3

In-depth interviews with ethnic-minority, low-income, urban adolescents reveal the multiple meanings of trust and closeness in friendships, the intersection of trust and distrust, and the ways in which close friendships are firmly embedded in cultural contexts.

Close Friendships Among Urban, Ethnic-Minority Adolescents

Niobe Way, Rachel Gingold, Mariana Rotenberg, Geena Kuriakose

The world of close friendships among urban, ethnic-minority adolescents is intricate and murky, as well as deeply moving and profound. Stories of betrayal and deceit abound, as do stories of love and affection. Boys speak about not being able to live without their best friends, while describing the ways in which boys steal from each other (including each other's girl-friends) and betray each other's secrets. Girls speak about their deep commitment to their best friends, while describing their belief that you "can't trust anybody." Responding to the lack of studies exploring the friendships of ethnic-minority adolescents, we have been listening for four years to a group of sixty African American, Latino, and Asian American adolescents from poor and working-class, urban families speak about their friendships as they go through adolescence. We sought to understand how they experienced closeness in their friendships and how these experiences changed as they went through adolescence. This chapter presents key findings from this four-year longitudinal, qualitative study.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

Theories of close relationships indicate that friendships provide particular benefits to adolescents, such as companionship and a sense of intimacy, self-worth, and validation, and that each of these benefits, or "provisions" (see

Weiss, 1974), influences the other (Furman and Robbins, 1985; Chapter Four, this volume; Sullivan, 1953). Intimacy, for example, enhances an adolescent's sense of self-worth and provides a feeling of mutual validation between friends (Sullivan, 1953). In addition, the extent to which these relational provisions are experienced depends on development, with children's friendships providing companionship and adolescent friendships providing intimacy and emotional support as well as companionship (Buhrmester and Furman, 1987; Hartup, 1993). Most research on friendships draws from this theoretical model and focuses on, for example, the extent to which particular provisions or components of friendships (such as support and intimacy) are evident during different developmental periods or across gender or ethnicity, or how these provisions are associated with various indicators of adjustment (Bukowski, Newcomb, and Hartup, 1996; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985; Savin-Williams and Berndt, 1990).

A common finding from this body of predominantly survey-based research, one that has dominated the conversation about friendships for over a decade, is that adolescent girls are more likely than boys to experience intimate self-disclosure and emotional support in their friendships, while adolescent boys are more likely than girls to have "activity-oriented" friendships (Belle, 1989; Buhrmester and Furman, 1987; Savin-Williams and Berndt, 1990). Qualitative research, however, draws a very different picture of the friendships of adolescents, suggesting that adolescent boys have more emotionally nuanced relational lives than has been indicated in questionnaire-based research. In-depth, semistructured interviews with adolescents have indicated, for example, that boys desire intimacy in their same-sex friendships as much as girls do (see Way, 1998), are as relationally oriented as girls are during middle and late adolescence(see Chapter Two, this volume), and are acutely attuned to the emotional complexities in their male friendships (Chu, 2004). These qualitative findings suggest that the questionnaire-based research, which emphasizes the "activity" orientation of boys' friendships, does not fully capture the experience of friendships among adolescents. Although it may be the case that girls are more likely than boys to report having intimate same-sex friendships, girls may not be more likely than boys to desire intimate same-sex friendships or to be relationally oriented. These qualitative findings do not pose a challenge to the theories of relationship (that is, those of Weiss [1974] or Sullivan [1953]) that underlie the survey-based research on adolescent friendship or to the validity of the a priori dimensions examined in such research. What these findings do, however, is highlight the importance of understanding the ways in which a priori dimensions such as intimacy, trust, and support are experienced by the adolescents themselves and the need to explore what adolescents desire in their friendships as well as what they have. Such processes are easily captured using qualitative methods of research.

In addition to the problem of method (that is, the overreliance on survey-based methods in friendship research), a sampling problem has also

been persistent in the friendship research. The vast majority of theory and research on adolescent friendships is based on samples of white, middle class adolescents. Yet studies of friendships with ethnic-minority youth repeatedly suggest that findings based on white, middle-class, suburban adolescents cannot be generalized to all youth. In their study of early and middle adolescents' friendships, Jones, Costin, and Ricard (1994) found that African American males were more likely to reveal their personal thoughts and feelings to male friends than were European American males. Furthermore, European American adolescents were the only ones who revealed significant gender differences in levels of self-disclosure in their friendships. Similarly, DuBois and Hirsch (1990) found, in their study of black and white junior high school children, that white girls reported having significantly more supportive friendships than white boys did. No gender difference in friendship support, however, was detected among the black students. They also found that black boys were more likely to have intimate conversations with their best friends than were white boys, whereas no differences were found between black and white girls. Finally, Gallagher and Busch-Rossnagel (1991) found in their study of adolescent girls that middle-class white and black girls were more likely to disclose their beliefs and attitudes to their close friends than were white or black girls from low-income families. In our survey-based research with low-income, urban adolescents, African American and Latino adolescents reported higher levels of friendship support than Asian American adolescents did. Furthermore, a gender difference in support from friends was evident only among the Latino adolescents, not among the African American or Asian American adolescents (Way and Chen, 2000). These studies not only underscore the dangers of generalizing about friendships based on data derived from white, middle-class adolescents, but also raise questions about differences across ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) in the experiences of intimacy and support in friendships.

