

Forming and Maintaining Bonds with Others: What the Boys Say

WEBSTER, Chris, MA, University of British Columbia

This qualitative study investigated four 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.