Abstract

This study investigated adolescent boys’ perceptions of how they form bonds with others. The particular means by which this was undertaken was through photo elicitation interviews, a process in which participants are asked to take photos documenting their experiences and which then serve as prompts during an interview process. The participants’ stories about these photographs were then examined using a form of narrative inquiry, thematic analysis.

The extant literature suggests that males seek counselling or therapy less frequently, that they remain in counselling for shorter lengths of time, and that this may have negative impacts on their mental and physical health. Current theories of masculinities suggest these trends may be because the culture of counselling is incongruent with the culture of masculinities. As one key determinant of successful therapeutic outcomes is the bond between counsellor and client, the present study proposes that if more is known about how adolescent boys perceive forming bonds, practitioners will be in a better position to meet their specific needs. It contributes to the literature by employing a qualitative methodology, an approach underutilized in previous studies of masculinities, by researching a group that has hitherto been relatively unexplored, and by suggesting a new framework through which practitioners might understand forming relationships with young male clients.

Participants’ narrative accounts suggest that four overarching themes guide how boys form and maintain bonds with others: Features of the Self, Features of the Setting, Features of the Other, and Features of the Relationship. Of these four, participants particularly emphasized Features of the Relationship. Based on these findings, several theoretical, practical, and ethical recommendations are suggested, particularly that practitioners need to be open to alternate ways of forming relationships with male adolescents, especially during therapy’s nascent stages.
Preface

This research was conducted with the approval of the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The Certificate Number of the Ethics Certificate was: H11-01137
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Preface............................................................................................................................................ iii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... iv

List of Tables .................................................................................................................................... ix

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................................... x

Chapter I--Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter II--The Literature Review ................................................................................................. 3

Theories of Masculinity ................................................................................................................... 3
Masculine Ideologies and Gender Role Strain ............................................................................. 6
Therapeutic Engagement as a Form of Help Seeking ................................................................. 13
A Multicultural Approach ............................................................................................................. 14
Engaging Men in Therapy ............................................................................................................. 16
Deficiencies in the Literature ....................................................................................................... 24
The Relevance of the Proposed Study and the Research Question ........................................... 25

Chapter III--Method ...................................................................................................................... 28
Features of the Self. .......................................................................................... 97

   Emotion and Expression—“I cannot deal with sad.” ..................................97
   Perceptions about Gender—“Guys are supposed to be more perceptive…and girls are just
   more emotional.” ..........................................................................................99
   Coping Skills—“I can keep going by myself.” .............................................100

Features of the Setting .................................................................................. 101

   The Right Timing or Conditions—“Because it’s anonymous, people are more willing to
   share ideas.” .................................................................................................101
   The Right Place—“A safe place.” ....................................................................104

Features of the Other .................................................................................... 105

   Similarities and Differences—“We are the same person.” ..........................106
   “Counselling” Skills—“Just someone who is always a listening ear for me.” ....107
   Personal Qualities I Admire—“She’s always there for me.” ..........................108

Features of the Relationship ........................................................................ 109

   Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition—“That was how the trust thing
   formed, because we saw each other all the time.” ......................................109
   Doing Things Together—“My Dad was the one who taught me to ride a bicycle.” ....111
   Laughter, Fun, Excitement and Novelty—“We were sharing a laugh, and that helps with
   bonding.” .................................................................................................112
Reciprocity and Equality—“When you have a boy share his feelings…you have to do the same.”............................................................................................................................. 114
Talking Together—“Sometimes it’s almost better not to be talking about the problem.”........................................................................................................................................ 116

Ancillary Findings .......................................................................................................... 118

Atthul’s Reflection............................................................................................. 118
Sam’s Reflection................................................................................................ 118
James’ Reflection................................................................................................ 119
Min’s Reflection................................................................................................ 120

Ancillary Themes ............................................................................................................ 121

Features of the Self. ............................................................................................ 121
Features of the Setting. ....................................................................................... 121
Features of the Other.......................................................................................... 123
Features of the Relationship................................................................................ 123

Summary of the Findings................................................................................................ 124

Chapter V--Discussion ................................................................................................................ 126

Overview ......................................................................................................................... 126

Theoretical Contributions to the Literature................................................................. 127

Practical Contributions to the Literature................................................................. 129

Methodological Contributions to the Literature ............................................................. 131
Implications for Theory and Practice ................................................................. 133

Implications for Ethical Practice ........................................................................ 137

Conclusions ........................................................................................................ 141

References ........................................................................................................... 145

Appendix A—Recruitment Flyer .......................................................................... 157

Appendix B: Parent Consent Form ....................................................................... 158

Appendix C: Student Assent Form ...................................................................... 162

Appendix D: Member Verification Email ............................................................. 166
List of Tables

Table 1: Cross—Narrative Themes and Sub-Themes ......................................................... 96

Table 2: Ancillary Themes and Sub-Themes..................................................................... 122
Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible if not for the continuous support, encouragement, wisdom and patience of my research committee: Dr. Marv Westwood, Dr. Marla Buchanan, and Dr. Dónal O Donoghue. Whether by phone, email, or over an epistemological cup of coffee, whenever I had a question they were there with an answer--or sometimes with another, even bigger question. In particular I want to thank Dr. Marv Westwood, my advisor, for his unspoken and unconditional trust in my ability to complete this work and for my gradual development as a researcher. His confidence in me and his interest in the impact of masculinities have been invaluable.

I am also greatly indebted to the four boys who volunteered as research participants. Without their input this project would still be waiting to happen, and their sincerity, honesty and insight were an inspiration to me. Although I began this dissertation with under the conception that I was the one conducting the research, it quickly became apparent an interest in how boys see the world was one we shared, and one we were all researching together. It has been an honour to spend time and to talk with them.

Finally, I am grateful to my family, particularly Janet and Stel.la--the former for imbuing me with the importance of an education, and the latter for giving me the time and space to pursue one.
Chapter I--Introduction

There is a considerable research base that suggests men are far less likely than women to seek the therapeutic help of a counsellor, psychologist or therapist (Cochran, 2005; Addis & Mahalik, 2003). What’s more, this comparative underutilization of psychological services persists across demographics such as age, race, nationality, and ethnicity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Powell, 2006). Instead of seeking help, men are known to engage in behaviours that may further degrade and endanger their health, including engaging in high risk activities, denying illness, and avoiding contact with health care services (Courtenay, 2000a; Oliffe & Phillips, 2008; Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Much of the research base suggests men not only fail to seek help, but that this failure may also contribute to some of the alarming statistics that illustrate Canadian men’s poor health care. For example, although they are far less likely to be diagnosed as depressed, and far less likely to attempt suicide, Canadian males are nearly four times as likely as females to commit suicide. Similarly, Canadian men have shorter life expectancies than women, are more likely than women to die from the nation’s fifteen leading causes of death, and are significantly more likely to perpetrate acts of violence, to suffer from addictions, and to be homeless (Government of Canada, 2006). Clearly, men’s reluctance or inability to seek help has economic, social and health implications, and at least one study suggests that it should be considered the principal health-related issue impacting men (Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005).

This ignorance or denial of the importance of help seeking also extends to adolescents, and particularly to adolescent males. Research suggests that although 20% of adolescents in the United States suffer some form of emotional or behavioural disorder, only about 6-10% of them receive services in a mental health setting (Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg, & Jackson,
Thus, like their adult counterparts, adolescent boys are reluctant to seek help, this may have immediate social and health implications for their lives, and it may also be entrenching unhealthy patterns that will be perpetuated into adulthood.

An important question, then, is what is preventing males of all ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds from seeking help for their concerns? The fact that this reluctance to help seek extends to both medical and psychological settings suggests that it is not necessarily factors unique to one environment acting as barriers, but perhaps barriers that exist within men themselves. Thus we might begin by examining male socialization, looking at what elements of this socialization impede their ability to help seek, and then discussing how therapy might be adapted, if at all, in ways that assist men and boys in scaling these barriers.
Chapter II--The Literature Review

Theories of Masculinity

Three paradigms have influenced much of the way we theorize about how gender and masculinity account for men’s reluctance to help-seek: essentialist, social constructionist, and feminist (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Englar-Carlson, 2006). In many cases, contemporary research and suggested strategies for conducting therapy with men blend these approaches, so it may be useful to understand the theoretical underpinnings of each.

The first and most enduring theory to explain men’s reluctance or inability to engage in help seeking is referred to in the literature as the ‘essentialist’ or ‘nativist’ understanding of gender. From this perspective, men and women are biologically different, and men’s behaviour—whether it be difficulty relating interpersonally, a higher likelihood of addictive or self-destructive behaviour, a preponderance to violence, or a resistance to counselling—can be seen as a function of their sex. According to this position, men and women are essentially different, and as these differences are generated by biology, there is very little we can do to change these predispositions. As counsellors and therapists, our role is to help clients of both sexes acknowledge these differences, and use what other essentialists would regard as positive, innate qualities of men (for example, their altruism, their stoicism, and their industry) in an attempt to overcome their predisposition to more negative behaviours. As individual men and women, or as counsellors who take the essentialist perspective, we become “more likely to view the dark side of masculinity as an unfortunate, but relatively inevitable, outcome of male heritage” (Brooks, 2001); both clients and counsellors, therefore, are less likely to believe that real and permanent change is possible, and this may drastically alter the course and the outcomes of therapy. Thus one of the criticisms of the essentialist approach is that it is often used to
support stereotypes that constrain men and women (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Englar-Carlson, 2006). Finally, according to the essentialist position, as all men share gender we would expect all men to be alike, but this is clearly not the case. Masculinity is a construct that varies between individuals according to demographics such as age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion, it has also been shown to be a construct that varies within individuals across a lifespan and according to context, and we know that women and girls can possess, to varying degrees, “masculine” traits.

Given this diversity of masculinities between and even within men, a more recent understanding of gender that has evolved has come from the social constructionist perspective. This paradigm argues that the reason men are more resistant to therapeutic engagement is a product not of their sex but rather of their gender, and whereas sex is genetic gender is socialized. Thus men and women are socialized to behave the ways they do because they learn gendered attitudes and behaviours through on-going social interactions, both with individuals and with social institutions such as schools, the media and our work environments (Courtenay, 2000a; Englar-Carlson, 2006). As these institutions change, and as people change, conceptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine also evolve, and thus a man’s understanding of what it means to be male will vary during a lifetime. Additionally, research also indicates that masculinity varies according to other socio-cultural norms and constructs, and thus the literature now employs the term “masculinities” to reflect “the interaction of masculinity with other culturally salient variables such as race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, ability, and age” (Englar-Carlson, 2006, p. 20). Conceived in this way, we can conceptualize masculinity not so much as a stable property of an individual, but rather a contextually situated construct that varies according to a variety of recursive interactions between the person and their environment.
(Addis & Mahalik, 2003). In this manner, boys and girls are not empty vessels who have gender imposed upon them, but active participants who interact with the world around them to create their own understanding of gender (Courtenay, 2000a). Pleck (1995) comments that in this way “...social constructionism has the virtue of reinforcing an emphasis on individuals’ adaptation to gender expectations as a lifelong process as well as one in which individuals are not only acted upon but act” (p. 24). Within such a paradigm, members of both genders have agency and power to change their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, a much more hopeful outlook than that suggested by the essentialist position.

A third perspective on men’s reluctance to engage in help-seeking behaviour comes from the feminist perspective. The feminist and social constructionist perspectives are similar in that both are anti-positivist and postmodern, and both see gender as constructed rather than innate. However,

Where feminist perspectives on masculinity depart is in the degree to which power differences between men and women are seen as central to any analysis of gender.

Gender...organizes relationships between men and women in such a way that men are economically, politically and often interpersonally dominant. Thus, masculinity cannot be understood apart from men’s place as a group in a social order that privileges them (Addis & Cohane, 2005, p. 642).

Like the social constructionists, feminists argue that gender is created through social transactions such as language, education and commerce, and that as another type of social act, health acts also help to define gender (Courtenay, 2000a). Through the feminist lens, an explanation for why men avoid help seeking would examine the ways men benefit, both individually and collectively, from avoiding or refusing help seeking. By hiding or denying their
pain, refusing to admit vulnerability, dismissing help, and often allowing themselves access to only one emotion, anger—an emotion which often depends on asserting oneself and subverting others through verbally or physically aggressive behaviour—men acquire or maintain positions of dominance and power (Courtenay, 2000a; Addis & Mahalik, 2003). If we subscribe to the feminist perspective that gender is socially constructed and that elements of sexism are so deeply ingrained in our society that both women and men act as agents, often unwittingly, in maintaining patriarchy, then we can see how men’s actions often have devastating consequences for women. Additionally, given the overwhelming statistics on men’s comparative rate of suicide, addiction, homelessness, disease, and mortality, it seems entirely possible that the institutions and social transactions that men use to maintain their power come with a concomitant and perhaps unrecognized cost. As Good and Brooks (2005) suggest, “The critical point is that contemporary men, regardless of the many advantages and entitlements of a culture that generally treats men quite well, are nevertheless experiencing considerable subjective pain” (p. 3). Thus from a feminist perspective we can view the study of masculinity as a study of how socially constructed roles victimize both men and women, and view men’s reluctance to help seek as a social transaction that has a negative impact socially, interpersonally, and intrapersonally (Brooks, 2001). Facilitating or improving men’s help seeking becomes a way not only to address their own problems, but to address patriarchal transactions and institutions within our society.

**Masculine Ideologies and Gender Role Strain**

The most popular contemporary approach to understanding masculinity, the Gender Role Strain (or Gender Role Conflict) paradigm is rooted in social constructionism, but it incorporates elements of the feminist perspective. Pleck (1995) makes ten propositions about Gender Role
Strain (GRS), among them that (1) gender roles are defined by gender norms and stereotypes, (2) these norms are often contradictory and inconsistent, (3) the proportion of people who violate such norms is high, (4) violating such norms leads to social condemnation and (5) psychological consequences, and (6) the imagined consequences of norm violations leads people to over conform to these norms. Apart from the sexist and patriarchal institutions GRS helps to uphold, it also has psychological consequences. For example, one of the ideologies that a boy or man may have about what it means to be masculine is that “real men” do not feel vulnerable emotions such as sadness. Given that this is a near impossible ideal, there are likely to be times when a man notices a discrepancy between this ideal and his own feelings of loss, shame or despondence. This dynamic is what Pleck refers to as “gender role discrepancy,” and he argues that such incongruities are potentially damaging to men’s self-esteem and may contribute to depression or anxiety, either because of their own negative judgments of themselves or because of social admonishment or ostracism (Englar-Carlson, 2006). Secondly, were a man to achieve such an ideal, the socialization process leading to this sort of ideal would likely be psychologically damaging, leading to what Pleck refers to as “gender role trauma.” It might require, in the case of this example, that a man or boy learns to divorce himself from his own emotion and subvert any feeling apart from those he perceives to be adequately masculine. Finally, when men achieve many of what they have understood to be the norms of masculinity, these norms are often inherently damaging. Returning to the example, a man who becomes completely emotionless is likely to have difficulty achieving emotional intimacy with his spouse, his children or other loved ones. In this way, in achieving a masculine ideal he has also achieved what Pleck would refer to as “gender role dysfunction.” Men are thus at risk from three sources: the discrepancy between their masculine ideals and what they can realistically embody,
the trauma in striving to achieve these ideals, and the dysfunction inherent in their eventual attainment. All three have social and psychological consequences for men, their families and society as a whole. As O’Neil, Good and Holmes (1995) summarize:

Gender role conflict is a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences on the person or others. Gender role conflict occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in personal restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self. The ultimate outcome of this kind of conflict is a restriction of the human potential of the person experiencing the conflict or a restriction of another’s potential...When individuals are personally devalued, restricted or violated because of sexism and gender role conflict, psychological and physical health may be at risk (p.167-8).

Good and Brooks (2005) have proposed two recent additions to our conceptualization of the GRS paradigm, what they refer to as “The Interactive Model of Gender Role Strain,” which essentially reflects a synthesis of Pleck’s (1995) social constructionist model with Bowen’s (1978) family systems theory and Gilmore’s (1990) ecological perspective. Part of Bowen’s theory was that when people give up self, anxiety results. Given that both women’s and men’s socialization requires them to deny or subvert parts of their character, we should expect anxiety to result, and that this anxiety might lead them to enact even more rigid definitions of acceptable gendered behaviour. In addition, Gilmore’s (1990) research of masculinity through different cultures revealed that “almost all contemporary cultures have a code of masculinity based on competition, risk taking, stoic emotional reserve, and rejection of the feminine” (as cited by Good & Brooks, 2005). However, more rigid definitions of masculinity depend on two ecological variables, specifically the degree of external threat and the availability of natural
resources. The higher the level of threat, and the fewer the resources, the more rigid and inflexible the definitions of masculinity and their endorsement become.

Pleck (1995) also theorized that when gender violations do occur, the resulting strain is so unpleasant that men compensate by ascribing even more rigidly to traditional definitions of masculinity. This is problematic because there is a growing body of research that suggests a strong positive correlation between the degree to which men endorse traditional or dominant masculine ideologies and poor health behaviours, including the ability to seek help (Courtenay, 2000b). In addition, men’s ascription to particular masculine ideologies is correlated with such psychological problems as lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression and anxiety, addictions to sex, pornography, video games or work, substance misuse, a greater likelihood of interpersonal violence, emotional inexpressiveness, poorer attitudes toward help seeking, and increased psychological distress (Rabinowitz & Cochran, 2002; Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson, 2003; Englar-Carlson, 2006). Finally, even when men’s gender role strain does not lead to psychological disorder, it may still obstruct or prevent their development and self-actualization (Brooks, 2001).

As Englar-Carlson (2006) notes, one of the central tenets of GRS is that of masculine ideologies. Simply put, masculine ideologies are conceptualizations of what it means to be a man, and particularly “beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behaviour” (Pleck, 1995, p. 19). The study of masculine ideologies is concerned with the extent to which men endorse ideologies that emphasize self-reliance, competitiveness, emotional control, power over others, and aggression” (Mansfield, Addis & Mahalik, 2003, p. 95). Recently there has been a shift in the syntax of the literature base, with authors moving from “masculine ideology” to “masculine ideologies,” a change intended to
reflect that there are multiple definitions of what it means to be male, that these beliefs are endorsed to differing degrees, that there are variances among individuals and different subgroups, and even variance within individuals across time and situational contexts (Pleck, 1995).

The literature base suggests that some of the other characteristics associated with masculine ideologies are altruism, particularly when it comes to sacrificing individual needs to provide for dependents, a willingness to take on and try to solve other people’s problems, an ability to think logically and calmly, even when facing danger or when the emotional stakes are high, expressing love and affection through actions rather than words, and valuing traits such as loyalty, integrity, and commitment (Englar-Carlson, 2006). Others have suggested that men place high value on success and self-reliance (McCarthy & Holliday, 2004), and that they also tend to identify themselves through their bodies, and thus tend to measure themselves according to their physical and sexual performance (Oliffe & Phillips, 2008).

As the socialization process continues, however, there is opportunity for these ideologies to become increasingly rigid and limited. Mahalik, Good, and Englar-Carlson (2003) suggest seven scripts, or role types, which men adopt, and which they frequently present in therapy. Characteristics of these scripts include projecting an image that one is stoic and in control; that one is able to manage one’s emotions, especially those associated with being vulnerable; that the male is fearless and indestructible; that the only acceptable male emotion is anger; that the male is competitive, achievement oriented, successful, and in control; that men are strong and independent; and finally, that to be male is to be the opposite of any of the characteristics associated with either femininity or homosexuality. As Englar-Carlson (2006) states, these masculine ideologies function both to uphold patriarchal codes and also influence men “to
internalize ideals that encourage emotional disconnection, achievement and status seeking, and interpersonal dominance” (p.18).

While these scripts are presented as a way of understanding how men may present themselves in therapy, they are also many of the same scripts that men present to the world, and which are related to some of men’s dysfunction and poor health. Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between the degree to which men endorse these masculine ideologies and the likelihood they suffer from lower self-esteem, challenges with interpersonal intimacy, higher rates of anxiety and depression, emotional inexpressiveness, and substance abuse (O’Neil et al., 1995; Mahalik et al., 2003; Englar-Carlson, 2006). Hayes and Mahalik (2000) found that higher scores on the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS; O’Neil, et al., 1986) were significant predictors of psychological distress, specifically “hostility, social discomfort, and obsessive compulsiveness.” Given that a high score on the GRCS indicates a more rigid definition and endorsement of what we might term traditional or hegemonic masculine ideologies, perhaps the most relevant finding is that high scores on the GRCS also predict negative attitudes toward help seeking (Englar-Carlson, 2006). Thus the way men are socialized not only predisposes them to a certain range of psychological disorders, but this challenge is compounded by the fact such socialization also renders them less likely to seek help, and research suggests this is true across both medical and mental health settings.

A broad explanation for this phenomenon is that regardless of whether they correspond to mental or physical health care, health acts are social acts, and such they are also influenced by our gender (Courtenay, 2000a). One such act is seeking help for psychological or emotional distress, but the implications of much of the current research are that men’s conceptions of masculine ideologies may create obstacles to help seeking, particularly if it implies violating
their conceptualization of masculine gender roles (Mahalik, et al., 2006). In other words, mental health is gendered, and this impacts both how we define and present different psychological disorders as well as how we view them. For many men, counselling is seen as a feminine endeavour (Gillon, 2007), and many of the tasks concomitant with approaching a psychiatrist, psychologist or counsellor for psychological help, “such as relying on others, admitting that one needs help, or recognizing and labelling an emotional problem, are at odds with hegemonic notions of masculinity” (Englar-Carlson, 2006, p. 25). Robertson and Fitzgerald (1992) summarize the incongruence between the culture of men and the culture of counselling:

many approaches to personal counselling require that clients bring a sense of self-awareness to the counselling room; yet men appear to be socialized away from self-awareness and encouraged to control (or hide) their feelings. In addition, personal counselling is designed for people who admit they have problems, but men are generally taught to compete on their own and not admit that they need help. Many counsellors further invite clients to discuss their vulnerabilities; men, however, are taught to hide their vulnerabilities to maintain a competitive edge. Finally, counselling asks clients to explore their lives openly with another person, whereas men are socialized to be in rational control of their lives, implying that any self-exploration should be done independently and on an intellectual level...Although these comparisons certainly do not suggest that men bring ‘wrong’ attitudes to therapy or that traditional counselling assumptions are ‘right’, they do highlight the differences between masculine socialization and the expectations of many traditionally trained counsellors (p. 240).
This “lack of fit” between masculine ideology, male gender socialization, and the perceived culture of counselling often causes men to avoid help seeking for psychological problems, or when they do make it into a therapist’s office, to be resistant to the process.

**Therapeutic Engagement as a Form of Help Seeking**

The existing literature on masculine ideology and socialization tends to use the words “help seeking” to refer both to the initial decision to seek help as well as the secondary decisions, once therapy begins, as to the extent to which men will choose to participate and engage in the process. This is likely because in both cases men are influenced, and sometimes restricted by, men’s gender role socialization. For example, a man might resist entering counselling because seeking out the help of another runs counter to the traditional masculine ideologies of independence, strength, and self-control (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Powell, 2006). Some researchers have even postulated that these masculine values may be so deeply ingrained in men, even by the point of adolescence, that some boys and men are simply unaware when they have a problem for which they need help (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003). Similarly, even if a man should overcome these barriers and enter therapy, his gender role socialization will still influence the process and the outcomes of therapy; his socialization as a male may prevent them from fully engaging in counselling, and he may be at risk to drop out prematurely, before maximum gain, or any gain, can be reached (Levant, 1990). As with the initial decision to seek help, this secondary decision is influenced by the fact that many of the activities involved in the counselling process are incongruent with masculine values. For example, therapy calls for clients to be emotionally literate and expressive, to be able to make oneself emotionally vulnerable, to express self-doubts, and to enlist the support of others, all characteristics which run counter to men’s traditional masculine socialization (Rochlen, 2005; Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Brooks, 1998; Gillon, 2007).
So, although the initial decision and the secondary decision are both influenced by male gender socialization, they represent two separate stages, and as such it may be useful to refer to the former as “help seeking” and the latter as a secondary form of help seeking which we might term “engagement.” It is this secondary decision, engagement in therapy, which this proposal will address, particularly as it relates to adolescent boys.

Historically, this incongruence between the necessities of therapy and more traditional male gender socialization has only been addressed by attempting to identify masculine traits that are obstacles to men’s engagement in therapy. Though a necessary step, the danger of conceptualizing of men and boys in this way is that we may come to see males as simply inherently “therapeutically deficient.” It might be more useful, therefore, to shift paradigms and conceive of ways in which therapy might be adapted to suit the needs of male adolescents (McCarthy & Holliday, 2004). One manner of accomplishing this might be to think of counselling males as another form of multicultural counselling.

A Multicultural Approach

People working with men in mental health settings may find that counselling with men presents a variety of challenges. For example, some therapists note that issues of control or dominance are often played out in passive-aggressive ways, with men ignoring questions, challenging the purpose of an activity or the usefulness of the process, or avoiding emotional issues (Gillon, 2007). In some cases the therapist may even note that the male client has entered into a sort of competition with them, refusing to admit a mistake, omission or error, or appearing to be an expert on a topic that has been discussed in therapy (Ipsaro, 1986). Apart from indicating many men’s resistance to engaging in the process, this type of client posturing impacts
the counsellor and may often leave a practitioner uncertain as to how they might best engage the reluctant male client. As Good & Brooks (2005) explain:

Many counsellors...don’t feel adept at engaging reluctant men in treatment. Many don’t understand how to customize traditional therapy modalities to serve men better. Finally, many don’t see how to integrate the progress made in a man’s therapy work into systematic change that will benefit him and his loved ones (p. 8).

For the benefit of both the client and the practitioner, therefore, a variety of researchers have suggested that therapists might find it useful to conceptualize counselling males as another type of multicultural counselling, and to apply the same guidelines to counselling men as one would with other cultural groups (Good, Thomson, & Brathwaite, 2005; Englar-Carlson, 2006; McCarthy & Holliday, 2004). In a manner that is similar to how persons of colour and women are coerced into limited roles, men are also socialized to think, feel and act in ways for which, though there may be benefits, there are also consequences (Liu, 2005).

Many counsellors, however, understand that a central purpose of multicultural counselling is to focus on the needs of under-represented or marginalized groups. As we live in a patriarchal society where men hold much of the power, they might argue that treating men as simply another under-represented group is an affront to those who are truly marginalized. However, research and anecdotal experience suggest that, when it comes to counselling, men are underrepresented--estimates of the ratio of female to male clients runs ranges anywhere from 7:1 to 2:1 (Good et al., 2005). In addition, race, culture and ethnicity are components of all individuals and are not simply features of people who represent minorities (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992); to ignore men’s culture or socialization simply because it represents a position of power or privilege does little to address those men’s concerns or to lessen the impact their psychological
health has on their families. Even if we were to concede this argument that men cannot represent an under-privileged group, multicultural competency also encompasses the clinician’s ability to work with a diverse range of clients, and given the particular needs of some men, and the fact that many men are being failed by existing strategies, it may be useful to think of some males as another distinct cultural group. Finally, the first point of the Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists (APA, 2002) is that clinicians need to be culturally aware of themselves and others. In this way, including men and masculinity as a multicultural competency may help clinicians be aware of their own stereotypes, attributions, and expectations of men; encourage clinicians to confront their own sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism; and increase the development for interventions and strategies that are useful for men (Liu, 2005, p. 689).

