of rejection had also triggered other previous suicide attempts, and had precipitated many instances of her running away from foster homes and group homes.

Both Carmen and Maria also engaged in non-suicidal self-injury, such as cutting their arms and legs. Maria additionally had engaged in banging her head against walls. Animals (e.g., monkeys) and humans who experience severe adverse events, such as separating from one's mother or experiencing abuse and neglect early in one's life, are especially vulnerable to such self-injurious behaviour (Joiner, 2010). Such early experiences are believed to interfere with the development of more normal stress-regulation abilities (Joiner). It is not surprising then that Carmen felt that her self-injury had become like an addiction to her, because it reduced her feelings of emotional pain and "felt good." As she explained, "...it numbs a lot, Like it's still there [the emotional pain] but it's a lot less after you cut." The good feeling that Carmen described may be the result of endorphins that are released in response to the injury. Both humans and monkeys may engage in self-injury as a "means to self-administer a crude form of acupuncture" (Joiner, p.214). The areas that humans and primates select to injure themselves have been associated with "acupuncture/acupressure induced pain relief" (Marinus, Chase, & Novak, as cited in Joiner, p.214).

In addition to having learned how to induce biological mechanisms for feeling good, Carmen appeared to conceive of cutting as a psychological coping strategy that directly targeted her emotional

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<sup>52</sup> In the next chapter, I will discuss how such attachment-related problems may underlie the young women's doubts about the value of their continuing their lives, both for themselves, and for those who care about them.

distress. Seeing her blood come out apparently helped her to externalize her pain: “It’s good that it’s painful. It’s like the pain in my brain is coming out physically and that’s something that will heal.” “So I’m turning my mental pain into something physical – it’s like I’m able to cope with it better.” Also consistent with the research literature on self-injury (Joiner, 2010), Carmen observed that the novelty of the wound and the blood distracted her from her negative mood. She described the whole “ritual” of cutting as being “therapeutic”: “Everything from the point where you’re doing it and bleeding everywhere to the point where you’re cleaning yourself up and you’re healing. It’s a week later and you’re covered in scabs. All of it is completely therapeutic.”<sup>53</sup>

Just as self-injury appears to involve the simultaneous experience of pain and a means for coping with pain, the suicide attempts of the young women and the potentially fatal violence engaged in by Jay also appear to reflect both suffering and the means for coping with suffering. Regarding the latter, I already discussed the range of benefits that Jay derived from his willingness to commit violence. Additionally, Jay often appeared to enjoy providing highly detailed descriptions of other potentially fatal risks that he had engaged in, such as high speed chases from the police. While this may have partly reflected a young man’s bravado<sup>54</sup>, intended to impress his interviewer, Jay’s enthusiasm in conveying extensive accounts of such exploits implied that he had derived great pleasure from the excitement that had attended these risks. Similarly, Tamara admitted that she missed the “rush” that she got from

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<sup>53</sup> Although both self-injury researchers and Carmen distinguished between biological pain and psychological pain, it appears that “those who are rejected show increased activity in the dorsal anterior cingulate and the anterior insula — two of the regions that show increased activity in response to physical pain... As far as your brain is concerned, a broken heart is not so different from a broken arm.” (Eisenberger, Lieberman and Williams, as cited in Weir, 2012). Thus when youths and researchers make a distinction between physical and emotional pain, they may just be reflecting a Western cultural bias for upholding the idea of mind and body as distinct. Self-injury may actually be directly targeting emotional pain rather than the reduction in emotional pain being mediated by distraction from negative mood or the idea that one is externalizing psychological pain.

<sup>54</sup> However, Maria discussed her more risky crimes in a similar vein, thereby suggesting that the bravado may not be exclusive to males in street life.

others' reactions to her threats of suicide. Specifically, when others would tell her that they would be devastated by her loss, Tamara would feel rewarded. Accordingly, Tamara acknowledged that she had sometimes threatened and even attempted suicide to keep significant others close to her.

Nevertheless, for both Tamara and Jay, considerable suffering and personal risk was sustained by them, even as they experienced the rewards of such behaviours. Mental health professionals have suggested that the term parasuicide be reserved for self-harming behavior that is identified by a patient or client as suicidal but that has a low probability of actually resulting in death (Reidbord, 2009).

Clinicians who frequently deal with parasuicide caution that although such behavior may appear to have a manipulative intent<sup>55</sup> (i.e., it elicits attention or sympathy from others) does not mean that it will still not lead to death by suicide (Reidbord). Such clinicians are not just referring to the possibility that someone might accidentally kill herself in the process of trying to achieve some other desired effect for herself, but also that suicide attempts (and perhaps other potentially fatal risks) may be at once both a reflection of one's dire suffering (and a wish to end that suffering through death) as well as a potentially non-lethal means for relieving that suffering (e.g., by attracting the attention and interest of significant others/people who can help). Joiner (2010) likewise acknowledged that the same people may engage in self-injury that is not intended to end in death and in self-injury that is intended to be fatal – a statement that clearly applies to Carmen and Maria's self-injury and suicidal behaviours but also to Tamara who acknowledged that her suicidal behaviour had sometimes been "manipulative." The reason that both real, significant anguish *and* a seeming intent to manipulate others may co-occur is likely because these youths are engaging in self-injurious behaviours for the main purpose of controlling their

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<sup>55</sup> Reidbord (2009, para.2) points out that "Aim and intent become complex philosophical issues once the idea of a dynamic unconscious comes into play. Can one intend something without knowing it? Can intent be discerned by a therapist over the patient's heartfelt disagreement?" I will elaborate on this issue of unconscious motivators for the youths' risk behaviors later in this chapter and the next chapter.

negative moods. Just as Carmen described a “therapeutic” aftermath to her cutting, Joiner points out that “for monkeys who engage in self-biting at times of stress and thus of accelerated heart rate, their heart rate decreases after self-injury” (p.214). This would explain why only someone who felt very seriously bereft with respect to feeling loved and valued (an extreme stressor for many high risk youths and individuals diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder [BPD]<sup>56</sup>, both of whom often experienced early adverse events) would experience hearing others profess their feelings of devastation in the event of her death as so reinforcing as to liken it to a “rush” of adrenaline.

Although I will elucidate further on the youths’ extreme ways of reacting to feelings of rejection in the next chapter, their subjective feelings, and the risk behaviours that represented attempts to cope with those feelings, appear to be captured by the following description of psychological isolation: “...a feeling that one is locked out of the possibility of human connection and of being powerless to change the situation. In the extreme, psychological isolation can lead to a sense of hopelessness and desperation. People will do almost anything to escape this combination of condemned isolation and powerlessness” (Miller & Stiver, as cited in Brown, 2012). The hedonic satisfaction from whatever gave the youths a “rush”, with respect to the various risk behaviours they engaged in, appeared to mask a great deal of unhappiness, contrary to what it may have looked like to others.

*Resorting to risks, in desperation, to communicate and cope with pain.* In addition to experiencing various types of pleasurable reinforcement, alongside of their intense suffering, risk behaviour also occurred, in response to the problem of psychological isolation, as a means of communicating with others. Carmen’s self-injury was, in part, a way of alerting her parents to her emotional distress. Carmen denied that she was just seeking attention from her parents or that her

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<sup>56</sup> Individuals diagnosed with BPD also commonly use self-injury as a means of emotional self-regulation (Joiner, 2010).

cutting was even a consciously chosen communication strategy. She explained that the cutting occurred after she had repressed her distress over her family problems for as long as she could: “for so long until it explodes and you’re cutting yourself.” Carmen had repressed her feelings because her parents punished her for expressing them: “Cos’ all my life it was just been dealt with like just holding it in, cos’ I’ve no outlet for it and if I talk about it with my parents, I’m just in more trouble and it’s me who’s a problem.” Carmen acknowledged having engaged in yelling, screaming, breaking things, and even putting her hand through a wall, at one point. These expressions of anger arose in response to her feeling cut off from the support and understanding of her parents: “Like when people get upset, cos’ you got angry, but you only got angry, because no one was understanding you – why you are so upset [and] feel unsupported. It’s kind of like when you’re angry and you yell. It’s cos’ you feel like you’re far away and people don’t understand that. They’re just like, “Shut the fuck up!”

Her parents’ misunderstanding of these behaviours had caused Carmen to reflect that she had resorted to cutting herself for lack of knowing any other way to express and cope with her feelings. This only elicited more punishment from her parents. As Carmen put it, “Mom didn’t know how to deal with it [the cutting]...she made me feel worse for doing it. Yeah cos’ it was me hurting them [her parents] if I’m hurting myself. And I’m such a horrible inconsiderate conceited person and hope my fucking arm hurts from cutting it. They guilt tripped me and made me feel bad. Like I was doing something to them.”

Though Carmen had not consciously chosen to use cutting as a way to communicate her distress to her parents, she had hoped that their response to seeing her injury would have been to see it as a sign of the severe level of distress she was experiencing, and care enough about her to help her: “But they’re too fucked up to really give a shit about their fucked up daughter. So that’s why I stopped cutting on my arms, because I don’t want people to know that I’m a cutter”. That is she realized from

her parents' reaction that others may also misunderstand her and punish or stigmatize her for cutting herself.

Similarly, many of the conflicts that Tamara had engaged in with her mother reflected her desperation to "get a reaction out of her." Her mother typically would not demonstrate any emotions in response to Tamara, which caused Tamara to resort to extreme behaviours such as screaming deliberately hurtful comments at her mother. Tamara indicated that she felt that she had to resort to such behaviour: "What else could I do?" Given that nothing other than the most extreme verbal provocation could seem to elicit a response from her mother, it is easy to see how Tamara, like Carmen, was effectively driven to engage in highly emotionally dysregulated forms of antisocial behaviours.

Given the underlying problem of psychological isolation, neither of the young woman's efforts to enlist significant others to help them assuage their emotional distress should be thought of as being intentionally "manipulative." Rather it appeared that they felt caught in a "double-bind" (Bateson, as cited In Gibney, 2006), a dysfunctional communication dynamic with their parents that caused them to feel that there was no way, short perhaps of engaging in highly extreme other-destructive and self-destructive behaviour, that they could possibly have their feelings be heard within their families. If they externalized their feelings by expressing them in a moderate tone of voice or even through mild forms of "acting out" their anger and/or their desperation to be listened to (e.g., yelling), they were condemned by their parents (often leading to greater isolation for the youths<sup>57</sup>), and if they internalized their feelings, they were prone to self-injurious and suicidal behaviour, which was also met by parental condemnation.

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<sup>57</sup> Though Tamara's mother had a restraining order against Tamara for the years that she was in care, her mother would still see Tamara, whenever she was feeling confident that she would be physically safe in Tamara's presence. This intermittent reinforcement may have also fuelled Tamara's desperation to be with her mother, and to feel connected to her, whenever her mother elected to see her.

Beyond the learning of poor self-regulation skills and the use of self-injury as a communication strategy, self-injury and suicide attempts, among other self-destructive forms of risk behaviour (e.g., drug abuse), are often interpreted by Gestalt psychotherapists as retroflection (Bucay, 2013): an unconscious defense mechanism by which one substitutes one's self for some aspect of her environment, which can take the form of doing things to one's self that one wants to do to others (e.g., aggress against parents). A barrier is thus imposed by the self to protect others from one's aggressive impulses. Retroflection can be a way of coping with an environment that is perceived as dangerous (e.g., worries of parental retaliation or even more rejection/abandonment). However, it is a mechanism that often leads to isolation anyways because one's underlying needs for support and connection are not being expressed directly. Carmen recalled that she had once cut herself furiously after some man in her neighborhood had propositioned her for sex. She explained that as she cut herself, it was as if she were sarcastically saying to him, "See how pretty I am now." In this instance, it appeared that cutting served as a substitute for not having the courage to directly confront this man with her feelings of anger towards him (a fully understandable fear for a young woman who was living on her own in a dangerous inner city environment.)

Gestalt therapists contend that if anger is not channelled into some kind of pro-active behaviour, the individual will invariably become angry at themselves or channel that anger through risk-taking behaviour or other emotions/bodily responses that mask the anger such as depression, guilt, or somatization (Bucay, 2013). Thus in the above example of Carmen being propositioned for sex, by cutting herself she protects herself from not feeling angry at herself for her failure to confront this man directly. The apathy that Jay, Tamara, and Carmen appeared to feel in their family situations may also reflect their predicament of feeling trapped in a double-bind of being unable to express one's needs, without also incurring negative consequences for themselves – a situation that would engender

“learned helplessness”<sup>58</sup>, as discussed in the previous chapter. It would be hard to experience one’s self as an efficacious and moral agent, in this context of powerlessness and isolation resulting from parental and societal censure over one’s problem behaviours/coping efforts.

***The role of identity diffusion in problems with moral agency.*** The youths’ apathy and concomitant engagement in destructive risk behaviours to fulfill needs for emotional/material survival, social belonging, and social identity reflects what James Marcia (1993) refers to as identity diffusion. As mentioned previously, identity diffusion is the failure to be interested in exploring various routes to personal identity formation, in order to commit to one which best reflects who one *feels* one’s self to be. Though research suggests that identity diffused youth are a heterogeneous group, hopelessness and depression have been more commonly observed in this subset of youth, than is seen among the other identity statuses that young people might occupy<sup>59</sup> (Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, & Branje, 2012). As noted earlier, identity diffusion often occurs due to a lack of societal options for identity formation, which is best reflected in Jay’s and Carmen’s situations of having turned to drug dealing as a solution to their social and vocational identity needs. However, identity diffusion may also proceed from developmental deficits, such as difficulties in negotiating early stages of Erikson’s (1959) psychosocial stages of identity. In the next chapter, I will elaborate in detail on how childhood experiences,

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<sup>58</sup> Learned helplessness, or failing to perceive that one can exert control over an aversive stimulus, such as punishment or rejection from parents, has been identified as a causal mechanism in clinical depression (Seligman, as cited in Hiroto, 1974).

<sup>59</sup> In some studies, young people who occupy Marcia’s moratorium status have been observed to also demonstrate more internalizing problems than is seen in identity achievers or identity foreclosures. It is unclear if moratoriums demonstrate more depression and anxiety than diffused youth (Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, & Branje, 2012).

particularly those that led to the pain that the youths felt in relation to unmet needs from their parents, may have contributed to the social-emotional deficits that can underlie their identity struggles.

But for now, I will mention that psychiatrist Otto Kernberg (2012) offers a psychoanalytic explanation for how events such as parental rejection and abandonment may contribute to identity diffusion. Kernberg and other object relations theorists contend that individuals first internalize representations of themselves and significant others in the form of the dyadic relationships that they have participated in, such as mother and child. Eventually dyadic representations of the self-significant other give way to the child's development of separate representations of herself and her mother. If such self-significant other relationships are associated with predominantly painful emotions for the child, the child may ultimately become unable to integrate both positive and negative aspects of how she experienced this relationship into her own sense of having a separate self. When the time to mentally represent her self as separate from her mother approaches, the child fails to recognize that she has both good and bad aspects, just as her mother and other significant others have. In contrast, the normative integration of good and bad that is hypothesized to correspond with the process of understanding one's self as a separate individual apart from one's mother should take place somewhere between the end of the first year to the end of the third year of life, and is hypothesized to occur gradually within this period. However, the child who does not undergo the aforementioned normative integration process will keep loving self-images and images of good others fused together at an emotional level, and separate from hateful self-images or images of bad others, which are also linked together by negative or aggressive emotions. A psychological structure to the self then develops in which "totally negative representations are split off/segregated from idealized positive representations of self and others" (Levy et al., 2006, p.486), which accounts for the child's tendency to see people, including themselves, as being either all good or all bad. It is easy to see how such a mindset would become increasingly harder

to maintain as one becomes older, due to increasing cognitive sophistication and life experiences which are likely to raise doubts about seeing people in this extremely dualistic way.

This may well explain why high risk youth may experience intense anger at their parents, particularly their mothers, and view them as being completely bad, while also describing a painful, ambivalent struggle to perceive themselves as being different from their mothers. Jay's comments about being the drug dealing son of a crackhead can be read as implying that he feels that no boundary exists between himself and his mother. That he responded with angry resignation about being an extension of his mother, rather than trying to distance himself from her influence, makes sense from Kernberg's (2012) perspective. Beyond the influence of other bad family and community models, he felt most trapped into the street lifestyle on account of being his mother's son.

Similarly, although Tamara chronically railed against her mother, she suggested that she will always be fused with her. Tamara commented that if her mother died, she would feel compelled to commit suicide. At one point, I asked her whether it might be better for her to have a more circumscribed relationship with her mother, given the level of distress that she still often found herself in concerning her mother. Tamara furiously resisted this idea, stating emphatically that there was no way that her mother could "walk away" from her again, and that she would "take her [mom] down with her", if she ever thought that she could do that again to Tamara. It appeared that Tamara had experienced the suggestion of simply having a more defined set of boundaries to regulate their relationship as being as threatening to her as when her mother separated from her when she was fifteen. Tamara's feelings of having been deprived of her mother even inspired fear for her future children. She went on to insist that there was no way that her future children would be denied a relationship with their maternal grandmother.

Such experiences of enmeshment, as opposed to the more normative experience of increasing autonomy and separation-individuation (Blos, as cited in Kroger, 2004) from parents in adolescence/young adulthood may underlie the youths' incapacity to engage meaningfully with questions of identity. For it is only by engaging in a process of deliberating on how one is both similar to and different from significant others, and synthesizing this information with the interests, abilities, character traits and values that one has otherwise selected to be self-defining, that one is able to ultimately differentiate mental representations of one's self and others. Put another way, sensing who you truly are, as reflected by your engagement with your capacity to choose amongst a variety of identity options, necessarily entails coming to terms with who you are not, and who you do not want to become. Thus a mature identity cannot be based on the experience of "splitting" (Kernberg, 2012) or failing to mentally integrate the good and bad experiences in a child-parent relationship. Rather it is only when one is able to hold balanced representations of one's self and others as both good and bad, that one is capable of experiencing a sense of continuity with one's past (Kernberg).

Though Kernberg's (2012) explanation of identity diffusion cannot be verified given its dependence on unconscious processes<sup>60</sup>, it does appear to fit with some of the youths' experiences. It is also consistent with the finding of insecure, preoccupied attachment for all of the youths from their Adult Attachment Interviews, which will be discussed in the next chapter. (Attachment representations or 'states of mind' from the Adult Attachment Interview are believed to reflect information that is at least partly, if not predominantly, unconscious to the individual, in keeping with Bowlby's construct of internal working models.) (Fonagy & Target, 2007). For now, I will also mention that Noshpitz (1994),

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<sup>60</sup> Empirical research also provides support for a relationship between identity diffusion and poor parenting. Identity diffused young people report having parents who were distant and rejecting (Josselson, as cited in Kroger, 2004). Kroger also observes that diffused youth are "likely to have had great difficulty internalizing a parental introject during early childhood" (p.43).

another psychoanalyst, suggests that substance-abusing youth often feel unconsciously driven to validate their internal sense of being bad (a reflection of their supposedly 'bad' internal working models of self from insecure attachment) through self-destructive behaviour. Moreover, Kernberg (2012) believes that the the splitting of the psychological structure in identity diffused individuals is implicated in the etiology of borderline personality disorder, which is the clinical diagnosis that is most commonly applied to those who engage in self-injury. It may be that parental rejection underlies both the observable emotion regulation difficulties that are characteristic of individuals with a borderline diagnosis such as self-injury, and the unconscious roots of emotion dysregulation (i.e., splitting) that Kernberg (2012) suggests underlies their identity diffusion. It may be then that both a lack of societal options for identity formation and/or the existence of unconscious obstacles to such development contribute to identity diffusion, hence the youths' struggles to consistently perceive themselves as being basically or mostly good, or even just capable of being good.

*Negative identity as a form of identity diffusion.* The youths' lack of societal options for identity formation together with their conscious or unconscious emotional conflicts may be why they seemed to adopt what Erikson (1959) referred to as negative identities. Negative identity is an "identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, has been presented to the individual as most undesirable or dangerous" (Erikson, p. 131). A common way that young people may manifest identity diffusion is through the adoption of a negative identity, which often takes the form of acts of delinquency (Erikson). Negative identity may serve as a temporary way for the young person to resolve the adolescent identity crisis, but cannot be a long-term solution, because a viable, mature adult identity must ultimately be validated by mainstream society (Erikson).

One reason that each of the youth participants appeared, in varying degrees, to have adopted negative identities through their involvement in street life was, as mentioned previously, because of the

many needs that such identities could address, such as providing a sense of belonging, status, and purpose. Recall that it has been observed that high risk youth will not give up their identification with the street lifestyle and desist from risk behaviours unless they are provided with effective substitutes for such needs (e.g. non-criminal vocational options) (Ungar, 2005).

Given that psychological isolation appears to be at the heart of their identity diffusion, the youths may have also been trying to compensate for the powerlessness they felt in their perceived (and often real<sup>61</sup>) social exclusion from their families and communities. Both negative identity and borderline emotion regulation problems often involve 'bad' behaviours that can confer a sense of power, in being able to disrupt social norms or control others via aggression or perhaps what has been described as "manipulation", in the case of parasuicidal behaviour. Equally if not more important than power and control, however, it was the outcome of obtaining connection with others that appeared to be most reinforcing to the young women participants, in particular. As I suggested previously with respect to Carmen's and Tamara's "manipulative" self-injurious behaviour, they appeared to be trying to control others as a way of staving off the abandonment that they perceived as being imminent for them. This may explain why any attention (positive or negative) that they received for their 'bad' behaviours could serve to maintain such behaviours, or maintain even just their reports of being in trouble of some kind (e.g., the fabricated stories that Tamara told to her social workers that I will elaborate on shortly). Marsha Linehan (1993), a psychologist who treats individuals diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, likens such desperate efforts to compel others to stay with them or to listen to them to how someone might 'act out' if they were a burn victim or cancer patient and pain medication was being withheld from them. Labelling such desperate efforts at coping with painful emotions as attention-

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<sup>61</sup> as evidenced by being kicked out of family homes, being required to leave foster placements, being 'dumped' by friends/dating partners, or being subject to a restraining order that bars contact with family members

seeking or manipulative would be mistaking the effect (making someone feel as though they were manipulated) with the cause of the behaviour (i.e., psychological isolation): “These individuals’ numerous suicidal behaviors and suicide threats, extreme reactions to criticism and rejection, and frequent inability to articulate which of a numbers of factors are directly influencing their own behavior do at times make other people feel manipulated. However, inferring behavioral intent from one or more of the effects of the behavior -- in this case, making others feel manipulated -- is simply an error in logic” (Linehan, p.17).

Apart from their engagement with self-injurious behaviour, the young women had engaged more commonly in acts that are generally thought of as being delinquent or antisocial, (e.g., running away, lying), than pathological. Child welfare caseworkers and other support professionals were often the receiving audience for such behaviours, given their control over the youths’ placements and other resources, including their attention and emotional support. As a child, Maria often ran away from foster homes or exhibited behaviour problems which resulted in her being kicked of homes that her child welfare caseworker had regarded as being good homes for her, presumably based on the reputations that the foster parents had acquired from taking in other children. However, Maria’s efforts to leave such homes typically followed situations in which she was not treated as well as the other children that lived there, particularly the foster parents’ biological children. In addition to foster parents’ demonstrating favoritism towards their own children, Maria was taunted by their biological children for not having ‘real’ parents of her own.<sup>62</sup> As an adolescent, recall that Maria prized the relationships that she had established with guards at the young offender centre so highly that she once deliberately fought with a youth court judge in order to receive a longer sentence. At the same time Maria resisted

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<sup>62</sup> When Maria had once complained to one of her former foster fathers about his daughters’ mistreatment of her in this way, the father disbelieved Maria and verbally attacked her for speaking ill of his daughters.

spending time outside of jail, for fear that she would be pulled into trouble by her family and friends. Thus youth jail represented both safety and belonging for Maria. As an adult, Maria continued to flirt with female staff of a homeless shelter, despite being repeatedly reminded of the professional boundaries that precluded such romantic relationships. Through my interviewing of her, I could establish that Maria understood the concept of professional boundaries, but that did not deter her from seeking more involvement with some of the women, on account of her very strong desire to be loved by them. In fact, the distancing efforts that were undertaken by staff members appeared to re-ignite her past experiences of feeling rejected by others, which had the effect of fuelling her desperation to connect with them even more.

As noted earlier, Tamara believed that the only way that she could sustain the attention of her group home workers was by lying about being in more trouble on the street than she really was. She had observed that girls who had more problems than she were granted more time and attention in the workers' office, than those with apparently fewer needs. Psychological isolation was clearly behind her efforts to secure more attention for herself: Tamara offered that the reason she coveted the attention that the needier girls received was because she just "needed her mom." Being separated from her mother had apparently made her feel so deprived of positive attention and affection that Tamara recalled wanting someone to hug her "thirty six hours a day." Thus it would appear that as with their self-destructive behaviours, many of young women's acts of delinquency/failures to respect boundaries were motivated by psychological isolation and maintained by either attracting the attention of supportive others or escaping isolating, non-supportive environments.

The fact that Tamara and Maria could not regularly access their mothers' love and attention due to the issues that had brought them into care (e.g., Maria's mother's drug addiction and Tamara's mother's restraining order against her) highlights a significant challenge in implementing Ungar's (2005)

recommendation to find effective substitutes for high risk youths' underlying needs. Underlying psychological isolation caused Maria to desperately and often unsuccessfully cling to those staff members in her environments whom she seemed to perceive as being surrogate mother figures (i.e., jail guards) or other attachment figures (i.e., the romantic partners that she hoped some of the homeless shelter workers might become). Her persistence in trying to realize attachment relationships with such individuals, despite often eliciting the opposite effect of what she desired, likely reflected having no other options for supportive relationships, given her family members' problems.

In contrast, Tamara viewed getting her workers' attention as only a temporary stop-gap measure for while she was in care; such relationships could only ever be a poor substitute for her mother and other 'real' family relationships. Tamara explained that family members were the people who would "hang out with you", as opposed to just spending time with you during their office hours. She observed that someone like a counsellor can help give insight into your problems, but they did not really care about you. When I asked her if a better solution than workers and counsellors would have been to have provided her with foster parents, she said that she did not think that that would have worked for her either, given that "They were going to go away one day, so what was the point?" "What would be the point in going to live with those parents if they were not going to adopt you? They would leave you in the end anyways." Tamara also did not think that there would be any point in her complying with the likely more stringent rules of foster parents (versus group home or shelter settings), when she could not receive the enduring support that she surmised could only come from a 'real' parent, like her biological mother. Tamara's comments implied a distrust of support professionals, on account of their being paid to look after children -- a feeling that has been commonly observed in young people who have been in care (Beam, 2013). Her distrust of professionals also appeared to betray her chronic concerns about being abandoned, as she felt her mother had done to her. Professionals were

assessed as being even more likely to walk out on her, given their lack of a biological connection to her. Thus the likelihood of abandonment implied that it would be prudent for Tamara to not trust in, or rely on, professionals for any more emotional support than was necessary, during her temporary period of estrangement from her mother. Thus both the perceived and real limitations of professional relationships (e.g., professional boundaries, lack of permanency) conspire against professionals being able to fulfill attachment needs in the ways that the youths require. Not only is there difficulty in providing effective 'substitutes' for attachment figures, but the provision of what the youths perceive to be 'poor' substitutes for 'real' family members, have the effect of compounding their feelings of isolation and exclusion.

*'Playing' at badness versus being bad 'for real'*. Through their various forms of deviant and delinquent behaviour, Maria and Tamara can be seen as performing the kinds of undesirable behaviours that typically reflect negative identities (Erikson, 1959). However, the adoption of a negative identity requires that the youth also identify personally with such socially undesirable behavior. Though youths may have felt driven to cope with psychological isolation through such seemingly maladaptive behaviour, the extent to which they each identified with their 'bad' behaviours is another question entirely. It appears that the extent to which all the youth participants personally and consciously identified themselves as being 'bad' depended on whether they perceived these behaviours as being more of an act that they performed to survive street life, or more of a reflection of their inner selves that were infused with the pain and shame of parental rejection. Social worker Brené Brown (2012) observed that disconnection "when coupled with the shame of believing that we're disconnected because we're not worthy of connection ... creates a pain that we want to numb" (p.139). Brown's observation is consistent with Bowlby's (1982) view that an internal working model of one's self as unworthy of love, and a model of others as untrustworthy, proceeds from the experience of insensitive,

inconsistent caregiving. This form of caregiving is believed to be responsible for insecure attachment, particularly preoccupied states of mind (Hesse, 2008).

Consistent with the above observations as well as Noshpitz's view that 'bad' internal working models underlie young people's self-destructive behaviour, particularly substance-abuse, Tamara suggested that there were only three ways for her to cope with the pain of her mother's rejection: "hurt self, hurt others, or numb out with drugs." She elaborated that drugs provide an escape from emotional pain because they "change the balance in your head, numb the source [of the pain] which is your brain." Tamara explained that you could also "beat other people to cope with your problems because you're angry at yourself", presumably referring to the self-reproach that she had felt, following her assault of her mother. (At another point, Tamara admitted to having also hurt others through vandalism and property theft, because it was "fun" to lash out at society. She said that she did not want to feel like she was the "only one" who was hurting.) The "last option" she knew of to escape her pain was suicide. Tamara suggested that the pain of rejection was so severe that only these "three things that can happen." She called these coping methods the "three extremes of like dealing with problems."

Jay similarly acknowledged that drugs were the primary way that he numbed the pain of being rejected by his family. (I elaborate on his numerous rejection experiences at the hands of many family members in an upcoming section on being an outsider.) Though Jay never seriously considered suicide, it appeared that he would agree with Tamara regarding beating up other people as a coping mechanism. He acknowledged that his mother's rejection had led him to take out his feelings of anger on his "custies" [drug customers]. Thus it would seem that not only can maternal rejection function to disinhibit young people from caring about whether they caused harm to their selves or others (the apathy/learned helplessness that was described earlier), but it can actively fuel their taking out their feelings of anger and frustration onto others. Taken together, these intense emotional responses to

powerlessness might well have caused them to override the regulatory pull on their risk behaviours that their consciences and moral values might have otherwise exerted. This would explain why the youths felt 'lost' or identity diffused in response to maternal rejection, because in such a state of conscious emotional dysregulation (and perhaps as Kohlberg suggested limitations in experiencing a coherent 'core' to one's self due to unconscious 'splitting'), one may not possess full capacity or agency to 'choose' their behaviours and assume moral responsibility for them. Instead the youths appeared to be in a state of mind that made them vulnerable to go along with opportunities for extreme risk-taking, given that violence, drugs and even the possibility of losing their own lives presented them with opportunities to temporarily numb, and perhaps put a permanent end to, their extreme emotional pain.

Though the youths' efforts to numb and distract one's self through drugs, violence or suicidal/parasuicidal behaviour may reflect shameful feelings of unworthiness in one's self as Brené Brown (2010) would suggest (and thus a logical reason for their psychological isolation), Jay also suggested that his 'badness' and anger was mostly a persona that he maintained in front of his street peers. Though he admitted to feeling afraid when committing highly risky crimes, such as breaking and entering people's homes, he had to cover his fear up by "walking in all big bad ten feet tall invincible." As mentioned previously, Jay had to maintain a tough façade in order to ensure his street survival on many levels. Moreover, the anger that he constantly exhibited during his street life was a reaction to all the stressors and threats that he felt constantly bombarded by in that lifestyle (e.g., fear of being arrested, fear of others stealing from him, fear of losing his reputation or having to defend someone else's reputation). Jay thus denied that the violence and anger that seemed to consume him during his street life was really a reflection of his true self. Though he kept up a good façade, he commented that it really "weigh[ed]" on him to be angry all the time: "By the end of the day, I'm exhausted."

Likewise, Carmen expressed that her 'badness' was an act that she put on primarily for the purpose of selling drugs. Similar to Jay, she distinguished between the adaptive value of being tough for her street life and her need to protect her true self: "I acted tough and shit when I was a drug dealer and people didn't fuck with me, but that was acting like I was a different person....I don't see that as me though. I knew I was just doing what I had to do to survive and get by and make money." Because of her strong conscience, she reflected that she was "not a very good criminal." Consequently she decided that she "might as well do something legit that's fun." Resisting the idea of having ever been a serious "gangster", she commented, "I'm a nice girl. I should just be an artist or an anthropologist or something, not a fucking meth dealer."

Thus it appeared that Carmen and Jay saw themselves as mostly "playing at being bad" (Ungar, 2002, p.135), as opposed to really identifying themselves as truly bad people. Understanding herself as having merely acted a 'bad' role appeared to help Carmen preserve a sense of herself as basically good, as well as help her commit to her mainstream identity formation. Carmen expressed that she had been careful to keep separate the role that she had been playing from her other thoughts about herself: "I'm really careful like with what I tell myself mentally if I'm gonna go sell drugs or I don't let that become me. I like make sure I differentiate it in my head and like it's like, 'This is survival. This is who I am.'" Carmen felt that her conscience and morals helped her to keep clear about the need to maintain her true, good self, as opposed to becoming 'lost', as she had feared: "It's possibly why I've just stayed me." Her view of herself as possessing inner strength also appeared to help her resist the 'hardening' of one's personality that addicts sometimes attribute to chronic drug use (e.g., Jay's belief that he had become callous from methamphetamine use): "I'm too strong for that." In other words, Carmen felt that she was too strong mentally to lose her true good self to drugs.

In contrast, although Tamara once said that her street life had been “one big lie” on account of her not being truly “broken” like so many other high risk youth who endured chronic childhood abuse, she nevertheless believed that she would never have become as immersed in street life as she did, if she had been able to stay living in her family home and had been “properly nurtured” by her mother. In other words, despite not experiencing the same degree of family problems that she perceived in other high risk youths, Tamara’s emotional pain from her family life had still driven her to become very involved in street life and to become identified with being ‘bad’. Moreover, because Tamara had channelled her genuine feelings of anger about her family into criminal activities, she felt that her engagement with such risks made her involvement in street life more ‘real’ than that of other people, like her best friend, for example.

Tamara implied that she had truly belonged in street life, unlike her best friend, who was not really a ‘bad ass’. It did not make sense to Tamara why her best friend would try to act all tough amongst their street peers when she did not have the same level of family difficulties that Tamara had, let alone the level that was experienced by most other street youth. In particular, Tamara perceived that her own experience of being “abandoned” by her family due to her mother’s restraining order against her differentiated her best friend’s level of family difficulties from that of Tamara’s and other street youth: Though she acknowledged that her best friend had problems with her parents, Tamara was sure that her best friend’s family “would have never turned their back on her.” Thus despite not being like the very “broken” kind of high risk youth that constituted the majority of her street peers, Tamara still felt entitled to belong in the ‘bad’ street lifestyle, on account of identifying with a similar kind of emotional pain (i.e., abandonment) that she shared with other high risk youth.

Tamara also said that her street life involvement had *felt* really important to her. She described having meticulously documented on calendars what she had actually done in her street life as well as

happenings that she had made up to tell her child welfare caseworkers. Though the ostensive purpose of this documentation was to help her keep her story straight in front of her caseworker (so as not to lose any resources that she was eligible for as a 'high risk' youth), Tamara also thought that she recorded these events to help her escape from the pain of her real life: "Cos' I didn't wanna remember other things. So it would be better to remember this big fake life than to remember my real fucked up life." In addition to her embellishments, Tamara spoke of wanting to remember all the people she had met and did stuff with in her street life. Like Jay, she prized many of these social connections, because they afforded her power and influence with other street youth.

However, despite the emotional and social benefits that she derived from this semi-fictional way of narrating her self, this practice had also cost Tamara, because it had kept her more personally involved, invested, and identified with street life, relative to how Carmen and Jay "played" at being bad, in order to survive street life. Though her stories of being engaged in a higher level of risk behaviour than she actually was had enabled her to access what Tamara had thought of as "better" group home/shelter placements than if she had been just a homeless youth, in retrospect, she realized that her lies had the effect of making her problems worse. By becoming segregated with other very high risk youth in her residential placements, she came to be involved in riskier behaviour than she believed she would have otherwise. Recall that Tamara felt that most of the trouble that she had gotten into in her street life could be attributed to the poor company that she had kept.

Tamara also recognized that coming to believe the lies that she had told had had a negative effect on her mental health. As she explained, "Like I'm pretty sure that like the only way that I could manage all my lies was to believe them, because then at any point name of child welfare caseworker could be like, "What did you do like?" and if I didn't like convince myself that all this stuff happened,

[then the story would not have been convincing].” By losing touch with what had really happened to her, she endangered her mental health: “I really wasn’t crazy but I drove myself crazy.”

Thus while understanding one’s self to be just “playing at being bad” (Ungar, 2002, p.135) may have helped Jay and Carmen to preserve a view of themselves as good and/or to stay committed to becoming even more good in their transitions to mainstream life, identifying with the emotional pain shared by other high risk youth had ultimately pushed Tamara into riskier social situations and her mental health was made more precarious. These outcomes could be expected to have reinforced an inner sense of her self as bad.

Additionally, the deviant activities that Tamara and her street peers engaged in were often experienced as reinforcing. For example, the act of vandalising or stealing from others provided a “thrill” from being ‘bad’. Beyond the adrenaline rush of doing deviant things, Tamara also received love and admiration from her peers, by being the “bad” Tamara (I will elaborate on this further in an upcoming section.) Thus compounding the difficulty of locating an effective substitute for the psychological isolation underlying youths’ risk behaviours, it can also be challenging to find substitutes for these kinds of rewarding aspects of bad behaviour.

**Supply and demand influences.** Still another challenge for the youths in doing what they knew to be right and good concerned the influence that a scarcity of resources and the experience of relative deprivation had on their judgment. Although Jay was not pricked by his conscience or by a set of personal morals when he reflected on the harm that he had caused to others during his street life, moral struggles (the aforementioned “self-battles”) became much more common for him, as he began to transition to a mainstream life. These struggles appeared to be tied to his deliberations about the level of commitment that he could make to a mainstream identity. When Jay was participating in the ex-offender re-entry program, one of his former street peers asked him to “hook her up” with one of his

old connections (i.e., suppliers) for drugs, so that she could get back into drug dealing temporarily. This young woman was seeking to earn just enough to cover the initial costs of renting an apartment, before returning to her goal of exiting her criminal lifestyle. Hearing this young woman's plan had prompted Jay to wonder whether it might be okay for him to similarly "dip" into his old lifestyle, for the purpose of accelerating his own transition to the mainstream. For example, he could put his illicit funds from drug dealing towards paying for cabs for appointments with his probation officer, given that these appointments took place in locations that were difficult to reach by transit. Jay also required money for other necessities (e.g., personal hygiene products) that were not well provided for in the transitional housing he lived in while attending his re-entry program. After his aforementioned discussion with his former street peer, he reflected both on his own similar needs for money, and on his having given up a great deal in terms of status and money for a very uncertain looking future at that point. As a result of these reflections, Jay decided that it would be prudent for him to keep a foot in both camps (street lifestyle and his pursuit of mainstream goals), until he was in the position where he no longer felt that he needed the safety net that a source of illicit funds could provide for him. Jay straddled both street and mainstream worlds until he finally made an absolute commitment to living a 'clean' mainstream identity in all respects, upon entering drug and alcohol treatment.

Jay's reasoning for straddling both worlds sheds light on why poor people are often perceived as doing things that appear to not be in their best interest for improving their lots for the future (e.g., not saving money when they have it or failing to prioritize necessities such as food and shelter in their spending). These actions are similar to Jay's decision to keep one foot in crime because of his current and possibly future situation of needing money. Obviously with this decision he risked losing everything he had been working towards by going to jail or by getting killed. Moreover, his straddling prevented him from making a full commitment to pursue a truly good and honest mainstream life. Jay's decision to

keep one foot in crime becomes more understandable when one considers the reduction in mental capacity for making rational decisions that can occur for people in poverty. Behavioral economists have observed that the mental capacity that we can employ to make decisions, what Mullainathan and Shafir (as cited in Rosenberg, 2013) refer to as mental “bandwidth” (para.5), is reduced under conditions of economic scarcity. “Worrying about money when it is tight captures our brains. It reduces our cognitive capacity -- especially our abstract intelligence, which we use for problem-solving. It also reduces our executive control, which governs planning, impulses and willpower. The bad decisions of the poor...are not a product of bad character or low native intelligence. They are a product of poverty itself. Your natural capability doesn’t decrease when you experience scarcity. But less of that capacity is available for use. If you put a middle-class person into a situation of scarcity, she will behave like a poor person.” (Mullainathan & Shafir, as cited in Rosenberg, 2013, para.6). Jay maintained that if he had had enough money to adequately support himself while he pursued his mainstream goals, he would have never entertained straddling both worlds in the first place.

Not just lacking the money to pay for basic necessities, but the experience of relative deprivation appeared to factor into his judgment that he could not adequately look after his needs with the supports provided by his housing placement and the ex-offender re-entry program. For example, although his housing placement provided food and shelter, the meals were the exact same as Jay had eaten in jail (the residence apparently contracted the same catering company as the jail). Consequently, Jay elected to use the small amount of money that was provided to him to buy microwaveable meals for himself. Likewise the halfway house type setting in which Jay was housed had also felt like jail, given its small, minimally furnished rooms and residents comprised exclusively of ex-offenders and drug addicts. The residence’s strong resemblance to jail was part of what had prompted Jay to question whether the

mainstream changes that he was working towards would really be worth sacrificing the 'sure thing' of status, money, and power that he knew could be his again in street life, if he so chose it.

Furthermore, just as Tamara had experienced an intrinsic thrill from engaging in deviant behaviour, Jay admitted that he had missed the excitement of crime, despite all the threats and stressors that had motivated him to leave that life: "I missed the hustling, missed that life." Dipping his toe back into the lifestyle put him on a slippery slope for engaging in crime much more often than he had really needed to, for assuaging both his 'real' (i.e., absolute) and relative experiences of deprivation. He recalled thinking, "Now that I'm hustling [again], I can have way more than that", referring to indulging in more than what he knew himself to truly need. Thus Jay's stop-gap measure for meeting his needs while in the ex-offender program kept him more tied to the street lifestyle than he had probably intended.

Similarly, Tamara acknowledged that her continuing involvement in prostitution, at the time of our interviews, was not always for the purpose of paying for necessities. While Tamara often relied on prostitution to pay bills that she could not otherwise afford, she admitted to also paying for things that she did not absolutely need, such as new clothes for herself. As with Jay's slippery slope into more crime, Tamara explained that her plan to prostitute was often occasioned by a dire need to pay for some necessity such as a cell phone bill. However, she often found herself engaging in more prostitution than she truly needed to do to cover the cost of the original necessity. At times she found herself in the situation of doing more than she had intended, because of shame. Tamara explained that she often bought herself things to make herself feel better after prostituting herself: "like some clothes now to justify what I just had to fucking do that's disgusting." In this way, she tried to wipe out her shameful memories: "...bury what I just did." Relative deprivation was also sometimes a factor in her engaging in prostitution to pay for things that she did not truly need. When Tamara lived in Supported Independent

Living (SIL), the amount of money that she was provided by child welfare was enough that she could sometimes treat herself to new clothes, but now that she was on her own, she had no source of money for anything “extra” for herself.

Though having new clothes and other “extras” are not something that one cannot do without, Mullainathan and Shafir (as cited in Rosenberg, 2013) might still argue that Tamara’s seemingly poor judgment, like Jay’s, was a psychological effect of scarcity. In practice, a chain of events which reduced mental “bandwidth” for Tamara might have taken this form: First, the mental strain of focusing on how she is going to pay her cell phone bill, for example, leads her into a tunnel, meaning her attention is exclusively focused on solving the phone bill emergency in front of her -- in this case, by the desperate act of prostitution. The fact that this solution will end up with her feeling ashamed and with her putting her health and safety at risk will not register to her at that moment, just as Jay’s susceptibility to returning to jail did not appear to be especially salient for him when he made his decision to “dip” back into crime. The only solution that one attends to when scarcity captures one’s brain is the one which solves one’s immediate emergency; “You take very little notice of what’s outside of the tunnel” (Mullainathan and Shafir, as cited in Rosenberg). Tamara’s phone bill represented a ‘real’ economic emergency for her, because she saw having a cell phone on her at all times as a way that she could keep herself safe as a young, single woman who lived alone and still had contact with a number of ‘risky’ people from her street life days. Second, experiences of relative deprivation may have exerted a similar effect on her as absolute deprivation emergencies. Economist Amartya Sen (1995) suggests that “being poor in a rich society is itself a capability handicap...Relative deprivation in the space of incomes can yield absolute deprivation in the space of capabilities. In a country that is generally rich, more income may be needed to buy enough commodities to achieve the same social functioning” (p.115). Thus the desire for nice clothes or food/shelter that does remind one of jail may function as social-emotional

emergencies for Tamara and Jay, as these kinds of goods were important for belonging (and feeling like they belonged) in more normative environments than street life. In addition, for Tamara, her feelings of shame likely also had a disinhibiting effect on her self-control (Brown, 2012), which may explain why she felt driven to bury her feelings with 'retail therapy' specifically, a solution that just perpetuated her need for money and her use of prostitution to procure it. It is also possible that Tamara and Jay's self-control may have been disinhibited simply from the fact that they were forced to continually exercise self-discipline, on account of their lacking money. Self-control has been likened to a muscle that has only a finite capacity to be flexed (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). One can easily use up too much of this capacity through applying one's willpower constantly to resist indulging in anything beyond the basic necessities for survival.

Regarding having to treat herself once in a while, Tamara explained that "then you don't go fucking crazy." She acknowledged that seeing her same age peers have things made her want those "extras" even more: "Yeah! You go down the street and everybody has everything everywhere you go and everyone has a better fucking life than you -- It makes you go fucking crazy." Tamara even suggested that this relative deprivation was the reason why so many single girls like her were working as escorts: "Because everybody has more than us. Everybody has something we don't have."

Sen's observation about more commodities being required for social functioning in a rich society was also supported by Tamara's comments. Tamara pointed out that being able to have some nice clothes or to have some money to go out with others is important for having a mainstream social life. She wondered how high risk youth could be expected to fit in with "normal" youth when "you always have to make up excuses why you can't fucking go to the movies or the mall or why you don't have that [thing that everyone else has]." Tamara imagined that "normal" youth must think the following kinds of thoughts about her: "Oh she must be a loser." "Or we might as well not fucking ask her [to do something

that costs money] because she always says no.” Further imitating “normal” youth, Tamara asked, “Why do I have to fucking pay for you to go to the movies?” As she put it, these money difficulties explain “why I don’t have friends.” “Like you lose so many opportunities [mainstream youth] had and how they’re doing stuff because you like can’t go [wherever they go].”

Just as Jay’s ex-offender program failed to provide him with adequate funding and segregated him with other people who were all ex-offenders and drug addicts, Tamara blamed her after-care supports for her education (the Advancing Futures program) for setting her up for failure. By not providing her with sufficient funding and other resources for her needs, Tamara claimed that “they’re setting you up to meet people that are fucking that are exact same as you.” Unlike when she had child welfare status, under Advancing Futures, she was no longer eligible to access municipal recreational programs for free. In lieu of such support, Tamara was advised to avail herself of the recreational programs that are provided through inner city agencies. Tamara railed against the free soccer practices that are an example of such programs, as they are frequented by “fucking drugs fucking needle injectors”-- exactly the type of people that she did not want to associate with, as she was trying to develop a mainstream life. She commented sarcastically, “Oh that’s who you want to be friends with, right! A bunch of people that live on the fucking streets!” In addition to losing her recreational support (which she pointed out that she could have had if she were on disability or welfare), the conditions of her after-care educational funding meant that she had also lost her funding for bus passes, a support that one might consider to be essential for many students. (Though some schools and colleges provide bus passes for their students, Tamara’s high school upgrading program did not.)

Tamara received a total of nine hundred and forty one dollars from her after-care program and her rent was seven hundred and twenty five dollars. As a result, she often did not have enough money

to cover her utilities bills and her phone bill. She also often went without eating.<sup>63</sup> It is not surprising then that Tamara felt that she was effectively forced into prostitution by the inadequacy of her after-care funding: “I’m not living no lap of luxury, Like, yeah, because I suck dick all day I have money, but like fucking if I was living a normal life doing nothing wrong, I would have fucking nothing.”

Nevertheless, like Jay, Tamara spoke with angry self-recrimination about how she has come to rely on prostitution for far more than she truly needed. As with Jay, she felt lured by what they both perceived as ‘easy money’, despite all the risks that their involvement with crime entailed. For example, Tamara was angry at herself for not even trying to find more ‘legitimate’ work: “I don’t even try to work. I go out and fucking wrangle some guy into fucking what? Giving him a blow job and he gives me money.” Prostitution can also apparently seem ‘easy’ if you don’t consider a hand job or a blow job to be sex, as Tamara did, and if you charge more money for performing these acts without your underwear or bra on. Tamara explained that you could even make money before you have to do anything at all with a john, by charging a “show-up” fee. Such fees usually go to the drivers of escorts, but Tamara asked for them anyways, even when she was just working for herself. Tamara also used her sugar daddy for “free” money (i.e., money not directly tied to sex, as explained earlier) and for paying for necessities such as toilet paper, tampons, and sometimes her utilities bills.

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<sup>63</sup> Tamara said that she could not manage to find a cheaper rental apartment, without jeopardizing her physical safety or mental health. Anything cheaper were in “ghetto” areas of the city like “crack towers by Chinatown” or “in a basement suite where the woman upstairs is mental or the place does not have water.” Though her after-care program suggests that the budget for one’s rent should be five or six hundred dollars per month, Tamara pointed out that rooms in rooming houses “where all the drug addicts are” are the only places that are priced at five hundred dollars, while a private room with a shared bathroom starts at six hundred and twenty dollars at the YMCA.

Despite her perception that making money through prostitution was easier than perhaps the long hours that she would have to toil in a legal job to make the same amount of money, the risks that she was incurring, to meet material needs that could hardly be called extravagant, regardless of whether they were absolute or relative needs, were considerable. Though Tamara spoke of her apparent shame from doing “disgusting” things with men and expressed fears of dying from AIDS, her immediate needs had to take precedence over such other concerns, as they do for so many poor people. Given Jay’s and Tamara’s predicaments, it is easy to see why cortisol, a hormone produced by stress and which impairs impulse control, is often found to be higher in poor people (Aitkenhead, 2012).