A limitation of friendship studies of ethnic-minority adolescents, however, is that they have typically compared ethnic-minority adolescents to white, middle-class youth, implicitly suggesting that this latter group should be the norm from which to compare the former group. Such comparisons, at the very least, obscure the variation within each group. The experiences among youth of color and youth from low-income, urban families clearly need to be understood in their own right (see Gaines, 1997).

The Connections Study

In response to these limitations in the friendship research, this study sought to explore three questions using qualitative methods: (1) How do African American, Latino, and Asian American adolescents from low-income, urban families experience closeness in their nonfamilial friendships? (2) How do these experiences change from middle to late adolescence? and (3) How

does the experience of close friendship vary by gender and ethnicity? The reason we chose to focus on nonfamilial friendships is that our qualitative research has consistently indicated that although friendship networks often include cousins and siblings, the closest friendships of urban adolescents are more likely to be nonfamilial peers than familial peers (Way, 1998).

The intent of our study was to generate theory on the friendships of adolescents rather than to test theory. Testing existing theories of friendship development (for example, Sullivan [1953] or Selman [1980]) with a population that has rarely been included in developmental studies of friendships seemed premature. We were interested in understanding how urban adolescents experienced their friendships and how their stories contributed to the development of theory on adolescent friendships and not how these adolescents fit into theories that were developed primarily on another population of adolescents.

Participants. The sample encompassed sixty adolescents (thirty-two girls and twenty-eight boys) who were, on average, 14.4 years of age during the first wave of data collection. The students were ethnically diverse, with twenty-one (35.5 percent) black (primarily African American), twenty-five (42.2 percent) Latino (primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican), eleven (17.7 percent) Asian American (almost exclusively Chinese American), and three (4.8 percent) of mixed racial/ethnic descent. The ethnic diversity of the sample reflected the larger population of the school. Most of the parents of the participants did not go beyond a high school education (77.1 percent), and only 28 percent of the adolescents came from two-parent households. All of these adolescents attended a public high school located in a large northeastern city. The students in the school in which the study took place consisted predominantly of students from low-income families, with 90 percent qualifying for federal assistance through the free lunch program. The sixty participants in the study were part of a larger quantitative study of friendships conducted from 1996 to 2000. The sample from the larger study represented an 85 percent response rate of the freshman class in the high school. The sixty participants in our study were students who were interviewed each year for the first four years of the project. They were selected based on our goal of having a representative sample of girls and boys and African Americans, Latinos, and Asian American students that reflected the student body in the school. They did not differ significantly on any demographic or friendship variable from those in the larger study.

Procedures. Qualitative data were collected during the fall semesters of 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999. During the first year of the study, students were recruited from mainstream English classes to ensure that study participants were fluent English speakers. Approximately 85 percent of the students in the school were in mainstream English classes. Informed consent from parents and students was obtained. The parental consent forms were translated into Spanish and Chinese, the two languages spoken most commonly by non-English-speaking parents. The interviews were held during

the school day, lasted approximately two hours, and took place in empty classrooms or offices in which confidentiality could be ensured. The interviews were conducted each year by an ethnically diverse group of graduate students in psychology who had been extensively trained in interviewing techniques. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. Students were paid between ten dollars (Time 1) and forty dollars (Time 4) for their participation.

Each student participated in a series of four one-to-one semistructured interviews (one each year for four years) in which they were asked to focus on their relationships with their friends. We probed about friends who were close as well as those who were not close with the aim of understanding why particular friends were considered close or not close. The interview protocol included questions such as: "How would you describe your close friendships?" "How do you think your close friendships have changed over time?" and "How do you think your friendship with your best friend(s) is different from your friendship with your other friends?" Although each interview included a standard set of questions, follow-up questions varied across interviews to capture the adolescents' own ways of describing their friendships.

Data Analysis. We used a process of open coding (see Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to generate themes from the data. Four data analysts first read through the entire set of interviews (240 total interviews) and created narrative summaries that condensed the interview material while retaining the essence of the stories being told by the adolescents (see Miller, 1988). Each narrative summary was read independently by the data analysts who looked for themes in the summaries (for example, distrusting peers). A theme retained for further analysis had to be identified as a theme by at least three of the four data analysts independently in any one year of the study. Once themes were generated and agreed on, each data analyst returned to the original interviews and noted in what year in the project and where in the interview itself these themes emerged. They also took note of how the themes changed over time during the four years of the study.

Our thematic analysis indicated that trust formed the root of the experience of closeness with friends; it was the reason the adolescents felt close to their friends. Yet like the root of a tree that extends in many directions, there were multiple ways of experiencing trust and closeness. For most of the adolescents, the experience of trust and closeness involved sharing secrets, sharing money, protecting each other from harm, receiving and providing assistance with daily tasks, and integrating their friends and family members. These themes often varied by gender, age, and ethnicity, with boys, for example, emphasizing sharing money in their close friendships more than girls. The data also indicated that close friendships were embedded in a context of distrust of peers. "You can't trust anybody" was a common refrain heard among the adolescents when asked about their peers. The combination of themes of trust and distrust suggested a type of relational

resilience (Way, 2004) among the adolescents. In the following pages, we describe these themes in more detail and the ways in which their interviews revealed resilience in relationships.

The Experience of Closeness. Among the adolescents in our studies, there were five ways in which adolescents experienced closeness and trust in their close friendships.