Henkelman and Paulson (2006) suggest that the most important factors predicting a “successful” therapeutic experience involve the client’s readiness and resources, and therefore treatment should be catered to their perceptions, ideas, and needs. “Extant beliefs that men have few problems because of their more privileged position in our society have hindered attempts to understand the male gender role” (Good, Gilbert & Scher, 1990, p. 376), and have likely prevented some therapists from engaging men through means that are the most beneficial for the client. Seeing gender as a part of culture, and including working with some men as another type of multicultural competency, may benefit both therapist and client.

Engaging Men in Therapy

With a multicultural approach in mind, several authors have developed a variety of techniques that they theorize would be more appealing to some men and would therefore increase the likelihood of their engagement in therapy. It is not proposed that they will be useful
with all men in all situations. Again, as masculinity is a construct that varies across a number of factors, for some men these strategies may be superfluous, and for others they may not be enough. These techniques can be broadly divided into two categories: characteristics of the therapist and characteristics of the therapy.

Characteristics of the therapist that help men engage in therapy include any traits related to the clinician’s therapeutic style, or how they interact with the individual or the group. For example, it has been suggested that therapists working with men should use more humour and self-disclosure than they would in other contexts (Englar-Carlson, 2006; Brooks, 1998). Brooks (1998) has also suggested that in group therapy, group leaders should strike a balance between extremes. For example, therapists leading a group have to appear experienced without being jaded, confident without being smug, and in charge without being authoritarian. Individuals working with men should also be open to exploring their own stereotypes of men and examining how they impinge on the counselling process (McCarthy & Holliday, 2004), and they need to be able to put aside aversive reactions to men struggling with the “dark side of masculinity”—men who have perpetrated acts of violence, who may be substance abusers, or who simply appear reluctant or ambivalent about embracing change (Brooks, 2001). It is theorized that all of these traits make the counsellor more approachable for the client, allow empathy and the therapeutic alliance to develop, and thus enhance the possibility that male clients will engage.

Characteristics of the therapy include any specific interventions that a clinician might use, a toolbox of strategies or activities which, while not exclusive to use with men, are often advantageous to engaging male clients. The first and most prevalent, based on the suppositions that males often form friendships through the sharing of activities (Powell, 2006), and that males are more likely to accept help when there are opportunities to reciprocate (Brooks, 1998; Brooks,
is that men and boys will therefore respond more favourably to group than to individual therapy, and that an all-male therapy group may be particularly valuable to fostering their engagement (Johnson & Hayes, 1997; Englar-Carlson, 2006). Such a group offers several advantages over other forms of counselling, including the fact that groups help counter men’s emotional isolation; self-disclosure leads men to see that there are some common themes uniting them, and in turn this helps to instil new hope in the participants. It is argued that self-disclosure, a fundamental component of group therapy, is itself easier to attain in an all-male group context, and in fact this may be the “optimal environment for coaxing men to reveal insecurities, disappointments, and private fears gradually and reciprocally in a gentle, shared process” (Brooks, 1998, p. 113). Two other advantages are first, that all-male therapy groups allow for a process of mentoring or modelling, both between the therapist and group members and between group members themselves, and second, that group therapy, unlike individual therapy, allows for a process of engagement and disengagement, a characteristic that permits men to distance themselves when the topic seems too onerous, but to re-engage when they feel comfortable (McPhee, 1996). Finally, perhaps because it plays to the masculine ideology of being in control and appearing capable and knowledgeable, it is suggested that men are often more willing to engage in therapy when there is a chance to reciprocate the help they receive, another distinct advantage of group therapy (Powell, 2006).

Of course, one of the criticisms of running an all-male therapy group is that some groups may just reinforce negative male communication patterns or stereotypes, and that this may actually increase their isolation and dysfunction. While one of the purposes of the all-male therapy group is to help men feel safe at a time when they might be feeling highly vulnerable, as their level of engagement increases, there can be a corresponding increase in the difficulty of the
therapeutic tasks and processes. The goal, therefore, is not inertia, nor are these groups meant to reinforce hegemonic male patriarchies. As Brooks (1998) explains:

> An all-male group can help a man passionately re-experience past stresses and failures with the male chorus and nostalgically rediscover the more therapeutic aspects of male bonding groups. At the same time, however, this all-male group must become a place where new and different behaviours are learned; the group must teach men role flexibility instead of role restriction, tolerance instead of judgment, compassion instead of scorn, cooperation instead of competition, and intimacy instead of emotional detachment (p. 104-5).

This relates to a second therapeutic characteristic that is frequently cited in the literature, and that is incorporating a gender role analysis into therapy (Englar-Carlson, 2006). Other authors such as Brooks (2001) and Schaub and Williams (2007) suggest that at some point in therapy men have to be challenged to re-evaluate their gender role socialization, and that this may also be a portal that allows them to begin the concomitant investigation of how women are similarly restricted in their roles.

Other popular suggestions are that the initial stages of therapy with men be more action oriented or performance based (Ipsaro, 1986; Johnson & Hayes, 1997). Instead of achieving a therapeutic alliance through sharing of affect, as in predominant therapeutic models, in the nascent stages of therapy men may achieve what Englar-Carlson (2006) refers to as “intimacy by doing.” This is not to say that therapy with men should never turn to discussing emotions or the sharing of affect. Rather, it is suggesting that therapy begin with goal setting, or with activities such as role-playing or storytelling. Then, once the therapeutic alliance and a feeling of safety have been firmly entrenched, therapists can begin to move men toward discussing their feelings, making themselves emotionally vulnerable, and other characteristics of therapy which, if
introduced at therapy’s incipience, men might find overly discordant with their traditional male socialization.

The key point to this considerable body of literature is that men will participate in psychological services if they are tailored to their needs (Levant, 1990). By conceiving of therapy with men as another form of multicultural counselling, by asking questions about that culture and understanding more about how men form bonds with others, we as therapists have a better chance of creating a similar context or relationship within our practices, and thus potentially engaging and benefiting increasing numbers of men.

Counselling Adolescent Boys

If we conceive of men as a special type of population that may need counsellors to adapt the manner in which they do therapy, then it certainly begs the question of whether adolescent boys may also need special consideration; both their gender role socialization and their age may require accommodations in the counselling process. The first question then is: are there adolescent boys who, despite being younger, have nonetheless ingrained masculine ideologies and gender role socialization to similar degrees as older males? And the second question is: if so, would the strategies and approaches suggested for creating working alliances with men also be effective for working with adolescent boys?

Forbes (2003) argues that traditional counselling, particularly as it is conducted in school settings, has not sufficiently addressed the needs of male adolescents. Adolescent boys remain more likely than adolescent girls to be referred for disciplinary problems, to receive lower grades in school, to fail a grade, to fail to graduate high school, to not continue on to college, to commit suicide, to assault or to be assaulted, or to die from homicide (US Department of Education, 1996, as cited by Watts & Borders, 2005). Given that these statistics are reminiscent of some of
the statistics for their older male counterparts, and that previous research has indicated men’s psychological distress is positively correlated with the degree to which they endorse more hegemonic definitions of masculinity, Watts and Borders (2005) conducted a preliminary examination of whether an adolescent version of the Gender Role Conflict Scale was valid when applied to adolescents aged 13 to 18. Eleven boys were interviewed both individually and in small groups. Participants answers were examined using a method of conceptual analysis, and the authors concluded that among adolescent boys gender role conflict is developmental, that as boys and young men they have already received strong messages about what it means to be male, and that by adolescence they are already struggling to deal with some of the negative implications of this socialization. Good, Thompson and Brathwaite (2005) argue that like men, boys engage in masculine socialization that alienates them from the awareness and expression of vulnerable emotions, particularly those needed for nurturing others, and that as with men, “failing to meet cultural standards of masculinity opens boys to ridicule and shame” (p. 700). Similarly, Levant (2005) also suggests that even young boys have learned to feel ashamed of emotions that express vulnerability, and argues that the same is true of emotions that suggest caring, neediness, or emotional connection to others. This leads to problematic behaviour with drugs and sex; narcotics and alcohol replace or deaden painful emotions, and “Like being angry when you are hurt, being lustful when you are needy is the only acceptable way a teenage boy trained under the code of masculinity can behave” (p. 166). Hess and Richards (1999) summarize some of the literature on “developmental and gender influences which impact an adolescent’s ability to learn and use effective coping strategies” (p. 149) and conclude that, according to the extant research, female adolescents have a broader repertoire of coping strategies than males, and that they are more far more likely to invoke social support as a coping strategy than their male
peers. Finally, a grounded theory study in New England by Timlin-Scalera et al. (2003) explored the help-seeking behaviours of a small group of male adolescents. The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with a snowball sample of 22 white, middle-class adolescent boys, 4 female adolescent counterparts, 4 parents, and 5 guidance department staff members. Data were analysed using a process of “open, axial and selective coding” (p. 342). Results indicated that these boys experience enormous pressures to be successful across all facets of their lives—academic, athletic, and social. Of particular relevance, they noted that boys living in environments that emphasize male strength and success encourage the projection of a strong, independent image that creates a significant barrier to help seeking, and that in such environments “male adolescents felt that they could not seek help in dealing with the problems, as this would be viewed as a distinct sign of weakness and failure by themselves, their families, and their community” (p. 348). According to all of this research, the process of becoming gendered begins early; boys experience many of the same limits to their full expression and development as older men, and with many of the same harmful consequences.

Not surprisingly, given this similarity between the socialization of men and boys and the ways in which both groups perceive some of the consequences of help seeking, conceptualizations for how to counsel or work with boys in therapy are remarkably similar to the suggestions for working with men. Among the recommendations are using games, multimedia and recreation as means to engage boys and earn their trust, as well as using shorter meeting times outside of the unfamiliar and perhaps intimidating setting of the counsellor’s office (Smith, 2004; Kiselica, 2005). Other suggestions include using group work, in part because of the ease in implementing active, hands-on activities thought to appeal to boys’ sense of “doing” rather than “feeling,” and because they often allow psycho-educational components that boys so often need.
(Caplan, 1957; Hess & Richards, 1999; Kiselica, 2005). Other suggestions include using more humour and self-disclosure than you would with other clients (Hess and Richards, 1999; Kiselica, 2005), and Kiselica adds that subtle differences to the language and physical space of therapy can make significant differences. For example, he recommends sitting side by side with boys rather than opposite them; using fewer open-ended questions; employing language, at least initially, that focuses on action and solution rather than affect; and hearing the boy’s views about counselling so any misconceptions can be addressed.

Finally, when we are counselling adolescent boys we need to bear in mind that we are not just counselling a subset of males, but that these people are adolescents, and that presents its own set of challenges. Fox and Butler (2007) conducted surveys with 415 British secondary school students about their attitudes toward school counselling. Many of the questions were open ended in nature, and a content analysis was conducted on responses that were coded separately by two researchers. The study found that two barriers to adolescents seeking counselling were a fear that adults would not listen to them or that adults might breech their confidentiality. They also found that girls seemed much more positive about counselling than boys, and that among the teenagers themselves there was agreement that it is much harder for boys than girls to approach a counsellor, in large part because of the perceived social stigma connected to this act.

Thus, we might perceive as counselling adolescent boys as a type of multi-cultural counselling on two fronts—gender and age—and this means adapting the ways school counsellors and therapists work with this population.

If we really intend to help school-age boys, we must understand that their ways of relating tend to be different from the preferred relational style of most mental health professionals. Consequently, we must adjust counselling and psychotherapy to fit the ways that boys
approach the world so that boys will feel comfortable with counsellors and the work they do (Kiselica, 2005, p. 26).

This study asks boys for their own perspectives on how we might best achieve such an outcome.

**Deficiencies in the Literature**

Despite the volume and diversity of these suggestions, and although many practitioners recognize that therapy with males may require some adaptation, one of the major deficiencies of the literature is that very few controlled studies have been conducted that demonstrate the effectiveness of specific approaches with male clients (Cochran, 2005). As an example, Timlin-Scalera et al. (2003) used grounded theory to propose a model of making mental health services more available to white, male high school students. As such, they explored the first decision alluded to earlier in this paper, examining the process by which males choose to seek or not seek help, but did not attempt to study the second, an exploration of how men come to engage with the process of counselling. The proposed research, therefore, continues where theirs ended by exploring what males say about how they create close bonds with others, data that would be useful for engaging men in therapy.

Other deficiencies in the literature include an over-reliance on quantitative methodologies. One meta-analytic study that examined a decade’s worth of research into males and masculinity concluded that there was a need for significantly more qualitative research (Whorley & Addis, 2006). In addition, much of the research on adolescent help seeking has been “large scale self-report surveys focussing on perceptions of help seeking rather than on actual help seeking behaviours,” and that more in-depth interview formats are necessary (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003). Again, the proposed research aims to address this deficiency by using qualitative methods, specifically a form of narrative inquiry employing participant photography.
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the vast majority of the literature involves the suggestions of researchers based on their own anecdotal observations (see Rabinowitz & Cochran, 2002; Greer, 2005; Brooks, 1998; Powell, 2006; Levant, 1990). What most of the research has neglected to do is consult the opinions of their male subjects. In other words, to let boys speak in their own voices about male culture, and particularly about how they form close bonds with others that allow the sort of social exchanges necessary for counselling to have a chance of success.

The Relevance of the Proposed Study and the Research Question

Another way of framing the question of how to make the therapeutic environment more congruent with the needs of men is to conceptualize any changes to the therapeutic environment as efforts to improve the therapeutic alliance. The alliance, or the connection between counsellor and client has been:

reflected to as the ‘therapeutic alliance,’ the ‘working alliance,’ ‘the ego alliance,’ and the ‘helping alliance.’ It refers to the quality and strength of the reciprocal relationship between a client and a counsellor and includes both the affective elements and the collaborative working elements of this working relationship (Bedi, Davis & Arvay, 2005, p. 71).

The alliance is of particular significance because alliances that are reported as stronger, particularly when this assessment comes from the client, tend to correlate with more favourable therapeutic outcomes. However, despite its central importance, “the literature examining the alliance from the client’s phenomenological perspective is scarce” (p. 72).

The extant literature base suggests two key ways to strengthen the alliance with male clients, either through adapting the characteristics of the therapist, or through altering the manner
or context in which therapy is undertaken. What is missing, however, is a boys’ perspective on
how this might best be undertaken. Given that many teenage boys have never experienced
therapy and those that have are likely unfamiliar with the concept of therapeutic alliance, if we
want to understand how they form bonds in therapy we might first ask them how they
accomplish this in other settings. A place to begin might be through an analysis of what
adolescent boys say about the characteristics of people, relationships, experiences or
environments where they have formed close bonds with others.

Such an examination of adolescent boys’ culture would be useful to a variety of parties.
First and foremost, if therapists have a better understanding of what boys say about how they
create bonds with others, or the contexts under which such bonds are created, they may be in an
improved position to create similar situational or interpersonal conditions in therapy. Such
conclusions might also generalize both to adult males and to other occupational settings such as
social work, medicine, and school counselling. Furthermore, boys report that one of the factors
that motivates them to seek help is a positive past encounter with the mental-health field (Timlin-
Scalera, et al., 2003). Therefore if we can examine the processes by which they form bonds with
others, and counsellors can create conditions which replicate or mimic these processes, this may
play a significant role in improving boys’ access to mental health care; it may also, over time,
reduce the incidences of male stress-related illness.

One means by which to explore the processes by which boys do or do not engage in
therapy would be to interview adolescent boys about their experience, particularly the means by
which they allow themselves to form close, trusting bonds with others. Such interviews might
help inform practitioners as how best to form strong therapeutic relationships with young male
clients. Given the suggestions of many therapists of how best to engage boys, one advantage of
this particular design is that boys themselves may be able to discuss conditions of the context or the relationship that have not yet been posited in the literature.

The specific research question is how do adolescent boys describe forming bonds with others? One means by which to explore this question would be through a form of narrative inquiry, specifically a method that uses photographs generated by participants—photo elicitation interviews.
Chapter III--Method

My research interest is examining how professionals working with adolescent boys might adapt their approach to better facilitate boys’ engagement in that process. As one key determinant of therapeutic outcome is therapeutic alliance, or what we might otherwise refer to as a bond between client and therapist, one might ask boys about their perceptions of how they have been able to form close bonds with people in the past. Given much of the existing literature is focussed on the theories of practitioners, and on postulations of what they believe might be most effective in engaging adolescent boys, this emphasis on boys’ perspectives is particularly relevant. A research method particularly suited to this research is narrative inquiry, more specifically a thematic analysis of data derived from photo-elicitation interviews.

Research Paradigm

Narrative inquiry is a methodology situated in a post-modern understanding of the world. In this particular paradigm, ontology takes on a relativist orientation--that is to say that reality is understood as being known to the knower in a particular context. Additionally, people’s epistemologies, how they come to know or interpret the world, are understood as being socially constructed. According to this worldview, reality does not reside in an object or even in one’s interpretation of an object, rather “reality” is being constantly constructed and reconstructed according to two or more people’s understanding of a phenomenon, and their understandings are constantly changing according to social, cultural, historical and linguistic influences that guide their perceptions. A researcher, therefore, does not “discover” a phenomenon; research findings are instead understood as a co-creation of the interviewer and his or her participants, and they are understood as being fluid rather than fixed in nature (Riessman, 2008).
According to Burr (1995), although there is no singular definition of what it means to be a social constructionist, there are four key assumptions that guide this worldview. The first is a questioning of taken-for-granted knowledge. In this way social constructionism opposes positivist and empiricist ideologies that truth and reality can be revealed by observation. Indeed, according to this ideology there is no one truth or reality; our observations and our understandings are always laden with values and biases that influence our understanding. Thus as our values and biases change, and as different people interact in the study of a phenomenon, so too will our understanding of that phenomenon. Secondly, our understandings of the world are always culturally and historically specific. The types of questions that I ask as a researcher, or even my interest in a research question, are in part determined by the culture in which I live, and the same is true for the answers given by participants. Thirdly, according to Burr, knowledge is generated out of social processes, and “It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated” (p. 4). In this way constructionist approaches can be thought of as inductive, and the researcher can be seen as taking a key, generative role in the results. Finally, Burr also asserts that social constructionists believe that knowledge and social action are concomitant. In other words, each interpretation of the world invites a different type of action from humanity, and how we interpret the world, whether as people or researchers, can either sustain certain social actions or challenge them.

One of the most important implications of a social constructionist ideology on research is that a researcher does not have direct access to a phenomenon. In the case of narrative research what we have is the participant’s or speaker’s imitation, or mimesis, of reality, and this interpretation is again filtered by the researcher’s understanding of what has been said (Riessman, p. 208).
This study attempted to reflect a social constructionist paradigm through a number of means, including entering the interview as an open-ended process with a loosely constructed idea of how the interview should unfold rather than a set interview protocol; by including a section that situates some of the researcher’s known biases, hopes and expectations so that the reader might understand how these have influenced the analysis and discussion; by understanding the interview as a co-created phenomenon; by using the first-person voice as a reminder of the researcher’s role in the interpretation of the phenomena; by coding data based on the participant’s words rather than pre-existing categories generated by the literature; and by understanding the results not as a “truth,” nor as something fixed and permanent, but rather as a phenomena that is constantly evolving.

### Research Design

**Narrative Inquiry.**

One of the goals of psychology is to understand people’s thoughts and emotions, and as Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) explain:

One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individuals about their lives and their experienced reality. In other words, narratives provide us with access to people’s identity and personality (p. 7).

People are natural storytellers, and the stories that they tell are revealing of their identities and how they interpret the world. If we can analyse these stories we can understand something of how people see themselves, their place in the world, and even their social and cultural contexts. Narrative inquiry is one research method by which we might attempt this.

Narrative inquiry is loosely defined by Riessman (2008) as a qualitative methodology in which the researcher interprets events as told by a speaker. These events are usually organized
into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story. Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience (p.3).

Almost any text that tells some sort of story can be understood as a narrative, including spoken, written and even visual materials. In addition, narratives are constructed by the teller for a variety of overlapping purposes, including revisiting and reassessing memories, persuading, sharing an experience, entertaining, or even misleading. In the social sciences, narrative might refer to the stories a research participant selects and tells, to the interpretive accounts of the researcher based on their observations or interviews of participants, or to the narratives a reader constructs when engaging with the aforementioned accounts (Riessman, 2008). In the case of this study, we are particularly interested in the first case, the subjective experience of boys as revealed by the stories they construct about how they form bonds with others.

In narrative inquiry the role of the researcher is to interpret narrative texts as spoken or told by a narrator, and therefore “the analyst is interested in how a speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning, that is, make particular points to an audience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Narrative inquiry is consistent with a social constructionist paradigm in that it recognizes “that there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text. The narrative approach advocates pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 2).

**Photovoice.**

Photo elicitation interviews are a method whereby photographs are inserted into the research interview as a means to prompt discussion, meaning and understanding (Clark-Ibáñez,
A method widely used in anthropology and sociology, referencing a photograph often leads to “outpourings of all kinds of information, feelings thoughts and situation details. The concreteness, the materiality of photographs...seems to provide a versatile and moveable scaffolding for the telling of life history, life events, life material” (Weber, 2008, p. 8).

There are a variety of terms for studies incorporating photographs that are often used interchangeably. Photo elicitation interviews, for example, can refer to studies in which photos are provided by the researcher or the participant. The former might be done in cases where the researcher wants to ensure photos of a certain quality, or where an analysis of historical or archival photos is required. In the latter case, photo elicitation refers to studies in which photographs are generated by participants. Subjects are given access to cameras and the means to print their images, and a variety of images are then selected and discussed in the context of a semi-structured interview and/or a focus group. These studies are referred to by a variety of terms including self-directed photography, participatory photo interviewing, participatory photography, autophotography, or photovoice. For the purposes of this research, we will use the term photovoice, and define it as a specific type of photo elicitation interview in which participants generate their own photographs.

The benefits of using visual methods in interviews have been well elucidated. Liebenberg (2009) suggests the benefits fall into four general categories. First, they facilitate the interview process between the subject and the researcher. For example, visual materials may act as prompts for discussion, and they may provide additional structure to the interview process. In turn, this may reduce some of the awkwardness inherent in interviews, facilitate rapport between the interviewee and the interviewer, and ultimately allow greater depth in their conversations. Indeed, as other researchers have noted, employing photovoice:
alone or with other qualitative methodologies such as interviews or participant observation can illuminate dynamics and insights not otherwise found through other methodological approaches. In addition, [it] empowers the interviewees to teach the researcher about aspects of the social world otherwise ignored or taken for granted (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004, p. 1524).

Secondly, in photovoice studies, or in other types of studies in which visual representations are created by the participants, photographs allow the researcher to visualize the subject matter the participants have created, in effect allowing them to see the phenomena that are being discussed and facilitating their understanding. Additionally, given that research usually involves a hierarchical power dynamic with the researcher holding some degree of power over a subject, the collaborative nature of visual methods may help lessen this hierarchy. As Harper (2002) explains, “My enthusiasm for photo elicitation also comes from the collaboration it inspires. When two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together. This is, I believe, an ideal model for research” (p. 23). This brings us to Liebenberg’s fourth point, that using visual methods with marginalized groups—where there may be issues with communication, where research is crossing multiple cultural boundaries, or where there are heightened possibilities for cultural misunderstandings or misrepresentations—may be particularly valuable. In this manner, visual methods can be empowering, giving voice to people who might not otherwise be heard and allowing them a form of expression that was hitherto unavailable. Finally, one last benefit of using photovoice in this particular study is that it meshes with a social constructionist paradigm. Specifically it emphasizes the subject’s role in the co-creation of meaning. According to Gotschi, Delve & Freyer (2009):
Participatory photography emphasizes the active role of participants in the generation and interpretation of photos and understands it as a research method that hands over the cameras to people—individuals or groups—for the purpose of eliciting information to inform a research project and stimulate self-reflection and interaction with others (p. 293).

Finally, it should be clarified that although some studies that use photographs employ visual analysis, a means of interpreting the photographs as part of the data, this study makes no attempt to do so. Indeed, many of the researchers who use photo elicitation choose not to examine the meanings that reside in the photos themselves, but in the ways in which participants interpret the images (Guillemin & Drew, 2010), and it is their spoken interpretations, or narratives, that become the focus of the analysis. Such is the case with this study.

Participants

An independent school in Vancouver, Canada, was approached and written consent was obtained from the administration to allow access to the student population. In time, 4 male students between the ages of 15-16 were recruited for this study. To be eligible for inclusion, participants needed to meet certain criteria: (1) to be adolescent males; (2) to be 13-18 years of age; (3) to be able to make a time commitment of approximately four hours over two or more months; (4) to be willing to attend and participate in photography workshops and one or two semi-structured interviews; (5) to discuss their experiences forming bonds with others; and (8) to be able to converse in English.

As the researcher worked both as a counsellor and a teacher in the same school from which some of the participants were recruited, boys who were current students or engaged in a counselling relationship with the researcher were excluded. That said, given that both the researcher and subjects came from the same school community, to some degree dual
relationships were inevitable. The research attempted to mediate any potential harm that might emerge by addressing this with the research subjects, iterating that they may know other members of the research group or the researcher from other contexts, answering any questions or concerns they had, obtaining written informed assent from the students and consent from the parents, and reminding them consistently that their participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to leave the research at any point.

**Recruitment**

Volunteers for the study were initially recruited by means of flyers (Appendix A) posted throughout the school that clearly stated the purpose of the study and asked that individuals interested in volunteering contact the researcher for a first meeting. Given that after several weeks this recruitment method had seen only one potential participant approach the researcher, I made a point of approaching several boys I knew from the school community, asking if they had seen the posters, and inviting them, if they were interested, to participate. Five potential subjects met with me. During an informal discussion, the purpose of the research and the research question, approximate time commitments, and some of the potential benefits (for example, the opportunity to learn more about photography) were discussed, and prospective subjects were invited to ask any remaining questions. I made a particular point both of emphasizing the freedom of participants to refuse to participate without fear of consequence, and to keep the tone of the meeting light-hearted and informal. One of the five potential subjects indicated he did not wish to participate, and the remaining four were given both a parental consent form (Appendix B) and an individual assent form (Appendix C). They were asked to return the forms within a week, and it was explained that if they decided not to participate no further action on their part
was required. The four remaining potential research subjects all returned the consent and assent forms.

The Photography Workshops

Part of the rationale behind this study was to give a group that has been under-represented in the literature an opportunity to be heard, in this case adolescent males. However, the majority of research conducted with adolescents is usually quantitative, in part because researchers often report finding it difficult to obtain the necessary depth of information from a population that may be reluctant or unable, to verbalize their experience. One way I attempted to mediate this was by beginning the research phase with photography workshops rather than interviews. In part it was hoped that these workshops would offer an opportunity to build rapport between myself and the participants and among the participants themselves, and that this sense of familiarity would make the interview more comfortable and more meaningful for participants. A secondary purpose was to allow subjects to build some confidence in using cameras; past researchers have indicated that participants can sometimes be embarrassed about the quality of their images, and as well as leading to their discomfort, it can also mean they feel they have little to talk about in subsequent interviews.