Jay’s and Tamara’s experiences lend support to Jay’s idea that one may have to be able to *afford* to be good. Despite the youths’ intentions, their lack of money clearly makes it harder for them to sustain their plans to become good, mainstream people. Behavioural economists, Banerjee and Duflo (as cited in Aitkenhead, 2012) have observed that everyone would feel taxed to control themselves in the same way as Jay and Tamara experienced, if placed in similar circumstances. At first glance, Carmen appeared to be an exception to this point of view. It appeared that Carmen’s conscience and morals enabled her to not ‘sell out’ with respect to doing what she knew was right, in regards to drug selling at least. She acknowledged the temptation to go back to that life, given her “just living with nothing for so long”, like Jay and Tamara. Like Jay’s self-battles, she commented that resisting going back to selling drugs is “always a struggle”: “...cos I do have a [moral] line I won’t cross, whereas other people, they don’t give a shit.” However, it must be remembered that Carmen often relied on boyfriends for things that she could not afford. Recall that these relationships for Carmen were a source of moral self-conflict in their own right, given their similarity to prostitution. If Carmen had not been able to rely on a boyfriend for many of her necessities such as food, shelter, and laundry, it would have been difficult for

her to maintain her resistance to selling drugs, as she attempted to transition to a mainstream life.

(Maria, of course, had similarly relied on boyfriends, as well as sugar daddies, whenever she had to.)

***The role of rewards for 'good' behaviour.*** Another factor that compounds the youths' difficulties in staying committed to their mainstream goals is the fact that the rewards for being good do not seem to come consistently or fast enough for them. As noted above, Tamara observed that it was single girls like her that feel driven to work as escorts because everyone else's lives appear to be better than theirs, with respect to what they could buy or participate in, on account of having money. However, it appeared that Tamara would be much more motivated to give up prostitution and having a sugar daddy, despite the economic deprivation that this would cause her, if she could have a mainstream boyfriend. Tamara desired such a relationship for the companionship, rather than as an economic substitute for prostitution or a sugar daddy. Thus having a 'good' supportive partner who could alleviate her loneliness appeared to be as reinforcing to Tamara as money. It is not surprising then that Tamara especially questioned whether the 'good' changes that she was making to become part of the mainstream were worth giving up her old life, after her first mainstream boyfriend broke up with her. It seemed that behaving in a good mainstream way was not consistently delivering the kinds of rewards that she had expected, such as having a decent boyfriend. One of the reasons that she had felt so pulled to date the other young man that I mentioned earlier, whom she knew would cause trouble for her, was because she felt insecure about being able to maintain a relationship with a mainstream boyfriend, on account of her first failed relationship of this sort.

However, when God and spirituality were salient in her mind, Tamara was able to exercise self-control with respect to dating the young man who could drag her back into her old life. Tamara remarked that "negative karma" works faster in that it requires the accumulation of fewer negative deeds, in order for something bad to happen to someone, as a consequence of their doing something

bad. Conversely, she also believed that “positive karma” requires the performance of many good deeds, which implies that more time may have to pass before someone gets rewarded for their good actions. This understanding helped Tamara “be patient and do the right thing” (i.e., ending her relationship with the young man who put her at risk).

*Loneliness and the unpredictability of social rewards.* Nevertheless, Tamara continued to struggle with being patient with respect to developing mainstream friends. When she was attending her alternative high school program, she felt frustrated that she could neither meet mainstream peers, nor could she even fit in with the more ‘at-risk’ (as opposed to high risk) “ghetto kids”, as she called them, who also attended her school. In addition to the at risk youth being a few years younger than her, Tamara felt that she could not fit in with them because they considered her to be a “snob” for trying to improve herself. It appeared that Tamara had outgrown the interest these youth expressed in things like getting rich via drug dealing. Tamara commented that talking about such things “[didn’t] make sense to [her] anymore”, given that she now knew that there could be no real future for someone in being a drug dealer, as a result of observing her peers: “They get ten grand maybe then go to jail, two grand then go to jail.”

Likewise, although Jay could also be said to have outgrown the partying that his non-sober school peers engaged in, he nevertheless struggled with not having hardly anyone that he could go out with. As with Tamara, he needed to distance himself from both his former high risk peers as well as the majority of the students in his high school upgrading program, due to their lack of sobriety. Thus for both Tamara and Jay, a more mature outlook on partying and crime, as well as a motivation to stay sober for the prospect of a high school diploma, kept them from belonging to any peer group, let alone a mainstream one. This obviously frustrated them because they felt that they were promised a better life by being good. While it was true that they no longer had to worry about being arrested or killed, it

appeared that they did not expect to continue to feel so lonely and alone. Such feelings likely added to the youths' experiences of psychological isolation, which as I suggested earlier, appear to be rooted in attachment dysfunctions stemming from early experiences with rejection and abandonment, in particular.

As a result of her loneliness, Tamara once resumed contact with a former boyfriend from her street life. Though she worried about being physically hurt by this young man as she had been in the past, she could not help "relapsing" by having sex with him, on account of how lonely she had been feeling. Given her motive of loneliness and her limited prospects with respect to meeting mainstream peers, what may have looked to others like impulsivity or difficulties with delaying gratification (which is what Tamara had been told concerning such behavior of hers), may have actually reflected a rational judgment to "give in" to the present opportunity for gratification, in view of the uncertainty of her receiving better, safer opportunities for addressing her loneliness in the near future. When the timing of receiving future rewards is uncertain, "the value of persistence [in delaying gratification] depends crucially on the nature of a decision-maker's prior temporal beliefs" (McGuire & Kable, 2013, p.1). When I pointed out that she may only have to wait another few months until she started her new accelerated high school upgrading program to have the chance to meet other 'better' peers, Tamara worried that such a delay would be too long for her. It seems likely that her disappointment with her peers at the alternative school, and her belief in positive karma taking longer to work than negative karma, may have helped her form the belief that the mainstream social rewards that she was seeking would not arrive fast enough for her to avoid resisting the pull to 'relapse' back into her old life. McGuire and Kable (2013) point out that when people have already been waiting for an outcome, "a delay's predicted remaining length increases as a function of time already waited" (p.1). Thus Tamara

likely experienced my suggestion of waiting for just a few months before giving in to risk behaviour as interminably long, in view of her temporal beliefs and perceptions.

Similarly, from all of the young women, I had the sense that they had sometimes “relapsed” with drugs, not because they had especially wanted to, or were pulled into such behaviours by the presence of peers, but just because they did not want to feel left out of a group and lonely. Of course, this fits with their aforementioned resistance to abstinence, on the grounds of not wanting to be regarded as a social misfit for not drinking, in particular. Nevertheless, they all had accepted that they were bad for not being able to show greater willpower in such circumstances, as others had apparently expected them to. They tended to accept others’ (e.g., professionals) interpretations of their behaviour as their willfully inhibiting their capacity for self-control, despite their knowing the right thing to do. However, if the youths had allowed themselves to consider the compelling role that loneliness appeared to play in their diminished self-control, they might have resisted seeing themselves in this negative light, provided they did not also feel unduly ashamed of being lonely. Professionals could have facilitated their resistance to risk behaviour by helping them to better address their loneliness, without adding to their sense of shame through their reproach.

*Lacking practise with resisting fun/being bored with being good.* The youths may have also had trouble resisting opportunities for immediate gratification, because they had rarely been required to do so, during their street lives. In other words, they lacked practice at saying no to pleasurable prospects. This is not surprising given their aforementioned lack of practice with complying with structured routines. Tamara pointed out that both her child welfare caseworker and her probation officer had put few demands on her throughout most of her time in care. As mentioned previously, Maria’s child welfare caseworker did not push her to go to school, once she had become a teenager. By lacking the influence of either social workers or consistent parental influence during their street lives, Carmen and

Jay also did not have anyone who could have regularly pushed them to delay gratification in favour of other more constructive pursuits.

It would be especially hard to delay gratification when instead of structured routines, you are used to partying hard and being engaged in exciting acts of deviance and the “drama” of street peer relationships (e.g., people cheating on their boyfriends or girlfriends, going to jail, getting pregnant, being involved in violence, etc.) Once when especially frustrated by her social life (or lack thereof), Tamara said that she had gotten bored with being good: “Being good’s boring.” More mundane pleasures were just not enough for her, relative to the excitement that she derived from taking risks: “What are you supposed to play with if you don’t play with fire...how fun is that?”

That said, Tamara also wondered about her inability to find as much pleasure from more mundane activities as other people did. She said she knew that “normal people [didn’t] just fly over to here [referring to an ‘impulsive’ trip to Las Vegas, when she needed to be studying for exams], go over here, bus over here, drive BMWs back over here.” Her loneliness may have also caused her to underrate the pleasure that can come from more ‘normal’ social activities. Recall that Tamara “probably” did want to walk around a park, presumably with other young people, but that this ordinary social pleasure could not compete with her greater desire to date the aforementioned young man that was likely to get her back into trouble. Cacioppo (2008) observed that lonely people find the typical “social uplifts of everyday life” (p.102) to be “less intense and less gratifying” (p.102) than that experienced by people who are not lonely.

*Trauma affects temporal perceptions/beliefs.* Trauma may be another factor in the youths’ feeling that the rewards from being good were not coming to them fast enough. For example, trauma may have played a role in Maria’s lack of confidence about her future (which could have also contributed to her limited expectations for herself or her sense of ennui). She said that she “actually

[felt] caught between doing horrible things and wonderful things because she [was] afraid” of postponing enjoyment only to die young. Maria genuinely had a sense that her life might be cut short. Consequently, she puzzled over the value of her delaying self-gratification, in case she did not live long enough to reap the rewards for such behaviour. Young people who have survived trauma have been similarly observed to possess a shortened sense of the future (McNally, 1993). Not only did Maria sense that she may die young, but she also had a “feeling that she [was] going to lose people” that she cared about. Maria’s fears about her own death and that of others were likely rooted in her many childhood experiences of separation and loss, which I will discuss further in the next chapter.

**Cultural relativism influences.** On some occasions, it appeared that the youths’ difficulties in maintaining good behaviour resulted from their confusion in regards to determining what would be the right thing to do in certain situations. Sometimes this confusion stemmed from differences that they encountered between what was considered to be adaptive and good in their street lives, and what is adaptive and good in mainstream society. As mentioned previously, the value that Jay placed on loyalty to his street crew could have jeopardized his mainstream transition, if he had not been advised to be loyal to himself first, as his ex-offender program worker suggested. Trouble with navigating the differences in what constitutes moral behaviour in street life versus mainstream life may be another reason why Jay appeared to be more challenged than the young women with respect to adhering to an internal moral compass, such as his conscience or a personal set of values. Of all of them, Jay was more exclusively involved with people from his street community, who in many ways held similar values to those held by his family, specifically his mother’s family. As such, it may have been harder for him to develop a prosocial, moral orientation relative to the young women who had greater exposure to the mainstream values of some of their families and those of professional family substitutes (e.g., social workers). Through their non-kinship placements in child welfare, Tamara and Maria clearly had exposure

to professionals who would be expected to model and encourage compliance with mainstream values. As noted previously, Carmen's mother served as such a moral influence for her, since she was very young. Despite leaving her family home at the age of fifteen, Carmen remained the most connected to her mainstream, middle class family. She went back to live in her family home intermittently during her years of street life.

That said, the young women still struggled with navigating the moral expectations of mainstream life, on account of their extensive immersion in street life. Despite her mother's restraining order against her, Tamara was able to regularly connect with her by phone, and sometimes in person, whenever her mother consented to seeing her. In spite of this contact and her contact with professionals, Tamara still expressed confusion about how to behave in mainstream life. She wondered about whether certain situations called for scamming or manipulating others or whether such behaviours would just not work for her in mainstream life, as they used to in her street life. Though as mentioned previously, there are good reasons for not viewing Tamara's suicide attempts as being manipulative, she nevertheless often prided herself on her ability to successfully manipulate others, whether those others were her street peers, her sugar daddy, or her social workers. At times, Tamara reflected that she saw her manipulative behaviour towards her sugar daddy as being bad, because she knew it was not right to be dishonest with him regarding her efforts at school, for example. However, at other times, it appeared that the only reason that she considered some course of action to be wrong was because she saw that it would not be acceptable to others in mainstream life.

This was similar to Jay and his criminal peers, whom as I have already noted, did not seem to view morality as being anything more than the set of rules that specify appropriate conduct in any given social context. The vast majority of mainstream adults also reflect such a "conventional" (Kohlberg, as cited in Kroger, 2004) level of morality, because they understand themselves to be good people just by

being law-abiding, or by conforming to group norms, in settings such as work and school. Kroger points out that “doing one’s duty to maintain the social order for its own sake and avoiding breakdown in the system regardless of consequences is the motivating force behind this stage of [moral] reasoning” (p.97). In most mainstream communities, such conformity does not typically result in widespread harm, and often protects individuals, where laws and norms were developed with the public interest in mind. However, in street life, conventional morality permitted Jay to accept that the people that he and his peers had targeted for violence knew the ‘rules’ of street life, thereby justifying the violent retribution that they received for violating such rules.

Even worse, Jay and his crew appeared to think that it was alright to rob someone of everything he had, and tie him up and torture him as retribution for his having done something ‘bad’ (e.g., stealing or other act of “disloyalty”) to them in the first place. Jay reflected that such extreme violence was morally justifiable, as long as you don’t “jack ‘em up for no reason.” Such payback was seen as being an extension of the idea that one cannot be held to be in the wrong for hurting someone as long as that person had thrown the first punch (i.e. the legal ‘rule’ of self-defence). Jay said this earnestly, having apparently accepted an opportunistic way of thinking that reflected a combination of pre-conventional morality (i.e., avoid pain/optimize pleasure in taking advantage of the opportunity to “jack” someone up) and conventional rule-based morality (i.e., the rule of street life is that it is ok to hurt someone if they wronged you first). Pre-conventional moral reasoning is typical of children between the ages of four and ten years old, whereas conventional reasoning begins to be displayed in pre-adolescence and continues to dominate for most adolescents and adults (Kohlberg, as cited in Kroger).

Jay’s morality thus appeared to be more dependent on conventional rules and his own self-interest, than a concern for the pain that he had caused to others. One might expect then that if Jay felt that he could “get away” with such retribution from a court of law (perhaps by invoking self-defence),

he might still be inclined to think that such use of violence was morally justifiable in mainstream life. As mentioned previously, the potentially homicidal violence that young men commit to avenge social slights on the street is the result of their rational calculations about the “probable costs and benefits of alternative courses of action” (Wilson & Daly, p.70), including the likelihood of their receiving a serious sentence for such violence.

***Caring for family and friends adds to the confusion.*** Given that Jay had been making progress towards goals such as getting a high school diploma and having an apartment of his own, he came to have much to lose by getting involved with such violence. However, Jay ran into trouble in figuring out what was the right thing for him to do in some mainstream situations, when some of the perhaps less self-interested moral rules by which he abided in his street and family life conflicted with what appeared to be the right thing to do in mainstream life. Since Jay was a small child, he would fight his mother’s boyfriends when they would be abusive to her. His mother would yell at him in the middle of the night so that Jay could rescue her. Naturally Jay had thought that he was doing ‘good’ by beating on his mother’s boyfriends. Her “blood curdling screams” made Jay do whatever he needed to do, to prevent his mother from being seriously injured or killed. Though this must have helped keep both his mother and him alive when he was young, it was when he was attending his high school upgrading program that the ‘goodness’ of this practice got called into question for him. Jay had gone to visit his mother, who was again being treated badly by her then boyfriend. Her boyfriend was calling her racial slurs and ordering her to do things for him. As per his old habits, Jay’s first instinct was to punch him out. However, he backed down when he remembered that assaulting this man could lead him back to jail, which would mean the end of his dreams for completing high school.

Jay discussed this incident with a counsellor that he was seeing at the time. His counsellor reinforced his decision to back down, by suggesting that his mother’s battles were not his to fight.

However, Jay found it difficult to accept that he was being righteous in backing down from this fight, especially since he had been taught by his step-father to always protect his mother. (His step-father had also admonished Jay to never use drugs, right before Jay's mother took him back to Edmonton with her. It appeared that Jay's step-father was well aware of the kind of unstable and dangerous home environment that Jay would be exposed to in Edmonton.)

Jay experienced the same moral conflict when a female friend had had her face slashed by her boyfriend. Jay recalled how he would have never hesitated to avenge that violence on his friend by assaulting her boyfriend, when he was in his street life. However, given the new life that he was trying to create for himself, he had to tell himself that this incident had nothing to do with him, just as his mother's battles were supposedly no longer his responsibility. Nevertheless, in the case of both his friend and his mother, it had felt both wrong and heartless to just sit back and do nothing about the harm that had come to them, in order to protect his own self-interest. Reflecting on this clash between his street and family values versus mainstream values, Jay observed that "sometimes the wrong way is actually the right thing." In this case then, Jay's moral self-conflict arose because he was adhering to an arguably higher-level moral response of caring for and protecting the safety of more vulnerable others [what some have described as an "ethic of care", (Gilligan, 1995, p.120)], than the conventional rules and laws of mainstream society.

Jay may have also been more inclined to care about close friends and family, because his step-father had also stressed the importance of loyalty to such individuals. Still another point of convergence between what he was taught in his step-father's home and what was adaptive in street life was the importance of being tough. Jay said that he learned to be tough because his step-father had taught him to hunt and fish. His older cousins had also taught him to be tough by roughhousing with him, despite his being much smaller and weaker than they were at the time.

While these childhood values had helped Jay to survive street life, they also created trouble for his functioning in mainstream life. In addition to loyalty being a street norm that was crucial for economic survival, and a value that was also prized by his step-father, Jay had experienced conflict over whether or not to remain loyal to his former street peers because he really felt that they had looked after him, when his own family had rejected him. It appeared that the fulfillment of such social-emotional needs was the major reason that he had struggled so much in relinquishing his allegiance to them. Carl Hart (2015) has explained how such loyalty can become so important to a young man, who like himself, had lacked substantial parental involvement. Hart reflected on how the only person he knew who had refused to go along with a crime that his peer group had been planning was a young man with two parents. This young man had received much more parental guidance, in contrast to Hart and his peers, who had grown up in single family homes. Lacking parental supervision and support, Hart recalled that the only thing that he had to place value on was being “cool and its requirement of loyalty to our group” (p.131). “[Loyalty] was the foundation of my values, one of the few things that really meant something to me and structured my social life. Putting those ties at risk, to me, seemed much more dangerous and threatening than anything the system could do to you if you ever got caught. If you stayed cool, you could handle that. If not, you weren't a man and there was nothing much to live for anyway” (Hart, p.131).

As noted earlier, the affection and loyalty that Jay had felt for his street family could have even led him to commit violence against his own biological family. If he had been asked by his street peers to collect on the drug debts that his aunt had owed to some of them, Jay said that he was fully prepared to have been involved in that collection. Having experienced friendships that he would have risked his own life and those of his family members for, it makes sense why Jay had initially reacted so strongly against his counsellor’s suggestion that he could have friends that he did not see outside the context of school,

so as to not risk his sobriety. Jay just could not get his head around the idea that a friend could be someone that you did not always have to support “one hundred percent”; the notion of a casual friendship that just took place at school instead seemed to Jay to devalue both the person he was friends with and their relationship, in view of his former street loyalties.

Thus Jay had clearly faced challenges in becoming ‘good’, as a result of having deeply internalized the values of his real family and street family -- values that had real adaptive benefits, both materially and socially in his street life. It should be pointed out that although the reframing of loyalty (i.e., being loyal to himself first), that he had accepted from one of his ex-offender program workers, had allowed him to retain a value of loyalty as part of his new identity, Jay was really fundamentally changing the meaning that loyalty had carried for him. For Jay, it appeared that being loyal to one’s self was really the same as putting one’s self-interest before others, just as he had been counselled to do with respect to his mother and female friend, when they had been hurt by their male partners. The requirement that he relinquish a morality that had helped to ensure his own survival and that of loved ones was thus another way that Jay felt that he had to voluntarily exclude himself from the people he cared about, particularly when it seemed that his family and friends had needed him the most.

***Parental guidance (or lack thereof) brings further confusion.*** In contrast, for the most part, Tamara and Carmen were exposed to family values that unequivocally supported their efforts to become part of the mainstream. Despite this, the values that they were transmitted from their families still sometimes caused them conflict, given that the lives that they had been living (e.g., their experiences with drugs, poverty, and social assistance) had made them call into question some of the moral censure that their families had directed towards them during their street lives. Tamara, for example, found herself oscillating between believing most of what her mother said about unemployed people and believing what she knew to be true from her own experiences on the street. While Tamara

found herself agreeing to some extent with her mother's view that unemployed people do not require the "crutch" of government assistance, her own experiences and observations of others in poverty had made her understand how someone might be genuinely not able to work and consequently fall into homelessness, through no fault of their own. Similarly, Carmen rejected her father's emphasis on making money. Recall that she particularly rejected his devaluing of her artistic endeavours on the basis that such work was unlikely to help her move off of welfare.

Such conflicts with their parents may have actually been helpful for these young women, with respect to facilitating the formation of their mainstream identities. Erikson (1968) said that it was the responsibility of parents to provide a socially acceptable moral framework for their children, if only to provide something for the young person to rebel against. The rebellion, or perhaps more accurately, the questioning and exploring of parental values that Carmen and Tamara appeared to be engaged with here, must occur if only in a very subtle way, in order for young people to be able to claim that the beliefs they have selected for their own identities were truly their own choices.

Jay and Maria, in contrast, were clearly not provided with socially acceptable moral frameworks from their parents. Even worse than Jay, Maria was neither transmitted values that could facilitate a transition to the mainstream, nor was she transmitted values that might have helped her to just adapt or survive her own family circumstances or her street life circumstances. As mentioned previously, Maria felt that her mother could not have transmitted to her any values from her aboriginal culture or otherwise, because her mother was not equipped to provide even basic care for her and her siblings. (During the Adult Attachment Interview, when asked to identify who it was that had raised her, Maria was the only youth to have replied that she had raised herself.)

Not only were Jay and Maria each deprived of a values framework that could have helped them become clear about their own identity-defining beliefs, but it appears as though they even missed out

on receiving clear instruction on basic issues of right and wrong, from their parents or parental substitutes. Basic moral guidance failed to be imparted to Jay and Maria, not just due to a lack of parental involvement, but because both of their families were extensively involved in crime and with drugs, going back several generations. Apart from his step-father and his maternal grandparents<sup>64</sup>, the rest of Jay's family was involved in using and/or selling drugs. Jay's family members began inducting him into selling and using drugs, when he was only eleven or twelve years old. His cousin had introduced him to smoking marijuana and his aunt had introduced him to smoking crack cocaine. As mentioned previously, a different aunt (the one who came to be his kinship foster mother) had initiated him into selling drugs, and his own mother even became part of Jay's customer base at one point.

Though as young adults, Jay and Maria were clearly aware of the wrongness of their respective families' involvement with drugs, the very young ages at which they were exposed to drug-related activities (Maria had heard that her family's home was burned down by drug dealers when she was four years old), and even invited to participate themselves in such activities, would have facilitated their acceptance of illicit drugs. It would have been very hard, if not impossible, for Jay's eleven or twelve year old self to have failed to comply with his aunt's request that he deliver drugs for her on his bicycle, especially since she had stepped in to care for him when his mother no longer could. Likewise, Jay could not have reasonably been expected to refuse his other aunt's invitation to smoke crack cocaine with her when he was just thirteen. Rather he recalled being attracted by the offer, given that he had already experienced how fun it was to smoke marijuana, courtesy of his older cousin.

In addition to his susceptibility to such influences on account of being so young, Jay's compliance also likely reflected his desire to please his new family. Jay wanted to be part of his new

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<sup>64</sup> Jay never met his paternal grandparents because his white biological father had wanted to protect him from their racist attitudes toward aboriginal people.

family. Since leaving his step-father's home, his home environment with his mother was marked by instability. In addition to his mother's multiple, often abusive partners and her drug abuse, Jay lacked a bedroom and consistent access to food. When he went to live with his aunt, he was able to regain these semblances of a 'real' home, along with the company of cousins and parent-like figures in the form of his aunt and uncle. A similar mix of reasons (early and ongoing exposure to illicit family behavior along with an intense desire for family belonging) had likely also informed Maria's pleasure at having earned her place on her mother's "wall of shame." Recall that Maria's pleasure defied the admonishments that she had received for years from her social workers to not be like the rest of her family.

**Success at hustling reinforces 'bad' identity.** Additionally, the values and skills that were adaptive in both Jay's family life and street life facilitated not just his street survival but also the level of success that he ultimately attained through "hustling". Following the "wheeling and dealing" that he did for his aunt, Jay began to deal drugs for himself. Once he began high school, he was able to buy his supply from other youths in his school, which eventually led him to become connected with his first incarnation of a "street family."<sup>65</sup> I already discussed why Jay was vulnerable to returning to street life if he did not feel that he had a chance at mainstream economic success. Recall that Jay had to weigh his much greater feelings of confidence about being successful in street life, which he appeared to be 'groomed' for since his early adolescence, against his much greater insecurities about his academic and vocational efficacy. The fact that he was engaging in this comparison as he began to make his efforts towards transitioning to a mainstream life explains why he was so upset when his younger cousin

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<sup>65</sup> Jay's street family should not be confused with a gang. It was possible for Jay to move away from his street family, if he so chose. He would not experience the threat of violent reprisal that typically ensued if someone wanted exit a gang. Though he associated with gang members, Jay told me that he preferred to retain his freedom to "roll" with whomever he pleased, rather than be committed forever to the same gang. Jay's acceptance of the principle of loyalty to one's friends probably obviated his street family's need for him to commit to them in the same way that a gang requires its members to commit to it.

ridiculed his newfound sobriety, following his completion of his treatment program. It also explains why Jay craved the admiration for leaving street life that he had received from gang members that he had formerly done business with. Although Jay worried about being destined for a 'bad' street life, he also apparently *chose* at some level to remain identified with it, even after he had completed treatment.<sup>66</sup> Otherwise, he would not have been as affected by the reactions of people from his street life to the changes he was making in himself.

It makes sense that Jay continued his identification with street life, even as he was trying to change himself. Succeeding in that life was just much more of a sure thing for him. His street life identity was so well rooted in his family and his own drug-related experiences of success since at least his early adolescence. In contrast, Jay lacked roots for the kinds of efficacy that he had had to cultivate in a real hurry, in order for him to gauge whether a mainstream life could truly be possible for him. (I will comment more on this in the next chapter.)

I mentioned previously that Jay straddled his old life and a mainstream life for some time when he was in his ex-offender re-entry program, and that he had even fought with himself while he was in his high school upgrading program to not revert to his old ways. In addition to economic deprivation, these behaviours may also have reflected a need for him to retain his identification with street life for as long as he could, in order to protect himself from the pain of disappointment, should his efforts to better his condition fail. The fact that he marked his high school graduation as the day that he finally put "closure" to his past is consistent with this idea. It explains why Jay said that giving up the street "lifestyle" (what I would interpret as his first identity -- a negative identity) was the hardest sacrifice for him to make in order to have a better life. Jay said that it was much harder for him to give up this lifestyle, than it had

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<sup>66</sup> Recall that Jay said that he made a full commitment to pursuing a mainstream life and had stopped straddling street life and mainstream life, when he made the decision to go to treatment.

been for him to give up using drugs. In an earlier footnote, I mentioned that Jay and Maria might feel more prone to feelings of shame or anxiety, in relation to not achieving academically or vocationally, as a result of their aboriginal ethnicity, given prevailing racial stereotypes about aboriginal Canadians as being drunk, lazy recipients of government handouts. By retaining their identification with such burdensome ideas about their cultural membership, Maria and Jay may experience a diminishment of “response uncertainty surrounding vocational and marital choices” (Kagan, 2007, p.175), thereby diminishing their anxieties about mainstream success. Continuing to use drugs and alcohol amongst other aboriginal community members might therefore provide a solution to the adolescent/young adult identity crisis for Jay and Maria, as well as provide protection for their self-esteem in the event of school or job failures. Likewise, retaining identification with a street lifestyle might also be a way for them to quell their anxieties about being able to achieve a mainstream identity.

**Resisting the ordinary.** Jay’s vulnerability to falling back into his old life may have also been influenced by dominant cultural messages that suggest that an ordinary life is a meaningless life (Brown, 2012). In general, people are bombarded with messages about the importance of wealth and fame (Brown). Surveys of high school seniors and entering college students confirm that Millennials (those born after 1982) hold extrinsic values such as money and fame to be more important than intrinsic values such as self-acceptance and community, relative to previous generations of young people (Twenge, Freeman, Campbell, 2012). However, it may also be that for some young people, desiring so strongly to be more than ordinary can be a defense against feeling, at a fundamental level, that one is not good enough. Brown contends that the shame of being ordinary is about the fear of “disconnection - the fear that we’re unlovable and don’t belong”<sup>67</sup> (p.109).

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<sup>67</sup> American Indian author Sherman Alexie’s (2012) short story “The Search Engine” discusses the experiences of an American Indian young man who tries to pass himself off as being a poet from his biological family’s Spokane reserve, when in fact, he was adopted by a white family at a young age and had never set foot on

Tamara exhibited a kind of perfectionism that appeared to be less about the high premium that she placed on being regarded as extraordinary, especially as regards her physical appearance, than about the 'ticket' that she saw her good looks as providing her with. Tamara thought that her appearance had brought her the love and attention that she had received from others in her street life. She likewise believed that her looks would be her ticket to her finding a husband and having a family in mainstream life. Tamara described herself as "superficial", meaning that if she could get a husband right away, she would not bother anymore with completing her schooling and pursuing a career.

Throughout the course of my interviews with her, it was clear that Tamara remained most vulnerable to falling back into street life because of her inability to get the same level of love and attention in mainstream life that she could get from her former street peers for being "the 'bad' Tamara." While deliberating about whether or not she should continue to be involved with the aforementioned young man who was sure to get her back into trouble, Tamara protested my suggestion that she could perhaps get love and attention from mainstream peers who might presumably cause fewer problems for her. Tamara explained that she needed other people to "big" her up (i.e. tell her how great she is). She predicted that mainstream young people would not do this for her because such youth were confident in themselves. In her view, only her street peers who were personally insecure would provide her with the praise that she craved, because they reportedly looked up to her and wanted to be associated with her. Tamara admitted that she required such feedback from others

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the reserve. The man stops writing poetry after his Indian identity is called into question at a reading of his work. Reflecting on the identity crisis that this precipitated, he commented that "I was ordinary, or maybe a little better than ordinary, and I wanted to be more than that, and I couldn't be, and it hurt for a long time. I think writing poems, I think if I would've kept writing them, I would've always been reminded of that, of how ordinary I am" (p.411). Consistent with Brown's (2012) observation then, it appears that his desire to be extraordinary (and the tendency to give up when one cannot achieve this status) was fuelled by a fear of not being accepted by other Indians (and perhaps not accepted in the dominant, white mainstream either). The former poet concludes that one lesson that can be learned from his story is "Never pretend to be an Indian when you're not" (p.410).

because she struggled to give herself the praise that other people, like her mother and her teachers, expected her to be able to give herself. (Recall that when Tamara felt close to God, she would remind herself that she could provide herself with reassurance about her good qualities, rather than feel compelled to seek this out from bad peers.)

As with Jay's insecurity about his abilities, Tamara's insecurity about her appearance<sup>68</sup> and her social behaviour were tied to her fears about being able to transition to mainstream life in a way that she could experience as being successful or personally satisfying. Fuelled by her inability to hold onto her first mainstream boyfriend, her insecurities left her vulnerable to falling back into her old life, given her seemingly shame-based needs to prove to herself that she was worthy of receiving love, attention, status and belonging *somewhere*. Thus like Jay, Tamara's straddling of street life and mainstream life appeared to serve both her social-emotional needs and her economic needs.

Regarding her economic needs, another way that Tamara straddled street life and mainstream life was by engaging in arguably safer forms of prostitution than street walking, such as working as an escort or having a sugar daddy. Within these activities, Tamara would try to safeguard her future by engaging in less risky behaviour than many of the other escorts she knew. Her goal of someday having a husband and children made her especially cautious to not contract HIV. She explained that "Money fuels my world, but it's not always going to." Recall that part of Tamara's anguish over being economically deprived was about how her lack of money obstructed her ability to form mainstream friendships. She was also willing to give up having a sugar daddy, if she could have had a mainstream boyfriend. It may be that Tamara saw money as a temporary substitute for her need for relationships.

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<sup>68</sup> as betrayed by her perfectionism in this area

Until she found a mainstream boyfriend/potential husband who could alleviate her loneliness and insecurity, having money could help her compensate for her feelings of social-emotional deprivation.

**Out of practice with being good.** Despite her efforts to keep her ongoing risks from contaminating her future, Tamara's straddling of two worlds may have caused her confusion on another level. Sometimes Tamara became confused about what she thought constituted moral behaviour. She wondered whether such confusion occurred because she was out of practice with respect to being good on a regular basis. Tamara said that her "brain" would get confused about what she should do, because her adolescent and young adult years were not spent doing good things consistently. She provided the following analogy in which shelving books is a metaphor for doing good things in one's life. Tamara explained that mainstream people can be thought of as having practised at putting books on shelves. They have been shelving books in the right places throughout their entire lives. In contrast, as Tamara put it, "My life has been put it [one of her books] on the shelf, put it on the fridge", referring to her history of having been inconsistently good, throughout the last seven years of her life. Consequently, Tamara said that when she looked at her behaviour, she would question, "Do I think it is cool to go to school or is it cool to beat people up?" I mentioned earlier that the psychologist Karl Weick (as cited in Grant, 2014) similarly asked, "How can I know who I am until I see what I do?", when speaking about the youths' confusion in determining what kinds of academic and job skills they might be capable of. It appears that Tamara also looked to her own behaviour for clues about her moral beliefs, in addition to her academic efficacy and vocational efficacy beliefs.

**Moral "self-battles": Conscience versus negative identity.** Tamara's metaphor of books going on a shelf and her reference to her brain becoming confused implies that her confusion about her moral beliefs (and the moral identity confusion that comes with it) occurred passively on its own -- that she did not consciously intend to have become this way. Her history was just comprised of so many bad actions

juxtaposed with good actions that it was impossible for her to stay clear about what she thought of as being right, and be clear about whether she was a good person or not: “Do the right thing, fucking hit somebody, do the right thing, drop out of school.” Moreover, every time she succumbed to doing something bad, her negative identity with all of its reinforcing qualities (e.g., peer attention) would seem to become activated, thereby increasing her confusion about her moral character. Tamara would also find it harder to get back on track with being good thereafter, even when she was clear about what the right thing was for her to do with respect to future choices. She said that when she made the decision to be bad in some way, to ‘relapse’ as she put it, she felt that she had to go all the way to the bottom, instead of stopping herself mid-way on a chain of bad behaviors and climbing back up. Tamara knew that whenever she behaved badly, she was feeding (i.e., reinforcing) “the ‘bad’ Tamara”, as she called her street identity. She said that whenever she would get together with her sugar daddy, she knew that she was showing her “brain” that “it’s normal to be this [kind of] person which [it’s] not, which makes me fight with myself every day, because I’m fighting my conscience.”

**Moral “self-battles”:** **Conscience versus perceived survival needs.** It became clear as we talked further that the fight she was referring to was not just between her conscience and her bad behavior, the latter having become normalized for her because it was performed so often. Rather, a fight also occurred between her conscience and her ability to deceive herself into thinking that she needed to do something bad in order to survive: “I know I’m not supposed to be using somebody [her sugar daddy], because that’s not who I am, but right now I need money and I need to survive and I need to be doing all these things that I think I need to be doing, but really I’m not starving or dying.” Like Carmen then, Tamara’s conscience helped her keep clear about her real survival needs and her true moral character.

That said, what Tamara said earlier regarding the pull of relative deprivation on her behaviour should not be discounted as something that she just made up in order to justify her involvement in

prostitution. Just because Tamara was aware of what she truly needed for her basic material survival does not take away from her experience of psychological scarcity from not being able to afford most of the things that other young people her age are able to. Summarizing David Hume, Iris Murdoch stated, "If a fiction is necessary enough, it is not a lie" (Murdoch, 1994, p.7). Hume (as cited in Murdoch) was speaking of how people commonly believe in such things as a reality to the self or a reality to the external world, without having any real evidence for such beliefs. Such central beliefs that inform our everyday experiences are thus more a result of feeling or sentiment, rather than reason. An implication of this is that our minds must somehow need such beliefs, leading Hume to contend that such necessary fictions should not be construed as deliberate lies.

Analogously, Tamara may have largely convinced herself due to her feelings of relative deprivation that she really needed to engage in prostitution to have money for non-essential things. Though she maintained awareness that she did not strictly need those things in order to live, in her subjective psychological reality, such a fiction could be experienced by her as "necessary enough": While her physical survival may not have been at stake, her social and psychological survival was, as I described previously, linked to such things as being able to afford to go to the mall or movies with mainstream peers or being able to sometimes afford new clothes for herself. Tamara's change in language from making passive references to her brain becoming confused to referring to herself as a moral agentic "I", when she experienced the pull of her conscience, is suggestive of a vigorous internal battle between her proneness to being bad (as fuelled by her extensive practise with being bad and her relative deprivation experiences) and what she knows to be good as guided by her conscience (which keeps her aware of her absolute survival needs).

***Old 'good' self versus newer 'bad' self.*** Like Carmen, Tamara experienced her conscience as being linked to the good Tamara of her childhood experiences. Her efforts to transition to the

mainstream reflect her trying to re-establish continuity with the good person she is sure she would have been “if [her] life would have been nurtured like a normal kid.” Tamara’s estrangement from this original, fundamentally good self underneath all the mostly bad, onion-like layers that she acquired in adolescence and young adulthood may well be the reason why she commented, “I feel kind of out of my mind” in regards to her highly contradictory behaviour.

Thus when Tamara was referring to her brain being confused, she may have also been referring to the battle between her old, good self that she was trying to resurrect and her more familiar bad self, given the strong reasons that she had to identify with each of these versions of herself. Recall that Tamara rejected the semi-fictional street life narrative that she had once documented on calendars to help her keep her story straight in front of her child welfare workers. Despite the social-emotional importance that this self-construction had once held for her, she came to see that life as being incongruous with her truly good self, the self that was never really “broken” like that of many other high risk youth. As she put it, she rejected that self narrative “cos it wasn’t really me...even though I’m continuing to do like the same fucking things, which is annoying.”

Tamara also wondered if, in addition to inconsistent behaviour, her internal moral battles were what made her respond in contradictory ways on personality questionnaires that she was required to do as part of a psychological assessment that she had underwent a few years prior. Tamara would recall endorsing some trait about herself and then as she put it, “...two seconds later, my conscience will be like Tamara, you’re not fucking like that, and then two questions later, I’ll be like no I’m fucking definitely not like that, but no you are really like this [referring to some other trait]”.

**Morality as a life skill.** Consistent with Tamara’s struggles to be consistently good, Jay spoke of his need to keep working on his “morality and honesty” in his new, mainstream life. For Jay, however, it

was not his conscience<sup>69</sup> that provoked his recognition of this need, but rather his lack of practice with, and even lack of concern for, thinking about what was the right thing for him to do. Recall that Jay was not provided with mainstream moral instruction or modelling from his family, and his success in drug dealing was certainly not facilitated by complying with mainstream morality. As mentioned previously, with the exception of his desire to protect women that he cared about, Jay appeared to be most used to thinking about what actions, including violence, could maximize gains for himself, while also minimizing potential harm to himself, in whatever social context (mainstream or street) that he was occupying. In his mainstream life, for example, Jay came to take a job working at a cell phone kiosk in a mall. He thought nothing of covering for his co-workers by agreeing to sometimes sign them out before their shifts were actually over. When his boss discovered this practice, Jay was punished for it by receiving fewer hours at work. Jay responded by being resentful rather than remorseful. Though it appeared that he knew he was in the wrong, he felt mostly upset that he failed to get away with something that had seemed safe for him to do, given that his boss was rarely present to supervise him and his co-workers. While working at the kiosk, Jay also experienced no internal conflict when he offered to sell the kiosk's prospective customers new cellphones that he had bought from someone else. He also offered to the kiosk's customers his own 'side' service of unlocking phones for them, for a fee that would go strictly to

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<sup>69</sup> In the next chapter, I will discuss how early childhood experiences, particularly the inadequate development of attachment security, may have had some bearing on why Jay seemed to be less able to draw upon an inner moral compass, such as his conscience, in guiding his behavioural choices. Though all four of the youth turned out to be insecurely attached, it appeared as though Tamara and Carmen may have experienced a loss of attachment security during their adolescence, as opposed to having never experienced such security as young children (the latter being more likely to have been the case for Jay and Maria.)

him. Thus in mainstream life, as in street life, Jay displayed a highly opportunistic, pre-conventional (Kohlberg, as cited in Kroger, 2004) moral orientation.

Albeit for different reasons then, both Jay and Tamara were in the position of having to unlearn their tendency towards immorality, as they might unlearn some other bad habit. One could say that transitioning to the mainstream required them to see morality as a life skill that they needed to learn or relearn, which involved getting their 'brains' consistently used to ideas that were either new for them or had not been very salient for them for a long time. To some extent, Jay and Tamara may have struggled with this process due to systemic reasons, in addition to their inner moral struggles. For Jay and Tamara, their family lives and street lives may have encouraged them to engage in "covert resistance" (Hart, 2013, p.37).

**Covert resistance.** Covert resistance refers to the experience of having survived adverse circumstances such as poverty and other forms of deprivation through "getting the inside deals" or "working the system" (Hart, 2013, p.37). Rather than reflecting an opportunistic, pre-conventional morality as I suggested above, Jay may have perceived his selling of his own phones on the side as a legitimate opportunity to make the best of his time in a low wage job, which offered him no security, benefits, or even a guaranteed number of hours per week. Especially considering his 'sacrifice' of the large amount of money that he could have continued to make in street life, it would make sense that he might not perceive any moral problem with engaging<sup>70</sup>, including his unlocking of phones for a fee. Tamara's sense that she could not have accessed the resources that she either needed or wanted from her child welfare caseworkers, without her lying to

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<sup>70</sup> I should note that Jay's source for the new cellphones that he was selling was unclear. They may have been stolen, although not by Jay himself.

them about her level of needs, is an example of her thinking that she needed to ‘work the system’ in order for her to get any help. (I will further elaborate on this point in chapter five).

Covert resistance may be the result of how some children are socialized since early childhood. Poor and lower middle class children appear to be socialized for “life on the bottom” (Lareau, as cited in Hart, 2013, p.37) of the socio-economic scale. In contrast to more solidly middle class and upper class children “who were constantly being taught explicitly to advocate for themselves with authorities” (p.37), poorer classes of children were “taught to submit [to authorities] without question” (p.37). If lower class children did resist the dictates of authorities, “they learned by experience to do so covertly, not openly”(p.37). Children whose parents employ an authoritarian parenting style in which coercion is used to ensure children’s compliance are also more likely to either submit to authority or to covertly resist it (i.e., engage in evasion or subversion) (Baumrind, 2012). Authoritarian, coercive parenting also occurs more commonly in lower class families (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002). (In the next chapter, I will discuss how Jay and Tamara experienced such coercive parenting, in addition to being children from lower class families. Though Tamara’s extended family was certainly from the middle class, her mother struggled financially as a single parent, particularly when Tamara was a young child.)

Acceptance of the need for covert resistance may well be why Tamara did not consider herself to have ‘scammed’ the child welfare system when she made up stories about having had more serious problems than she actually had. Rather, Tamara unapologetically contended that she used the child welfare system for all it had to offer her. Hart (2013) admitted that “covert resistance permeated [his] early life so thoroughly that it was as natural as breathing” (p.37). Despite being the first African-American neuroscientist to be hired at an Ivy League university, he commented “Even today, I feel uneasy and disconnected when I have to do something like pay an outrageously overpriced bill for cable

TV or parking. Part of me still thinks that paying full price is for those who don't have a friend who can cut them a special deal" (p.37).

***Brain changes interfere with good intentions.*** Yet another possible explanation for why Tamara may have felt that her brain was confused about moral issues may actually lie in neurological changes that have been found to accompany long-term drug and alcohol use. Chronic drug and/or alcohol use can impair an addict's cognitive flexibility, manifesting in "impaired reversal learning" (Jentsch, as cited in Solis, 2013). This learning deficit refers to struggling to learn the new rules that are suggested by the new circumstances that one encounters. An example of such a new rule for an addict that is seeking to become sober may be "When I use drugs, bad things happen" (Solis, 2013). David Jentsch (as cited in Solis), a neuroscientist, suggests that while addicts may accept the wisdom of such a new rule given the increasingly bad consequences that typically prompt addicts to want to quit, "they're unable to update their behavior" (para.9) in accordance with the new rule. This learning impairment can be observed in long-time drug users who are struggling to break any old habit, not just drug addiction. Problems in synaptic transmission involving the neurotransmitter glutamate in the nucleus accumbens are responsible for a drug user's failure to fully receive information from her pre-frontal cortex (Jentsch, as cited in Solis). This disruption in the relay of messages from the pre-frontal cortex is what prevents addicts from being able to exert adequate self-control over brain regions, like the nucleus accumbens, which drive habitual behaviours (Jentsch, as cited in Solis). It could be then that Tamara continued to intermittently engage in bad behaviour, despite her feeling that this was "annoying" and not a reflection of her true moral self, on account of such an impaired ability to translate her intention to be good into consistent action. In addition, people who 'scam' others (i.e., lie, cheat, or manipulate for their own benefit) may be reinforced by an emotional 'rush' that they feel inside themselves from having got away with the scam (Ruedy, Moore, Gino & Schweitzer, 2013). This effect has been named the "cheater's

high”(Ruedy et al.); such positive affect following immoral behavior is imagined to be quite common, especially in circumstances in which there is unlikely to be “obvious harm or a salient victim” (Ruedy et al, p.532). Recall that Tamara missed the ‘rush’ that she would experience, following her threats of suicide, from hearing others profess how sad they would be if she died.

Thus Tamara’s perception that her “brain” was confused about moral matters was likely very accurate. Her moral self-battles may well have been driven, at least in part, by neurological rewards (e.g., feelings of self-satisfaction) that may have ensued from getting away with bad actions such as scamming, lying or cheating, and/or from brain changes that result in impaired learning of new rules, both of which would explain her seemingly passive attitude towards doing many bad things and choosing not to interrupt a chain of bad behaviours, once she had initiated them. Two important caveats should, however, be observed about Tamara’s unethical behaviour: If her conscience became activated by, for example, her violation of a cherished moral value such as honesty, as occurred when she thought of scamming her sugar daddy, then Tamara would experience internal conflict , which could prompt her to stop doing whatever bad thing she was doing. Also, Tamara’s concern about not hurting other people, especially those close to her, was another factor that would inhibit her bad behaviour. For example, she said that when a former boyfriend threatened suicide to prevent her from leaving him, Tamara finally understood the difficult position that she had placed her own loved ones in, each time that she had made similar threats, prompted by her own fears of abandonment. Until then, she had apparently missed perceiving the extent of the harm that she was causing others, being as absorbed as she was in her own intense feelings of emotional pain and fear.

**Being an outsider.** In addition to the variety of factors that I have already discussed which may have affected the youths’ evaluations of their respective moral characters, the tendency to perceive one’s self as being an outsider, in relation to multiple social contexts, likely compounded their struggles

to construct 'good' identities for themselves. I already discussed how the youths' lack of appropriate social skills for mainstream living, and their consequent doubts about their social efficacy, had compromised their ability to succeed in settings such as workplaces and schools. Their differences from many of the other youth that they had attended alternative schools and high school upgrading programs with<sup>71</sup> had also caused them to feel that they did not belong amongst such peers.

***Street family exclusion.*** Such feelings of being different from others around them were not at all new to them. Feelings of alienation and loneliness commonly arose in their street lives, in their previous school experiences, and in their family lives. Though I said earlier that belonging was a need that was met by having street peers, it is perhaps more accurate to say that street life provided the youth participants with relationships that were the best they had at fulfilling their affiliative needs at the time. Nevertheless, Jay and the young women still always found the relationships wanting. For example, Jay described himself as having been surrounded by buddies with whom he could have fun and do business with, but these were never people with whom he could experience deep emotional intimacy or that he could completely place his trust in. Jay said that despite the loyalty that they had professed to one other, and that they had, for the most part, actually held for each other, he always had to remember that these people, including his girlfriends in street life, could still turn on him "in a heartbeat." Jay explained that such capricious behavior was just part of the nature of street culture, given the imperative for people to make money from drug selling, above all other considerations. Even when he had members of his street crew providing him with around the clock protection from his street adversaries, Jay recalled feeling that he just wanted to get away from them at times. He wished that he

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<sup>71</sup> Recall that the participants had felt variously at odds with 'at-risk' youth, racially different youth and/or non-sober youth, while enrolled in high school upgrading.

had somewhere else to go where he could encounter people that he could really turn to for genuine support and protection like a family: "Where can I go right now? [I had] nobody, nobody, nobody."

Thus not only were his street family not people that he could trust or depend on for very long (Jay described them as "touch and go" relationships), it appeared that he did not really feel that he fully fit in with them, because they never provided the home he was looking for. Jay spoke of his longing for a home, which appeared to symbolize for him the stability, security and love that a family should provide to its members. Holidays like Christmas or Thanksgiving had especially caused him to feel alienated and alone. Jay recalled thinking regrettably about the fact that even his drug addicted customers seemed to have families that they could visit during holidays. He had even once remarked that jail had felt closer to a home for him than his life on the streets had. Jay explained that jail had at least provided him with a sense of stability and continuity, through providing him with a bed and meals: "Isn't that a sense of home?" Despite the money he was making, Jay's life was unstable in every respect, due to his drug addiction and the lack of structure inherent in the street lifestyle. During his street life, Jay had variously "crashed" with friends, stayed in "crack shacks" (i.e., drug houses), paid for hotels and intermittently returned to his mother's apartment for brief interludes, until she would kick him out once again.

