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Intimacy, Desire, and Distrust in the Friendships of Adolescent Boys

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At a conference for the Society on Research on Adolescence a few years ago, I was approached by a well-known and respected researcher of friendships who asked me about my research on friendships among adolescents. He wanted to know about my qualitative findings since he had yet to use such methods in his own research. As I was describing some of my preliminary findings, I indicated who my research participants were—urban, poor and working-class, ethnic minority adolescent boys. He interrupted me by saying: "Oh, so you study gangs." I clarified that I do not study gangs but rather the friendships of urban youth.[1] He seemed confused by my distinction.

The conflation of friendships among urban adolescent boys with gangs represents a troubling and harmful stereotype that is pervasive in the social sciences and the larger culture. Relationships between male teenagers from the "inner city" are assumed to be problematic, dangerous, and fraught with violence. This stereotype has led to the exclusion of urban adolescent boys from the developmental literature, which results in an incomplete, reductive, and thus inadequate understanding of adolescent development. Urban, low-income, ethnic minority adolescent boys, like their suburban, middle-class, and White peers, provide information not only about what it means to be an adolescent in a particular environment and from a particular culture, but also what it means to be an adolescent.

For almost a decade, the goal of my research has been to understand the experience of friendships among adolescent boys from urban, low-income neighborhoods. I focus on same-sex friendships because my early

qualitative research indicated that male friendships are key relationships in the lives of urban adolescent boys (Way, 1998). Friendships constituted the relationships in which the boys experienced the most joy, but also the most difficulty. In their interviews, the boys spoke of struggling more with finding and maintaining close friendships, for example, than with separating from their parents. Although my early research was originally focused on boys' experiences of peer and family relationships, same-sex friendships repeatedly consumed the boys' interviews.

African American, Latino, White, and Asian American boys from poor and working-class urban families have been telling me and other researchers who focus on similar populations (e.g., Cunningham & Meunier, this volume; Stevenson, this volume) stories that often challenge the most fundamental beliefs about boys' development. Yet, few developmental researchers seem to be listening, believing perhaps that these predominantly ethnic minority boys from urban low SES families are not good representations of what it means to be a boy or to have friends. Their stories are perceived as relevant only for the study of Black, Latino, or poor communities and not relevant for the study of boys, friendship, or adolescence. Those of us who have been listening for many years to boys from the "hood," however, strongly disagree.

Previous Research on Boys' Friendships

Although the research on friendships does not, for the most part, include the voices of urban youth (boys or girls), such research is important to review because it forms the base of what we know about boys' friendships. The research on adolescent boys' friendships[2] has predominantly focused on dimensions of friendship quality (e.g., intimacy, affection, companionship, conflict) and has typically assessed, for example, the levels of intimacy in boys versus girls' friendships or in adolescent friendships more generally (Bukowski, Newcomb & Hartup, 1996; Furman, 1996; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Sharabany, Gershoni & Hoffman, 1981; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). Research has repeatedly found that adolescent girls are more likely than boys to experience intimacy in their friendships, while adolescent boys are more likely to have activity-oriented friendships (Belle, 1989; Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). This particular finding has, in some respects, dominated the field of adolescent friendships with textbook after textbook repeating this finding of sex difference in their discus-

sion of adolescent development. Recent research suggests, however, that this sex difference declines over time as adolescents begin to rely on each other for processing, among many topics, romantic relationships (see Azmitia, Kamprath & Linnet, 1998; Rawlins, 1992). Yet despite these newer findings, the belief that adolescent boys have activity oriented rather than intimate male friendships continues to pervade the research literature and popular culture. Research has also suggested that loyalty, as well as feeling understood and being able to truly be oneself in the relationship, is a key component in close friendships for girls and boys (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). These features of close friendships (i.e., intimacy, loyalty, acceptance) are considered critical aspects of adolescent friendships and distinguish adolescent from childhood friendships (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990).

Research with ethnic minority youth suggests that friendship qualities, such as patterns of intimacy, may be shaped by culture (Cauce, 1986, 1987; Dubois & Hirsch, 1990; Gallagher & Busch-Rossnagel, 1991; Hamm, 1994; Jones & Costin, 1997; Way & Chen, 2000). In their study of friendships among 240 sixth and ninth graders, Jones, Costin, and Ricard (1994) found that African American males were more likely to reveal their personal thoughts and feelings to male friends than were European American males. Furthermore, European American adolescents were the only ones who revealed significant sex differences in levels of self-disclosure in their friendships. Similarly, DuBois and Hirsch (1990) found, in their study of 292 Black and White junior high school children, that White girls reported having significantly more supportive friendships than White boys. However, no sex differences were detected among the Black students. They also found that Black boys were more likely to have intimate conversations with their best friends than were White boys, whereas no differences were found between Black and White girls. Finally, Gallagher and Busch-Rossnagel (1991) found, in their study of relationships among 311 adolescent girls, that middle-class White and Black girls were more likely to disclose their beliefs and attitudes to their friends than were White or Black girls from low-income families. My survey-based research with adolescents indicated ethnic differences with African American and Latino adolescents reporting more positive and satisfying friendships than Asian American adolescents. In addition, sex differences in perceived quality of general friendships were detected only among the Latino adolescents and not among the African American or Asian American adolescents (Way & Chen, 2000).

While this body of research underscores the importance of culture in understanding friendship processes, a limitation has been its tendency to compare ethnic minority or low SES adolescents with White or middle-class adolescents. Implicit in this research is the premise that White and/or middle-class populations are, or should be, considered the norm against which to compare ethnic minority and/or low-income populations. The experiences of ethnic minority and/or low-income populations, however, should be researched and understood in their own right (see Gaines, 1997). There has also been a tendency in the friendship research with White, ethnic minority, middle-class, and low SES adolescents to study gender differences rather than how boys, or girls, specifically experience their friendships over time. This skews the findings so that the only elements of boys' friendships that are understood are those that appear to be distinct from girls' friendships.