When I first met with students to discuss their interest in the study, I made a point of asking them about their interest in photography, their perceived ability level, and what photography skills they might like to learn during the study. Based on their interests, I created three short, simple photography workshops, each of approximately 30 minutes in length, where we focussed on a particular skill or concept. Participants were then given “an assignment” that would employ that skill, a roll of film, borrowed film cameras, and asked to go out into the world and practice the skills they had learned. Participants were also asked to complete the assignment
and drop off their roll of film sometime before the next meeting so it could be developed at a commercial lab. They were also assured that once the film had been developed I would not look at their photos before they had had a chance to go through them in case there were any that they wished to remove or destroy. Finally, at the beginning of the second and third workshops, subjects were invited to begin the session by sharing with the others a photo or photos that they had taken from the previous week. This usually led to a discussion of numerous topics, including the perceived skills of the photographer, questions that had arisen from the previous workshop, the subject of the photograph, and the relation of the photography to the broader research question. During these workshops I took the role not of expert but rather a type of co-participant. Members of the group sat in something resembling a circle, often while eating our lunches, and participants also brought their borrowed film cameras so that we could practice the technical details of whatever skill was being discussed. Although it was our intent to meet weekly, people’s schedules meant we met on a much more ad-hoc basis over approximately six weeks.

In the first workshop we talked about composition, and we also discussed how objects may have symbolic meaning, that they can tell a story about a connection between two people. Participants were then asked to go out and take photos of objects that told a story about their connection to another person. In the second workshop we discussed lighting and how light can influence the mood or tone of a photograph. I then asked the group to go out and take photos of places that they had formed close connections with other people. In the third and final workshop we discussed the relationship between aperture and shutter speed, and the effect that aperture can have on portraits. Participants were invited to spend the week taking pictures of people with whom they had formed a close connection. These three assignments—to take photographs of objects, places, and people—were decided on in part because of some of the themes practitioners
have suggested are implicated in how boys form relationships, and in part because it gave these subjects something specific to focus on rather than the more ambiguous task of taking “photos that show your connection to others.” How this may have influenced the findings is delineated in the discussion chapter. However, it should be noted that though they were given these specific assignments, at each meeting I iterated to the participants that if there was something else that they wished to photograph, some other way to visually represent the stories of their bonds with others, that they were encouraged to do so.

**Data Collection**

Once the three workshops were complete each participant had a small portfolio of approximately 72 printed photographs. Either through email or in person, we scheduled a mutually amenable time and place to meet to conduct an individual interview. The approximate intended length of the interviews was 60 minutes, and given that this mimics the approximate length of most secondary school classes, it was hypothesized that this was a time frame familiar and therefore comfortable for adolescents. In actuality, the interviews lasted anywhere from sixty to eighty minutes.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations according to the schedules of the participants. Two were conducted in a classroom at the school where the students are enrolled, one was conducted at the public library in the centre of the city, and the fourth took place in a small classroom on the university campus.

In an effort to make consent and assent an on-going process, interviews began with a reminder that this research was voluntary, that participants had a right not to answer any questions that the researcher posed, and that subjects had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. All four participants expressed a strong verbal desire to proceed, so they were then...
given their printed images, reminded that they could remove any photos they did not wish the researcher to see, and invited to choose some photographs they would most like to discuss.

Interviews were semi-structured and largely emergent, so the researcher did not enter the interview with a set list of questions. This is consistent with Riessman’s (2008) understanding of narrative interviews---not as a process where an expert researcher elicits information from a knowing but naïve subject, but rather as an interaction where meaning is jointly constructed by two participants; the researcher’s role therefore becomes asking questions that invite conversation and allow co-participants to co-create answers they find meaningful. A general line of discussion for each photo was who or what was represented, the participant’s relationship to this person, place or object, why they chose to photograph this particular subject, and what it tells us about how they form bonds with others. In this way the photographs acted “as a medium of communication between researcher and participant” (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004, p. 1512), and the participants acted as narrators who interpreted stories about people, places and events in their lives. All of the interviews were audio taped so that they could later be transcribed.

**Role of the Researcher**

Braun and Clarke (2005) suggest that researchers must make their epistemological and other assumptions explicit, in part so that they may be aware of their own biases and how these may influence the ways in which they construct and interpret their research, and in part so that readers of their work might also discern for themselves the manner and degree to which these biases have influenced the findings. With that in mind, I will share a short narrative of my own.

In one of my early relationships with a woman, a long-term relationship, we’d engaged in a classic battle of the genders: she would do everything in her power to enter the world of my emotions, and I would do everything in mine to keep her locked out. This was not always true,
mind you, and in telling the tale I am, even in the first sentences, falling back into a mistake I made then and that I still make now, and that’s believing a black and white distinction: that men lack emotion and always resist expressing it, and that women are fluent in its language and are always speaking it. It’s not true. But I came to believe it to be true, perhaps in part because when I would resist I would hear how it was unhealthy (and ergo, by engaging in this behaviour I was doing myself harm), that I was inexpressive, even that I was emotionless. Of course, my own words and behaviour did not help me, because the more she pushed me the more I retreated and the less expressive I became. There were lots of reasons I resisted: in part because it was a power struggle, and in giving in I would be letting her win; in part because sometimes I just could not be bothered to go there—I knew how I felt, and I or we had talked about it ad hominem, and I wanted to move on to something else; and in part, sometimes, because it was going to be scary to go there—I was frightened of being emotional, or losing control of my emotions, of falling to pieces and not being able to put myself back together again. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy. I do not know which happened first, her giving me the label or me earning it, but I started to believe that there was something wrong with me, that somehow I was deficient. I started to doubt that I was ready to have an adult relationship, that I didn’t have the tools necessary to create intimacy, that I lacked communication skills.

Years later, when I started a Master’s program in counselling psychology, one of the early courses was a lab where we had to “counsel” fellow students. Our sessions were videotaped, and sometimes our teacher would also watch over us while we practiced our nascent listening and empathy skills. If she saw something that she thought could be done better she would hasten down the hallway, knock quietly on your door, and poke her head in and have you “rewind” and try whatever it was she suggested. On one such occasion I was playing the role of
client and was being counselled by a fellow student, a woman, and our prof popped her head in the door and told my counsellor that she needed “to go for the emotion.” I had said something significant, and now it needed to be emotionally unpacked. I do not remember what I had said, but I remember it being something with some emotion behind it. And I remember liking how my fellow student had handled it—there had been a pause, an unspoken invitation to say more, but she had not pressed me on it. Now, with the advice of our prof, she rewound to the moment and tried to extract more emotion from the story. I felt awkward. Exposed. Instead of walking with me and hearing my story I now felt like an object that was being mined for more information. I was a rock that needed to be opened. My “counsellor” pushed for more information, and the conversation evaporated. I left class with familiar feelings: I lacked the ability to access my own emotions, or at least I was inexpressive. My previous experience had shown me I lacked the skills needed for an adult relationship; now that same deficiency likely meant I would also prove a failure in my chosen profession. After all, if I could not talk about my own emotions, how could I expect to work effectively with and for my clients?

My own bias is that men (and boys) do not lack emotion. We swim in a sea of them. Sometimes, and I do not want to speak for all men here as you may have noticed some differences between us, some of us have difficulty talking about events in our lives, past, present or imagined, that make us emotional. The reasons for this are likely very complex and nuanced, but I believe they probably have to do with the way both men and women learn gendered roles that they in part co-create and then enact.

I also believe it is because some men may be less practiced in discussing their emotional lives that counselling remains such an infrequent choice for men as opposed to women. We know, or think we do, what goes on in counsellor’s offices, of what happens to people when they
undergo therapy. People go there to talk about their shortcomings, their questions, their broken
relationships, and their perceived failures, inadequacies and abnormalities. In doing this they
expose themselves, they make themselves vulnerable to judgment, and they are likely to
experience a dearth of emotions, some of which will feel uncomfortable, perhaps even
overwhelming. Given that men like myself may be less familiar with the currency of emotional
expression, counsellors need to be sensitive to trading in it. I remember sitting next to a male
classmate in a class where we watched a demonstration where a counsellor asked a client, “when
you picture your emotion, what colour does it have?” He and I exchanged glances which
suggested our incredulity, our simultaneous amusement and our shock; had a therapist asked me
such a question in session it would likely strain any bond between us as I would see it as
ridiculous, and were I to take it seriously I would have had a genuinely hard time answering it.

People co-construct their identities, and they do this according to a variety of political,
social, historical, interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts. If males are emotional beings, and I
believe they are, and if identity is socially constructed, then I also believe we should be able to
coop-struct contexts with male clients that allow men to enter into and engage in therapy. This
research was thus born out of this interest, a desire to find out what a particular segment of this
population-- adolescent boys--say about how to create such contexts.

**Initial Data Analysis**

Participant’s spoken narratives about the bonds they had formed with others constituted the
data that was analysed in this study. I transcribed the four audio-taped interviews; together they
comprised about 190 pages of text. Although the researcher made an effort to record the speech
of the participants as accurately as possible, it should be acknowledged that “there is not a one-
to-one correspondence between conversational events that unfold during human interaction and
what a researcher transcribes from an audio- or video-taped recording. Rather, the process of transcription is both interpretive and constructive” (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p.72). My goal, however, was to try to represent their speech as accurately as possible, and for that reason once the transcriptions had been made, the recorded interviews were played again as the researcher read along with the interviews so that corrections could be made. The researcher then engaged in a process that Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as immersing oneself in the data: each of the four transcripts was read and re-read multiple times, so the researcher could gain some familiarity with each of the four stories and look for key phrases, patterns and themes within each participant’s narrative. I also began to make some initial notes on tentative codes that I thought might be useful in subsequent stages.

All the transcripts together formed what researchers often refer to as the corpus, or the entire body of data for the project. These were read once more and the researcher selected portions of the text he interpreted as most relevant to the research question. This data, a subset of the corpus, is referred to as the data set--the data being used for a particular analysis. The data set was used to form a narrative account for each participant. This involved the deletion of a substantial amount of the original data. In addition, some minor changes were made to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the text. For example, pronouns were sometimes replaced with subjects, errors in verb or pronoun agreement were corrected, and names or other information that could be used to identify the participant were either changed or deleted. As much as was possible, however, the intent was to leave the speaker’s intended meaning, language, tone and verbal mannerisms intact. Each narrative account ranges in length from 10 to 12 pages.
Thematic Analysis

The narrative accounts formed the unit of analysis of in this study, and they were interpreted according to a form of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2005). As they point out, thematic analysis can mean a range of different approaches, but its commonality is “the searching across a data set—be that a number of interview or focus groups, or a range of texts—to find repeated patterns of meaning” (p. 15). The two authors also point out that researchers employing a thematic analysis have to make three early decisions: whether to focus on themes across narratives or within them, whether to focus on the semantic or latent content of participant’s speech, and whether to code the data using an inductive or deductive method. For this particular project I opted to focus on the broader themes across the data set. Although this might not present as comprehensive an understanding of a single theme or account, its benefit is that it allows the reader a sense of the broader themes across participants. Equally importantly, as is the case with these subjects, it is “a particularly useful method when you are investigating an under-researched area, or with participants whose views on the topic are not known” (p. 11).

Secondly, the researcher undertook the analysis of the data set using an inductive method. This means that rather than using codes generated from the literature base or the researcher’s analytic interest or theory, instead the data set was read and coded with no intended reference to the beliefs of the researcher or the literature review. A caveat here is that no researcher codes in an “epistemological vacuum” and reading the extant literature on the topic may have influenced coding decisions. As much as possible, the researcher attempted to allow the codes to be data rather than theory driven; again, the intent was to let the boys words speak for themselves rather than impose practitioner’s pre-existing concepts upon them. Finally, the researcher examined the semantic meaning of the data set. In other words, themes were looked for in the explicit speech
of the participants. The researcher did not examine pauses, silences, humour, metaphors, or any other part of the data that might have yielded a rich understanding of the underlying meanings of what participants were saying. Instead themes were interpreted and derived from the understood explicit meaning of participants.

After the researcher has immersed him or herself in the data, the data has been transcribed, and the narrative accounts have been created, Braun and Clarke (2005) suggest that the researcher begin coding the data. During this process they recommend that one code for as many patterns as possible, and when applicable, code individual extracts of data in different ways. In this study, for example, codes were typically based around complete sentences, but smaller chunks of meaning such as clauses or key phrases were also coded, as were larger segments such as entire paragraphs. In this way an extract may have been coded several times, particularly if it was rich with perceived meaning. These individual coded chunks of data, or data extracts, were each given a short name that was derived by attempting to paraphrase the participant’s speech. All four narrative accounts were coded generating a total of 559 data extracts.

The next step in the process was to search for themes. The 559 data extracts were entered into a spread sheet program, and the researcher began looking for commonalities or patterns between what the four participants had said. Whenever a perceived pattern was discerned, data extracts were placed into a broader category. This was a recursive process where categories were created, renamed, deleted, or merged in order to fairly represent the coded data being placed inside them. In the end the researcher had narrowed what were originally 30 categories into just 13, and these 13 categories became sub-themes, each one falling under four broader, overarching themes.
At this point Braun and Clarke (2005) recommend reviewing the themes. This involved going back to the coded data abstracts, checking them against the themes, and confirming that the theme accurately captured what was contained in the data. During this process I changed the categories for 16 of the data extracts, and I created a thematic map of each of the themes and subthemes using post-it notes placed on a previously forlorn living-room wall. Satisfied that each of the themes seemed sound and adequately distinct, the second part of this particular process involved re-reading the entire data set to see if during the original coding process any data had been missed. I read through the data once again and coded an additional 19 data extracts, rendering a new total of 578 data extracts. All of these new extracts fell into existing sub-themes and themes. As the authors note, “coding data and generating themes could go on ad infinitum…when your refinements are not adding anything substantial, stop!” (p. 21). Given that no new sub themes were being created, and that the thematic map seemed to adequately describe the data, at this point the researcher turned to the process of writing the analysis.

Member Reflections and Ancillary Findings

As the analysis of the interviews was conducted during a lengthy school break, the analysis chapter of this study was written before the subjects had a chance to read or comment on their narrative accounts. Just before the school year resumed, however, students were sent a member reflection email (Appendix D) asking them to read the narrative accounts and make any necessary additions, deletions or changes. Essentially, the participants were being given the opportunity to evaluate whether they were being fairly and accurately represented, and if not, to change the way their experiences were being portrayed. All four participants responded, and two participants commented that “the whole account looks great and seems pretty accurate,” and “everything of what I meant to say was correctly portrayed.” One participant reminded me that I
had forgotten to change a student’s name (an error that I amended), but apart from that none of the them elected to make any changes.

During the process of recruitment, the initial photo workshops, the interviews, and then listening and re-listening to the boys stories, I was consistently struck by the candour, sincerity, and openness with which they had spoken. I was also aware during the interviews that there was often a palpable sense of emotion in the room, and that on a few occasions the boys were close to tears as they recounted stories from their lives, and I wondered what it was that had allowed this to happen.

It had been my intent throughout the research to include some of the suggestions for working with boys that I had encountered in the literature. For example, photovoice was chosen as a methodology in part because it allowed the sort of “bonding through doing” so often alluded to in the literature, I had made an effort to treat the participants as equals rather than as students or subjects, to use humour and self-disclosure, and to allow them to become familiar and comfortable with me prior to engaging them in any discussions that were potentially uncomfortable or unfamiliar. It was my impression that at least to some extent this approach had worked, and this was evidenced by the honesty, sincerity and candour of the boys. In other words, paradoxically, while engaging the boys in a process aimed at talking about how they understand their bonds with others, some type of bond had also been formed between researcher and co-researcher.

When I was discussing this with a friend and fellow counsellor and explained that I wanted to ask boys about this impression, she cleverly summarized that this sounded like the counselling equivalent of using immediacy, though in this case in a research rather than therapeutic setting. In other words, I was asking boys to reflect on more immediate relationship rather than a more
distant one—the relationship between researcher and co-researcher. So in the member reflection email, participants were also asked to consider the process of the research, particularly whether it was there perception that some type of bond had formed between the researcher and themselves, and what had either prevented or facilitated this development.

All four participants responded, and they wrote reflections that varied in length from a short paragraph to a page. I then undertook the same process that I had engaged in with the original data set: parsing their responses to remove information that was perceived as extraneous or that potentially impinged on people’s privacy, immersing myself in the data, coding using an inductive method, and then categorizing and theming the coded data. Their responses and my thematic analysis of this second, smaller data set is included in the Ancillary Findings.

Criteria of Worth

Referring to narrative methods, Riessman (2008) points out that “...there is no cannon, no clear set of rules or list of established procedures and abstract criteria for validation that fits all projects” (p. 200). Still, there are some guidelines to which researchers using qualitative methods might adhere in order to ensure the quality of their research. Tracy (2010) expounds on eight such criteria of quality that “can be approached via a variety of paths and crafts, the combination of which depends on the specific researcher, context, theoretical affiliation, and project” (p. 837).

The first criterion which Tracy (2010) describes is worthiness. In her words, “Good qualitative research is relevant, timely, significant, interesting or evocative” (p. 840). This means a study may be worthy in its findings, particularly if it changes current thinking, but if it is simply questioning taken-for-granted assumptions it may also be worthy in its intent. The current study has attempted to meet a sense of worthiness by studying a topic that is certainly relevant—few would disagree that there is an incongruence between the mental health of males and the
rates at which they seek help—and by questioning the existing and accepted thinking of practitioners by researching an underrepresented group—adolescent boys.

A second criterion that Tracy (2010) suggests is “rich rigor.” Research may be rich with rigor in several ways, among them: whether a study is perceived to have face validity, whether the means of collecting data and the data itself are sufficient to support a detailed analysis, the breadth of field notes, the level of detail in transcription, and transparency in the processes of choosing and organizing data. I have attempted to meet this criterion by gathering a wealth of information through the interview process, by transcribing interviews to a level of detail that far exceeds that required for a thematic analysis, by checking transcriptions against the recorded interviews, by rigorously coding the data set using an inductive process, by constantly forming, collapsing and deleting categories, and by attempting to be transparent about these processes. It is my hope that the length and quality of the narrative accounts testifies to the richness of the rigor employed in this study, and that this is echoed in the comprehensiveness of the analysis and the discussion of its implications.

Tracy (2010) also suggests that qualitative research should be sincere, and this “can be achieved through self-reflexivity, honesty, transparency, and data auditing” (p. 841). One means by which I have attempted to embody this in the study is by asking myself why I am so interested in this topic, and by including a section in the paper where I attempt to answer this question and to lay bare some of my biases. I also made field notes on my initial impressions of the interview, reflecting on expectations and initial themes as they first occurred to me. On reflection, one area I wish I had been more transparent was in the level of detail in my audit trail, particularly when it came to coding and categorizing the data and the many changes and revisions that occurred at this stage. This was such a rapid, recursive and intuitive process that it
was often difficult to keep track of my own thoughts, a challenge that I note should I undertake this type of research again.

Tracy’s fourth criterion is credibility, or “the trustworthiness, verisimilitude and plausibility of the research findings” (p. 842). I have attempted to make this study trustworthy in part by providing enough detail in my analysis “that readers may come to their own conclusion about the scene” (p. 843). That said, one of this study’s shortcomings is that it omitted much of the available data, including photographs and the latent content of the interviews. Indeed, there were a variety of means through which the data could have been analysed, and I quickly became aware that what was being studied was only a fraction of what was available.

Verisimilitude is the appearance or semblance of truth, and one means by which I attempted to confirm its presence in the results was to ask an expert to review the findings. For this research, the expert is a recent graduate of an M.A. program who had also completed a dissertation using narrative analysis and who frequently works with boys in her counselling practice. She was given a copy of each participant’s narrative account and a description of the themes and sub-themes and asked to describe the extent to which, if at all, her impressions of the cross-narrative themes resembled those of the researcher. She was also asked to reflect on whether the themes created in this particular research study resembled her personal impressions garnered from counselling boys. Some of her comments were: “Your themes fit very well with my impression of what the boys are saying. I found them to be comprehensive. There were a few ideas that initially stood out as additional, but when I went back to your themes, I saw that they could accommodate what had stood out.”

Finally, I attempted to make the research trustworthy, both to the reader and to my research participants, by using member reflections. As Riessman (2008) says, “Taking one’s work back to
those studied earlier strengthens trustworthiness” (p. 197), and so with this in mind the boys who
participated in the study were given a copy of their narrative account (and also invited to look at
their transcripts) and asked to reflect on whether the accounts accurately represented their
understandings. They were invited to make any changes necessary to clarify their thoughts,
feelings and opinions, including adding, deleting, or modifying text.

In addition, while conducting this research it became my impression that the phenomenon
under study, how boys describe the process of forming and maintaining bonds with others, was
also inherently present in our interactions. Simply put, the palpable sense of emotion in the
interviews, the fact that boys were sharing details of their lives that they said they had never
previously divulged, and their sincerity in engaging in the process, all of these impressions
suggested to me that in trying to understand how boys form bonds we had ourselves created one.
So part of the member reflections also involved asking the participants to reflect on the process
we had engaged in, whether my impressions were accurate, and to write me a brief reflection of
what may have made this possible. A copy of the email inviting them to engage in this process is
included in Appendix D, and their responses are included in the ancillary findings.

Ethical considerations comprise the sixth criterion proposed by Tracy (2010). Procedural
ethics were followed by obtaining the approval of the Behaviour Ethics Review Board of the
University of British Columbia, by obtaining the permission of the school administration where
the study was conducted, and by attaining both informed consent and assent from participants
and their parents/guardians. In addition, I attempted to make assent on-going by continually
reminding subjects that their participation was voluntary. Procedural ethics were also followed
by conflating segments of the data; in addition to changing names, some details of the research
were changed to protect people’s identities. Relational ethics were also considered. I attempted
to be very conscious of the participants’ needs, to speak to them as co-investigators rather than as students, and to represent them fairly and accurately in the results.

One other ethical consideration I debated during this project is whether my research is likely to perpetuate or challenge gender roles or stereotypes and existing patriarchies. If we see boys or men as different, as needing different therapeutic approaches, then there is the chance that this will lead to stereotyping and to the perpetuation of gender roles that are harmful to both men and women. My hope for the present study is not that it will reinforce stereotypes about men, but rather that by engaging men in this process both men and the practitioners who work with them will come to see men as emotional, thoughtful people who can thrive in therapeutic environments that have given some thought as to how to achieve this.

The final three criteria that Tracy (2010) proposes are resonance, significant contribution, and coherence. She defines resonance as “the researcher’s ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience” (p. 844); a significant contribution as research that extends knowledge, improves practice, empowers, or catalyses further research; and meaningful coherence as research that achieves its stated purpose, interconnects literature, research objectives, methods and analysis, and uses methods that fit with stated theoretical paradigms. I have addressed how I believe the methodology for this study is well suited to its broader theoretical paradigm, and so I will leave the reader to evaluate the strength of my claims. As for whether this study inspires changes in practice, new thinking, or additional studies, and to the degree to which it holds meaningful coherence, these too are questions best answered by time and the response of the broader community, whether that be fellow researchers, practitioners, or others.
Limitations and Delimitations

This study seeks to examine boys’ understandings of the conditions that allow them to feel close to other people. As little is known about the experiences of this demographic as they engage in the therapeutic process, the research is intended as a starting point, a catalyst for future discussions and research on the topic. This is an exploratory and descriptive study, and the proposed sampling procedure is purposive. It would therefore be an error to generalize any findings from this research to other populations.

The purpose of the study was made clear to potential participants from the outset, so boys who are particularly adverse to talking about themselves, or to examining their bonds with others, or who are suspicious of the therapeutic process, may have immediately de-selected themselves, a shame as this is exactly the population we are most interested in learning how to reach.

Additionally, it should be noted that this proposal targets males at a particular stage of life: adolescence. It does not seek to explain the experience in men at other life stages. Also, although many women may have very masculine values, and may have been socialized according to masculine norms, for the purposes of this research they will not be interviewed. It would be interesting for future research to investigate these two groups and determine what they have to say about how they form close bonds with others.

Representing the Findings

Given that this is a qualitative study, and one of the purposes of qualitative research is to develop themes from the data (Creswell, 2009), one of the ways to represent the findings is to do an analysis of themes across cases. A thematic approach across cases would permit both the author of the study and its readers a view into adolescent boys’ own perceptions of how they
form and maintain bonds with others, and what we as clinicians might do to help further their engagement and thus extend the benefits they reap from the therapeutic encounter.
Chapter IV--Findings

Introduction

In this section the narrative accounts of each participant are presented. They are comprised of data collected from individual photovoice interviews, and describe four different participant’s individual understandings of the conditions under which they form close bonds with others. Each of the accounts has undergone a member verification; that is, once the transcripts had been shortened into these accounts, the participants read through them and verified that they were accurate representations of their experience. Although the language has been edited with the intent of protecting confidentiality and improving clarity, a concomitant intent has been to leave the boys’ language as unchanged and true to its original form as possible.

The second section of this chapter presents the themes and sub-themes that I have derived in my analysis of the participants’ narrative accounts. They are co-created; at the most basic level, they are in-part the boys’ understanding of their own experience, and they are in-part my personal understanding of what they have said. Four overarching themes and their corresponding sub-themes, each which has been named using the words of participants, are explored and explained in detail.

The last section of this chapter presents the ancillary findings. As was previously mentioned, it was my perception that in researching and talking about the participants’ bonds with others, a type of bond also formed between researcher and participant, and I asked for their reflections on the accuracy of my perception. As with the narrative accounts, their comments are presented, and I then explain some themes and sub-themes derived from these comments.
Sam’s Narrative Account

Well I have a really weird relationship with my mother in comparison to most people. At least I think I do, I imagine that I do. Um, because most people have a parent/child relationship with their mother, but my mother is comparatively young to a lot of my friends’, so we have a much more friend/friend relationship, my mother is like my bro. And yeah, we have pretty immature, immature moments. We have I hate you battles: when one of us can’t win an argument it resorts to I hate you; I birthed you and I hated you first. It’s childish, and it’s fun.

I can trust my mum. I talk to my mum about all kinds of things—things that most kids probably don’t talk to their parents about. But it’s like, my mum and me gossip. She tells me what’s happening with her adult friends, and I tell her what’s hot in the school.

What do me and mum talk about? Well, considering we have a fairly dysfunctional relationship, a lot of time is spent me making fun of my mother. For all kinds of things. Largely that, you know, she is not the brightest bulb in the janitor’s closet. Then of course, she makes fun of me. All the time. You only got 90 on that test? Well, we have to disown you! We have a fairly dysfunctional relationship, but to me that’s perfectly normal. And I kind of love it.

I think our trust relationship just comes from the way she’s always treated me. I see parents talking to their kids and it almost seems condescending. With my mother, it’s like, you know, I am your mother. This is the basis of my claim. I have to do it because I am your mother. And we’re very rarely mad at each other, we don’t force each other to do things, and she doesn’t usually yell at me. I think that’s the basis of it—that, you know, she has always just treated me like an equal. I’m not sure there’s like a distinct tale, because it’s my life. It’s just like, this is my mother and me. Our interaction is that. I don’t think there’s one instance where it was like wow,
you guys have such a level playing field kind of relationship. It’s just that anyone outside looking in sees it. Immediately.

But um, so the tale behind me Paul and Daniel. I was never friends with them. They were in a totally different social group to me. I did not know Paul. We weren’t really friends, and we had totally different interests. He’s very sporty, and I’m very not. And one day, honest to God, out of the blue, I don’t understand it to this day, he called me and invited me to his birthday party. So I went, and it was, to be honest, completely uncomfortable and the weirdest thing I have ever done in my entire life. But he was nice. And it was great. And two weeks later he called me again, still completely out of the blue. He says Hi, I’m on a soccer team, do you want to join our soccer team, with me and Daniel. And I was like, I’ll get back to you. And so I did. I joined Paul and Daniel’s soccer team, and I had actually never spoken to Daniel in my entire life. And that was the beginning. It wasn’t me, it wasn’t me who wanted to initiate the relationship, it was him and his social awkwardness.