Carmen also spoke of having relationships that she could not rely on, throughout her time in street life. As mentioned previously, she had boyfriends who would abuse her. Some of her boyfriends had exploited her economically. One had lived in her apartment that was paid for by welfare, and another had stolen her tuition money for upgrading. However, like Jay, she had initially welcomed the opportunity to hang out with drug addicts, when she first started using drugs herself. Carmen even enjoyed the company of much older adult addicts, because they had apparently provided her with more support than she had felt at home. Carmen described their support as follows: "They'd let me talk to them about whatever I wanted." "They'd talk about anything. Cos' really, [although] it seemed like they

[were] really fucked up ...it seemed a lot more nicer and normal than my family. So that's got to say a lot. My family [was] going through complete chaos." The level of chaos from her father's abuse and violence was such that when Carmen ran away and had no other option than to stay in a dangerous "meth house", she preferred the meth house to returning back home.

Carmen especially valued the acceptance that she received from other drug users: "A lot of people [were] really accepting of me, cos' they [were] meth addicts. Like really, if you're a meth addict and you're talking to another meth addict, you're not going to judge them. You're both equal. You're both drug addicts." Just as Jay spoke about how important it was for him to have been embraced by his street family when his own family was simultaneously pushing him away, Carmen observed that being a part of a drug using community gave her the acceptance that she was not getting at home: "Yeah I was treated like the problem at home. So why wouldn't I try and leave it? Let them have their beautiful family then. See how great it is without me." In contrast to her judgmental and punitive parents, Carmen was met with what she perceived as being sincere concern about her and her problems from fellow drug users: "I was able to talk to them. I mean they'd comfort me and make me feel better. [They would] be like, 'Oh here, smoke this pot...They seemed like they genuinely cared. Yeah they might have been meth heads but they cared. They were still good people on the inside." She explained that some of the older users she hung out with have since "got clean... and got their kids back...so they really were good people. They're just addicted." Carmen even admitted that the main draw for her in smoking methamphetamine was this companionship: "Yeah I think that's why I liked smoking meth so much is that everyone was really accepting of me."

Carmen specifically contrasted her biological father with a former "crackhead" with whom Carmen had come to regularly smoke marijuana with. She described the latter man as her "extra dad", on account of his "old" age. Carmen recalled the support of her "extra dad" when she suffering from

withdrawal symptoms: “Yeah extra dad... was there when I was going through drug withdrawals. My [biological] dad was shitting on me, telling me I was a bum. So fuck him. He wasn’t being supportive. He made me want to go use more and half the time when I’d talk to him and try to get more support, I would [end up using] more. Cos, he’s just be so rude.” Carmen admitted that if she could have experienced the same level of support from her biological parents, she would not have “adopted new street parents.” In the absence of government or family assistance as a youth, she also needed her street family for practical, material support (places to stay, food to eat, drugs to sell) as well as physical protection. She recalled how members of her street family had once beaten up a man for having propositioned her for sex in exchange for drugs. As Carmen put it, “If it wasn’t for like amazing people [in] my life and friends, I’d be pretty fucked over.”

Although Carmen’s views about her street family gradually became more negative after she was disappointed by them many times over, throughout most of our interviews, Carmen extolled the virtues of her current street family and even those of former members of her street family. In this way, Carmen differed from the other youth participants who had appeared to have become savvier regarding their ability to trust other street people, as a result of their similarly discouraging histories with such people. It appeared that Carmen thought that her current friends were a better incarnation of street family than she had previously experienced. In her words, her street family “had evolved” to fit better with the positive changes she was making in her life. Carmen felt that she had left behind the very abusive and exploitive people that she had known in her heavy drug using past. She described her new street family as “pretty wicked”, and again highlighted the support that she received from them (e.g., her street peers reamed out her boyfriend when he cheated on her and they took care of her when she got broken glass stuck in her foot.) The composition of her new street family was based more on their pre-existing

friendships than coming together primarily for the purpose of smoking drugs: “Me and my boyfriend share a lot of the same friends, so we’re basically a family.”

Although Carmen had initially seemed to me to be more naïve than the other youth participants who, as I have already mentioned, had come to realize that they could not rely on such people, Carmen’s clinging to her peers (even when her new street family had started to disappoint her) likely betrayed her desire that they replace her real family. Noshpitz (1994) believed that the substance-abusing youth that he had worked with as a counsellor also harbored fantasies of creating new surrogate families that could meet their needs better than their real family. All of Carmen’s comments above, of course, are suggestive of such a fantasy. Her apparent disposition to overlook or minimize the “fucked up” characteristics of her methamphetamine-addicted street family, in order to see them as basically “good” people, underscores her need to trust that such people could fulfill the needs that her parents would not meet (even as they sometimes failed their own children, by losing them to child welfare). Carmen also saw her street family as healing the physical and/or emotional wounds that were created by her real family. Of her initial street family, Carmen commented: “They did so much for me. They were really nice. When my dad punched me out, they fucking wiped on my face. They smoked meth with me. They called my drug dealing boyfriend.” Carmen may have even felt a more fundamental connection with such older addicts over her parents. Not only would they not stigmatize her for her drug use but she recognized that they could help one another, having experienced the same underlying psychological issues that prompted their use of drugs in the first place: “A lot more people who are drug addicts are probably going through the same stuff to make them drug addicts so they’ll understand.” Both Carmen’s underlying psychological commonalty with older drug users as well as their common experience of being stigmatized by non-users fits with Noshpitz’s observation that the feeling of being an outsider that first occurs because of experiences in the home makes substance abusing youth want

to join with other outsiders (i.e. street family members). I will elaborate on the youths' experiences of feeling like outsiders in their family homes at the end of this section.

In spite of all the benefits that Carmen derived from her street family, like Jay, she failed to experience true intimacy with them. Even amongst her then current, more "evolved" street family members, she did not feel that she could confide her true feelings. Carmen said that she would not open up with such people, unless someone directly expressed an interest in what she was feeling. She feared that she could cause herself problems with her peers if she expressed her true feelings: "I just think, oh well, there's no reason for me to bring this up. It might start a fight or something like that. And I just kinda shy away from bringing it up. Or I don't want to give the impression that I'm a bitch or that I'm being insecure and stuff like that. So I just bottle it up." However, Carmen acknowledged that the emotions that she pushed down would eventually come back up. In her case, this resulted in her attempting to cope with her feelings through self-cutting: "[I'll] constantly bottle my shit up. Until someone brings it up and actually want[s] to talk to me about my problems? I'm not gonna mention them. I'm just gonna [let them] build and build and build, until they bleed out my leg."

Thus despite meeting some of Carmen's companionship needs, these relationships clearly did not provide Carmen with a safe outlet for her feelings. Like Jay, it was clear that she felt that she could not fully place her trust in them. Also like Jay, she observed that dating relationships in street life had failed to provide her with any greater level of intimacy. Carmen described most of her relationships as having been very casual: "Yeah it was sorta relationships but it was just really fucked relationships cos' – cos' there was so much drugs everywhere constantly and [that's] usually what fucked up the relationships." Carmen felt that such relationships were mostly good for "just killing loneliness."

***Childhood social problems.*** Carmen's social problems can be traced back to her early school years, an experience that she shared with the other female participants. (All of them discussed having

problems making friends from a very young age.) Carmen recalled that she had been bullied for “being too quiet.” However, her social reticence developed in response to being rejected by school peers, after her family had moved to Alberta just in time for her to start grade three. Though she had had friends at her former school, in her new school, “Everyone just rejected me so then I just [would] keep to myself. At recess, I’d always just stand by myself waiting for recess to end so like I could go back to class and have this whole day end.” Prior to her involvement with drugs during high school, Carmen described herself as being “the biggest loner ever.” She remarked, “I didn’t even have a social life. I didn’t hang out with people from school cos’ they were all assholes.” (These school rejection experiences perhaps shed light on why Carmen was so sensitive to not fitting in with others in her first high school upgrading program and at her drug treatment program, both of which she had likened to high school. Though Carmen’s popularity increased in high school, she was popular among other drug users rather than mainstream peers.)

Drugs entirely changed Carmen’s social world by helping her to become more extroverted. Carmen said that she no longer felt “shy” while on methamphetamine: “I was able to be loud. People could hear me when I was talking.” As a consequence, Carmen felt that she was able to begin to assert herself with her peers and even to develop social skills: “Yeah the meth totally changed me. I kinda like I think if I won’t have done drugs I’d still be quiet shy timid person getting pushed over, so I think drugs help[ed] me. And in opening up and becoming more social – definitely helped social skills.” Her first real best friend was a boy with whom she smoked methamphetamine. In addition to easing her social anxiety and connecting her with other drugs users, Carmen’s popularity increased dramatically when she began selling drugs. She believed that her social skills continued to improve as a result of her new ‘job’: “That’s how I learned my social skills – was [through] selling drugs.”

Tamara also recalled not having many friends when she was much younger. She recalled being teased when she was very young, although she said that she could not remember what the teasing had been about. Tamara commented that “In school, people were mean to me...people have always been jealous of me” (presumably because of her appearance). She offered that she never had real friends, only fake ones. Tamara explained that although she was popular in junior high, she felt that the other popular girls truly hated her. She assumed that these girls were jealous of her. Such jealousy became a particular problem for her in junior high, because according to Tamara, girls exhibit way more jealousy in an all-girls school such as the one Tamara had attended, than when they continue to be schooled in a co-educational environment.

Tamara also experienced social challenges in other contexts when she was young. Though much of her time outside of school was spent playing water polo, she was unable to develop friendships with the other girls with whom she played. Tamara thought that this may have been because she was such a rough player: She recalled how “people wouldn’t screw with her” because of the aggression she displayed when she played. Tamara then admitted to having taken out her anger about her family life on other players.

Recall that Tamara similarly spoke of having taken out her anger on “society”, through criminal acts such as property theft, when she was in her street life. Tamara also echoed her discussion of the mainstream social skills deficits that she attributed to her lengthy time in street life, when she spoke about how she lacked sufficient practice with learning about how to be friends when she was younger, because her mother would not let her go on sleepovers. Tamara also suggested that she had failed to learn how to just be friends with guys, due to having been in an all-girls junior high, and having only had boyfriends while in street life. She said that she had only had sexual relationships with guys, implying

that she had missed out on the opportunity to have just been friends with them at some earlier point in her history.

Maria's social challenges as a young child stemmed from her being in foster care. She endured ostracism at school for having been a foster child. Maria had even run away from group homes over their restrictive rules about being able to visit with friends who did not reside in the homes. She recalled wanting to have the opportunity to go on sleepovers like other non-foster children did. Like Tamara, she felt that it was impossible for her to make friends, without having the same opportunity to visit the homes of non-foster children that her schoolmates had.

***Exclusion from intimate female friendships.*** All of the young women continued to struggle with developing same-sex friendships into adolescence, not just at school, but also when they left school for street life. Each of them had felt as though they were in competition with other young women, with respect to getting the attention of young men in street life. Consequently, they expressed wariness about trusting other young women, particularly if they had a boyfriend at the time. Carmen expressed her difficulty with developing female friendships as follows: "Like as far as chick friends go, it's really hard for me to be friends with a female. It's never been easy. I'm used to them like being bad people to me. Yeah I'm used to chicks either wanting to steal my boyfriend or steal my stuff or both. Girls are evil - just as bad as men if not worse." Perhaps feeling especially threatened by the fact that her boyfriend had recently cheated on her, Carmen described the young women who went over to the house that her boyfriend shared with his roommates as being "random sluts and bitches": "Like there's not character to them. They're not real. They're just there to get fucked up and put out. Get the fuck away from my boyfriend!"

Perceiving of such women as 'whores' likely reinforced her distrust of other young women, and took some of the responsibility off of her boyfriend who had cheated on her. Carmen could thus more

easily maintain her relationships with boyfriends who treated her badly, while excluding herself from the possibility of female friendships. In the case of her then boyfriend, Carmen let him off the hook by convincing herself that the young woman that he had slept with had had “magical slut powers” that her boyfriend could not easily have resisted, especially given the degree to which he was “fucked up” from a combination of both pills and alcohol on the night that he cheated on Carmen.

Maria and Tamara’s response to other young women who competed with them over guys was to limit themselves to hanging out primarily with guys. This response thus also had the effect of cutting themselves off from the possibility of experiencing intimate female friendships during their adolescent and young adult years, unlike their mainstream female peers. Tamara said that she had made no real female friends during her time in street life. The only girl that she had hung out with during this time was her one “true” friend, whom she had known since childhood. Likewise Maria failed to develop intimate relationships with female peers her own age. She named a young man instead as being her best friend; however even this situation had become precarious by the time that I had started to interview her. This was because her relationship with the young man had become sexual and was starting to cause problems for her in that form.

Maria’s lack of intimate female friends may be another reason that the attachment relationships that she had formed with older female professionals such as the guards at the young offender centre and some of her youth workers and social workers had assumed so much importance for her. A lack of intimate friends may be another reason why Tamara in part kept up her relationship with her sugar daddy, as she admitted that he was one of very few people that she could count on, especially after her file was closed with child welfare. Similarly Carmen appeared to tolerate the bad treatment of her boyfriend at least in part because she had no one else to turn to for support. Though she knew that it was wrong to keep forgiving her boyfriend for what had eventually become repeated instances of

infidelity on his part, she nevertheless found herself going back to him, especially when she needed emotional support for herself, because it was “easy” to rely on him – easier than having to cultivate new friends.

Thus not being able to establish female friends appeared to make it harder for them to risk disconnection from bad male partners. The absence of such supports also likely contributed to Maria’s and Tamara’s tendencies to elicit as much support as they could from professionals that were involved in their care. It seems likely that a combination of lacking close friendships, lacking parental support and lacking “true” street peer support influenced the young women to maintain their relationships with bad male partners, as well as risk crossing boundaries or otherwise alienating professionals with overwhelming demands for care and attention.

**Family exclusion.** Though Jay did not experience peer difficulties in his school years prior to his street life, he experienced the greatest sense of alienation and loneliness in the context of his family life. In the presentation that he would give to young teenagers who lived in group homes, he displayed a picture of himself with the word outcast superimposed diagonally on his body. Jay remarked that the people that he felt “outcasted” from the most were his own family. Similarly, Carmen identified as the “scapegoat” of her family. Both of them asserted that the other children in their respective families, such as siblings and cousins, were treated much better than they ever were. They also each recall being labelled as the “bad child” of their respective families for their teenage involvement with drugs. This occurred despite their own parents’ problems (e.g., Jay’s mother’s drug problem and Carmen’s father’s alcoholism) and other older family members’ (e.g., aunts, cousins, grandparents) problems of their own with drugs and alcohol.

Beyond being labelled “bad” and feeling as though they were treated worse than other children, the feeling of being an outsider with respect to their families was cemented by their families’

unequivocally rejecting behaviour towards them. In addition to the aforementioned judgmental and stigmatizing behaviour of her father over Carmen's use of drugs and her receipt of welfare, Carmen said that she had felt most rejected by her parents when they had refused to seriously participate in her counselling sessions when she was a pre-teenager. Their refusal of family therapy was due to their maintaining that Carmen was the exclusive source of the family's problems. (I will elaborate on this in chapter five). Though technically it was Carmen's choice to leave her home mostly for good at the age of fifteen, she had done so feeling that she could no longer endure her father's abusive treatment of her and her mother. It was either leave home or commit suicide for Carmen: "I just couldn't do it anymore. I just had to stop. I was so suicidal and I didn't want to cut myself anymore. I didn't really want to kill myself. I just wanted the situation to be better." In view of this, it is more accurate to see Carmen as feeling as though she had been effectively pushed out of her family home.

Carmen's feeling of desperation in leaving home was likely made even worse by the knowledge that there was no one else she could turn to in her family. She recalled staying for a brief period with an aunt and uncle, though their own marital difficulties had made their home an untenable option for anything more than a very short-term stay. Even worse than not being able to stay with family was the fact that she did not feel that most of her extended family had even cared "enough" about her to go out looking for her, when she had ran away at age of fifteen. (Recall that only her maternal grandfather had searched for her after she left home.)

Similarly, Jay had felt that he had no choice but to immerse himself in street life, because he was "pushed away from all of [his] family": first his mother, then his aunt who had become his kinship foster care mother, and finally his grandparents. According to Jay, his mother first pushed him away by attending more to her drug use and the men that she brought home with her at night than him. Following the nights when she would bring home men, Jay's mother would often fail to let Jay back into

their apartment when he returned home from school. Presumably Jay's mother was incapable of realizing Jay's need to be let back into their home, on account of her having "partied" too much.<sup>72</sup>

Such circumstances were what had prompted his aunt to pursue legal custody of Jay. He recalled that his aunt had pushed him to push his mom to sign away her guardianship of Jay, so that she could receive government funding for him as a kinship foster child<sup>73</sup>. Though Jay initially had gotten his own room and could look forward to regular mealtimes in his aunt's home, it was this aunt that had him delivering drugs for her. Moreover, in time, like his own mother, Jay recalled that his aunt had started to "forget about [him]" too. For example, she reportedly would pick up take-out food for her family, but somehow "forget" to buy something for Jay. Jay would then be given a few dollars, so that he could go out and get something for himself. The same aunt had also kicked Jay out of her home, on one particular Christmas Eve. Ironically, she told Jay that he was being kicked out because his drug use set a bad example for her younger children.

Though Jay never lived with his grandparents, their rejection of him came when they accused Jay of having stolen from them. His grandparents believed Jay's cousin when he had informed them that Jay had stolen some equipment from their garage. Consequently, they severed their relationship with Jay. His grandparents later sought to reconcile with Jay when the same cousin was discovered to be the real thief of their property. However, Jay refused to accept their apologies, on account of the pain that he had felt from their betrayal. Each of these family rejection experiences might be expected to have

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<sup>72</sup> Recall that as a teenager, Jay's mother also pushed him away by kicking him out of her home.

<sup>73</sup> Despite his awareness as an adult that his aunt was motivated to look after him for the money that she would receive as his foster parent, Jay still suspected that being looked after by "strangers" would have resulted in his being treated even worse than he had been by his own family, given the lack of a kinship tie. Like many aboriginal youth, Jay had heard bad stories (e.g., stories of abuse) from other youth who had the experience of being placed with foster parents who were not family members.

reinforced his fatalistic sense that he was unworthy of better things in his life, on account of having been born to his 'bad' mother, and otherwise being a member of a 'bad' community.

Unlike Jay and Carmen who had been told to leave or who had felt compelled to leave their homes, Tamara's rejection at the hands of her mother was, of course, much more formalized in that it had occurred in the form of her mother obtaining a restraining order against her. Tamara referred to the restraining order as her mother having "abandoned" her. As mentioned previously, Tamara believed that she had a real reason to feel angry and to act angrily relative to her best friend, because her family had "abandoned" her on account of her behaviour, whereas she felt that her friends' family would have never kicked her out under any circumstances. In addition to feeling that she would not have been able to access 'better' resources from the child welfare system if she had not lied to her workers, Tamara maintained that she also felt driven to lie on her own behalf. She was aware that she had no one else that she could rely on to look after her needs, given her mother's abandonment of her.

Though Tamara's biological father re-entered her life for a short while after she became unable to return to her home, the only way that he could help her was to have her live with him in a meth house. (He had left her in the care of another drug addict when he had to be hospitalized after having been stabbed.) Moreover, like Carmen, Tamara also had no one whom she could turn to amongst her extended family members. Despite her significant efforts to transition to a mainstream life at the time of our interviews, Tamara said that she still does not attend family reunions. However, the major reason that she would decline to attend was not because of their failure to support her in her time of need. Rather Tamara was ashamed of having been the only young person in her family "who has had so many problems." It pained Tamara to hear her family members speak of similarly aged young people who had already become professionals or were on their way to doing so, while she was still struggling to

complete high school. In defiance of what she supposed other family members thought of her, she said that she “only answers to” her own mother.

Like Tamara, Maria’s experience of having been rejected by her mother is perhaps best described as a form of abandonment. As mentioned previously, one of Maria’s earliest memories was that of her mother indicating her intention to surrender Maria and all of her siblings to child welfare, because she had decided to commit suicide. Though only four years old at the time, Maria recalled that her mother had gathered her and her siblings together to give them each a personalized suicide note (i.e., each note was written specifically for each child.) At that gathering, Maria’s mother had reportedly told her children that they were all bad. Maria explained that her mother was referring to the fact that each of the children had behavioural problems. Her mother apparently cited these behavioural problems as the reason why she felt that she could no longer take care of them.

Maria of course also had memories of having been abused by foster parents and treated as though she were inferior to their biological children. Her frequent running away from foster homes and group homes as well as her child welfare caseworkers’ decisions to move her to new placements also appeared to have often been precipitated by problem behaviours on the part of Maria – behaviour that was often triggered by her feeling rejected and bereft of love. Later, Maria was stigmatized, and consequently felt ashamed, for being eligible for disability benefits. One might expect that this would have compounded her history of being made to feel different and inferior. In fact, being pushed away by her biological family as well as by multiple foster families had led her to question, “Am I going to be broken forever?”

Moreover, as noted earlier, feelings of being unloved and alone in the world resurfaced for Maria when her child welfare caseworker refused to let her return to her Supported Independent Living (SIL) placement, as a way of teaching her a “lesson” about valuing her placements, rather than ignoring

their rules. When her caseworker refused to let Maria come back to SIL, Maria attempted suicide. Because of the serious level of drug addictions and mental illness in many of the women who resided there, the emergency shelter setting had terrified Maria. Being relegated to such a setting had also caused her to feel that there must no longer be anyone left in the world that cared about her: After all, how else could she have ended up in such a place of last resort? Other suicide attempts also punctuated her time in care, which landed her repeatedly in the mental hospital or a secure treatment facility for high risk youth.

***Lack of belongingness (amongst other factors) predicts suicide risk.*** Maria's experiences fit remarkably well with Thomas Joiner's (2010) theory of suicide. Joiner contends that two states of mind contribute strongly to a person's desire for suicide: a perceived lack of belongingness and perceived burdensomeness. When these states of mind are coupled with a person having become habituated to the kind of pain that their chosen means of suicide might entail, then that person becomes significantly more likely to take action on their suicidal thoughts and feelings. The foregoing account demonstrates how Maria, like all of the other youth, unequivocally meets Joiner's first criterion of perceiving a lack of belongingness for herself in any context. Maria even explicitly said that she had always wanted to kill herself: "[I] wanted to kill myself ever since I was a little girl, because I was alone, never belonged, nobody wanted me."

It is also easy to see how Maria's perception of her frequent movement between foster placements exemplifies perceived burdensomeness. She suspected that she was moved so often because no one could handle her bad behaviour. After all, her 'badness' had even necessitated her moving to another province so she could live in a special residential treatment centre for youth with very high behavioral needs like herself. Maria acknowledged that in her various residential placements, she could be 'hard to handle.' Of her behaviour in such settings, she described herself as "very hyper,

moody, crying and berserk.” It is not surprising that Maria also blamed herself for her mother’s surrendering of her to child welfare, in view of how her mother explained her reasons for wanting to give her children up and then end her own life. Despite her extreme feelings of hurt and anger over her mother’s abandonment, Maria’s acceptance of her mother’s rationale is reflected in the following comment: “My mom did, like, we were all badass kids too, like we had behavioral problems.” It appeared that Maria had started out to criticize her mother in the first part of her statement, but then adjusted her response to reflect her understanding of why her mother would have felt overwhelmed by her and her siblings. Given her practise of self-injurious behavior, Maria may have also habituated to the high degree of pain that typically accompanies many different methods for suicide, including drug overdose. People who are already habituated to pain are less likely to inhibit a desire for suicide for fear of the level of pain that they might inflict upon themselves (Joiner, 2010).

Though the suicide attempts of Tamara and Carmen were clearly also informed by their perceived lack of belongingness, and Carmen may have also habituated to pain due to her history of self-injury, neither of these young women perceived their existence as posing a burden to others. In contrast to Maria, by the time that I interviewed Carmen and Tamara, they had come to see that they had something to offer to the world. As I discussed previously, Carmen had come to feel that art saved her life, because her desire to make art and base her identity on this pursuit had given her a reason to live. Similarly Tamara had come to see herself as having been given gifts from God, such as her beauty and her intelligence. Not only was she grateful for such traits (that God had presumably bestowed on her for a reason), she had also become fiercely critical of people who failed to perceive their very existence as being a precious gift from God, despite her own previous suicide attempts. Tamara railed against the idea that such non-believers could take their lives for granted, rather than cherishing what they had been given. Thus it appears that Tamara’s faith may have inoculated her against seeing herself

as being a burden to others, by providing her a way of understanding the intrinsic value of each person's life, as well as their unique God-given attributes.

Though Jay also met Joiner's (2010) criterion of perceiving that he did not belong anywhere, it does not appear that he ever perceived himself as being a burden to others. After all, Jay was put in the position of having to fend for himself and even to have to look after some of his mother's needs, from a young age. It is possible that his venting of his anger and frustration through acts of violence and other crime may have protected him from resorting to self-injurious behavior, including suicide, to cope with his emotions. Though Jay recalled feeling intense despair about his future, when I asked him about whether he had ever considered suicide, he said that he never saw the point of taking his own life, because his high risk criminal behaviour was "bad enough", meaning that such risks were leading him in the direction of likely losing his life anyway.

In other words, Jay's risk-taking could be regarded as a slower form of suicide. His involvement in violence would have certainly helped him to habituate to physical pain (a doctor was even dismayed by Jay's level of pain tolerance after a police dog had attacked him so viciously that the bone of his arm had become exposed). Furthermore, becoming apathetic to whatever might happen to him as a consequence of his risk behavior may be thought of as a stand-in for having to overcome the fear of self-inflicted pain: If Jay happened to die through his involvement in violent crime, he did not have to anticipate such pain. Recall that Jay's apathy about what could happen to himself or others was especially triggered by his mother having kicked him out for the last time. Thus despite not considering himself to be a burden to others given his early self-reliance, Jay clearly felt a similar level of pain as the young women had with respect to his own perceived lack of belongingness.

The idea that Jay may have been engaging in a slow form of suicide is consistent with what a youth worker from an aboriginal counselling centre had once shared with me. His young clients would

sometimes tell him that they did not care if they accidentally died from an overdose. They had reportedly become so apathetic about their lives that they would have been just fine with ending their lives in this way. It seemed that such young people assumed that an accidental overdose would be a painless, perhaps even pleasant way of dying, despite the reality that many such overdoses often involve a high degree of pain from organ damage. Young people may also underestimate their high chance of being revived following an overdose, and therefore would be unlikely to think about the chronic, disabling health consequences that they may incur should they survive.

All of the youth participants then experienced the painful feeling of being an outsider, which appeared to contribute to their sense of being 'bad', and appeared to play a role in their putting their lives at risk in some way. Especially for Maria, her feeling of being an outsider, when combined with other risk factors of perceived burdensomeness and pain habituation, likely explains her multiple suicide attempts over the years. Though Carmen and Tamara appeared to enjoy more protection from perceived burdensomeness at the time of our interviews, it seems quite possible that all of Joiner's three criteria could have been met by them on past occasions, thereby precipitating their previous suicide attempts as well.

***The adaptive value of being an outsider.*** Despite their pain at feeling like outsiders, an outsider identity is also something that, at times, some of the youths would wear proudly. In his presentations to youth groups, Jay would say that he was proud of having accomplished all that he had (e.g., sobriety, schooling, jobs), especially considering what his family was like. Jay was happy to be an outsider in the sense of having broken free from the destructive lifestyle of his family members – the kind of lifestyle that he had once considered his destiny.

Being used to feeling like an outsider was likely also adaptive for him in making his transition to mainstream life. It likely made it easier for Jay, for example, to accept the Alcoholics Anonymous

treatment philosophy of “giving up” people in his life who were not going to be supportive of his sobriety. Recall that the young women would not embrace a philosophy of abstinence because of how abstinence would cut them off from friendships, both now and in the future. In contrast, Jay gravitated to the idea that he was “sacrificing” non-sober friends and family to a higher cause – that of saving himself. This appeared to be what made it comfortable for him to declare, as he did in his first speech in his treatment program, that the route to sobriety for him had to be a “solo” one. As mentioned previously, his then girlfriend’s betrayal of their joint commitment to becoming sober and perhaps the betrayals of other family members who failed to support his sobriety may have also stoked his drive to exclude from such others.

Such experiences may have paved the way for his self-exclusion from his peers in his high school upgrading program. Jay felt comfortable with putting the time that he might have otherwise spent socializing with such peers into doing his schoolwork, because so many of his classmates still drank and used marijuana. Jay also believed that the time that he spent by himself gave him the opportunity to discover what he liked and could be good at in mainstream life, a process which would have been much harder to accomplish, if he always had to negotiate with others about how to spend his free time. Unlike some of the young women, Jay did not struggle with how to enjoy spending time alone. Thus loneliness did not make him as vulnerable to engaging with peers who could lead him to stray from his mainstream goals.

Like Jay, Carmen was proud of being different from the rest of her family. The self-identified scapegoat was happy to be the only person in her family that did not collude with the dishonest image that the rest of her family was reportedly interested in portraying to the rest of the world. Carmen was resentful that her family appeared to care more about projecting an upstanding image in front of others, rather than being honest about what really went on between them behind closed doors. She explained

that her parents “pretty much act like they’re perfect and it’s all about their self-image ... the world has to see them as gold!” She attributed this interest in self-image to the greater value that her parents appeared to place on their affluence over being caring parents: “The most least successful white family in the suburbs would be the most fucked up family you’d ever seen, way worse than someone in the ghetto. At least the families with nothing know that they fucking have each other and care about it, whereas the fucking families in the suburbs only give a shit about their money and making more money.” Carmen also felt that her family’s wealth masked the problems in their relationships, such that the child welfare caseworkers who investigated her family when she was running away as a young teenager disbelieved her accounts of family violence and abuse.

Carmen’s pride in refusing to go along with her family’s public presentation appeared to help her resist the “identified patient” role that she was subjected to when her family sought counselling for her. Counselling was recommended by her family doctor for the depression that he had diagnosed in Carmen when she was ten years old. As mentioned previously, Carmen’s parents refused to participate fully in her treatment. Her mother in particular refused to become involved in family therapy. By resisting her mother’s identification of her as the only person in need of help in their family, Carmen likely protected her self-esteem. Moreover, if she had accepted her mother’s belief about herself, this may have hindered her from finally escaping the abuse in her family at the age of fifteen.

Likewise, despite Maria’s acceptance of blame for being burdensome to her foster families and biological family on account of her problem behaviours, she also demonstrated some resistance to the idea that she was solely responsible for her exclusion from a stable, loving home. When her child welfare caseworker would routinely inform of her yet another change being made to her placement, Maria recalled that her reaction would always be “more or less a question: Why me all over again?” Though she described herself as having been an “angry kid”, when I asked her what she thought she

might have been angry about, she sputtered that her anger was about “fricken abuse.” Thus like Carmen, Maria was aware that more was involved in her frequent movement between placements than her just being an intrinsically bad kid, as she had appeared to have been told. She was aware that her childhood experiences of abuse in her family, as well as in foster homes and treatment centres<sup>74</sup>, were an underlying reason for her bad behaviour. This may be why Maria maintained her ability to advocate forcefully for herself and for her sisters with their child welfare caseworkers. She observed that while her sisters would passively accept whatever unfair treatment would get doled out to them even as they became much older, Maria had always refused to do so and would even fight with her sisters’ caseworkers on their behalf.

Thus the youths’ pride at being different from their families or resisting their families’ narratives could be adaptive, provided that they remained somewhat balanced about their need to self-exclude from family and other people. As we will see in the next chapter, Jay’s desire to self-exclude can appear to go beyond what is useful for him to cope with maintaining his sobriety, seemingly due to an anger that stems from his insecure, preoccupied attachment style. Carmen’s chronic angry struggles to reconcile with her parents may also be related to her preoccupied attachment style and the enduring effects of trauma from her experiences at home and on the street.

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<sup>74</sup> Maria reportedly endured physical and psychological abuse in two residential treatment centres, one in Alberta and one in a neighboring province. One of the facilities had even received widespread media attention for their mistreatment of the young people in their care.

## Chapter Four

### **Antecedents of Identity Problems: A Deeper Look into the Past**

...the distinction between the past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.

Albert Einstein (as cited in Dyson, 1979, p.193)

#### **Precursor Stages to Identity: Erikson's Industry, Initiative, and Autonomy**

Given that familial rejection and other forms of child maltreatment recur frequently in the youths' narratives about their transitions from street life to mainstream life, it is not surprising that I discovered other related antecedents of their problems with self-efficacy, agency, and morality in their childhood experiences.

The youths' problems with lacking efficacy (and, in turn, agency, which begets the ability to select identity roles) did not just begin when they hatched their plans to transition from street life to the mainstream. Rather these struggles appeared to have developmental roots in much earlier periods of their lives. Jay was the only participant in his ex-offender re-entry program who could not identify any interests, skills, or values that were unrelated to his street life. This became apparent to himself and to others in the program when he was asked to represent such aspects of his life on a medicine wheel diagram. (These diagrams are used in some aboriginal-centred programming to help participants gain a deeper understanding of themselves, including their interdependent roles in social and ecological environments.) As mentioned previously, Jay observed that his lengthy immersion in street life had precluded many opportunities to explore himself in the ways that most other teenagers and young adults can avail themselves of. However, I suspect that inadequate opportunities to develop his self, well before his entry into street life as a young teenager, had caused him to miss out on building a sense of industry.

Erikson (1959) described industry as a sense of competence that the child gains from acquiring skills that could serve as a foundation for the kinds of vocational and social identities that one might choose in the future. Many children are afforded the opportunity to develop a sense of industry through school and other settings such as Scouts, music lessons, sports teams, and so forth. Such settings enable young people to explore whether they might have interests and aptitudes in various areas, in part, through comparing their proficiencies with those of their peers. Given that Jay was exempt from all such normative childhood environments (including a stable home, as I will discuss shortly), the extent to which he was bereft of self-knowledge for his medicine wheel makes sense.

In contrast to the other youth participants, Jay could not identify any interests or areas of personal strength from his childhood, other than recalling that he was introduced to hunting and fishing by his step-father, when he was a young child. However, given his separation from his step-father at the age of ten, it was not possible for him to develop independent skills in these areas. Jay also failed to identify any academic competencies that he could be proud of from his early school years. He acknowledged having difficulty with doing his homework during his junior high school years, given the instability in his home life with his mother. It seems reasonable therefore to assume that Jay likely developed more of a sense of inferiority than industry as a result of his childhood circumstances. Erikson (1959) suggested that inferiority would be the outcome if one's school-aged experiences tipped more often towards failure than success. Given that resolution towards the negative pole of any of the bipolar crises that characterized Erikson's psycho-social stages (in this case, industry versus inferiority) would leave a child less optimally prepared to negotiate the developmental tasks associated with subsequent, hierarchical stages, it is understandable why Jay had difficulty deliberating about possible mainstream identity roles. A failure to become industrious seemed to pave the way for Jay's challenges in negotiating identity, as Erikson would predict.

A sense of deep-seated inferiority could explain why Jay struggled to shore up the motivation (or “gather ammunition”, as he put it) to leave the security he had felt in his street life, despite constantly feeling the threats of street and jail violence upon him. While in transition to mainstream life, Jay’s much stronger confidence in his ability to be successful in street life co-existed with his then present day struggles to develop mainstream skills, which included an anxiety about whether he possessed, at a fundamental level, the capacity to acquire such skills. Such anxiety may have had even earlier roots than his elementary school years. It is possible that Jay’s problems with industry and motivation may have been rooted in psycho-social deficits that are characteristic of precursor stages to Erikson’s industry stage, such as those of autonomy vs shame/doubt and initiative vs guilt —crises that normatively occur in one’s toddlerhood and preschool years, respectively. A sense of courage and capability to act independently from one’s parents is achieved in these early years, if one successfully resolves the stages of autonomy and initiative. Such resolution is promoted by exposure to parenting that strikes a balance between, on the one hand, encouraging a child’s exploration and mastery of her environment and, on the other hand, protecting the child from dangers that she is not yet equipped to handle.

It seems plausible that Jay’s parents’ alcohol and drug addictions cheated Jay out of the opportunity to be encouraged and assisted to develop age-appropriate skills during his early years, thereby obstructing the development of autonomy and industry. From what he was told by his biological father, Jay was frequently left alone to play by himself in the family’s living room, on account of the lengthy durations that his parents would spend in the bathroom while injecting intravenous drugs. Jay’s father recalled that Jay would often pound on the door to try to get his parents to re-emerge from the bathroom. Jay was also told that he did not speak until he was four years old, presumably because of his parents’ longstanding neglect. Jay’s biological father also hit him on occasion when he was a young

child. This typically occurred when Jay would try to stop his father from hurting his mother. His father also reportedly violently hurled Jay into the bathtub after Jay had once resisted taking a bath.

Early and ongoing childhood mistreatment was also a feature of the young women's lives. They recalled feeling frightened by being left alone as young children, and/or being frightened by someone who had perpetrated abuse on either themselves or their mothers. Being a single mother, Tamara's mother frequently left her alone in the evening when she went to work. This began when Tamara was only six or seven years old. Her mother's absences continued even after Tamara called the police on a few occasions because she had felt frightened while at home alone. (Rather than child welfare intervention, the police responded by arranging for Tamara to stay with neighbours until her mother could return home.) Tamara also recalled being alone in her home, both before school and after school, during her elementary school years. By her late elementary school years, Tamara was accustomed to taking several buses on her own to play water polo. Part of the reason that her mother placed her in this structured activity was because Tamara was making "bad" friends in her neighborhood, on account of having been left alone so often. Practices for water polo, and later cheerleading, which Tamara began in junior high, kept her occupied and supervised until ten at night, most nights of the week.

In view of this history, it is understandable that Tamara may have been predisposed to feeling "abandoned" by her mother, even before her mother had started dating the man that would become her step-father. Tamara's mother had begun dating Tamara's future step-father when Tamara was in her early teens. Her mother had never dated until then and Tamara recalled feeling displaced by him. She missed receiving the exclusive attention of her mother. In fact she felt so deprived of adequate attention from her mother that she felt that her mother should not have had a child given her single mother status: "Sometimes there's not enough parenting for one – like for the kid, right?" Tamara

perceived that all high risk youth have parental neglect in common, that is, “someone not having enough time for them.”

Tamara’s difficulty in the aftermath of her family becoming blended, due to the addition of her step-father, was not unusual. The addition of a step-father figure is commonly a difficult family transition for female teenagers, in particular, to navigate (Vuchinich, Hetherington, Vuchinich & Clingempeel, 1991). The transition from a single-parent household to two-parent household has also been associated with higher rates of behavioral difficulties, including juvenile offending (Schroeder, Osgood & Oghia, 2010). Such outcomes are often thought to be the result of lower parental support and monitoring, consistent with Tamara’s experience. Moreover, an elevated risk of sexual and physical abuse has been observed for youths that come from homes with a non-related parent figure in residence (McRee, 2008). Although Tamara was removed from her home due to her physical assault of her mother, her step-father had also physically assaulted her in a chain of violence that took place between them at the time; however, he was never charged by the police. Tamara indicated that her step-father had lied to the police about her being high on methamphetamine at the time, thereby suggesting that her violence towards her mother was as a result of her substance abuse. In fact, Tamara had not begun using methamphetamine until well after she was forced to leave her home, due to her mother’s restraining order against her.

Like Jay and Tamara, Carmen felt that her mother was ill equipped to parent her, although for different reasons. She reflected that her mother “had me when she was seventeen/eighteen. She pretty much grew up with me. Kids shouldn’t have kids. You should grow up, figure out who you are, get a good career so you can take care of your children.” Carmen regarded her mother’s immaturity and dependency on her father as the reason for her parents’ ongoing fighting, and the concomitant problems of her father’s chronic alcoholism and abuse of her and her mother. Carmen explained that

her mother “pretty much ended up depending on my dad cos’ she had me and my brother and then she told my dad like, ‘Get a career or I’m out. I’ll take these kids and see ya later.’ So my dad’s like, ‘Ok, I’ll get a career. Don’t leave.’ And that’s what happened.” Once again, the youths’ problems during adolescence, particularly their perception that their needs were chronically neglected, were rooted far back in their early childhoods, and may have even started well before they were born in the form of circumstances that compromised their parents’ ability to parent effectively.

However, perhaps even more than neglect, Maria and Carmen recalled early memories of abuse of either themselves or their mothers. I already discussed Maria’s traumatic memory of her mother’s preparations for suicide. During her Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996), in which I was required to specifically ask Maria about experiences of abuse, she indicated that she had felt fearful of her mother (“It was scary. My mom’s a scary fricken person at times.”), and that she had felt fearful of her maternal grandmother for having abused her emotionally and physically. Maria was also fearful of her brother and of her biological dad, as they had each sexually abused her when she was a young child. (Maria was nine years old when her brother began raping her every day.) It was apparently too painful for Maria to coherently relate the details of such frightening experiences, apart from saying that her family members would always threaten to kill her. (I will elaborate on this incoherence in an upcoming section that is focused on the youths’ AAI results).

Recall too that Maria’s first set of foster parents had abused her by causing her to urinate on the floor and then clean the urine with her hair. After this incident, which was her first experience among many of being abused while in foster care/group homes, Maria recalled feeling scared of any foster parents, and that she “hated it so much” to be placed with any of them. She remarked that foster parents “torment you.” When I asked her what she had meant by using the word torment, she replied

“It’s all the other fricken shit”, referring to abuse experiences that she again appeared to be unable to talk about: The “shit”, she explained, was all the “things that go on behind closed doors.”

As mentioned previously, Carmen said that her early memories were of her father’s violence towards her mother: “Some of my first memories are like my dad like throwing my mom into a wall and a painting falling. My mom being, ‘Like get out of here! Go to your room!’” Carmen recalled that “Dad was abusing mom ever since I was a child.” Carmen believed that she must have been three or four years old when she first observed her “dad constantly knocking [her] mom into walls.”: “My mom begging my dad to stop. Fucking -- my mom constantly crying. It’s one of the biggest memories throughout my childhood is my mom fucking crying.”

Consistent with Jay’s early experiences then, the young women’s parents and other caregivers were challenged to provide the kinds of safe and nurturing home environments that would have enabled them to confidently explore their surroundings and develop skills that encouraged a sense of autonomy, initiative, and industry. The social problems experienced by all of the young women from an early age at school, as well as the academic problems experienced by Maria and Carmen in elementary school (and by Jay in junior high school) would have also likely compromised the development of industry.

**The impact of chaos.** In addition to neglect and abuse, the development of autonomy, initiative, and industry would have likely been impeded in the youths by the chaos that they had endured in their homes. Chaos refers to home environments that are characterized by instability and disorganization (Vernon-Feagans, Garrett-Peters, De Marcos & Bratsch-Hines, 2012). Instability is defined as frequent residential moves or frequent changes in the partners of the parents or other members of the household (Vernon-Feagan et al., 2012). Disorganization refers to environments characterized by a high level of noise, overcrowding, and lack of household routines (Vernon-Feagan et al., 2012). The construct

of chaos has been posited as a way of investigating the specific mechanisms by which poverty exerts its effects on child outcomes. For example, high scores on chaos measures have predicted such outcomes as lower child IQ scores and greater childhood conduct problems in those living in poor households (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2012). That said, chaos has also been shown to be related to child outcomes in middle-class families as well (Vernon-Feagans et al).

Jay and Maria appear to have been more affected by chaos that can be linked to their families' histories of poverty. The greater instability in their childhood living arrangements is understandable in view of the fact that both families did not have any options for obtaining money other than crime or welfare, given their parents' lack of education, criminal records, and problems with addictions. Lack of sufficient money to pay rent and police scrutiny due to family members' intoxicated behaviour and/or drug dealing and other crimes made these families constantly vulnerable to losing their accommodation. Not only are such families necessarily more transient and more likely to have to split apart in order to keep a roof over everyone's head, but family composition is also more likely to fluctuate if child mistreatment generates the attention of child welfare. The attention of child welfare would be more likely to be directed to geographical areas where a high proportion of families in poverty live, as parental stress due to poverty is a significant risk factor for child maltreatment (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Greater scrutiny would also extend to those families that have had multi-generational involvement with child protection like Maria's (High Risk Youth Task Force, 2005).

Given that sixty two<sup>75</sup> percent of children under the protection of the province of Alberta are aboriginal, (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009), poor aboriginal families are likely receiving disproportionate scrutiny relative to the rest of the population. Aboriginal family advocates have

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<sup>75</sup> Aboriginal children constitute only 9% of the child population in Alberta (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009).

perceived such greater scrutiny as being motivated by racism, given the genocidal intent that a Manitoba judge identified as the motive for the “60’s scoop” (i.e., child welfare policies which caused aboriginal children to be disproportionately apprehended and adopted out to predominantly white middle class families between the mid-1960’s and mid-1980’s) (Philip, 2002, p.F4). That said, many more aboriginal children are in care today across Canada than the total number apprehended as result of the 60’s scoop, despite provincial government prohibitions on non-native adoptions and the fact that aboriginal child welfare societies themselves are responsible for the apprehension of many of these children (Philip). In view of this, it seems more likely that the social and economic forms of exclusion that I described in the previous chapter that appear to give rise to many aboriginal peoples’ experience of ennui and attendant problems of drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, suicide, and so forth are more likely to be responsible for the high number of aboriginal children that continue to be taken into care across Canada. The funding inequity between provincial child welfare ministries and the federal government’s allocation to reserves for child welfare may be another reason for the high rate of child apprehensions -- fewer available preventative supports such as child care workers may result in more apprehensions. (Blackstock, 2010).

Although Jay was never apprehended by child welfare, he would have been given child welfare status as a kinship ward, given that his aunt received government money for his care. His mother voluntarily agreed to allow his aunt to become his legal guardian, when substance abuse issues interfered with her ability to care for Jay herself. (Formal kinship agreements with the province as well as informal kinship placements, where the parent retains legal responsibility for their child, are now the most preferred placements for aboriginal children.) (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009).

Prior to his guardianship by his aunt around the age of thirteen, Jay moved from being first cared for by his mother and his biological father during his preschool years, to being cared for by his

mother and step-father until the age of eight or nine. Jay's mother subsequently left him in the care of his step-father, who lived in another province, for approximately a year. She then retrieved Jay and moved him to Edmonton with her. During the next few years that Jay was exclusively in the care of his mother, her attention to her various boyfriends at the time and her substance abuse problems precipitated Jay's kinship care arrangement, as described above. After his aunt kicked him out of her home sometime thereafter, followed by his mother's final refusal to let him return to living with her (which he had done intermittently after leaving his aunt's home), Jay began living in various places while on the street (e.g., hotels, 'couch surfing' with friends). Jay was fifteen when he was forced to fend for himself on the streets in this way. Though he felt that he had received more care from his aunt than his mother, it must be remembered that his aunt and cousin had initiated him into drug selling and drug using. Their home was even raided by the police at one point, which caused Jay to have been ferociously attacked by a police dog. Jay recalled lying to the police about the drug activity going on within his aunt's home, to prevent his younger cousins from being taken into care. Although Jay did not have to endure frequent school moves, his ability to do his homework was compromised in junior high by all of the chaos that he had endured in both his mother's home and in his aunt's home.

Maria was on the move almost constantly from the time that she was four years old, as a result of having being shuffled between various forms of residential foster placements. As a teen, she alternated between foster homes, group homes, and the young offender centre. During her childhood and adolescence, she also occasionally stayed with her mother, who also moved house frequently on account of being unable to afford where she was staying. Her mother had various partners throughout the years. These relationships provided Maria with several half brothers and sisters, some of whom she barely knew as a result of her lengthy time in care and the lengthy time that her half siblings had spent in care. Maria also intermittently lived with other family members, such as her grandmother and her

sisters, as well as members of her reserve – this kind of placement having also been favoured by child welfare over non-aboriginal homes. However, these homes were also often marked by considerable disorganization and instability. For example, Maria resisted having to stay at her overcrowded grandmother's house. Too many of her family members were often staying there because they had become homeless for one reason or another. The inadequate supervision of her foster mother on her reserve enabled her to spend nights with older boyfriends and ultimately to become involved with prostitution. As a result of Maria's frequent residential moves, she was also required to change schools often. As mentioned previously, her child welfare caseworker stopped enforcing Maria's attendance at school when she became a teenager, thereby resulting in even more gaps in her education due to her skipping classes.

Despite Carmen's and Tamara's parents' middle class status, these young women did not appear to have been completely immune from the effects of chaos either. That the impact of unstable living arrangements may have occurred at a later age for them, and was more due to street life as opposed to their family circumstances however, implies that they received greater childhood protection from chaos than Jay and Maria, who experienced it on an early and ongoing basis in their families as well as on the street. This is consistent with the greater childhood resources that Carmen and Tamara could point to and utilize in the narrative construction of their identities, as mentioned in the last chapter. Although the young women do not speak specifically about the benefits of having an intact, middle class family and stable residence, such circumstances constitute a basis for seeing themselves as belonging to people who could be upstanding members of the community and as not being completely "broken", despite the early abuse, neglect, and addictions problems that were also present within their homes. Nevertheless both Carmen's and Tamara's families were still prone to disorganization.

Carmen lived in a fairly stable family home until she began running away at the age of twelve. Despite her lack of frequent residential changes and her stable family composition, disorganization accompanied the chronic physical and emotional abuse that she and her mother endured. In addition to physically assaulting each other, her parents frequently destroyed their home by throwing objects at each another. Her father also specifically “trashed” Carmen’s room, when he was angry and drunk. Like Jay, Carmen left her family home mostly for good at the age of fifteen. From the ages of fifteen to nearly eighteen, Carmen resided at a series of farms in the country. Farmers exploited her situation of being unable to live with her family by giving her room and board only (i.e., no money), in exchange for hard labour on the farms. As noted earlier, Carmen completed her grade ten final exams, but then dropped out of school because of her lack of school success and her idea that she could support herself with drug dealing.

Tamara’s living situation was the most stable of all of the youths in that she had been able to remain with her mother until the age of fifteen<sup>76</sup>, following which she moved through a variety of group homes and shelter placements. That said, from an early age, Tamara’s relationship with her mother was highly conflictual, thus making her home prone to disorganization. The coercive style of parenting that Tamara’s mother employed led to counter-coercion on the part of Tamara (i.e., defiant and aggressive responses intended as retaliation against her mother) (Patterson, 1982). As mentioned previously, the use of harsh, physical discipline<sup>77</sup> is commonly seen amongst parents of low-income homes (Hoff,

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<sup>76</sup> The fact that three of the four youths permanently left their homes at the age of fifteen may be influenced by developmental factors, as well as family and street circumstances. Mid-adolescents are most vulnerable to risk-taking due to still immature pre-frontal cortex development and inadequate “cross-talk” between the pre-frontal cortex and subcortex (Steinburg, 2008). This immaturity makes it more difficult for teens to inhibit impulses, plan actions, delay gratification, and control emotional responses – the same reasons that I cited earlier for why some professionals reject a harm reduction approach to drug abuse for young people.