There have, however, been studies that focus exclusively on boys' development. This body of work, primarily focused on White middle-class boys, has emphasized the detrimental impact of conventional masculinity on boys' relationships (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1998). In order to conform to conventional masculinity, it is argued, boys cover up their emotions, feelings, and vulnerabilities. Accommodating the norms of masculinity, in essence, forces boys to give up their intimate relationships with other boys in the name of autonomy, strength, independence, and heterosexuality (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1998). Yet as Chu (this volume) indicates, this work on boys presents the boys as "passive participants or even victims" of this process rather than as active agents in their socialization and development. There is no room, in these depictions of boys, for boys' responses to these cultural mandates much less boys' resistance to, or at least a conscious engagement with, these norms of masculinity. The boys are presented as if they have little or no agency, and as if their experiences are independent of race, ethnicity, or social class. These limitations result in a series of questions with respect to my own work: Do these arguments have relevance for diverse populations of boys who have not necessarily experienced the benefits of accepting, whether unconsciously or explicitly, a conventional stance of autonomous masculinity? Do boys from urban, low-income families also cover over their emotions, thoughts, feelings, and vulnerabilities in their relationships with other boys? Do they forego intimate relationships with other boys for the sake of maintaining a masculine pose?

In response to these questions and gaps in the research literature, my

studies with predominantly ethnic minority adolescent boys from urban, low-income neighborhoods sought to explore how boys experience their friendships with other boys, and how these experiences of friendships change as they go through adolescence.

Method

Participants

Since 1989, I, with the assistance of colleagues and graduate students,[3] have been conducting a series of longitudinal studies of boys and girls from poor and working-class urban environments (Way, 1995, 1998; Way & Chen, 2000; Way & Pahl, 1999, 2001). These studies have focused primarily on the development of friendships and have included, in sum, approximately 200 adolescent boys who have been interviewed each year for a 3–5 year period from early adolescence through late adolescence. The ethnic composition of each study included African American, Puerto Rican, and Dominican youth. Some of these studies have also included Asian Americans who primarily identify as Chinese American and a few White boys. All of the youths in my studies come from poor or working-class families and attend neighborhood schools that are struggling to keep their doors open despite the chaos and dysfunction that permeate their buildings.

Research Orientation

My approach to research is voice-centered, relational, and grounded in feminist theory. Based on women's experiences, a voice-centered, relational approach to research aims to listen closely to the subtleties of human voices and stories. The approach underscores the complexity of development, the "nonlinear, nontransparent orchestration of feelings and thoughts" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, 3).

A relational approach to research assumes that the patterns that are "found" by researchers are products of what occurred between two or more people—the researcher and the researched. The narrative in an interview or the responses in a survey are never a pure or "innocent" representation of the "Other" (see Fine, 1991), but are jointly constructed. In my research with boys, this relational assumption led me to allow for

both stability and spontaneity. Although a specific set of interview questions was posed to each boy, room was given during the interview for the adolescent and the interviewer to follow new and unexpected pathways. This semi-structured approach to interviewing explicitly acknowledges both the interviewer's agenda (e.g., to understand a particular topic from the boy's perspective) and the adolescent boy's agency (e.g., to introduce important new knowledge that the interviewer had not anticipated).

Understanding and attuning oneself to the power dynamics within the research relationship is an additional goal in relational and voice-centered research. What is said as well as what remains unspoken by both the interviewer and interviewee is determined, in part, by the inevitable power dynamics within the research relationship. The research might be empowering and/or disempowering for the interviewee and interviewer depending on the specifics of the interview protocol, context, and goal. Although as an interviewer and principal investigator, I exercise the authority to phrase and select the questions and to interpret the adolescents' responses, the adolescents have the power of knowing, interpreting, and phrasing their own experiences and deciding what to tell me and what not to tell me. Attuning myself to who is speaking and from what vantage point, without pretending to understand another's position completely, strengthens the rigor of my research because it encourages me to see and hear the unexpected.

A relational approach also assumes that an individual's words cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are embedded. To examine how a person speaks about her or his world is to understand that these experiences are intimately connected to her or his specific location in the world. Holding such assumptions, I am consistently searching and probing during and after the interviews to understand what types of cultural expectations, hopes, desires, and stereotypes are influencing the stories of the participants as well as my own questions, thoughts, interpretations, and comments. Reflections on this process are then incorporated into the findings of the research.

Procedure

The boys in each of my studies have been interviewed by me, one of my colleagues, or a graduate student. These interviewers are ethnically diverse and come from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Often, they have had extensive experience working as counselors or teachers in urban settings.

Although I originally thought that most of the boys should be interviewed by male interviewers, many boys over the years have expressed a preference for a female interviewer. Consequently, most of our interviews have been conducted by women who have had extensive experience working with adolescent boys. The boys were often interviewed by the same interviewer each year for 3–5 years in order to enhance, to the greatest degree possible, the quality of the interviews and to create a safe space for the participants.