We were on our soccer team together, all year, and about three months into the beginning of our strange relationship he said, you know, do you want to stay over this weekend? And so, I’d go over there on Friday nights, me and Daniel, would go over there, Friday nights. And I would just stay there ‘til Sunday. Just all weekend, because their house is enormous, like a hotel, no one would even know you were there. That happened once, and the weekend after it happened again. And, I swear to God, throughout all of Grade 9, I’m going to say that 90% of the weekends were spent at Paul’s house. And we became like super, super, super close, and I spent almost every weekend there.

And Daniel’s been Paul’s best friend since about Grade 3, so Daniel was also there, so it was me and Daniel. I barely knew him at first, and during the three months we became
inseparable. And whenever Paul had gone away for whatever reason, I would spend the weekend at Daniel’s house. All the time, non-stop. And so there was nigh a weekend in all that year when I was at home, and my mother was like what are you doing? And the same the next year, basically except Paul less so, and then I became closer with Daniel.

How did I come to realize that this was someone I wanted to spend time with? Well, it was very gradual, because I saw him all the time and it was like proximity. It was just I was there one weekend, and the first weekend, and it was like, ok, let’s play soccer in your enormous yard, let’s play video games. The next weekend it was let’s play soccer and video games, next weekend soccer and video games. And when you are doing the same thing with the same person over and over and over again, you just start to talk, I suppose. And then of course I was sleeping over there as well. All weekend--Friday night, Saturday night and then leaving on Sunday. And when you’re just lying there, chattin’, ‘cause his bedroom is also enormous, he’s got beds, and he’s got blankets, pulled out couches everywhere, it’s huge. And I was 14, and so guys they just talk like, so what girls do you like? And that was like the weird, strange basis of our relationship.

That was where the whole trust thing starts to come in. Guys talking about the girls they like and how they would rate the girls in their grade, like the cool 14 year olds that we were. And um, so that was how the trust thing formed, because we saw each other all the time, and it just became like, no, of course you’re my best friend. We’re just going to trust each other because that’s how it is. I see you all the time. How could you not trust someone you see every weekend, all weekend, a good 72 hours?

I have never had two really close guy friends, and so all of a sudden it was weird, it was just like talk about ratings of girls, and talk about guy things, and talk about sports, and weird different stuff. So we talked about things that I wasn’t going to tell Erin and Michelle; they
weren’t going to tell me what boys they liked, and I wasn’t going to tell them what girls I liked. So, Me, Daniel, Paul. That was the guyish aspect of my life.

In case you couldn’t infer, Paul is very forward, he’s just like we’re just going to be friends. You don’t have a choice, you don’t have a say in the matter. So Paul’s personality was just huge, like, it’d be weird, I don’t know if it would work with other people. If Paul hadn’t take the initiative? I swear to God I still would have spoken maybe only four or five words to him. Both he and Daniel are really outgoing people.

Paul and Daniel are kind of shallow in the sense that their friends are very attractive, they’re the in-group. They’re very fun, the pretty, fun, inner group, and me and my friends are just like, whatever. Society can do whatever they want. We’re just rebels being crazy and whatnot. And Paul had this weird habit, actually it wasn’t weird it was just annoying, of asking me, why are you friends with them? He would tell me he didn’t like my other friends, I shouldn’t be friends with them, they’re not cool enough, they’re not pretty enough, they don’t rate on his attractiveness scale. And so at one point it boiled down. And honest to God I don’t remember what he said, or like how he said it, but he said something, really, really mean about Erin…And I am sure it had something to do with her ethnicity or being unattractive or something like that, but I don’t remember what it was, and I just snapped, I got really mad at him. I just got so angry at him, I just flipped. It was a progression. He was doing it, and it was getting worse and worse and worse until he said something really mean.

Sense of humour is a big thing, and I am glad you noticed that because, yeah, sense of humour is huge. I’m definitely not going to say I’m mature because that’s not a thing, but um, but I feel like my attitudes and my way of acting are more mature than theirs were. We were watching a TV show, and it’s a medical show and a kid goes into seizure. Full on seizure. And
Paul and Rahul and Anthony’s reaction is to burst out laughing because this kid is having a seizure and he looks funny. Daniel and I looked at each other like, he’s having a seizure, it’s not funny. And that’s when I started to be like we have very different senses of humour, and Paul was adjusting his to fit theirs, and I couldn’t deal with that, because I wasn’t going to adjust mine (inaudible).

Part of the connection with Daniel is we can relate on the same level intellectually. We both have the same high GPA, we both find the same things funny, we both watch the same TV, like we’re both on the same level of intelligence.

Me and Daniel stayed pretty good friends. I used to go to his house all the time, became good friends with his parents, and siblings, and he lives close so it was easy because I would just walk to Daniel’s whenever. Daniel I would see after school and we’d do things, and then we went on a school trip together, which helped, and we went on another school trip together, and um did all kinds of things.

Me and Erin’s story. Alright. So, Erin came to the school and she was the new girl, and to be honest Erin is the polar opposite of Paul. She is the most socially awkward person in the entire planet. When she first came to the school she was shy and awkward and timid, but we both got put in the same Grade 8 advisory, and I ended up sitting next to the new girl, and I wasn’t ecstatic about this, and (indicating another friend, a girl in a separate photo) had gone away to boarding school, so I had very few friends, because me and (names another girl, also pictured in a photo) hadn’t become friends yet either, and so a bunch of people I had known in Grade 7 had left to go off to different high schools, and so I was like oh, me and the new girl. I just remember we had two classes together in Grade 8, and we decided to sit next to each other, because, well, you know, we seemed to like each other. And from there onward, our relationship just
progressed, we became ever more and more close. It wasn’t so structured as my relationship with Paul and Daniel as we hung out all the time, it was, Erin was my go-to hangout. It was, I’m going to hang out with Erin today. Who am I going to hang out with? Erin. It was very go-to and I was her go-to friend as well because she had just come to the school.

We kind of drifted apart a bit, in Grade 9, and lo and behold, Paul called me, and I went and became friends with Paul for a good solid year, and so I think Erin felt left out after a while. It was like ok, we can still be friends though, we can still hang out. And then all of a sudden me and Paul stopped being friends, and since then Erin and I have been inseparable. I see her all the time. We’re just completely the same person.

There are a bunch of reasons Erin and I became friends, I suppose. A, she is a girl, and I’ve always had a really close girlfriend, regardless of who it is, it’s always been that because I’ve been raised around girls. (Names another girl in a separate photo) was my friend in elementary school, she left, so I guess a little part of me was you need to find a girl best friend. You need to have that. And Erin sat next to me. That’s kind of the lame, shallow reason, deeper reasons being--she’s exactly like me. If you have ever seen me and Erin talk we are the same person. It’s just like guy/girl same person. Um, we are very competitive, and um, it doesn’t sound like it would be conductive to a healthy relationship but it is. And admittedly, I know she is ten times smarter than me, but I don’t know how, but I’ve always created the illusion that I’m just as smart as Erin, although my average is a significant two per cent lower than hers. But I’ve always created the illusion that I am smarter than her. Maybe it’s because I have this awesome vocabulary (inaudible).

We are also the type of people who like to regiment, we like to plan. We both liked to schedule things, to have it all planned out instead of it being all willy nilly. We’re also both very,
how to phrase this, we’re very strange. We don’t quite, we don’t quite fit into the cool in-group. Even though I was for a little while, it didn’t fit me at all. Us, we like to talk about the nerdy, deep things in life. We would hang out. We’d watch nature programs on TV in her theatre room, and we’d just chill there, talking about the big things in life. We’d be like, so, tell me your views on religion, and just have all these deep and meaningful conversations and it was super cool. And we both enjoyed that. We were like, we could be out partying right now. Nope, instead we are watching nature programs and eating popcorn.

We became, at the end of Grade 10, we became a tad more socially sociable, because as you get older you try to explore more friendly things. And so Erin and I were like, we should, we should go party. We should go to a party. And um, so we did that, and I went over to her house and we had some vodka. And it was foul and disgusting, but me and Erin both found ourselves getting completely annihilated. So, we are very similar in the regard that we both decided it was time to be social—then. We motivate each other to be, normaler. Everyone else is doing this, so we should be doing it too.

But we are different, too. I should probably mention that we are not entirely the same. Because we are not. There are some key things that kind of separate me and Erin at times, two things, actually that are most important. Erin is very emotional, and she is very expressive of her emotions. If she feels the remotest bit of sadness, it’s time to cry. It’s time to weep. And if you insult her, it’s time for rage; she will be mad at you and be infuriated.

And me, I am not. I am not expressive and I am not emotional, and if you hurt my feelings I will not tell you about it. And if I am mad at you I will not show it. And if I am sad you will never know. Ever. And that’s a thing that I wasn’t used to. I’ve never had a friend who was so sensitive and emotional. It became a thing where it was very, very much…oooh, did I just insult
her? She walked away very quickly. (whispering) Did I insult her? I think I might have insulted her. So that’s the big, the big difference between us, but that’s the only one really.

Never tell her I said this, but I do find it less attractive. It’s a repelling force. It’s like, oh no, she’s emotional right now, and wow, I need to, I need to separate and distance myself from her—I am in the firing path. And it’s not like she does this all the time, like once or twice a year, but it’s enough to remember it and it’s like not a great quality she has because it’s not justified.

The anger is fairly spectacular. She broke up with her boyfriend. She was furious, and she was sad, and I needed to separate, I needed to distance. But no, we vented. Sebastian’s a dick. I’m so sad about Sebastian. Let’s get back together. No, Sebastian! And that’s not something I do, so I find it very strange.

Well, you know I’ve had girlfriends before, so I know girls are more emotional than guys, but I am, I am even less emotional than guys. I am, I am not even sure that I have an emotional centre in my brain. Like I don’t cry in movies, I don’t cry when things die. I’ve had three dogs die, and I haven’t cried at one of them, and it makes me feel bad that I haven’t cried, because I just don’t feel sad, often. I have like anti-depression.

And I’m Erin’s closest friend and so she cries to me. And I am not a counselling psychologist, I am not good with people in that state. ‘Cause you know they want you to be like, it’s ok, like compassion, everything’s going to be great. I’m not good in those situations at all. I don’t know what to say, I don’t know how to deal with it. My go-to is humour. I am a funny person, I cannot deal with sad, so I don’t know how to react in that situation ‘cause I know humour isn’t gonna work. But um, when she’s crying, or when I’ve done it, especially, I have no idea what to say. So that’s why being sad is an issue for me. You see? Couldn’t be a psychologist, couldn’t be a counsellor, couldn’t do it.
Erin is definitely the closest friend. I’ve told Erin things, things that I just couldn’t tell other people, because like, I don’t know why, I can’t even begin to explain why, just mainly because with a lot of my friends I don’t know where I stand in relation to other people. But with Erin, we are both completely on the same realm, like I am your best friend, you are my best friend, it’s completely, completely open. I know exactly where I stand with Erin, and so it helps that I know where we are. Because I hate not knowing where I am. And with me and Erin it’s like, yeah, I’m your best friend, tell me that. You’re my best friend, I’ll tell you this. It’s a good, a good dynamic.

With Paul there were still certain things that I wasn’t going to tell Paul ‘cause a little tiny part of me was like, no, I shouldn’t tell Paul because I don’t know how he’ll judge me or he’ll think of these things.

As sociopathic as it sounds, I probably haven’t cried since I was ten years old, because the only real emotion I have felt really, really, really, strongly, that I got really emotional about, is that one time, with Paul. I was angry, and I don’t even know why. Maybe I’m just a crazy sociopath! It was the culmination of things past, combined with that one event, that brought all those emotions I hadn’t felt for six years just back, and it was like I’m going to kill you. The anger was all focussed on him. And I am sure most of it wasn’t justified to be pointed at him, because I am sure there were all sorts of other people who that anger was diverged at, but it all went to Paul.

Ok, so me and Michelle. I never knew her in elementary school. She was in a different friend group as well. Just like Paul, but not with the cool, popular in-crowd, she had her own kind of social outcast group. Erin had gone off to camp, she would go to summer camp back
then. And over that summer, me and Michelle became really close, ‘cause Erin had gone off to camp and I needed someone to see because I was bored.

I didn’t really think we had a lot in common. Because Michelle is very into art, she is much more rowdy and party-loving than I am. She is a social butterfly, she just likes to meet people all the time, she goes to parties with people she doesn’t know, she hangs out with her cousin’s friends, her friend’s friends, and she’s totally ok with it. That’s not me. So I didn’t really think I could be friends with this person, because she didn’t seem like me at all. But um, we just slowly but surely came together. Just by seeing each other, because we were bored, both of us, because our friends had gone away.

Mainly me and Michelle would go for ice cream, when I got back from Paul’s. That was our thing. Almost every week. Gained a solid ten pounds. Every week, without fail. And we would have rowdy burger fun night, which was our excuse to go out. It was like date night, but we weren’t dating. We called it rowdy burger fun night because we just did, I don’t know how it came to be called that! After we’d go back to her house and watch terrible television. And then we’d laugh because it was so funny.

I don’t know what it is I like about her. You know I think it’s, and it doesn’t make any sense because I am not like that, but she is again, another, it’s not a polar opposite, it’s a triangle. There are three personality types in my life and she’s the third one. She’s just a free spirit. She likes to do things last minute. She likes to do wild, crazy things that I didn’t do with Erin, I didn’t do with Paul, and I didn’t think I wanted to do them, either. But with Michelle it was like, you wanna go roller-blading on the sea wall and get crepes? She was spontaneous and it was fun and it was different, and I don’t know why that appealed to me but it clearly did. Because we were friends. And yeah, it was different and it was interesting.
If I were to go full on, open up, of all the people here it would be with Erin. And um, what would have to be present? It doesn’t take much, it just um, in Erin’s basement, she has a room, couches kinda aligned around a TV, and that is where whenever she is sad or angry she vents and she yells at me. And I feel like if it were ever to happen, it would be in one of two places, it would be there, on Erin’s couches, or, it would be in Katie’s basement, in her theatre room, because we have also had some pretty deep and meaningful conversations there. And I feel comfortable talking about them there because right now, at this particular moment in time, these two (pointing to pictures of Erin and Katie) are my closest friends, and they would be present if anyone would be present.

It’s not the type of conversation you could have on a park bench. That’s too public, too weird. These talks happen in their basements! No idea why. It’s the atmosphere. It feels very private and personal. It’s usually late at night. So we’re in the basement, and there we are, just chattin’ about boring school things like how was the physics test today? And then usually how it works is that we’re in the dark, the lights are all off, all you see is the projector, because they both have projectors in their basements, the projector’s against the wall, the sound has been turned down. It’s warm because we have all somehow found our way under one communal blanket. And we’re all lying on each other, or lying in the vicinity of each other, on these couches, under these blankets, and it’s just a very private, personal atmosphere. And so you feel you can talk about things when you are all just lying there just like, hey, (whispering) talk about this. Yeah, the atmosphere is important.

And it has happened before in that context, maybe not so much the emotional, but they were the first girls who I’ve ever had a conversation with about who I like. So there is the sense of knowing it’s ok to talk about it there. ‘Cause like (pointing to photos) I didn’t have a place
with him, or her, or her, or most of these people. There is no place where it’s like this is a good place, this is where we can talk. And those are the only environments, that is the environment. A safe place.

**James’ Narrative Account**

Part of the getting close to other people is being near them all the time. Mere exposure effect. Physically close to them, yeah. So, being around people, and talking to them. If you are around the same people all the time, it's hard not to make friends with them, I find. Even if you really don't like them you will put on a façade.

If making bonds to fictional characters counts, then Harry Potter was my life when I was younger. Uh, I picked up the first book when I was about 8, and I grew up alongside the books and, you know, of the characters inside Harry Potter, I would like to say I relate most to Harry or Hermione.

It's like, you look at the first book and it's descriptive of an eleven year old, and you know, then from a 12 year old and a 13 year old, and it goes up. Harry grows up in the book as I grew up with the books, so I kinda learned with Harry as he learned through his whole life.

Hermionie, too. I’ll be honest. I am intelligent, so I relate to Hermionie sometimes because she is ostracized or segregated from others because of her ability to understand certain concepts, and maybe that's a hindrance to her ability to make social relationships with other people, and for me at least sometimes that can occur. I am a little sociopathic occasionally and don't really understand people's feelings and why they do things. And, sometimes it's a barrier.

If I ever have personal, emotional things, you know, it's kind of easy for me to bottle them up and defenestrate them. It’s easier for me to take a more analytical perspective when looking at just about everything. There's that classic stereotype between science people and arts people, and
I am very much a science person. I don't really show emotion that often. I can offer emotional support, but you know there's only so far that that can go sometimes.

I have a best friend, and whenever I talk to my best friend, because we've known each other so well, and we know each other like the back of each other's hands, we know each other's quirks, we know how we talk. If I ever receive a text message from her, not from her phone, you know I will know it's from her because that's how she types, right? So, during those times, you know, she's definitely more on the emotional side. I am like the analytical person, and she can moderate my opinions it will be like, can you check this? I'll say something, and it's just like, is that normal? You know, it's like the normalcy barrier there. And she'll be like, nooo. Or yes. It's a fun relationship. I like it.

When we were in Grade 8 we talked occasionally, and then in Grade 9 it was talking more, and then in 10 it was phoning every night. So I don't know what happened there. We're not like, in a relationship. It is intimate, but it's not like boyfriend/girlfriend, it's best friend/best friend. There was no specific staring point.

We have similar humour, I guess. We kind of laugh at the same things, or we both have this rather cynical view of people sometimes. It's just the way that we present the jokes to each other, and even more than that we both have a really sardonic humour, you know, it's almost caustic and sarcastic, but it's fun, and it's not intentionally made to harm anyone's feelings. We have really ironic humours, yeah.

I think one of the big things similarly is that we talk similarly. You know, like when somebody says something to you and you totally agree with them, you know those kinds of things, our speech patterns are really similar. We mimic each other pretty much. We both did the MBTI and found out we had the same personality, too.
Surprisingly with my best friend Sarah, we know so much about each other that in-depth conversations are seldom because we know what would be discussed, kind of thing. I do have another friend, Amy, whom I do have in-depth conversations with, and, I don't know, we've talked about a lot of things. We've talked about the value of a friend kinda thing. My conversations with Amy have been rather unique 'cause we uh, we've had philosophical arguments over you know, we've talked about death and life and the purpose of things like that, and existentialist themes would pop up frequently.

The difference between me and Amy's relationship and me and Sarah's relationship is that me and Amy's relationship is very much a vocal thing. Like, we will talk. Me and Sarah. Or Sarah and I, Sarah and I we will have conversations over instant messaging services like MSN, Facebook or something like that. It's more, I don't know. Texty? Textual? So, and I guess that gives us more time to collect our thoughts and give us better discussions about in-depth things.

Yeah, so if I have some kind of thing emotionally that I can't defenestrate myself then it will be Amy. If I have some kind of, if I have a problem with, some kind of issue that's bothering me for a while, like dying or something, then I'll go to Sarah. I guess, I guess the difference is if my inner brain is like distressed emotionally then I go to Amy, if my inner brain is distressed logically then I go to Sarah.

For some reason, I don't know, I have absolutely no idea why, but I think maybe a year or two ago I had this intense, strange phobia of death suddenly develop. And then, I kinda resolved it when I was talking to my friend Sarah, and she actually, before this happened, she didn't have it. And then it kinda reciprocated onto her, which was a little bad, because I know that a few weeks ago actually her grandfather passed away, so she came to me for help about dealing with grief and death and that kind of stuff. And I comforted her by saying like the exact same thing
she said to me years ago, so that's how it worked there. And that's one of the examples of the logical things.

It took a while before I shared it with her, a good month or two. I guess we, we were on, the instant messaging service at the exact same time. You know, the thought casually bubbled up again, and it was like why not just talk about it here, 'cause you're given the opportunity, right? It was a good opportunity to do it just 'cause it was right there, you know? So I guess that's kinda what happened there.

Being a bit removed from the person makes a difference. I find that when I am outside situations, outside situations looking in, you have an advantage of being more objective, less subjective, which definitely helps when you're trying to discuss, 'cause I like taking the most objective view as possible, and looking from the outside in is probably as about as objective as you can get.

I think that's one of the reasons why we have discussed this over instant messaging and why we haven't discussed it in person. Because I don't think I could ever discuss something like that in person, besides here obviously because I've done that already. But I don't think I could ever do that with a person, really, because that just doesn't work for me. It just doesn’t. Or the only other situation where I've actually done that is a situation where you know you'll never see the person again, then I'm cool with it.

So, funny story. I was in Stanley Park, and there was some kind of walk or something and I was supposed to direct people. And I met a person, and he was sitting on a bench, and he was feeding the swans. He was from Scotland, and basically we were just talking about our lives. I don't know how. I kinda just sat down. He kinda was just was sitting there, too, enjoying the weather, and then we just struck up conversation. I don't even know who started it. It just
happened, you know? But we sat there for an hour and we just talked. And at the end of the conversation we didn't even share each other's names; I just had this amazing conversation with this person, and I'm never going to see this person again, but I don't know their name. That almost dumbfounded me afterwards. It was a rare experience. Yeah. So, we both shared a little bit of each other's lives, and we both shared our views on existentialism. I learned about his family and where he came from. He was the delegate of his generation, and I was the delegate of ours. And at the same time, we also shared tidbits of our own, like the people that he knew kinda thing, or the way he talked to people, the things he wasn't happy about himself. And I did the same thing. It was almost, it was almost the right thing to do, because if someone shares that, you kinda feel, it was almost like because it was just two people there sitting together on a bench, out in a park, looking on the lake in Stanley Park, you know, it was like anything you say has to reciprocate back.

And I found myself saying stuff to him that I would never say to anyone else. I found myself, you know, saying things that I'd like never reveal to other people. Secrets, you know? Maybe it was like, a catharsis almost, a releasing of something I kept up inside, and just like having some kind of conduit to expound upon the ideas that were kept in my head. So, I think just having that outlet and never seeing that person again was very, very helpful. I think that's one of those things actually, you know there's that service Kids Help Phone, and I've noticed, I think because it's anonymous, almost, people are more willing to share ideas. I think that's almost what happened with me and the person, you know, 'cause it was, it was anonymous in the sense that we did have a conversation, we did talk to each other for a very long time, but we both knew without saying it that we would probably never seen the person again.
Anonymity definitely played a role that day where, you know, I guess almost talking to someone behind a barrier. Like, sometimes they have in churches those things where the priest sits behind a screen door and you talk to the priest behind the screen door, but neither of you are looking at each other. It was almost like that, 'cept it was closer because we could see each other and talk with each other and relate with each other, and it wasn't just one person confessing to another person. It was like, it was a two-way street, a two-way relationship, but at the same time just knowing that nothing you say matters 'cause, cause you will never see the person again, but at the same time being able to say it, I think that's valuable.

The impact it had was I'm a lighter person, I guess. You know, it's like. Let's be honest here. What teenager doesn't think that the world's burdens are on their shoulders at some point, you know? And after that conversation, I realized to myself like, you know, sometimes talking is ok. Yes I am a really analytical person, but now I am most definitely not devoid of emotion. I mean, I can ignore it, but that doesn't mean I don't have it. Yeah it did feel really good to go there, actually. That was a powerful experience. I don't think I have ever shared that with anyone, have I? It's just never come up in conversation.

Of course there are the adults who are pretty much like living their childhood as adults, and I have so much respect for those people, because they have not lost the, almost the innocence of youth, you know, that a lot of people lose when they get older, and you know you can have innocence and you can have experience at the same time.

I guess I seek the qualities that I have, that I don't have myself. I don't have the personality that is carefree, or that's isn't totally angst ridden in everything. I don't have that personality. I am a very angsty, type A, competitive, sometimes caustic person, and then when I see someone just letting go or taking the more relaxed perspective to life, I'll be like, what if, what if I was like
that? You know, I'll say to myself, no, I can't be like that I won't get to where I want to be, and I won't get my goals that I want set, and all that kind of stuff and mumbo jumbo, and at the same time it's like, c'mon James, just open yourself up.

Tara is in my own grade, and she is studying psychology there (indicating photo--the photo is of a fellow student, sitting under a table, with an open textbook in her lap). I find that Tara is a very carefree person, and she still does represent the care freeness, and you know, kinda like the ability to hide under a table 20 minutes before an earthquake drill and not feel judged by it.

She came to our school in Grade 3, but we never really talked until maybe Grade 10, and she was in my advisory, too. It was Grade 8 and 9 and she was in my homeroom and she still wouldn't talk ever. Now we can talk. We're not best friends, and I wouldn't really say that we are friends even I would just say we are good acquaintances. Yeah. How did it happen? Uh, it was just the little quirks that she had, the little things that happened, like hiding under desks, or you know, like jumping onto people, or it was the little weird things and it was just like, it would be me questioning her, like, what are you doing? And she would be like, I am having fun.

I have a lot of friends that are girls. I have a lot of friends who are guys, too, it's just that I don't have the same relationship with them. When you talk to a girl it's kinda like, you have, I think I have said this before, the traits that you don't have you seek often. I find that the traits I don't have are often situated in girls or women more than they are in men. Partially because, maybe I am being stereotypical here, but guys tend to be more...analytical. Yeah, so, I do have guy friends too, but we are all just similar people in the sense that, you know, it's kinda like a mirror reflection of yourself, and because it's a mirror reflection you're not as interested in them. Like, I am less interested in myself. That kind of sounds weird, but yeah.
The characteristic of being different is something valued. Being unique, I guess. That's pretty much all I have to say about it.

I am unwilling to say emotional! I am very unwilling to say emotional to describe myself and my relationships. I'm unwilling to say that, because, I don't know. I'm stereotyping guys here. Let's be honest. We're supposed to be really, we're supposed to have a really like hard, strong perspective of like, I don't know, gender roles almost. It's almost a gender role to say that guys are supposed to be more perceptive, rather, and that kind of stuff, and girls are just more emotional. I don't want to say it's emotional because, to myself that is totally not what I would say to myself, you know. It's absolutely a no-no in my personal self-conscious. I see myself as very, an emotional bond-developing person, but I am also very much an analytical person. By conceding and saying that I have an emotional relationship with girls is like, I don't know. I am a perceptive person, and an analytical person. I secretly acknowledge that I am an emotional person, but I refuse to believe it of myself. I acknowledge it but I refuse to believe it. Self-deception. It works perfectly. There is nothing wrong with it!

I think I said this, between the two friends, Amy would see the emotional side of me, and Sarah would see part of it. And then, besides that, nope. It kind of shuts off.

The way it works with me and my brother is, when we were younger we were very close. As we got older we got farther apart, mostly because we had different friend groups, and we have totally different personalities, like polar opposites! So, I did say that we seek traits that we don't have in other people. I do see different traits in my brother, but unfortunately I don't seek them that much. My brother and I's relationship is one of those relationships where it gets better where we get farther apart. Like, the less time we spend talking together, the more time we spend
like messaging each other over email or something, that's when the relationship gets better. I don't know, that's kind of like a dysfunctional relationship.