Sharing Secrets. As predicted from the theoretical and research literature, the vast majority of the adolescent girls and boys spoke with great passion and conviction about their ability to share "everything" with their friends. When asked what makes her feel close to her best friend, Amanda says, "She keeps everything a secret, whatever I tell her." Maria says her best friend knows her "like the back of their hands. . . . I can talk to her about anything, like if I call her, I'm hysterically crying or something just happened or whatever . . . and maybe she'll be doing something, she'll stop doing that to come and talk to me and to help me." Brian says in response to a similar question, "I tell [my best friends] anything about me and I know they won't tell anybody else unless I tell them to." A key part of Justin's friendship is the mutuality: "He [his best friend] could just tell me anything and I could tell him anything." When asked to define a best friend, Justin says, "Like I always know everything about him. . . . We always chill, like we don't hide secrets from each other." When asked to explain why he feels close to his friends, Malcolm says, "If I'm having problems at home, they'll like counsel me, I just trust them with anything, like deep secrets, anything."

In order to find out whether friends could be trusted with deep secrets, girls in particular often put their friends through "trust tests," which involved providing confidential information and seeing "if it gets out." When Gabriele is asked how an "acquaintance" becomes a friend, this conversation ensued:

GABRIELE: I give them a test. I start them off with something personal and I see if they tell somebody. That just tells me which level I will put them in. Like my best friend, I told her like family problems and stuff, she never told nobody.

INTERVIEWER: How does one go from the friend level to the best friend level?

GABRIELE: There's another test there too. See I tell 'em something personal but not that personal. I will say something that I don't want my aunt to know and then I see if they tell her, and if they don't tell her, they go to the next level.

Trust tests appeared to help girls decide who was trustworthy among their seemingly untrustworthy peers.

Sharing secrets was one of the primary ways in which the adolescents trusted and felt close to their friends. In contrast to previous research and

to cultural stereotypes of boys' and girls' friendships, there were no gender differences in the emphasis on shared secrets. Although trust tests were more common among the girls than the boys, boys were as likely as girls to indicate that they felt close to their friends because they could trust their friends with their "deep[est] secrets."

There were, however, age differences in the content of shared secrets. For example, secrets during the first year of the study might include revealing who someone has a crush on or how someone did on a academic test. By the fourth year, secrets focused more on conflicts in romantic relationships or at home. As the adolescents grew older, the content of their secrets grew seemingly more complex.

Sharing Money. Like a mantra, the adolescents, particularly the boys, indicated that they trusted their close friends to share their secrets and "hold" their money. Knowing that a friend will keep their money and not spend it or steal it was an important way in which adolescents trusted and felt close to their friends. When Randall is asked, "In what ways do you trust your friends?" he responds, "I trust them to hold my money. . . . If I lend them money, they'll pay me back." When Nathan is asked how his best friend is different from his friends who are less close, he says:

NATHAN: I could leave any amount of money with him. He gave me money, I give him money. If I need something, he gives it to me, I give it to him [if he needs something]. . . .
INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about a time that you trusted your best friend?
NATHAN: [On Friday.] He asked me if he could borrow fifty dollars and he gave it back to me by Monday. He gave me back seventy-five. He was, like, thanks for lending it to him. He gave me back extra.

Nicole says when asked about a recent time that she trusted her best friend: "We went shopping and I put money in her pocket, but I forgot about how much I had given her. And then she gave me the right amount back. . . ." Mark claims that the way he knows he can trust his friend is that if "I give them a stack of money to hold, they wouldn't be, like, 'oh well I lost it.' . . . They would like keep it in a safe spot and wouldn't tell anybody that they are holding that money for me." When Mike is asked why he feels close to his best friends, he says, "If I lend them money, I usually don't have to ask them for the money, usually get it back, I don't even have to ask for it." In addition to knowing that friends would pay them back, the adolescents emphasized their willingness to loan money to their friends.

Not only were there gender differences in this theme, with boys more likely than girls to emphasize sharing money; there were also age differences. As the adolescents grew older they became less likely to emphasize the sharing of money in discussions of their close friends; with more cognitive and

relational sophistication, their definition and experience of closeness became more emotionally and less materially based. This pattern is supported by our quantitative-based research that indicated a sharp increase over time in boys' reports of intimate self-disclosure in their male friendships from middle to late adolescence (Way and Greene, under review).

Protection from Harm. Another way that the adolescent boys, in particular, experienced trust and closeness with their friends was through the protection of each other in fights. The boys repeatedly discussed the importance of knowing that their friends will protect them in fights and that they will, in turn, protect their friends. When Raphael is asked by his interviewer, "What could you trust with your friends?" he says: "Let's just say I had a big fight, I got beat up, I had, like, five guys against me, they'll come and they'll help me out." When Akil is asked why he trusts his best friend, he says, "You get into a fight with somebody else, [my best friend] will tell me to calm down, chill. . . . Like when someone jumps me, he will help me." He also says he feels close to his friend because he knows that he would protect him in a fight.

Armondo discussed how his bond with his friends was enhanced through their mutual protection. He described a time when he and his three male friends were confronted by another group of boys who wanted to fight them. He explained to his interviewer how it was up to him to protect his friends: "And I'm behind my friend. . . . If something happened to him where it was, like, he couldn't react fast enough and I was behind him, it would have been up to me to . . . protect him and help him out." Had he not protected his friend, Armondo says he would have been isolated by his friends: "If something had happened and I didn't do anything, I'm just standing like a big dummy, you know, I mean, none of them would ever want to hang out with me again."