The semi-structured interviews in each study have typically been one-to-one interviews that last two to three hours. The interview protocol (similar across all of the studies) focuses on how adolescent boys experience and describe their friendships, what makes them feel close to their close male friends, what they value about their friendships, and how they see their friendships changing over time. Although each interview included a standard set of questions, follow-up questions were open-ended in order to capture the adolescents' own ways of describing their relationships. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the interview transcripts has included two techniques: narrative summaries (Miller, 1988) and a variation of a data analytic technique called the Listening Guide (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The intent of narrative summaries is to condense the stories told by each participant, quoting the participant extensively in order to maintain the flavor of the discussion (Miller, 1988). In the analyses presented in this chapter, my research team and I created brief summaries of each discussion of friendship in each interview. Next, we identified themes across and within these narrative summaries. Then we read the interviews for each theme, which involved highlighting each passage, sentence, or word in the transcription that suggests the particular theme in question. This process of highlighting helps to create a trail of evidence for the themes one is following. My technique of listening for themes is based on the Listening Guide (Brown et al., 1999), which encourages the listener to pay close attention to the form (i.e., how the story was told) and content of the interview, and to follow one's own process of interpretation. Both of these data analytic techniques encourage the listener to attend closely to the voices of the adolescents and to attune oneself to the relational elements of the research process.

Through this analysis, my research team and I were able to identify distinct patterns that revolve around the experiences of intimacy, desire, and distrust and are intricately woven into the fabric of boys' friendships. These patterns are evident, within any one year as well as over time, in the interviews of the boys in my studies over the past decade. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the ways in which these patterns are experienced in the context of male friendships.

Patterns of Friendships among Boys

Intimacy

Sharing Secrets

James, a 15-year-old African American who spends most of his free time writing plays with his best friend, tells his interviewer that he has satisfying and trusting relationships with other boys. He believes that they know him well and that they can relate to him emotionally:

> *Interviewer:* OK, can you tell me things that you like about your friends who are guys?
> *James:* They understand how I am. They know how to make me feel better whenever I am feeling down. We all understand each other's feelings and, you know, if there's a home problem, we understand that.
> *Interviewer:* How do you know that somebody else understands you?
> *James:* They show it by their feelings, like, expressions.

Although James is an unusually creative boy, who does improvisational theater with his best friend on a regular basis, his sense of intimacy with his friends and the language he uses to describe it are not atypical for the boys in my studies. Boys tell me and the other interviewers that their best friends are their confidantes, their partners, their "deep depth" friends, and those people in their lives without whom they would feel "lost." Boys report sharing their most "private secrets" and firmly believe that they can trust their closest friends to keep them confidential. Boys speak about other boys with great warmth and affection, setting a tone that conveys an emotional depth and intensity to their friendships.

Talking together and listening to each other's problems is a critical part of these boys' friendships. Asked what he does with his best friend, Julio, a sensitive 15-year-old from Puerto Rico, tells his interviewer: "we hang out, we talk to each other about serious things, share some deep secrets." For Julio, whose mother was dying of AIDS at the time of the interview, it seems particular important to be open with his best friend. Fortunately, his friends are quite empathic.

> *Interviewer:* Do you think this [best] friendship has changed since you were younger?
> *Julio:* It changed a lot. Just like my other friends changed a lot.
> *Interviewer:* Like how?
> *Julio:* When we were younger, it used to be like not so tight as we are now. It was not like if something goes wrong, like one of us would shed a tear, the other one will cry.

Johnny, a 14-year-old Chinese American boy, tells his interviewer about his friend comforting him when he was sad: "I had this goldfish for a long time and it died. So I started crying and crying, I don't know why but I went [to my best friend] and I was crying and . . . you know, he comforted me, he talked to me." Although the severity of the loss that Julio and Johnny were experiencing is not the same, the empathy and concern that their friends showed them were similar. Crying along with a friend and comforting him are acts of feeling for and with a friend, defying stereotypes of adolescent boys as lonesome cowboys who prefer to keep their feelings to themselves.

Brian, an African American 15-year-old says about his best friends: "I tell them anything about me and I know they won't tell anybody else unless I tell them to." A key part of Brian's friendship is the mutuality: "He could just tell me anything and I could tell him anything." When asked to define a best friend, Justin, a 16-year-old Puerto Rican, says: "Like I always know everything about him. . . . We always chill, like we don't hide secrets from each other." When asked what he likes about his friend, Justin says: "If I have a problem, I can go tell him. If he has a problem, he can go tell me." Steven, a 16-year-old African American, says about his best friends: "We share secrets that we don't talk about in the open." When asked to explain why he feels close to his friends: "If I'm having problems at home, they'll like counsel me, I just trust them with anything, like deep secrets,

anything." When Jerome, a 16-year-old West Indian boy, is asked to describe his best friend, he says:

> He's like a brother, I could tell him anything, anything. If I ask him to keep it a secret, he will keep it a secret. If he tells me something, he tells me not to tell nobody. I keep it a secret. If I need him, I know he's going to be there . . . When I talk about problems . . . he'll tell me or give me ideas or things to do.

Shawn, a 15-year-old African American student, says that his best friend has "privileges like you can do things with him or talk about things, anything like you can't with somebody else, [you can] talk about . . . private stuff, secrets."

Malcolm, a 16-year-old African American adolescent, suggests a strong sense of intimacy in his friendships when he speaks about the difference between his best friend and his girlfriend. "Cause if you have a best friend you know, you express yourself more and you like—you feel lost without them. So you know with her it's really just we have a close relationship where we can express things." Expressing one's thoughts and feelings, "deep depth secrets" and "private stuff" is a central part of the friendships of the boys in our studies. Adolescent boys, who have been described in the literature as activity oriented rather than relationship-oriented (see Belle, 1989; Kilmartin, 1994), carefully described the emotional nuances of their friendships and the importance of shared secrets in their friendships.

Sharing Money

Intimacy was experienced through shared secrets but also through borrowing and loaning money to each other. Like a mantra, the boys repeated that they trusted their best friends to "keep [their] secrets" and "to hold [their] money." When Randall, a 14-year-old Dominican teenager, is asked: "In what ways do you trust your friends?" He responds: "I trust them to hold my money, and I trust them to, if I lend them money they'll pay me back." When Nathan, a 16-year-old African American adolescent, is asked the same question, he says:

> I could leave any amount of money with him. He gave me money, I give him money. If I need something, he gives it to me, I give it to him [if he needs something] . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* Can you tell me about a time that you trusted your best friend?