So I do meditate occasionally, usually only when I am very stressed out. For example, days before exam week, or when something really bad happens or something. Whenever I need to like, whenever there is something bad, if I can't get past it through just relaxation techniques, then I will call up a friend. But then calling up a friend is only after two months of allowing it to fester in my heart and brain. Yes. Allowing it to fester is a better choice than it is to release myself emotionally with other people, and I don't know why that is, and I feel that is totally detrimental to myself, my psyche and my health, but that's how it goes.

Unless something like the park bench situation happens, in which case if that happens, the reset button is hit, and everything up to that point just gets flushed out. Like, catharsis in that way that it's not angry or violent, but in the way that it's a release of emotion and ideas, and analysis that's pent up.

This whole question of how we get boys to talk about those tough, emotional things is a really hard one to answer, and that's one of the reasons why I came to help out the study, just 'cause that's one of the things that I want to know, too. Just 'cause, you know, I don't think I have an answer to that, because I think I am an example of one of those people that you know, refuses to go to counsellors or psychologists or friends, sometimes, just 'cause, I have this thing in my head. Maybe we have to do something about the education system. There has to be a fundamental change in the way people think, which is difficult. I think that the problem is deeper than what we originally thought. There's more to it than just a simple technique. There has to be something different about society in general for it to facilitate this. There has to be a different way of thinking. Either that or there has to be like an intervention where people are forced into it.
One of the things that have to be present is confidentiality, of course. If that's not carried, I don't see any hope. Two, I think in the relationship there has to be reciprocity. With the person I was talking to on the park bench, that person, because he was sharing with me and I was sharing with him, when you have a boy share his own feelings and stuff like that, you have to uh, you have to do the same. But then I am not really sure if in that case if the psychologist or therapist is willing to do that, to share their feelings, too. So, that's one of the things that will help keep them in the door, the thing is whether they will walk in the door in the first place. That would maintain a relationship. I don't know about--I wouldn't know too much about whether that would initiate the relationship.

Atthul’s Narrative Account

So this is a photo of my family room. This is where a lot of our family time is spent. Especially in the evenings, especially in the summers, and the three of us always sit in this room, in the evenings. This is just a place that symbolizes family time for us, and it's a place where I really connect with both my parents, and I formed a relationship with both of them. It’s sort of an evening ritual.

We have discussions in there. We often eat on the dining table, but sometimes if it's just a lazy evening or something we will eat in the family room. And of course we use it for watching TV and video games. But really it's a very social room.

Whenever I am planning my courses for the following year, it's always been discussed in this room. Um, fights usually happen in this room, happy times usually happen in this room, and this is the room also in which we discussed getting a dog.

So I know that this is a bit of an obscure photo, but ever since I was little, laundry has been one of my fascinations and something that connects me to my mum. Ever since I was three or
four years old, she used to put me in the laundry bin, and we would do the laundry, and then she
would throw laundry at me, and we would fold it and chat. When I was younger, she used to put
me in the laundry basket and slide me down the stairs—we used to have so much fun doing that.

My mum and I have been really close forever. She's like my best friend. She's always been there for me, like for my entire life. Never missed a day, like picking me up at school, she's never late. And she's just someone that I know that I can always confide in and talk to and I never hesitate to talk to her.

I don't think there's necessarily one particular story about how I formed that bond with her, because I think it's always been my upbringing with her and my dad. Um, and I think it's just ever been since I was young. Like, it's just something that's just instinctual, you don't think twice about it.

My mum is very kind, loving, nurturing. She has this desire to always fix things if things aren't ok, and she'll like put herself on the line to make sure that everyone else is ok. So she's very selfless. Like she'll keep going because she knows that there's other things she has to do, and like she never, ever wants to let anyone down. So she's very determined in that way.

I'm the youngest of all my cousins by ten years, but Davina and I have always been really close because she has just taken an interest in me ever since I was a baby: I vomited on her, I peed on her when I was a child. She's basically my older sister, I see her like three times a week. And she's someone that if there's something that I wouldn't want to tell my parents, which doesn't happen very often, but if there's something where I would just be uncomfortable, she would be the person I would text or call.

She is very warm and open, and she's just such an easy person to talk to; she's one of those people that just attracts you. And you are able to form a relationship with and confide in them.
very easily. And I think the second thing is that she doesn't have that close relationship with her older brother, who is her only sibling, so I think that since there's been kind of a void there, the two of us have become closer in that sense, and she often consults me for advice for things, and I often consult her.

Sometimes you might not necessarily want to bring something that's happening at school with a school friend because you don't want gossip to spread, so sometimes in that situation I consult with her and just ask her what to do. Confidentiality is important and I have it with my cousin.

Usually when I talk about my problems or I go to seek advice, I tend to gravitate towards girls for that, specific girls that I tend to ask advice from because, and I don't mean to be sexist in any way, I just find that sometimes I get more advice and more understanding from a girl than I would from a guy. And I feel like sometimes guys, we are more nonchalant about it, or don't want to chat about emotions, whereas with a girl that's no problem. But then sometimes if I just want to go and have a good time, or go out and do something stupid, then I would gravitate towards a guy for that.

My relationship with Anna is actually quite new, it's one of those relationships that just tends to build quickly like Tetris. She's just the type of person that's always there to listen. Always. No matter the time of day, it's someone that I know I can call. And that she's, she's very good at reading people, and understanding people. She's just very natural at giving advice, and she knows me and knows what I am comfortable doing, and she's able to give me advice based on my range of comfort.

We became friends in a class at the beginning of the year. So Anna and I were both kinda like the loners who, we knew everyone in the class, but you know that day when you get into
class on the first day, and the seating is already done, and you just come in late, and it's like oh, where do I sit? It's awkward. And then the two of us sat together, and then just like this (snaps fingers), like we became best friends, and within a month we were calling each other, chatting up a storm. We can just really relate to each other, I guess.

I don’t think we even necessarily have common interests or anything, but I think that we are both just very happy go lucky, free people who just love to laugh or have a good conversation, and I think that that's it's easy with her. Like you wouldn’t necessarily talk to a regular friend about your beliefs about religion or something, but if it ever came up between Anna and I it would just be like funny, and we would just talk about it openly with one another.

I think the thing that I also really admire about her is that she, she really does, and I know genuinely, not just because she said it to me, but because I can feel it from her, that she really does think that we are best friends. It's not a relationship that you would actually ever predict would happen, but I think that our personalities just mesh.

I like the fact that she is calm. Um, she has her moments, but I like the fact that for the most part she is calm, she is ready to listen, she is very down to earth and tranquil about things, and I like the fact that if there is something that I am really not doing that she knows that I need to be doing, she will tell me forcefully, like you need to do this. So she kinda like always steers me in the right path in that sense, and I think that one of the things she derives from me in our friendship is that sometimes she is so calm that she forgets to have a good time, and I think that I do that for her, I have a contrasting role in the sense that she will call me if she wants to be like, she wants a pick me up or something. So like you said before it's very reciprocal.

I think that for me I often gravitate to people that are very similar to me, or very contrasting from me. Anna is very similar to me, but I’m also open to having a friend that is a
polar opposite. And I think that having a friend like that pushes me, like out of my comfort zone, which is something that I like because I always want to keep growing as a person, and I like to form relationships in which I am being pushed. I like the idea of not necessarily knowing how to deal with a situation right away, or being in a new situation where I have to figure out, ok how do I resolve this? So, I think being very similar relationships work for me, and also very opposite relationships work for me too.

However, if I’m dealing with a problem, concern or worry I am more likely to go to a friend that’s similar to me because I think we have more of the same ideology in terms of how we would deal with the situation, and in terms of bringing up a problem I just feel more comfortable interacting with people similar to me.

Sylvia and I have had an on-going relationship since the very beginning of Grade 8, and I think that when I was kind of lost and transitioning into the school at the beginning and like, oh my god, where is this classroom, she is just the type of person that is very vibrant and just someone who is always a listening ear for me, and I am always a listening ear for her.

As you can see in this photo, she's really happy go lucky, and she's never the type of person to get mad at your or hold a grudge, and I think it's just her attitude and the way that she approaches situations that makes it easy to talk to her.

I got to know Sylvia in choir in Grade 8, and there were only three of us from my grade in Grade 8 who decided to do the choir, and um I was the only boy. So um, I stood beside Sylvia because we were assigned to the same section together, and things just spread from there. We started talking to each other, making conversation, and we realized we liked each other, even though there's a two-year age gap.
We decided to try to form a relationship with one another so we began hanging out outside of school, like we would go to dinner together, or we would go to the movies together, or we would go shopping downtown together. And I think those events outside of school really helped us become friends.

One day after school the two of us decided to go to a restaurant. So we had a really nice dinner together, and then she said why don't we go downtown, like I want to go see this movie. So, I said to her, do you know how to get there? And she said, yeah, yeah I do. And we got on the bus together and then she got lost, of course. Sylvia. Classic. So then we ended up missing our movie, so we just grabbed a crepe and hung out instead. But it was like an experience. Like now we look back on it and just laugh.

I do seem to gravitate to forming relationships with people that are older than me, and I think that's because I have always been the baby. Everyone in my grade is older than me. Back in Grade 1 I had skipped kindergarten, and I was literally the kid who would stand in the corner and eat lunch at the table by himself. So it was a very rough introduction in Grade 1, but when I came into high school, I think with me being in a lot of advanced courses, my sciences and math, I am in way more classes with older kids than I am with my kids in my grade. Hanging out with older kids is what I am used to. And I think a lot of it stems from the family dynamic, too.

This is a photo taken of Jennifer. And this is probably the photo that is the most humorous out of the six. The weird thing with Jennifer and I is that we met when I was a little boy and we were both flying as unaccompanied minors. And the reason I took a picture of her hair specifically is because I always used to make fun of her hair and it's one of the very first things for a lot of people that you notice about Jennifer.
Jennifer's like my good friend, good fun, cheer-up friend. If I am ever down she's just so happy and always laughing--you never really feel stress with Jennifer. If she's stressed about a test or something, you could never tell with her. So whenever I want to go have a good time I will call her up and we'll chat and go hang out downtown or whatever, and every single time I am with her, after I leave it, it's like, oh, we had such a good time today.

I try to always put on the mask that I am happy because I never want to let problems spread to my other relationships, and I am a juggler trying to juggle so many different relationships at one time and make sure that they are all happy. And I think that I am really good at just making it seem like I am always happy and positive. But especially with this whole situation that's been happening with this break up, I was really like I guess down and depressed this weekend, but whenever I talk to Jennifer she just cheers me up right away. Jennifer is one of the fun-time rowdy people.

Back in Grade 8 mid-way through the term, I found out that I was failing math. I had always done very well in math, and I was so depressed, and I talked to Jennifer and she was like, what's wrong? So I told her the story and she was like why don't we just go hang out, and I was like, well, I was going to study today. And she's like you don't have a test right now, like seriously, just drop your books, let's go hang out. And um, we went downtown. It seems like I always end up going to the same restaurant, and that's where we ended up. Afterwards, we just grabbed a coffee and went to a movie, so, that was fun.

When we get together like that, I spend some time talking about the problem, and then I probably just like spending time together, talking about school, like what's happening, grade-wide gossip, or whatnot. This helps because it allows you to forget your woes and problems, you know what I mean? And sometimes you need a, I think for me especially sometimes I just, there
are those days you just feel so much like crap, that you need a pick me up to bring you back almost to neutral so you can keep going rather than like trying to climb your way up the ladder by yourself. So I think that it's a perfect formula. She is able to pick me up, get me back on my feet, and then I can keep going by myself.

Sometimes it's almost better not to be talking about the problem. Sometimes it's one of those situations where I don't want to talk about it, like what's done is done, especially in a situation like marks where there's nothing you can really do to change it besides pick up your effort, but um I just needed a pick me up that day.

If it was someone I just needed to let it all out with, that would be Anna, because Anna is not the same. Like, she is a pick me up person, but she isn't someone I would gravitate to right away for that, she would be someone that I would let it all out with and then we would go and hang out and talk about it. But if I was with her, I would be talking more about the problem more so than just having a good time, necessarily. But she always tries to refocus me because I think she has realized that since I am such an emotional person I often need someone to help me cut the string when I have done everything that I can, because for me I won't stop even if I am, um, doing it to my own detriment. So, usually two different people. With Anna we'll really talk it out if there's something that I really need to remedy and I want to do it quickly.

Like I have never gone to that extent with Jennifer, and it's almost because I have that need fulfilled, like I have that outlet with Anna. The difference between Anna and Jennifer for me is pretty much it's quite simple, I think it's because I don't know Jennifer as I do Anna, and even though I am sure she would be perfect in dealing with that I have never gone to her. I guess I am just used to talking to Anna about that.
My morning ritual is more so revolved around my dad, I guess, because he is the one who wakes me up in the morning. It feels like it happens the exact same every day. And I think whenever I think of my morning ritual the first thing that comes to my mind is probably the car ride with my dad and the interaction that I have with him in the car, like very fond memories of that.

One of the things that happens usually with my dad is since both of us love to travel so much we love to plan like vacations and always get excited to plan vacations. And we would spend drives and drives talking about summer vacation and where we should go. Like, ok, have you looked at the airfare yet? Have you looked at the hotels? Like what do you want to do? We just love talking about travel. It seems like that's a very frequent topic, and for sure it's something that I always remember vividly talking about. Recently we did a drive and I booked an entire trip to Europe! So that was a really fun car ride that morning. And we were so happy it was like yea, we are going to Europe!

We have a lot of fun together. Like we do the most random things. Often on Friday nights, that's usually time when my dad and I try to hang out together because Friday nights is the one night that I try to take off studying, where I just like to put my books away. And about a month ago he said to me what do you want to do tonight? And I was like, do you wanna watch our show, because we watch a weekly TV show together. And this time we watched it and it was about 8 o'clock, and he said what do you want to do now? Do you want to watch something else? And I'm like no, I don't really feel like watching TV. He's like, why don't we go to Deep Cove. And I was like, why? Like why would I want to go to Deep Cove? What are we going to do there? And he's like, come on, let's just go. So we put the dog in the car and the two of us went to Deep Cove, and we came back at like 11 that night, and we just went for ice cream, and then just
sat in the car with the dog just talking, and then took him for a walk, like just completely randomly in a neighbourhood, and then just drove back.

There's a constant spirit of adventure with my dad. When I was younger I think we co-created that, and I think that now I am older I have become more rigid, and now I think that he's the one who always initiates it. Of course as soon as I go I have the best time, it's just sometimes I take a little bit of convincing. We are two peas in a pod. We are absolute best friends. Um, sometimes I feel like he is more of a best friend than a dad to me in some sense, not because he is not a dad to me or a leaderly figure to me, but also because we also get along so well that it's like we're just best friends.

Min’s Narrative Account

My dad was the one who taught me to ride a bicycle. We would go on the grass part here in the park, and I would get on the bike, and what he would do is that he would push me, um, I don’t know, for like about five metres or so and he would let go, and then I would just keep pedalling and everything, and then my first achievement was I actually went (indicating same photo) from this end all the way to the other end, uh, with a single push, so I was very proud of that, but then before I could do that I fell and I, you know, I cried and everything. But, um, we used to go there pretty much every day until I got the hang of it. And one day I was somehow able to just ride it—to start pedalling without him, uh, pushing me, and he was very proud of me for that. And yeah, I thanked him for that as well.

My dad gives me support all the time when I need support. Like for exams and everything he’s like always try your best you know, it doesn’t matter if you get a bad mark as long as you can do your best it’s the best. He is very supportive.
The thing is that I only see him once a year and everything, ‘cause he lives overseas and is working there, actually twice a year during winter break for about a week or two, and then in the summer I go to there for like a month or two. Still he’s working and everything when I go so I don’t, I guess I can’t really, I don’t have that same relationship in some ways as I do with my mum as she’s always here for me. But um, nevertheless, when I need him, I guess he comes to my soccer games and everything, and he’s always cheering me on. Like before each game, during the winter, he’s like, do this, do that, I’m like, okay dad. He just keeps encouraging me to do the best I can in everything, in all aspects of life, like studying, academics, arts, or athletics.

We use the phone to talk. Yeah, um I don’t really talk to him that often as well, ‘cause like, I’m studying and everything, but he occasionally calls, actually he calls every day to see how we are doing. But I guess because I haven’t been with him for such a long time, it’s not really like, the questions that he asks and the answers that I give are pretty much always repetitive. He’s like, how’s it going? Oh, it’s good. Is there anything wrong? No. Ok. And it’s the same thing over and over again, but um, yeah that’s fine.

But like I said before, he’s working most of the time when I go visit him, but he comes back every night. Like, the thing is his work and where we sleep are in two totally different areas. So he pretty much has to drive like two hours to his work, and come back for two hours, so when he comes back after his work he spends the night with us, and then he has to get up like at 4 or 5am to go to his work, so that just I guess kinda shows his dedication to do the best for our family.

I guess whenever he comes here, or whenever I visit him with my mum and my sister, he tries to make it the best, I guess, time possible. Like the best time of our lives I guess you could say. He takes us to places that we have never been to.
I told you about this photo before in the workshop. It’s a baseball that my dad caught for me at a baseball game. The first time that I actually went back after immigrating here was several years after immigrating, but then because he got a new job and everything it was hard for him to come, ‘cause like he doesn’t really get breaks and everything, and if he does it’s only like a week or two, so that’s not a lot. Ok anyway, first time going back after immigrating to Canada, he took me to a baseball game. And then every single year that I would go back he would take me to a baseball game. At the time I wasn’t very interested in baseball. He was like, let’s go to the baseball game. I’m like, oh, um. I didn’t want to say no because he sounded so excited, so I was like, yeah, ok. So I went. It wasn’t very exciting. And then every year it was like that. And it was finally last year that I was like, ok, maybe I will take some interest in something. And we went to the baseball game again, and he got us these very expensive seats. I was impressed, because at the time we used to get the farthest seats, like way back there. I’m like, how can I see what’s going on? So he got us a seat right behind home plate, um, so I would see everything. And third or fifth inning, it was a new ball, the pitcher threw it, the batter hit it, it went foul ball, and then it went all the way up, like past us, but then hit the concrete on the stair, it hit that and somehow came back to us, and then my dad he suddenly stood up and caught the baseball with one hand, with his bare hand, and he gave it to me, and I was like, man, I couldn’t believe that we actually caught a baseball! Like a one in a million chance that we would have, um, so I guess, I guess this is kind of something to, an object and like a symbol that kind of symbolizes my relationship and my growing closeness or my relationship with my dad as well. I cherish this ball now, like I clean it and everything, ‘cause it’s something that I’m connected to, you know? It’s not something that someone bought for me, I was there to experience it. Gifts are special and
precious in their own ways, but then you don’t really experience that. And like, because I experienced this in some ways it makes it that much more special.

My dad and I were close, and then because he was working so much and everything, and when we would go there to visit him in the summer he would still be working, so I pretty much only saw him for the night times and the weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, so, so even then because he would work, and because we could only pretty much do things in the daytime and everything at the time, I would just hang out with my mum and my sister again, and yet I’d do that pretty much most of the time in Vancouver as well, so uh, I guess over time, because he’s making that dedication, because he’s dedicated to our family and everything, I guess, kind of, that relationship’s getting stronger as it had been before. Um, ‘cause it was kind of like we were close and then he kind of separated from us and we didn’t know what to talk about in some ways, because again we would repeat the same things. Because we don’t share that same experience, and because we don’t do things together for such a long and extended period of time, like, like we don’t know what to say to each other. And then over time, as I go there, and as he comes back, and as we talk more often, and I guess characterized with this experience here, I guess, well I feel like the relationship is getting closer and stronger again, than it had been before, so yeah.

By separating I mean the fact he had to go overseas to work and everything, so that the things that we do during spring break, he’s not there, and winter break he’s back, so the number of things that I do with my mum is much more than I do with my dad. So just because of the fact that he’s physically away from us kind of makes it feel like we are separated in some ways.

This (indicating photo) is a violin. I think I started playing the violin when I was in Grade 3 or 4, ‘cause then my mum told me that when she was my age, she always wanted to play the
violin but her parents didn’t allow her to. So I guess she wanted to kind of live that, I guess, in some ways through myself. Um, I don’t know.

Anyways, now it’s kind of tedious to go to all these lessons and everything that she books for me every Friday, but you know that’s actually the time where I can take my mind off things. Um, like I am stressed most of the time with tests, projects, homework, and exams now, so, just having something to, a leeway to something so that I don’t have to focus on that, allowing my brain to take control of something else is actually very helpful, and kind of very good in some ways. So I guess when I’m under conditions where I’m stressed out, and when I have a lot to do, um I know that fifteen to twenty minutes would not only help me, and not only like improve my violin skills, but also to kind of you know, relax. I know that studying the entire time is not good for myself, so I like to stay in my room, pop the violin, and play some scales, some pieces here and there. Yeah. It’s kind of soothing to listen to music and play it also, and the accomplishment, you get that sense of pride and sense of accomplishment that you can play a very difficult piece.

Well, whenever I play the violin, not every often, but when I do on the weekend, like I guess my mum feels relaxed as well in some ways. And that she feels more calm and everything, and after I play the violin and I come out into the living room, and I see her on the couch, not doing anything else, just listening to me play, and then she will just close her eyes, sleepy I guess in some ways, ‘cause like she says that me playing the violin allows her to relax and allows her to sleep. So, yeah, I guess she’s kind of proud of me to do that, so I hope to do that more often, um, than I am now.

Whenever I try to, skip a lesson, she kind of gets mad, and at the time I didn’t really understand why, I’m like, oh, I don’t want to go, I am so caught up with everything else. She’s like go, you have to go. I understand why, now as I matured and everything, I understand like
where she’s coming from, and because she said that she always wanted to play and that this is her way of living the moment, or living I guess the dream, if you want to call it that, like I know now to, you know, go to all the lessons and like, um, play the violin, so that… I guess to make her happy in some ways, and to help me. And at the time she said, when I first started she’s like, this will help you, I’m like how, and she’s like you’ll see. Now I see how it has, so I guess a kind of lesson taught in some ways. Yep.

And she’s there for me as well, like during my exams when I am stressed out, she’s always there like my dad over the phone, like try your best, everyone goes through the same thing, I’m like yeah ok I’ll try. Yeah, she’s like, if you’re so stressed out just fail, I’m like ok, so I know not to do well now!

I am close with my parents, but then because I study and everything, like I don’t have much time to talk to her, and I guess we really don’t talk as often as we can. Because I am always most of the time in my room, and she’s, she’s in the living room, or she’s in the office, on the computer or on the TV, but when I need her she’s always there for me, and after my exams we communicate and we bond, I guess, so I guess she knows what I want and what is priority for me, so like I respect that, and she respects me and what I need and what I want.

My mum and I bond by doing things that I probably won’t do when I am studying, like go to the movies, uh shop, although, you know , um just go to a restaurant, mostly just like watching movies and going on the car rides, and it’s actually in the car that we talk the most, I guess. And yeah, just watching television, and helping to bake cookies I guess after making cakes, yeah.

Why do we talk in the car? I don’t know, just because you are going to a place, right? It’s like it’s going to be awkward if you just don’t say anything, and because it’s such a long ride to go to the movie theatre, because we go all the way to the suburbs to watch the movies, so yeah,
so we talk, and then when we watch the movies we are silent, and then we come back and eat dinner and we talk in the restaurant, we talk in the car, and like me coming back from school to home, um, we talk about what I did in school and everything, and then when I get home I have to study so I am in my room again. The car is, I guess, the main place where we can kinda communicate.

The harder conversations are at my house, in her room, she would close the door, and we’d just talk. So that my sister won’t hear. They are kind of all like school related. And mostly about my academics. Like pretty much every year I always tell myself that I am going to study for my exams starting April but then that doesn’t really work out. And the same thing happened to me this year. I’m like, ok, this is not good. Um, so last year, and in Grade 8, I was actually so stressed out that I, that I started to cry. I’m like oh, how am I going to do on my exams and everything. So I guess that was like a hard moment there, and she took me into her room, and she was like, she gave me that like lecture again, saying that, you know, just try your best, that’s all we care about, you know, and like, if you are so stressed out just try your best and everything, those were the hard, harder conversations. By lecturing I don’t mean forcefully, but like giving me advice, and like comforting me in some ways, and giving me words of wisdom, uh like repeating the advice again and again so that I know that this is what she wants me to know. She says things like just try your best, everyone goes through the same stress, it’s not just you, it’s just one exam, it’s just one test, once you are through it, you’ll be happy, like just try your best and put in all your effort that you can. Um, and the end results is pretty much the, the end result is pretty much the result of the amount of work that you put in, so stressing about it won’t help, just relax, take deep breaths, and just study and just absorb as much knowledge and things as you can.
Actually this (photo) is another one with my mum. Ok, this is like a little pathway, it’s like this trail that goes on, it’s like a block away from my house, and like um in the summer time and the spring time and occasionally in the winter time, I will take my long board, and she would exercise, she would walk up and down this trail, and I would just ride my long board, just going along this trail thinking I was a real pro and everything. And I’m really not. And then afterwards we would play badminton like right here, along this road, and then she would always make these comments, like a radio broadcaster, like a commentator, oh Min hits the birdie! And I’m like, that’s a bit uh, childish. And then I’d kinda get embarrassed when people would walk by, and I’m like, mum, just be quiet right now, ok? But then she’s doing that to kinda like, have fun, with uh, with myself, with me, I guess, uh because, it’s rare that we do this, because it’s only during the breaks, and I guess when I am not, you know, caught up with other things that we do this, so it’s very rare, so um, yeah I guess it’s kind of, special in its own way, because it’s something that I can do, an activity that I can do with my mum. It’s something that’s personal, and something that’s close to me, and something that I can, you know, that I know that I can have fun with.

This one is another one with my dad, this is actually just the hill right here (pointing to a hill outside). One time when I was pretty little it snowed, and then my dad would take me to this hill. And then he would be like, hey this is like a mountain! And I believed him at the time, like whoa, really?! And we would go sledding down this hill, and we’d go so fast, and I was scared, and then my dad would hold on to me saying it’s ok, it’s ok we’re just having fun and everything. I was like, oh, ok. And then um, as I grew, it snowed again, and then my dad and myself went again, and I was kind of embarrassed at the time to go with my dad, but then I knew that he was having fun, so that kind of made me happy, so I kind of forgot about my surroundings and forgot about, uh, other people around me. I was like you know what, it’s
snowing, it’s going to be once in like five, I don’t know, like one in a million chance that I’m going to do this again because it doesn’t snow anymore, so I’m gonna have fun. Um, so that was another experience I shared with my dad, and I’m pretty sure that, again, um, if it snows again and he comes back, we’re obviously going to do it again, so yeah. And then we will definitely go a bit slower because we are so big and everything, like we try to fit into this one little uh, sled, and occasionally my dad would just fall off half way down the hill, um, and I would freak out scream and everything. Yeah, just another experience that I shared with my dad. It was a lot of fun.

Like I guess my parents support me in their own ways, they try to make my life as pleasant, or as meaningful as possible, I guess. Um, so they try their best, and they do whatever they can to help me and to, I don’t know, assist me I guess in some ways with everything: athletics, academics, arts, yeah.