 Protecting each other was not only about backing each other up in fights, but also about helping each other calm down, thus preventing a fight. Chris, a Puerto Rican student who was sixteen years old at the time of the interview, emphasized how his best friend, Scott, helped him stay out of trouble. For him, this was a crucial aspect of why they were best friends:

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

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

INTERVIEWER: What do you not like about this friendship?
JORGE: That he smokes weed and that he sells drugs. Well I'm trying to change him. He's trying to stop 'cause I told him. I be talking to him and he's trying to get off drugs and smoke.

The stories of mutual protection between boys and their friends were striking in their vulnerability. However, they did not emphasize, as one might expect based on stereotypes of boys, their own protection of their friends. They provided stories of both being protected and of protecting their friends, suggesting a comfort in the interdependency of their friendships.

The theme of protection from harm was evident during each year of the interviews. However, similar to the theme of shared secrets, the type of protection provided or received shifted over time. Protection from harm primarily involved physical fights ("having each other's back") during the first few years of the study, but during late adolescence, it expanded to include protecting each other from emotional harm. Boys such as Chris spoke about trying to soften the emotional impact of being "disrespected" or betrayed by their peers. Similar to the other themes, the change over time in the theme of mutual protection suggested that as the boys grew older, their friendships became more emotionally laden and nuanced.

Providing and Receiving Help. Providing and receiving help from friends was another way that adolescents experienced trust and closeness with their friends. This theme was heard during each year of the interview and did not vary in form or content over time. For example, Markia explains why her best friend is her best friend: "She helps me out like when I need her to babysit. I could call her and if I need her to watch the baby for a minute, two, she'll take him for the whole day. . . . She helps me out with him. She's like, 'Well if you ever need something just tell me.' Just say 'I'm low on Pampers,' she will come through with a box of Pampers, you know even if I don't need anything, she'll still bring it. You know I love her for that."

Although there were no gender or age differences in this theme, there were ethnic differences in the type of tasks with which friends helped each other. For the Asian American adolescents exclusively, helping with homework was the focus of their discussions of close friendships, appearing to provide them with a genuine sense of closeness with their friends. When Sam, a Chinese American adolescent, is asked what he likes about his best friends, he replies that he and his friends help each other with homework assignments and tests. He also indicates that he can share his most intimate secrets with his best friends and trusts them to "hold his money." His experience of closeness resonates with the other boys in the sample who do not share his ethnic heritage, but his discussion of helping with homework makes his responses stand apart from his non-Asian peers. While the African American and Latino adolescents were equally likely to emphasize the importance of mutual assistance in their friendships, the content of this assistance was not typically focused on homework.

The Family-Friend Connection. A theme that was heard exclusively among the African American and Latino adolescents was that friends were close *because* they knew each other's families. Anthony's aunt (his primary caretaker) used to babysit Pedro, his best friend. His other best friend's mom is the best friend of his aunt. The mother of Minda's best friend is the best friend of her mother. Michael says about his best friend, "Since we were real small I have known his whole family, he knows everybody in my house, we just walk over to his crib, open his fridge without asking or something, that's how long we've know each other." Ken says he is close with his best friend's family and that is a large part of what makes the friendship special. When asked to define a best friend, Ken says, "Like I always know everything about him, I'm close with his family, he is close to my family." Farouk says when asked what makes him close to his best friend, "Um, basically 'cause he knows my family, he knows my sisters, my mom, my dad. I know his mom, his dad, we know where we each other live." Armondo says, "If you know somebody's parents, then you know how far the trust can be stretched."

Best friends, who were rarely related by blood, were often referred to as brothers, sisters, or cousins. The African American and Latino adolescents incorporated their nonfamilial friendships into their family by considering their friends to be "fictive kin" (Stack, 1974). The integration of family and friends was both a way of being close with their friends and a context in which their close friendships were embedded. Making friends into fictive kin appeared to create a safe space in which their close friendships could thrive.

The Context of Distrust. The adolescents in our study described a world in which friendships are not only possible but are key relationships in their lives. Their friendships are often the relationships about which they feel most passionate and which they will go to great lengths to maintain over time. Yet these intimate friendships exist within a context of peers who will "try to take over you and take you for everything you've got and step on you." In response to a question about the other students in the school, Anthony says, "I don't trust [them], I trust me, myself, and I. That's the way I am. I trust nobody." Although across all the years of the study, he has a male best friend in whom he confides and to whom he feels close, his perception of his peers in general involves much mistrust. Richard says about his male peers, "Can't trust anybody nowadays. They are trying to scam you, or scheme, or talk about you." Richard admits that although he has never directly experienced these types of betrayals from his male peers, he "know[s] what most of [them] are like."

During the first- and second-year interviews, in particular, distrust seemed to be a cliché that the adolescents perpetuated among themselves but did not truly represent their feelings about their peers. Yet by the third- and fourth-year interviews, the adolescents' feelings of distrust seemed more genuine as they described specific friends who betrayed them and thus led them to trust no one. While stories of love and affection for close friends

were still evident in these later interviews, stories of betrayal and distrust began to dominate the interviews. The adolescents, particularly the boys, increasingly believed that there were fewer options for close same-sex friendships than when they were younger (see Way, 1998).