> *Nathan:* [On Friday] he asked me if he could borrow fifty dollars and he gave it back to me by Monday. He gave me back seventy-five, he was like, thanks for lending it to him. He gave me back extra.

Mark, a Puerto Rican boy in his sophomore year, knows he can trust his friends because if: "I give them a stack of money to hold, they wouldn't be like 'oh well I lost it.' Or 'somebody took it from me' or something like that. They would like keep it in a safe spot and wouldn't tell anybody that they are holding that money for me." When Mike, another Puerto Rican boy in his junior year, is asked in what ways he trusts his friends, he says: "If I lend them money, I usually don't have to ask them for the money, usually get it back, I don't even have to ask for it." In addition to knowing that friends would pay them back, the boys emphasized their willingness to loan their friends money when they needed it. Sharing, borrowing, and lending money were critical elements of intimacy among these boys.

Protection from Harm

In addition to experiences of shared secrets and shared money, protection from harm was another way in which boys expressed intimacy with each other. Raphael, a 17-year-old Dominican boy, is asked by his interviewer: "How do you trust your friends?" He says: "Let's just say I had a big fight, I got beat up, I had like five guys against me, they'll come and they'll help me out." When Akil, an African American boy in his junior year, is asked why he trusts his best friend, he says: "You get into a fight with somebody else, [my best friend] will tell me to calm down, chill . . . like when someone jumps me, he will help me." He also claims that he feels close to his best friend because he knows that his friend would protect him in a fight.

Armando, a Dominican young man in his freshman year, discusses the bonds between him and his friends being enhanced through the protection of each other in fights. He describes a time when he and his three male friends were confronted by another group of boys who wanted to fight. He explains how it was up to him to protect his friends: "And I'm behind my friend . . . if something happened to him where it was like he couldn't react fast enough and I was behind him, it would have been up to me to . . . protect him and help him out." Armando explains that had he not protected his friend, he would have been isolated by his friends:

> If something had happened and I didn't do anything, I'm just standing like a big dummy, you know, I mean, none of them would ever want to hang out

with me again, and it would be the same with any of them. So, it's a trust thing.

As a result of this incident, he and his friends felt closer to each other knowing each would protect the other.

Like Armando, the boys in my studies repeatedly indicate that if they discover that their friends do not protect them, the friendship is terminated. Mark, a Dominican adolescent in his sophomore year, says:

One month ago I happened to be in a fight. I was getting jumped and one of my friends, who's supposedly my friend, he didn't come to try to help me. I was like "yo I was getting jumped why didn't you help me?"
Interviewer: What happened to the friendship*?*
Mark: There was no friendship simple as that. There was no friendship.
Interviewer: And there was a friendship before?
Mark: There was a friendship before but now there is no friendship.

Protecting each other was not only about "backing each other up" in fights, but also about helping each other calm down, thus preventing a fight. Chris, a Puerto Rican student who was 16 at the time of the interview, emphasizes how his best friend, Scott, helps him stay out of trouble. For him, this is a crucial aspect of their friendship.

Interviewer: Why do you think your friendship with Scott is better than with other friends?
Chris: Well with him when I'm in an argument with somebody that disrespected me and he just comes out and backs me up and says, "yo, Chris, don't deal with that. Yo let's just go on, you know," 'cause I could snap.

Another way the boys protected each other was by showing concern about harmful behaviors such as smoking, selling drugs, and cutting class. Jorge, a 14-year-old Dominican who is trying to help his best friend change, tells his interviewer that his best friend is like a little brother to him. However, Jorge is trying to change his friend's behavior.

Interviewer: What do you not like about this friendship?
Jorge: That he smokes weed and that he sells drugs.
Interviewer: Is there something you would like to change about Benny?
Jorge: That! That's about it . . . Well I'm trying to change him. He's, you

> know, trying to stop cause I told him. I be talking to him and he's trying to get off drugs and smoke.

A similar relationship is described by Jonathan, a 14-year-old African American adolescent. With his best friend, Jonathan is the "little brother" whereas his friend, who is almost the same age as Jonathan, acts like a protector. Jonathan says about his best friend: "He's honest, he never lets nobody try to harm me, and he's like a big brother that I never had. So we've become closer than we ever have been." When asked what makes his friend like an "older brother," Jonathan answers: "He's taking care of me, he buys me what I need. Like if I need stuff for my birthday, or need something to go out, he'll buy me an outfit or some sneakers or whatever I'll need, he'll try his best to give it to me." The nurturing quality of his friend's protection is readily apparent. Not only does his friend protect him against potential attackers, but he also provides for his friend.

These stories from boys about being protected by their friends and protecting their friends were striking in their apparent vulnerability. The boys wanted to believe, and did believe, that their best friends would protect them from harm and that they would also protect their friends. However, they did not emphasize, as one may expect based on stereotypes of boys, the protection of their friends but rather their friends' protection. They openly referred to and seemed proud of their interdependent, sensitive, and caring relationships with other boys.

Family Connections

An additional way in which intimacy was expressed among the African American and Latino adolescents exclusively (and not by Asian American boys) was by considering their male friends as "like brothers" or "like family." African American and Latino boys made such references to fictive kin when asked to describe the quality of their friendships with other boys. In addition, these boys often claimed that they are close to their friends *because* they know each other's families. Anthony's aunt (who is his primary caretaker) used to babysit Pedro who is his best friend. His other best friend's mom is the best friend of his aunt. Michael says about his best friend: "Since we were real small I have known his whole family, he knows everybody in my house, we just walk over to his crib, open his fridge without asking or something, that's how long we've known each other." Ken, a 15-year-old Puerto Rican young man, says he's close with his best friends' family and that is a large part of what makes the friendship "special."