My sister knew my, essentially, my love for dolls, and when she came back from Asia she brought me this one. I named him a Japanese name, Ibito, and I guess it’s kind of something that I cherish, and something that reminds me of my sister. She’s in university, so she’s still living with us, but like we hardly talk, like especially during her tests, her exams, my exams, and because she ends so early, and because I end later with my exams, we kind of hardly talk. But then it’s during the summer time that we bond closer, but then again that bond that we created it’s kind of lost when we come back to Canada and we go back to school. So it’s kind of this back and forth kind of relationship I guess, in some ways, getting stronger then getting weaker, then getting stronger and weaker again. So this is definitely something, an object that I can relate to, that reminds me of the time, and the growing connection that I’m hopefully going to experience with my sister, over the years.
How do we come together or bond? It’s definitely when we go back overseas that we start. It kind of starts with the fact that we have to share a room. And then because the, my sister’s and my beds, are in the same room, um, we kind of start communicating there, and then, over time, because I start hanging around my mum and my sister more, going shopping and eating dinner and everything, because I don’t have to worry about anything else, like worry about time management, all I have to worry about is having fun, so because my mind is free, I guess, of other things, of other stressful things, I get to concentrate on having, on developing that relationship with my sister and my mum and dad. So, it starts with like, it starts with the fact that I don’t have anything else to worry about, and then I can, it starts with like dinners and like movies, and like car rides again, um, and yeah.

Once my sister and I had this conversation at night time. I don’t know who brought this up, but the year before, um my dad he came home really drunk, um like on a Friday, and then he rang the doorbell of our apartment, and he was completely wasted. His tie was not straight, like completely undone, his glasses were down here to his nose, and his hair was all messed up, and he was speaking gibberish, and no one could understand what he was saying. And then so last year my dad didn’t come home again, like he came home late, so he called my mum saying that he was hanging out with his friends and everything, so we knew that he was drinking, he was going to drink, and it was about midnight and my sister and I were in our room in our beds, and I don’t know who brought it up, but we started talking about that moment my dad came home really wasted, and it was funny for all of us, so we pictured that again, so we started laughing and talking about it, and saying like what if he came home like that again? And started enjoying our dad getting drunk, that’s not really something to laugh about, but you know, we were sharing a
laugh about a funny event, and that helps with the bonding. That was one of the most, I guess, enjoyable conversations, the one filled with the most laughs and everything.

If I am feeling overwhelmed or upset, who would I see? Probably, again, my mum because, just because like I know her, just because she lives with me and because I know that she is going to give me that support, like I am confident that she is going to help me, and also because of the fact that she's physically there for me, so that she can help me overcome my fears or my emotions and my, other things, like stress or other things as well. So because of the fact that, because of the experiences that I have had with my mum, and because of the advice that I have been given from my mum, and because of the fact that I’ve previously gone to her for advice, um when I do have problems I would definitely go to talk to her. Um, so that she would give me again that advice, that she would comfort me and everything, yeah.

I don’t really have a similar level of trust with anyone else. Because if I do talk to my friends, I don’t know if they will listen or not, because of the fact that I’ve never asked them these kinds of questions. Um, usually they are kind of sarcastic about everything, funny things and serious things, so I don’t know whether or not they would give me good advice. But because of the fact that I’ve never done it before, like I myself am not confident taking that risk, of sharing my fears or sharing what I am afraid of, or sharing what’s kind of stressing me out. Um, so essentially the people that I have bonded with, the people that I have formed a good relationship, it’s definitely going to be the people that I am going to first talk to, so like my parents, my dad, my mum, and my sister.

Cross-Narrative Themes

The four cross-narrative themes extrapolated and created from the four narrative accounts include Features of the Self, Features of the Setting, Features of the Other, and Features of the
Table 1: Cross-Narrative Themes and Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub Themes</th>
<th>Coded Data Extracts</th>
<th>Participant Endorsement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features of the Self</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion and Expression</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions about Gender</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features of the Setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right Timing or Conditions</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right Place</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features of the Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities and Differences</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Counselling Skills”</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Qualities I Respect</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features of the Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Things Together</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter, Fun, Excitement and Novelty</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity and Equality</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Together</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Extracts That Do Not Fit into any of the Themes</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Data Extracts</strong></td>
<td>578</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship. Each theme had two or more sub-themes, and there were 13 sub-themes in total. As evident in Table 1, all four themes were represented across all four participants, and all of the 13 sub-themes were represented across at least three of four participants. Fully one-half of the sub-themes were represented by all of the participants.

Although the research question involved how boys perceive themselves as forming bonds with others, in the interviews boys talked about bonding both in a relationship’s incipient stages and as part of an on-going and recursive process. As both types of data are relevant to people who work with boys, both were included, analysed, and placed under one of the four themes.

**Features of the Self.**

The first theme, Features of the Self, represents participants’ perceptions of the self that are seen as either facilitating or hindering forming or maintaining bonds with others. It is comprised of three sub themes: Emotion and Expression, Perceptions about Gender, and Coping Skills.

**Emotion and Expression—“I cannot deal with sad.”**

Participants often talk about themselves as lacking in emotions or in the skills of emotional expression. They make frequent reference to themselves as showing little emotion, of being unable to cry, as being inexpressive, as perceiving themselves as less emotional or emotionally expressive than others, or as being vehemently opposed to even calling oneself emotional. Instead they tend to use words like “scientific” or “analytic” to describe themselves. In some cases, the world of emotions is so foreign that one participant, James, describes how a friend often acts as his emotional filter, telling him whether his emotions are “normal” and whether he can share them with others. Similarly, Sam describes himself as being unable to cope with the emotional world. He tells the story of a female friend as having what he terms “strong emotions,”
and explains that when she becomes emotional he finds it unattractive and often feels the need to “separate and distance” himself:

I am even less emotional than guys. I am, I am not even sure that I have an emotional centre in my brain. Like I don’t cry in movies, I don’t cry when things die. I’ve had three dogs die, and I haven’t cried at one of them, and it makes me feel bad that I haven’t cried, because I just don’t feel sad, often. I have like anti-depression.

And I’m Erin’s closest friend and so she cries to me. And I am not a counselling psychologist, I am not good with people in that state. ‘Cause you know they want you to be like, it’s ok, like compassion, everything’s going to be great. I’m not good in those situations at all. I don’t know what to say, I don’t know how to deal with it. My go-to is humour. I am a funny person, I cannot deal with sad, so I don’t know how to react in that situation ‘cause I know humour isn’t gonna work. But um, when she’s crying, or when I’ve done it, especially, I have no idea what to say. So that’s why being sad is an issue for me.

You see? Couldn’t be a psychologist, couldn’t be a counsellor, couldn’t do it.

The participants’ self-perceived lack of emotional fluency or discomfort is so strong that one of them describes “defenestrating” emotion, refusing to admit, even to himself, that he has an emotional side, and claiming that it is better to allow things that are bothering him to fester than it is to express them.

Yet there was a contradiction in this sub-theme, and a potential brighter side to their perceptions of their own emotionality and expression was that they often spoke of its dysfunction and the need to change. For example, James reports that when he had previously expressed strong emotion it had felt good, or cathartic:
And after that conversation, I realized to myself like, you know, sometimes talking is ok. Yes I am a really analytical person, but now I am most definitely not devoid of emotion. I mean, I can ignore it, but that doesn't mean I don't have it. Yeah it did feel really good to go there, actually. That was a powerful experience.

Despite this contradiction, what is made clear through what the participants say is that they often find the world of emotions—whether they reside in others or the self—a foreign, confusing and even frightening one.

*Perceptions about Gender*—“Guys are supposed to be more perceptive…and girls are just more emotional.”

A second sub-theme of Features of the Self is what participants say about the ways they see gender influencing how males and females act in the world. Some of the data extracts here make reference to the fact that the gender of the people they form bonds with is important in determining whether they decide to bond with them and the type of bond they form with them. For example, they identify boys as being less emotional, as not wanting to chat about emotions, and being the preferred choice when they want to go out and have a good time. Conversely, they identify girls as being more understanding than boys, at giving better advice than boys, and state that forming bonds with them is attractive as it is perceived as offering something different. As James says:

I have a lot of friends that are girls. I have a lot of friends who are guys, too, it's just that I don't have the same relationship with them. When you talk to a girl it's kinda like, you have, I think I have said this before, the traits that you don't have you seek often. I find that the traits I don't have are often situated in girls or women more than they are in men.

Partially because, maybe I am being stereotypical here, but guys tend to be
more...analytical. Yeah, so, I do have guy friends too, but we are all just similar people in the sense that, you know, it's kinda like a mirror reflection of yourself, and because it's a mirror reflection you're not as interested in them.

It is also worth noting that among the four participants, posed a variety of questions about how they form bonds with others, they almost exclusively talked about their bonds with girls rather than boys. This may indicate they feel more comfortable forming bonds with females than males, or that when questions like these are posed they immediately think of bonds with women rather than men. Finally, although these statements were about males and females in general and not about the self, we can see their statements about gender as a reflection of what they also perceive to be true about themselves, how they may be influenced or constrained by their perceived gender roles, and they types of bonds they believe they are likely to form with either gender.

**Coping Skills—“I can keep going by myself.”**

The third and final sub-theme of Features of the Self is Coping Skills, or statements the participants make about their ability to cope in the face of adversity or hardship. Many of the statements relate to their own independence, for example, the fact that they see themselves as someone who refuses help, or referencing strategies they employ--listening to or playing music, or meditating--that are independent in nature. On occasions when they do identify themselves as seeking help, they mention reaching out to someone only once they have tried to solve the problem on their own, or only to the point that they can continue independently. Atthul says:

When we get together like that, I spend some time talking about the problem, and then I probably just like spending time together, talking about school, like what's happening, grade-wide gossip, or whatnot. This helps because it allows you to forget your woes and
problems, you know what I mean? And sometimes you need a, I think for me especially sometimes I just, there are those days you just feel so much like crap, that you need a pick me up to bring you back almost to neutral so you can keep going rather than like trying to climb your way up the ladder by yourself. So I think that it's a perfect formula. She is able to pick me up, get me back on my feet, and then I can keep going by myself.

Clearly, these participants have an understanding of the self as independent when it comes to dealing with problems or adversity. They are likely to form connections or bond with another only when independent methods have failed, and only to the extent that they can carry on independently once again.

**Features of the Setting.**

The second overarching theme, Features of the Setting, represents participants’ perceptions of the setting that either facilitate or hinder forming and maintaining bonds with others. It is comprised of two sub themes: The Right Timing or Conditions, and The Right Place.

*The Right Timing or Conditions—“Because it’s anonymous, people are more willing to share ideas.”*

In telling their stories, the participants often talk about the right conditions in which to talk, connect or bond with another. One key feature of these conditions is that confidentiality and privacy must be in place for them to speak freely or self-disclose to others. It should be noted that though confidentiality and privacy are also seen as Features of the Other, in far more cases they are referred to as a condition of the setting, which is why they are included here. Take, for example, the way James describes confidentiality as important, and as function of the context rather than the person:
And I found myself saying stuff to him that I would never say to anyone else. I found
myself, you know, saying things that I'd like never reveal to other people. Secrets, you
know? Maybe it was like, a catharsis almost, a releasing of something I kept up inside, and
just like having some kind of conduit to expound upon the ideas that were kept in my head.
So, I think just having that outlet and never seeing that person again was very, very helpful.
I think that's one of those things actually, you know there's that service Kids Help Phone,
and I've noticed, I think because it's anonymous, almost, people are more willing to share
ideas. I think that's almost what happened with me and the person, you know, 'cause it was,
it was anonymous in the sense that we did have a conversation, we did talk to each other
for a very long time, but we both knew without saying it that we would probably never
seen the person again.
Anonymity definitely played a role that day where, you know, I guess almost talking to
someone behind a barrier. Like, sometimes they have in churches those things where the
priest sits behind a screen door and you talk to the priest behind the screen door, but
neither of you are looking at each other. It was almost like that, 'cept it was closer because
we could see each other and talk with each other and relate with each other, and it wasn't
just one person confessing to another person. It was like, it was a two-way street, a two-
way relationship, but at the same time just knowing that nothing you say matters 'cause,
cause you will never see the person again, but at the same time being able to say it, I think
that's valuable.

A related component of the context, and it is alluded to in the preceding quotation, is that
boys often talk about forming bonds with others in contexts where the communication is not
face-to-face. For example, James’ conversation with a stranger was side-by-side on a park bench,
Sam’s late night conversations with his friends in darkened basements take place when they are lying next to one another rather than sitting opposite each other, and Atthul and Sam both talk about forming bonds in the car, when they are sitting either beside or behind one of their parents. James talks about revealing his fear of death to his best friend through instant messaging rather than in person, and explains “Being a bit removed from the person makes a difference.” It may be that boys find it less emotionally intense to discuss more intimate details of their lives when the person to whom they are telling their story is “removed,” perhaps because it means it is more difficult for the listener to detect the level of their emotionality or vulnerability. Whatever the case, it’s apparent it is an important aspect of The Right Timing or Conditions.

Another example of things the participants say about the right conditions for forming a bond with other people include that the timing feels right. For example, both Sam and Atthul mention forming relationships when a void is created, either by the departure of a previous friend or being cast into a new, unfamiliar situation. Similarly, Min refers to the right timing for connecting with other people as a time when he is free of other worries, deadlines or pressures. And both he and Atthul indicate that they are less likely to be open to connecting with others when they are busy or preoccupied with schoolwork. This may seem an obvious point, but it’s significant as it means that when boys feel under the most stress it may be the time they are least likely to seek help, or to accept the help of others. Finally, timing also relates to precedent, as several of the participants indicate that though they may have bonds with many others, they are most likely to share a problem or a secret with a friend with whom they have done that before. For example, speaking of one close friend, Atthul says, “though I am sure she would be perfect in dealing with that I have never gone to her. I guess I am just used to talking to Anna about that.” Similarly Min says he does not have emotionally self-disclosing conversations with his
friends “because I have never done it before, like I myself am not confident in taking that risk, of sharing my fears or sharing what I am afraid of, or sharing what’s stressing me out.” Precedent is a form of timing, and for these participants it clearly impacts the degree of their bond with others.

**The Right Place—“A safe place.”**

The overarching theme Features of the Setting is also composed of a second, corollary sub-theme, and that is that the participants often report there being a right place to talk, connect or bond with others. It was noted that even if no conversation is taking place, just being in a physical location may give participants a feeling of closeness to another person. For example, Atthul talks about the significance of the laundry room where he has had myriad chats with his mother, and Min tells the story of the park where he would skateboard while his mother would exercise, or the hill where he and his father went tobogganing. These are places where boys feel connected to another person, and though at first the bond there may have been created through shared activity, now the place itself allows them to feel connected to another. Additionally, just as precedent is a feature of the right time to talk to others, so too is it a feature of place; the participants often report that if an intimate, challenging or self-disclosing conversation has happened previously in a particular location, they feel more comfortable talking about similar issues in that same location. It is almost as though the place is a precedent, that by virtue of the fact intimate conversations or actions have taken place previously in this location grants one permission to talk intimately in that same physical context. For example, participants refer to places they are used to having conversations and connecting with others such as the car, family rooms, and the bedrooms of their parents.
Inextricably linked to this sense of place as precedent or as familiar is that places are also described as having the right atmosphere for intimate bonds to be formed or perpetuated. Sam describes what place means to him:

These talks happen in their basements! No idea why. It’s the atmosphere. It feels very private and personal. It’s usually late at night. So we’re in the basement, and there we are, just chattin’ about boring school things like how was the physics test today? And then usually how it works is that we’re in the dark, the lights are all off, all you see is the projector, because they both have projectors in their basements, the projector’s against the wall, the sound has been turned down. It’s warm because we have all somehow found our way under one communal blanket. And we’re all lying on each other, or lying in the vicinity of each other, on these couches, under these blankets, and it’s just a very private, personal atmosphere. And so you feel you can talk about things when you are all just lying there just like, hey, (whispering) talk about this. Yeah, the atmosphere is important.

And it has happened before in that context, maybe not so much the emotional, but they were the first girls who I’ve ever had a conversation with about who I like. So there is the sense of knowing it’s ok to talk about it there. ‘Cause like (pointing to photos) I didn’t have a place with him, or her, or her, or most of these people. There is no place where it’s like this is a good place, this is where we can talk. And those are the only environments, that is the environment. A safe place.

**Features of the Other.**

The third theme, Features of the Other, represents participants’ perceptions of the other that either facilitate or hinder forming bonds. These features are understood by the participants as primarily characteristics of the person rather than of the environments or the relationship
between them. Features of the Other is comprised of three sub themes: Similarities and Differences, “Counselling” Skills, and Personal Qualities that I Respect.

**Similarities and Differences—“We are the same person.”**

The participants see themselves as forming bonds with people who are both similar and different from themselves. James, for example, describes seeking out people who have traits that he does not believe reside in himself, allowing him a better understanding of the world.

Similarly, Atthul describes himself as “open to having a friend that is a polar opposite. And I think that having a friend like that pushes me, like out of my comfort zone, which is something that I like because I always want to keep growing as a person.” However, the participants spend a much greater degree of time describing bonds with people they perceive as similar to themselves. All kinds of similarities are named, including similar senses of humour, comparable levels of intelligence, or even shared identities, for example, both being loners or “rebels.” In some cases these similarities extend to similar ways of behaving or even mimicry. James explains:

I think one of the big things similarly is that we talk similarly. You know, like when somebody says something to you and you totally agree with them, you know those kinds of things, our speech patterns are really similar. We mimic each other pretty much. We both did the MBTI and found out we had the same personality, too.

What is more, some differences are described as unappealing, for example, differences in perceived levels of emotionality, and the participants sometimes indicate being unsure of how they might form a bond with someone who is different. Describing his relationship with his friend Michelle, Sam comments, “I didn’t really think we had a lot in common. Because Michelle is very into art, she is much more rowdy and party-loving than I am. That’s not me. So
I didn’t really think I can be friends with this person, because she didn’t seem like me at all.”

Finally, though the participants report being open and forming bonds with people who are different, they admit that when faced with a challenge or difficulty, they are much more likely to share it with someone they perceive as similar to themselves. Atthul explains:

...if I’m dealing with a problem, concern or worry I am more likely to go to a friend that’s similar to me because I think we have more of the same ideology in terms of how we would deal with the situation, and in terms of bringing up a problem I just feel more comfortable interacting with people similar to me.

So although these boys report being open to the idea of forming bonds with people they perceive as either similar or different, what they say also suggests that when it comes to sharing problems or issues of disclosure their preference is to do this with people they judge as most similar.

“Counselling” Skills—“Just someone who is always a listening ear for me.”

A second sub-theme of Features of the Other to which the participants make frequent reference is the other’s perceived level of “Counselling” Skills. Counselling is contained in quotation marks intentionally, as this is by no means an exhaustive list of counselling skills nor would all counsellors agree that each item named in this section is necessary or even desirable in a counselling relationship, but they tie together as a sub-theme because they are often perceived by adolescents as skills of a counsellor. Under this sub-theme, qualities of the other that are listed as important for forming bonds are that the other is seen as being supportive, reassuring or able to cheer up the participant. They are also recognized as being thoughtful, of being “good at reading people,” of being easy to talk to, or of knowing or having a strong understanding of the participant. Participants describe such people as being a “guide,” giving advice, teaching or
sharing their wisdom. Min describes something of this sub-theme when he tells the story of a time he was upset and received support from his mother:

…in Grade 8 I was actually so stressed out that I, that I started to cry. I’m like oh, how am I going to do on my exams and everything. So I guess that was like a hard moment there, and she took me into her room, and she was like, she gave me that like lecture again, saying that, you know, just try your best, that’s all we care about, you know, and like, if you are so stressed out just try your best and everything, those were the hard, harder conversations. By lecturing I don’t mean forcefully, but like giving me advice, and like comforting me in some ways, and giving me words of wisdom, uh like repeating the advice again and again so that I know that this is what she wants me to know. She says things like just try your best, everyone goes through the same stress, it’s not just you, it’s just one exam, it’s just one test, once you are through it, you’ll be happy, like just try your best and put in all your effort that you can.

A key feature of this text is the sense of support, encouragement, advice and empathy that Min is receiving from his mother, and as such it is a strong example of the emphasis boys place on the importance of “Counselling” Skills in people they form bonds with. Interestingly, although being a good listener is an implicit component of many of these other qualities, only one participant explicitly mentions being a good listener as an important skill in the people with whom he feels a connection, and he only mentions it briefly.

**Personal Qualities I Admire—“She’s always there for me.”**

The last sub-theme of Features of the Other that appeared frequently in the data was Personal Qualities I Admire. These qualities are different from either of the previous two sub-themes in that the emphasis is not on whether these are perceived as qualities they have in
common with the other, nor are they necessarily related to counselling, but they are spoken of reverently and frequently. For example, participants often refer to the other as having selfless qualities such as being altruistic, as putting other people before themselves, or even trying to make life meaningful for the participant and the rest of his family. Additional qualities of the other that are seen as respectable are that they are hardworking, determined, or dedicated. Dependability was also frequently referenced. For example, talking about one of his friends, Atthul says, “She’s just the type of person that’s always there to listen. Always. No matter the time of day, it’s someone that I know I can call.”

**Features of the Relationship.**

The fourth theme, Features of the Relationship, represents characteristics the participants name as important in facilitating or hindering either the creation or maintenance of bonds with other people. These features are understood by the participants as predominantly situated in the relationship rather than in the setting, themselves or the other; they are understood as a product of the interaction of two or more people. Features of the Relationship is by far the largest of the five themes the participants discuss and is comprised of five sub themes: Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition; Doing Things Together; Laughter, Fun, Excitement and Novelty; Reciprocity and Equality; and Talking Together.

*Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition*—“That was how the trust thing formed, because we saw each other all the time.”

The participants report that proximity is one of the key ways that they form and maintain bonds with others. As James puts it, “Part of the getting close to other people is being near them all the time. Mere exposure effect. Physically close to them, yeah.” Similarly, in his account Min notes that his feelings of closeness to others vary with his proximity to them. For example,
though they share a house in Vancouver during the year, it is not until the summer when he and his sister return to their country of emigration that he feels closer to her, and he attributes that in part to the fact that when they are on holiday they have to share a room. Similarly, the boys describe forming bonds with others because they sat next to one another in class, or they stood next to each other in choir. Tied to this, in the sense that it facilitates proximity, is a sense of accessibility. So, for example, a feature of Sam describing how he became closer with Daniel was the fact that the two lived around the corner from each other and he could therefore very easily spend time with him. In addition, the boys described themselves as forming relationships with others where the relationship felt familiar. For example, Atthul describes how as an only child and the youngest member of an active, tight-knit, extended family, he tends to form relationships in which he is also the youngest. He explains: “…with me being in a lot of advanced courses, my sciences and math, I am in way more classes with older kids than I am with kids in my grade. Hanging out with older kids is what I am used to. And I think a lot of it stems from the family dynamic, too.” It’s not clear whether familiarity leads to a desire to be proximate, or whether proximity leads to a feeling of familiarity, but it is clear both are important features of these participants’ experiences bonding with others.

Psychologists have long known that being proximate to other people and being more familiar with them leads to increased feelings of attraction (both platonic and sexual), a term that James correctly identifies as the Mere Exposure Effect. A corollary theme evident in the participants’ accounts, however, has to do with the intensity of its duration or repetition. Sam was the one participant who most clearly and forcefully enunciated this. In describing the creation of a friendship with Paul and Daniel, he explains that they would spend nearly every weekend at Paul’s house, the entire weekend, and that they did this for months on end. Min, too,
mentions learning to ride a bike with his dad and that “we used to go there pretty much every
day,” and there is a sense of familiarity and repetition when Atthul describes his morning car
rides with his father and says “It feels like it happens the exact same every day.” So perhaps it is
not solely proximity or the familiarity of the experience, but its interaction with a perceived
intensity borne out of its frequency or repetition. As Sam says:

…so that was how the trust thing formed, because we saw each other all the time, and it
just became like, no, of course you’re my best friend. We’re just going to trust each other
because that’s how it is. I see you all the time. How could you not trust someone you see
every weekend, all weekend, a good 72 hours?

In this way, proximity, accessibility, familiarity and repetition all seem to be linked to one
another, and also important to how the participants see themselves creating bonds with others.

**Doing Things Together—“My Dad was the one who taught me to ride a bicycle.”**

A second sub-theme under Features of the Relationship is evident in the emphasis the
participants give to Doing Things Together. Some of these activities may be singular events,
such as going to the movies together, playing a team sport such as soccer, watching television,
playing video games, or eating out in a restaurant. In other instances the activity is one that is
repeated often, almost like a ritual that is to be expected. For example, Sam talks about “rowdy-
burger fun night,” Atthul speaks of folding laundry with his mother, and Min talks about going to
a baseball game with his father each summer. In each instance the activity is a shared one and
may be repeated, but the emphasis is not on the repetition or intensity of the experience (as it was
in the previous sub-theme) but the fact that it is shared. Min discusses how playing the violin is
in some respects an activity he shares with his mother:
Well, whenever I play the violin, not every often, but when I do on the weekend, like I guess my mum feels relaxed as well in some ways. And that she feels more calm and everything, and after I play the violin and I come out into the living room, and I see her on the couch, not doing anything else, just listening to me play, and then she will just close her eyes, sleepy I guess in some ways, ‘cause like she says that me playing the violin allows her to relax and allows her to sleep. So, yeah, I guess she’s kind of proud of me to do that, so I hope to do that more often, um, than I am now.

**Laughter, Fun, Excitement and Novelty—“We were sharing a laugh, and that helps with bonding.”**

A feature of the relationship that participants discuss frequently is laughter or humour. And though it is difficult at times to discern whether the humour is being perceived as a similarity, whether it is a feature of the other, or whether it is a feature of the relationship, it is certainly prevalent in the data. Most often it appears that humour and laughter are thought of predominantly as a feature of the relationship, a product of a funny situation that the participant had co-created with another. Consider for example the way Min describes sharing a laugh with his sister:

…it was about midnight and my sister and I were in our room in our beds, and I don’t know who brought it up, but we started talking about that moment my dad came home really wasted, and it was funny for all of us, so we pictured that again, so we started laughing and talking about it, and saying like what if he came home like that again? And started enjoying our dad getting drunk, that’s not really something to laugh about, but you know, we were sharing a laugh about a funny event, and that helps with the bonding.
Connected to this are the ways participants talk about the importance of fun in their relationships, and in turn this is also tied to a sense of novelty. Atthul talks, for instance, about a car ride with his dad that he remembers being particularly fun because they used it to book a trip to Europe, and Sam talks about the sense of novelty and fun in his relationship with Michelle:

She likes to do wild, crazy things that I didn’t do with Erin, I didn’t do with Paul, and I didn’t think I wanted to do them, either. But with Michelle it was like, you wanna go roller-blading on the sea wall and get crepes? She was spontaneous and it was fun and it was different, and I don’t know why that appealed to me but it clearly did. Because we were friends. And yeah, it was different and it was interesting.