<sup>77</sup> In addition to beating Tamara with a belt on her hands, Tamara’s mother would make her eat soap. She also repeatedly called Tamara an idiot.

Laursen, & Tardif, 2002). As a single mother, Tamara's mother did experience economic stress when Tamara was a young child. However, Tamara attributed her mother's parenting style to a culturally based, authoritarian mode of parenting that her Low German grandmother had used with her mother. According to the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario (2014) website, "Spanking is an area of particular religious concern. Low German Mennonites often use Bible verses to explain why they choose to use this form of discipline, and when they are told they cannot use this, they lose what they view as an effective parenting tool and also feel as though they must choose to obey God's law or Canadian law" (para.3). Tamara observed that her grandmother still engaged in physical conflicts with both her and her mother. As with her mother, Tamara said that she would not hesitate to retaliate against her grandmother too, despite her advanced age: "I fucking lay out my grandma too."

Before Tamara assaulted her mother, she was able to complete some of her grade eleven courses. Her enrollment in classes after she received child welfare status was sporadic, and the effort that she usually exerted on her schoolwork was minimal for several years, as she would only enroll in school because some form of day programming was required to be eligible for many of housing placements that could be accessed by high risk youth.

Long-standing and even multi-generational household chaos may have also been an obstacle for Jay and Maria with respect to their ability to coherently narrate their family history, and, in turn, narrate their own self-continuity. The instability of bricks and mortar brings with it instability in terms of not just family relationships, but also the knowledge of how people may be related in one's family. Given her entry into foster care at the age of four, Maria appeared to have lost track of the fact that she had other siblings, apart from the two sisters that she was often placed with as a young child. She said that she recalled realizing one day, when she was feeling sad about not feeling that she had a family of her own, that she actually did have brothers but had forgot about them. Maria recalled thinking to herself, "Oh

my God! I do have a family. I'm not alone." Moreover, Maria lacked such basic knowledge of her family history as knowing whether her parents had ever married. At the age of twenty, she had just learned from her mother that one of her sisters, whom she had always assumed was a full sibling, did not share her biological father. Maria said that she was still not clear about the ages and birthdates of even the siblings that she had been in close contact with for the past several years, because her mother had never given gifts on their birthdays.

It seems then that Maria's lack of family knowledge reinforced her lack of feeling 'grounded' in a family unit. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was not just that she lacked the positive influence and benefits of having an intact and 'good' family, but that she was bereft of even feeling a place of belonging anywhere – a sense of where she came from and who she could claim as her own people. Cori (2010) observed that, "to not feel wanted is to have no solid ground" (p.16), from which to develop self-worth and to confidently explore the world. Maria thus lacked a solid experience of both of the interpersonal contexts (home and school) in which a child's sense of competence (or autonomy, industry, and ultimately, identity) is typically developed.

It is notable that all four youths had difficulty establishing a sense of home as young adults. Though they had each expressed a desire for stable housing, the young women especially suggested that they tended to feel restless whenever they had stayed in a place for any significant length of time. As mentioned previously, part of the reason that Maria was still constantly on the move, at the time of our interviews, was that she was 'hard to house' due to her lack of independent living skills. However, she also acknowledged that she felt unaccustomed to staying put in one place, given her history of always changing foster/group home placements. Though Tamara had been living in her own apartment for several months, if not a year, at the time that I interviewed her, she acknowledged that she frequently felt the urge to pack up her stuff and leave, but that she could no longer do that as easily as she did in

the past, because she had accumulated so many things for living on her own. When her belongings could easily fit in a couple of garbage bags, she would often welcome moving to another child welfare placement, even if she had no serious problems with her then current placement. Cori (2010) suggests that problems in the development of the parent-child bond (i.e., insecure attachment, which I will elaborate on later), such as occurs in parent-child dyads that have experienced significant separations and/or abuse, may prevent the child from experiencing the parent as a secure “home” base. Problems in achieving a secure base may impact the child’s later ability to replace one’s parent as one’s home base by “subsequent relationships and whatever we identify as *home* – be it community, country, place or something else” (p.41).

**The role of children’s coping efforts.** The development of autonomy, initiative, and industry for these youths was also likely compromised by the considerable amount of energy that the youths would have had to invest in their parents to ensure their own survival, given the apparent attachment problems and sources of trauma within their homes. The development of children’s cognitive abilities (e.g., attention, memory, problem solving) and emotional self-regulation is often impaired by the adaptations that children develop to keep themselves safe (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2007). As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is possible that the concerns that the youths repeatedly expressed about their ability to cope and survive in street life, and the seemingly inevitable (to them) forms of coping that they enacted (i.e., hurting others, hurting themselves or numbing themselves with drugs, as Tamara described), may have been rooted in their often unstable and sometimes frightening childhood homes. In addition to self-cutting and other forms of self-injury (whose possible links to attachment and trauma I have already described), youth may continue to rely on acting aggressively among other “rudimentary skills” (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, p.48) to obtain some outcome or coerce others. Reliance on immature or self-destructive coping strategies not only interferes with learning more age-appropriate

and adaptive skills but often leads to more serious social and psychological problems as children become older. “Many of the problem behaviours which emerge in the elementary school years and persist over time -- and which lead to service system referral—may be traced back to early disruptions in caregiving” (Blaustein & Kinniburg, p.48).

Another indication that the youths were likely investing considerable energy in their parents comes from the collapse of intergenerational boundaries that could be observed in each of their families. The roles of parents and children appeared to have become inverted in response to the families’ difficulties. Despite the often acute anger that each of the youths often felt towards their mothers, each youth was also very protective of his or her mother, and some would try to take on the responsibility of solving their mother’s problems. I already mentioned how Jay would protect his mother from her abusive boyfriends. Like Jay, Carmen also spoke of trying to protect her mother from her father’s violence. She observed that she would like to be rich someday, so she could ensure her mother’s safety by eliminating her mother’s dependency on her father. Carmen felt compelled to “take her [mom] out of that situation”: [I’d] be like ‘Mom, you don’t have to be with him anymore. I won’t beat you.’ Maria felt protective towards her mother, because of her mother’s greater vulnerabilities, due to her drug use. For example, she worried about what would happen to her mother, when her mother would get kicked out of one form of housing or another, because she could not pay rent and required money to support her addictions.

The youths also spoke about having to fend for themselves, with respect to ensuring basic needs and performing housework at an early age, within their family and foster/group homes. As if Jay’s basic needs for food and shelter were his responsibility to address, he spoke about trying to “better his situation” by going to live with his aunt, because he knew he could get his own bed and three meals a day there. Prior to living with his aunt, he figured that he could alternate between going to his best

friend's house, his grandmother's house, and his aunt's house so he could have dinner each night, given his mother's incapacity to provide him with food, due to her addictions. Carmen commented that she had learned how to perform household chores, like doing her own laundry, from a very young age, because her parents were preoccupied with their constant conflicts: "I felt alone when I was living with my parents, other than like, the conflict, so it was pretty much I took care of myself then."

Similarly, when asked during the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996) to identify who it was that raised her, Maria was the only youth who responded that she had raised herself. Though Maria struggled with independent living skills such as budgeting and paying bills, she had learned how to cook and do other household chores, because she was required to do them on a fixed schedule in many of the group homes that she had lived in. As a result, whenever she stayed with her sister, she required her sister's young children to abide by a similarly structured schedule to the ones she had become accustomed to while living in group homes (e.g., mealtimes would be followed by kitchen clean up, followed by free time in one's room, etc.) Although such learning of household chores and routines did not appear to be age-inappropriate in Maria's case, it appeared as though her having to perform all these tasks for her self contributed to her sense that no one had raised her except herself.

Role reversals of parents and children, whether it takes the form of caring for a parent or assuming adult responsibilities, typically occurs when the parent has unmet childhood or adult psychological needs for "parenting, intimacy or play" (Macfie, McElwain, Houts, & Cox, 2005). "Although role reversal may help a parent to meet his or her unmet needs, it is also thought to compromise the child's development. Specifically, role reversal may interfere with the development of autonomy and individuation (self-development) in the toddler period, as the child focuses more on the parent's needs than on his or her own and the parent seeks to keep the child dependent" (Macfie et al., 2005). Later identity development may also be affected: Childhood role reversal is associated with

difficulties in young adults' ability to individuate from their families and to adjust to college (Kerig, 2003).

**There are no children here.** One way to encapsulate the legacy that the youth participants carried with them, with respect to their childhood experiences, comes from a statement made by the mother of children who were growing up in a violence-ridden housing project in Chicago during the 1980s. The mother is quoted as saying "There are no children here" (Kotlowitz, 1992), referring to the fact that the resident children assumed adult-like concerns and responsibilities, well before their time, on account of their exposure to violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and poverty, among other concerns. These children felt burdened by all the stressors that adults in their families and communities failed to protect them from. Children from housing projects also often lack sufficient opportunities for carefree play and supervised, structured recreation, both of which can contribute to building skills and confidence. And as they approach adolescence, they begin to act like miniature adults with respect to engaging in the same antisocial activities as many of the adults in their communities (Kotlowitz, 1992). It appears then as though there are obvious parallels between American youth who grow up in public housing and the experiences of Canadian high risk youth.

**The additional burden of ennui.** For at least the two low income aboriginal youths in this study, their failure to have experienced a more typical or 'normal' childhood may have also been influenced by a push to assimilate the despairing attitudes or *ennui*<sup>78</sup> of the adults in their communities. Richard Wagamese (2013), the aboriginal writer, suggests that ennui is "foisted upon our youngsters and our youth and robs them of vision...they lost it [interest in activity intended to foster change and growth] because in the larger picture of their lives [such activity] had no place. It would end as all things end. It

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<sup>78</sup> as defined in the previous chapter

would flare as all promises flare and then gradually slip away never to be repeated. Ennui. The acceptance that this is all there is and all there will be” (para 10 & 11). Wagamese’s description of ennui being foisted on youth who had already grown weary of the broken promises for a better life that adults had made to them is reminiscent of the attitudes held by the children and youths that resided in the aforementioned housing project in Chicago. For example, one young person from the Chicago housing project was described as “increasingly cynical. And in a child who has not experienced enough to root his beliefs, such an attitude can create a vast emptiness. He had little to believe in. Everyone and everything was failing him. School. The Public Aid Department. His father. His older brother. The police” (Kotlowitz, 1992, p.222)

As with such young people from Chicago, who suffered from both macro-level social exclusions (e.g., School and Public Aid) and micro-level exclusions at the level of family relationships, it seems reasonable that in addition to the macro-level social and economic exclusions for aboriginals and the ‘welfare mentality’ that resulted from the Indian Act, ennui may have also been fostered by the fragmentation in aboriginal family relationships that occur as a result of child welfare intervention, parent and youth incarceration, and a greater risk of deaths from suicides, drug overdoses, accidents, and violence (Lalonde, 2005). Against this backdrop, it makes sense why Carmen and Tamara apparently felt that they could still derive (or regain) a sense of purpose and belonging from feeling that they had come from a much more stable and even somewhat reputable family and community, relative to Jay and Maria, despite sharing many of the same family problems of violence, neglect, and addictions. As E.O. Wilson (1998) observed, “People must belong to a tribe; They yearn to have a purpose larger than themselves” (para. 10). In other words, we turn to the social groups that we feel some sense of kinship with, perhaps because of family, ethnicity, or social class, to identify meaningful pursuits to

engage in and to derive a sense of identity. This would explain why Thomas Joiner (2010) observed that a perceived lack of belongingness and burdensomeness significantly contribute to one's risk for suicide.

**Social exclusions undermine the social contract (and disinhibit impulsivity).** Lacking a sense of connection to family or a larger community, it stands to reason that many aboriginal youth might have less motivation to inhibit risk-taking and may be even more vulnerable to the experience of becoming 'lost', that the youths in this study had mostly attributed to maltreatment by their families. Cacioppo (2008) suggests that social isolation and fragmentation undermines the implicit bargain that individuals make with society – individuals agree to self-regulate, thereby relinquishing certain 'freedoms', in exchange for social acceptance. Recall that while all the youths engaged in potentially life-threatening risk behaviours, Carmen and Tamara tended to see their underlying emotional pain as more time-limited and circumscribed as regards their current family circumstances. They therefore took precautions against seriously endangering their futures. This implied that they saw themselves as rejoining mainstream culture at some later point. In contrast, Jay and Maria did not take such precautions. They were not as concerned about remaining excluded from the mainstream if they incurred adult criminal records, for example. This likely reflected feelings of ennui, as discussed in the previous chapter. It likely also reflected the fact that they experienced more belonging in their socially marginal families and in their street subcultures, when they did engage in antisocial behaviors such as crime. Thus Jay and Maria appeared to have less incentive to enter into a bargain with mainstream society, because in their worlds they could perceive fewer returns from that investment than Carmen and Tamara likely could. As noted earlier, this is the reason that Abhijit Banerjee (as cited in Aitkenhead, 2012), the behavioral economist, suggested that poor people do not seem to be as invested in inhibiting impulse control than people from more privileged socio-economic classes. All the factors that contributed to greater social marginalization for Jay and Maria, whether it be macro-level exclusions from wealth, jobs, and

education, or micro-level exclusion in the form of highly fragmented, fragile families and inadequate compensatory care from child welfare, placed the aboriginal youths at a much greater disadvantage materially, and with respect to making decisions that could have improved their lives.

**Social exclusions undermine psychological resilience.** Social isolation and fragmentation may also be half of the equation with respect to whether someone experiences an event as traumatic. Although all traumatic events are, by definition, events that would be overwhelmingly frightening or terrifying to most people, the kind of social response that the victim receives is often a critical factor that bears on whether he or she is likely to endure significant and lasting post-traumatic symptomatology. For example, psychiatrist, Bessel Vanderkolk (2014), observed that the outpouring of public support for victims of the 9/11 attacks and attacks on the Boston Marathon was instrumental in preventing lasting psychological damage in many individuals. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Vern Saddleback (as cited in Stolte, 2011, p.A5) made the observation that many of the aboriginal parents on his reserve had gone to “sleep”, referring to the parents’ inability to adequately support their children on account of their own ennui-related social and psychological problems, including unresolved grief and trauma of their own (and the drug and alcohol abuse that often occurs secondary to such problems).

**The identity burden of accelerated development.** While a greater number of factors appear to compound the aboriginal youths’ situations, the challenges posed by failing to have had a ‘normal’ childhood can be observed in all four participants’ identity struggles. Recall that Jay and Tamara felt as though they were “behind” their mainstream peers, given their struggles to interact with others in a manner that is socially appropriate for mainstream contexts. At the same time, the youths each felt that their development had been “accelerated” as a result of having experienced hardships that most of their same-age peers would not have typically been subject to. Add to these street and family hardships, the

challenge of having to quickly surmount the unfavourable family conditions for development that I have just described, in order to appease the demands of the child welfare, criminal justice and education systems, as one “ages-out” of, or otherwise becomes ineligible for, support services such as ex-offender programs. What emerges from this mix is the way that the youths’ experiences are most consistent with the idea of an “accelerated and compressed” (Stein, 2006, p.273) transition to mainstream adulthood.

It is not just that high risk youth must quickly remediate years of educational gaps or gaps in social skills and/or life skills in order to develop viable mainstream identities, but, as I first argued in the beginning of chapter two, they lack the childhood developmental resources of autonomy, initiative, and industry that would have facilitated this already extremely difficult task of remediation, especially in a relatively short period of time. Immigrants to a new country may have the ability to utilize their experience of having developed a sense of agency in their home cultures when approaching the task of learning the new customs of the country they have migrated to. In such cases, they might be expected to possess, to at least some extent, a basic sense of confidence in their own ability to learn to operate in new cultures, having been successful in their home cultures. In contrast, high risk youth appear to grow up strangely; that is, they cannot very often transfer what they have learned in their homes to easily integrate into mainstream culture. Although I have been saying that Tamara and Carmen may have had an easier time of ‘reintegrating’ into mainstream culture, they still faced significant challenges in this respect, on account of the family problems that undermined the development of their agency since early childhood.

It is not surprising then that the youths seemed to regard their accelerated development (both the greater hardships and their lack of agency among other resources to cope with them) as an obstacle or a burden. Recall that Jay and Tamara concealed their street experiences from their school peers because they surmised that such peers would not be able to understand their previous lives and would

judge them negatively for their 'bad' choices. Though experiences like role reversal with one's parents could result in pseudomaturity (i.e., acting as though they are mature beyond their years) (Johnston, 1990), the youths' attitude towards their acceleration, however, was not one of arrogance (despite Tamara having worried about other girls' perceiving her that way). Rather the youths described their accelerated development with a sense of weariness or heaviness (e.g., Jay felt as though he had lived at least forty years, given the number of hardships he had already experienced by his twenties). Carmen also described the cumulative negative effect of experiencing multiple stressors throughout her adolescent and young adult years: "When I look back, I'm like 'Holy Shit! It's just like one thing after another after another after another. It just doesn't end!"

**The additional burden of trauma.** In addition to the number of hardships that the youths had to cope with without the support of their families (and often because of them), trauma likely contributed to their sense of weariness or heaviness. As discussed earlier, rather than relief, Carmen seemed ambivalent about having survived suicide attempts. She described an extreme feeling of burdensomeness upon realizing that she was still alive following one of her previous suicide attempts, in particular. This attempt was precipitated by the abuse she had experienced at the hands of the man who had kidnapped her and forced her to marry him. At the time of our interviews, Carmen still questioned the value of having been revived at the hospital, given the amount of mental anguish that she experienced, both before and after the suicide attempt (Carmen's assailant forced her to resume living with him thereafter.) Carmen recalled that her assailant "was a really horrible person. I would much rather have died than gone through that shit." The "shit" included being previously stabbed by the same man and as Carmen put it, "...there was about two months when he was terrorizing me here and fucked up my apartment and destroyed my entire life, to the point where I was like, I tried to kill myself." Carmen said that she took every medicine she could find because "he was breaking shit, trying

to force me to do things sexually I didn't want to do." She still regretted having survived because as she put it, "whatever I had to endure after wasn't worth it." Martha Stout (2001) describes the mental "universe" of the extreme trauma survivor as one of "fear and exhaustion – especially exhaustion -- and people will try almost anything, however irrational, to make it stop" (p.D7). Victims of trauma experience days "when you feel like a quivering, cowardly shell of yourself, when despair yawns as a terrible chasm, when fear paralyzes any chance for pleasure. This is just a fight that has to be won, over and over and over again" (Woodiwiss, as cited in Brooks, 2014, para.2).

**Social alienation and self-alienation.** Obviously, the youths' feelings of being different from other young people, including feeling chronically burdened, can encourage alienation from others, thereby making it even harder for the youths to integrate with mainstream peers. If, as Jay and Tamara did, they purposely conceal aspects of their selves from others, this can also give rise to a discrepancy between their inner and outer experience of self, thereby encouraging self-alienation: "People can feel detached, disconnected, and fractured from their own self-definition" (Roth & Newman, 1991, p.291). In addition, youth can struggle with the feeling that they may have been permanently changed as a result of their traumatic experiences. Maria's experiences of childhood sexual abuse caused her to constantly question whether her sexual feelings, both at the time of the abuse and since then, were "normal." She questioned why she had sexual feelings towards a guard at the young offender centre when she also perceived that person to be like a mother figure to her<sup>79</sup>. Maria also vacillated between thinking that she has always been a lesbian and thinking that she might ultimately end up in a heterosexual relationship. She questioned whether her desire for women was due to her feeling "safer" with women than with

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<sup>79</sup> It is common for victims to form trauma bonds, also known as betrayal bonds (Carnes, 1997), with their abusers. The sexual abuse from her father and brother may have made it especially hard for Maria to not learn an association between sexual feelings and feelings of attachment, which can then become a dysfunctional template for future attachment relationships.

men. The emotional aftermath of trauma, from street life and/or family life, can thus be another reason that the youths felt like outsiders with others or even with themselves. (I will elaborate further on the effects of trauma in the next section.)

### **Trauma and Attachment Beliefs Scale (TABS)**

The idea that trauma may have added to the youths' social and personal identity struggles is also supported by their responses on a questionnaire. Results from the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003) suggested that for the young women, in particular, their core beliefs about themselves had likely been adversely affected by problems with attachment and trauma. The TABS measures five areas that are hypothesized to represent "universal psychological needs that [are] vulnerable to disruption by traumatic life experiences" (Pearlman, p.27), based on the test author's review of the psychological literature on trauma, and her "listening to clients speak about their relationships and trauma memories" (Pearlman, p.27)<sup>80</sup> The five needs that were identified through this process are: safety, trust, esteem, intimacy and control.

Trauma survivors are often naturally concerned about whether they or their loved ones will be harmed (safety) (Pearlman, 2003). Trust in other people and in one's own judgment is often eroded (Pearlman). Self-esteem may be damaged by such experiences as "defilement, degradation, humiliation, rejection, or devaluation" (Pearlman, p.17-18). Respondents may also have low opinions of others, on account of having been abused or violated (Pearlman). Intimacy with others can be impaired as a result of events such as the loss of an important attachment figure or alienation from others (Pearlman). One

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<sup>80</sup> Although not all of the validity information for the TABS is documented in its manual, the scale appears to be valid for the purpose of identifying heightened areas of personal sensitivity or beliefs that are often, but may not be exclusively, the result of trauma and attachment problems. Despite the fact that the five needs assessed may be shaped by many factors (not just trauma and attachment), test reviewers have concluded that "it is appropriate for use in a therapeutic context" (Aidman & Garro, 2005, para. 23), although caution is advised in using it as a standard clinical instrument until more evidence of predictive validity, in particular, is available (Aidman & Garro, 2005).

may even feel estranged from one's own feelings or seek to avoid awareness of their feelings by avoiding spending time alone (self-intimacy) (Pearlman). Impulsive and risky behaviors may be a way to compensate for the feeling that one lacks control in a situation or feels trapped by others (Pearlman). Aggression can also be a defense against the emotional pain from feeling powerless (Pearlman). Alternatively, controlling others may be a response to feeling powerless (Pearlman).

On the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003), five of the ten subscales reflect beliefs about the self in relation to each of the universal needs that may be disrupted by trauma (e.g., Self-Safety, Self-Trust, Self-Esteem, etc.) and the other five subscales reflect beliefs about others in relation to these needs (e.g., Other-Safety, Other-Trust, Other-Esteem, etc.)<sup>81</sup> Scores in the "very high" (Pearlman, 2003, p.14) range indicate a potentially clinical level of concern. These scores are higher than scores obtained by 84% of the individuals in the nonclinical standardization group (Pearlman). Scores in the "extremely high" (Pearlman, p.14) range indicate a "substantial disruption" (Pearlman, p.14) in self-beliefs or other-beliefs related to the psychological need being measured by a particular scale. Scores in this range exceed 97% of the scores obtained by individuals in the nonclinical standardization group (Pearlman).

Carmen's scores and Tamara's scores all fell in the very high range or extremely high range, with the exception of two scales each. Similarly, Maria's scores all fell in the very high range or extremely high range, with the exception of three scales. Altogether then for the young women, at least seven out of ten scales were significantly elevated and, as such, they each had significantly elevated scores across a number of both self-belief scales and other-belief scales, though the profile of which self-beliefs and other-beliefs were significantly elevated and which were not, varied from person to person. In contrast,

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<sup>81</sup> A description of each of these scales can be found in Appendix A.

Jay had only one score that could be classified as very high (Other-Safety), and no scores that were extremely high. The percentile scores obtained on each scale by each participant, along with the interpretive ranges that they correspond to, can be found in Appendix B. The results that most inform the youths' biographical accounts are discussed below.

### **Trauma from Street Assaults and Childhood Attachment Disruptions**

**Street assaults (intimate partner violence or prostitution related violence).** With respect to Other-Intimacy, the young women's scores either closely approached or fell in the extremely high range (greater than the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile for Carmen and Maria, 96<sup>th</sup> percentile for Tamara). This is consistent with the argument that I have been making for the youth feeling a strong sense of psychological isolation. Avoidance of interpersonal situations often accompanies such feelings of isolation or disconnectedness from others. The Trauma and Attachment Belief (TABS) scale (Pearlman, 2003) scores thus shine a somewhat different light on some of the youths' experiences that were discussed in the second chapter. Although as mentioned previously, the youths probably correctly surmised that their street peers would not have been able to meet their intimacy needs, it may have also been the case that trauma may have caused them to see social situations as challenging or even frightening experiences, which could have led to self-exclusion or withdrawal from others. For example, Carmen described herself as having been agoraphobic at one point. She recalled being afraid to leave her home. Carmen attributed her extreme reluctance to leave the house to having had one "bad" (i.e., abusive) relationship after another. That every day after her high school upgrading program would end she would rush to be with her then current boyfriend (who also mistreated her) instead of developing friendships with her classmates also speaks to her long-standing social anxiety. Though this anxiety had roots in her early peer rejection, it appears that it may have been exacerbated by trauma and, as mentioned previously, exacerbated by her history of drug use, particularly her ongoing, heavy use of marijuana.

The feeling of being an outsider to one's self (i.e., self-alienation) that I described earlier is supported by the young women's demonstrated difficulties on the Self-Intimacy subscale. Maria's and Carmen's Self-Intimacy scores fell in the very high range, while Tamara's score fell in the high average range. Though the high average range is not indicative of a potential clinical problem, Tamara's score at the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile is still indicative of a greater problem with feeling connected to her own experience (i.e., feeling comfortable reflecting on her experiences or spending time alone), than most other people might experience. It seems likely that the young women's experiences of disrupted self-intimacy are connected to their safety concerns that I will elaborate on below.

The Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003) scores drew attention to the extent to which all of the young women continued to feel under threat and feel that their loved ones were also in danger of some kind. Their Self-Safety and Other-Safety scores fell either in the very high range or in the extremely high range. That they were also anxious about their capacity to manage their feelings and behaviors is reflected by the fact that their Self-Control scores were either in the very high or extremely high ranges. It appears then that the young women still felt that much of their energy must be directed to survival, and directed to the challenge of having to contain their emotions, despite their ongoing feelings of being threatened. It seems reasonable that the young women may have continued to feel threatened, given that all of them continued, in varying degrees, to be involved in risky sexual relationships and/or had assailants that could potentially threaten them again. (Although the assailants of Tamara and Maria had gone to jail, they were each due to be released soon. In Carmen's case, her assailant had never been charged.)

The young women's safety concerns may have also reflected their histories of abuse. Carmen's reasoning for why she refused to live with her parents after she got away from her kidnapper, despite having no money and no place to stay, reflects the cumulative effect of repeated abuse from her

childhood and the streets [the “compounded community trauma” (Weine and Jekel, 1995, p.1)] that I described in chapter one). In response to her father’s invitation for her to return home, Carmen responded, “I’m like ‘Fuck no! So I can listen to you beat up my mom more? Like fuck I just got stabbed. Covered head to toe in bruises. And I have to listen to this shit? Like fuck off.’” Such compounded trauma may also explain why the young women shared the above pattern of scores, in contrast to Jay who had never personally been a victim of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, or chronic childhood abuse.

That Carmen and Maria felt that they needed someone to live with in case they became overwhelmed with feelings of fear, especially at night<sup>82</sup>, (i.e., disrupted self-intimacy) is a good example of how their compounded trauma put them at risk of crises such as homelessness. They each expressed fears of being attacked again by the same men who had previously assaulted them. The man who had repeatedly assaulted Carmen and kidnapped her forced her to marry him, under the threat that he would kill her brother if she did not comply with the marriage. Carmen said that she would not file divorce papers as she was afraid that he could learn where she now lived: “That could cost me my life.” She said that she feels that she still has to “watch [her] back” no matter where she is. Maria said that she still has panic attacks whenever she is reminded of a man who viciously assaulted her after picking her up near a well-known prostitution stroll (Maria, however, had not been prostituting). She sustained many injuries and required extensive facial reconstruction as a result of this attack. Not surprisingly then, Maria still cannot bring herself to return to the area where the assault took place. When she did have to go there one time, she had to hug a tree in order to ground herself; she recalled having the sensation that she was going to die.

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<sup>82</sup> Carmen reported that she experienced night terrors.

Such fears sometimes led to homelessness, because often the only people whom Carmen and Maria could find to room with them in cheap rental accommodations were other high risk youth or family members. Both of these groups were people who they were prone to have conflicts with. Such conflicts were often fuelled by drug and alcohol misuse. Consequent noise violations or assaults might then draw the attention of police and landlords. For example, because Maria's siblings would engage in "domestic disputes" with their partners while living with one of her sisters, "everyone got evicted" and her sister's children were apprehended by child welfare. When she stayed with friends, the apartments were similarly chaotic, noisy, and overcrowded (e.g., Maria might have to sleep on an air mattress in a kitchen because there was no other room or she might have to share a bachelor's apartment with three other women and two dogs.)

Nevertheless, Maria often tolerated such environments, even when she could afford to have a place of her own, on account of her fears of living alone. She commented that she would even prefer to live in a shelter than to live alone, because having others around could help her if she is not feeling "right" by herself: She sometimes feared that she would be unable to stop herself from seriously hurting herself. (I will discuss more about such self-regulation problems, especially in relation to attachment-related trauma in an upcoming section.)

In contrast, Carmen's response to her post-traumatic fears was to do whatever she could to avoid having to stay in a shelter. She explained that she could not bear to stay in such noisy, crowded, and violent environments, after having endured so much violence in her past. Carmen said that she would leave wherever she was staying to find another place to sleep if people were arguing, because she could no longer tolerate aggressive people. (This is consistent with her reasons for not returning home, as discussed above).

That said, like Maria, Carmen also wanted to have a roommate of some kind, even when she could afford a smaller place on her own. When she had her own apartment (courtesy of welfare), she admitted that she was easily exploited by her then boyfriends; she explained that kicking boyfriends out of her apartment was “kind of really hard for me because I was agoraphobic and super anxious. So it was really hard for me and that’s why so many boyfriends like walked over me and used me for a place to stay.” Recall that Carmen attributed her agoraphobia in the first place to having had one abusive relationship after another. She acknowledged that such chronic exploitation had made her especially vulnerable to accepting the abuse from the man who had kidnapped her: “I was already suicidal but he pushed me over the edge with all his put downs and just the way he made me feel about myself. And I couldn’t get him out of my house, like I’d be like ‘Get the fuck out! I don’t want you here.’ He’d be like ‘I’m not fucking blah blah blah and all this stupid shit.’”

It appears then that the aftermath of trauma continued to exert a counter-productive effect on the young women’s psychological resources (e.g., their capacities for being alone, exercising self-control, maintaining boundaries and being assertive), thereby impeding their transitions to mainstream life. Similar to Carmen, Tamara also had difficulty kicking youths out of her apartment when they refused to leave. She agreed to let other high risk youths stay at her place temporarily when they were homeless. Tamara admitted to repeating this same “mistake” of letting other youths stay over despite knowing that she will struggle to get them out, because she was lonely. Lonely people have been observed to exhibit a greater willingness to endure exploitation (Cacioppo, 2008). Cacioppo suggested that over time, as a consequence of the bad experiences that follow letting someone else exploit them, lonely people form the impression that they should expect to feel betrayed or rejected in most relationships.

**Attachment related trauma.** Recall that Tamara’s sensitivity to betrayal and rejection appeared to first follow from her mother’s “abandonment” of her, when she was fifteen. In the last chapter, I

suggested that the youths' extreme reactions to perceived rejection of any kind, such as their suicide attempts and other problems with emotion regulation, reflected the desperation that accompanied their "psychological isolation" (Miller & Stiver, as cited in Brown, 2012), an experience of feeling powerless to reverse the fact of having been "cast off" from others. John Bowlby (as cited in Cacioppo, 2008) wrote that "To be isolated from your band and, especially when young, to be isolated from your particular caregiver, is fraught with the greatest danger. Can we wonder then that each animal is equipped with an instinctive disposition to avoid isolation and maintain physical proximity?" (p.7).

It seems likely that the youths' Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003) results reflected the trauma of having to separate from parents, as such trauma can negatively affect the development of internal working models of self and other. Violations of trust that one's needs would be consistently met by caregivers can lead to the child developing a distrustful orientation towards others generally, as well as impair her ability to trust herself. "The quality of the caretaker's messages gives the infant a sense that it is all right to be, to be oneself, and to become "what other people trust one will become" (Erikson, 1963, p.249)" (Kroger, 2004, p.25). The achievement of such basic trust through the parent-child attachment bond constitutes optimal resolution of the first of Erikson's (1959) psycho-social crises (trust versus mistrust). It is the foundation for successful development throughout subsequent, hierarchical stages that are concerned with the development of agency, and ultimately identity, that I have already discussed (e.g., autonomy, initiative, industry) (Erikson, 1959).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Successful mutual regulation and interactions between parent and child actually produce a "rudimentary sense" (Kroger, 2004, p.24) of identity. The child gains the sense of being an 'I' who can hope -- hope being the virtuous outcome that develops as a result of the experience of trusting others. Kroger notes that the capacity to hope is a "basic ingredient of later survival" (p.25) for the child.

Though a trusting orientation or positive working model begins to form in infancy, children and adolescents remain prone to attachment disruptions such as separations from parents which, as mentioned above, can be experienced as traumatic for the young person. Tamara, Jay, and Maria all experienced having to physically separate from their mothers. Jay also had to separate from other attachment figures in his life, such as his step-father and the aunt who became his kinship foster mother. Likewise, Maria had to separate from group home workers and other professionals, some of whom she had become attached to. She repeatedly bemoaned the fact that the policies that governed group homes and other sites like the youth offender centre prohibited contact between workers and youths, once the youths had moved on to other residential placements. Although there were a few workers that she particularly missed, she especially fantasized about being able to meet again with the guard that she had known at the young offender centre. That Maria saw this as an attachment relationship is reflected in the fact that she had repeatedly asked this guard to adopt her.

Although Carmen did not have to physically separate from her mother, “role reversal necessarily makes the parent unavailable, to use Bowlby's term. Repeated experiences of the parent's unavailability are cumulative and can have all the emotional impact of an actual, acute loss” (West & Keller, 1991, p.429). It appears then that experiencing a significant caregiver as being emotionally absent, for whatever reason, can constitute a significant disruption to attachment relationships. Given that such relationships are responsible for the formation and refinement of working models of self and other, this may have conditioned the youths to be hypervigilant about abandonment and rejection. On the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003), Tamara's and Carmen's Other-Trust scores fell in the very high range, while Maria's score was in the high average range. Though perhaps not a clear clinical concern, at the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile Maria's score should still be seen as indicative of a serious problem with trusting others.

Recall that when Jay beat up his customers or when Tamara destroyed other people's property, they were, by their own admission, defending against the pain of maternal rejection through the use of aggression. Maria also believed that she frequently aggressed against group home staff, prison guards, and other youth, because of the abuse and neglect that she had suffered at the hands of her parents and other family members. I previously quoted Brené Brown (2012) to suggest that these youths experienced not only the pain of isolation from rejection, but the pain of not even feeling that they were worthy of connection. Tamara's and Maria's Self-Esteem scores fell in the very high range, while Carmen's score fell in the high average range (76<sup>th</sup> percentile). Although the youths' scores and interview data related to trusting others and to self-esteem may also reflect their experience of street-related trauma, such as the assaults that I described in the first part of this section, the youths' proneness to negative feelings about others and themselves appeared to be mostly linked to attachment disruptions, and are thus likely a reflection of their working models. While the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) (Pearlman, 2003) scores cannot differentiate between the kinds of trauma a respondent may have experienced, conclusive evidence that all four youths experienced significant attachment problems can be observed from their results on the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996), which I will discuss next.

### **Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)**

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996) for all four participants yielded results suggestive of insecure attachment. All four youths were classified as insecure-preoccupied (analogous to the childhood attachment status of insecure-ambivalent, also known as insecure-resistant), based on the style of discourse that they displayed while being interviewed about their attachment experiences. As mentioned previously, all respondents to the AAI who are judged to be insecure demonstrate an inability to provide a coherent discussion of their attachment experiences

(Hesse, 2008). Those who are judged to display the preoccupied form of insecure attachment demonstrate characteristic ways of violating Grice's maxims of conversational discourse (Hesse). While they adhere to the maxim of quality, which is to say that they appear to be telling the truth about their attachment experiences and can support their claims with evidence, they demonstrate violations of the maxims of quantity, relevance, and manner (Main, Hesse, & Goldwyn, 2008). Regarding quantity, they tend to use too many words or provide more information than is necessary to express their ideas (Main et al.). Violations of relevance refer to providing answers that stray from the topic of the questions (Main et al.). Manner violations occur when the respondent offers confusing or even incomprehensible speech, which may include references to psychological jargon (Main et al.).

A preoccupied classification is indicated by high scores on scales which identify passivity or vagueness of discourse (indicating manner violations), and scales that identify involved/involving anger (indicating relevance, quantity, and manner violations) (Main, Hesse, & Goldwyn, 2008). Passivity or vagueness of discourse is indicated when the respondent seems as though she is unable to find the right words or decide upon an interpretation of her experiences or stay focused on a topic (Main et al.). The respondent may use vague expressions, add vague endings to sentences such as "I sat on his lap, *and that*" (Main et al., p.53) or confuse the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves and their parents. They may also unintentionally speak as if they were a very young child, presumably due to being absorbed by early childhood recollections (Main et al.). Involved or involving anger refers not to direct descriptions of anger, but rather "run-on grammatically entangled sentences describing situations involving the offending parent; subtle efforts to enlist interviewer agreement; unlicensed extensive discussion of surprisingly small recent parental offenses; extensive use of psychological jargon (e.g., my mother had a lot of material around that issue"); angrily addressing the parent as though he or she were present; and in an angry context, slipping into unmarked quotations from the parent" (Main et al., p.52).

Preoccupied interviews lack the above constituents of coherent discourse because respondents are unable “to move beyond a sense of involvement in particular relationships or attachment-related experiences, while either accepting this state passively, or else struggling against it without success (Main & Goldwyn, as cited in Cassidy & Berlin, 1994, p.981).

Preoccupied interviews are classified into one of three forms that reflect the predominant ways in which a respondent signals her enmeshment (E) with her attachment figure: passive (E1), angry (E2) or fearful (E3) (Barone, 2003). An E1 interview is one in which the respondent engages in much vague discourse and cannot stay on topic (Steele & Steele, 2008). An E2 interview is one in which the respondent is unable to answer the questions because she is consumed by the topic of how her parent or caregiver has mistreated her (Steele & Steele, 2008). An E3 interview is marked by the respondent bringing up frightening experiences, even when they are irrelevant to the topic being discussed (Lyons-Ruth, Yellin, Melnick & Atwood, 2005). As in both the E1 and E2 kinds of interviews, E3 respondents are too consumed by past events to provide relevant and succinct responses to the questions (Steele & Steele, 2008). Of the four youth participants, none was classified as E1, three youths were classified as E2 (Jay, Carmen, and Tamara) and one was classified as E3 (Maria).

It is not surprising that Maria, as the only youth who was classified as E3, also received the classification of unresolved loss or trauma (denoted by the letter U). Given her many attachment disruptions throughout her time in foster care and the extensive abuse that she suffered at the hands of parents and other attachment figures, it would be reasonable to expect that Maria would suffer more from attachment-related trauma than any of the other youths. And it would be reasonable for someone with a very high degree of attachment-related trauma, including parental abuse, to be preoccupied with frightening experiences that relate to attachment figures. As with the code of E3, the code of U was applied to Maria, based on her receiving high scores on certain scales, namely those that relate to

potentially traumatic experiences of loss and/or physical or sexual abuse by attachment figures. Such high scores reflect the respondent speaking in unusual ways about loss or trauma experiences (Main et al., 2008). More specifically, they may exhibit lapses in their monitoring of reasoning or discourse when discussing the death of significant others or other potentially traumatic experiences (Main et al., 2008). An example of a lapse in the monitoring of her reasoning occurred when Maria implied that she had caused the death of an ex-boyfriend (who actually froze to death) by not following the voices in her head. She suggested that she could have prevented his death if she had told his friends about a voice she had heard in her head that told her that her boyfriend was going to die that night: “And I felt so bad because I -- ‘cause fricken obviously that little someone told me inside me, ‘You need to say something.’” A lapse in the monitoring of her discourse was exhibited by the fact that she had first started out talking about the death of a friend that had occurred during her childhood and then suddenly switched to talking about her ex-boyfriend’s death. Such lapses are believed to reflect “temporary alterations in consciousness, and are now believed to represent either interference from normally dissociated memory or belief systems [in the case of reasoning lapses], or unusual absorptions involving memories triggered by the discussion of traumatic events [in the case of discourse lapses]” (Main et al, 2008, p.61).

Because such lapses can be demonstrated by high functioning people and do not typically reflect a respondent’s usual speaking style, interviews that are coded unresolved (U) are also assigned a code that best fits the kind of discourse that they displayed on the remainder of the interview (i.e., questions that did not specifically refer to loss or trauma). It is therefore possible for an interview to reflect both an organized<sup>84</sup> strategy for responding to caregivers generally (secure-autonomous, dismissing or

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<sup>84</sup> The former three codes are described as organized strategies because they are marked by a respondent’s ability to be either flexible (in the case of secure-autonomous) or inflexible (in the case of dismissing and preoccupied) when discussing their attachment-related experiences. For example, a dismissing individual may

preoccupied), as well as disorganization in responding to potential attachment-related trauma. For this reason, Maria received both the unresolved and preoccupied codes, even though the former code suggests that her unresolved experience of losses and trauma is linked to the confusing, contradictory kinds of behaviours<sup>85</sup> reflected by children who are classified as displaying disorganized attachment in Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation (a research protocol in which preschool-aged children are briefly separated from their mothers and then reunited with them).

Unresolved/disorganized attachment is associated with "frightened, frightening, dissociative, and other forms of anomalous parental behaviour" (Main et al., 2008, p.62 ); it is thought that "fear may intrude upon [parental] interactions with the infant in the form of (often inadvertently) frightening behaviors, leading to disorganization and disorientation in the infant under stress" (Main et al., p.63) Most of the mothers of children who display disorganization were found to have suffered major losses or traumas themselves (Main et al.). This family background is, of course, consistent with Maria's discussion of her fears of her biological mother, father, and grandmother in her Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). Maria also described emotional and physical abuse at the hands of one of her former foster mothers in her AAI.

Given the epidemiological literature that has consistently linked parental loss, separation, and abuse to a wide range of psychopathology (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008), it is not

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keep their focus persistently away from past relationships, while a preoccupied individual may be so "strongly oriented toward attachment relationships ...that it prevents appropriate response to queries" (Main et al., p.38). In contrast, the attention of a secure-autonomous individual may fluctuate between moving towards and away from attachment relationships, in a way that is suggestive of more "balance" in how she evaluates her attachment relationships.

<sup>85</sup> Infant behaviours in the Strange Situation Protocol coded as disorganised/disoriented include: *"disordering of expected temporal sequences; simultaneous displays of contradictory behavior patterns; incomplete or undirected movements and expressions, including stereotypies; direct indices of confusion and apprehension; and behavioral stilling"* (Main & Solomon, 1990, p.122).

surprising that the unresolved classification (along with the insecure organized categories) tend to be overrepresented in clinical groups (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg). A recent meta-analysis suggests that internalizing disorders such as unipolar depression and borderline personality disorder tend to be more associated with preoccupied attachment (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg). Victims of abuse and individuals prone to suicide tend to be both unresolved and preoccupied (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg). The authors suggest that such individuals may be directing their attention towards maximizing attachment-related behaviours from “potentially supportive” (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, p.87) others, in the form of self-injurious behaviours including suicidal attempts. Recall that in chapter two, I suggested that this may have been the case for the young women participants of this study; their autobiographical accounts of such behaviours were more suggestive of a drive to maintain proximity to prevent perceived abandonment, rather than intentional “manipulation” of others or mere attention-seeking. Further evidence to support this view is discussed in the next section.

### **The Relational Dynamic Underlying Preoccupied Attachment**

**Unmet needs resulting from inconsistent caregiving.** The incoherence displayed by insecure-preoccupied respondents on the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) reflects their emotional responses to the kind of caregiving that they experienced as young children. Consistent with their accounts of parental rejection and neglect, the preoccupied speaker is “flooded by emotion and unfavorable memories of childhood attachment experiences that seem to have led to, and may still leave the speaker with apparent feelings of being unloved, misunderstood and hurt” (Steele & Steele, 2008, p.11). These emotional responses make sense in view of the inconsistent maternal availability and interference

with exploration that has been observed from mothers or other caregivers of insecure ambivalent<sup>86</sup> children. Cori (2010) explains why a mother's inconsistency may affect the ambivalent child (and later the preoccupied adult) in the way that it does: "This style of attachment has been correlated with mothers who are less consistently rejecting than the self-sufficient [insecure-avoidant] child had, but not consistently responsive enough to secure attachment. Sometime they're there and sometimes they're not. Sometimes they are experienced as loving; other times as inexplicably rejecting. The preoccupied child (and later adult) doesn't know what to expect" (p.50). Because an internal working model of inconsistent maternal availability is thought to develop in such individuals, it is understandable that they try to stay close to their mothers and frequently monitor them in an attempt to pre-empt their mothers from becoming unavailable to them in the future (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). The excessive attention given to the mothers takes away from the attention that the children could be directing towards exploring their environments (Cassidy & Berlin). It has also been proposed that the mothers of insecure-ambivalent children display intermittent responsiveness and discourage their child's explorations of her environment because such strategies ensure that the child remains close to her mother to meet her mother's emotional needs. Cassidy and Berlin explain that intermittent responsiveness is the most efficient strategy to engage in "if a mother (consciously or nonconsciously) wants to be particularly assured of her importance to the infant, of his dependency on her, and of his availability to meet her own attachment needs... relative unresponsiveness may be viewed as a maternal strategy for increasing the infant's bids for attention" (p.984). Alternatively parental incompetence may be another reason that compels a child to become concerned for her parent, and to stay close to her, in order to care for

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<sup>86</sup> Recall that the childhood analog of the insecure-preoccupied status is insecure-ambivalent (also called insecure-resistant).

her safety (Cassidy & Berlin), as was observed in the role-reversing behaviour and attitudes demonstrated by Jay, Carmen, and Maria.

Despite the use of the term strategy, it is believed that the mothers of such children do not consciously intend to meet their own needs at the expense of those of their children (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). The mother's "own background may not have provided her with opportunities for learning competent parenting skills" (Cassidy & Berlin, p.984). At the same time, however, as ambivalent children feel compelled to meet their mothers' needs, they must also meet their own needs in order to survive. They do this by adapting to their mothers, although they are likely unaware that they are doing so. (Rather it is thought that such children repress awareness of their own needs in order to consciously endorse a belief in their need to care for their parents<sup>87</sup>). In Jay's case, his attendance to his mother's safety when she was being assaulted by her boyfriends served to not just ensure his mother's safety but also to ensure his own survival, both materially as well as psychologically. If his mother had become harmed, Jay would have lost his secure base, from which to explore his environment (Cassidy & Berlin). If he lacked a secure base due to his mother's incompetence, he would have also desired to stay close to his mother (Cassidy & Berlin). In addition, younger children (i.e., preschoolers), due to cognitive egocentrism, may be more likely to blame themselves for a mother's illness including depression (Noshpitz, 1994). Such early ways of thinking might have also contributed to the responsibility that some of the youths described in regards to trying to ensure their mother's happiness.

Later on, the needs that the children had suppressed within themselves end up re-surfacing. Such needs may then manifest themselves in intensely negative reactions to their mothers' failures to reciprocate caring for them. Tamara and Carmen regularly commented about their respective mothers'

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<sup>87</sup> See the upcoming section in which I discuss role reversal as a form of Bowlby's defensive exclusion.

failures to be empathic with them. In Carmen's case, her mother's shame-inducing judgment of her, that occurred whenever she tried to confide in her mother, caused Carmen to hide her true self from her mother. As Carmen observed, "I couldn't be honest with my mom. I had to constantly lie to her cos' if I want to be honest with her or get her advice -- or tell her anything about my life, she'd be like, "Oh! What you're doing is wrong. This is wrong. There's nothing right about you kind of thing." Tamara was critical of the impersonal kind of advice that she received from her mother. As with Carmen's mother, Tamara's mother would just tell her not to do things that could get her into trouble, but would never do so in a way that could give Tamara the sense that she could understand what Tamara was going through: If her mother could just give her some "personal story" so that Tamara could feel that she has not been the only person who has struggled with different issues, then she thought that maybe she could begin to see her mother as a "role model". Instead, Tamara's mother reportedly always projected an image of herself as being perfect, as someone who "had never made any mistake": "Like I just want her to be like, you know what? Tamara, I've been through this, and like, you know? But no, like she's never gone through anything." Tamara's mother reportedly refuses to talk about her past and insists that "she's never done anything wrong as far as she's concerned" anyway. According to West and Keller (1991) such "empathic failures are mini-experiences of loss that engender a feeling of being isolated and alone" (p.429).

At times the youths apparently felt forced to resort to extremes of affective signaling, in an attempt to get any emotional response out of their parents, let alone an empathic, attuned one. Consistent with the aforementioned idea of using suicide attempts to maximize attachment-related behaviour, Tamara remarked "The only reason why I ever would kill myself and the only reason why I've ever tried to kill myself is 'cos my mom shows no emotion to me?" Tamara went on to recount an incident with her mother in which they were driving somewhere together. The two women nearly got

into a car accident because of another extreme method that Tamara employed to get her mother to 'show emotion' to her. According to Tamara, she made her mother "distracted" by saying that her mother should have had an abortion instead of having Tamara. Tamara explained that she could relate to a story she had become aware of concerning a "kid" who had sued her parents because of "this horrible life that she's had", because her parents were apparently irresponsible people who had never intended to have a child. Tamara recalled telling her mother this story "and that's what I was like. I'm like, I didn't ask to fucking be born. I'm like, 'You should have used a goddamn condom.' You know what I mean?"