When asked to define a best friend, Ken says: "Like I always know everything about him, I'm close with his family, he is close to my family, we always chill." Farouk, a 14-year-old African American boy, says when asked what makes him close to his best friend: "Um basically 'cause he knows my family, he knows my sisters, my mom, my dad. I know his mom, his dad. We know where each other live." In his interview the following year, Farouk says he is close with his best friend Scott because he knows Scott's parents. Armando says: "if you know somebody's parents, then you know how far the trust can be stretched."

Some boys gave family status as a reward to those who have been most loyal to them. Jonathan says about his closest friends:

> They are there for you. Even though your family can be there for you too, your family got to be there for you. Your friends, they don't have to be there, but they choose to be there and since they choose to be there for you, they make you want to accept them into your family . . . so you make your family bigger and bigger.

These boys expressed love and concern for each other by bringing their friends into the fold of their families.

Desire

With a clarity that is striking in light of the dominant beliefs about boys' friendships, the interviews consistently have suggested a strong yearning for intimate friendships among the boys who do not have close male friendships. Albert, a Puerto Rican boy in his junior year, says to his interviewer:

> *Albert:* I got friends and everything but I don't consider them as close friends, not now.
>
> *Interviewer:* Why is that?
>
> *Albert:* No 'cause it's like I haven't known them that good. I know them this year and a part of last year, you know so I don't know them good . . . I would like a friend that if I got anything to say to him or like any problems or anything I'll tell him and he'll tell me his problems . . . Some friends be your friends when you're not in trouble, when you have money or something. Once you don't have a lot of money or something

> they'll back off. But a real friend will stick right there with you. He won't back off.

In contrast to what the research literature suggests, Albert does not claim to want friends with whom to "do things," but to discuss personal problems. Victor, an African American student, suggests a similar theme in his junior year:

> *Interviewer:* Do you have a close or best friend this year?
> *Victor:* I wouldn't say, I don't say I would. 'Cause I feel that a friend is going to be there for you and they'll support you and stuff like that. Whether they're good and bad times, you can share with them, you would share your feelings with them, your true feelings . . . that's why I don't think I have any real close friends. I mean, things can travel around in a school and things would go around, and the story would change from person to person. Yeah, basically, I hate, it, I hate, it, 'cause you know I couldn't mind talking to somebody my age that I can relate to 'em on a different basis.

Boys, like Albert and Victor, yearned for friends who "would really be there" and with whom they could share their "true feelings." They feel betrayed by the gossip of their peers and they sought refuge from the rumors.

When asked what he would like to change about his friends, Michael says: "everything. I would like to have better friends . . . that I could trust as family." Scott says: "I would like one that I could trust. 'Cause then I could be able to talk to him about things or talk with him about things that I can't even talk to my family about." These boys stated that although they valued their relationships with their families, they still desired close male friendships. Carlos, who says that he does not have a close or best friend because he can't trust "nobody these days," would still like to have such a friend: "Yeah as long as like, you know I could talk to them about anything and if I tell them to keep a secret, to keep it, like I been telling you." Alberto wants a best friend who "doesn't talk nothing behind my back, tell my personal problems to . . . not leaving me for another . . . You know a friend that would be real tight to me, close, that I could tell him just anything." These boys spoke of not having but yearning for intimate male friends who don't "leave [each other] for another."

These stories of yearning for intimate friendships with other boys are not stories revealed exclusively by acutely sensitive boys who are isolated in school. They are stories told by popular boys in the school who are members of athletic teams as well as boys involved in theater arts. They are told by straight "A" students as well as by students who are struggling to get by in school. The language of yearning for intimacy is used by boys looking hip hop, cool, laid back, and macho in their low riding pants, Walkmen around their necks, baseball caps drawn low over their brows, sneakers untied. Boys who have been portrayed in popular culture as more interested in shooting each other than in sharing their thoughts and feelings spoke to us about male friendships that "you feel lost without," about "deep depth" friendships, and about wanting friends with whom you "share you secrets," "tell everything," and "get inside."

Distrust

The context of this world of intimacy, however, was a world of distrust of peers who will "try to take over you and take you for everything you've got and step on you." Comments such as "you can't trust anyone" are heard alongside comments about love for their male friends. In response to a question about his male peers in general, Anthony, a 17-year-old African American young man, says: "I don't trust [them], I trust me, myself, and I. That's the way I am. I trust nobody." Although he has a best friend during all four years of the study, a friend in whom he confides and to whom he feels close, he expresses strong distrust of others. Richard, a 16-year-old Puerto Rican young man, says about his male peers: "Can't trust anybody nowadays. They are trying to scam you, or scheme, or talk about you." Richard admits that although he has never directly experienced these types of betrayals from his male peers, he "know[s] what most of [them] are like." At times, this theme of distrust seemed to be a cliché that the boys perpetuated among themselves. I often wondered whether the boys truly believed these assertions or whether they simply repeated statements of distrust because that is what their peers were saying.

Yet by their junior and senior years, the boys' feelings of distrust were increasingly based on actual experiences with friends. While the affection for their close male friends was still heard in the boys' interviews in these latter years of high school, the stories of distrusting peers and even close friends began to dominate their interviews. Boys spoke of trusting

neither their peers nor their friends due to experiences of betrayal. Joseph, a Dominican student, tells me in both his freshman and sophomore years that he has a best friend with whom he had been friends for ten years. In his junior year of high school, however, the situation has changed.