Novelty is also tied to a final component of this sub-theme, and that is the sense of adventure evident in many of the stories the boys told. This was most clearly present when the participants told anecdotes about singular experiences that had happened in a relationship with another. Atthul, for example, talks about the time a he and a friend got lost on a journey downtown, and there is a sense of adventure and excitement in the story that James tells about his conversation with a stranger on a park bench. It is evident, too, in Min’s description of tobogganing with his father:

This one is another one with my dad, this is actually just the hill right here (pointing to a hill outside). One time when I was pretty little it snowed, and then my dad would take me to this hill. And then he would be like, hey this is like a mountain! And I believed him at the time, like whoa, really?! And we would go sledding down this hill, and we’d go so fast, and I was scared, and then my dad would hold on to me saying it’s ok, it’s ok we’re just having fun and everything. I was like, oh, ok. And then um, as I grew, it snowed again, and then my dad and myself went again, and I was kind of embarrassed at the time to go with
my dad, but then I knew that he was having fun, so that kind of made me happy, so I kind
of forgot about my surroundings and forgot about, uh, other people around me…. and
occasionally my dad would just fall off half way down the hill, um, and I would freak out
scream and everything. Yeah, just another experience that I shared with my dad. It was a
lot of fun.

*Reciprocity and Equality*—“When you have a boy share his feelings…you have to do the
same.”

Reciprocity and Equality is a third sub-theme of Features of the Relationship, and it is
evident in at least three different senses. First, participants talk about reciprocity in the sense of a
returned favour, that if someone has done or is doing something for you, that you should give
them something in return. For example, Atthul talks about how his cousin “often consults me for
advice for things, and I often consult her,” and later, when describing his relationship with Sylvia
he says “she is someone who is a listening ear for me, and I am always a listening ear for her.” In
a more subtle and broader sense, reciprocity is also evident as Min describes situations with both
parents where he feels disinterested or embarrassed but, because he knows it’s important to them,
or that they are making an effort, he engages and reciprocates the interest. He talks about going
to the park with his mum:

And then afterwards we would play badminton like right here, along this road, and then she
would always make these comments, like a radio broadcaster, like a commentator, oh Min
hits the birdie! And I’m like, that’s a bit uh, childish. And then I’d kinda get embarrassed
when people would walk by, and I’m like, mum, just be quiet right now, ok? But then she’s
doing that to kinda like, have fun, with uh, with myself, with me, I guess, uh because, it’s
rare that we do this, because it’s only during the breaks, and I guess when I am not, you
know, caught up with other things that we do this, so it’s very rare, so um, yeah I guess it’s kind of, special in its own way, because it’s something that I can do, an activity that I can do with my mum. It’s something that’s personal, and something that’s close to me, and something that I can, you know, that I know that I can have fun with.

Although it stands to reason that two people who have a connection or bond would reciprocate a liking of each other, the second sense in which participants talked about reciprocity went beyond this, as in this case participants talked about the importance of letting each other know where they stood in the relationship, or a reciprocal sense of how important each was to the other.

Atthul talks about how with his friend Anna, whom he describes as being his best friend, that “…not just because she said it to me, but because I can feel it from her, that she really does think we are best friends.” Sam, too, talks about his need for knowing where he stands with other people as a facet of his bond with them. He says, “…with a lot of my friends I don’t know where I stand in relation to other people. But with Erin, we are both completely on the same realm, like I am your best friend, you are my best friend, it’s completely, completely open. I know exactly where I stand with Erin, and so it helps that I know where we are.” In both of these cases there is a reciprocated sense of being each other’s best friends, and this allows Atthul and Sam to feel connected or bonded to the other. Finally, a third sense of reciprocity was evident when it came to instances of self-disclosure, and that when one divulges something personal about oneself, the expectation is that that risk will be reciprocated by the other. This was perhaps best illustrated by James’ story of his chat with a stranger in the park:

So, we both shared a little bit of each other's lives, and we both shared our views on existentialism. I learned about his family and where he came from. He was the delegate of his generation, and I was the delegate of ours. And at the same time, we also shared tidbits
of our own, like the people that he knew kinda thing, or the way he talked to people, the things he wasn't happy about himself. And I did the same thing. It was almost, it was almost the right thing to do, because if someone shares that, you kinda feel, it was almost like because it was just two people there sitting together on a bench, out in a park, looking on the lake in Stanley Park, you know, it was like anything you say has to reciprocate back.

Inherent in all three ways that these boys are describing reciprocity is an implied sense of equality, and for this reason it also forms a part of this sub-theme. Additionally, in some instances, equality was individually distinguished as an important aspect of the relationship. For example, Sam talks about being on a “level playing field” with his mum, in part because there is no condescension and no coercion, and Atthul says that in many ways his relationship with his father feels more like one with a best friend. In all of these ways, reciprocity and equality are seen as important aspects of the relationship with the other.

Talking Together—“Sometimes it’s almost better not to be talking about the problem.”

Despite the quotation that helps form the title of this sub-theme, the participants did discuss Talking Together as an important aspect of their bonds with others, and for this reason it forms the fifth and final sub-theme of Features of the Relationship. Notably, however, in terms of its frequency in the data it is seen by the participants as the least important of the relational themes, and ranked third last in importance among all the sub-themes across the entire data set. That said, boys do discuss conversation as being a feature of the relationship. For example, they say they talk about “guy things,” or about “girls,” about “nerdy” or “existential” topics, and several of them make mention of “chatting” or “gossiping.” Atthul mentions a time when he was depressed about his mark in a course and went to talk it out with a friend, and Sam talks about the late-night conversations he has with friends in their basements. Although some may argue that boys
see talk as a by-product of the things that they do with other people, it is clear from James’
description of the conversation he has in the park with a stranger that talking, in its own right,
can lead to closer bonds with others, and that boys can come away from conversations feeling a
sense of connection to another person. Additionally, they imply that when talk is absent or
awkward, that this can be a strain on the connection between two people. For example, Min
speaks of awkward phone conversations with his father where “we don’t know what to say to
each other,” and where “the questions that he asks and the answers that I give are pretty much
always repetitive.”

However, although they may use talk to connect and bond with others, talking about
difficulties or problems can be more challenging. For example, referencing times when he talks
to his friend Erin about a problem, Atthul says, “when we get together like that, I spend some
time talking about the problem, and then I probably just like spending time together, talking
about school, like what’s happening, grade-wide gossip, or whatnot. This helps because it allows
you to forget your problems, you know what I mean?” Later, he continues: “Sometimes it’s
almost better not to be talking about the problem. Sometimes it’s one of those situations where I
don’t want to talk about it, like what’s done is done.”

So boys did identify Talking with Others as an important way of connecting with people,
but perhaps given the infrequency with which this sub-theme is mentioned, and that a participant
reports that talking about some topics, such as problems or challenges, can be undesirable,
practitioners should consider placing less emphasis on talk as a way of forming or maintaining
bonds with boys.
Ancillary Findings

During the member reflection process, participants were also invited to comment on any perceived bonds created during the process of the research. Specifically, I invited them:

…to write me a brief reflection on our interview. One of my perceptions was that you all talked about some quite personal experiences, and you all spoke sincerely and earnestly, discussing some tough topics, perhaps ones that you don't normally (or even ever) talk about with others. So I am wondering--first of all, if you had similar or different perceptions about the interview. And if so, how come that happened? What was it, in your own estimations that created those conditions? You can include anything that you think is relevant.

This section includes their responses and a cross-narrative analysis of the content.

**Atthul’s Reflection.**

I found that it was extremely easy for me to share my emotions and connect with you. Overall, I would say that I am comfortable sharing my emotions with males or females of any age provided that I have developed and fostered a bond with them, especially a bond where trust exists. If I am even slightly sceptical of my trust in another, I keep my emotions very hidden. With you, I have always felt that there is a deep-seated level of trust and mutual understanding between the two of us. I feel that this is definitely heightened because it is a professional relationship. For these reasons, I found it very easy and natural to discuss my emotions and share my stories with you.

**Sam’s Reflection.**

I certainly do feel that we formed a bond, however it was not due entirely to this research. The original basis for this bond was definitely formed for me over the course of the eight months
that you were my teacher. You had a friendly and approachable teaching style and this led to a sense of trust developing and a sense of comfort between us. As well, during the course of his research I found that feeling like I was on more of a social level with you greatly improved our relationship. It also helped that you occasionally called your participants into your office "just to chat," further easing tensions and developing trust.

James’ Reflection

In participating with this project, a “bond” or “relationship” most definitely formed between you and me. As participation was entirely voluntary, knowledge of the research required some level of developed relationship with the researcher. Thus, the greatest factor to the creation of the relationship during the research was the relationship developed beforehand: within a course in my school where you were my teacher. Having been your student for nearly a year, you and I had already formed a weak but stable relationship. Using this as a conduit, and by engaging in additional activities that encouraged relationships to develop both between the participants, and between the participants and you, I could become more acquainted and thereby more comfortable with you. As the research continued, we engaged in group discussions, storytelling, and photography, all of which became significant factors in developing the relationship. The final and most important factor of all, however, was my confidence that you were professional and confidential. Because I understood how my information was being used, how you would conduct his research, and that you were trustworthy and honest, the threat of releasing the information and causing disturbances was eliminated, which thereby facilitated the unconditional creation of the relationship.
Min’s Reflection.

When you gave me the opportunity to become involved in this research project during third term, I honestly did not know what I should expect. Rather, it was a chance for me to not only further my knowledge with the camera technology, but also to work co-operatively as a group (with my fellow friends), and to understand how university research projects are conducted.

During my interview, I talked about various personal experiences that I rarely ever talk about with anyone, aside from my parents (as highlighted throughout the interview). At times when re-calling memories about my father and the experiences I have shared with him, I forced myself from crying. This emotional state allowed me to realize how powerful memories can be. Reminiscing about childhood memories that I have had the privilege to share with my father was something unique and special. As I have so many things going on in today’s life with school, volunteering, university, etc., I was separated from my past. However, having the opportunity to not only re-call but to share those special memories with another person who is willing to listen with sincerity allowed myself to open up my feelings.

Ultimately, I believe that in order for a boy, girl, or anyone to open up their feelings to share their memories, concerns, or whatever it may be, it is vital to create a situation where that person feels comfortable to willingly share their thoughts by first gaining their trust. This statement was certainly the case for me. Because you created a “safe-haven” months before the interview, with meetings, both as a group and independently, you gained my trust and my belief that you were the type of person who was willing to listen to anything that was said. In summary, creating an environment and an atmosphere with that person is, I believe, imperative. Lastly, I had a more comfortable time during lunch meetings when it was done as a group in the early stages of the project. Creating a group where everyone shared the same problem or memories or
thoughts as me, made me understand that I was not the only one; but instead there are several other people that are just like me. So, having that level of comfort allowed me to share my feelings and memories earnestly and sincerely during the interview.

Ancillary Themes

As is apparent in the four preceding reflections, all participants reported some degree of bond between themselves and the researcher. In explaining how these bonds came to exist, the four overarching themes present in the cross-narrative analysis of the participants’ narrative accounts were replicated in the ancillary findings: Features of the Self, Features of the Setting, Features of the Other, and Features of the Relationship. Similarly, Features of the Relationship was again the dominant theme, accounting for 19 of all 33 coded text segments. Of the 13 sub-themes that were evident in the narrative accounts, seven were also represented in the ancillary findings. One new sub-theme in Features of the Relationship was created: Trust.

Features of the Self.

The only sub-theme of Features of the Self that the boys discuss during their reflection is Emotions and Expression. In particular, Min discusses how he felt that during the interview he was able to be emotionally expressive and to talk about things that he rarely talks about with anyone other than his parents. Despite this, he also reports that he “forced himself from crying,” suggesting that despite this bond, there are still limits to how far is was willing to go in his emotional expression.

Features of the Setting.

In talking about the research and their perceptions of their relationship with the researcher, participants talk about the sub-theme The Right Timing or Conditions. For example, they refer to the research as an opportunity in their busy lives to reflect in a way that they would not
### Table 2: Ancillary Themes and Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub Themes</th>
<th>Coded Data Extracts</th>
<th>Participant Endorsement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Features of the Self</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion and Expression</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of the Setting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right Timing or Conditions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of the Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Counselling Skills”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Qualities I Respect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of the Relationship</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Things Together</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity and Equality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Extracts That Do Not Fit into any of the Ancillary Themes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Data Extracts</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ordinarily, or that the process was an unique opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings. Similarly, they talk about how confidentiality and transparency were important conditions of the research setting and how this allowed them to form a bond. Interestingly, they also talk about the importance of doing some of the early work for this research in a group setting, that being in a group made some of the early meetings more comfortable, and that it also helped to normalize some of their own thoughts and feelings. This latter point, in turn, helped facilitate the subsequent individual interviews and the perceived bond with the interviewer.

Features of the Other.

In their reflections, participants talked about two sub-themes they had mentioned in their narrative accounts, “Counselling” Skills, and “Personal Qualities I Admire.” For example, they referred to the counsellor’s ability to “listen with sincerity” and the fact that he was “friendly and approachable.” So, as in the narrative accounts, Features of the Other are seen as an important consideration in forming a bond with the researcher.

Features of the Relationship.

When discussing their bond with the researcher, as they had in their narrative accounts the boys place heavy emphasis on the importance of the Features of the Relationship. For example, they reference the sub-theme Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition when they talk specifically about how knowing the researcher from another context (as a former teacher) allowed the initial bonding process to begin. As James says, “the greatest factor to the creation of the relationship during the research was the relationship developed beforehand.” Again, the fact that I was a familiar figure is seen as a crucial factor in allowing the relationship to form. The sub-theme of Doing Things Together is also referred to in the member reflections. One participant comments that the group discussions, the storytelling, and the photography
workshops were all significant in allowing a bond to form. Participants also refer to the sub-theme of Reciprocity and Equality. These statements allude to the perception that the researcher and participant were “on the same level,” or that the informal nature of the relationship helped develop the bond.

One new sub-theme was created during this phase of the research and that was Trust. Although it was implicit in much of the data from the narrative accounts, in the member reflections it was so explicit as to justify a new sub-theme. In talking about how a bond was formed between participant and researcher, for example, Atthul said, “there is a deep-seated level of trust and mutual understanding between the two of us,” and Min commented that “it is vital to create a situation where that person feels comfortable to willingly share their thoughts by first gaining their trust.” Clearly, at least in their reflections, the participants understood the trust that existed in the relationship as integral to allowing a bond to form.

**Summary of the Findings**

Posed the question of how they formed bonds with others, four participants told stories that related both the incipience of and maintenance of bonds with people in their lives. A thematic analysis of these narratives revealed four broad themes: Features of the Self, Features of the Setting, Features of the Other, and Features of the Relationship, and in turn these four themes could be further broken down into 13 sub-themes. Each of these themes was relevant in that the participants perceived it as having some impact either as helping or hindering how they form a bond, or the quality of the bond that is formed, with another. Of these four themes, participants clearly placed the most emphasis on Features of the Relationship.

In addition, given that I had attempted to incorporate many of the recommendations for working with men and boys into this study, I asked for participants to comment on any perceived
bond formed themselves and the researcher during the process of the research. Their affirmative responses suggest that some of these recommendations may be useful to practitioners working with boys, and the striking similarity between the themes in the narrative accounts and in the member reflections suggests that how boys see themselves as forming and maintain bonds is persistent across contexts.
Chapter V--Discussion

Overview

The question posed in this research study, how do boys describe the ways they form bonds with others, revealed four overarching themes, and these four themes could in turn be subdivided into 13 sub-themes. Yet I begin this chapter highly cognisant that in many ways these divisions are artificial. They are artificial first in the sense that this study has placed at its core a social constructionist paradigm, and as such we recognize that “reality” is a construct of time, place, and context, and so the categories borne out of the data today may be very different from those derived from the same data set by the same researcher in the future, that the same research subjects might yield very different data at a different point in time, or that different boys--different research subjects--could have an entirely different precept of how boys form bonds with others. These categories are also artificial in the way they have been presented as separate, whereas my sense is that they are overlapping and interconnected. For example, I classified humour under the theme Features of the Relationship because that was the theme under which it was most frequently talked about by the subjects, but one could certainly make the argument humour also falls under Features of the Setting or that a sense of humour is a Feature of the Other. The same applies to a variety of the other sub-themes, and perhaps the broader themes as well. The purpose of coding, categorizing and eventually naming themes and sub-themes was therefore not to generate a definitive explication, but rather to analyse the data to the level that some of the key concepts at work in how boys form bonds with others might be better understood. My interpretations of the data suggest that these themes and sub-themes overlap and intercede, and in fact they may be inexorably linked. Trying to keep them separate, and talking about the degree of their importance according to how many times a data segment was coded and
placed under a particular theme therefore seems short-sighted, particularly when we subscribe to the notion that men and boys construct their gender roles according to context. Instead it may be useful for readers of this data instead to think of the themes collectively, particularly the ways the themes and sub-themes both confirm many of the theories extant in the literature base, and also extend upon them.

**Theoretical Contributions to the Literature**

The current study makes several contributions to the literature base, the first of which is by lending support to some of the theoretical lenses through which we conceive of masculinities. Theories of how men are socialized are well documented in the literature, and Addis and Mahalik (2003) illuminate how Pleck’s theory of Gender Role Conflict and the theory of masculine ideologies pervade current theoretical paradigms for working with males. Among the traits of masculinities that are seen as being particularly relevant for undertaking therapy with men, the literature base suggests that men value altruism and an ability to think calmly and logically, that they value traits such as loyalty and commitment (Englar-Carlson, 2006) and self-reliance (McCarthy & Holliday, 2004). Men may therefore present themselves as being in control, as managing rather than being controlled by their emotions, as strong and independent, and as free from any of the traits that we might associate with femininity, such as emotionality (Mahalik, Good & Englar-Carlson, 2003).

These theories seem to be supported by the way that boys talked about forming bonds with others, and some of the values of hegemonic masculinity can be discerned in their stories. This was particularly evident when boys discussed Features of the Self. For example, James talks about his unwillingness to label himself emotional. He identifies women as being more emotional than men, and men as being more analytical or objective, traits that he values.
Similarly, Sam identifies himself as being unable to deal with an emotional friend, of wanting to separate and distance himself from her when she presents as emotional, and also insisting that when she is in this state he does not feel that he knows what to say or do. He identifies himself as someone who cries at nothing, and emphatically declares “I am not expressive and I am not emotional.” And Atthul makes reference to how he identifies as self-reliant and independent when he explains that when he does talk to a friend about a problem, he only does so to the extent that she can get him back on his feet and he can “keep going by myself.” Finally, some of these hegemonic masculine values were also evident in the theme Features of the Other, particularly the sub-theme Personal Qualities I Respect. For example, the traits the subjects most seem to value in others are altruism, dedication, and reliability. Participants placed much less emphasis on traits that might typically be stereotyped as more feminine, such as kindness, compassion, or being a good listener. Finally, the participants’ narratives seemed to suggest that in some cases they were aware of the perceived costs of ascribing to these gender roles. For example, even when something is bothering him or he feels upset, James says “Allowing it to fester is a better choice than it is to release myself emotionally with other people, and I don't know why that is, and I feel that is totally detrimental to myself, my psyche and my health, but that's how it goes.” In all of these ways, what the boys said about how they form and maintain bonds with others suggest evidence for existing theories about how men and boys are socialized and how they, to varying degrees, embody and co-construct these masculine ideologies. It also implies that boys this age may also already be facing some of the negative consequences of these values (Watts & Borders, 2005).
Practical Contributions to the Literature

A second contribution of this study is that it lends support to some of the practical suggestions that have been made in the literature with regard to how to engage boys once they have begun therapy. Powell (2006) posits that men form friendships based on the sharing of activities, or what Englar-Carlson (2006) refers to as “intimacy by doing,” and this is why practitioners such as Smith (2004) have suggested that work with boys should include opportunities for using recreation, multimedia, or games. Others have suggested that therapeutic work with boys might involve more humour and self-disclosure (Hess & Richards, 1999; Kiselica, 2005; Englar-Carlson, 2006; Brooks, 1998), that the process can be made more comfortable by sitting side-by-side (Kiselica, 2005), or that men and boys need opportunities to reciprocate the help they receive (Brooks, 1998; Brooks, 2001; Powell, 2006), and that they may be prime candidates for group rather than individual therapy.

This study is the first I am aware of to actually ask boys what they think is significant in the process of forming bonds with others, and though they were never asked directly about the aforementioned practical suggestions, their responses indicate these methods might be useful. Of particular significance were their comments on the importance of bonding through shared activity. The sub-theme of Doing Things Together was particularly illustrative of this point. When telling their stories of how they formed bonds, boys talked about a variety of shared activities, both singular events and “rituals” that were repeated with friends and family members, that they said helped them feel closer to other people. The importance of Doing Things Together was also repeated in the ancillary findings when boys talked about the early photo workshops and the impact this had in making them feel comfortable before proceeding to the “talking” portion of the research. And it was also present in a variety of other sub-themes, including
Laughter, Fun, Excitement and Novelty, where though the emphasis may not have been on shared activity, it was certainly implicit in that these stories often involved situations where boys were engaged in activities with others. This second sub-theme also underscores the importance of humour and laughter in building relationships with boys, a second practical suggestion that seems to be endorsed by their stories. It may be that laughter indicates a shared understanding, or perhaps a shared worldview, or it may be that it simply eases tension, but whatever the case the stories of these particular boys suggest that it’s important in forming and maintaining bonds. It was also apparent, as suggested in the literature, that opportunities for reciprocity are significant in working with boys. For example, they often talked about reciprocity in the traditionally understood sense that if someone did something kind for them, they felt obliged to return the favour. But the importance of reciprocity was also evident in the way they talked about the need to know where they stood with the other, a reciprocated sense of where each other stood relative to the relationship. And it was also meant in terms of self-disclosure—James’ advice that if a boy takes a risk and shares something personal with you, you had best be prepared to do the same. According to his understanding, “boy culture” necessitates that such emotional risks be reciprocated. Finally, boys did talk about situations bonding with others where they sat side-by-side. James talked about sitting next to a stranger on a park bench, and Sam about the late night chats he would have with his friends in a darkened room, each of them looking ahead at a wall rather than each other, and Min described sitting next to his father as they would take in their annual baseball game. My own feeling about this point is it is not that sitting side by side is important so much that they are all situations where a boy can more easily mask his feelings, where though he may be highly emotional, even vulnerable, some part of this remains hidden to
his audience. It may be important, therefore, for practitioners to allow for situations or contexts where this is also the case.

One additional point is the frequent suggestion in the existing literature that doing therapy with boys should involve group work. Again, this study, particularly when you examine what the boys said in their member reflections, suggests that working in a group in the incipient stages can help boys feel more comfortable. In part this may be because working in a group is obviously a part of the sub-theme “Doing things Together,” and thus by working with other people the participants were able to form bonds with each other as well as the researcher and this provided a degree of comfort and confidence before moving to the latter stages of the research. Additionally, as one participant said, working in a group in part helped to normalize his experience because he heard other boys’ stories that were similar to his own. This, too, may have been an important factor in allowing the participants to speak so candidly and personally in the latter stages of this project. That said, it is noteworthy that boys did complete the last stage of this project in an individual rather than a group setting. So the present research seems to suggest that group work, particularly in the nascent stages of developing relationships with boys, may be important, but that once this relationship has been established that boys are capable of individual conversations that are more personal, even emotional.

**Methodological Contributions to the Literature**

This study makes three methodological contributions to the extant literature. The first is that it joins a long list of studies that suggest that arts-based visual methods, in this case a technique called photovoice, may be an effective qualitative means by which to examine a phenomenon. Of Liebenberg’s (2009) four arguments for using photovoice, this study emphasized that incorporating photographs into the interview, in this case photos that the
subjects had generated, can help facilitate discussion. Although it is often reported that when interviewing adolescents, boys in particular, that interviewing can be a difficult process and that questions are often met with short responses, in this study it was my observation that the boys had a wealth of things to say and that the interviews could have gone much longer had they been allotted more time. This may have been in part because the process of participating in the workshops and then having to go out into the environment and take photographs allowed boys to think about what it was that they wanted to say. It may also have been the case that having the photographs present allowed the boys to feel as though they were talking about the photos rather than directly about themselves; similar to a therapeutic technique used in narrative therapy in which clients are invited to see a problem not as a part of the self, but as residing outside it, here the participants were invited to speak about the stories behind the photos rather than directly about their own experiences, a subtle shift that may have facilitated their comfort and facilitated the interview. In addition, this study also underscores Liebenberg’s point that photovoice is a method that allows for collaboration and may help remove some of the hierarchies in place between participant and researcher. Both the process of the workshops and the interviews fostered a sense of collaboration, a feeling that participant and researcher were co-exploring the phenomena of how boys form bonds with others, and participants referred to this sense of equality in their member reflections. In this way photovoice proved an enjoyable way to do research, both for participants and the researcher, and one by which one might facilitate an interview, particularly with a potentially reluctant subject.

A second methodological contribution of the this study is that, as far as I am aware, it is the first to incorporate suggestions for working with boys and then examine what boys say about the outcomes. Although participants were never asked specifically about the various practical
suggestions I attempted to incorporate into the study (for example, by forming a bond initially through activity, by completing the initial stages in a group rather than in an individual setting, by trying to encourage a sense of equality, and by using humour) the boys commented, both in their narrative accounts and in the subsequent member reflections, on these processes as being an important part of how they form bonds with others. I have elaborated on some of these techniques in Practical Contributions to the Literature, but what the boys say suggests that many of these sorts of practical guidelines may be on the right track, both for people who wish to work therapeutically with boys, and also those that wish to engage them in research.

The third and final methodological contribution that this research makes is to answer Whorley and Addis’ (2006) call for more qualitative research on men and masculinities. As these two authors point out, much of the research on masculinities has been quantitative in nature, and quantitative research often reveals results which, though broad, lacks some of the depth that can be attained with qualitative studies. The current study therefore provides an alternative to the current methodological trends.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

One way in which the present study extends the literature is that it provides practitioners and those working with boys a more complete sense of how boys talk about the ways in which they build and maintain relationships. When I first began this research, my perception of the suggestions for working with boys in the extant literature were that they were either characteristics of the therapy--specific interventions one could use (recreation, playing games, working in groups), or characteristics of the therapist-- ways that counsellors or therapists should try to present themselves to boys (having and using a sense of humour, being able to self-disclose). While the present study suggests that these suggestions are indeed effective, it also
hints that the entire process is entirely more complex, and that there are four broad themes that counsellors need to be aware of when they are trying to form working relationships with boys: Features of the Self, Features of the Setting, Features of the Other, and Features of the Relationship. Thus, when working with boys, practitioners need to listen and become aware of how boys perceive Features of the Self: how they understand their masculinities, and how this impacts their ability to emotionally express themselves, and the value that they place on independence and an individual ability to cope. They also need to be aware of how boys perceive Features of the Setting: whether the context is perceived as anonymous, confidential and safe, whether the physical space has been a precedent for sharing emotional or intimate details, and whether boys are given the choice to place themselves physically (for example, side by side) in the setting in a way that allows them to feel that they have more control over how much of themselves, particularly their emotional selves, that they allow the other to see. People working with boys also need to be aware of Features of the Other, that is, how they are perceived by the boys. In the present study, although the participants did talk about “Counselling” Skills, they also indicated that they are more likely to bond with, or at least have more intimate discussions with, people who they feel they have something in common, and so it may be important for people working with boys to look for commonalities with their clients. It may also be useful for them to remember additional Features of the Other that the participants reported as important such as dedication and selflessness. Finally, counsellors or therapists who work with boys need to be conscious of how boys perceive Features of the Relationship. The boys in this study reported being able to form bonds most easily with people whom they knew from other contexts, with whom they had had chance to bond by doing things together, with whom they could share a
laugh or do novel, exciting things, with whom there was an opportunity for reciprocity and a perceived sense of equality, and with whom they could talk.