These distrustful beliefs about peers stemmed not only from actual experiences of betrayal and deceit but also from messages from parents or other family members. Ken, a freshman, says, " 'Can't trust nobody.' That's what my mother always used to say." He claims again in his sophomore year, "Can't trust everybody. . . . My mother always told me, 'You gotta watch out who you hang out with.'" After talking at length about her best friend and the trust she has with her, Anna says, "I think that since my mother always puts in my brain, like, don't trust anybody, like that always stays in the back of my mind and I feel that I can't trust [my friends]—like I can't trust anybody because you never know when they are gonna turn on you." Consistent with research on social trust that finds that adults from disadvantaged, oppressed communities are often less trusting of others than adults from more economically and politically advantaged groups (Smith, 1997; Uslaner, 2002), our data indicated that the families of the adolescents in our study often warned these adolescents about the dangers of trusting others, particularly those who were not part of their families.

While girls and boys reported distrusting their peers, there were gender differences regarding whom they reported distrusting. Girls were much more likely to indicate that their distrust was primarily, if not exclusively, of their female peers, while boys were more likely to indicate that they trusted neither boys nor girls. Girls, in fact, often spoke about how they could trust boys more than girls and seemed at times to idealize their friendships with boys. When asked to compare her male friendships with her female friendships, Monique says, "Well, in a way, I think I'm closer to guy friends than girls 'cause girls stab you in your back and you can't really talk to them that much because they spread rumors around about you." Anna says, "I prefer hanging out with guys because I think they won't talk about you. . . . I only tell my best [female] friend like secrets and stuff but with boys it's like a friendship. Like we all go in groups to the movies and we hang out." Elizabeth says in her freshmen year, "To me I feel more comfortable with the guys than the girls because the girls are, like, always talking about other girls. This girl did this, this girl did that. . . . The girls might talk about one certain girl that they can't stand or something and I might know her."

Elizabeth continues this theme in her sophomore year interview: "I get along with boys more because girls . . . like, they are fake. . . . You're not yourself it's, like, you're trying to be somebody you're not. You think you're too good for anybody. . . . A lot of girls are jealous 'cause of some stupid reason and they want to go and get all up in your face and they want to fight you and I don't want to go through that. So I'll just stay hanging out with the guys."

In her junior year interview, Mara says:

MARA: I find it easier to talk to guys. . . . It's easier 'cause they don't talk much or sometimes you don't want people to give opinions or judge, you just want to tell someone and they always listen. . . . You just have someone to tell and then they might give you advice. I find it easier to talk to guys. . . .
INTERVIEWER: And who are your friends who are guys?
MARA: Roger . . . we're not that close anymore and right now he asks me for homework and I don't talk to him much. Other guys are basically the same we don't really talk.
INTERVIEWER: But you find it easier to talk to guys?
MARA: Yeah much easier. Girls are jealous. I hate jealousy. . . .

The striking aspect of these narratives was that in the same breath that girls spoke about trusting boys more than girls, they spoke about their close relationships with their best *girl* friends and their lack of intimate communication with boys. Similar to the theme of distrust of peers, the girls appeared to maintain clichés or cultural scripts (see Tolman, 2002) about other girls, but these clichés did not appear to have a negative impact on their abilities to maintain close, intimate female friendships. In addition, as is evident from Mara's comments, an idealization of boys did not appear to result in close male friendships.

The theme of distrust of peers was pervasive among the adolescents and suggested that the cultural cliché that girls, in particular, are untrustworthy continues to hold weight in the lives of adolescents. Yet the remarkable element of these stories was that they were embedded in stories of close and trusting nonfamilial same-sex friendships. This pattern suggests a type of "relational resilience" (Way, 2004) in which adolescents continue to maintain healthy and supportive nonfamilial friendships despite the seemingly strong pressures from home (such as parents and siblings) and school (such as peers and teachers) to distrust others, particularly nonfamilial peers. This relational resilience was evident throughout the four years of the study, and it was particularly evident during late adolescence when adolescents both reported strong feelings of distrust of others and at the same time reported experiencing high levels of trust and closeness in their same-sex, nonfamilial friendships.

Discussion

Our findings indicated that the key components of close friendships (trust, intimate self-disclosure, and emotional support) that have been commonly noted in theoretical descriptions of adolescent friendships as well as in previous research on white, middle-class adolescents were evident in the close friendships of the ethnic-minority, low-income, urban adolescents as well. Yet our data suggests that the experience of these dimensions vary by context. For example, while most theory and research on friendships indicate

that intimate self-disclosure is an important component of close friendships for adolescents, research with white, middle-class adolescents finds this pattern to be more evident and more important among girls than among boys (see Chapter One, this volume). Our findings with ethnic-minority, low-income, urban adolescents, however, indicate that boys were as likely as girls to emphasize the importance of shared secrets or intimate self-disclosure in their friendships. Activities like playing video games or basketball were common in the boys' and girls' friendships in our study, but were not discussed as reasons for why or how they felt close to their friends. It may be that gender differences in secret sharing or self-disclosure are not as apparent in middle or older adolescents, the focus of this study, as they are during early adolescence, the focus of much of the previous research, due to late adolescents' increased involvement in romantic relationships and thus increased desire and inclinations to share their experiences with their close friends (see Chapter Two, this volume; Hartup, 1993).