> *Interviewer:* Do you have a close or best friend?
> *Joseph:* No. I don't trust nobody.
> *Interviewer:* You don't trust nobody? How come?
> *Joseph:* (Pause) Can't trust nobody these days.
> *Interviewer:* Have you had bad experiences with people?
> *Joseph:* Yeah, especially this year.
> *Interviewer:* Can you tell me about one of them?
> *Joseph:* Yeah, okay. Me and my friend got, you know, in trouble at school 'cause we broke the elevator. . . . Don't say nothing about it. And he went and told Mr. Talcott that I was the one who did it . . . nobody knew that we did it. So he just went and told him. He went ahead and told and I got in trouble. I got suspended for five days.

Experiences of betrayal do not register lightly for the boys in my studies. The boys' sensitivity to betrayal seems acute and dramatic. Boys who are actively discouraged in homophobic mainstream culture to have intimate, close male friendships appear to become particularly intolerant of maintaining such friendships when they entail betrayal and loss.

In his senior year, Albert explains:

> Can't trust people no more. Before you could, but now, you know when you got a girl, and they think that she's cute, they still might go try to rap to her and everything. You can't trust 'em like before that they will be serious. Like that friend I had in New York, my best friend [the friend he referred to in his sophomore year], I could trust him with my girl, you know, and he could trust me with his girl. People ain't like that no more . . . back then you could trust.

Albert believes that when he was younger, trusting others was easier than it is now. He remembers his former best friend from junior high school (whom he mentions each year) as someone he could trust and whom, he says later in his interview, he could "talk to and he would talk to me, too."

Albert's "back then" seems to indicate less "the good old days" than simply a younger age.

Many of the boys in our studies refer to junior high school as a time in which they could have close friendships with other boys. A few boys, in fact, made links between having friendships and the junior high school itself. Justin says:

> That's why in this school I can't be friends with like a lot of people 'cause you can't trust nobody. 'Cause in this school you say one thing and it's all over the school in two days. Nobody here got their own mind. . . . In junior high it was better because everyone knew each other so there was more trust. . . . now that you in a new area, you gotta maintain yourself and make sure you don't blab at the mouth.

While many of the boys continued to have close friendships during high school, they often believed, as did Justin, that it was easier to have close male friendships when they were younger.

When Marcus, from El Salvador, is asked about his close friends in his freshman and sophomore years, he discusses his close friends in great detail. However, by his junior year, he says he doesn't have a close friend.

> *Marcus:* I don't trust trust nobody. You know I have just a little trust.
> *Interviewer:* Why is that?
> *Marcus:* I don't know. I just think I always think that [my friends] won't be there when I probably need them a lot.

The fear of betrayal deeply influenced boys' experiences of intimacy. Marcus says in his junior year that while he has friends who protect him, he does not have friends whom he trusts. When the interviewer voices confusion regarding why this may be the case, he responds:

> I believe that, I mean all I know is that, say if I was with these guys and these guys didn't get along with the other guys. But I'll have his back, and he'll have my back, you know. We know that already. If my friend was in trouble, I'll be there, backing him up, or if I was in trouble, he'll be backing me up. But that's not being trustful.
> *Interviewer:* Why?
> *Marcus:* 'Cause maybe the next day, he might be the one that's joking and making fun of you.

In this revealing description of friendship and trust, Marcus suggests that someone who "backs you up" may not necessarily be trustworthy. He implies that although a friend may "be there" when he is in danger (i.e., he may protect Marcus when he is physically threatened), this type of dependability may not last, or may not ensure that this friend will respect him or protect him from embarrassment or feelings of vulnerability ("he might be the one that's joking and making fun of you"). Marcus appears to be drawing a distinction between physical and emotional protection. The boys' experiences of physical protection from their friends did not necessarily mean that they trusted their friends to protect their feelings.

The fear of betrayal, the distrust of peers (and sometimes close friends), and the loss of close friendships during the latter years of high school have each been themes in the boys' interviews. Like the themes of intimacy and of desiring intimate close male friendships, the themes of distrust, betrayal, and loss are heard in the interviews of a diverse set of boys: boys who are popular, boys who are alienated, and boys who are star athletes. They are themes that weave in and out of the boys' narratives of male friendships and seem to have a profound influence on boys' experiences of relationships. However, these themes of distrust are embedded in a world of intimacy and desire. The boys may distrust their peers, and have "lost" many close friends due to experiences of betrayal, but they often continue to have or desire close intimate friendships with other boys. Even in a context of distrust, many of the boys resist these dictates to distrust by maintaining close friendships with other boys. It is this juxtaposition of feelings of intimacy, desire, and distrust that seems most remarkable and poignant in the boys' stories of friendships.

Discussion

Listening to African American, Latino, and Asian American boys from poor and working-class families, we hear old and new stories about boys' friendships. As many other researchers have heard, my research team and I hear similar themes of loyalty and acceptance in close friendships. We also hear, however, themes of intimacy that involve shared secrets, shared money, protecting one another, both physically and emotionally, and family and friend connections. We hear boys discuss their loyalty and love for, their desire to share "everything" with, and their trust in their close male friends. In some cases, we also hear boys' longing for

intimate friendships. In addition, we hear themes of distrust, fears of betrayal, stories of deceit that lead to loss, and reluctance to find new friends based on experiences of betrayal. Adolescent boys, who have so often been portrayed in the research literature as having friendships that are emotionally flat and that focus predominantly on physical activities rather than on sharing thoughts and feelings (see Hartup, 1993; Kilmartin, 1994; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990), were typically found to have or want friendships that involve shared secrets, emotional commitment, as well as physical and emotional protection. Activities (i.e., playing video games or basketball) were a part of boys' friendships, but sharing secrets, shared money, protection, and, for the African American and Latino boys, familial connections appeared to be particularly important aspects of boys' friendships throughout adolescence.