Tamara explained that although, in general, she would prefer to elicit positive emotions from her mother, she felt that she had to resort to extreme methods to upset her. This was because Tamara had experienced a long history of failure in eliciting any kind of positive reaction from her mother: "But like, if nobody shows emotion, then it pushes me to like, make her show emotion in like, and you can't make her happy. So what's the other side of happy? It's like making her like, absolutely mentally crazy. You know what I mean?" I mentioned previously that Tamara fantasized about what her funeral would be like, in the event that she committed suicide. Recall that Tamara was interested to know how people would respond to her death because she questioned whether anyone really cared about her, despite what they professed. She acknowledged fantasizing about her mother crying: "...maybe I'll see her cry, you know, like, my big goal is to like, see her cry, 'cos you can never make her happy." Apart from the apparent need for any sort of attention from her mother, it appeared that Tamara relished the idea of upsetting her mother because she could not get her own emotional needs met by her. She commented that she has had to push her mother to express her love for her: "She doesn't like say like 'I love you'— well, she says 'I love you', but that's only in the couple last years. Like 'cos I used to like get on her all the time. But like she doesn't hug me, and like she doesn't like [pause] yeah."

In view of the above account, the characteristics of individuals with preoccupied attachments, such as being angry and punishing of others when one's needs are not met, being distrustful of others' motives and emphasizing neediness or helplessness to keep others close to one's self (Cori, 2010), become understandable. Such behaviours constitute strategies for managing the discomfort that follows from the inconsistent availability of a mother. As Cori put it, "these children, (and later adults), are so anxiously tied up with how available others are that it dominates their lives" (p.50).

Despite being chronically disappointed in her mother's responses towards her, and experiencing her mother as "an exhausting lady", and insisting that all of her problems were due to her mother ("It's 150% her fault. Your parents—you become what you fucking get raised by."), Tamara nevertheless felt so enmeshed with her mother that she felt that if her mother died, she would have to commit suicide. Tamara was also intensely fearful that her mother could try to abandon her again. She was adamant that she would kill her mother if she tried to "walk away" from her again: "I'd just kill her because sorry you don't fuck up my life and walk away from me. You don't fucking make me psychotic and then when you can't handle it anymore. Fucking 'Oh well, you gotta go, Tamara. Get out of my house.' Actually, I'll fucking smash your face in...she can't create all this anger...this is all her!"

The experience of having to affectively signal her frustration and fear through self-destructive and other-destructive methods, with no guarantee that she would be successful in eliciting a response from her mother, would be expected to have compromised the development of Tamara's self-regulation skills, thereby explaining her often out-of-control behaviour in response to feelings of anxiety about being abandoned by others. Apter (2012) suggests that a mother's emotional unresponsiveness pushes the child to experience the following paradox: "I love my parent and need to be close to her, but I cannot get a response. Her inner life is either inaccessible to me or dark and distorted. I can be physically close to her, but not really close" (p.138).

The “involved/involving anger” (i.e., anger that cannot be expressed directly and coherently, thereby suggestive of intense emotional entanglement with the parent) (Main, Hesse & Goldwyn, 2008, p.52) that seemed to follow from the aforementioned paradox was observed in the other youths as well. Carmen, for example, would get so absorbed by her feelings during our biographical interviews that, like Tamara, she would address her parents as if they were in the same room as us: “Fuck this, fuck that. Just leave me in Edmonton. I want nothing to do with you people! Get the fuck away from me. This is why I don’t come for family stuff.” Other people such as Carmen’s youth worker also observed that Carmen’s energy and capacity to focus on her own day- to- day problems of just surviving on the streets were being completely exhausted by her preoccupation with her parents. According to Carmen, her youth worker told her to “focus on herself. My parents were just taking too much out of me. And I was so worried about it and it was all I could talk about and he’s [the youth worker] just like ‘Tell your parents to fuck off! You don’t need those assholes’”. At one point, Jay so completely lost his focus from the topic of our interview that the next fifteen pages of our interview transcript were comprised solely of his venting about his mother.

### **The Impact of Trust Violations: Moral Injury**

The intensity of the youths’ involved/involving anger (Main et al., 2008) can also be understood as their response to having suffered various forms of “moral injury” (Shay, as cited in Guntzel, 2013) at the hands of their parents and other caregivers. In addition to parental maltreatment and general neglect, “being abandoned as a child *in times of urgent need* [my italics] is also traumatic and leads to attachment injuries” (Cori, 2010, p.54). Cori observes that “not being protected or being overlooked in a state of emergency will be felt as abandonment and perhaps a violation” (p.54). Certainly, the restraining order that Tamara’s mother imposed on her, which immediately resulted in her losing her family and her home, qualified as such an injury. Carmen also felt betrayed by what she called her

parents' "abandoning" of her and her brother, following the death of her grandfather. Carmen felt abandoned over the fact that her parents chose to move to another province at the time. She complained that her parents made this decision without regard to their children's emotional state (i.e., grief over their grandfather) or consideration of how they were going to survive on their own. Carmen's brother had just turned eighteen but was jobless. Though Carmen has been living on the streets for some time, her parents' move to another province meant that she had lost the "safety net" of ever again returning to her family home (which she had done occasionally since she left home at fifteen), in the event that she became completely destitute.

Though Jay's and Maria's histories were more marked by continuous abandonment given their placement in care and their mothers' drug addictions, Jay identified a pivotal moment that he believed could have altered his criminal trajectory, if his mother had then made some effort to help him. When Jay was still a teenager, the police, at one point, informed Jay's mother that he had two guns that did not belong to him stored under his bed. Though the police sternly warned Jay against continuing to associate with his street peers, he recalled that his mother did nothing. In retrospect, Jay wished that his mother could have got him involved in some programming intended to deter young people from getting deeper into crime. Jay felt that the incident with the police should have been a big "wake up call" for his mother to try to get him on the right track. More similar to Carmen's and Tamara's "abandonments", Maria's relegation to a woman's shelter by her child welfare caseworker, whom she regarded as a mother figure, created such a feeling of betrayal that, as mentioned previously, it prompted her to attempt suicide, convinced as she was that there must be no one left in the world who loved her.

What all of the aforementioned youth complaints against their mothers (or other attachment figures) also have in common is the sense that their caregivers caused their social and emotional problems and then did nothing to help them address these problems. Recall that Tamara felt intensely

threatened by the possibility that her mother could relinquish her responsibility for Tamara's problems by 'walking away' from her for a second time (the first time being when her mother obtained the restraining order against her.) Jay was sure that he would not have become involved in crime if he had not been pushed to the streets by his family, particularly his mother. Similarly, Carmen was pushed to leave her home on account of family violence. Maria knew that her problems with being 'hard to house' as a young adult could, in many ways, be traced to her history of having been shuttled between foster placements for most of her life.

Psychiatrist, Jonathan Shay, who works with war veterans experiencing trauma, coined the term 'moral injury' (Shay, as cited in Guntzel, 2013) to explain the persistence of grave psychological problems in civilian life. Shay believes that moral injury more aptly describes these difficulties than the label of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Moral injury occurs where "there is a betrayal of what's right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation" (Shay as cited in Guntzel, 2013, para. 8). Shay suggests that PTSD symptoms like hypervigilance or flashbacks can be thought of as being like an uncomplicated or "primary injury" (para.6), which is not what tends to "kill" (para.5) the soldier, psychologically speaking. What kills him are the complications of his injuries, such as infections or hemorrhaging (para.6), which are analogous to the later interpersonal and personal consequences of the moral betrayal that he has suffered, such as the destruction of trust in others and in one's self.

The high risk youths would have felt betrayed by their parents, not just for their having harmed them or for their failure to have kept them safe and comforted, despite this being their 'job' as parents to do, but also because their parents were the only ones who possessed any real power to effect any change in their lives, once the attachment damage had been done. Their parents' ongoing failure to make amends for the past and to correct their behaviour now and for the future constituted the youths' own source of infections and hemorrhaging, to use Shay's (as cited in Guntzel, 2013) metaphor. The

youths spoke about their repeated unsuccessful efforts to get their mothers to engage with them to repair their relationships, and bemoaned that their mothers refused to change their behaviour. Jay and Tamara spoke of wanting their respective mothers to acknowledge the damage that they had done to them; likewise, Carmen railed against her mother's view that Carmen was the only person who was having problems in their family, and therefore the only person in need of counselling. Recall that Tamara thought that professional 'carers' such as counsellors or foster parents could only ever be an inferior substitute for the kind of enduring love and support that she felt that she could only expect from her mother. Part of her fear that her mother could abandon her again came from her worrying that her mother might think that she could "opt-out" of her job of parenting her, now that she was a legal adult: "You can't fucking opt-out of this shit, just cos' I'm over eighteen. This fucking is far from done for me-her. If she thinks she's just gonna move on with her life after fucking up my life -- not a chance. I'll fucking pull her all the way to hell with me."

It seems fair then to say that these efforts on the part of the youth participants to have their mothers acknowledge their wrongs by them and to repair them were as much about seeking a sense of justice for themselves, as it was about them still trying to get their mothers to meet their attachment needs. The youths' desire for reparations may also be a strategy, (although likely an unconscious one), by which they are attempting to repair the damage that their attachment related trauma has caused them regarding their ability to trust in others generally. It seems possible that in addition to the youths' complaints against their parents' maltreatment and neglect, including their many empathic failures [which can, as mentioned previously, have the "emotional impact of an actual, acute loss" (West & Keller, 1991, p.429)], their mothers' 'fucking up' of their lives as Tamara put it, may include their sense, at some level, that they developed "deformities of character" (Shay, n.d., para. 55) from the effect that their attachment insecurity had on their capacity for trusting others.

Shay (n.d) suggests that if a soldier's feeling that *themis* (the Homeric word for what's right) is betrayed then,

you get a deformity of character afterwards that can be best understood as destruction of the capacity for social trust. When I say destruction of social trust, I mean not blind naive child-like trust: "Oh, here, hold my wallet".

I'm talking about a patient goes into a hospital with a stomach pain and the need to get a diagnosis and treatment for this stomach pain. In the absence of social trust, the person going in to the hospital expects people to hurt him, to exploit him, or to humiliate him. That is a fixed expectation of someone whose capacity for social trust has been destroyed.

A lot of people say, "Oh, they're paranoid." Well, the word paranoid doesn't add anything to our knowledge here. It is the expectation of harm, exploitation, and humiliation. That is what is left when social trust has been destroyed. (para 51, 52, & 53).

The concept of moral injury also offers another explanation for why the youths struggled so much with the harms that they had perpetrated against others. Though they were aware that their emotional pain from their families drove them to inflict pain onto often innocent others and themselves, recall that each youth had nevertheless questioned whether her aggressive actions meant that her true, fundamental moral character was a bad one.

Consistent with the youths' fears that they had "lost" themselves, or may have been heading towards a loss of their true moral self or soul (as Tamara described it), Shay (as cited in Guntzel, 2013) suggests that a shrinking of "the moral and social horizon" (para.9) and concomitantly, a shrinking of the person's "ideals and attachments and ambitions" (para.9) accompanies the moral injury. Shay (n.d) explains that "one of the most lurid and dramatic psychological changes that can happen to people in war is for them to totally lose any care, interest, concern, or attention to their own safety, [and for them

to] just want to rain down destruction...it's just a personal berserking, a personal state of being totally wild with vengeance" (para. 56 & 57). Becoming lost or apathetic about what happens to one's self or others then may be fundamentally a relational problem that can occur in the aftermath of trauma: In the case of these high risk youths, they were betrayed by the parents and other caregivers who failed to support them, to protect them, and to not abandon them, despite the fact that these individuals were specifically invested with the authority, responsibility, and power to do all of these things. On top of that, the youths were blamed and shamed<sup>88</sup> for their aggressive responses (presumably their form of going 'berserk') to their caregivers' betrayals, which probably further disinhibited them from 'acting out' their frustration in response to those betrayals.

Such 'bad' behaviours on the part of the youths are consistent with the observation of psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk (2014) that the social response to the traumatic event is highly influential in whether a victim will experience enduring psychological sequelae from the event. An empathic response from others, for example, could alleviate the shame that can accompany traumatic victimization or the shame that may proceed from moral transgressions that were committed in response to the pain of victimization. Such allaying of shame should help assuage the youths' tendency towards extreme emotional dysregulation in response to their moral injuries.

Shay (n.d) emphasized that the social response to one's narrative is crucial to recovery from the trauma: "It's not simply the telling of the story, it is the whole social process. If I have suffered some terrible experience, I have to be socially empowered to tell the story. You have to be socially empowered to hear it" (para.1). However, as I discussed in chapter two, it is unclear how many people in modern Western culture would be sufficiently empowered to hear the telling of transgressive stories

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<sup>88</sup> by their parents and professionals (e.g., child welfare, mental health, youth justice, education)

of youths that have lived on the streets and respond to such narratives with understanding and compassion. The dominant cultural narratives of people who commit criminal activities do not, after all, tend to be sympathetic to the narratives of traumatic victimization that may underlie those criminal acts, if they acknowledge such narratives at all. Even if the general public were sympathetic to the trauma that may result from repeated sexual assaults, for example, in the case of the young women participants, they would likely not be informed, and therefore not prone to believe, that disruptions to the attachment bond between parents and their children could be so influential in the etiology of youths' high risk behaviours. Moreover, young people who come from poverty backgrounds and those who commonly experience discrimination on the basis of their race (e.g., aboriginal youth) or other stigmatizing characteristics in the general population (e.g., being a foster child or poor) would probably not feel particularly empowered to tell their trauma stories to most people. As with war veterans (Shay, (as cited in Guntzel, 2013), the youths may also resist sharing their emotional pain from trauma because they may feel that they deserve it – the shame of having perpetrated much harm themselves would be expected to inhibit seeking care and support from others. However, if social validation of narrators' stories of trauma could be realized, then one might expect that the youths' abilities to commit to mainstream identities might be enhanced – in other words, they might feel that their identities could be rescued from being defined as mostly or even fundamentally bad. (I will return to this point in the next section on betrayal of the attachment bond.)

Thus in contrast to the emphasis that a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis places on the experience of fear (e.g., the terrifying nature of events which can induce fear-related symptoms such as flashbacks or nightmares), it is the identity shattering emotions of guilt and shame that follow from events that people register as moral atrocities (as opposed to all types of highly fear-inducing events) that may be more relevant to understanding the youths' moral conflicts about themselves.

Moral injuries may also underlie the confusion that some of the youths' exhibited in relation to just being able to decide about what is right and what is wrong (self-trust), given the highly unusual street circumstances (e.g., feeling compelled to engage in violence or prostitution) that they have had to survive. As one young veteran of the Iraq war put it about being on the battlefield (which for soldiers tends to make the political conflicts of war much more morally ambiguous than for civilians): "Most deeply, [moral injury is] a loss of confidence in one's own ability to make a moral judgment with any certainty...It's not that you lose your ability to tell right from wrong, but things don't seem so clear any more" (as cited in Freedman, 2013, para.9).

**Betrayal of the attachment bond: Impacts on identity development.** It needs to be emphasized that the youths suffered not just from being betrayed by any legitimate authority in a critical situation. Obviously, they suffered not just from a breakdown in the trust that they felt they had appropriately placed in authority figures generally, but also because of the emotions that they naturally invested in their relationships with their parents. Apart from grappling with the moral injustice of their unmet needs, the youths could not help but love their parents. As Robert Karen (as cited in Cori, 2010) so eloquently put it:

Virtually all children, even abused children, love their parents. It's built into the nature of being a child. They may be hurt, disappointed, caught in destructive modes of being that ward off any possibility of getting the love they yearn for, but to be attached, even anxiously attached<sup>89</sup>, is to be in love. Each year the love may become a little more difficult to access; each year the child may disavow his wish for connection more firmly; he may even swear off his parents and deny

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<sup>89</sup> another term synonymous with insecure-ambivalent, insecure-resistant, or insecure-preoccupied (in the case of an adolescent or adult)

that he has any love for them at all; but the love is there, as is the longing to actively express it and to have it returned, hidden like a burning sun. (pg. 2).

***Betrayal bonds and acceptance of physical and sexual abuse.*** Earlier in this chapter, in a footnote related to Maria's sexual attraction to her favourite guard at the young offender centre, I introduced the concept of betrayal bonds or trauma bonds (Carnes, 1997). I suggested that Maria's attraction to this person whom she also regarded as being a maternal figure in her life may be related to the sexual abuse that she suffered in her family, as such familial abuse could have made her prone to form attachments in the presence of shame, danger, or exploitation. Carnes (1997) suggests that in familial abuse and neglect, "There often is seduction, deception or betrayal. There is always some form of danger or risk" (p.29). As a result, children learn to expect to feel betrayed, ashamed, and/or frightened at the same time that they feel affection and love in their attachment relationships.

It has been suggested that such trauma bonds are often the reason why people stay in abusive relationships or continue to return to them despite repeated attempts to leave for good (Carnes, 1997). Misplaced loyalty and continuing to trust and seek contact with people who have repeatedly hurt them are signs of traumatic bonding (Carnes, 1997), which could explain the young women's persistent involvement in abusive relationships. As mentioned previously, Carmen and Tamara had each wondered whether they had unconsciously emulated their mothers with respect to their own repeated choosing of abusive partners. It is possible that like Maria, Carmen and Tamara may have learned to associate the abuse of the father figures in their lives (Carmen's father and Tamara's step-father) with feelings of love and affection in their families.

It is also possible that the young women may experience trauma arousal (Carnes, 1997). The physiological arousal that accompanies trauma events like abuse, for example, can result in the victim actively seeking and finding "pleasure and stimulation in the presence of extreme danger, violence, risk

or shame”(Carnes, p.11). In addition to Maria’s attraction to the young offender centre guard, Tamara acknowledged that she could not think of anything more exciting to her than having sex with men who could kill her or seriously harm her. Carnes suggests that trauma victims often come to compulsively seek such arousal states, as they become a way for them to block out or numb the physical and psychological pain that accompanied the original trauma. Becoming exposed to situations that remind one of the original trauma has also been found to have an analgesic effect, which may be another (likely unconscious) reason for Tamara’s seeking to re-expose herself to stimuli that are reminiscent of her prior sexual assaults (van der Kolk, 1989). Trauma arousal and trauma re-exposure thus shed light on why Tamara had described her attraction to risky men as an addiction (despite resisting using the language of addiction to describe her drug misuse). The unconscious pull of these trauma effects may have made it seem to her as though she had far less control over her attraction to risky men, than she did over the trauma-related causes of her drug use, which she had more conscious awareness of (i.e., she was aware that she was using drugs to cope with her mother’s abandonment). Trauma arousal, in combination with other sources of intermittent reinforcement (e.g., the absence of pain and/or instances of warmth or affection from the assailant), may also be a mechanism that reinforces development of the trauma bond (Carnes, 1997, van der Kolk, 1989). Van der Kolk, (1989) explains that in such high risk sexual encounters, "there are two powerful sources of reinforcement: the 'arousal-jag' or excitement before the violence and the peace of surrender afterwards. Both responses, placed at appropriate intervals, reinforce the traumatic bond between victim and abuser" (p. 394).

***Trauma bonds, conditional parent regard, and negative identity.*** Trauma bonds can also form in non-sexual attachment relationships such as friendships, and may persist in non-sexual adult parent-child relationships as well. When the youths persist in trying to get their parents to pay attention to them or to like them or to be understood by them, despite the fact that they repeatedly receive

indications that their parents are uninterested, this may reflect the fact that in such relationships, feelings of betrayal by their parents and love (at least the love that the child feels for her parent and/or the attention that the parent delivers to the child when the child attends to her needs) become fused in a very unhealthy way. Against a background of already feeling deprived by their parents, young people are confronted with the following dilemma: To experience any form of positive parental attention, the child/youth must submit to being the kind of person that exists to meet her parent's needs – a situation which requires them to sacrifice their own needs to develop and express their individuality. Apter (2012) describes the child's experience of this dilemma as a "choice between life and death"(p.41): "We have to choose between valuing our own needs, developing our own thoughts, and identifying our own emotions, on the one hand, and maintaining a significant relationship with our parent, on the other" (p.41).

Instead, if the youths could have just experienced unconditional reciprocity of the love that they directed to their parents, a fundamental need to receive validation for one's core sense of self would have been met simultaneously. This validation occurs through feeling loved for being who one is. The cumulative empathic failures on the part of the parent that are described above would be devastating to a child at any age, not just because of the sense of emotional loss and isolation that they engender, but because they neglect the fundamental need to be known and understood by one's parent. Apter (2012) says that the "Failure to 'see', to understand, and to listen in this powerful relationship strikes the child as a moral failing and a betrayal of the parent/child bond" (p.184).

One might expect that such empathic failures might be experienced as particularly damaging during the identity forming years of adolescence and young adulthood. Conditional parent support, which occurs when parental approval is contingent on the young person fulfilling high expectations that the parent cherishes (Harter, 1992), has been linked to low self-esteem, depression, and suicidality in

adolescents (Harter, 1992). Such conditional support would be expected to interfere with the young person's selection of identity commitments that reflect who they feel themselves to be. Harter (1996) found that conditional parent support can be a significant impetus for the development of false self behaviour, whereby the adolescent acts in ways that she perceives to be contrary to who she really is. When adolescents engaged in false self behaviours to win the approval of their parents, they tended to have lower scores on a measure of knowledge of true self, along with lower scores on measures of depression, self-worth, and hope, relative to adolescents who engaged in false self behaviours as part of their developmentally normative identity role experimentation (Harter, 1996).

In view of such findings, it is not surprising that Tamara suggested that she was confused about whether the changes she was making towards developing a mainstream identity, such as completing high school, were changes that she actually wanted for herself or things that she did because they would please her mother. She acknowledged that she's "kind of still trying to get a reaction" (i.e., trying to get her mother's attention by doing the "right" things), in addition to the extremely destructive behaviours that she sometimes felt forced into, when her mother failed to 'show [any] emotion' towards her.

Conditional parent support is also something that Carmen obviously struggled with in her resistance to her father's criticism of her interest in art. When I paraphrased Carmen by saying that it sounded like all she wanted was for her parents to get behind her and accept and support her for who she is, Carmen replied "It's pretty much all anyone really wants from their parents." Carmen went on to say that she perceived her parents' failure to accept her for the person she has become as being an extension of how they treated her for her whole life: "I've been neglected in my entire life." It seems likely then that the following observation by Apter (2012) would resonate with Carmen: "The epitome of not "being there" for a child is not physical absence but *emotional* absence. More chilling than coldness,

more nerve-racking than anger, emotional absence deprives a child of a basic sense of self. There is no resonance, no responsiveness, no mutuality” (p.137).

A major reason that Erikson identified for the development of a negative identity was the young person feeling that they could never live up to their parents’ expectations. He observed that the young person would “rather be nobody or somebody totally bad or, indeed, dead—and this by free choice—than be not-quite-somebody” (1968, p. 176). When Tamara was still attending the alternative high school, she said that she did not try at school as much as she could have because she felt that she could not meet her mother’s perfectionistic standards. She similarly sabotaged her own mainstream success when she resorted to getting negative reactions from her mother, through her fights with her mother and her risk-taking, because she could not make her mother happy. At the same time, of course, being the ‘bad’ Tamara won her the attention and approval of her street peers.

Carmen obviously also felt that she could never meet her parents’ expectations for her – expectations that were vastly at odds with her perceived strength areas and interests. When I asked her what her parents would have to do to create the kind of relationship that Carmen needed or wanted from them, she replied that, “To stop shitting on my hopes and dreams would be a nice start. My entire life they told me, ‘Now, don’t become an artist. You suck. You’ll never make it anywhere. Don’t bother public speaking. No one wants to hear what you have to say. That’s how I’ve had to grow up all my life.” In part, Carmen attributed her parents’ lack of validation for her developing identity to the value that they placed on maintaining a respectable image in front of others: “My entire life I was fucking told, ‘You need to like live in this act and don’t be yourself. And you need [Carmen imitates the deep voice of her father here], ‘It’s very important how people view you, Nicole.” Putting their concern for appearances above that of their concern for their daughter made Carmen feel uncared for: “I want fuckin’ parents that are – actually give a shit about me.”

Carmen's failure to be "seen" by her parents may well be why she could not commit solidly to her artist identity, by pursuing the development of her artistic skills through post-secondary study, for example. Apart from doubts about her artistic efficacy that were reinforced by her family, it may be that Carmen held fast to the *idea* of being an artist (rather than being committed to a course of behaviours intended to actualize this goal) as a way to rebel against her family's expectations: "Art is one of the two things I've ever been good at or [has] given me any kind of joy [the other being drama/public speaking]. It's also the two things my dad has always discouraged completely so I have to prove him wrong."

As with Tamara, Carmen received support and validation from her street peers and youth workers for her artist identity. Though such an identity is unlike the 'bad' or antisocial behaviour that won Tamara the affection of her street peers, it is still an identity that Erikson would have characterized as negative in that it is in direct opposition to the values that Carmen's family reportedly cherishes (i.e., making money, looking good to others). In fact, Erikson specifically identified parents who are preoccupied with social status, or at least the appearance of high status, as being more likely to give rise to negative identities in their adolescent offspring. He further described such parents as "overpowering and inescapable" (as cited in Adams, Gullotta & Markstrom-Adams, 1994, p.271) and, as such, more likely to use their children for their own needs: "It would appear that such parents implore their children to give meaning to their existence while treating them as possessions that must be jealously guarded or be stolen away by others" (Adams et al., p.271).

As mentioned previously, forms of negotiating the adolescent identity crisis that are predominantly a reaction to parental desires such as negative identities and foreclosed identities are often not sustainable in the long-term, at least not without creating negative consequences for the individual [e.g., feelings of isolation as a consequence of being incapable of true intimacy, due to intimacy depending on having first engaged in one's own efforts at authentic self-definition, according

to Erikson (1959)]. Additionally, in young people who adopt negative identities, problems with self-worth would be expected from the shame of not feeling able to live up to parental/societal expectations and feeling that one's unique individuality cannot be accepted within one's family. Because of the importance of parental approval, a negative identity may just serve as a fragile mask that is useful for coping with feelings of inferiority. As such, negative identities would not adequately address the adolescent/young adult identity crisis. Just as Carmen could not seem to make a firm commitment to an artist identity, Tamara also oscillated between railing against her mother's seemingly impossible expectations regarding her school performance, among other things, and feeling that she just "[wants to] be perfect in everyone's eyes", particularly, the eyes of her mother, it would seem.

The preceding discussion on the impact of preoccupied attachment thus suggests that the youths' resulting problems with their emotional states, energy levels, and agency (capacity to set personal goals and maintain consistent effort and perseverance towards them) would appear to interfere significantly with their mainstream identity transitions. Although the youths seemed to be largely aware of how profoundly they struggled with being able to 'move beyond' their entangled relationships with their parents, their identity struggles may have further been informed by unconscious influences that are also related to their preoccupied attachments. I discuss these unconscious influences below.

### **Possible Unconscious Influences on Identity Development**

The above discussion makes clear that the experience of not being able to feel loved for who one perceives one's 'true' self to be is implicated in the youths' confusing and contradictory behaviours (i.e. the moral and identity confusion that I described in the previous chapter). Experiencing the pull of being loved by one's peers for behaving contrary to parental expectations and yet still feeling driven to win the love of parents by attempting to meet seemingly impossible demands was immensely

frustrating for some of the youths: Tamara complained that she has received “mixed messages” all her life about how she should behave. Given that the youths were not clear about how they should act and were unsure about their fundamental moral character, it is not surprising that they vacillated between good and bad evaluations of themselves. However, they also appeared to vacillate between good and bad evaluations of other people. Recall that the youths alternately praised and criticized their street peers and family members. Sometimes Jay and Carmen spoke as though they owed their lives to their street peers, and, at other times, the same peers could not be trusted or relied upon. Likewise Tamara and Carmen alternated between praising their mothers’ role modelling and their good moral guidance and condemning them for their lack of empathy and their abusive relationships with men. Such oscillations are apparently common in individuals with preoccupied attachments (Kernberg, 2012).

**Excluding painful memories underlies identity diffusion.** Such instability in thoughts about one’s self and others are reflective of identity diffusion. As mentioned previously, Otto Kernberg (2012) suggests that such diffusion may be the result of shutting off from certain painful attachment experiences, which leads to the infant being unable to integrate those experiences into their representational models of themselves and others. For a time in early infancy, all infants are theorized to normatively split off or segregate negative representations from positive representations of self and others: “This early split experience protects the idealized [positive] experiences from “contamination” with bad ones, until a higher degree of tolerance of pain and more realistic assessment of external reality under painful conditions evolves” (Kernberg, p.9). Later on, however, in securely attached infants, “the normal predominance of the idealized [positive] experiences leads to a tolerance of integrating the paranoid [negative] ones, while neutralizing them in the process (Kernberg, p.9-10). This integrative process permits the securely attached infant to achieve a balanced view of herself and others as being capable of being both good *and* bad. In contrast for the insecurely attached child, her growth in

cognitive capacities and life experiences, in conjunction with her continued inability to establish continuity with the memories that she excluded from conscious awareness, results in confusion about whether she and others should be seen as good *or* bad people (Kernberg). In other words, the process of having excluded information from awareness interferes with the individual achieving a balanced view of the good and bad that exists in all relationships and the people who constitute them, thereby explaining the fluctuations in moral evaluations that are commonly observed from people with insecure-preoccupied attachments, from a psychoanalytic perspective (Kernberg). (It should be noted that Kernberg suggests that because all forms of insecure adult attachment classifications reflect “contradictory, incompatible working models of attachment” (p.13), presumed to reflect the shutting out of painful early experiences, all types of insecure classifications place one at greater risk of identity diffusion.)

Moreover, the lack of a balanced perspective towards others and one’s self implies that individuals with insecure attachments would have less tolerance for containing negative aspects of relationships and negative feelings within one’s self; the bad feelings become projected onto the external world which results in paranoid or persecutory feelings about others (Kernberg, 2012). Though this unconscious strategy would help enable their emotional survival, insecurely attached children gain a maladaptive and less accurate view of the world outside of them as being more “angry” and “cruel” (Kernberg, as cited in Gunderson, 2008, p.121) than is really the case. In contrast, in infants and young children who are securely attached, because the good aspects of relationships “predominate sufficiently to tolerate an integrated view of self and others” (Kernberg, p.10), such children are more likely to develop emotional self-regulation and the capacity to trust others.

Kernberg (2012) suggests that identity diffusion occurs in adolescence/young adulthood when the “earlier developmental stage of dissociation or splitting between an idealized and persecutory

segment of experience persists. Under these conditions, multiple, non-integrated representations of self split into an idealized and persecutory segment, and multiple representations of significant others split along similar lines, jointly constituting the syndrome of identity diffusion” (p.10). Kernberg points out that although Erikson discussed the importance of lack of integration of the self to one’s development, he did not speak of the “equally important function of the corresponding integration or lack of integration of the representations of others” (p.11), the latter having been contributed by object relations theorists, such as Fairbairn, Jacobson, and Mahler.

**Excluding painful memories interferes with self-continuity.** Another way that unconsciously excluded memories may pose obstacles to identity development draws upon John Bowlby’s (1980) concept of defensive exclusion. Similar to Kernberg’s (2012) theory of identity diffusion, by defensive exclusion, Bowlby (1980) refers to the failure of those who are insecurely attached to integrate some attachment information into their working models of self and others, on account of the painful emotions that attend that information. A form of defensive exclusion that Bowlby (1980) called preconscious exclusion causes the processing of the excluded information to stop prior to the person being able to gain access to it in conscious thought. In this situation, one’s attachment system, which elicits emotion related to attachment, is activated by the initial unconscious level of processing of the excluded information; however, because of preconscious exclusion, accurate interpretation of this activation is not possible. This means that those who engage in preconscious exclusion are in danger of experiencing painful emotions in the absence of being able to reach a clear understanding of why they feel the way that they do. West and George (2002) contend that insecure-preoccupied individuals defend themselves against consciously registering painful attachment-related emotion to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the subject of attachment, because they cannot dis-entangle themselves from their attachment experiences. Specifically, they unconsciously engage in cognitive disconnection (a specific type of

preconscious exclusion), which refers to efforts to detach attachment information from the emotions that accompany it, such as arousal or distress (George & West, 2004). However the cost of this strategy is that they still become emotionally aroused, while turning “again and again to the microscopic details of attachment experiences and feelings in a futile and frustrating attempt to achieve a coherent identity” (West & George, p.281) given the absence of the excluded information that they need for this purpose. Preconscious defensive exclusion thus offers a different perspective on how unconscious factors may interfere with identity development. By interfering with the ability to narrate a coherent account of childhood attachment experiences, the identity requirement of self-continuity in adolescence/young adulthood is jeopardized.

**Excluding painful memories interferes with self-agency.** The repeated turning over of attachment details in one’s mind, that West and George (2002) identified, suggests another explanation for the youths’ apparent tendency to angrily ruminate about their mothers, while feeling powerless to separate from them -- an experience that is analogous to the ambivalent/resistant behaviour (i.e., angrily protesting yet simultaneously clingy) that they would have been expected to have displayed as young children in response to being separated from their mothers or otherwise unattended to. Consistent with the idea of interfering with identity formation, West and George found that a loss of agency mediated the relationship between preoccupied attachment and dysthymia in a community sample of women. As discussed previously, an inability to integrate the loss of significant others (Unresolved) on the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996) has also been linked to preoccupied attachment and depression (West & George). It may be that the preconscious exclusion of attachment information and the helplessness or loss of agency that such exclusion begets, by pushing the individual to try to discover satisfactory explanations for her painful feelings to no avail, could be responsible for the associations that have been observed between, on the one hand,

unresolved grief and other forms of attachment-related emotional absences, and on the other hand, depression.

**Unconscious love deprivation underlies emotional dependency/social problems.** Alternatively, the greater risk for depressive disorders in preoccupied-insecure individuals versus other insecure classifications that has been observed by West and George (2002) among others may be understood as proceeding from their intense experience of being deprived of love. Cori (2010) suggests that those with emotionally absent mothers may experience what has been described as an orphan complex or orphan archetype: “It is a feeling of being without parents and without love. This feeling is often deeply repressed because it is so painful; to be without these things threatens a child’s survival” (p.106). Jungian psychoanalysts suggest that those with the orphan archetype feel that they are the “injured one” (Cori, p.106) and therefore in need of all the care that they can get from others<sup>90</sup>. Consequently, such individuals are prone to engage in dependent and clingy behaviour with anyone who can function as a stand in for the security that a mother represents. Cori suggests that this “love hunger” (p.106) is often a reason why people stay in abusive relationships: “the feeling of need is so desperate that the individual can’t leave. Not having an internal reference point for being well loved, they often feel, *This is better than nothing*” (p.106).

In fact, it may be difficult for anyone in this emotional position to turn away from the receipt of any kind of positive attention. I have already discussed how loneliness and social anxiety motivated Tamara and Carmen to stay in abusive relationships and continue their association with street peers. Such loneliness and social anxiety may well be rooted in their preoccupied attachments. Although Jay

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<sup>90</sup> Cori (2010) also observed that adult children of emotionally absent mothers may suffer from a chronic sense of scarcity: “Deprivation can be so deeply branded into your consciousness that it becomes a lens through which you experience life. You may feel as if there’s never enough money, never enough love, and never enough joy” (p.111). This may be part of the reason that the youths struggled so much with differentiating between what they really needed for their survival and what they could do without.

did not engage in abusive relationships, he described being similarly vulnerable to the approval of his street peers, given that his family members were all simultaneously rejecting him.

In addition to their proneness to dependent and clingy behaviours, the longstanding social problems of the young women may have stemmed from inhibited exploration of their environments as young children. Insecure-ambivalent children have been found to be more socially unskilled with their peers (than secure children), and display more social inhibition and submissiveness, in addition to reporting the most loneliness (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). Such social problems also create a vulnerability to be mistreated in intimate relationships.

**Deficits in reflective functioning interfere with self-agency.** Another reason for the youths' diminished sense of agency regarding their preoccupied conflicts with attachment figures may be that they lacked the capacity to imagine why their parents may have behaved the way that they did with them. Not only did they feel helpless to resolve their problems with their parents interpersonally, but they did not appear to be able to make inferences about their parents' mental states that might have helped them to move beyond being stuck in enmeshed and dependent relationships with them. Jay, for example, refused to accept his mother's view that she may have failed to meet his needs properly, because she had problems of her own. He could not entertain that his mother could have been using drugs and alcohol to numb her own emotional pain, just as he had done in his own life. This was despite his knowledge that his maternal grandparents had been abused in residential schools and that his mother and her siblings had grown up in a stressful, overcrowded household. Likewise, though Carmen is aware of the severe physical abuse that her father and his siblings endured as children, she cannot empathize with him. Rather she angrily focused on her father's dismissal of the abuse that he perpetrated in their family: "And my dad still doesn't see it. Cos' his family in growing up was really really abusive. So just because he wasn't as abusive as his father, he's not abusive at all." Similarly,

Tamara could not entertain how her mother could be so cold towards her, despite the fact that she was sure that her grandmother had beaten her mother. Preoccupied individuals have been observed to be deficient in their awareness of the mental states of both others and themselves, and deficient in understanding how such mental states may affect people's behaviour (Fonagy & Bateman, 2005). This cognitive ability is known as reflective functioning or mentalization (Fonagy & Bateman).

That said, Fonagy & Bateman (2005) have countered the claim that preoccupied individuals are capable of only a low mode of reflective functioning in all of their relationships. They observe that the "delinquent adolescent is, for example, aware of the mental states of others in his gang, and the borderline individual is at times hypersensitive to the emotional states of mental health professionals and family members" (p.192). This observation certainly applies to the youths in this study. Not only has the aforementioned hypersensitivity been observed particularly in the young women, but all of them had voluntarily availed themselves of counselling at some point, which they reported deriving at least some benefit from, as a result of learning to perceive the events in their lives differently. Jay even described his motivation for participating in this study as due to his wanting to avail himself of any opportunity that would help him to understand himself better, thereby continuing the trajectory of personal growth and development that he felt began with his participation in the ex-offender program.

Fonagy, Gergeley & Target (2000) suggest that preoccupied individuals show deficits with respect to reflective functioning mostly in their highly charged relationships with caregivers and other attachment figures. As with Kernberg (2012) and West and George (2002), Fonagy et al. suggest that those who are preoccupied-insecure engage in an unconscious process of shutting off from information, but they do this as part of a larger cognitive processing style in which they characteristically exclude themselves from the process of mentalizing about caregivers entirely. Children abused by a parent, for example, may cope with their abuse by refusing to think about what their caregiver might have been

thinking when they abused them, thereby protecting themselves from registering that their caregivers wished to harm them (Fonagy et al.).

The cost of avoiding contemplation of such mental states is that they will come to “operate on inaccurate, yet rigidly held, schematic impressions of thoughts and feelings” (Fonagy et al., 2000, p.111) regarding attachment figures that are characteristic of people with personality disorders (especially borderline personality disorder). In addition to the relationship difficulties that such schemas may promote, the cost to the individual who fails to mentalize is the experience of isolation – from others and one’s self. Fonagy et al. explain that “To experience being with another, the person has to be there as a mind; to feel the continuity between past and present it is mental states that provide the link; emptiness and, at an extreme, dissociation is the best description such individuals can give of the absence of meaning which the failure of mentalization creates” (p.116).

Reflective functioning can be retarded by maltreatment as noted above. By avoiding having to think about caregivers’ malicious intentions, the child also does not have to grapple with worrying about her own worthlessness or unlovability being a possible cause of such intentions. However, children may also become confused about their parents’ mental states, because abusive parents often voice feelings that are inconsistent with their behaviour (Fonagy et al., 2000). Children may also create a separation in their minds between their public worlds, where reflective functioning is accepted and expected, and the private attachment domain of their families, in which it is not (Fonagy et al). There may be insufficient opportunities for mutual understanding if the child “feels treated as an uncared-for physical object” (Fonagy et al., p.112). Similarly, it is felt that a lack of scaffolding for developing the capacity to mentalize may result from parents and children being unable to assume a playful stance towards one another, as a consequence of the parents’ adoption of an authoritarian parenting style (Fonagy et al).

### **Attachment and Trauma Influences on Youth-Worker Interactions**

Of course, all of the youths experienced at least some of the events described above, which could have compromised their capacity for reflective functioning. However, of all of them, Maria was probably the most deprived of a lack of scaffolding for the development of mentalization, both as a result of her childhood abuse and neglect and the harsh discipline that she was subjected to from staff members in the various group homes and residential treatment settings in which she had been placed. Physical restraint of children was common in such sites, as were verbal threats and abuse. Maria especially recalled how the staff at one of the residential treatment centres would try to eliminate noncompliance on the part of the children by threatening to increase the length of their required treatment. The staff reportedly warned the children that they would convince their child welfare caseworkers that they needed to stay there even longer than was intended for them, if they continued to misbehave. Since apparently no child could bear the thought of having to lengthen their stay in these environments, this threat tended to be highly effective. It would seem that this threat even worked for those children who had never been told how long they were supposed to stay in residential treatment in the first place. Although Maria was told that she was being sent to residential treatment on account of her bad behavior, she was never told how long she was supposed to stay in such places, nor was she informed as to what constituted successful treatment of her behavioural problems.

Having been placed repeatedly in such coercive settings, it was not surprising that Maria became practised at counter-coercion (Paterson, 1982). Like Tamara with respect to her mother, Maria's counter-coercion often took the form of physically aggressing against staff members. Maria would even brag about how she managed to beat up youth workers, guards at the young offender centre, and even nursing staff, whom she would encounter in secure units or mental hospitals, following her many suicide attempts. As with Jay's bravado about his risky criminal escapades such as high speed police chases, it

seemed that Maria relished the power she felt when she physically aggressed against her workers, perhaps because she lacked other means of securing power for herself, particularly within such coercive environments.

Despite the reinforcement that she gained from behaving aggressively (recall that Maria also relished the power she gained on the schoolyard from beating up boys), it seemed that Maria would have preferred to have never felt the need to assert power in this way. While discussing her vision of an ideal placement for children and youth like herself, Maria suggested that she would create an environment in which children wanted to take part in chores and engage in other forms of cooperating with staff, because of the positive relationships that they formed with staff. Her experiences in the few 'good' group homes in which she resided had taught her that it is best when children and workers interact with one another as though they are family members. In such placements, she expected group home workers to "talk [children] through doing chores instead of forcing them, punishing them." For example, staff could tell children stories to encourage them to help others. Maria agreed with me when I attempted to paraphrase her view by saying that it sounded like a child would want to comply with workers if she liked the workers and wanted to be a part of their activities as a result: "Exactly."

Despite the fact that she had experienced a few good group homes which appeared to have provided healthy attachment supports to facilitate the development of mentalization, Maria's sense of powerlessness in many other group settings was likely compounded by her childhood abuse; recall that Maria had attributed some of the violence she had perpetrated in these settings to having been abused as a child. It appeared that she would experience herself as having reached a "limit" of her capacity to endure mistreatment without lashing out at others. Reflecting on why she sometimes hit other youth or staff members without apparent provocation, Maria commented, "There is this limit. I honestly don't know what the limit is or what triggers it...I react so fast." Fonagy (1999) suggests that "Criminal

behaviour may be seen as a socially maladaptive form of resolving trauma and abuse... Violent acts are committed in place of experienced anger concerning neglect, rejection and maltreatment. Committing antisocial acts is facilitated by a non-reflective stance of the victim..."(para.64). In other words, maltreatment that occurs within the context of an insecure attachment relationship is most likely to underlie criminality, because the inability to mentalize would remove the inhibitions that many people would have about harming others. Access to the likely mental states of one's prospective victims should protect against harming such others. Thus Fonagy hypothesizes that "attachment to individuals as well as social institutions may be critical in reducing the risk of delinquency and adjustment processes that are severely disrupted by childhood maltreatment" (para.53). The reader will recall that Jay and Tamara also described being involved in similar acts of indiscriminate violence against others; Tamara once recalled assaulting her child welfare caseworker, although she could not remember what event, if anything, had precipitated the attack. To explain the assault then, she assumed that she must have been very high on drugs at the time. However this explanation seemed to trouble her, presumably because she had previously acknowledged that her acts of aggression, even under the influence of serious drug use, were not entirely impulsive or compulsive behaviours.

At other times, however, Maria was very aware of the reasons she had for aggressing against staff members, even though an observer might not have been able to see an obvious reason for her to retaliate against them. Her history of being repeatedly engaged in coercive cycles with workers appears to have led to her developing a hostile attribution bias (Dodge, Price, Bachorowski, & Newman, 1990). Maria described having become hypersensitive to even very subtle signs that staff members may be seeking to control her. She was especially vigilant when new workers would arrive on scene. Even if these workers just displayed an arrogant attitude in Maria's view, she was primed to aggress against them: If they were "stuck up", Maria could be "real nasty." Maria admitted to "testing" new workers to

see “how much they could take?” (i.e., could they keep their cool with her if she provoked them by saying something really insulting or offensive to them?) It appeared that such testing was likely a response to her sense of powerlessness, something akin to a pre-emptive strike.

Maria also said that she needed to engage in such testing because she needed to know whom she could trust. If workers had a sense of humour or could be relaxed when she provoked them, then she knew that she could risk becoming closer to them. In other words, she was figuring out who she could feel safe around. (This explanation was clearly influenced by a staff member. A worker had told that she engaged in this testing, because she had been hurt so many times as a result of having been moved around so much. The worker even explained that this meant that Maria had an attachment problem.)

Despite the sense of security that she derived from testing her workers, Maria admitted that there was a problem with this process. She realized that her first impression of people turned out to be wrong sometimes. Maria regretted having treated one of the guards at the young offender centre very badly, because she had incorrectly assumed that the guard was a bad person from her initial experiences with her. Given that she was specifically looking for individuals who could pass her highly offensive tests by displaying exceptionally understanding behaviour given the circumstances (i.e., humour, a relaxed attitude), it is easy to see how a lack of reflective functioning about how new staff members would have experienced her testing could have contributed to Maria’s mistreatment of the aforementioned guard. Fonagy (1999) suggests that having a hostile world view in combination with deficient mentalization processes may especially predispose one to committing violence.

It may be that the youths’ preoccupation with power and control to ensure their own survival facilitated their shutting off from the idea that many people could have non-coercive intentions towards them. Their preoccupation with power and control might have also encouraged them to unconsciously

override their capacity to think about the suffering that others would experience as a result of their aggression towards them. Maria's sensitivity to others' exerting control over her is echoed in Tamara's insistence that she needs to be the one that is "in control" in any kind of relationship that she participates in. Even in the future marriage she imagines for herself, she expects to be the one who is always in control of her spouse. She further acknowledged that she "don't listen to people well" and that only if she has respect for someone will she agree to listen to them. Tamara thus suggested that she exclusively directed her attention to the mental states of perhaps only a few select people whom she preferred over most other people. Fonagy (1999) observes that such failure to take into consideration the current mental state of most others with whom one interacts is often part of a defensive strategy of disabling one's mentalizing capacity so as to protect the self. It may be that Tamara would only admit into her awareness the mental states of those others who did not pose a threat to her need to maintain power or control in her relationships<sup>91</sup>.

Echoing Tamara's view that she had only three options for coping: hurt others, hurt herself, or numb her emotional pain with drugs, Jessica Benjamin (as cited in Epstein, 2009) suggests that the most common reaction to powerlessness for trauma victims is to "simply reverse the scenario: to try to assume some power by becoming a perpetrator oneself, by blaming or hurting the other person or by blaming and hurting oneself" (p.57). Benjamin (as cited in Epstein) calls this a "'seesaw mentality: one person is up while the other is down. The primary way out of trauma in this mentality is to seek vengeance or revenge, to lower the other while raising up oneself" (p.57).

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<sup>91</sup> Recall that Tamara continued to gravitate to her street peers because she felt confident that they would "big" her up, while she expected that mainstream youth would not do the same for her because in her view such youth were not personally insecure and therefore would not be motivated to ally themselves with her.

The violence in Maria's relationships with her workers could have also been fuelled by a sense of moral injury. As discussed previously, she expressed frustration and a sense of helplessness at having never been given a proper chance to become a good person, due to no one ever wanting her to stay with them for the long-term. Of all the things that a long-term or permanent placement could have given her as regards helping her to become a good person, Maria especially lamented having never had the opportunity to feel that she belonged somewhere. Upon leaving the mental hospital following a suicide attempt, Maria recalled crying to her child welfare caseworker that she did these 'bad' things (i.e., suicide attempts) because as she put it: "I have nobody. Everybody else had somebody. Everybody else had a mom." In other words, if she felt secure that she had people, particularly a mother who loved her, she would not have resorted to lashing out in pain and might have become "normal" as she put it: "I actually wanted to be normal. [But] I always felt that I was one of those bad people who were never going to do anything, never actually had a chance. I wanted to be like everybody – nice home, mum and dad, go to school."

Maria's frustration at not being provided with such conditions to be good was exacerbated by the fact that she was always being blamed for her 'bad' behaviour, despite such behaviour being a reaction to her not having been "nurtured properly", as Tamara had once put it. Ironically, after Maria spoke with her child welfare caseworker about her lack of feeling loved as being the root of her suicide attempts and other 'bad' behaviours such as running away, Maria was placed in the 'good' foster home where she was stigmatized by the biological children of her foster parents for lacking parents of her own, and then chastised by her foster father for complaining to him about his children's behaviour towards her.

Not only did Maria lack the emotional bonds (love and a sense of belonging) that would have helped her to act "normal", due to her constant movement and rejecting experiences in foster care, but

she was also betrayed by her parent surrogates (child welfare caseworkers, foster parents, group home workers) with respect to learning the skills that she required to live independently as an adult. As with her frustration about behaving badly, even though she was not provided with the emotional supports to have behaved otherwise, Maria had expressed frustration with her child welfare caseworker over her expectations that she demonstrate more “maturity”, before she could be placed into Supported Independent Living (SIL). According to Maria’s child welfare caseworker, maturity could be displayed by doing things such as going to school. However, Maria could not understand how she could be subjected to such a prerequisite for getting her own apartment when her caseworker knew that Maria had not consistently attended school for several years at that point. She wondered about how she could be expected to demonstrate that she could budget her money when she had hardly learned any math skills, having been in “institutions” all her life. Thus Maria felt powerless to satisfy child welfare requirements for programs that were supposed to help her transition to independence, ironically because she lacked basic skills as a result of her having been in care for so long. Contrary to how her child welfare caseworker interpreted her behaviour then, Maria was not choosing to continue to remain ‘immature’.