The lack of gender difference, however, may also stem from the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the adolescents in the study. In studies comparing African American youth with white youth, gender differences in friendship intimacy or support have been detected only among white youth (Jones, Costin, and Ricard, 1994; DuBois and Hirsch, 1990). Furthermore, research has indicated that black adolescent boys are more likely to report intimacy in their friendships than are white adolescent boys (DuBois and Hirsch, 1990). Thus, the lack of gender differences in our sample may be due to higher levels of intimacy experienced by the boys in the current sample than by the white, middle-class boys who form the majority of boys in previous studies. A reason for this high level of intimacy or self-disclosure among the boys in this study may be due to the strong emphasis on interdependency that is typical of many African American, Latino, and Asian American families (Chao, 2000; Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam, 1999; Townsend, 1998; Hines and Boyd-Franklin, 1990). An interdependent value system, in which adolescents are made acutely aware of the need for mutually supportive relationships, may increase the likelihood of self-disclosure and intimacy among friends. Although nonfamilial friendships may not be encouraged by family members (as is the case in this study), the relational skills acquired as a result of an interdependent value system may extend to relationships outside the family. Understanding how cultural contexts shape the experience of emotional intimacy is a crucial next step for friendship research.

In addition to sharing secrets, sharing money was another important component of close friendships particularly among the boys. Although material support is typically considered a component of social support, it has rarely been examined as a component of trust and closeness in the friendships of adolescents. It is unclear whether this pattern of shared money is unique to adolescents from low-income communities, where money and material items are not as readily available as in more affluent communities.

The emphasis on knowing that their friends would pay them back is likely influenced by the extent to which one needs the money to be paid back. It is also not clear why this theme was more evident in the boys' interviews than in the girls' interviews or why this theme was less evident in the interviews in the later years than in the early years. Loaning or borrowing money may be another way, in addition to physical protection in fights, to be protected or to protect friends in need. The free exchange of money may be experienced, particularly by the boys, as consistent with the belief that their friends are there for them when they need them. This reliance on material proof of their friends' support may become less necessary, however, as boys and girls enter late adolescence and focus more on the emotional elements of their friendships.

Receiving and providing protection from physical and emotional harm was also a part the experience of closeness for the boys in the study. The importance of protection in the friendships of children and adolescents has been noted previously (Azmitia, Kamprath, and Linnet, 1998) and is considered more important in boys' friendships than in girls' friendships (see Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Yet the ways in which protection is experienced has been rarely discussed. The boys in this study repeatedly expressed their desire to be protected by and to protect their best friend from harm. The fact that boys were more likely than girls to report this theme could reflect a greater likelihood for boys, compared to girls, to get into physical fights. Furthermore, providing "protection" is consistent with conventions of mainstream masculinity to which boys seek to adhere (see Stevenson, 2004). Strikingly, however, the boys' emphasis on receiving protection from their friends is not a part of these conventions of masculinity and is, in fact, often feminized and associated with the needs and desires of girls and women. In contrast to the image of the autonomous and independent "skill-oriented" adolescent boy evident in popular culture and in much of the social sciences, the boys in our sample strongly valued their mutually dependent relationships with their male friends. These findings are consistent with other research findings that reveal the relational orientation of adolescent boys during middle and late adolescence (see Chapters One and Two, this volume).

In addition, the interviews suggested that providing and receiving help with daily tasks enhanced feelings of trust and closeness among friends. The importance of providing instrumental aid has been noted throughout the friendship research (see Savin-Williams and Berndt, 1990, for a review). Our study suggested, however, ethnic differences in the type of aid provided, with Asian American youth emphasizing homework assistance and the African American and Latino youth emphasizing nonacademic types of assistance, such as doing chores and errands. Exploring the content of this friendship provision (providing assistance) revealed the ways in which the cultural context infiltrates the experience of friendships. Had we simply assessed the frequency of this provision of friendship, we would not have

found ethnic differences and would have thus overlooked the ways in which the experience of this provision varies by cultural context.

The fifth and final theme related to the experience of trust and closeness was the integration of family and friend networks, a theme that has also been repeatedly noted in previous research (Townsend, 1998; Hines and Boyd-Franklin, 1990; Kerns, 1994; Armsden and Greenberg, 1987). Our interview data suggested that friendships among African American and Latino youth were formed and maintained over time precisely because friends became family members and family members knew their friends. Thus, adolescents felt closer to and more likely to trust their friends. The absence of this theme among the Asian American youth is likely due to multiple factors, including the employment patterns of the Asian American parents, which in our sample often consisted of factory jobs that left little time for the parents to be at home with their children. Thus, there were few opportunities for the Asian American adolescents to get to know their friends' families. In addition, Asian American adolescent participants often reported being discouraged by their parents from spending time with their friends outside school. This discouragement may decrease the opportunities to blend friends with family. Furthermore, there may be less emphasis on fictive kinship in Asian American communities, such as the Chinese community, than in African American or Latino communities.

The close friendships of the adolescents in our studies, however, were embedded in a context of distrust. Although most of the adolescents had close and intimate friendships at some point during the study, they typically described their peers as untrustworthy and deceitful, and these negative feelings seemed to intensify over time. Reasons for this mistrust may lie in experiences of racism and harassment that haunt the daily lives of urban, low-income, ethnic-minority youth (see Rosenbloom and Way, 2004). They may also emanate from the urban school context in which principals, teachers, and students distrust one another in a low-resource environment where stress levels are high and rewards are few (Epstein and Karweit, 1983). Much has been written about the ways in which contexts with few resources and high levels of discrimination, stress, and anxiety often produce low levels of social trust among adults (Smith, 1997). The same processes that are evident among adults may also be true of adolescents.

Yet what is notable about this pattern of distrust was that it did not seem to prevent close, trusting nonfamilial friendships from flourishing. The adolescents seemed resilient in their ability to maintain friendships in the midst of strong pressures within the family and school contexts discouraging nonfamilial friendships. It may be that considering friends as fictive kin allowed adolescents to cross the barrier of mistrust by having close friends become part of their families. Alternatively, the mistrust of peers may enhance the closeness experienced between friends. An antagonistic outsider may lead adolescents to appreciate their close friendships even more than if the contrast did not exist.