What is interesting to note is that each of the practical suggestions for working with boys in the extant literature fits into one of these four themes, and in this way this study does not reveal any ground breaking new ways in which this particular population might be approached. What is does provide, however, is a theoretical framework that is more comprehensive, and more revealing of some of the complexities of working with boys, than simply conceiving of them as a population who can be accessed merely by pulling a few tricks out of the therapist’s hat. This research suggests that boys create and co-create their relationships with others based on four overarching and intersecting themes, and therefore in working with boys practitioners might reflexively ask themselves how does this boy understand his masculinities, how does he understand the setting, how does he see me, and how does he perceive our relationship? In this way this study presents four novel organizing principles that may inform and guide how people work with boys, particularly in how they attempt to encourage working relationships.

A second extension this research makes to the literature is that it makes clear that when talking about forming and maintaining bonds with others, boys place a huge amount of emphasis on the relationship. This is important in part because it underscores that boys are not empty or naïve vessels being acted upon, but rather active participants in the relationship’s creation. In this way we avoid the trap of looking at boys as a group of people whom can be acted upon by virtue of a few key practical techniques, a paradigm that reinforces the idea that boys or men are somehow deficient or therapeutically inept. Instead it invites boys to co-create a bond that is conducive to an effective working dyad or group. In this way, we also might concurrently
encourage a Feature of the Relationship that boys report as integral to forming bonds—
Reciprocity and Equality.

Thirdly, that the sub-theme Proximity, Accessibility, Familiarity and Repetition was pre-
dominant among all others in Features of the Relationship suggests that people who wish to work
with boys have to find ways to start building relationship even before the therapeutic work
begins. While this may not be feasible for every practitioner who works with this population, for
others such as school counsellors it may mean connecting with boys in their school environment,
forming initial bonds with them as teachers, coaches, or club sponsors, and seeking out
opportunities to chat with, to laugh with, or to do things with boys. What the participants said, in
both their narrative accounts and their member reflections, indicates that the sense of familiarity
and the concomitant sense of safety gained through these connections are vital precursors to a
boy being able to share his feelings, to reveal a more intimate aspect of himself, skills that are
often taken-for-granted in therapeutic settings. If we can find ways to co-create bonds with boys
before expecting them to enter into an environment which they may perceive as alien and
potentially threatening, we may be able to have them enter that therapeutic environment more
easily, to remain there longer, and to emerge with a greater sense of accomplishment than they
otherwise would.

Finally, this study suggests that boys are capable of doing some of the things that we
expect of them in therapy if we adapt therapy to suit their needs. Instead of looking at men and
boys as “therapeutically deficient,” therapists might do well to remember that our relationships
with this population are co-created, and rather than trying to force men into a therapeutic glass
slipper, as people who wish to help this population we have to find ways to meet their needs.
What is clear from this research, and the candour of the participants, is that when those
conditions are met boys can and will do many of the things expected of them in therapy including forming trusting bonds, taking risks, and making themselves emotionally vulnerable.

**Implications for Ethical Practice**

One of the key messages derived from the data is the importance the subjects place on knowing the person with whom they will form, or continue to form, a bond. Two of the major themes, Features of the Other and Features of the Relationship, imply that knowing the other person, and knowing how they will interact with that person, are key considerations for these subjects when they are considering forming a bond with another. The subjects talked about a sense of familiarity, shared experience, laughter and excitement, and a feeling of reciprocity when talking about their relationships with others with whom they had formed close bonds; concomitantly they talked about qualities in the other that they respected, or compared and contrasted themselves with others with whom they had formed bonds. Thus according to these participants, some knowledge of the other is highly important to their sense of being able to approach or connect with another person.

In an increasing number of schools, however, policy or practice is that counsellors have no contact with students except in a counselling setting. Whereas previously many school counsellors also doubled as teachers, advisors or coaches, it is becoming increasingly common for counsellors to work solely in one role. Thus for boys the stigma and fear around visiting the school counsellor is potentially compounded, at least according to the account of these four participants, by the added obstacle that this person is entirely unknown and unfamiliar to them.

This practice is likely in part due to the economic exigencies of many schools and districts, but it may be also partly due to the codes of ethics under which many school counsellors function, specifically sections that prohibit dual relationships. For example, one of
the most influential mental health regulatory bodies in Canada is the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), and according to its code of ethics psychologists must “avoid dual relationships…that might present a conflict of interest or that might reduce their ability to be objective and unbiased” (CPA, 2000). Although school counsellors are typically not psychologists, both they and other mental health professionals often follow this code because it provides a high standard and represents an umbrella under which many of their professions fall, and codes published by similar organizations contain similar provisions. Thus counsellors, their administrations and districts have taken this as a caution that professionals with a dual role of counsellor and teacher should not be counselling a student who is concurrently a pupil in one of their classes. However, in a culture that is increasing litigious, many schools are now extending this caution and interpreting it as a rule that counsellors should have no other contact with students except in a counselling setting, avoiding the possibility of dual relationships altogether.

This interpretation is not without merit. Certainly, when counsellors have dual roles, the potential for damage to the counselling relationship and even harm to a student is not hard to imagine. Take for example the case of a school counsellor who has a client who is enrolled in and failing one of his courses, or a counsellor who has a client on one of his teams whom he benches during a game or tournament. On the other hand, given what participants in this study have said about the importance of knowing the other, of being able to identify qualities they respect, or “counselling” skills such as their ability to be supportive, it would seem that in schools where counsellors are strictly counsellors and have no other contact with students, the chance of boys stepping into the counselling office are even more remote. One may argue that boys will have a chance to make these judgments once they have entered into the counselling
relationship, but in such environments, the crucial step of initial contact appears prohibitively more difficult.

It is also worth pointing out that in the CPA code of ethics and in others like them, the guidelines are often hierarchical. In the CPA code, the guidelines on dual relationships fall under one of four sections: Integrity in Relationships. However, there is a preceding section, Responsible Caring, that states psychologists will “protect and promote the welfare of clients,” and also “Be sufficiently sensitive and knowledgeable about individual, group, community, and cultural differences and vulnerabilities to discern what will benefit and not harm persons involved in their activities” (CPA, 2000). If we know that some boys report that familiarity and exposure leads to initial bonds, and that these initial bonds are often gateways or necessary precursors to more profound levels of talk, sharing and intimacy, then completely eliminating opportunities for school counsellors to connect with male students outside the counselling office seems counterproductive, and not true to “protecting and promoting the welfare of clients” (CPA, 2000). If dual relationships within schools and other environments can be managed where these relationships are made explicit, where they are referred to in a process of on-going informed consent, and where both counsellor and client are aware of their risks, then perhaps this duty of care can take a responsible and reasonable precedent over integrity in relationships. Otherwise there is the potential for the risks of ignoring the needs of a population to well outweigh the harms that are sometimes encountered in dual relationships.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study asked boys to describe how they form bonds with others. Although each was of different ethnicity, the participants in this study were all between the ages of 15 to 17, and all attended an independent school in Vancouver, BC. Future researchers who are interested in
asking similar questions about how boys form bonds, or what they count as important in that
process, may want to consider a more heterogeneous sample, one that represents any number of
factors which may influence a boy’s understanding of his masculinities, including age, ethnicity,
sexuality, or social class. Such studies may reveal other boys who are “hypo-masculine,” or
whose concept of their masculinities may not suggest the need for adapting the counselling
process, or “hyper-masculine,” boys for whom adapting the way we do therapy with boys needs
to be even more carefully considered, or considered in different ways altogether.

Another way to extend the present research would be to ask a similar question of girls. An
assumption of this study, and the literature base, is that boys are somehow different, and that
these differences extend to the ways that boys do, or do not, engage in therapy. But it may be the
case that girls label as important many of the same processes and factors in forming bonds with
others as boys do, and that there is less distinguishing how boys and girls form bonds than this
research would suggest. It may also be the case that there are women and girls who have been
socialized with more masculine values, and that the findings of this study may present a new way
to meet the needs of such a population. As such, it is clear that this research is a beginning point,
and that further research into gender socialization and the way this impacts the creations of
therapeutic relationships is needed.

It was also apparent to me during the study just how much data was being ignored or left
behind. For example, though I am certain they would have been rich with information and
meaning, no effort was made to complete a visual analysis of the many photos that the
participants created. Similarly, there are other forms of narrative inquiry that could have
provided a wealth of information—in choosing to undertake a thematic analysis of the semantic
content of participants’ stories I ignored a wealth of other ways their understandings might be
accessed. I leave it to future research to determine whether other forms of narrative inquiry, broader methods of qualitative methods, or quantitative studies would derive similar findings.

Finally, in three different photo workshops boys were asked to go out and take pictures of things, places and people. This was done in part because it gave the participants something more concrete to do than the more nebulous instruction to take photos of anything that told a story about how they formed bonds with others. But it may also have influenced the way they framed their understanding of what was important, and thus what they talked about in the interviews. For example, perhaps the theme of Features of the Setting was in part derived from the fact that I had asked them to take photos of the settings in which they had formed bonds with others, and this in some way primed participants to give context or setting a greater sense of importance in their narratives than it would otherwise be accorded. Again, it will be future research which frames the question or the photo assignments differently, or that asks the question of how boys describe forming bonds with others using a completely different methodology, that begins to shed light on this question.

Conclusions

Psychotherapy has often been referred to as the “talking cure,” a phrase first coined by a patient named Bertha Pappenheim even before it was adopted by Sigmund Freud. As therapists we often expect our clients to enter therapy willing to talk, and willing to talk in a very intimate sense, about their lives. Many therapists also value intimate, self-disclosing talk as a means by which to build rapport and a working therapeutic relationship between the client and therapist. A depth of research on gender, masculinities and Gender Role Conflict, however, suggests that because of their socialization men may find this process difficult. They may lack the self-awareness required to talk about their emotions, for example, because they are unaccustomed to
having such discussions, and they may be unwilling to engage in many of the processes expected of them in therapy because the gendered rules by which they have been socialized and in which they participate are incongruent, even antithetical, to the perception of therapy as requiring such traits as openness, vulnerability, insight and emotionality.

This study suggests that despite their gender socialization boys are willing to talk, find that talking can be therapeutic, and that it can be a means by which they bond with others. However, it also suggests a whole range of other ways that boys understand as important to bonding and building intimacy with others, and suggests that people who wish to work therapeutically with boys have to be open these possibilities. This appears to be particularly true in the nascent stages of the relationship where boys may be wary of anything resembling therapy, where the creation of a working alliance may benefit from de-emphasizing the value practitioners often place on “therapeutic” talk, and where they are open, for example, to creating a bond though shared activity, humour, or self-disclosure. None of this is to suggest that “therapeutic” talk is unimportant, but rather that the route by which we achieve this might be more circuitous than it is presently conceived.

On the other hand, talking about “counselling for men” presumes a type of homogeneity between men or boys, but the research on masculinities suggests that gender is a complex construct, and that it varies widely between men and even within men depending on the cultural, interpersonal, and historical contexts in which they place themselves. So it is not the conclusion of this study that we should be adapting all counselling as a necessary means to do therapy with all men, but rather that there may be cases where modifying some of the presumptions or values of therapy may be useful for helping men initiate and sustain their engagement in the process.
This research began with some alarming statistics regarding men’s rates of drug addiction, suicide, homelessness, and violence, and a hope and presumption that if we can increase the comparatively low levels of men willing to enter and remain in therapy we may be able to ameliorate some of these trends. We do not yet know whether adapting the way we do therapy with some men will have any impact on these trends, but it seems clear that men’s current reluctance to seek help has negative impacts socially, interpersonally, and intrapersonally. If therapists and others who work with males in health settings can be open to adapting their conceptualization of how they conduct this work it may offer one route to improving the health and wellbeing of men and the lives of the people whom they impact. In turn, this may lead to a better appreciation of the way that gender socialization, and our participation in it, shapes the lives of men and women, both for better and for worse.

What this requires is no small task, and goes far beyond a few simple tips or tricks that a therapist pulls out of her toolbox whenever a male client walks through their door. What is required instead is a shift in thinking. As James so clearly explains:

This whole question of how we get boys to talk about those tough, emotional things is a really hard one to answer, and that's one of the reasons why I came to help out the study, just 'cause that's one of the things that I want to know, too. Just 'cause, you know, I don't think I have an answer to that, because I think I am an example of one of those people that you know, refuses to go to counsellors or psychologists or friends, sometimes, just 'cause, I have this thing in my head. Maybe we have to do something about the education system. There has to be a fundamental change in the way people think, which is difficult. I think that the problem is deeper than what we originally thought. There's more to it than just a
simple technique. There has to be something different about society in general for it to facilitate this. There has to be a different way of thinking.

Perhaps as practitioners, as people working with boys and men, we can be some of the first to help this new way of thinking come to light.
References


Lapadat, J. C., Lindsay, A. C. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. Qualitative Inquiry, 5, 64-86.


Men in groups: Insights, interventions, and psychoeducational work (pp. 21-34).

groups: An integrity model, value-based perspective. International Journal of Men's
Health, 7, 218-236.


gender role conflict scale: New research paradigms and clinical implications. The


& Recovery, 1, 95-116.


Wanted: A Few Good Men

Do you have an interest in photography? Would you be interested in taking part in a University of British Columbia research study with other 13-18 year old boys?

A group of researchers from the University of British Columbia wants to interview boys about how they form bonds with other people. You will be given a camera, you'll participate in some workshops learning how to use it, and then you'll be asked to take some pictures. Once your photos are developed, you will be invited to talk about the pictures you have taken. No experience is necessary, and participation is entirely voluntary!

We're only able to accept the first 3-5 applicants, so if you're interested see or email Ms. Lee (talee@wpga.ca) or Mr. Webster (cwebster@wpga.ca) for more details.
Appendix B: Parent Consent Form

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Marv Westwood, Professor
Faculty of Education, The University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC, V6T 1Z4
Telephone: 604-822-6457
Email: marvin.westwood@ubc.ca

Your son has expressed an interest in participating in a research study that investigates how he and other male students create bonds or attachments. We, a research team from The University of British Columbia, are interested in the conditions under which boys say they form bonds with other people, including friends, family or other individuals important to them. In this research we would like to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are some of the personal characteristics of people your son feels or has felt attached to?
2. What are some of the contexts in which he has come to feel attached to other people?
3. How might counsellors and other mental health workers who work with boys use this information to better work with this population?

If your son volunteers for this research project, we will ask him to do the following three things:

1. **Take some photographs that capture and tell us about the close bonds he has with others.** Through workshops, the research team will provide him with some training in taking photographs. While doing this work, he will receive technical support from the research team.

2. **Have a conversation with the researchers.** After your son has taken the photographs, we would like to have two meetings with him to talk about the images. These conversations will be audio taped. These recordings will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored at The University of British Columbia. No one else, including the school, will have access to these recordings.

3. **Participate in a final group interview with the researchers.** This focus group will include the researcher and all other students who have volunteered for the study. We would like to videotape this conversation. This recording will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored at The University of British Columbia. No one else, including the school, will have access to these recordings.
**Why is it important to do this research?**

Research indicates that boys are less likely to visit school counsellors than girls, and that when boys do go to counselling they are more likely to drop out early. One hypothesis for this is that the culture of counselling is incongruous with the culture of boys; skills that counsellors are currently taught to develop bonds with clients, such as quickly accessing or discussing client emotions, may run counter to what boys understand to be acceptable gender roles. If we can learn more about what boys say about how they feel comfortable forming bonds with other people, then we can provide this information to those in charge of schools and schooling and to other counsellors so that we can improve the ways a variety of professionals work with boys. Ultimately, we hope that boys will benefit from working with counsellors and other professionals who know more about how to meet their needs.

**Confidentiality: Will the images my son makes and the information he shares with the researchers be shared with others?**

Some of the photographs that your son makes may be shared with other researchers and university students, but his name, and the name of his school, will never be given to anybody. Any information he shares with us will remain private and findings from the research will not be attributed to any one individual in his school. To share our research findings with other researchers and university students, it might be necessary to share some of his photographs at conferences, or to publish them in academic or research journals. In both of these settings, his images would be seen by other researchers.

The images he makes will not be posted on the Internet by the research team. The only time that images might appear on the Internet is when the academic research journal(s), in which the research is published, is accessible through an online library subscription, or when the scholarly journal is an online publication. This means photos your son takes could eventually end up online.

There are some exceptions to the sorts of photos that we would distribute. These include photos that your son elects not to discuss in either the individual or the group interviews, photos where people can be identified, and photos where the school could be identified. This is explained in more detail in the last section of this letter.

It is also important to recognize that when we meet for the focus group the researchers will emphasize how important it is for members of the group to respect each other’s confidentiality and not reveal what was said in the group. However, the researchers cannot guarantee that other group members will never reveal what is said in these sessions.

**Payment/compensation:**

Your son’s participation is voluntary, and thus there is no payment for his involvement in this study. Participation is likely to be beneficial in that he will have an opportunity to work with photographic processes. From that he may develop some photography skills. He will also have a chance to work with others and to develop a body of work that describes some of his bonds with others and explains something of the story of how they are/were formed.

**Contact for information about the research study:**
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Marv Westwood by phone at (604) 822-6457 or by email at marv.westwood@ubc.ca.

Consent:
Your son’s participation in this study is entirely voluntary; he does not have to participate if you or he do not want him to, and he can decline to participate without fear of repercussions. Similarly, if you consent to his involvement and later have concerns, you have the right to withdraw your consent.

Contact for information about your son’s rights as a research participant:
If you have any concern about your son’s treatment or rights as a research subject, you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the University of British Columbia’s Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

There are two sections below that we ask you to read carefully: Section A and B.

Section A
If you sign your name in this section this tells us that you give your consent for your son to participate in this research. Your signature also tells us that you have received a copy of this form, which we ask you to keep.

I give consent for my son’s participation in this research study, which includes photo/video documentation.

___________________________________________ __________________________
Parent Signature       Date

____________________________ ___________________ _____________________
Name (please print)    Phone number   Email

Section B
We would like to have your consent to show others some of the photographs that your son makes while involved in this research study. We would like to show his photographs to other researchers and university students. If we get your permission, we will show these photographs to other researchers at conferences and in published articles in academic journals. Others researchers and university students are normally the people who attend conferences.

There are three types of photos that we will never show to others:

- Photos that your son does not want included. Before each interview, he will have chance to go through the photos and shred any that he does not want the researchers to see. Additionally, during the final focus group, he will be asked if there are any photos he has taken that he does not want to be published at conferences or seen by other researchers, professors or students. Again, these images will be shredded.
- We will not use any photos of anyone who can be identified. For example, close ups, headshots, or even landscape shots where a person can be individually
identified will not be included. This is because we would need the written
permission of the people in the photos to share an image of them.

• Similarly, we will not use any pictures where the school could easily be identified.
This is to protect the confidentiality of the school and the people participating in the
study.

Section B is different from Section A. If you sign your name in Section B you will be telling us
that it is okay for us to show your son’s photographs to other researchers and university students.

I give permission to the researchers to show the images my son makes (photographs)
to other researchers and university students at conferences and/or in publications:

___________________________________________ __________________________
Participant signature       Date

____________________________ ___________________ _____________________
Name (please print)       Phone Number       Email
Appendix C: Student Assent Form

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

STUDENT ASSENT FORM: GRADES 8-12
What Boys Say about Creating Attachments with Others

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Marv Westwood, Professor
Faculty of Education, The University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver BC, V6T 1Z4
Telephone: 604-822-6457
Email: marvin.westwood@ubc.ca

You are invited to take part in a research study that investigates how you and other male students create bonds or attachments. We, a research team from The University of British Columbia, are interested in the conditions under which boys say they form bonds with other people, including friends, family or other individuals important to them. In this research we would like to find answers to the following questions:

4. What are some of the personal characteristics of people you feel or have felt attached to?
5. What are some of the contexts in which you have come to feel attached to other people?
6. How might counsellors and other mental health workers who work with boys use this information to better work with boys?

If you volunteer for this research project, we will ask you to do the following three things:

4. Take some photographs that capture and tell us about the close bonds you have with others. The research team will provide you with some training in taking photographs. While you do the work, you will receive technical support from the research team.

5. Have a conversation with the researchers. When you have taken your photographs, we would like to have two meetings with you to talk to you about your images. If it’s ok with you, we would like to audiotape the conversation. These recordings will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored at The University of British Columbia. Your school will not have access to these recordings.

6. Participate in a final group interview with the researchers. This interview will include the researcher and the other boys who have been participating in the study. If it’s ok with you and the other group members, we would like to videotape the conversation. This recording will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored at The University of British Columbia. Your school will not have access to these recordings.

Why is it important to do this research?
Research indicates that boys are less likely to visit school counsellors than girls, and that when boys do go to counselling they are more likely to drop out early. One hypothesis for this is that counsellors don’t know enough about how to form bonds with boys. If we can learn more about what boys say about how they feel comfortable forming bonds with other people, then we can provide this information to those in charge of schools and schooling and to other counsellors so that we can improve the ways a variety of professionals work with boys. Ultimately, we hope that boys will benefit from working with counsellors and other professionals who know more about how to blend in with the culture of boys.

Confidentiality: Will the images I make and the information I share with the researchers be shared with others?
Some of the photographs that you make may be shared with other researchers and university students, but your name, and the name of your school, will never be given to anybody. Any information you share with us will remain private and findings from the research will not be attributed to any one individual in your school. To share our research findings with other researchers and university students, it might be necessary to share some of your photographs at meetings, or to publish them in academic or research journals. These meetings, which are also known as conferences, are attended by other researchers. Academic research papers usually include papers written by academics to describe and discuss their research projects. The images you make will not be posted on the Internet by the research team. The only time that images might appear on the Internet is when the academic research journal(s), in which the research is published, is accessible through an online library subscription, or when the scholarly journal is an online publication. This means photos you take could eventually end up online.

There are some exceptions to the sorts of photos that we would distribute. These include photos that you elect not to share with the researchers, photos where any person or persons could be individually identified, and photos where the school is recognizable. This is explained in more detail in the last section of this letter.

It is also important for you to know that when we meet for the focus group the researchers will emphasize how important it is for members of the group to respect each other’s confidentiality and not reveal what was said in the group. However, the researchers cannot guarantee that other group members will never reveal what is said.

Payment/compensation:
Your participation is voluntary, and thus there is no payment for being involved in this study. Participation is likely to be beneficial in that you will have an opportunity to work with photographic processes. From that you will likely develop some photography skills. You will also have a chance to work with others and to develop a body of work that describes some of your bonds with others and explains something of the story of how they are/were formed.

Contact for information about the research study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Marv Westwood by phone at (604) 822-6457 or by email at marv.westwood@ubc.ca

Assent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary; you do not have to participate if you do not want him to, and you can decline to participate without fear of being penalized by the researchers. Similarly, if you agree to participate and later have concerns, you have the right to withdraw your assent.

Contact for information about the your rights as a research participant:
If you have any concern about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you can contact the Research Subject Information Line in the University of British Columbia’s Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

There are two sections below that we ask you to read carefully: Section A and B.

Section A
If you sign your name in this section this will tell us that you want to participate in this research. Your signature also tells us that you have received a copy of this form, which we ask you to keep.

I agree to participate in this research study, which includes photo/video documentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (please print)</th>
<th>Phone number</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Section B
We would like to have your permission to show others some of the photographs that you make while involved in this research study. We would like to show your photographs to other researchers and university students. If we get your permission, we will show these photographs to other researchers at conferences and in published articles in academic journals. Others researchers and university students are normally the people who attend conferences.

There are three types of photos that we will never show to others:

- Photos that you do not want included. Before each interview, you will have chance to go through the photos and shred any that you do not want the researchers to see. Additionally, during the final focus group, you will be asked if there are any photos you’ve taken that you do not want to be published at conferences or seen by other researchers, professors or students. Again, these images will be shredded.

- We will not use any photos of anyone who can be recognized. For example, close ups, headshots, or even landscape shots where a person is recognizable will not be included. This is because we would need the written permission of the people in the photos to share an image of them.
• Similarly, we will not use any pictures where the school could easily be identified.
  This is to protect the confidentiality of the school and the people participating in the
  study.

Section B is different from Section A. If you sign your name in Section B you will be telling us
that it is okay for us to show your photographs to other researchers and university students.

I give permission to the researchers to show the images I make (photographs and short
film) to other researchers and university students at conferences and/or in publications:

___________________________________________ __________________________
Participant signature       Date

____________________________ ___________________ ___________________
Name (please print)   Phone Number  Email
Appendix D: Member Verification Email

Hi __________!

I hope your summer has been going well and you are not too traumatized at the thought of being back at school next week. I’ve spent the last month at home here in Vancouver and have been slowly working on my research project for UBC. You might find this hard to believe, but I have really enjoyed working on this project. The best part has been reading and re-reading some of the very thoughtful, insightful and powerful things each of you said.

Originally I was going to wait until next week to contact all of you, but it occurred to me that some of you might like to complete the last part of the project before the craziness of school starts up again. So I’m going to explain it here, and if you’d like to respond before next week then I’d welcome that, and if you’d like to respond later, perhaps after we’ve crossed paths next week, that’s fine too. My deadline for submitting my project is quickly approaching, so I’d ask that you please get back to me by September 7.

I promised I’d get back to you with a version of our interview, and so I’ve attached a file that is called a narrative account.

The narrative account is a sort of summary of what you said in the interview. Once I had typed your transcripts I had nearly 200 pages of text, and for the sake of space I had to compress these down to about 10 pages each. So I went through the transcripts and copy and pasted all of what you said that relates to my research interest into the narrative account. So, the narrative account is a sort of edited version of what I think you said about my research question. I tried to keep it in your words and maintain the way you told your stories. However, I did have to make some changes, mostly to the language. These included: replacing pronouns with names, adding conjunctions or connecting phrases, changing verb tenses so they matched, and taking out personal details and replacing people's names so that we could maintain people's privacy. You'll notice that I've given each of you an alias that, if you'd like to change, just let me know! And if you want to look back at the original transcript, I can show you that, too.

I would ask you to do two last things, and these will conclude the research together. I’d ask you to spend no more than an hour TOTAL on this:

1. I'd like you to read the narrative accounts. As you read through them, ask yourself the following questions:

   - Is this what I meant to say?
   - Do I want to make any changes?
   - Do I want to delete anything?
   - Is there anything else I want to add that's not here?
If you'd like to make changes, you can either a) do this in Word and email it back to me (please use .rtf and highlight changes), or b) come and meet with me at school and we can look at it together.

It's not an expectation that you make changes, rather it's a chance for you to be sure that I'm getting what you said right. Once you have checked it over and given it back to me, I will make any changes that you've asked for, and then this edited version of your narrative account will be included in my thesis.

2. I'd invite you to take a few minutes and give a written answer to one last question. Don't worry, your answers can be short, and you can simply write them in an email to me. This is intended to be a very open-ended question. Please answer it as you see fit and be as honest as you can.

In participating and then reading the interviews, it was my perception that each of you talked about some very personal experiences, perhaps even ones that you don’t normally (or ever) talk about with others. I got to thinking that perhaps in undertaking this research together, where we were investigating how boys create bonds, we had also created a type of bond ourselves.

Was that your perception or did you feel differently? Whichever the case, what do you suppose were some of the most important factors that contributed to you feeling like you did?

You guys have all been terrifically helpful, and I can promise you that these will be my last two requests. You have all been fantastic to work with, and I am very grateful for your efforts and your contribution to this project.

See you at school!

CW