Apart from her lack of consistent learning opportunities, Maria’s cognitive difficulties had likely also made it difficult for her to comply with some of the basic requirements for entry into SIL. Tamara described being subjected to similar requirements that were supposed to demonstrate that a youth was mature enough for independent living (e.g., making and keeping appointments, doing basic banking). Though Tamara implied that this process was challenging (“It’s a fucking rat race, for sure”), it appeared that the number of tasks that she was required to perform had made her feel that way, rather than her being challenged by the difficulty level of such tasks, in contrast to Maria. Of course, Tamara also had the advantage of living in a middle class home environment until her mid-teens, which could have provided her with more exposure to the modelling of such skills.

Despite being subjected to what they had each perceived as a rigorous process for entrance into Supported Independent Living (SIL), both Tamara and Maria felt betrayed after having lived in SIL. Both young women felt that they had not been provided with adequate opportunities to learn independent living skills, despite this being the purpose of the program. According to Tamara, “they [SIL workers] do teach you things there, but not as much as you need to know.” Both girls had wished, for example, that they had been given the opportunity to practice paying rent and bills, while they still had SIL workers with whom they could consult about such matters. Maria explained that the only tasks that youths were required to do while in SIL was to attend some form of day programming such as school or a job readiness program and comply with rules such as no drugs and alcohol and no overnight visitors in their apartments. The girls received nearly four hundred dollars in spending money biweekly, after their rent and bills were paid for by SIL workers. Given this arrangement, the young women were never required to budget for necessary expenses, nor did they know how to set up their own apartments, in terms of paying for utilities, arranging for phone and cable services, or even just paying rent. Tamara, for example, was unaware that she could not pay her rent with cash.

After leaving Supported Independent Living (SIL), Tamara was also critical of the program for failing to help her learn how to grocery shop and cook, which she later realized were important skills, particularly if someone has little money to spare. Although it could be argued that most young people would similarly need to learn how to live within their means, the reader should bear in mind that the vulnerability of high risk youth to risky criminal activities such as prostitution meant that learning how to budget, pay bills on time, and meet basic needs with minimal expenditure assumed even greater importance than it might for many other kinds of young people. Beyond lacking the economic safety net of parents, SIL was also the last opportunity that some of the youths had for consulting adults who could

reasonably be expected to help them learn how to perform daily living skills, given that they would soon no longer have child welfare supports of any kind.

Consequently, the youths' failure to obtain sufficient help from Supported Independent Living (SIL) for when they would be on their own held very serious consequences for them. It constituted yet another high stakes situation in which authority figures betrayed them, which not surprisingly made them very angry. At the time of our interviews, Tamara was still upset that SIL did not help her to anticipate the need for a driver's license upon leaving care: "I'm eighteen and I'm leaving [child welfare] funding. Why wouldn't [SIL] have helped me get my learner's [first phase of a graduated license]? Now that I'm 22, I got my learner's like by myself. Like don't you think [they] should have been like, 'Hey you should go for your learner's?'" "If you're gonna make me independent, then you should be helping me get my driver's license and credit card, so I can build my credit. I have to figure it all out by myself."

Another factor that made Supported Independent Living (SIL) an especially high stakes situation for high risk youth was the youths' drug addictions. Tamara felt that she and the other youths in SIL were especially let down by SIL workers' failure to help them anticipate their future needs, given their problems with addictions: "Obviously if I'm a fucking drug addict runnin' around, I'm not gonna be thinking about all these things that are gonna make me like stable when [child welfare] fucking ditches me." Even though Tamara acknowledged that she may not have been ready to listen to such advice at the time, she felt it could have helped her later. SIL workers should have been telling her to "slow down with the drugs and friggig think about all this stuff because it's going to make your life easier [in the future]." "And now it's making my life harder that like somebody didn't sit down and be like 'You should really think about getting this done.' Or something like that. Like there was no guidance."

Moreover, Tamara's feelings of betrayal and anger about Supported Independent Living (SIL) appeared to be conflated with her feelings of betrayal at being 'ditched' by child welfare, before she felt

ready to “age-out.” As mentioned previously, without adequate help from SIL, Tamara expressed that she went from having no demands or structure imposed on her for three years while she was in care to being required to have a job and a place of her own by age eighteen, so [child welfare] could “dump [her] on her ass and close [her] file.” Tamara’s anxiety about her lack of readiness for such independence by her eighteenth birthday appeared to be exacerbated by the fact that her child welfare caseworker was increasingly withdrawing her support and attention as Tamara’s birthdate approached. As a result, Tamara felt that she had had to unfairly cope with many stressors on her own (breaking up with her boyfriend, having an abortion, taking antidepressants, to name just a few).<sup>92</sup> She was especially angry because she felt that she was cut off from support because her caseworker seemed to think that she was doing fine just because she got a job and could hold onto her apartment. Tamara wondered how her caseworker could have assumed that she was alright to be on her own, given that she was taking antidepressants, still taking methamphetamine, and had tried to commit suicide right around that time: “I wasn’t fucking normal when they fucking let me go!” She felt that both her child welfare caseworker and her SIL workers were already too busy with other youths to continue to help her during this transitional period. Even when she tried to tell SIL workers that she was in crisis, she was directed to the suicide hotline: “I don’t know what they are supposed to do but like every time I called there or like I was like having a mental breakdown and like nobody would help me. They are like, “Call the suicide hotline’, like always call someone else.” Tamara’s feelings about her workers (SIL and child welfare) thus echoed her feelings of abandonment in relation to her mother.

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<sup>92</sup> Even well before Tamara was approaching her eighteenth birthday, her child welfare caseworker had been spending less and less time with her, despite the fact that the caseworker belonged to a dedicated unit for high risk youth, which facilitated regular (i.e., weekly) visits with youth, by assigning very small caseloads to its workers. Tamara reported that her visits with her worker had gone down to once per month instead.

Of all the supports that she lost when she was cut off from child welfare, Tamara most lamented the loss of emotional support and guidance from her caseworkers. Though she received more money while in child welfare and could access more supports under child welfare than she could under Advancing Futures (e.g., recreational opportunities, transportation), she said that the money and rides to places that her child welfare caseworker would give her were not as important to her as “Someone to fucking talk to! “Fucking check up on me or something, you know what I mean?” Moreover, Tamara lost her eligibility to access counselling from a psychologist, which she could have done if she was still under child welfare: “So you don’t have any fucking options [for someone to talk to] when you’re independent.” Tamara also still needed practical assistance with navigating systems (e.g., legal, educational, medical). For example, she would have liked to have had support for preparing to testify against a former boyfriend who had assaulted her. In fact, Tamara expressed that she would still like to live in a setting like Supported Independent Living (SIL) so she could knock on a worker’s door when she needed to or at least be able to call someone. Despite the fact that SIL workers neglected to help her when she was in crisis and despite their inaccessibility after four o’clock in the afternoon (“Who the fuck is supposed to answer all [my] questions if my workers like leaving at fucking four and I have no one else to call?), clearly having someone that she could rely on for some support was better than having no one to turn to. As with Maria then, Tamara experienced betrayal with respect to lacking the emotional support and guidance that she should have been able to count on from parental surrogates, such as her child welfare and SIL workers.

While Carmen never had any formal professional supports when she was under the age of eighteen, like Tamara and Maria, she nevertheless expected more from her welfare (Income Support) workers, both on an emotional level and a material level, than she had ever received. Echoing her feelings about her parents’ lack of caring for her, she interpreted the fact that no category of

government assistance existed to help people like herself (i.e., traumatized and at least temporarily unable to work as a result) as evidence that nobody in the system cared about her. Her failure to see that welfare workers could not help her outside of their mandate, however, was likely reinforced by their apparently callous responses to her. She felt that welfare workers thought that she should have, by then, have gotten “over” her psychological difficulties from having been kidnapped. She felt that most “workers are so cold hearted and just want to get you out of their face.” According to Carmen, the attitude that she routinely encountered from welfare workers was that she was just going to use their money for crack cocaine: “They do go out of their way like to make me cry in their office and shit.” It was not surprising then that Carmen felt that rather than helping her “[welfare workers] just kick you more when you are down.”

The grossly inadequate amount of welfare money that she received appeared to reinforce her view that government systems are not set up to help anyone, a view that she had apparently first developed as a consequence of her encounters with child welfare caseworkers, when she was still a teenager. Recall that Carmen felt that the child welfare caseworkers who met with her and her family, when she was running away from home, had sided with her parents, on account of the family’s affluence. Moreover, because she did not receive enough welfare money for her daily needs, she “[could not] go forward at all”, meaning that she remained vulnerable to returning to selling drugs and to being exploited by others for shelter, among other negative street outcomes. Carmen and Tamara had each expressed that they felt that the government purposely allotted an inadequate amount of funding for high risk youth, thereby ensuring that they remained in poverty. Although Carmen had interpreted her failure to be helped by child welfare to her parents’ upstanding public image, she had also surmised that child welfare workers were reluctant to ‘take the youth’s side’ because removing children from family homes costs the government money. It appeared that Carmen and Tamara were

suspicious that they constituted an underclass upon whose backs the government could fund other priorities.

Given Carmen's distrust of government systems, it made sense that she devised her own criteria for determining which professionals she should trust. Although she did not subject her welfare workers and non-profit youth workers to the same kinds of provocative testing that Maria did<sup>93</sup>, Carmen apparently looked for signs that such workers were not just in helping roles for the sake of a paycheque only. However, like Maria, her views of which behaviours professionals should demonstrate to signal their caring may have been influenced by problems with reflective functioning. One such sign that professionals truly cared about her, for example, was if they sided with her against her parents, making them unlike the child welfare caseworkers and counsellors that she had encountered in the past. (Though her former counsellor from when she was ten years old had encouraged her family's participation in counselling, it appeared that Carmen had not felt that the counsellor had done enough to ally with her against the "identified patient" role that her mother had particularly insisted upon for her.)

Moreover, in keeping with the aforementioned common stance of those who are preoccupied-insecure, Carmen insisted that her parents were never going to change. Thus those professionals who allied with her in this view were the ones that she felt had really cared about her: "I definitely need someone to tell me to tell my parents to fuck off. Cos' like every other counsellor I saw was like, 'Oh you can patch things up and make things better blah blah blah', but the other people aren't willing to change. It's not going to get better [with my parents], so I just focused on myself."

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<sup>93</sup> Though Carmen did not physically aggress against others like Maria and Tamara did, she recalled that she had no problem with "mouthing off" to those child welfare caseworkers whom she had encountered in her mid-teen years. She attributed her comfort in being cocky with such adults, while she was still very young, to being practised at telling off her dad when her dad would aggress against her.

It is not hard to see how an Us (Carmen and her 'good' workers) versus Them (Carmen's parents) mentality may reflect the aforementioned see-saw mentality that victims of trauma frequently hold: It is possible that Carmen could only feel safe with workers who sided with her exclusively, given that to do otherwise would signal betrayal by fraternizing with the 'enemy'. Carmen recalled feeling validated when one of her trusted youth workers "instantly took [her] side", as he had "heard [her] story a hundred times from other kids who [had] grown up in like the well-off families in the suburbs." Though this youth worker's empathic response had clearly helped Carmen to trust him, the trust in their relationship was gained at the expense of a more balanced view of her relationship with her parents that perhaps a worker more knowledgeable about attachment could have encouraged in Carmen over time. [Both of the youth workers who joined with Carmen against her parents had worked for non-profit youth serving agencies that were not known for requiring advanced education of their staff (i.e., qualifications beyond a college level diploma)].

It is notable that Carmen perceived these two youth workers as being a part of her street family, presumably because they, like her street peers and a few older street adults, provided the support that she could not get from her parents. Similarly, I previously described how Jay seemed to regard his professional supports as substituting for the support he had felt from his street family. This would explain why he felt so hurt by what had seemed to him to be a betrayal of their relationship by one of his trusted youth workers (also from a non-profit youth serving agency). Jay was dismayed when this worker acted "too much by the book" with him (i.e., complied strictly with the letter of the law) with respect to her failure to sign off on the community service hours that he was performing at the worker's agency. The youth worker refused to credit Jay with a few more hours than he had actually worked, despite Jay's promise that he would complete those hours upon his return from a holiday that he had been planning and working towards for several months. Jay failed to see how this staff member could

treat him in such an impersonal and distrusting way, given the lengthy involvement (greater than a year) that he had had with both the agency and that person in particular. He was especially angry because the worker knew that by failing to sign off on the hours, Jay risked going back to jail. (The community service hours were presumably a condition of his probation).

Given that Maria viewed the ideal foster placement as one in which staff and youth would act like family towards one another, and the fact that she railed against policies that required professionals to cease contact with youths once the youths had moved on from a placement, it was not surprising that she had also felt betrayed by other measures that workers had taken, throughout the years, to prevent her from becoming attached to them. Some group home workers explicitly warned her to not get too attached to them, as either the youths or the workers could pick up and leave any day. Maria appeared to take this injunction personally. The workers' attempt at setting professional boundaries was interpreted by Maria as a message that she was being rejected "because they [the staff] have their own families." She recalled feeling jealous when the children of staff members would visit their parents at work. Maria was especially hurt when one such staff member declined an opportunity to be her volunteer mentor in a Big Sister program, citing a "conflict of interest" because she had previously worked with Maria in a different setting.

In addition to her rejection experiences in her biological family and in her foster placements, Maria probably was also prone to viewing the above events as rejection, because other workers had departed from acting "by the book" with respect to maintaining a long-term relationship with her. She described the youth workers in one of the group homes that she had resided at, between the ages of eight and eleven, as being like "her parents", and described her current long-time youth worker and long-time child welfare caseworker as being "her mothers." She fondly described another worker as having "kept" her all these years, despite his being reprimanded for his practise of staying in touch with

youths long after they had departed the group home. The continuous presence of these people in Maria's life underscored to her that for the other workers whom she had experienced while in care, working with foster children "was just a job for them." Given these circumstances, it was not surprising that Maria seemed to regard the importance of maintaining professional boundaries as being a somewhat dubious reason for failing to maintain a relationship with her.

Ironically Maria's experiences at the young offender centre had most inspired her vision of what could be the ideal placement for children and youths like her. At the young offender centre, guards would tell her stories and encourage her to do the right things. She recalled how her favourite guard was a nurturing sort of person, as opposed to a "lay down the rules" person. This guard upheld rules and routines but could be counted on to be flexible as well, when the circumstances called for it. Maria explained that she had fought hard to stay as long as she could at the young offender centre, because as she put it, "It was my home. I loved that place." Despite the fact that the centre had to house her if she had been sentenced to serve her time there for a crime, Maria regarded it as the place where she had felt the most accepted in her entire life: "No matter how bad I was, they would take me." It appears that Maria likely contrasted the acceptance she received at the young offender centre with the much more punitive and rejecting treatment that she often received in foster care placements.

In particular, it seemed that Maria could not help contrast the feeling of 'homecoming' that she felt when she returned repeatedly to the young offender centre with the feeling of being pushed out of numerous child welfare placements, for the supposed reason of her being too 'bad' for anyone to handle. Though Maria also admitted to feeling highly isolated, sad, and suicidal while at the young offender centre, she nevertheless "didn't ever want to leave"; her relationships with the guards, the sense of security and stability that came from the structured routines, and her inability to get back into serious substance use, like she would have if she were on the outside with her family and friends,

provided Maria with the closest thing to an experience of family that she has had to date. (Though leaving the centre for the last time was reportedly the “hardest day of [Maria’s] life”, she said that she no longer wanted to be there because she has “goals” for herself now, referring to becoming successful at living an independent mainstream life. However, when she was younger, she admitted that she did not care if she did nothing with her life but remain in the centre indefinitely.)

In contrast, recall that Tamara did not think that her relationships with professionals could provide her with an effective substitute for her mother. As mentioned previously, it may be that she resisted becoming close to her workers as a pre-emptive strike against being abandoned by someone else.<sup>94</sup> This opportunity to flee from having to attach to professionals, following her mother’s abandonment of her, may have encouraged her to view her workers in the instrumental way that she did. Tamara primarily regarded her workers as useful solely for providing her with needed or desired resources such as housing placements or vouchers for clothes and so forth. One of the reasons that she preferred a dedicated group home for young women in prostitution over a more general group home was that in the latter setting, she didn’t have that “one staff person that really liked [her]”: “So I couldn’t really manipulate them?” Though Tamara said that she missed having someone to talk to when her file was closed with child welfare, even the emotional support that she received from, for example, the home for young prostitutes was regarded by her as just a temporary substitute for her mother: The lies she told about her high needs ensured that she received more “motherly time” from these workers than she believed she would have received otherwise.

Tamara’s instrumental view of workers may have also been encouraged by the fact that child welfare caseworkers did not provide, or suggest, any interventions for her and her mother to work out

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<sup>94</sup> Despite Maria’s obvious desire for attachment, she too recalled that she had tried to withdraw from others in order to protect herself from getting hurt, beginning around the age of ten or eleven. She recalled that there was one year in which she had been moved twenty four times.

their problems with each other. Tamara said that she did not see such interventions as her caseworker's role; in her view, their role was just to compensate for her lack of a home and other supports, while she could not live with her mother.

The fact that most workers (e.g., SIL, child welfare, group home) acted as gatekeepers to resources, based on rules that Tamara thought she could influence by her lying, was probably the factor that had most encouraged her to think of her workers as being solely the purveyors of resources, as opposed to people with whom she could form meaningful attachment relationships. Recall that Tamara felt that she had to resort to exaggerating her problems to her workers because as she put it, "No one helps just homeless youth or even homeless drug addicts. I had to be a homeless drug addict prostitute to get help." However, Tamara did not just project an image of being an exceptionally troubled youth to her workers. She was careful to ensure that her workers did not use the stories that she had made up about herself against her: "You wanna seem like you have enough problems to make it to the next level [of services] but not too many problems because they could throw you in secure treatment or [make you] see a psychiatrist so don't act too crazy – just want to do the minimal to get a nice place to do drugs and get free money to do drugs. You need to pick up on what others are saying to play the system – like say its urgent that you are getting evicted so that you will get damage deposit [for an apartment]."<sup>95</sup> (Recall that Tamara prided herself on her ability to manipulate people generally.)

However, her insecurity about having to fend for herself in shelters and group homes for the first time as a teenager had likely also driven Tamara to request more resources and "scam" more

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<sup>95</sup> Tamara acknowledged the problem of moral hazard that was created by her child welfare caseworker providing her with funding when she was still a drug addict. She now questioned whether her caseworkers had enabled her to keep using drugs for longer than she might otherwise have done, just because they kept giving her money to live on (which she used for drugs). However, Tamara cautioned that I should not write in my "report" that "it is not beneficial to have social work, like if someone were to cut my file in the middle of being crazy, I would have killed myself and done drugs and died."

opportunities for herself than she had actually needed. Tamara, for example, denied that she was scamming the system by lying to her workers, because she had no other choice but to look after herself in this way, given that she did not have her mother to look out for her. She said that she had recently had an “epiphany” about the period in which she went to elaborate lengths to keep her story straight in front of her workers. The epiphany was that she now realized that she could, as she put it, “stand up myself” meaning that she could access funding legitimately by being a serious student (one that was truly intent on getting a higher education), as opposed to just enrolling in school and doing the bare minimum of work that was needed to maintain her housing, as she had done before. The difference was that now Tamara possessed the efficacy for completing school, working a job, and remaining sober, whereas before she lacked confidence in her ability to survive within child welfare (and then outside of it, when her caseworker was about to close her file) by complying solely with their rules. In other words, efficacy enabled her to interact with systems honestly for the first time. She no longer felt that she had to fake having problems in order to maintain her dependency on a government system for her own survival.

As mentioned previously, at the time of our interviews, Tamara acknowledged that her scamming had caused her more problems than it had done her good, because it had placed her in contact with peers who were engaged in higher risk behaviours, which she soon came to emulate. Recall that this immersion in a high risk peer environment had later made her confused about whether she was really “broken” like many of the other youths, who had had much more difficult upbringings than her own. It is likely that her confidence in her fundamental sense of herself as a basically good and competent person had been shaken, both by these peer experiences as well as by her mother’s abandonment. A combination of influences (including her not being pushed to complete school or maintain a job while in care) thus likely eroded her basic confidence in herself as well as in others,

thereby contributing to her instrumental orientation towards her workers generally, besides the normal experience of fear that any mid-adolescent could be expected to have just from being on one's own for the first time in their lives.

It seems reasonable that Tamara's instrumental orientation may have also reflected her aforementioned need for power and control in all of her relationships. Through her feeling that she was being masterful at manipulating others, she would have gained a sense of control over her workers that likely helped her to cope with all her reasons for feeling insecure when she first entered care and then again, when she was being required to leave care, before she felt ready to do so.

Though Tamara may have requested more or better resources that she did not strictly need, Carmen was pushed into being dishonest by the conditions of her government assistance. Recall that Carmen had to, for example, lie about having a permanent address so she could receive money for both rent and food from Income Support: "If you're homeless, they won't give you your money for rent. They'll give you money for food and send you on your way." Such policies reinforced her view that the government has no interest in helping her move out of poverty. As mentioned previously, by failing to help her with even the most basic costs of living (if she were to be honest), she wondered how did the government expect her to ever "move forward" with her life. Not only could she never be able to afford her own apartment or pay her fair share in shared accommodation (As mentioned previously, Carmen often performed free housekeeping for her roommates/boyfriends in exchange for paying less rent than her roommates), the stress of having to lie to the government in this way added to the psychological stress of trauma that was, in her view, her main barrier to being able to work in the first place. The thought of having to resort to crime when she ran out of her welfare money also added to her stress and incredulity with respect to the government's failure to support people like herself: "They wonder why like people turn to crime? Like what the fuck am I supposed to do?"

While Carmen may have felt pushed into lying for her own survival, Tamara had also questioned whether she had really scammed the child welfare system or whether she had simply used the program for what it was intended to be used for (support for youth who did not have parents), regardless of how she might have gone about doing so. I have encountered child welfare caseworkers who regarded both youths' direct demands for more supports, as well as their lies to get more resources, as evidence of their having an "entitled" attitude; that is, such youths were seen as being unreasonable and even spoiled for asking for more than was their due (their due being interpreted as only that which they strictly qualified for under child welfare policies). This caseworker attitude prevailed despite the fact that no youth in child welfare or young adult in adult welfare could hardly be said to be living a pampered life. [In Tamara's case, it must be remembered that the 'better' placements that she had sought by presenting herself as being high risk had, after all, subjected her to more harm ultimately, while providing her with only slightly more comfortable living conditions (e.g., having her own room versus living in a dorm setting or having access to better or more food)]. Moreover, each young woman had expressed that if they had just received twelve hundred dollars a month (the amount that most recipients of provincial disability benefits or Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) received, at the time of our interviews), they could live on that amount and not feel vulnerable to engaging in crime to make ends meet. Such a paltry monthly income would not seem to support a view of either Carmen or Tamara as being very "entitled."

Carmen felt that she was entitled to the amount of money that an AISH recipient might receive, because after all the trauma and housing instability that she endured following her kidnapping, as she put, "I haven't been given a chance to fucking be a person." (i.e., begin to live a normal, stable life). Moreover, as mentioned previously, she would use all of this money towards becoming stable and educated, so that she could ultimately move out of poverty, unlike other people whom she knows that

are on AISH who use the money for drugs. Jay, Carmen, and Tamara were also aware that workers of all kinds could sometimes bend system rules in order to meet the needs of their clients. Jay's experience of this was reflected in his being so upset with his youth worker, who he felt had made a decision against him by being "too much by the book," with respect to not signing off on his community service hours. It appears then that the youths were questioning the ethics of systems that failed to include so many people in their criteria regarding whom they helped, and to what degree they could help them. These youths were aware that they were 'falling between the cracks' because the boxes that the systems of support had to place them in far from fitted them neatly; in such circumstances then, was it really unethical to lie to try to maximize their help from systems that were already set up to provide them with too little support as it was?

Another reason that professionals may have viewed high risk youth as displaying an unreasonable attitude of entitlement could be due to the youths' resistance with respect to using services for destitute adults (e.g., homeless shelters, soup kitchens, inner city recreational opportunities). Some of Carmen's comments, for example, suggested that she saw herself as being better than the people who had to use such services: "Yeah, I pretty much managed to avoid having to use them. Yeah, maybe if I was selling my body for heroin, I'd go line up for shitty spaghetti at the [name of soup kitchen]. My life isn't that shitty though....Yeah [I'm not] a desperate crack head that's going to steal your VCR so I have to go eat at [name of soup kitchen]."

That said, through further discussion, I realized that when the youths were being so vehement in expressing their feelings of disgust regarding the clients of such services, they were trying to put distance between themselves and those clients. Their failure to identify with such a population meant that they could resist the thought of having to stay in such places, a prospect which clearly inspired a great deal of fear in them. Recall that Maria was very wary of the other women that constituted the

main clientele of the emergency shelter for women in the inner city: Such women, according to Maria were “hookers and crackhead(s) and smelled of body odor.” Of homeless shelters generally, Carmen commented that the residents are “too mentally unstable – just most of them you can tell are too far gone kind of people.” The youths were clearly concerned about their personal safety. As Carmen explained, “There’s a lot of fucked up people in those places. You never know who your roommate [is] going to be....I would have troubles sleeping. Like what’s the point of going to a shelter if I can’t sleep. I’d be better off walking around all night than fucking laying in a bed with someone near me.”

Insisting that they did not belong amongst such a ‘down and out’ group of people also appeared to help them quell an even greater fear that they would end up becoming like these destitute older adults. Recall that Maria was concerned about what being relegated to the emergency women’s shelter had to say about the kind of person she was. As mentioned previously, the shelter conveyed rejection (“It hurt so bad. How could [name of child welfare caseworker] let me down like that? I just thought everybody – nobody wanted me.”). Maria could not fathom how her caseworker, with her knowledge of Maria’s history of rejecting placements, could not have known what being left to fend for herself in the shelter would mean to her: “It’s bad enough I was thrown out my entire life. Throw me out again, you know?” Maria also questioned how, at seventeen years old, was she “really that BAD, that messed up to be in [name of emergency women’s shelter]?” She needed to distance herself from thinking that she belonged with the women in the shelter: “Here I am a normal girl, well, almost normal. I never had that life.” In other words, despite Maria’s experiences with prostitution, drug use, and other crimes, she never perceived herself as being in the same ‘league’ as the women who regularly used the shelter. Of another inner city homeless shelter for adults, she recalled being made to feel “real rugged” when she was there: “I was one of the cool, nice dressed, clean young people, so [I] didn’t fit in [there].”

To Maria, the emergency women's shelter represented her place of absolute last resort, other than staying with her grandmother. Her grandmother's house was where the rest of her relatives went, when they had absolutely nowhere else to go: "It was never going to be me. And then here it was me. Didn't want to be that desperate – like my mom's in my grandma's shed and everyone's at my grandma's: aunts, uncles, cousins." Recall that Maria resisted living with her mother and her grandmother, along with many of her other relatives, because of her propensity to relapse in their company. She was similarly concerned about being at risk for relapsing, while staying in the women's shelter. Not only were many of the other shelter residents addicted to substances such as cocaine and heroin, the women's shelter happened to be in close proximity to the inner city hotels and lounges which her mother and other relatives often frequented in order to buy and use drugs.

Carmen's fears about starting down a trajectory to becoming chronically homeless betrayed similar concerns about who she was and what she might become. In addition to her safety concerns, she vigorously resisted use of homeless shelters, because "most [homeless] people are like a bad influence too. I don't wanna be a homeless person." Maria explained that you can quickly fall into the routines of shelter life (e.g., have coffee at one drop-in centre, breakfast at another, wait in line at a soup kitchen for lunch and so forth), leading to a closing off of other more worthwhile future aspirations: "What do I do for the rest of my life? Am I going to stay in here forever, just sleep on a mat?" Carmen acknowledged that shelter routines would prevent her from "moving forwards" in her life in a different way: "You can't just wait in line [for a shelter bed or mat] and get kicked out at like six in the morning and have to sleep next to some smelly dude and eat shitty food. I actually need to be somewhat functional." Having to stick to the inflexible times that shelters have for waking, showering, eating, and so forth would have also made it harder for Carmen to get to appointments than if she were couch

surfing: When staying with friends, “you can sleep in until ten, if you have to go to your appointment at eleven.”

Moreover, Carmen pointed out that since there can be three hour line ups to get into shelters and no guarantee that you will get a space, “You’re better off asking your friends first and cleaning their house so you can stay on their couch.” Despite the fact that she was often exploited by her friends when she couch surfed with them (they asked for more money, marijuana, or labour from her than was warranted for staying on a couch), Carmen much preferred this situation, or even sleeping outside, to the prospect of lining up for a shelter spot. However, Maria’s frequent experiences of exploitation when staying with family and friends made her less sure of the benefits of couch surfing: “I’ve paid my friends. I’ve lived with my family. I’ve tried... Every single person I’ve lived with has done something to me, hurt me, kicked me out, stomped off [mad]...cos’ the moment you give them money, everything’s okay for a couple days, but you are gonna have to go after that.”

### **Some Final Observations About Housing Supports**

Thus far I have discussed the youths’ experiences with the various forms of adult accommodation that they utilized in making their transition to independent living (e.g., Supported Independent Living (SIL), shelters). I have also discussed their experiences with staff in group homes, especially when they were younger adolescents and children. However, I have not yet touched upon the short-term accommodation, which resembled a cross between a shelter setting and a group home setting, which Maria and Tamara floated in and out of, from mid-adolescence onward. I will refer to these sites as transitional safe houses (or just safe houses), as they provided a somewhat more stable form of accommodation than an emergency shelter, but were still far from what could be considered to be a long-term housing solution for adolescents in the child welfare system. For example, the young women could obtain a bed in a safe house that was understood to be theirs only until they could find a

more permanent placement, usually in SIL. However, as mentioned previously, the youths had to qualify for SIL by demonstrating that they were mature enough to handle such a placement. Child welfare caseworkers often assessed youths' maturity levels by observing their conduct in safe houses. However, many of the youths who are housed in safe houses often fail to pass the safe house's first test of their maturity, which is to hold onto their bed for some time by being compliant with the house's rules of conduct (e.g., abiding by curfews, not using drugs and alcohol). Three violations of these rules would mean that youths would lose their beds, rendering them either homeless or at-risk of ending up in worse accommodations, such as a very poorly run group home for high risk youth in the inner city.

Maria felt that such policies were unreasonable and unjust. In discussing her vision of the perfect placement for youth like herself, she emphasized that workers had to be able to give youths several chances as opposed to throwing them out over a few mistakes. She insisted that she would never throw someone out of her ideal home, which she fantasized about creating for other youth, just because they "messed up", the reason being that in her ideal home, the youth would be treated as if they were her own kids. Recall that Maria envisioned her ideal placement as being one in which workers and youth would behave like family members with one another, which to her implied a non-coercive setting in which the youths' feelings of belonging and liking of their workers secured their motivation to cooperate with staff.

When problem behaviours could not be prevented in young people, Maria felt that the underlying reasons for such behaviour should be addressed as opposed to punishing the youth. She pointed out that kicking youths out because of drug and alcohol use would not be acceptable to her, because "drugs use could be their issues." According to Maria, such youth should be viewed compassionately and helped with their problems rather than be punished, because you "wouldn't want your brothers and sisters to fall into that [i.e., addictions]." She understood other problem behaviours as

often reflecting a lack of opportunity for skills development, as had been her own case with qualifying for Supported Independent Living (SIL). She thus envisioned having three connected houses for adolescents: one primarily concerned with detoxifying from drugs and alcohol, another concerned with helping youth develop the skills needed for SIL (which she called a “transitional” home), and the last being something very close to the SIL placements that she had experienced. Maria suggested that if, for example, her version of SIL “doesn’t work out” for a given youth, “they can go back to transitional and work their way up again.”

In contrast, Tamara was more accepting of the aforementioned three strikes rule because she could not see how the system could otherwise manage the great number of youths that required beds. She commented that safe house workers had to “kick you out when you mess up and don’t allow you back to fix whatever problem it was because there are so many people waiting to take your spot.” Though she acknowledged that some youths are so messed up that they do not know how to begin to get back into a safe house after their three rule violations, the upside is that most youths could get back into a bed relatively quickly, because the residents are “all drug addicts...so they will fuck up, so it doesn’t take that long” for another bed to become available. Although Tamara acknowledged that this revolving door situation was far from ideal, she thought that the three rules policy did act as an effective deterrent for most young people who did not have another place to stay: “All those people have been homeless and we all know it sucks.” Tamara said that she would only risk her bed at the safe house when she knew that she could not stay at a friend’s place. Also she feared leaving her belongings there, as all her stuff could get lost or stolen if she were not there too. Once again, it appears that the difference between Tamara’s and Maria’s views of the safe house reflected their differences in knowledge and skill levels (i.e., comprehension of system demands and how to respond effectively) and access to resources (i.e., having other places to stay). Their contrasting views also reflect their different

levels of emotional tolerance for being kicked out of placements, in view of their different histories with respect to being rejected in foster homes and group homes.

Maria and Tamara were, however, united in some of their criticisms of safe houses. For example, they agreed on how being congregated with other high risk peers had impacted them. While many of the youths in safe houses were clearly not ready for Supported Independent Living (SIL), both young women acknowledged that many such young people appeared to be making a choice, at some level, to keep circling in and out of safe houses, because of the “dramas” that would transpire among the group of itinerant youths that tended to know each other, not only from the safe houses, but also through their street connections. As Tamara explained, if you were a part of this population of youths, “You are not there for stability. [If that were the case], you would be doing good in the [safe house] and then they would move you to SIL.” “Those people [in the safe house] aren’t trying to clean up. They’re trying to get high, have a place to shit, shower, and go to bed.” Being with such people, Tamara suggested, leads you to want to party: “You could make a graph and see where all the problems are resulting from”, if you knew which people a youth liked to party with. Both Tamara and Maria believed that their progress in moving to SIL was obstructed by being constantly subjected to the party atmosphere of the safe houses. (Being kicked out of safe houses also put you at risk of having to live in a dedicated group home for exclusively high risk youth, which Tamara described as “dirty” with “people having sex everywhere.” In this “ghetto” (ie., run-down) placement, there was “no food, no cooking for us, everyone sweating [and] gross couches.”)

In contrast, Carmen did not have access to safe houses as an adolescent. Lending support to Maria’s and Tamara’s views of the effects that living with ‘bad’ peers had had on them, Carmen credited her lack of child welfare support as being part of the reason that she did not compromise her morals to the extent that she had observed other youths do: “It might even be just being near like other kids who

were in social services too and they're like, "Oh well, this is the way it is. This is how you have to live and then they get it in their head? [to betray their values] Whereas I was all on my own. It was just me taking care of myself...I was more of a lone wolf and I wasn't forced into the ideas of a fucked up pack, I guess."

Despite feeling that she had preserved her moral integrity relative to many of her peers, Carmen nevertheless admitted to having 'groomed' herself to use and deal drugs, by watching those around her, in much the same way that Tamara suggested that she had groomed herself for getting involved in prostitution by watching her older, riskier peers. Carmen said that she had started using drugs because of her friends. Though she would receive 'free' drugs from her drug dealing boyfriends as Tamara also did, she eventually started selling drugs in order to get money to feed her growing drug habit. She learned how to drug deal by observing her dealer boyfriends and by helping them to do their deals. Carmen commented that every boyfriend that she had after she had started using methamphetamine was a drug dealer, "so [she] was just swallowed alive by drug culture pretty much." She remarked that she "didn't know anything else by the time [she] hit eighteen." This description of being pulled into and then immersed into a peer 'drug culture', of course, also captures the experiences of Tamara, Jay, and Maria.

The youths' observations of the power that their peer group had on their risk taking is consistent with a social neuroscience perspective on adolescent/young adult risk taking (Steinberg). Steinberg (2008) observed that most adolescent risk-taking occurs in the presence of peers, because peer approval constitutes one of the most salient rewards for adolescents, thus spurring the release of dopamine in adolescent brains. Oxytocin, another neurotransmitter associated with social bonding, is also released in the presence of peers (Steinberg). Together, this neuronal activity, in conjunction with the still immature development of other brain regions important to impulse control (e.g., prefrontal cortex) and a lack of efficient "communication" between different brain regions that support emotional

regulation and planning (e.g., pre-frontal cortex with limbic system) renders a young person especially vulnerable to risk taking in the presence of peers (Steinberg)<sup>96</sup>. It has also been observed that social influences such as incarceration predict adult crime more strongly than any biological factors such as dopamine (Hart, 2013) It may be that while all young people may be predisposed to greater risk taking, especially while amongst their peers, due to normative social and neurological developments, high risk youths' immersion in drug cultures on the street and in 'safe houses' among other congregated settings for high risk youth (e.g., residential treatment, group homes, young offender centre) are likely stronger factors in maintaining their involvement with criminal risk behaviour as young adults.

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<sup>96</sup> Some have even suggested that the immature adolescent brain and its increased sensitivity to peer rewards may account for why youth seem to be more susceptible to the influence of "imaginary audiences" (Steinberg, 2008) of their peers relative to other age groups.

### Postscript

As a prelude to discussing the implications of the study results in the concluding chapter, I provide a brief description here of how each of the youth participants seemed to be faring at the end of my interviews with them.

#### Jay

When I finished my interviews with him, Jay was working at a retail job, selling cell phones at a mall kiosk. He continued to remain sober and had started dating a young woman, who was also a recovering addict, and who seemed as committed to sobriety as he was. Just a few months earlier, Jay had enrolled in university, but he decided to quit shortly after receiving his first mid-term results. Jay found the transition from high school level courses to first year university courses to be extremely challenging. Despite exerting considerable effort in his university courses and using the same learning strategies that had enabled him to receive honors standing in his compressed high school program, Jay became very discouraged by his early performance at university. His workers from his ex-offender re-entry program reinforced his decision to withdraw from his courses rather than risk failure, as the latter may pose a greater obstacle to his ever returning to post-secondary studies. Jay did not speak to advisors at the university, before making his decision to withdraw. From my experience with conducting a separate research study with some of the workers who had been employed in Jay's program, I was aware that few such workers had themselves completed a university degree. It is therefore possible that Jay may not have received adequate educational counselling prior to making his decision to drop out of university. Nevertheless, Jay resisted seeing his dropping out as a failure, choosing instead to reframe his situation by regarding his high school graduation as his fulfillment of the bigger dream that he had always harbored for himself (i.e., a university degree would be icing on the cake, but was not as essential for entry into mainstream jobs as his high school diploma was.)

In spite of his university problems, Jay was, for the most part, continuing to succeed in living independently, although as previously mentioned, he had some difficulties with his employer as a result of covering for his co-workers when they had left work early. Though he still struggled with his feelings about his family, particularly his mother, he continued to cope with his family problems mostly by excluding family members from his life. He continued to lack sober friends other than his girlfriend. Despite the persistence of these emotional and social challenges, Jay appeared poised to continue to 'build on his successes', as he would put it. He was contemplating becoming trained as an addictions counsellor or as a real estate agent. Although Jay was aware that he needed a considerable amount of money to pursue these kinds of training programs and that having a criminal record was going to continue to limit his ability to find better paying work, he had already set his sights on figuring out he could ameliorate some of the employment obstacles that were posed by his arrest history (e.g., his high speed chases), such as finding out how he could go about getting another chance at a clean driver's abstract.

### **Tamara**

At the end of my interviews with Tamara, she was completing her final semester at the same compressed high school program that Jay had attended. (Recall that Tamara had finally worked up the confidence to transfer to this much more structured and teacher-led program, from the alternative high school that she had been attending.) Although Tamara was often stressed about her studies (mostly due to her becoming distracted by some of her 'bad' peers that she still associated with), she only occasionally relapsed in her use of drugs like methamphetamine. However, she remained vulnerable to 'hooking up' with former boyfriends and other 'risky' men. Tamara also continued her relationship with her sugar daddy, partly for the economic benefits but also for his emotional support and guidance. Because she often lacked her mother's support and no longer had a child welfare worker, she

sometimes turned to her sugar daddy for practical advice on how to set up her Internet service, for example, and for his encouragement of her efforts to complete school.

In addition to going to school, Tamara was working part-time at a liquor store and at a tanning salon. While it appeared that she got along reasonably well with her co-workers, she nevertheless continued to lack mainstream friends to spend time with outside of work. Consequently, she continued to feel lonely, which, as mentioned previously, had sometimes driven her to seek out former abusive boyfriends, against her better judgment. As she faced an entire summer ahead of her where she would lack opportunities to meet new people until she started her post-secondary studies, Tamara was struggling with inhibiting her desire to spend time with people whom she knew would cause trouble for her. She also continued to struggle with her preoccupied anger towards her mother. Tamara appeared poised to continue her pathway to mainstream integration via her pursuit of post-secondary education, provided that she did not become seriously derailed by her emotional and social challenges. Her challenges in these domains clearly still posed much greater obstacles for her than Jay's social and emotional challenges did for him, likely due to the additional traumatic influences in her life that Jay lacked (i.e., multiple instances of physical assaults and sexual assaults at the hands of family members and intimate partners).

### **Carmen**

Near the end of our interviews, Carmen had moved into an apartment with her best girlfriend. Though she saw this move as being the answer to many of her problems that came from her living with her boyfriend (e.g., his abuse, his pressuring her to get a job so she can pay more of the rent), her relationship with her girlfriend had started to sour within a short period of their living together. As her girlfriend was part of the same circle of friends that she shared with her boyfriend, Carmen became paranoid that her whole peer group (whom she regarded as her new and improved street family) was

turning against her, as a result of her conflict with her roommate. Terrified of being abandoned by her street family and, in particular, her boyfriend, Carmen attempted suicide following a particularly bad fight with her roommate.

Following this suicide attempt, a hospital psychiatrist referred her to a therapy group for dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) (a therapy commonly used with those who have been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder). However, Carmen appeared to resist the idea of group therapy, especially since she felt the psychiatrist had acted in a dehumanizing way with her. From Carmen's perspective, she felt that her concerns about her relationships were being dismissed by the psychiatrist because the psychiatrist saw Carmen's problems as being due to her having a disorder, based solely on the facts that Carmen had cut herself and had made multiple suicide attempts. Carmen was frustrated that the psychiatrist seemed unconcerned with talking to her about what drove her to engage in self-destructive behaviours.

Carmen was thus still having serious problems with perceived abandonment, emotional regulation, and with being receptive to helping professionals, all of which were likely connected with her preoccupied-insecure attachment classification. Moreover, recall that in Carmen's childhood experience of counselling, she had similarly felt that she had not received adequate help, given that her mother refused to attend her sessions with her. Subsequently, she had been placed in a group therapy context with other young people that she had also felt had done nothing to help her, other than allowing her to see how the other youths were, like her, being told to take psychotropic medication, as opposed to being listened to and helped with their family problems. It is easy to see how Carmen's distrust of her more recent referral to DBT group therapy was likely rooted in this past experience that made her feel that she had just been lumped together with a bunch of other 'crazy' kids, while the real family roots of her psychological problems were dismissed.

At the end of our interviews, Carmen began attending the high school upgrading program that she had struggled to obtain funding for from welfare (Income Support). Although being a student made her receipt of welfare more secure than when she was just seen as being temporarily unable to work due to medical reasons, she still continued to struggle to pay for her basic needs. Consequently, Carmen continued to hope that she may be eligible for permanent disability benefits. She was continuing to await an appointment with a gastroenterologist regarding her digestive problems, which might help her to support her application for such benefits. Meanwhile Carmen often cited her digestive problems as the reason for her failure to attend her classes regularly. Her frequent absences placed her at risk for failing her classes and for being pushed off of welfare, as regular attendance is a condition of receiving government assistance for the purpose of improving one's education.

Carmen's pathway to mainstream integration thus appeared to be more complicated than either Tamara's or Jay's, most likely because Carmen had not had the opportunity to develop sufficient work and life skills (e.g., keeping structured routines, limiting/eliminating her use of marijuana), and also because she lacked an attendant sense of efficacy regarding schooling or work that could have helped her to cope better with her second attempt at upgrading. Carmen was also not able to successfully advocate for herself with support staff at her college, to access the supports for her learning disability that she was legally entitled to, such as tutoring. Given these obstacles as well as the continuing impact of trauma on her behaviour, I expect that Carmen would continue to have much more difficulty in succeeding in her transition to the mainstream, than either Tamara or Jay, despite some of the 'good' childhood resources that she has drawn upon to help her cope with her problems to date. The absence of consistent, responsible adult support during her adolescence and her young adult years, even relative to the limited support of this kind that Jay and Tamara received, also compromised her chances of making a successful mainstream transition in the near future.

**Maria**

Near the end of our interviews, it appeared as though Maria might finally be living in her first stable residence in many years. She had been living for a few months, by herself, in her very own bachelor apartment, which she paid for with her disability benefits. At the time, there did not appear to be any factors that might put her at risk of losing this apartment, such as letting her family members stay over or depending on other high risk youth for their share of the rent. Recall that Maria's trauma history had caused her to feel that she needed to live with others. It may be that her fears of living alone had diminished on account of the fact that she now had a steady boyfriend, with whom she was spending a considerable amount of time. Maria's new boyfriend also had a moderating effect on her drug and alcohol consumption; the couple appeared to favour going out to eat or to the movies and other sober activities, as opposed to drinking being their only source of fun. The fact that Maria's boyfriend had been gainfully employed for a number of years (he was also several years older than her), enabled them to participate in these alternatives to drinking. It also enabled them to lessen their contact with friends and family members, whom they would have otherwise been drinking with. As mentioned previously, many of these friends and family members had longstanding problems with addictions, which frequently brought them (and any surrounding company) to the attention of police.

Despite the greater stability that Maria's boyfriend had recently brought to her life, she remained vulnerable to deviating from her intention to become the 'good' mainstream girl that went to school and/or went to work. Maria's learning challenges and her failure to pay her student loan for the office assistant training that she failed to complete closed off the option of upgrading and most other forms of higher education as being a pathway to mainstream integration. Attaining a low or no skill entry level job in most industries was also difficult for Maria, due to the limited job market for young people in general, and particularly aboriginal youth who lack a high school diploma. By the end of our

interview period, Maria had also become convicted of fraud for selling a friend's stolen goods to a pawn shop. (Maria did not know the goods had been stolen.) Despite this being her first offense as an adult (and a relatively minor one at that), Maria received a criminal record, because her extensive youth record was taken into account in her sentencing. In contrast to Jay, who developed the capabilities to successfully pursue education and employment, which gave him a chance at circumventing the barriers imposed by his criminal record, Maria's criminal record appeared to cement the already highly unlikely prospect of her ever becoming employed.

Given the likelihood of her having to continue to depend on paltry disability benefits, Maria appeared destined to have to rely for extra money on others like her boyfriend, which kept her at risk of being exploited or abused. Like the other youths, Maria also continued to lack sober friends, which put her at risk of returning to 'bad' company, should she and her boyfriend break up. Maria also often felt obliged to help her siblings and other high risk friends when they were struggling, often by allowing her to stay with her, which put her own ability to maintain her accommodation and stay free from the attention of police at risk.

As with the other youths, and particularly the other young women, Maria was also vulnerable to continuing to experience problems with her mental health, perhaps especially so, given her unresolved/preoccupied insecure classification. As mentioned previously, Maria frequently brought up the subject of her childhood sexual abuse and would express a desire to talk about her involvement with prostitution (although she would often then change the subject). Her mood was often highly labile, although, by her own admission, she was no longer as prone to violent outbursts as she had been in the past. (As mentioned previously, both Maria and Tamara indicated that their risk of being criminally charged with assault as an adult had caused them to temper such behaviour.) Fortunately, Maria had started seeing a psychologist, near the end of our interviews. With Maria's economic and social

challenges compounding her ongoing significant level of stress from unresolved trauma and grief, I considered her to be the most at-risk of straying from her goal of developing a mainstream identity.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion and Implications

The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.

James Baldwin (1998, p.678)

Between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give a sense to that life, the empty space, the gap, is enormous. The desolation lies, lies *there*, not in the facts.

John Berger (2001, p.176)

Entitlement ... is a matter of feeling like we rather than they. You think you have a right to things, a place in the world, and it is so intrinsically a part of you that you cannot imagine people like me, people who seem to live in your world but don't have it.

Dorothy Allison (1994, p.14)

In the preceding postscript to the results discussion, I enumerated the barriers (e.g., structural, mental health) that each of the youth participants appeared to continue to struggle with at the end of our interviews. However, in the postscript, I did not speak specifically about how some of these barriers (e.g., preoccupied attachment, skills deficits, trauma) might be expected to continue to affect the youths in relation to compromising the development of their personal agencies, particularly their perceived capacities to stay committed to, and persevere with, their plans for developing viable mainstream identities. Though I have commented about those factors that appeared to influence agency development throughout the results discussion, I will summarize the main factors here, and discuss how the youths may have been differentially affected by some of these factors, which, in turn, may affect their future ability to accept, and make good use of, the dominant cultural ideology of possessing free

will and personal responsibility, with respect to pursuing their mainstream goals. When the youths' limited opportunities for developing agency and the persistence of formidable structural barriers to mainstream success are juxtaposed with the dominant ideology of free will and personal responsibility for one's choices, the necessity of strategies that address both agency and structure become apparent. Unfortunately, the difficulties in attending to both structure and agency simultaneously, particularly at the level of the individual youths, are made clear as well.

The following list summarizes the main factors which were seen to limit the development of personal agency in the high risk youth of this study.

- 1) Difficulties in developing a growing sense of competence and/or mastery of skills related to academic, social, and vocational domains, due to a lack of adequate parental stimulation, educational opportunity and/or protection from abuse and neglect. This was true for all of the youths, beginning in at least their preschool years. Given their insecure attachments, the very foundation for their agency and identity development (i.e. the formation of basic trust with one's caregiver) likely became unstable during their infancies.
- 2) For the two youth with confirmed learning/cognitive difficulties (Carmen and Maria), the aforementioned problem of developing self-confidence from the acquisition of valuable skills became even trickier as they reached adolescence/young adulthood. Although Carmen did not admit, as openly as Maria did, to having doubts about ever succeeding in jobs or schooling, it seemed likely that the fears that she did admit to, in regards to succeeding at high school upgrading, were well founded given her learning disability. As such, her interest in obtaining more money through permanent disability benefits (as opposed to continuing to pursue the job/schooling routes to the mainstream that friends and family were pushing on her) made sense: Not only could schooling *not* provide her with a pathway out of street life, but given the

difficulty that any youth, especially one with very limited social capital and low job and social skills, would have in landing a job, relying on benefits likely appeared to Carmen to be her only viable alternative to returning to crime. Given the limited youth labour market, particularly for those who lack a high school diploma, Carmen's and Maria's artistic pursuits constituted the only sources from which they could develop feelings of efficacy. However, it was difficult for them to sustain beliefs in their talents in areas such as painting and drama, without experiencing monetary success from them.