Remarkably, however, both girls and boys in our study perceive boys to be more trustworthy than girls. Yet, similar to the pattern of distrusting all peers but having close friendships with peers, this trust for the boys by the girls did not translate into close friendships with boys. The girls typically had close friendships only with their female peers. Numerous questions are raised by these findings, including why the girls believed that boys were more trustworthy than the girls. Clearly the stereotype of the "catty" girl who gossips and betrays others (see Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Brown, Way, and Duff, 1999) has infiltrated the minds of the girls and boys in our study. However, it is unclear why the girls idealized boys since they knew, often from firsthand experience, that boys betray them as well. Research on this topic has typically focused on the preference for same-sex peers (see Clark, 1989; Leaper, 1994) or the association between romantic partners and friendships (Connolly, Furman, and Konarski, 2000). Our study suggests that it is important to know not only which adolescents are more likely to have opposite-sex friendships than others (see Bukowski, Gauze, Hoza, and Newcomb, 1993), but also how dominant images and beliefs about opposite-sex peers influence same-sex friendships and vice versa.

Finally, the interviews indicated that as adolescents grow older, they experience more emotionally complex and emotionally laden friendships. They also grow more wary and cautious of their peers. This increase in both emotional complexity and distrust of peers over time suggests that the development of friendships for the adolescents in our study involved both gains and losses—gains in emotional complexity and losses of faith and trust in their peers as a whole. It is likely that the gains are due at least in part to cognitive maturity during adolescence. The reasons for the losses, however, are less clear. An increase in cognitive maturity may correspond with a harsher, and perhaps more realistic, view of the world. In addition, as urban, low-income, ethnic-minority adolescents grow older, they experience more discrimination (see Rosenbloom and Way, 2004), and these experiences may significantly decrease their sense of trust in others.

The findings of our study of ethnic-minority, low-income, urban adolescents point not only to the ways in which the experience of close friendships varies by gender, ethnicity, and age, but also to the ways in which the psychological (that is, the belief that you cannot trust anyone) and physical space or environment surrounding close friendships shape these relationships. Understanding the psychological and physical context of close friendships allows a better grasp of the meaning of these relationships for the adolescents themselves. Exploring how close friendship patterns and psychological contexts interact or vary by cultural context (gender, age, ethnicity, SES) and change over time is key to advancing our knowledge of the development of adolescent friendships. It is also key to the development of theory on friendship development. Existing theories of friendship development (see Sullivan, 1953; Selman, 1980; Youniss and Smollar, 1985) do not adequately take into account the diversity of experience among adolescents

and leave open the question of how relevant these theories are to the lives of an increasingly diverse population of adolescents. If there are no gender differences in the levels of intimacy or the extent to which intimacy is desired in the friendships of African American, Latino, and Asian American adolescents, the conversation about girls' and boys' experiences of friendship during adolescence changes dramatically. No longer can the stereotype regarding boys' activity-oriented and girls' intimacy-oriented friendships persist (even though it may be continue to be true for one particular group of adolescents). Listening to adolescents who come from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic communities forces the background (that is, the cultural context) to become foreground and draws attention to the ways in which the experiences of friendships are firmly embedded in, influenced by, and shape the contexts in which they exist.

References

Armsden, G. C., and Greenberg, M. T. "The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment: Individual Differences and Their Relationship to Psychological Well Being in Adolescence." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* 1987, *16,* 427–454.

Azmitia, M., Kamprath, N., and Linnet, J. "Intimacy and Conflict: The Dynamics of Boys' and Girls' Friendships During Middle Childhood and Early Adolescence." In L. Meyer and others (eds.), *Making Friends: The Influences of Culture and Development.* Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 1998.

Belle, D. "Gender Differences in Children's Social Networks and Supports." In D. Belle (ed.), *Children's Social Networks and Social Supports.* New York: Wiley, 1989.

Brown, L. M., and Gilligan, C. *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Brown, L. M., Way, N., and Duff, J. "The Others in My I: Adolescent Girls' Friendships and Peer Relations." In N. Johnson, M. Roberts, and J. Worell (eds.), *Beyond Appearances: A New Look at Adolescent Girls.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press, 1999.

Buhrmester, D., and Furman, W. "The Development of Companionship and Intimacy." *Child Development,* 1987, *58,* 1101–1113.

Bukowski, W. M., Gauze, C., Hoza, B., and Newcomb, A. F. "Differences and Consistency Between Same-Sex and Other-Sex Relationships During Early Adolescence." *Developmental Psychology,* 1993, *29,* 255–263.

Bukowski, W. M., Newcomb, A. F., and Hartup, W. (eds.). *The Company They Keep: Friendship in Childhood and Adolescence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Chao, R. "Cultural Explanations for the Role of Parenting in the School Success of Asian American Children." In R. Taylor and M. Wang (eds.), *Resilience Across Contexts: Family, Work, Culture, and Community.* Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2000.

Chu, J. Y. "A Relational Perspective on Adolescent Boys' Identity Development. In N. Way and J. Y. Chu (eds.), *Adolescent Boys: Exploring Diverse Cultures of Boyhood.* New York: New York University Press, 2004.