Why haven't we heard these patterns of intimacy before in studies of boys' development? Why haven't we heard, for example, the emphasis on "sharing everything" and "deep depth" friendships or the emphasis on desiring intimacy? Friendship research has suggested that African American adolescent boys report higher levels of self-disclosure in their male friendships than White adolescent boys (Jones, Costin & Ricard, 1994). Furthermore, gender differences in levels of intimacy are often not found among African American adolescents (DuBois & Hirsch, 1990). These studies suggest that the emphasis on shared secrets heard among the boys in the present sample may lie with the cultural context. The beliefs and values maintained at home and in the larger community in which adolescent boys reside most likely influence the ways in which boys befriend each other. In White, middle-class communities where values of independence are often emphasized, boys might have more difficulty expressing emotions and vulnerabilities in their relationships due to their desire to seem emotionally autonomous and stoic. In African American, Latino, and Asian communities, however, where community and "brotherhood" are strongly emphasized, boys might have less difficulty expressing vulnerability, emotional complexity, and sensitivity within their close male friendships. The interdependent value system that is typical of many African American, Latino, and Asian American families (Chao, 2000; Fuligni, Tseng & Lam, 1999; Townsend, 1998; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1990; Nobles, 1974) might enhance the likelihood of intimacy and self-disclosure between male friends.

Another reason for these patterns of intimacy may stem from urban adolescent boys' responses to conventional notions of masculinity. The

dictates of traditional masculinity—the imperative to be autonomous, independent, to take oneself out of relationships with other boys, and to be emotionally neutral—may be resisted by ethnic minority adolescent boys from urban low-income families because, quite simply, they don't benefit from adhering to these dictates. The benefits that are reaped by White, middle-class males for playing by the rules, for privileging autonomy over relationships, are great—they gain positions of power and prestige and are taken even more seriously in the wider society. Urban boys of color from low-income families, however, do not typically experience such benefits. The attraction, therefore, of following the autonomous trajectory inherent in mainstream masculinity may not be as great as it is for White, middle-class boys.

Urban boys of color living in urban, low-income communities, particularly African American and Latino boys, may also be more socialized than White middle-class boys to resist certain components of mainstream masculinity. Boys from poor urban environments are often raised by their mothers and/or grandmothers. These women, by virtue of being raised as women in Western culture and in African American or Latino cultures (Anzaldúa, 1990; Bell-Scott et al., 1991), may reinforce the importance of relationships and encourage boys to experience the full range of their emotions.

By the latter years in high school, however, the boys became more pessimistic about finding and maintaining intimate relationships with other boys. At the edge of adulthood, when relationships with women often become more central, the demands of a homophobic culture may begin to consume boys, and they become less able to resist the demands of heterosexual masculinity. However, the emotional expressiveness and sensitivity heard in the boys' interviews were evident in each year of our studies. While friendships with other boys were often abandoned during late adolescence, the boys' resistance to emotional neutrality or stoicism in their language seemed to be maintained throughout adolescence.

The difference in findings regarding intimacy in my studies and the studies of White, middle-class youth may also be due to the methodology used. What would White, poor, working-class, or middle-class adolescent boys say about male friendships if they were included in a voice-centered, relational research study that emphasized close listening? Perhaps they, too, would reveal a desire for intimate male friendships, for shared secrets, for protection, and emotional commitment from their male friends. Chu's work (this volume) with White, middle-class adolescent boys suggests that

the differences between the present study and previous studies with White, middle-class boys is based, at least in part, on the methodology used. When Chu, using a voice-centered, relational approach to research, listens to White, middle-class boys, she hears similar themes regarding the desire for genuine relationships with other boys.

In addition to sharing secrets, knowing one could borrow from or lend money to one's friend was an important component of intimacy in boys' friendships. It is unclear whether this pattern is unique to those adolescents from low-income communities, where money and material items are not as readily available as in more affluent communities. The emphasis on knowing that their friends "would pay them back" is likely influenced by the extent to which one needs the money or worries about being paid back (see Grant, 2003). It may be that borrowing money is intimately linked to the belief that boys protect one another. Loaning or borrowing money is another way perhaps, in addition to physical protection in fights, to be protected or to protect their friends in need. The free exchange of money may be experienced, furthermore, as consistent with the belief that their friends are "there" for them when they need them.

Protection from physical and emotional harm was also a critical element of intimacy in boys' friendships. Unlike sharing secrets and sharing money, however, the theme of protection has been noted as an important aspect of childhood and adolescent friendships in previous research (Azmitia, Kamprath & Linnet, 1998), and as a more important element of boys' friendships than of girls' friendships (see Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Yet the ways in which protection is experienced (i.e., as an interdependent process) has been rarely noted. The boys in the current study repeatedly expressed their desire to be protected by their friends, both physically and emotionally. Their friends' protection is what, in fact, made them feel close to their friends. They openly described the ways in which their friends took care of them and they, in turn, took care of their friends. Communities that emphasize interdependency may produce adolescent boys who are able to freely discuss their ways of relying on each other. In addition, survival for poor and working-class youth of color in poor urban areas may be based precisely on boys' ability to depend on each other for both emotional and physical protection. Protection may serve as a way to maintain relationships as well as a way to cope with the real challenges of living in dangerous urban neighborhoods.

Family connections were an important aspect of intimate friendships among African American and Latino boys as well. This theme has also been noted in previous research (Kerns, 1994; Kerns & Stevens, 1996; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Greenberg, Siegel & Leitch, 1983). Adolescents from ethnic minority communities have often described links between family members and friends (Stack, 1974; Townsend, 1998; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1990). However, when the links between family and friends have been examined in the friendship research, the focus has been on the ways in which attachment styles are similar between family and friends or the ways in which parental monitoring influences children friendships (see Parke & Ladd, 1992; Patterson, Pryor & Field, 1995; Snyder, Dishion & Patterson, 1986; Mounts, 2001). These studies have neglected to examine how family connections or knowing each other's families enhance the intimacy of friendships among boys. The association between friendship and family relationships, however, appears to be culturally based, with none of the Asian American boys describing such a link. Other researchers have also detected cultural variations in the association between family relationships and friendships (see Cooper & Cooper, 1992). Understanding why and how these patterns may vary across cultural contexts is an important direction for future research.