3) Unresolved trauma, be it attachment related or related to intimate partner violence and/or sexual assaults (in the case of the young women), caused the youths' past histories to exert a gravitational pull on their present behaviour, that was often experienced as reflexive (e.g., why Maria was not sure what the 'limit' was inside of her that caused her to react aggressively to others, often without apparent provocation). The young women's suicide attempts have similarly been automatic responses to situations that, when viewed through the lenses of their past experiences, were seen as being sure to result in yet another experience of abandonment for them. This inability to resist the pull of unconscious conditioning from their past experiences obviously obstructed youths' conscious efforts to persist with 'good' (i.e., socially acceptable) behaviour towards the development of a mainstream identity.

4) Despite often being unconsciously pulled to engage in 'bad' behaviour (or perhaps because of this), the youths wrestled with their moral identities, as a result of having been victimized themselves and/or as a result of the harms that they had perpetrated onto others. At times the youths were sure that they had been caught up in circumstances that drove them to engage in antisocial behaviour -- circumstances such as poverty, being congregated with other delinquent or deviant youths, or lacking other ways of coping with their problems than by using drugs, for

example. Though the identification of such circumstances protected them from seeing themselves as fundamentally bad, other factors such as feeling as though they had been born into a 'bad' family or being unable to resist doing crime to acquire things that they did not strictly need for their survival caused them to question their fundamental moral characters. Repeated instances of maternal rejection also seemed to lead some youth to feel profoundly "lost" regarding their identities, which resulted in extreme risk-taking and apathy about anyone else's welfare including their own (i.e., an override of what their consciences might have otherwise prohibited them from). Moreover, though the youths all seemed to realize that their negative street identities were untenable for them in the long-term, the functions such identities fulfilled, such as providing them with peer attention, status, a vocation, and a sense of belonging somewhere, were hard for them to relinquish in the absence of being able to locate effective substitutes for those identity functions in mainstream life.

5) For the two aboriginal youth (Jay and Maria), there was the added complication of being surrounded by the ennui (Wagamese, 2013) of street-involved family members and friends, which likely influenced their view of themselves as being destined for a 'bad' life, by virtue of having been born into their respective families/communities. The paucity of models that could be pointed to for having successfully escaped the many intersecting and mutually reinforcing problems within many disadvantaged aboriginal communities likely suggested to Jay and Maria that an attitude of ennui was the only response that could be seen as warranted in their situations. As mentioned previously, the shared attitude of ennui within a community could convince youths that trying to better one's self was pointless. Ennui thus functioned to help them protect their self-esteem if they failed to acquire the abilities and confidence to pursue

their dreams for themselves, as when Maria would decline to audition for acting roles or when Jay questioned whether becoming sober would really be worth the effort for him.

These five factors are conditions that separately, as well as taken together, appear to contribute to what Rollo May (as cited in Judith, 2004) described as “disordered will”(p.179). May suggests that those with a disordered will appear to experience a state of “feelinglessness, the despairing possibility that nothing matters, a condition very close to apathy” (p.179). Will is “the capacity to organize one’s self so that movement in a certain direction or toward a certain goal may take place” (May, as cited in Judith, p.179). Desire and longing fuels the will, which points us toward the future: “It is through the will that we bring the future into reality”(Judith, 2004, p.179). Disordered will seems to encompass the idea of ennui (which, as I have just said, promoted doing nothing towards one’s goals, by rendering one’s desire and longing for a different kind of life to be pointless) and encompasses the reckless indifference which often accompanied the youths’ identity confusion (which paved the way for extreme risk taking and self-destructive behaviours that were obviously incommensurate with mainstream dreams and ambitions).

Given the deficiencies of desire and longing that lie at the heart of a disordered will, it is not surprising that depression (a disorder characterized by constrictions in motivation, attention/concentration, emotions, physical energy, and the ability to derive pleasure) (Beck & Alford, 2009) is so commonly diagnosed within the high risk youth population. In fact Rollo May (1969) once defined depression as the “inability to see or construct a future” (p.243). Given the conscious and unconscious distress that accompanies maternal rejection, which can be so severe that it disrupts one’s fundamental sense of one’s self, including the sense of having an internal moral compass or conscience or inner core to the self that guide’s one’s behaviour, it is not surprising that borderline personality disorder (a disorder characterized by impulsivity, identity confusion, unstable relationships, emotional

dysregulation, and feelings of emptiness) (Kernberg, 2012) is also commonly diagnosed within this population.

The risks posed by high risk youth to the rest of society result from factors, such as those mentioned above, that conspire against their efforts to do anything constructive within the larger society (thus maintaining their marginal existence as criminals and drug users, always vulnerable to homelessness) and factors that conspire against their *feelings* of inclusion at any level of social unit, beginning with their families and continuing in institutions such as schools and workplaces, as well as the larger, mainstream community. Even their acceptance within subcultural communities such as their street families and that of their co-residents and staff within the range of temporary accommodations often occupied by adolescents within the child welfare system (e.g., group homes, shelters, independent living, young offenders centre) proved to be tenuous: trust, intimacy, and reciprocal caring like the kind that the youths felt should have happened within their own families were missing in both the street families that they became absorbed into and the institutional residences where youth workers and child welfare caseworkers were supposed to function as surrogate parents in facilitating their transitions to adult independence.

High risk youth are thus excluded from most avenues of social participation and belonging (let alone just the mainstream). Such circumstances have been seen to foment mass forms of social disruption and chaos, such as rioting, looting, violent protesting, and even acts of terrorism, where the numbers of youth afflicted by such comprehensive social exclusion are much greater (e.g., the 2014 anti-police protests/looting done by poor African American youth, the 2011 riots in the United Kingdom from young people excluded from employment, and the 2005 riots in France from youth of North African origin over racism and discrimination). When the numbers of youth afflicted by exclusion are smaller, such as in most Canadian cities, it would appear that society is mostly affected through crime (e.g. drug

selling, property theft, fraud) and the need to provide social assistance through welfare, social housing, increased health care, and incarceration<sup>97</sup>.

As the results of this study suggest, a high risk youth's difficulties in getting on a pathway to ultimately becoming a law abiding, competitively employed worker in mainstream society begins very early in her childhood. Neglect and abuse persist from biological parents well after children are removed from their homes, voluntarily or otherwise.<sup>98</sup> The rejecting effects of such maltreatment and inadequate opportunities to build skills and efficacy is then compounded through further rejection and other forms of inadequate care/stimulation in foster homes, kinship care, group home care, residential treatment centres, and Supported Independent Living. At the same time, belonging is experienced, albeit imperfectly, in street families, the young offender centre, and sometimes in biological families when a child effectively 'proves' her fidelity to her 'bad' family through her own engagement in antisocial behaviour, as in the cases of Maria and Jay.

Marginalization thus becomes cemented through a process of being pushed out of normative environments such as family homes and schools, followed by a failure to receive adequate compensatory care through child welfare and other institutional supports, and simultaneously feeling the 'pull' of deviant social contexts such as the streets and offender centres. Add in the aforementioned factors that contribute to a "disordered will" (i.e., unresolved trauma/attachment difficulties, ennui, and so forth), despite inclinations to be a 'good' person, and you have an explanation for why 'resilience' is so improbable for so many high risk youth.

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<sup>97</sup> Extreme acts of violence, such as mass murder, have also been linked to young people who feel extremely disconnected from society, such as school shooters and domestic terrorists (Langman, 2010).

<sup>98</sup> This study as well as other literature (Beam, 2013) acknowledges that youths continue to return to their biological parents even after they may have spent years in foster care, or left their families of their own volition due to abuse and neglect.

Even if they are counted as having been resilient according to such typical metrics as enrollment in post-secondary education and/or having a job, the present study's account of high risk youths' challenges provides insight into why 'resilient' poor youth have been seen to demonstrate worse mental and physical health outcomes than their less successful poor peers (Miller, Chen, & Brody, 2014). The efforts that the youths in this study expended in trying to succeed in jobs and schooling, amidst all of their structural barriers and personal stressors, already were resulting in serious mental health consequences and might be expected to eventually exact a heavy physical toll on them, if they managed to keep their best efforts up consistently (which, of course, none of them were able to do because of the aforementioned constraints on their efficacy/agency development, including Jay, who despite his very best study efforts, was still unable to be successful in his first two months at university). The poor health outcomes observed for resilient, poor black and Hispanic students in the United States have been attributed to "John Henryism" (Miller et al., 2014): In the nineteenth century, John Henry was a black railroad worker who, in a steel-driving contest, beat out a steam powered drill, but then subsequently died from exhaustion. The term John Henryism has thus come to refer to the greater susceptibility of "goal-oriented, success-minded people [who] strive ceaselessly in the absence of adequate support and resources" (Hamblin, 2015, para. 3) to working themselves to death.

The poor health outcomes of the resilient, minority youth may also be attributed to the effects of social isolation. As mentioned previously, Miller, Chen & Brody (2014) suggest that such youth (like some of the much less resilient youth in this study) may perceive that they do not have much in common with their fellow post-secondary students and may face racism and discrimination. In chapter two, I pointed out that loneliness is "on par with high blood pressure, obesity, lack of exercise, or smoking as a risk factor for illness and early death" (Cacioppo, 2008, p.93). The diminishment of executive control and/or lowering of self-esteem that accompanies loneliness may be responsible for

the neglect of good health habits. Other emotional needs for disadvantaged youth also continue to resurface. Speaking specifically of former foster youth, Beam (2010) suggests that “even when kids do age out and do well, even when they can conjure the American dream of college, they still regress. They still have to contend with lost parts of their childhood” (p.213). This may manifest in behaviours suggestive of emotional dysregulation, such as low frustration tolerance or extreme dependence and clinginess that, as mentioned previously, are often the result of early problems with attachment and trauma.

### **The Case for Counselling about Structural Limitations**

The above discussion of what might be happening to the health of a very small minority of disadvantaged youth who manage to make it to university and persist in their studies or to persist in non-criminal occupations suggests that such typical metrics of resilience really need to be reconsidered. Those disadvantaged youth with the most determination to succeed and with the most unyielding of work ethics (in other words, youth with very strong agency as opposed to those with disordered wills) severely compromise their health to compensate for having been deprived, throughout their lives, of the many more resources and opportunities to succeed (e.g., better schools and communities, tutors, afterschool programs, parents who are not struggling economically, peers who are academically inclined and can interact effectively in mainstream society) that are the birthright of their more economically advantaged peers. If a small minority of disadvantaged youth must kill themselves through their hard work for a chance to become upwardly mobile, then this implies that the high risk youth that I have been discussing who lack both the same structural resources and opportunities as well as lack psychosocial opportunities for agency development, need to be evaluated according to completely different yardsticks.

Instead of lauding resilience as measured by job attainment and school enrollment, high risk youths deserve to be lauded just for their success in surviving each day (psychologically, materially, and socially), and for their efforts to continue to try to become the good people that they wish to become (or resurrect, as they may see it). They deserve to *understand* why their daily survival and drive to live by their personal moral imperatives should be regarded as exceptional accomplishments, in and of themselves, in view of all they have been through. Put another way, they deserve to understand the myriad ways in which they have been disadvantaged and victimized and how such experiences may have continued to affect them. Rather than reinforcing a sense of themselves as powerless, such understanding could play a crucial role in empowering them to resist the many social forces that persist in working against their efforts to become upstanding young people. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss further why I see it as important that high risk youth develop such structural understandings of their life situations, in addition to receiving structural supports to improve their sense of agency, using examples from the youth participants' lives.

When I asked Jay once about what role, if any, did he see for personal responsibility in the struggles that high risk youth experience, he replied that the youth are unable to assume responsibility for their actions until they feel some confidence in their own abilities to be successful at something other than crime. Until he himself began to feel some efficacy with regards to sobriety and employment, for example, he could not really aspire to take responsibility for his 'bad' behaviour: his sense of helplessness precluded being able to do things like make amends for his past behaviour and to resolve to behave differently in the future. After all, it was not like he had any non-criminal skills that he could rely on that would enable him to resist doing the 'bad' things that he had been doing, and which he relied on for his survival.

Such helplessness fit with Jay's then deterministic way of seeing his future (i.e., the 'bad' life that he was destined for, as a result of having been born into his 'bad' family). Though his process of skill building, that he began with the support of his ex-offender re-entry program, enabled him to begin to entertain different dreams about his future, Jay still had to do battle with the longstanding feelings of ennui within him and that which surrounded him from family and friends. Still mired in their own problems with addictions and poverty, among other sources of helplessness, Jay's family and friends often refused to support Jay emotionally, as he began to make serious changes in his life. Added to this were the challenges to reforming his life that were posed by his criminal record and lack of money. Jay's decision to forge a pathway to a mainstream identity thus represented an uphill battle against all the forces in his then current environment and his past history that conspired to keep him where he was.

In contrast, although Tamara also was faced with developing skills and efficacy, after not being required to live a structured, accountable life for several years, her environments, both at the time of her decision to reform herself and historically, did not comprehensively work against her efforts to get herself back on a mainstream path. As discussed in chapter two, Tamara and Carmen had many 'good' past and present resources (e.g., upstanding family members, some sober friends, middle class neighborhoods, participation in skill-building, extra-curricular activities) that enabled them to see themselves as making a return to their past 'good' selves, as opposed to having to chart new territory, as Jay and Maria were more likely to have felt. In chapters two and three, I discussed how Tamara understood her 'bad' behaviour to be largely a reflection of her having made bad choices with respect to how she coped with family difficulties that she had always believed would be temporary<sup>99</sup>. In retrospect, having been pushed out of her mother's house at fifteen and having been housed with deviant peers

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<sup>99</sup> in contrast to Jay's and Maria's family problems, which extended back several generations and were expected to continue to affect them, as long as they lived.

had influenced her to choose drugs and crime as ways of coping with the pain of her mother's rejection. The idea of having chosen 'bad' coping strategies implies recognition of both structural influences on her behaviour (being segregated with older, higher risk peers, while away from her family for the first time, while still very immature) as well as personal responsibility in the idea of having made a conscious decision to engage with risky behaviours. Thus Tamara did not see herself as ever having been completely trapped by her circumstances – the notion that she had chosen her way into difficulties had later made it possible for her to conceive of choosing a way out of such difficulties, by becoming sober, for example. It makes sense that she had never felt as helpless as Jay, presumably because of her more advantaged background which had provided her with regular opportunities to feel competent in school, part-time work, and sports, well before she got into her troubles in street life.

It appeared that being primed for greater agency development than perhaps Jay or Maria had also made it easier for Tamara to make constructive use of the dominant cultural ideology of free will and personal responsibility for one's choices. Recall that Tamara was able to become very receptive to her former boyfriend's views that her brain was too powerful to become a "slave" to any substance, which negated Tamara's insistence at the time that she was too addicted to drugs to be able to give them up. Tamara's then boyfriend reinforced Tamara's mother's view that people use the idea of being addicted as a crutch, one of many beliefs that reflected her mother's unwavering adherence to an ideology of personal responsibility for one's actions.

Clearly Tamara's mother's views and her boyfriend's views were consistent with the dominant cultural narrative that in exercising our human capacity for free will, we must be prepared to be held to account for any consequences that ensue from those choices. Tamara apparently became an enthusiastic convert to the doctrine of free will after sensing that her boyfriend's beliefs about drug abuse resonated more with her own family (and perhaps social class) background. Her background

differed from the typically impoverished backgrounds of most other high risk youths that she knew. Many high risk youth also had backgrounds comprised of much more severe and chronic childhood abuse than she had ever experienced. Her realization of these 'true' social differences fuelled her embrace of what she had then referred to as her boyfriend's "philosophy." Tamara's adoption of this philosophy, in turn, resulted in her ability to kick her drug habit, mostly through her own volition.

Tamara's story explains why youths like herself and Carmen may, at least sometimes, be in a better position to make use of the dominant cultural ideology of free will, towards claiming or reclaiming mainstream identities for themselves. Recall that Carmen similarly credited her ability to give up drugs to her own strong willpower, and maintained that she was too strong in her "morals" to submit to prostitution to address her money problems. Such personal attributes or resources clearly enabled her to feel that she could choose sobriety whenever she desired, and choose to resist becoming "lost", through being faithful to her inner moral compass. Given the congruence of Carmen's feeling that she had the power to make such life-altering choices with the dominant narrative of free will, it could be expected that Carmen might be similarly receptive to dominant cultural messages that she could simply choose to make the personal changes that she needed to in order to become fully integrated into the mainstream. With respect to the issue of becoming sober or maintaining her moral integrity, Carmen's personal sense of her own agency would clearly have been reinforced by the dominant mainstream doctrine of free will.

However, if she had assimilated the free will narrative as readily as Tamara did, this could be another reason that Carmen was so sensitive to her father's injunctions for her to get a job so as to get off of welfare. In contrast to Tamara, the cognitive and social-emotional challenges that interfered with Carmen's ability to pull herself up from her bootstraps, so to speak, likely caused her to experience the doctrine of free will in relation to her school upgrading and job searching efforts as oppressive: As Jay

explained, only if you are able to reasonably feel that you can make a difference to your circumstances (i.e., through experiences that build efficacy), can you be expected to rise to the challenge of assuming personal responsibility for your 'choices.' In Carmen's case, despite the free will rhetoric that might be expected to prevail in her middle class family home, there were clearly some things that she legitimately seemed to feel were beyond her ability to personally control.

One might expect that the predominance of free will ideology would be most oppressive for Jay and Maria who, unlike Tamara and Carmen, were unable to lay claim to any personal areas of strength, as a result of their family and social class backgrounds, as well as their educational histories (until, at least, in Jay's case, he enrolled in high school upgrading as an adult). In the absence of backgrounds that could have equipped them with some beliefs in their personal power, it seems likely that dominant cultural messages that suggest that anyone can succeed, provided they choose to work hard at legitimate forms of obtaining cultural and economic capital, would have inspired conflict within Jay and Maria. Such messages could be expected to lower their self-esteem by convincing them that they must be lazy, stupid, unmotivated or otherwise prone to doing the same 'bad' things that the people in their families and communities did.

By lacking a structural understanding of their families' multi-generational struggles with poverty, substance use, abuse, and neglect, it appeared that Jay and Maria were relegated to understanding themselves as belonging to a long line of 'bad' people who had never done anything "productive" with their lives, to use Jay's description. Maria's child welfare caseworkers had, it would seem, inadvertently reinforced this view of her family, by encouraging her to be different from the rest of her relatives – to 'choose' to distinguish herself as a 'good' girl that went to school and/or work. Although positive intentions appear to be behind such comments, Beam (2013) observes that such talk causes children to have to "split themselves in half" (p.53). Recalling her own experience of being separated from her

mother, she described having to accept “words that told me that my old mother, my real mother was unfit, my life before was unfit, I too was unfit. But it was when I left my mother’s unfit home that I could no longer fit anywhere at all” (p.54). As discussed in chapter two, such sentiments would explain Maria’s enthusiasm about appearing on her mother’s “wall of shame” (photos of family members who had been to jail), at the same time that she felt truly ashamed of herself for having been incarcerated, in view of the messages that her workers had been giving her for most of her life. Likewise the treatment program that Jay had attended had encouraged him to exclude himself from any people who could compromise his efforts towards sobriety, which for Jay meant nearly all of his friends and family. From then on, he understood that in making a commitment to a mainstream identity, his pathway was to be a “solo” one. These young people suffer not just from their own isolation from cutting off from loved ones but also appear to suffer guilt at having themselves abandoned those loved ones, just as those loved ones had done to them. Recall that Maria had once wistfully suggested that there were some people that she just could not bear to cut out of her life and how Jay struggled to disengage himself from his mother’s violent conflicts with her partners. Beam similarly recalls the part of herself that remembers loving her mother and “remembers walking away. Yes, my mother gave up on me, but that small part knows I gave up too. And that part is very, very broken”(p.54).

Moreover, though Jay came to understand that he and others like him had been deluded into failing to “believe in themselves”, he and Maria did not fully appreciate all of the opportunities for efficacy and agency development that they had been excluded from. Though they could point to such things as irregular school attendance and living in unsafe family and foster homes as putting them at a disadvantage with respect to more ‘normal’ same-aged peers, they did not fully appreciate the negative influence that preoccupied attachment and unresolved trauma, for example, likely had on their physical and mental energies, capacity for reflective functioning, and capacity for trusting themselves, let alone

others. These are, of course, just a few of the possible impacts of attachment insecurity and trauma that might have interfered with their plans to reform themselves, including allowing others to help them reform themselves.

Ironically, a fuller appreciation of their victimhood may have proved more helpful to them in developing their sense of themselves as effective agents. With such an appreciation they would have been prevented from exclusively blaming themselves and individual family members (especially their mothers) for having 'chosen' their predicaments. Instead youths like Jay and Maria, in particular, could be empowered to point the finger more accurately and more constructively at economic and social conditions that had prevented several generations within their families from being equipped with the resources that they needed to parent more effectively (effective mental health/substance abuse treatments being paramount among these resources). The youths could also come to wonder about why the larger mainstream society had failed to adequately compensate for such parenting difficulties by providing them with safe parental surrogates in the form of competent and caring foster parents, who were unafraid to form the attachments they so desperately needed. They might question their lack of therapeutic supports to address their traumatization from parental separation, abuse, neglect, and the witnessing of family violence. They could further come to wonder why school personnel had not assisted them with learning challenges (both academic and social) that most likely could have been identified early in their school careers<sup>100</sup>, and why no one had insisted on their regular school attendance, despite the legal requirement that students attend school until at least the age of sixteen. Similarly they could ask why the justice system did nothing to prevent or interrupt their involvement in crime, despite the

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<sup>100</sup> In addition to Maria's cognitive challenges, Jay came to be identified as having a learning disability, not long after I had finished my interviews with him. Unfortunately, the learning disability was discovered after he had dropped out of university.

significant risk factors that were always present in their families and neighborhoods, and their own direct contacts with police officers by the time they had reached early adolescence.

In asking why, as vulnerable children, they did not get the help that they morally deserved and were legally entitled to, I do not believe that Jay and Maria would become stuck in the stance of being helpless victims of their circumstances. Rather, by achieving a structural understanding of their lives, they may be able to start to become truly empowered to change their circumstances for the better -- by first achieving some measure of self-acceptance. One of the most debilitating psychological consequences of trauma is unwarranted self-blame.<sup>101</sup> Unless youth understand how they have been victimized in traumatogenic situations, they are likely to assume personal responsibility for such events, as well as have their sense of personal blame (and attendant problems of low self-worth, depression, etc.) compounded by all of the other stressors in their lives (e.g., educational neglect, housing instability, loneliness, lack of guidance/emotional support, inadequate financial support) that they may have been led to believe are also their fault.

Not only does the dominant culture support an ideology of personal responsibility, but because some of these stressors may have resulted at least in part from the youths having perpetrated harm against others or themselves, they may be especially prone to accepting a definition of themselves as bad people. Given their proneness to accept identities as bad people, they may give less credence to their understanding of themselves as having victimized others as a maladaptive way of coping with painful feelings. Even though their suicide attempts, for example, were often reflexive responses to

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<sup>101</sup> Eliana Gil (as cited in Beam, 2013), a psychologist specializing in child abuse, found that ninety percent of the children she surveyed for her doctoral dissertation believed that they were in foster care because of something they did. Although self-blame is common in both child and adult victims of trauma, the cognitive egocentrism of early childhood can make matters worse. As Beam put it, "It's part of the wiring of childhood: they [children] know themselves as the axis around which events and mishaps and parents and everything else will spin" (p.101).

perceiving interpersonal threats or imminent abandonment given their prior traumatization, the youths would be prone to overlook this 'minority' view of their behaviours, given that the 'majority' view is that their 'bad' behaviours are a reflection of the bad choices that bad people make.

Although the youths were sometimes able to explain their involvement in perpetrating harm in terms of their response to attachment or trauma problems<sup>102</sup>, recall that the youths were nevertheless experiencing moral identity crises. They grappled with the question of what kind of people they must be for having done some very bad things in the past, and, in some cases, for still feeling compelled to do such things. Consequently, there is much about their intersecting problems that need to be disentangled for them, in order for them to resist defining themselves as thoroughly bad and therefore incapable of making any positive changes in their lives.

It would appear that there is more potential for high risk youths to accept such a maladaptive self-fulfilling prophecy, because of both the self-blame that trauma tends to induce and the helplessness that some of them<sup>103</sup> feel in regards to being able to make amends for past harms and alter their trajectories in the future. It seems likely that high risk youth may appear, to many people's eyes, to have resisted responsibility for any of their troubles, because the youth display an apathy that proceeds from their feelings of helplessness in regards to being able to do anything different from what they have done. However, this does not mean that they do not often privately feel great regret over having victimized others, especially those innocent people who had nothing to do with causing them the emotional pain that had often motivated their lashing out against others indiscriminately. Tamara was very concerned that I not think that hurting other people was ever part of her "plan." Similarly, Maria

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<sup>102</sup> Or as Jeanette Winterson (2011) more eloquently wrote of her own experiences as a child adopted into an abusive family: "...the people I have hurt, the mistakes I have made, the damage to myself and others, wasn't poor judgment; it was the place where love had hardened into loss" (p.211).

<sup>103</sup> Some of the youths like Carmen may feel helplessness in some areas but not others.

was deeply troubled by her assaults of workers and other youths who had done nothing to harm her<sup>104</sup>.

Though Carmen had never lashed out indiscriminately, she was tormented by the thought that she could be responsible for hurting or even killing people through her drug selling. If one thus feels regret or guilt but also unable to take steps to right the situation and stop such harms from occurring again in the future, it would seem that such a situation would serve to reinforce acceptance of the dominant view that one is a bad person.

This acceptance of one's badness may exist alongside the belief that one's own victimization and disadvantage should also be mitigating factors in judging one's character. However, as mentioned above, the idea of such mitigating factors is a 'minority' view on bad behaviour, and therefore less likely to be held by the youth. Some participants, such as Tamara and Carmen, also held more strongly to the idea of a fundamental character or essential self that they were born with. It may be harder to reconcile doing bad things with being a fundamentally good person, especially if, as in the case of Tamara and Carmen, their confidence in their basic goodness seemed to become more shaky, due to having done much more bad than good throughout their adolescent/young adult years.

I want to emphasize that in suggesting that youths come to understand the forces that influenced their 'bad' behaviour, I do not mean to absolve them of appropriate or justified feelings of responsibility for the harms they have caused, but rather lay the groundwork for self-compassion that can transform otherwise unhelpful feelings of shame (that tend to reflect an acceptance of one's self as fundamentally bad<sup>105</sup>) into more helpful feelings of guilt and remorse. In contrast to shame, which motivates one to blame others or lash out at others or avoid/escape situations, guilt tends to inspire

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<sup>104</sup> Recall that Maria was especially haunted by her very brutal assault of a young girl that she had once roomed with at a summer camp.

<sup>105</sup> As Nancy Eisenberg (2000) put it, "When a person experiences shame, the entire self feels exposed, inferior, and degraded" (p.667).

feelings of empathy for the people one has harmed and the desire to make amends (Tangney, as cited in Eisenberg, 2000). Thus only through giving appropriate due to their victimization can one understand the youths' roles as victimizers and, in so doing, encourage their often latent inclination to do right by their victims and, in turn, themselves, by enabling them to restore their sense of their own goodness and moral agency.

To be sure, the youths must feel a sense of responsibility to change their lives, even though they may not have truly been that responsible for messing them up in the first place. This can be a difficult idea for a young person to absorb; it would be reasonable for them to perceive the imperative for them to take responsibility now for the state that their lives are in as a form of 'victim blaming.' However, victim blaming is actually avoided by making appropriate external attributions of responsibility to those social forces that created the youths' present-day difficulties, while affirming the practical reality that no one could do more to transform those difficulties now than the youths themselves. If youths feel that they have a responsibility to reform themselves for the better, because they have the potential to be good and successful mainstream people, despite all the bad things that have happened to them that were not their fault, but that shaped their current predicaments (including their typically disempowered ways of thinking about themselves), then this is not only a more accurate frame of their lives but one that can empower them to want to make positive behavioral changes now, so as to exert maximum control over the future direction of their lives. As Bessel van der Kolk (1989) put it, "in contrast to victimized children, adults can learn to protect themselves and make a conscious choice about not engaging in relationships or behaviors that are known to be harmful...victims can learn that as children they were not responsible for the chaos, violence and despair surrounding them, but that as adults there are choices and consequences" (p.403-404).

I see this as a manifestation of the evidence-based recommendation for parents and other child carers to express disappointment in response to bad behaviour as opposed to more shame-inducing displays of anger, coercion, and love withdrawal. “The beauty of expressing disappointment is that it communicates disapproval of the bad behaviour, coupled with high expectations and the potential for improvement: You’re a good person, even if you did a bad thing, and I know you can better.” (Grant, 2014, para.16). Expressing disappointment, exploring how others were affected and providing guidance on how youths could rectify bad situations enables them to develop “feelings of empathy and responsibility for others, and a sense of moral identity, which are conducive to becoming a helpful person” (Grant, para. 16).

Such an understanding of his responsibility might have helped counter Jay’s insistence that he could not afford to be moral when his own survival in his street life existence was at stake. Though he may have been able to continue to justify his past violence towards other young men in the drug trade using this rationale, thereby inoculating him from feelings of guilt about such events, it must be remembered that Jay was nevertheless dismayed over his own lack of caring in response to hearing of his mother’s suicide attempt. Like the young women then, Jay was concerned about how heartless he had seemed to become, as a result of his involvement in street life. Though it is true that Jay was often backed into a corner with respect to having to fulfill his obligations to his street family members by committing violence with them or on their behalf, it would seem that professionals might be able to cultivate the motivation of youths like Jay to leave street life, by tapping into their latent concerns about losing their “souls”, as Tamara would have put it. Although such counselling would likely be insufficient on its own, it may have considerable impact when coupled with needed structural changes, such as economic opportunities other than drug selling, that are within the youths’ personal capacities to

access. I will speak more on the necessity of both individual counselling and structural changes in the next section.)

Moreover, only by resisting debilitating and often unwarranted self-blame for trauma and other conditions that the youths could not reasonably be expected to be held fully responsible for (such as learning/cognitive challenges, poverty, etc.), can the youths keep clear about what is really within their control to positively influence. That is, they can be clear about the areas in which they can really be expected to make a difference in their lives, based on their individual sets of existing competencies, capacities to obtain further skills, and their individual profiles of resources and obstacles for mainstream identity formation (i.e., their backgrounds). From this perspective, Carmen and Maria could have regarded themselves as understandably struggling with academic demands on account of their learning challenges, a situation which should have redirected them and their professional helpers to focus on suitable employment as opposed to upgrading, instead of having their academic failures reinforce their personal sense of themselves as bad (i.e., lazy, unmotivated, not trying hard enough). Moreover, an understanding of how hard it is to get a job in their situation of having no education and limited job skills in a very poor youth labour market should have been imparted to Maria and Carmen. By doing so, the challenges they would inevitably encounter in job seeking would not serve to reinforce feelings of unworthiness (that may exist from abuse and other experiences), which inspire apathy rather than agency.

### **The Case for Structural Interventions**

The fact that the above situation still looks so hopeless for Maria and Carmen, no matter how much effort they marshal towards getting the few jobs that they may stand a chance at getting hired to do, points to the need for structural changes, alongside of doing everything possible to cultivate one's will to become a good, mainstream person. Even Tamara, who showed the most promise in adopting

the free will ideology to achieve her mainstream goals, was often taken off course by lacking the money to pay for necessities such as bills. Both her lack of money for necessities, and the relative deprivation of never being able to treat herself in the way that her mainstream peers are able to, had caused her to resort repeatedly to prostitution. Moreover, despite being able to resist drugs by adhering to her boyfriend's "philosophy", Tamara found it much harder to choose to resist contact with "risky" men who could kill her, on account of her prior traumatization.

Until conditions are changed to enable Tamara to have enough money for her necessities (and perhaps a little bit more, given that relative deprivation influences behaviour in the same way that absolute deprivation does), and that she is able to free herself from the influence of longstanding unmet (and often unconscious) emotional needs, Tamara remains vulnerable to continuing to go in circles, rather than staying on a straight, linear track regarding her mainstream goals. Or, as she once put it, she might sometimes put a book appropriately on a shelf, but then the next time stick one somewhere inappropriate like on the refrigerator. Though Tamara assumed that she engaged in such inconsistent behaviour because she lacked the consistent practice with being good that she expected her mainstream peers had, it may be that she lacked a full appreciation of how insufficient supports (economic, mental health, educational, child welfare, etc.) could have influenced her 'choices' to be more consistently bad than good. In the absence of this understanding, she would have been prone to interpret the 'wrong' decisions that she continued to make as reflecting solely her individual failure to demonstrate sufficient willpower over her desires. Or, as she had suggested, her brain may have become "confused" about what is right and what is wrong, given her poor practice with being good during her teen years. It is obvious that such interpretations could adversely affect Tamara's confidence in her own agency. However they also kept her from considering how her lack of economic and psychological supports may be responsible for her predicament, and thus kept her from pursuing the

kinds of supports (e.g., therapeutic) that she might have benefitted from. Such intervention could have helped her avoid getting stuck in the same kind of agency-diminishing, moral self-condemnation that I just described in relation to the other youths.

### **The Interdependence and Equal Importance of Agency and Structure: Implications for Free Will**

The youths' situations thus illustrate the inseparability of structure and agency; optimal development of the latter depends on having appropriate structural supports in place for youths throughout their life spans. However, the ideology of free will and personal responsibility tends to obscure the role of such structural supports in the development of agency. In evaluating all four participants with an eye to who seemed most able to make use of the free will ideology towards developing their mainstream identity, what became illuminated was that the extent to which one believes that one possesses free choice reflects the extent to which one has been privileged, since an early age, with respect to enjoying many favourable conditions for development. These conditions include having secure attachment, being protected from abuse, neglect, exposure to drug/alcohol abuse and domestic violence, living in stable intact family homes in middle class neighborhoods and being provided with consistent educational opportunities, and where needed, additional remedial supports, to develop academic and social skills, surrounded by the company of community members that function as accomplished, respectable role models that one can relate to in some way. We have seen how such structural conditions, associated with race and class, afforded Tamara and Carmen, as white middle class youths, a distinct advantage in narrating themselves as competent agents who could choose to re-establish continuity with their mainstream, childhood roots. Their experience contrasted sharply with the fatalism that seemed so natural to poor, aboriginal youth like Maria and Jay, but was really the product of many intersecting forms of social exclusion.

That said, as my description of Tamara's situation above illustrates, the positive effects of having structural supports are not just additive or even necessarily linear. (Although, in general, it seemed that the younger in age that one can be exposed to such privileging circumstances and the more of them that one is exposed to, the better one's outcomes tend to be.) As I just explained, despite Tamara and Carmen having many good childhood resources from which to narrate themselves as being free, empowered agents, neither could employ the free will ideology successfully in all circumstances, when constructing their mainstream identities. Moreover, though at the end of chapter four, I speculated that Jay and Tamara appeared to be most poised for continued success at integrating into the mainstream, I kept wondering about this prediction. On the one hand, for example, Carmen appeared to be significantly disadvantaged relative to Tamara on account of her greater learning challenges and her lesser degree of consistent adult support (emotional and economic) throughout her adolescent and young adult years, thus far. However, Tamara's continued involvement with prostitution and other instances of engaging with 'risky' men, with both its ever present physical dangers and consistent effect of inspiring moral conflict within her, could easily derail all of the other progress she has made in establishing a mainstream life for herself.

As discussed previously, Carmen's ability to hold fast to her internal moral compass protected her from many of the moral conflicts that she saw her peers fall prey to, including peers like Tamara and Maria, who had child welfare caseworkers for several years. Tamara and Maria even had child welfare caseworkers that were supposed to implement PSECA, the Protection for Sexually Exploited Children Act (formerly called PCHIP, the Protection for Children Involved in Prostitution Act in Alberta). Such legislation mandates dedicated services for youth involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in prostitution/sexual exploitation. Though one might have expected Tamara and Maria to have had greater protection from pimps and johns, given the child welfare resources that were devoted to this

purpose, Carmen, in fact, fared much better in this regard, just due to the strength of her moral convictions. (It appears that child welfare caseworkers did not always implement PSECA as they were supposed to. For example, when Maria first disclosed her involvement in prostitution to a child welfare caseworker, she was not immediately placed in a safe house, despite the fact that PSECA explicitly mandates such action.)

It appeared then that having a good base of childhood resources for narrating one's self as morally good and/or capable of mainstream success was sometimes sufficient to save a youth from serious problems, as in the case of Carmen. However, such identity narration also has its limits. Some structural conditions, such as Jay's criminal record, for example, sometimes posed too serious an obstacle -- that one cannot simply choose a way out of, through telling a more empowered story about one's self. (If it had not been for his ex-offender re-entry program worker's unflagging encouragement as he drove Jay from one prospective job site to many others, Jay admitted that he would have given up on ever securing legitimate employment, in view of his being routinely rejected on account of his criminal record alone.)

Moreover, apart from the failure of child welfare caseworkers to protect Tamara and Maria from sexual exploitation, I could think of many more examples in which the presence or absence of a single condition (e.g., other instances of child welfare neglect, a criminal conviction, unsafe housing, a suicide attempt that rendered one disabled or dead) could potentially override other factors that might have been pulling for a youth's success. Although Carmen maintained that there was always an alternative to prostitution that she was able to use to ensure her physical survival, it is possible that such alternatives (e.g., housecleaning for friends, giving them marijuana) may no longer be available for her one day. It remains an open question then whether she will always be able to maintain her convictions,

despite such convictions being a core part of her identity and thus a reason for her psychological survival (i.e., the reason that she failed to become “lost” like so many of her high risk peers).

In contemplating the many difficulties or uncertainties involved in trying to predict the youths’ futures, I could not conclude that one’s individual sense of agency/identity narrative or possession of structural supports could be seen as more important than the other. Consequently, I can only conclude that what are required are both individual counselling for the youths, in which a structural or systemic view of their circumstances is communicated to them in order to promote their agency<sup>106</sup>, as well as a societal indictment for excluding high risk youth from so many structural supports that were needed for their healthy development. In order for both of these things to occur, some room needs to be made, alongside of the dominant narrative of free will, for the notion that some individuals and groups can be victimized and disadvantaged (even intergenerationally), and that such oppression can exert powerful, and even unconscious effects on one’s capacity to experience one’s self as an agent who can freely choose to alter one’s circumstances<sup>107</sup>. Moreover, as mentioned above, there are simply some forms of disadvantage (e.g., criminal records) that one cannot completely surmount, no matter how well developed one’s sense of agency is. Likewise, it is often too difficult to ameliorate significant cognitive and learning challenges in young adults that they may have been born with and/or acquired as a result of extensive gaps in schooling or even traumatization.

The implication of these facts about social disadvantage and victimization that high risk youths’ lives illustrate is that the dominant free will narrative may need to be attenuated somewhat: perhaps something to the effect of allowing that sure individuals can make material successes of themselves

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<sup>106</sup> as discussed in the first part of this chapter

<sup>107</sup> I will only mention that the story of high risk youths that I gathered and synthesized makes a case for making room for an acceptance of victimization alongside of free will ideology, but to suggest how this could occur in our culture, and if it ever will, is, I think, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

through hard work and dedication but that there may also be limits to this claim that need to be recognized. This is another reason why I suggested earlier that instead of typical resilience or success metrics such as the attainment of jobs and educational credentials, cultivating the drive to become someone who perceives herself as morally good and can be seen by most others in society as morally good should take precedence. The feeling that one can, in accordance with one's individual abilities and potential capabilities, have a significant effect on shaping the direction of one's life for the better would also seem to be a laudable and realistic goal for this population.

In other words, room needs to be made in the dominant culture for definitions of successful mainstream identity construction that are not exclusively tied to economic independence; the fact that some high risk youths may require long-term, if not life-long social assistance does not mean that they cannot live purposeful, moral, and happy lives -- provided that such identities receive support and validation from the rest of society. Biologist Lynn Margulies (as cited in Cacioppo, 2008) observes that independence is a political construct rather than a scientific term. Youth who have been disenfranchised in so many ways, beginning even before they were born (given the struggles of their parents and the intergenerational transmission of attachment), cannot be held to the same measures of successful development that are applied to mainstream youth, who, in contrast, have been the fortunate, relatively consistent beneficiaries of many privileging conditions for their transitions to adult independence, for most, if not all, of their lives. As journalist Nicholas Kristof suggests:

Critics note that if a person manages to get through high school and avoid drugs, crime and parenting outside of marriage, it's often possible to escape poverty. Fair enough. But if you're one of the one-fifth of children in West Virginia with drugs or alcohol in your system, if you ingest lead from peeling paint as a toddler, if your hearing or vision impairments aren't detected, if you live in a home with no books in a gang-ridden neighborhood with terrible

schools – in all these cases, you’re programmed for failure as surely as children of professionals are programmed for success. (2014, para. 15).

Though there are certainly high risk youths who will be able to surmount most of the difficulties that I have discussed throughout this dissertation, the fact remains that many will require ongoing public assistance in the form of money as well as well as other supports (e.g., mental health, guardianship, social housing) well into their adult years, for which they do not deserve to be denigrated as personal failures. The failures to successfully negotiate their accelerated and compressed transitions to adulthood should not really be considered failures, but rather as grossly unrealistic expectations for many young people who have been chronically and multiply disadvantaged for most of their lives. Or as Kristof (2014) similarly observes of youth in poverty, “...it’s not quite right to say that they ‘failed.’ Often they never had a chance” (para.16) (Recall that Maria had actually used the exact same words -- she did not feel that she had been given the chance to be a normal, ‘good’ girl.)

In saying this, I am not suggesting that high risk youth should be given a societal ‘pass’ for giving in to their often understandable reasons for feeling helpless, but rather that their very real social challenges need to be widely acknowledged, in order to prevent their receiving unwarranted scorn from members of the larger society. Not only would such scorn result in less government support and services, but it would have the effect of further reinforcing their ‘bad’ identities and, in turn, diminishing their agency even more. In contrast, it is only when others make room within society’s narratives for victimization, that high risk youths (and the rest of society) can become receptive to the idea, as journalist Charles Blow (2013) put it, there is “honor” (para.18) in trying to move up the hill [i.e., attempting to surmount structural obstacles to become upwardly mobile or mainstream – my insertion], whether you succeed or fail.

Certainly this understanding could help keep Maria and Carmen motivated to pursue paid employment, even as they depend on disability and welfare benefits, respectively. It might also encourage them to continue to develop their artistic identities, regardless of whether they ever receive financial remuneration for their artistic endeavours. Likewise, this understanding could have prevented Jay from returning to street life, should he have failed at high school upgrading. Recall that Jay admitted that he was vulnerable to returning to selling drugs, if he did not manage to earn a high school diploma. To Jay, the diploma signified a 'passport' to jobs other than menial labour. Jay reasoned that if menial labour was all that was available to him in mainstream life, he would prefer to go back to street life, where he was confident that he could once again be successful, both in terms of money and prestige. Being a 'somebody' in street life thus meant more to him than being a 'nobody' in mainstream life, despite the ongoing threats to his physical safety and returning to jail that he incurred in his street life.

The importance that Jay placed on money also points to the need to emphasize to high risk youth, (and, in fact, to emphasize to all young people), that there is more value to forming an adult mainstream identity than just becoming economically successful. It would seem that there would be value in extending Blow's idea that there is honor in exerting effort towards social mobility to there being honor in cultivating non-economic aspects of identity, such as gaining a sense of one's values and the drive to live by them, as when I earlier suggested that the drive to be morally good should be recognized as a measure of mainstream success. Recall that by the time Jay dropped out of university, he was no longer susceptible to returning to street life because he had found meaning and fulfillment in establishing "true" (i.e., close and trusting) relationships with sober people like his grandparents and his girlfriend at the time, and in participating in recreation that did not involve drugs and alcohol, such as cycling. These experiences showed him the value of an identity based on sobriety, which prevented him from returning to street life, irrespective of its economic incentives. Likewise particularly for youth like

Jay and Maria, who may be afflicted by a communal sense of ennui, honor can be located in efforts to continually resist the sense that they are helpless to alter the bad destinies of chronic drug addiction, prison, and premature death from street life that they were effectively raised to believe would happen to themselves. Thus integration into mainstream society should not be reduced to monetary markers alone. That Jay and the others appeared to have been influenced by the view that making money is the only way to be regarded as being 'somebody' suggests that room also needs to be made in society's narratives for ways of establishing identities that are not tied strictly to a capitalist ethos.

Still another difficulty in making concrete recommendations about what could constitute successful adult outcomes for the high risk youth population lies in the fact that as Beam (2013) observed, every child in child welfare is different. Beam observed that part of the difficulty that people have encountered in reforming child welfare is that every child who enters the system has a unique set of competencies and obstacles, an observation which has been well supported by the cases of the four youths that were studied here. Beam writes that "part of the problem with child welfare is that we're searching for a singular model that will meet all of the divergent needs of abused and neglected kids in all of their divergent places" (p.xvii). Given the diversity of the youths in this study, it is difficult to make recommendations that are relevant to each of them, as the preceding discussion on providing them with counselling about their structural obstacles already demonstrated. In the next section, I will similarly suggest structural interventions that could have relevance for all of the youths, as well as ones that might just pertain to some of them.

## Changing the Environment

Although cultures are improved by people whose wisdom and compassion may supply clues to what they do or will do, the ultimate improvement comes from the environment which makes them wise and compassionate.

B.F. Skinner (as cited in Butler-Bowdon, 2016, para. 1)

The inseparability of structure and agency implies that both types of interventions (social-structural/systemic and individually oriented) should be implemented simultaneously. Not only does agency development depend on structural supports, but in some cases, neither an individual solution nor a structural one would be sufficient to effect change on its own (e.g., Jay required both confidence in his abilities and the prospect of a better life for himself, in order to exit street life). Unfortunately, it would be impossible to have implemented all of the structural changes that the high risk youth participants in this study could have benefited from – such changes across a number of systems would likely take several decades, if not more, to implement and would require considerable political and social will, including support from market forces, such as businesses, both local and global<sup>108</sup>. Therefore it may be more realistic to turn to identifying supports that could have perhaps assisted the youths optimally at different times throughout their life spans. In other words, I will suggest changes to structural conditions below that I think could have made the most difference to the youth participants at some point in their lives, thereby hopefully pointing to the kinds of resources that could be implemented to improve the lives of future such children and youth.

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<sup>108</sup> to address, for example, the problem of a bad youth labour market

I have also organized my set of recommendations concerning structural changes as a response to the Alberta government's priorities for vulnerable children and youth, particularly those who are, or who have been, in care. The results of this study imply that the province's race-based policies in child welfare, and their prioritization of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), relative to the many other challenges that high risk youth commonly face, deserve more scrutiny. The results of this study also suggest that more scrutiny should come to bear on the Alberta government's practice of identifying street-involved young people as high risk youth. Seeing the youth through the lens of their risk behaviours has the effect of obscuring the many structural root causes of those behaviours that were illuminated in the youth participants' interviews.

**The case for prevention and early intervention.** The main take away from the study results is that much could have been done to prevent the problems that high risk youth experience, starting with events from before they were even born. As many of their struggles resulted from their parents' difficulties with addictions, low income, and domestic violence, prevention should involve supporting prospective high risk parents by intervening with their economic, psychological, and relationship problems, well before they begin to have children (or as soon as possible thereafter). Although none of the young people in this study had children, they were certainly more likely to become a young parent than most of their same age peers: "By age 19...the girls are already 2.5 times more likely than nonfostered peers to have been pregnant" (Beam, 2013, p.101).

Although Tamara and Carmen had each resisted having babies in order to receive more social assistance and had also rejected parenthood as a means of achieving an adult identity, they (as well as Maria) acknowledged that it was more socially acceptable for young aboriginal women to solve their economic and identity problems in this way. However, despite the fact that Tamara and Carmen came from family and social class backgrounds that influenced them to look down upon welfare mothers, they

nevertheless remained vulnerable to this outcome, given the supreme value that Tamara placed on being a wife and a mother -- goals that she admitted she would sacrifice her postsecondary education plans for. Tamara and Carmen's chronic loneliness and their consequent, continued involvement with men who could exploit them in various ways<sup>109</sup> also put them at risk of becoming welfare mothers, albeit inadvertently.

Jay was also susceptible to becoming a father who could not afford a child. If not for his involvement with his ex-offender re-entry program, he might have become absent in a child's life as a result of incarceration (as was the case for Tamara's father and for a more brief time period, Carmen's father, as well): "By age 19, 30% of the boys [who have aged out – my insertion] have been incarcerated" (Beam, 2013,p.101).

Efforts should thus be made to locate and flag high risk youth for intervention, not only because of their own extensive suffering, but because such challenges put them at risk of becoming parents themselves, who are likely to struggle in many of the very same ways that their parents did with them. In addition to economic and social supports (e.g., jobs and other opportunities and assistance to integrate successfully with mainstream peers<sup>110</sup>) that could help them avoid walking down the same pathways that their parents did, the study results clearly make the case for intervening clinically in the intergenerational transmission of trauma that occurred via disruptions to the attachment bond, exposure to violence, and child abuse and neglect.

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<sup>109</sup> Many of the inner city single mothers that sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas (2011) interviewed said that they hoped to hold onto their boyfriends by having their babies. Although Tamara and Carmen might not have admitted this openly, their emotional needs seemed to make them prone to do the same thing. (Tamara had even said that her mother had once accused her of planning to continue a pregnancy for this 'wrong' reason.)

In addition to psychotherapy for high risk youth, home visitation programs, such as the Nurse-Family partnership (Olds et al., 1997), can provide young parents-to-be with regular coaching on prenatal care and after-birth support on child care, with attention to both physical and emotional development, for a child's first two years. The children of mothers who received nurse visits were followed up with at age fifteen. Relative to comparison groups, such adolescents reported fewer instances of running away, arrests, convictions, number of sexual partners and less consumption of alcohol and cigarettes (Olds et al.). Families who received home visits during pregnancy and infancy had fewer reports of child maltreatment based on child protection reports during the fifteen year period, than families who did not receive the visits (Olds et al.).