Clark, M. L. "Friendships and Peer Relations in Black Adolescents." In R. L. Jones (ed.), *Black Adolescents.* Berkeley, Calif.: Cobb and Henry, 1989.

Connolly, J., Furman, W., and Konarski, R. "The Role of Peers in the Emergence of Heterosexual Romantic Relationships in Adolescence." *Child Development,* 2000, *71,* 1395–1408.

DuBois, D. L., and Hirsch, B. J. "School and Neighborhood Friendship Patterns of Blacks and Whites in Early Adolescence." *Child Development,* 1990, *61,* 524–536.

Epstein, J. L., and Karweit, N. *Friends in School: Patterns of Selection and Influence in Secondary Schools.* New York: Academic Press, 1983.

Fuligni, A., Tseng, V., and Lam, M. "Attitudes Toward Family Obligations Among American Adolescents with Asian, Latin American, and European Backgrounds." *Child Development,* 1999, *70,* 1030–1044.

Furman, W., and Buhrmester, D. "Children's Perceptions of the Personal Relationships in Their Social Networks." *Developmental Psychology,* 1985, *21,* 1016–1024.

Furman, W., and Robbins, P. "What's the Point? Issues in the Selection of Treatment Objectives." In B. H. Schneider, K. H. Rubin, and J. E. Ledingham (eds.), *Children's Peer Relationships: Issues in Assessment and Intervention.* New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985.

Gaines, S. *Culture, Ethnicity, and Personal Relationship Processes.* London: Routledge, 1997.

Gallagher, C., and Busch-Rossnagel, N. A. "Self-Disclosure and Social Support in the Relationships of Black and White Female Adolescents." Poster presented at Society for Research on Child Development, Seattle, Wash., Mar. 1991.

Hartup, W. "Adolescents and Their Friends." In B. Larsen (ed.), *Close Friendships in Adolescence.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Hines, P., and Boyd-Franklin, N. "Black Families." In M. McGoldric, J. McPearce, and J. Giordano (eds.), *Ethnicity in Family Therapy.* New York: Guilford Press, 1990.

Jones, D. C., Costin, S. E., and Ricard, R. J. "Ethnic and Sex Differences in Best-Friendship Characteristics Among African American, Mexican American, and European American Adolescents." Poster session presented at the meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescents, San Diego, Feb. 1994.

Kerns, K. A. "A Longitudinal Examination of Links Between Mother-Child Attachments and Children's Friendships in Early Childhood." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,* 1994, *11,* 379–381.

Leaper, C. "Exploring the Consequences of Gender Segregation on Social Relationships." In C. Leaper (ed.), *Childhood Gender Segregation: Causes and Consequences.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.

Miller, B. "Adolescent Friendships: A Pilot Study." Unpublished qualifying paper. Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1988.

Rosenbloom, S., and Way, N. "Experiences of Discrimination Among African American, Asian American, and Latino Adolescents in an Urban High School." *Youth and Society,* 2004, *35*(4), 420–451.

Savin-Williams, R. C., and Berndt, T. J. "Friendship and Peer Relations." In S. Feldman and G. R. Elliot (eds.), *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Selman, R. L. *The Growth of Interpersonal Understanding: Development and Clinical Analysis.* Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1980.

Smith, T. "Factors Related to Misanthropy in Contemporary American Society." *Social Science Research,* 1997, *26,* 170–196.

Stack, C. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community.* New York: HarperCollins, 1974.

Stevenson, H. "Boys in Men's Clothing: Racial Socialization and Neighborhood Safety as Buffers to Hypervulnerability in African American Adolescent Males." In N. Way and J. Y. Chu (eds.), *Adolescent Boys: Exploring Diverse Cultures of Boyhood.* New York: New York University Press, 2004.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. M. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.* Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1990.

Sullivan, H. S. *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry.* New York: Norton, 1953.

Tolman, D. *The Dilemmas of Desire.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Townsend, B. L. "Social Friendships and Networks Among African American Children and Youth." In L. Meyer, H. Park, M. Genot-Scheyer, I. Schwarz, and B. Harry (eds.), *Making Friends: The Influences of Culture and Development.* Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 1998.

Uslaner, E. M. *The Moral Foundations of Trust.* Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Way, N. *Everyday Courage: The Lives and Stories of Urban Teenagers.* New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Way, N. "Intimacy, Desire, and Distrust in the Friendships of Adolescent Boys." In N. Way and J. Chu (eds.), *Adolescent Boys: Exploring Diverse Cultures of Boyhood.* New York: New York University Press, 2004.

Way, N., and Chen, L. "The Characteristics, Quality, and Correlates of Friendships Among African American, Latino, and Asian American Adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent Research,* 2000, *15,* 274–301.

Way, N., and Greene, M. "Using Growth Curve Modeling to Understand the Trajectories of Friendships During Adolescence." Under review.

Way, N., and Pahl, K. "Friendship Patterns Among Urban Adolescent Boys: A Qualitative Account." In M. Kopala and L. Suzuki (eds.), *Using Qualitative Methods in Psychology.* Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1999.

Weiss, R. S. "The Provisions of Social Relationships." In Z. Rubin (ed.), *Doing unto Others.* Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974.

Youniss, J., and Smollar, J. *Adolescent Relations with Mothers, Fathers, and Friends.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

NIOBE WAY is professor of applied psychology at New York University.

RACHEL GINGOLD is a clinical psychologist in New Jersey.

MARIANA ROTENBERG is a doctoral student at Fordham University.

GEENA KURIAKOSE is a doctoral student at Fordham University.