Strikingly, intimate friendships for the boys existed within a context of extreme distrust. Although most of the boys had intimate friendships at some point during the study, especially during their freshman and sophomore years, they typically described their peers as untrustworthy and deceitful. These beliefs seemed to stem from parental warnings that one should be wary of trusting others and should always "watch their backs" in any situation. Ken says in his freshman year: "can't trust nobody. That's what my mother always used to say. Can't trust nobody." In his sophomore year, Ken repeats the same theme: "Can't trust everybody . . . basically my mother always told me 'you gotta watch out who you hang out with.'" These types of messages may reflect a belief system, common within many close-knit, oppressed communities, that those who are not part of one's immediate or extended family should not be trusted (Stack, 1974).

Reasons for high levels of distrust might also lie with the experiences of racism and harassment that adolescent boys of color experience regularly. The African American and Latino boys in our studies frequently spoke of harassment from the police, of being watched carefully in stores, on the street, in the subway stations and school buildings, and in their own

neighborhoods. They are watched by adults both outside and inside their own communities. When an entire auditorium of students in one of the high schools where I conducted research was asked if they had ever been stopped by the police, approximately 90 percent of the boys raised their hands. These adolescent boys repeatedly told stories of being strip-searched, asked for their identification, and questioned by police. They receive clear messages that they are not being trusted by many of the adults in their lives. This lack of trust experienced on a daily basis is likely to have an effect on these boys' ability to trust each other (Epstein & Karweit, 1983).

The Asian American boys also spoke of racism and harassment but these experiences primarily took place in school with their peers rather than outside of school with adults. The Asian American boys often spoke of being victimized in school by their African American, Latino, and Asian American male peers. Some of the African American and Latino males in our studies, who often resent the Asian American males who are regularly and openly treated preferentially by teachers and principals, taunt and harass their Asian American peers. Asian American males, wanting to "be cool," also pick on their Asian American male peers who are smaller and less able to defend themselves. These difficult experiences may lead the Asian American boys to distrust their peers as well.

The types of school where the studies have taken place may further explain the pervasiveness of distrust among the boys. All of the boys attended large, underfunded, and chaotic inner-city schools that lacked any real means to create a community within the school. The rates of suspension and dropout were high in the high schools in which we have conducted research. Epstein and Karweit (1983) state: "Negative features in a school environment—ridicule, discrimination, low expectations, stereotypes, repressions, punishment, isolation—may increase the dissociative quality of the setting and affect the thought processes and social behaviors of the students" (p. 60). The social relations and behavior of the adolescents who participated in my studies may be deeply influenced by their school. The school in which they spend a substantial part of their day conveys to them that they are not trustworthy, and these messages of distrust may influence their interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, these feelings of distrust did not prevent close, trusting, nonfamilial friendships from flourishing, at least during the freshman and sophomore years of high school. The context of friendships was one of mistrust but the close friendships themselves were often trusting and inti-

mate. It may be that considering friends as "fictive kin" or as family members allowed adolescents to cross the barrier created by feelings of distrust (Rotenberg, personal communication). Furthermore, the mistrust of peers may enhance the closeness experienced between best friends. An antagonistic "other" may lead adolescents to appreciate their close friendships even more than if the contrast did not exist. However, not trusting peers also made it more difficult for some of the adolescents to make and maintain friends, and by their senior year, close friendships with other boys were no longer possible. This shift suggests that boys are falling out of relationship with other boys right at the point in their lives when the messages about the presumed link between manhood and heterosexuality are at their peak. Raymond (1994) notes that "intense same-sex friendships that continue after adolescence—particularly those between men—are often discouraged, judged immature, and occasionally severely punished" (120). Not trusting other boys, and choosing not to maintain close relationships with other boys during late adolescence, might allow boys to distance themselves from their own potentially risky desires for close, intimate relationships with other boys.

My studies over the past decade have sought to understand the experience of friendships among ethnic minority boys from low SES families living in urban areas. The findings draw attention to the ways in which the friendships of boys are deeply embedded in the culture in which they are a part. Understanding those cultures and exploring how cultural beliefs and values shape and are shaped by boys' perceptions of their friendships seem to be particularly important directions for future research. If our understanding of adolescent boys is going to be more comprehensive and meaningful, it is essential to explore longitudinally and through the use of voice-centered, relational methods the ways in which adolescent boys from diverse cultures experience their relationships. From these studies, theories can then be generated about the ways in which cultures and contexts shape and are shaped by boys' relationships, and practices with boys (i.e., teaching, counseling, parenting) can be more responsive to and nurturing of boys' development.

NOTES

Parts of this article have been previously published (Way, 1998; Way & Pahl, 1999; Way, 2001).

1. The term "urban youth" is used in this chapter to refer to low-income adolescents from urban areas.

2. While there is a large body of research on peer relationships, the focus of the literature reviewed here is on dyadic friendships.

3. Colleagues include Michael Nakkula and Helena Stauber. Graduate students include Tine Pahl, Rachel Gingold, Susan Rosenbloom, Mariana Rotenberg, Geena Kuriakose, Lisa Chen, Vivian Tseng, Kirsten Cowal, Esther Marron, Melissa Greene, and Joanna Sattin. Postdocs include Judy Chu. Thank you to all!

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