However, it should be noted that this reduction in maltreatment did not hold in families where the mothers reported more than twenty eight incidents of domestic violence (Olds et al., 1997). The moderating effect of domestic violence on the effectiveness of home visits in reducing maltreatment supports the view that multiple, simultaneous efforts of both a structural and an individual kind are needed to effectively support high risk young people with their overlapping life challenges (e.g., the contributions of economic, social, and psychological factors to domestic violence). It makes sense that the visitation program may be effective in educating poor young mothers on how they can better manage their stress in general, and in how they can engage in more effective ways of parenting than by using physical coercion. However, education alone would be insufficient in coping with a violent partner. Such relationships are often maintained by mothers' economic vulnerabilities and longstanding psychological vulnerabilities, such as the insecure attachment and trauma-based loneliness and neediness exhibited by the young women in this study.

Preventive pre-kindergarten programs and programs for school-aged children, aimed ideally at educating both parents and children, also have the potential to seriously alter a high risk young person's

life trajectory. For example, counselling and in-vivo coaching of interpersonal skills (e.g., by trained teachers, social workers, parents/foster parents) should have begun at a young age, given the young women's difficulties in this area, since at least their early years of elementary school. Despite this, such efforts were absent from the youth participants' stories. Though the youths may not have been aware of any such efforts having been directed towards their families due to their young age, to the best of their knowledge, neither school personnel, nor health professionals, nor child welfare caseworkers had seemed to make a serious effort to recommend any of these kinds of educational or therapeutic services for their families.<sup>111</sup>

Rather, for each of the youths, child welfare became involved with their families in a time of crisis. Albeit for slightly different reasons, the mothers of Jay, Tamara, and Maria voluntarily surrendered their child into some form of care, due to their own, perceived inability to look after them. In Carmen's case, child welfare was alerted to her repeated instances of running away from home. However, little was done to monitor her family, beyond an initial, seemingly brief investigation (as is common for affluent families who could potentially engage a lawyer to fight back against any maltreatment allegations). Thus it would appear that opportunities to intervene with families to prevent the drastic measure of having to come into care and/or the youths resorting to solving their own problems by going onto the street were not taken. The absence of such efforts is even more remarkable when one considers that Maria's maternal grandmother among many of her other relatives had been involved with child welfare. Moreover, both her family and Jay's family were well known to the police. The police could have also served as a gateway to child welfare services in Tamara's case, given that

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<sup>111</sup> Carmen may be said to have been an exception, given that her parents had engaged with a therapist in their community, and that she was also seen by a school counsellor at one point. However, it should be remembered that her parents refused to participate in her counselling sessions with her, despite being explicitly invited to do so by her community therapist.

they were summoned more than once to her home when she left alone as a small child, because her mother had gone to work.

Given that the mandate of Alberta Human Services is to make decisions regarding a child's need for protective intervention, while being sure to give paramount consideration to the idea that "the family is the basic unit of society and its well-being should be supported and preserved" (Province of Alberta, 2000, p.12), it is also interesting to note the absence of interventions to either promote the maintenance of the family unit or to promote as swift a family reunification process as might have been possible, in the cases of each of these four youths. Although the policy goal of family maintenance and reunification above all else can be criticized on the basis that it can be interpreted as implicitly elevating the power of parents over a child's rights to safety and wellbeing, the trauma of having to separate from one's family, as discussed by the youth participants, makes it clear that not receiving preliminary services to try to keep them at home safely, represents perhaps as equally damaging a violation to their rights to safety and healthy development as leaving them in unsafe family homes.

Likewise it is obviously a gross injustice to remove a child from her home only to subject her to abusive foster homes and residential treatment facilities, as in the case of Maria. Such an egregious mistake merits condemnation, because one must assume that gross ineptitude, indifference and/or a lack of resources (e.g., scarcity of foster placements) must be behind many such errors. I cannot accept that mere ignorance on the part of child welfare caseworkers could be solely responsible for such placements, given that Maria explicitly told her child welfare caseworker about the abuse that she had suffered at the hands of foster parents and staff at residential treatment homes. And unfortunately she is not an anomaly with respect to both suffering abuse within foster care and having her disclosures fall on deaf ears. Former foster youth, Danielle Joseph (2002), among many others, has called for better

screening of foster parents and for child welfare workers to pay regular, unannounced visits to foster homes. As Joseph cogently articulated on behalf of those who were like herself:

This abuse and neglect of children in foster care has to stop! Children are put in the system to escape abuse from their biological parents and relatives. It doesn't help them to be placed in a situation that is just as abusive, or even more so. The Child Welfare Administration cared enough about us to take us out of abusive situations. It should care enough now to make sure that we are well taken care of. Have they forgotten about us? I know there are good foster parents out there, but I've been in four foster homes and haven't met a good one yet. Do agencies screen foster parents in depth? From what I've seen, it doesn't seem so. (2002, p.90)

Though few studies have been done on foster parents, the research that has been completed suggests that foster parents tend to be of older age, have low income themselves, and are unlikely to have completed post-secondary education (Beam, 2013). Not surprisingly then, Joseph (2002) said that she would tell foster parents: "All of you who do not have a job. Get one! ...Stop being parasites and preying on innocent, defenseless children who are unable to take care of themselves"(p.91). However, to attract a more diverse and better equipped pool of foster parent applicants, it would seem necessary to increase the amount of daily compensation that foster parents receive (The "basic maintenance rate" for a child depends on her age, with infants and preschoolers meriting slightly less than twenty four dollars per diem to the nearly thirty six dollars per diem that are paid for keeping teenagers aged sixteen or seventeen. An additional per diem payment of either fifteen dollars or twenty seven dollars and fifty cents, depending on the parenting skills level of the foster parent, is also paid to the foster parent, along with reimbursements for additional costs such as transportation, recreation, respite care, and babysitting) (Alberta Human Services, 2016). That said, better compensation does not solve the conundrum of attracting prospective foster parents who are only in it for the money. The problem of

foster parent recruitment thus further supports the case for prevention and intervening early with families, so that children do not have to be removed from their homes.

The problems of low remuneration and of low educational qualifications also extends to youth workers who supervise children in group home and residential treatment placements, and to child welfare caseworkers themselves, both of whom are not required to have even an undergraduate degree in social work . According to recent job advertisements on the Government of Alberta jobs website, two year college diploma programs in child care, youth work, or social work constitute the minimal educational requirement for child welfare caseworkers, whereas youth workers employed by non-profit agencies contracted by child welfare may or may not be required to have even a college diploma, depending on the agency they work for. To skillfully handle the power struggles, troubles with boundaries, and intense displays of emotional dysregulation/destructive behaviour, that appear to often be rooted in attachment and trauma difficulties, would seem to require more than the knowledge that an introductory course on child development or clinical intervention would provide. The level of knowledge and skills that are required would thus appear to exceed that of most recipients of college diplomas of social work or related fields. Those who possess undergraduate degrees or even graduate degrees may also be ill equipped to work effectively with such youth, if their training does not specifically emphasize the developmental and clinical challenges that are common to foster children. This lack of education, as well as likely limited on-the-job training and support, would explain the struggles that particularly Maria had, with so many staff members, across her various placements.

**The problem with race based child welfare policy.** I mentioned above that problems with low income, addictions, and domestic violence cut across the four youths' families<sup>112</sup>, irrespective of their

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<sup>112</sup> As mentioned previously, the families of Carmen and Tamara went through periods of having low income, despite being mostly middle class.

ethnicity. Though I have mentioned that there are many legitimate reasons why aboriginal children may be apprehended at much higher rates than children from other ethnic groups (many of which are associated with poverty and other forms of social exclusion), the Alberta government nevertheless prioritizes the cultural background of these excluded young people in their child welfare policies. They do this by making kinship care placements the preferred placement for aboriginal children and youth (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009). Child welfare caseworkers are instructed to make every effort to place aboriginal children with a family member (or even someone deemed to have a close relationship with a child's family), before investigating other placement options for them. If no family members or people closely connected to a family are found to be suitable and available caregivers, child welfare caseworkers must give preferential consideration to what some have referred to as a "kinship network" (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009, p.17)<sup>113</sup>(i.e., a broader conceptualization of family which, in the case of Alberta Human Services, extends beyond a child's blood relations to include those whom one may consider to be members of the child's cultural community, such as designates from a child's reserve).

Although kinship care may promote a greater sense of belongingness with family members and potentially greater willingness from family caregivers to keep siblings together and persevere with children's emotional difficulties (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009), the literature is still inconclusive about such benefits, given the dearth of research that has been conducted on kinship care thus far. Consequently, it can be concluded that the primary reason for privileging aboriginal caregiver placements for aboriginal children is the assumption that it allows the child to "continue to grow up in

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<sup>113</sup> or kinship social network or kinship family network (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009)

an environment with cultural values and affection... [in order to – my insertion]... develop and preserve the identity for First Nations children”(Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009, p.18).

There are several problems that seem to result from matching children to caregivers based primarily on kinship or ethnicity. One is the paucity of foster homes, period. There are simply too few foster parents of any ethnicity to meet the needs of most jurisdictions, without further whittling down the pool by restricting placements based on shared ethnicity, let alone kinship. At the time of this writing, the website of Alberta Human Services indicated that they were actively recruiting foster parents generally, but were especially interested in those of aboriginal descent: “We need more Aboriginal caregivers so Aboriginal children who are unable to stay with their natural families stay connected to their communities and cultures” (Alberta Human Services, 2015, para.1). Obviously, by limiting the number of available placements for aboriginal youth, this increases the likelihood of such children being placed in a home that provides substandard care or puts them at-risk of abuse, particularly in view of the high number of aboriginal children in care. (62% of all children in care in Alberta are aboriginal.) (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009)

Moreover, by especially prioritizing kinship ties, the pool of available and suitable placements for a child can become even more limited. This situation has prompted Alberta Human Services to officially relax their screening requirements for prospective kinship providers, relative to what is required for general foster parents. For example, kinship providers may be allowed to have a criminal record, provided that the offence that one was convicted of was not of a violent or sexual nature concerning a child (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009). Adults residing in the home are even given the latitude of not having to produce their criminal record checks for up to thirty days after a child has been placed in their home (Alberta Children and Youth Services). Even someone who has placed a child at risk of harm at some point (as indicated by a positive check on a child intervention record

check), can still qualify as a kinship provider, so long as a child welfare supervisor assesses the person to be of minimal risk to the specific child who is in immediate need of a placement (Alberta Children and Youth Services).

Although a review of kinship care conducted by the government of Alberta recognized the safety risk that such relaxing of screening criteria may pose to aboriginal children (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009), it is felt that by ideally placing the child with someone they know, as in the prototypical kinship placement of an extended family relation, this may reduce the trauma of being separated from one's parents, and perhaps lessen the need for multiple moves within the system (Alberta Children and Youth Services). However, we have no way of knowing if this would be the case for all children. The fear that Maria's maternal grandmother inspired in her suggests that the quality of the family relationship must be taken into account when assessing the value of being placed with a family member above a stranger. (Given the intergenerational transmission of attachment insecurity, one would think that it would be especially important to assess the caregiving competency of grandmothers particularly, as well as assess the impact that such a placement might have on the relationship between a child's mother and her grandmother.)

Even though Jay had initially perceived the aunt who became his kinship provider to be like a surrogate mother to him, it was unclear how much of the attention his aunt had given to him early on in their time of living together was due to her wanting Jay to pressure his mother to relinquish her guardianship of him, so that she could start to receive payment for his care. Jay's placement with this drug dealing aunt also exemplifies the kind of safety risk that the government is taking when they privilege kin relationships over ensuring that family members are capable of providing safe and secure homes.

The fact that criminal involvement, drug use, family violence, abuse, and low income are pervasive in many aboriginal families and communities (not just Jay's and Maria's) implies that more scrutiny on prospective kinship providers should be provided, rather than a relaxing of the preconditions and standards one would expect from all kind of foster parents. However, it would seem that the "dramatic increase" (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009, p.6) in kinship care, under this condition of relaxed criteria for caregivers, is a response to not just preference for same culture caregivers, but also "the challenges [of] recruiting and retaining foster parents due to changing work roles of women, rising costs for foster parents, increasing expectations on foster parents, and attrition as foster parents' age" (Alberta Children and Youth Services, p.6). In other words, the problems of having few foster parents period, and of having even fewer prospective kinship applicants who could meet the already low bar set for being a foster parent (even when kinship is defined as broadly as possible), are taken care of by compromising the safety and development of well over half (and nearly two thirds) of the children and youth who are in care.

The interest in providing support for an aboriginal young person's ethnic identity seems laudable, provided that ethnic identity can actually be established as a meaningful and salient group identity for many of them, most of the time. Contemporary research on ethnic identity suggests that ethnicity tends to become salient for ethnic minority youth only at certain times, such as when their race is made salient by some aspect of the environment, such as a teacher talking about racial discrimination, for example (Yip, 2008). Although I only interviewed two aboriginal youths, their comments suggested that the ethnicity of the professionals or other people invested with caring for them or supporting them had mattered little to them. Jay suggested that the only advantage to having aboriginal workers in his ex-offender program was that he did not have to explain his background to

them. By background, Jay was not referring to cultural identification but to the kind of family environment (i.e., criminal, drug-using, low education/income) that he had come from.

Jay did think that being cared for by his aunt was likely better than if he had gone to live with a stranger. Both Jay and Tamara implied that they would be more worried about receiving worse care by strangers, given that their own kin had demonstrated so little concern for them. Surely strangers would have even less reason to care, especially since foster care is only ever a temporary arrangement<sup>114</sup>, and therefore foster parents must only be motivated by the paltry payments they receive. Put another way, the youths' concerns about non-kin were more about the greater reasons that they feared that non-kin would have for not continuing to care and stay invested in them for the long-term, given that even their family members who were naturally supposed to do this, (and even legally obliged to do so), had nevertheless failed them. Maria, who had experienced both non-aboriginal foster parents and aboriginal ones (it is unknown if her reserve foster parents qualified as kin providers), was likewise unconcerned about the ethnicity of the person doing her caregiving, but much more concerned that the person be genuinely caring<sup>115</sup> and willing to "keep" her (i.e., remain in a relationship with her, even after she had to leave a placement). When I asked her how she felt about not being exposed to her cultural background by her family, as a result of having come into foster care at such a young age, she expressed annoyance at the fact that her mother was unable to care for her at all, thus implying that a loss of

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<sup>114</sup> Recall that Tamara rejected the idea of teens being given foster parents because the foster parents would have to leave her eventually, which seemed to trigger her fears of being abandoned, just as her own mother had done to her.

cultural transmission was of little importance to her relative to having a mother who could simply look after her.

Such youth comments regarding the importance of consistent, enduring, and genuine care, as opposed to shared genetics or ethnicity, are not unique to my small sample (Beam, 2013), and clearly cut across ethnic lines. It would appear then that political reasons (e.g., such as resisting allegations of racism in apprehending so many aboriginal children, more than during the 60's scoop) are more likely responsible for the focus on kin placements over children's safety, stability, and emotional health. Not only are aboriginal children being poorly served, but the needs of non-aboriginal youth are also being neglected. Tamara and Carmen were right to be resentful when they complained that they were not getting as much attention as aboriginal youth, including having less access to resources because they had been designated just for aboriginal youth, such as certain group homes. Tamara reasonably pointed out that since all high risk youths suffered the same kinds of problems in their families, it makes no sense to make services contingent on being a member of an ethnic group rather than on having shared problems, such as coming from an abusive family. Thus prioritizing ethnicity in placements and service delivery can obscure the real reasons why a child may come into care. As a result, little may be done to ameliorate such root causes – causes which have nothing to do with a person's cultural background.

Moreover, while the Alberta government may have hoped to placate those who level charges of racial bias against the child welfare system with its emphasis on kinship care, the race-based policies of the system may actually do more to foster wider discrimination against aboriginal people, by promoting the view that aboriginals constitute 'improper families'. Poor African American families came to be considered "improper families" (Beam, 2013, p.85) in the history of American child welfare, because their race became conflated with their poverty. As is the case in Alberta, families that qualified for social assistance received greater scrutiny from child welfare, and in the case of many jurisdictions in the

United States, such families were disproportionately black, thereby fortifying stereotypes about broken African American families, headed by single-mothers, often presumed to have drug problems, with fathers who were absent due to a presumed lack of personal responsibility (rather than a lack of jobs in poor communities, welfare policies that bar fathers from living with their families, and the high rate of incarceration for black males).

**The problem with prioritizing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).** As with its emphasis on aboriginal culture, the Alberta government has placed a priority on preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) (a range of disabilities that result from exposure to alcohol during pregnancy), and on supporting individuals with such disabilities. Not surprisingly, many of these individuals are children and youth within the child welfare system. This is an important and laudable emphasis, especially in view of the substantial number of young people in care, across many nations, who are believed to have been affected by alcohol in utero. “Prevalence estimates of overall FASD in foster care settings ranged from 30.5% to 52%... For FAS [Fetal Alcohol Syndrome] alone [the most severe of the disabling conditions associated with pre-natal alcohol exposure – my insertion] , a meta-analysis of studies [from a variety of Western nations and South Africa – my insertion] using formal diagnostic criteria for case identification showed that approximately 21% of children in foster care are likely to have the condition” (Government of Alberta, n.d., para. 9). A range of neurological deficits are associated with FASD that can adversely affect children’s daily living skills, academic performance, interpersonal skills, and executive functioning (i.e., the abilities to sustain attention, plan, organize, and exercise self-control).

Certainly difficulties in all of the above areas were exhibited by all of the youth participants in this study; however, only one of them had a degree of cognitive impairment that could merit further investigation of a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) diagnosis (Maria). The other participants appeared to demonstrate more subtle difficulties in the areas noted above. Although such subtle difficulties could

have been the result of maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy, the results of this study suggest many other plausible and perhaps more likely explanations for such difficulties, such as severe trauma, especially for Tamara and Carmen, whose mothers did not struggle with drug and alcohol addictions. It is more likely, as I already mentioned, that the addictions of Jay's mother and Maria's mother may have created neurological vulnerabilities in them (e.g., impulsivity, hyperactivity, memory problems) that could have made them more challenging to parent, thereby increasing the risk for maltreatment, especially by mothers who were already struggling with many problems of their own. In addition, the trauma that attends foster placement "is one of the factors that seems to ride along with drug [and alcohol – my insertion] exposure, in terms of affecting the prefrontal cortex and poor inhibitory control. It's sort of a double whammy" (Lester, as cited in Beam, 2013, p.65), which can be impossible to separate in any given child, so as to clearly determine the effect of one possible cause versus another. Thus one needs to be careful about attributing all of a child's difficulties (particularly a child is who is aboriginal and whose mother may have addictions) to alcohol related birth defects. Though the effect of impairment from trauma or drugs/alcohol may be the same, an organic cause can be much tougher, if not impossible, to significantly ameliorate than psycho-social ones. Though special education or other remedial interventions may help a child, irrespective of the cause of a learning or behavioural difficulty, we may miss the opportunity to intervene with trauma and perhaps other social conditions, like household chaos, due to diagnostic overshadowing (i.e., attributing all of someone's problems to a single diagnosis of, in this case, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), or even worse, just the presumption of FASD, which aboriginal children in foster care may be particularly susceptible to, given their membership in 'improper families').

It must also be remembered that women in poverty are more likely to have children with developmental difficulties due to a host of prenatal factors – the effects of other drug use during

pregnancy, poor prenatal nutrition, lack of medical care, to name just a few that can be confounded with the effects of alcohol. The failure to consider such potential confounds may add to the dangerous stereotype of aboriginal children in foster care all having been afflicted by their mother's drinking during pregnancy. In my experience as a psychologist in Alberta<sup>116</sup>, such stereotyping was common amongst professionals such as teachers and social workers, as well as many psychologists, as evidenced by their often automatic assumptions that learning and behavioural difficulties in aboriginal children were most likely fetal alcohol effects.

Unfortunately this stereotype may have also been reinforced by another long-standing stereotype – that of the 'drunken Indian'. If all or at least many aboriginals have a drinking problem, then one might reason that most of their children must be defective as a result. Just as the 'drunken Indian' stereotype has often been behind aboriginals' exclusions from employment, housing, and admission to public spaces, among other things, the assumption of their children having fetal alcohol effects can function as justification for excluding them from needed help of all kinds: If the brain damage cannot be reversed, then little can, or needs to, be done about such problems, goes the reasoning. Although such racist assumptions and rationale for saving on intervention costs cannot be verified, these may be reasons that Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) receives so much more focus by the Alberta government than any of the other problems that affect aboriginal families and that make them vulnerable to their children entering into care.

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<sup>116</sup> but not in my practise in Ontario. Perhaps because of the large, multi-ethnic population of Toronto in which I mostly worked, it was not as easy to sustain such stereotypical ideas about any particular ethnic group, whereas Alberta's population is far more homogenous, with an overwhelming majority of the population being white (75.4% of the population) (Statistics Canada, 2013). In contrast, aboriginals (First Nations, Inuit, and Metis) constitute only 6.2% of the population (Statistics Canada), but as mentioned previously comprise 62% (Children and of the children in care (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009). Thus service professionals overwhelmingly encounter aboriginals who are suffering; however, they appear to disproportionately focus on only one of many of the reasons for this suffering -- that of problem drinking.

On the other hand, the attention paid to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) may make professionals prone to look for the problem, in an attempt to get a child more resources. It is unclear if this may have played a role in the judgement of the psychologist who conducted the assessment on Maria, which enabled her to qualify for disability benefits, based on her low IQ score. Though the psychologist did not make a diagnosis of FASD or Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), she wrote that Maria appeared to display the characteristic facial features of individuals with FAS (e.g., small eyes, thin upper lip). However, Maria told me that she did not look this way her whole life; rather her features were markedly changed as a result of requiring extensive facial reconstructive surgery, following her assault by the man who had picked her up on a prostitution stroll. Maria was anguished by the psychologist's assumption of FASD. She was aware that her mother's addictions could have harmed her while in utero. However, Maria seemed to be more distressed by the fact that this wrong assumption about her facial features was being used to explain her poor test scores, which made her question many more of the statements and conclusions that were made by the psychologist in her report. (Such reflective ability on the part of Maria, of course, also raises questions about her IQ score being a valid measure of her intellectual ability.)

It is not hard to see how the attention and resources that the Alberta government places on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) could have led to the inclusion of the psychologist's speculation about Maria's features, even though such information was unnecessary for describing her functioning levels. Given the stigma associated with such a diagnosis, especially in view of the maternal confirmation of prenatal alcohol consumption that it requires, it would seem preferable to simply be able to offer help to youths like Maria for whatever their actual difficulties are (e.g., low IQ, problems with executive functioning) rather than worrying about confirming such a shame-inducing explanatory label for those difficulties, in order to maximize the supports that could be available to her. Another aboriginal youth I

know wanted to know if he should be assessed for FASD, after his psychological assessment identified him as having a learning disability. He was obviously aware that such identification could result in his potentially receiving more money for his post-secondary education, than that which he could get on the basis of his learning disabled label by itself. Such a young person should not have to seek out a much more culturally 'loaded' label in order to be provided with more support for his education, especially since FASD does not provide a more informative description of one's difficulties for the purpose of intervening with them, than other diagnostic labels that are less loaded and speak directly to specific, observable problems, without requiring unnecessary speculation about etiology (e.g., learning disability, ADHD, etc.). Moreover, in light of the attachment related conflicts between mothers and the youths in this study, it seems pointless to add yet another potential source of tension (the fact that mothers must admit to drinking during their pregnancy for their children to receive an FASD diagnosis) to relationships that are often already highly volatile.

To be clear, I do believe that attention should be directed towards preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and other neuro-developmental problems that may be linked to teratogens of all kinds. However, as I explained above, it is not strictly necessary to diagnose a child or adult with FASD in order to intervene with their difficulties. Moreover, given the potential for harmful stereotyping, and the potential for failing to identify and treat other possible co-morbid causes and contributing factors to a child's neurological difficulties than prenatal alcohol exposure, perhaps it would be better to simply focus on supporting addicted mothers with intensive treatment resources, for both their addictive behaviours as well as any mental health issues that might underlie their addictions. Social issues such as unemployment should also be addressed, given that low income/low skills seems to maintain drug use in more than just high risk youth. Contingency management programs have demonstrated success in reducing drug use among pregnant women: Paying pregnant women with drug addictions to learn

employable skills resulted in a significant reduction in their drug consumption, as measured by urine tests (Hart, 2013).

Ideally, these kinds of supports should be provided before a child is born. However, it is equally important to make such supports easily accessible to women after they give birth, so as to hopefully prevent the “double whammy” (Lester, as cited in Beam, 2013, p.65) mentioned above of a child having to experience both the trauma of out-of-home placement and prenatal alcohol and/or drug exposure. While child welfare caseworkers can be faulted for failing to intervene until crises arose in the youths’ families, the addicted mothers of Jay and Maria may well have been afraid to do their part in seeking help proactively from child welfare, because of the fear that they may be criminally charged for their drug use. Or their own psychological stability may have become too compromised for them to realize that they needed to ask for help, or even realize that it was possible to ask for help, let alone know how they could go about doing so. Recall that Maria’s mother had told Maria that she and her siblings were too “bad” for her to handle, and that consequently she surrendered them to child welfare, intending to kill herself thereafter. Clearly Maria’s mother was desperate for help with caring for her children, as well as for herself, but likely would not have considered phoning child welfare for support. In Maria’s family history, child welfare had a bad reputation after all, for having broken up families through involuntary apprehensions of children. It thus makes sense that Maria’s mother had called them to take her children away, only when she had no other options for ensuring her children’s survival without her.

Not long ago, child protection professionals realized that women were reluctant to ask for help with leaving abusive partners because they were concerned that their children may be taken away from them. Fortunately now such women are assured that as long as they work with child welfare on plans to ensure the safety of themselves and their children, they need not have to fear having their children removed from them. Surely, measures could similarly be taken to assure women with addictions that

they will not be criminally charged for their drug use, and that they will be supported with their own problems, so as to avoid not just the situation of apprehension, but of being driven to such desperation that they think that only by surrendering their children, and by themselves committing suicide, could they find a way out of their problems.

Likewise, Jay's mother could have been supported to keep Jay, by working out a plan with child welfare to get help with her addictions, abusive boyfriends, lack of money, and parenting deficits in caring for Jay, without requiring Jay to leave his home. Obviously having a drug addicted mother is not a situation that can be resolved quickly or easily, but it could have been helped significantly with serious efforts at intervention. A long-term commitment<sup>117</sup> to serious treatment and economic interventions, along with ongoing monitoring of his mother's home to ensure Jay's protection, may have resulted in a better outcome for Jay, than going to his aunt's home, which arguably hastened his entry into street life, perhaps even faster than if he had remained with his mother. Not only would he have been unlikely to have started drug dealing at such a young age, but staying with his mother, while his mother worked on her problems and, in turn, improved her caregiving capabilities, may have helped to obviate their attachment related conflicts and Jay's preoccupied anger. (If not for the preference for aboriginal kinship care, a child welfare caseworker may have also considered encouraging his mother to return Jay to the care of his white step-father, to whom Jay had been strongly attached.) That said, given that Maria's multiple moves within the system were far from unusual (70 % of children who have been in care for more than two years have been moved three or more times) (Beam, 2013, p.89), and that each move is likely to be experienced, as Maria had, as another betrayal of trust and indication that she was

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<sup>117</sup> instead of the approximately 30 day (short-term intensive treatment is defined as anywhere from 20 to 42 days) residential treatment programs for drug and alcohol abuse that adults are most commonly referred for. Although longer residential programming for 90 days was advertised on the Alberta Health Services website at the time this footnote was written, it should be noted that even the 30 day programs are difficult to access, due to a very long waitlist.

unwanted and unloved, supporting biological parents to keep their children, whenever possible, would seem to be the real 'preferred' placement option for all children. This would, of course, also be more in keeping with the professed priority of child welfare on maintaining and reunifying families.

**The problem with identifying youth as “high risk”.** Just as the emphasis on race/ethnicity and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) may take attention away from the many forms of social exclusion that were identified in this study as being root causes of the struggles of high risk youth, identifying youths as high risk promotes inordinate emphasis on their risk behaviors, to the exclusion of the root causes of such behaviours. One's attention becomes focused on the youths' surface or manifest problems with drugs rather than the psychological suffering and lack of economic opportunities that function as antecedents that trigger drug use, as well as factors which maintain drug use.<sup>118</sup> The youths' voices echoed Shirley Chisholm<sup>119</sup> when she said that “It is not heroin or cocaine that makes one an addict. It is the need to escape from a harsh reality”(as cited in Hart, 2013, p.254). As an advocate for families from poor neighborhoods, it seem likely that former United States Congresswoman Chisholm was referring to the harshness of having to living in such destitute environments, including the heavy toll that stress from poverty and other social ills such as neighborhood crime exacts on family members. However, as Tamara and Carmen demonstrated, harsh family realities can drive the use of drugs as a coping method, regardless of family income. Moreover, having no alternatives for making money, other than selling drugs or prostitution, was a harsh reality shared by all of the youths, when they were fending for themselves on the street. Apart from using drugs as form of coping with street life and

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<sup>118</sup> This implies that the focus on harm reduction, which is the approach taken by the dedicated child welfare unit for high risk youth in Edmonton, will likely do little to significantly reduce drug use, in contrast to mental health treatment and economic opportunities.

<sup>119</sup> the first African-American Congresswoman and the first African-American woman to make a bid for the US presidency

painful family issues, the lack of alternative reinforcers for them, such as educational or vocational success, or even success in forming intimate relationships, had made it seem pointless for them to stop using drugs.

Thus again, mental health treatment for youth and their families is indicated by these results, as is viable economic opportunities for leaving street life. The contingency management program, that I described for pregnant addicts (the one where they are paid to learn employable skills), may well produce similar success, if applied to high risk youth. Also the youths who were capable of completing high school, Jay and Tamara, could have used more support during their efforts at upgrading and post-secondary studies. Tamara lacked the teacher support that Jay was able to attract in his upgrading program, even after she transferred to the same program as his -- support which could have perhaps helped her to figure out a better way of ensuring that she could complete her high school credits without resorting to prostitution. Jay also required better academic counselling when he was encountering challenges at university, which may have prevented him from dropping out during his first semester. Moreover Tamara needed frequent encouragement, praise, and coaching on study skills to help her persevere with her studies, especially when exciting distractions such as partying with risky men presented themselves. The alienation that both of them experienced in upgrading programs also could have pushed them to drop out, particularly if they had not been able to develop enough efficacy in their abilities to complete their diplomas, as was seen in the cases of Carmen and Maria.

Some post-secondary institutions have begun to acknowledge that former foster youth often require extra assistance. Janine Montero (as cited in Winerip, 2013) who developed a special support program for former foster youth at U.C.L.A., for example, acknowledged that such youth differ from other low income youth in general in that members of the latter often have at least one parent that has supported them and who represents home to them. In contrast, former foster youth lack such a safety

net. The supports offered by U.C.L.A.'s Guardian Scholars program tries to address such problems as the youth lacking places to live, among many other needs such as academic remediation, counselling for social and emotional support, child care, and so forth. These often unmet needs explain why post-secondary graduation rates are so much lower in this youth population. In the United States, only three to eleven percent of former foster youth earn undergraduate degrees, relative to twenty eight percent of the general youth population (Beam, 2013).

Given the current "knowledge-based economy", the high school diploma, which Jay staked so much value on as his passport to something better than a menial labour job, may no longer possess the same currency that it used to: "The combination of technological changes favoring higher-order skills and globalization have made it quite difficult for a high school graduate with basic literacy and numeracy skills to secure a stable middle-class job" (Duncan, as cited in Edsall, 2013, para. 22). Those lacking analytical, communication, and teamwork skills are expected to be increasingly relegated to low-paying service occupations (Murdane, as cited in Edsall, 2013). Thus while I have already discussed the problems of the poor youth labour market, especially for those with no high school diploma, one may expect that even Jay and Tamara may experience further barriers to mainstream success, if they do not ultimately complete post-secondary education. As regards Carmen and Maria, whose employment and educational barriers are much worse in view of their difficulties in just completing high school, this strengthens the case for them to receive ongoing government assistance.

Attending to the economic and psychological root causes of risky behaviour such as drug use also implies that a different label should be applied to high risk youths; rather than focusing on high risk behaviours, a focus on their high degree of suffering would seem to be more in order. Though I have already discussed the need for psychotherapy for the youth generally, I wish to specifically reiterate here that the study results suggest that attention to often unconscious, trauma-related influences on a

youth's self-regulatory behaviour and sense of agency needs to be given special attention. Likewise attention should be paid to how the suffering of moral betrayals at the hands of parents, other caregivers, or even themselves (e.g., overriding their conscience or values to perpetrate harm against others or themselves) can affect their identity development.

While this may seem to require the special knowledge and skills of a highly trained clinician, I believe that a basic understanding of grief and bereavement, and a basic disposition of kindness and willingness to form attachments would likely equip most of the critical people in high risk youths' lives, such as foster/kinship parents, social workers, and teachers to respond sensitively and empathically (and therefore therapeutically) to these young people. A lot of healing can take place if natural caregivers can listen patiently to youth when they are frustrated and acting out, and once calm, help them to label the feelings (usually fears and anxiety regarding being abandoned or rejected) that provoke their aggressive, out-of-control behaviour. Clinicians such as psychologists could provide such training through consultation and through set curriculums for foster parents, before they begin caring for children. Similar curriculums for teachers have recently also been developed. For example, schools in low income environments have begun to adopt the Head Start Trauma Smart model, which aims to equip parents and school personnel (including janitors and bus drivers) to "decrease the stress of chronic trauma, foster age-appropriate social and cognitive development, and create an integrated, trauma-informed culture for young children, parents, and staff" (Holmes, Levy, Smith, Pinne, & Neese, 2015, pg. 1650). Although children who show signs of being traumatized are still referred to Masters-level clinicians, parents and school personnel also learn how to validate a child's feelings, help a child to regulate her emotions, and avoid compounding problems of self-blame or shame, by resisting the use of punishment or other forms of coercion, for example (Holmes et al., 2015).

Another natural source of attachment and support for Tamara and Maria was their involvement with religion, particularly Christianity. Despite the fact that her Christian beliefs were helping her to reclaim her view of herself as a good person and helping her to stay committed to listening to her conscience, such beliefs did not stay salient for Tamara most of the time, presumably because she lacked consistent support for them, because she did not go to church regularly or otherwise connect with people who shared her beliefs. Though Maria felt happier and connected to God when she attended church services, her youth workers and child welfare caseworker responded with bemusement whenever she would talk about her religious experiences. It is unfortunate that neither youth received encouragement to continue their involvement with religion, as it seems that both youths could have derived significant support, feelings of belonging, and validation of themselves as being good people, through regular participation in a religious community. Moreover, as mentioned previously, God has been identified, by many victims of intimate-partner violence, as “one of [their] few consistent sources of comfort, strength and hope” (Sharp, 2013, p.A26). Believing one’s self to be a child of God may also help to ease the alienation and pain that attends attachment insecurity. Jeannette Winterson (2011) wrote, “And the Bible told me that even if nobody loved me on earth, there was God in heaven who loved me like I was the only one who had ever mattered. I believed that. It helped me”(p.22).

Given that there could be many possible therapeutic agents amongst the natural carers and professionals with whom the youths interacted on a daily basis, it would be best if youths did not develop significant attachments with staff who work in either the young offender centre or adult offender centres. Though it was preferable that Maria developed an attachment to one of her guards, rather than feeling completely alone and isolated during her stints in the young offender centre, it would have been much more preferable for her to have people outside the jail setting function as her primary attachment figures. The potential for exploitation of Maria in this kind of power relationship

and captive setting is obviously greater than she would experience in other relationships with youth-serving adults, such as youth workers and social workers.

Moreover, because Maria's emotional needs were being met so well by her relationship with her young offender centre guard, (and so poorly by anyone else "on the outside"), she developed a very strong relationship to the young offender centre on the whole, one that made her wish that she never had to leave that environment. Like Maria, other young people may become so well accustomed to, and happy with, the structure, routine, and supports of the youth prison environment that they are not terribly upset if they later come to face the prospect of adult jail. Although Maria did not want to go to adult jail, when she was actually remanded into custody for her fraud charges, she partly welcomed the idea of going to the adult remand centre as a kind of "adventure", presumably because of her positive experiences at the young offender centre, and her newfound eligibility for her mother's "wall of shame".

**The case for reforming transitional supports towards adult independence.** Because the young offender centre is often the last stop in the train of youth placements for foster youth before 'graduating' to adult jails (Beam, 2013), it is important to do everything possible to interrupt this trajectory. Helping youths access an improved version of Supported Independent Living (SIL) as early as possible (e.g., by their mid-teen years) could be a good way of getting off the pipeline to adult prison. Given that the point of SIL is to equip young people with the life skills needed for adult independence, then it hardly makes sense to require them to jump through many hoops to prove their readiness for SIL, as they could be taught to do things like open a bank account and attend various appointments on time, while they reside in SIL. It seems more likely that such obstacles to accessing SIL lie in an insufficient number of beds for all the young people who could possibly benefit from moving into SIL placements. This situation relegates young people to cycling in and out of the more temporary 'safehouse' placements that Maria and Tamara had each criticized for having kept them congregated

with other deviant peers, a situation which increased their likelihood of being pulled into criminal activities.

Moreover the actual training of life skills that are provided within Supported Independent Living (SIL) placements need to be stepped up to resemble the actual challenges that youths are going to encounter when they obtain their first apartment. Being required to keep a job and pay bills by themselves, while having the support of SIL workers, would likely go a long way to preparing them to actually hold onto their first independent homes, once they have them. To that end, SIL workers and/or child welfare caseworkers need to do more to help youths get jobs and maintain them, similar to the kind and level of support in this area that Jay obtained from his ex-offender re-entry program. Partnering with local businesses to place youths in jobs, rather than expecting them to compete with older adults and temporary foreign workers would be especially helpful. SIL workers also need to be available to provide emotional support, in this stressful transition time in which youths may be seeing their child welfare caseworkers less frequently, in preparation for having their files closed.

That said, as I have already stated, the results of this study suggest that youths should really be able to continue to access some form of continuing government support (economic and emotional) for as long as they need. The duration of such “after care” support should vary from individual to individual, based on their unique profile of strengths and deficits with respect to being able to function as independent, economically self-sufficient adults.

The need for ongoing support after the age of eighteen for many youth raises the question of where that support should take place. Although some youths would be ready to be supported in their own apartments, Maria and Tamara each wished that they could have continued to live in a form of Supported Independent Living (SIL), where they could access on-site workers, whenever they needed assistance. It would seem that the best possible placement for many older teenagers/young adults

would be something like the kind of ideal placement that Maria imagined in which youths would be given multiple chances to reform themselves when they made mistakes, and where they could be helped to learn needed skills, starting from the level where they are at. Maria also envisioned that staff and youth would act towards each other as family members should. Recall that she described her ideal placement as consisting of three connected homes in which the different needs of adolescents (e.g., drug and alcohol treatment, skills development) can be addressed. It makes sense that Maria would conceive of this kind of multi-tiered, group home style placement, given the extensive time that she spent in various kinds of residential, institutional care. However, when one listens carefully to the kinds of youth-worker interactions that she described should take place within the various homes, it becomes clear that if you take away the bricks and mortar image of there being multiple group homes, what she is really describing is being able to live in a caring, supportive family, where one can easily substitute the idea of having parents for having youth workers.

It appears that Maria was far from alone in her way of thinking about transitional placements. A 2003 review of such placements for young people in New York echoed her views when the authors wrote that youths needed “family like settings” (Beam, 2013, p.132), instead of being placed with inadequately trained staff in substandard facilities. Though the review authors were blunt in their call for group homes to be shuttered in favour of placing the youths in actual families, if some group homes had to remain open, the authors stated that the “current group residence model with its focus on behavior control must be replaced with a service-based family-like model” (p.132). The report also especially criticized the lack of access to mental health services in such sites, a criticism that is certainly well supported by Tamara’s experiences when she lived in SIL while awaiting her child welfare file closure.

Unfortunately, when youths spent too much time in out-of-home settings, they tend to develop an internal restlessness, which could very well obstruct their placement in even the most ideal of family homes. Recall that all of the young women had become accustomed to being constantly on the move, and had felt strange about spending too much time in one place – even if it was a good placement. One becomes used to feeling unstable and detached, after having moved so much (Beam, 2013). However, at the same time, the young women (and Jay) longed to experience stability and belonging somewhere.

Jeannette Winterson wrote:

Leaving home can only happen because there is a home to leave. And the leaving is never just a geographical or spatial separation; it is an emotional separation—wanted or unwanted. Steady or ambivalent.

For the refugee, for the homeless, the lack of this crucial coordinate in the placing of the self has severe consequences. At best it must be managed, made up for in some way. At worst, a displaced person, literally, does not know which way is up, because there is no true north. No compass point. Home is much more than shelter; home is our centre of gravity.

A nomadic people learn to take their homes with them -- and the familiar objects are spread out or re-erected from place to place. When we move house, we take with us the invisible concept of home – but it is a very powerful concept. Mental health and emotional continuity do not require us to stay in the same house or the same place, but they do require a sturdy structure on the inside – and that structure is built in part by what has happened on the outside. The inside and outside of our lives are each the shell where we learn to live. (2011, p.58)

A high risk youth may lack a sturdy structure that can allow her to feel at home not just in a physical place, but within herself. The mental concept of home is developed through experiencing the

consistent care, love, and protection of people who function as parents, whether they are kin or not. Though the youths' constant moving may feel familiar, even necessary, it does not feel completely right. This is because the longing to belong never ceases, despite the youths not knowing how to belong, having never internalized the solid foundation of a family or any other social group, from which a sense of home and personal identity could take root within themselves.

This bifurcation in the self, of simultaneously longing but not belonging, needs to be healed in high risk youth. In her own case, Winterson (2011) discovered that "you can be a loner *and* want to be claimed" (p.211) – two binary poles that are very difficult to keep in balance in one's life. Such binary opposition also prevents one from achieving maturity. Erikson (1959) suggests that the person with a mature adult identity balances their need for independence or autonomy with the reality of interdependence – growing up requires understanding that one cannot just be an independent "I" but must also become part of a "We". After selecting identity roles and committing to them, one must take responsibility for those social roles such as employee, spouse, parent, and so forth, thereby taking one's place within a community. This is not too difficult to realize for many people. However, when one 'grows up strangely' as high risk youth have, becoming mainstream requires not just absorbing the work skills, life skills, and social skills needed for being an economically independent, law abiding person, but also becoming prepared psychologically to be assimilated in a community – that is, to *feel* like we rather than they, as Dorothy Allison (1994) defined the experience of entitlement.

This challenge of psychological assimilation would seem to explain why high risk youth tend to exclude themselves, at the same time that they are excluded: The outsider did not choose her marginalized, often maligned position in her family and society, but now feels too ill at ease within her own self, and too ill equipped, to be anything else. Because of her multiple, compounded social exclusions throughout her life, she has lost out on far too many normative opportunities for developing

a sense of herself as having an inner core, “a center that is oneself, to which action and experience can be referred”(p.7), as James Marcia (1993) put it. To use Winterson’s (2011) terms, what happened to her on the ‘outside’ has affected her ability to develop a “sturdy structure” (p.58) on the ‘inside’, thereby compromising her mental health, sense of continuity, and capacity for intimacy. This sums up the relationship between structure and agency/identity that was exhibited by the youths in this study. It also appears to represent the experience of many other young people in the system. Speaking of her difficulties in integrating socially into a school setting, a former foster youth was quoted as saying, “I’m like a broken thing; I’m always watching – looking for the hurt, looking for the pain. People want to get close to me, but I can’t. I look for pain, because that’s my escape into isolation. I’m better off alone” (Beam, 2013, p.146). Her teacher observed that when this student was the smartest pupil in front of her peers, she was fine, but when someone “challenged her on a point or simply wanted to connect with her”, she was “insulted, and retreated” (p.146).

To address our moral responsibility for having created such damage to the lives of high risk youth requires, as I have already suggested, not just reform of one government department or multiple such departments, but mass social reforms, including reform to our dominant cultural ideology about free will, racialized and classist notions about ‘improper’ families, and child welfare policies and practices that have more to do with easing political tensions than ensuring healthy and safe child development. To push beyond these convenient excuses to do very little or nothing about the problems facing high risk youth requires enormous political and social will, the kind that could probably only be generated by convincing people that the welfare of other people’s children should be as big a priority to them as their own children’s welfare.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy’s protagonist Jude is a poor but highly deserving young boy who is denied the chance at social mobility, by being denied entrance into a university. Many years

later, another boy, also named Jude, arrives at the protagonist's home claiming to be his biological son. The young Jude has effectively been abandoned by his mother and maternal grandparents. The protagonist is thus confronted with the question of whether he will take this boy in to become part of his family. The paragraph below describes what he ultimately decided:

The beggarly question of parentage – what is it after all? What does it matter, when you come to think about it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people's, is, like class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom. (Hardy, 1895/2014, p.5.3)

It is my hope that the understanding of high risk youth that I have written about in these pages may contribute to the cultivation of a collective drive to transform the marginalized, disempowering, and, more frequently than not, dangerous experience of being in care today to the inclusive experience of being “entitled to our general care”, as Hardy (1895/2014, p.5.3) saw it. The results of this study suggest that although changes in individual programs and policies targeted at intervening in youths' lives may certainly help their predicaments, the most important changes that can occur for these young people must come from caregivers, professionals and general members of the public, whose appreciation of the complexity of the youths' daily struggles, motivates them to respond to such young people with empathy and compassion. Such a compassionate response is the most powerful vehicle for starting to restore their sense of humanity: To become psychologically assimilated in the mainstream, to feel as part of a 'we' rather than 'they', as Dorothy Allison put it, requires the experience of being treated as worthy of taking one's place among other such recognized human beings. This means that effective prevention and intervention efforts requires no less than the youths receiving an experience of

being cared for that does not differ in quality from that which most child and youth serving professionals as well as most members of the public wish for, and strive to create, for their own children.

**To My Daughter the Junkie on a Train**

Children we have not borne  
bedevil us by becoming  
themselves  
painfully sharp and unavoidable  
like a needle in our flesh.

Coming home on the subway from a PTA meeting  
of minds committed like murder  
or suicide  
to their own private struggle  
a long-legged girl with a horse in her brain  
slumps down beside me  
begging to be ridden asleep  
for the price of a midnight train  
free from desire.

little girl on the nod  
if we are measured by the dreams we avoid  
then you are the nightmare of all sleeping mothers  
rocking back and forth  
the dead weight of your arms  
locked about our necks  
heavier than our habit  
of looking for reasons.

My corrupt concern will not replace  
what you once needed  
but I am locked into my own addictions  
and offer you my help, one eye  
out  
for my own station.  
Roused and deprived  
your costly dream explodes  
into a terrible technicoloured laughter  
at my failure

up and down across the aisle  
women avert their eyes  
as the other mothers who became useless  
curse their children who became junk.

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## Appendix A

**Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS) Subscales**

The following descriptions of the TABS subscales were taken verbatim from the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale Manual (Pearlman, 2003, p.16).

<b>Self-Safety</b>	Items reflect the need to feel secure and reasonably invulnerable to harm inflicted by oneself or others.
<b>Other-Safety</b>	Items reflect the need to feel that cherished others are reasonably protected from harm inflicted by oneself or others.
<b>Self-Trust</b>	Items reflect the need to have confidence in one's own perceptions and judgment.
<b>Other-Trust</b>	Items reflect the need to depend or rely on others.
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	Items reflect the need to feel valuable and worthy of respect.
<b>Other-Esteem</b>	Items reflect the need to value and respect others.
<b>Self-Intimacy</b>	Items reflect the need to feel connected to one's own experience.
<b>Other-Intimacy</b>	Items reflect the need to feel connected to others.
<b>Self-Control</b>	Items reflect the need to manage one's feelings and behaviors.
<b>Other-Control</b>	Items reflect the need to manage interpersonal situations.

## Appendix B

The following tables contain the youth participants' scores on the Trauma and Attachment Belief Scale (TABS), along with the verbal interpretation that is associated with each of their subscale and total scores.

**Jay**

<b>TABS Scale</b>	<b>Percentile</b>	<b>Interpretive Range</b>
Self-Safety	<1	Extremely Low
Other-Safety	90	Very High
Self-Trust	31	Average
Other-Trust	8	Very Low
Self-Esteem	4	Very Low
Other-Esteem	4	Very Low
Self-Intimacy	4	Very Low
Other-Intimacy	7	Very Low
Self-Control	46	Average
Other-Control	19	Low Average
Total	14	Very Low

**Maria**

<b>TABS Scale</b>	<b>Percentile</b>	<b>Interpretive Range</b>
Self-Safety	97<x<98	Extremely High
Other-Safety	>99	Extremely High
Self-Trust	82	High Average
Other-Trust	76	High Average
Self-Esteem	84	Very High
Other-Esteem	38	Average
Self-Intimacy	92	Very High
Other-Intimacy	>99	Extremely High
Self-Control	97	Very High
Other-Control	>99	Extremely High
Total	97<x<98	Extremely High

**Carmen**

<b>TABS Scale</b>	<b>Percentile</b>	<b>Interpretive Range</b>
Self-Safety	>99	Extremely High
Other-Safety	>99	Extremely High
Self-Trust	76	High Average
Other-Trust	96	Very High
Self-Esteem	76	High Average
Other-Esteem	99	Extremely High
Self-Intimacy	96	Very High
Other-Intimacy	>99	Extremely High
Self-Control	>99	Extremely High
Other-Control	99	Extremely High
Total	>99	Extremely High

**Tamara**

<b>TABS Scale</b>	<b>Percentile</b>	<b>Interpretive Range</b>
Self-Safety	88	Very High
Other-Safety	>99	Extremely High
Self-Trust	62	Average
Other-Trust	96<x<97	Very High
Self-Esteem	84	Very High
Other-Esteem	93	Very High
Self-Intimacy	76	High Average
Other-Intimacy	96	Very High
Self-Control	99	Extremely High
Other-Control	65	Average
Total	95	Very High