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Small Laughs: Understanding Hope In Early Adolescent Girls

by

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For Joseph,

I want to dedicate this work to you. Without you, it would have been impossible. Your life gives mine purpose and direction. I will always be proud of you.

> “Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me... Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.”
> - Shel Silverstein

Abstract

Hope is tied to better outcomes across development; however, quantitative studies have shown that girls experience a significant decrease in their hope during early adolescence. Research that has been done on hope in early adolescence uses adult conceptualizations of hope and applies them to an adolescent context. This qualitative study sought to describe and understand the development and experience of hope for early adolescent girls experientially and conceptually. Photo-assisted interviews were conducted with four participants and transcripts were analyzed using Basic Interpretive Inquiry (Merriam, 2002). Experiences of hope common to participants suggested that hope has unique qualities during early adolescence for girls. The following four themes emerged: Experiential Hope, Hope and Identity, Hope in Relationships, and Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed. Implications for counseling and research, as well as directions for future research are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Hope is often colloquially understood as a construct important to youth, perhaps because foundations laid in early adolescence have the capacity to impact major future outcomes such as academic achievement, self concept development, and achievement motivation (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). In many ways, early adolescence is an inherently future-focused stage, just as hope is also most often thought of as a future focused concept. Early adolescence is a time in development that serves as a transition: from childhood to adulthood, towards what one is going to become. However, despite hope's familiar association with the stage of young adolescence, stresses experienced in early adolescence leave youth at risk for disengagement in both their present and their future (Hamburg, 1985). In this study, I explore how hope plays a role in the lives of early adolescent girls, in an attempt to contribute a deep and rich description to understandings of hope for this cohort.

Statement of the Problem

Hope has been described as a respite for stress (Dufault & Martochio, 1985) and a construct that "enables individuals to envision a future in which they are willing to participate" (Jevne, 1994, p. 8). Hope is consistently demonstrated to be a protective factor for early adolescents struggling with the challenges of development (e.g. Stoddard, McMorris & Sieving, 2011; Valle, Huebner & Sudo, 2006). Accordingly, hope in early adolescence can act as a sustaining force during difficult times of transition, while positively impacting development and later life

outcomes. Therefore, hope appears to be instrumental in early adolescent development.

Early adolescence is a time which breeds both possibility and uncertainty. The transitional developmental period of early adolescence marks a divergence from the carefree world of childhood. Some scholars have called it a "snapshot" in the lifespan (Schave & Schave, 1989), distinct from the period before and after it (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). As such, early adolescents have a unique worldview. For instance, research has shown that early adolescents have different cognitive processes, time perspectives, and psychosocial functioning (Manning, 1993; Vander Stoep, McCauley, Flynn & Stone, 2009) than children, older adolescents and adults. Early adolescence is also a foundational time for identity development (Erikson, 1982), which sets the stage for the development of the adult self.

Unfortunately, while early adolescence is a time of exploration of self and formation of personal identity, it can also be stressful. Young women are particularly vulnerable to the stress of the transition towards adolescence. As early adolescent girls take on new roles and begin to develop their adult identity, they have been shown to experience double the rates of depression as their same-aged male peers (Petersen, Sarigiani & Kennedy, 1991) and are faced with greater biological and social challenges (Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 2004). Early adolescence is a time of gender intensification (Galambos, Almeida & Petersen, 1990; Hill & Lynch, 1983) in which both genders begin to take on personality traits more commonly associated with their gender in the broader culture. Girls in

early adolescence consistently have more ruminative and less instrumental coping styles, and are less assertive than their male counterparts (Petersen et al., 1991). Strong media and social messages about femininity, together with pressure from parents and peers to conform, result in early adolescent girls becoming more likely to base their perceptions of themselves on how others treat them and to believe they are less capable to control certain outcomes in their lives, in comparison to their male peers (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990).

When employing a cognitive behavioural measure of hope, girls enter the period of early adolescence with higher hope than their male counterparts and their hope steadily decreases until they transition into adolescence proper (in Grade 10) with lower hope than boys of the same age (Heaven & Ciarocchi, 2008). This trajectory suggests that hope changes during early adolescence in girls, but does not provide any context as to how or why. The decrease in hope for early adolescent girls undoubtedly has impact. Hope has been tied to identity development in adolescents (Larsen & Larsen, 2004), and has also been shown to be a protective factor against adverse life outcomes, including depression, suicidality, teenage pregnancy, and drug use (Dori & Overholser, 1999; Schmid et al., 2011). Clearly, the apparent decrease in hope common during early adolescent development in girls is troubling.

What then, is hope? Hope can be thought of as a personal concept that allows an individual to bookmark one or many possible future outcomes in the novel of his or her life before the story has yet been written. Hope is future-oriented and always uncertain, but grounded in an individual's present experience.

Hope research has proliferated in recent years due in part to a range of studies identifying hope as an important factor in an individual's phenomenological experience and associated with a host of commonly valued outcomes (see Cheavens, Micheal & Snyder, 2005 for a review). In early adolescence, higher hope has been linked to enhanced educational attainment (Gilman, Dooley & Florrel, 2006; Schmid et al., 2011), greater life satisfaction (Gilman et al.), improved therapy outcomes (Howell, Jacobson & Larsen, 2013), and even lengthened life span of patients facing a diagnosis of cancer (Hinds & Martin, 1988). Many researchers have attempted to provide a fleshed out understanding of hope, given its multi-faceted nature, along with its apparent impact. These studies have explored the experience, function, and meaning of hope in the lives of adults (e.g., Benzein, Saveman & Norberg, 2000; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985). However, much of the research done on hope in early adolescence has assumed an adult, cognitive-behavioural conceptualization of hope and simply applied it to an early adolescent context (e.g. Snyder et al., 1997).

Research has not established that adolescent conceptualizations of hope are the same as those of adults. Though limited in quantity, research studies with early adolescents seem to suggest that hope is an integral part of their self-understanding, and that they have less concrete and more unfettered hopes for the future than adults (Larsen & Larsen, 2004; Shepard & Marhsall, 1999). Further, hope research with early adolescents has sampled and analyzed data on boys and girls together, ignoring the potentially important influence of gender on hope. This study will seek to address these current gaps in the literature and will attempt

to provide a description and understanding of the conception and experience of hope for early adolescent girls. By understanding common experiences of early adolescent girls' hope in both depth and context, we will be better able to understand how we, as helping professionals, may cultivate hope in ways that may be helpful for girls of this age. Thorough literature searches reveal that this research will be the first attempt to parse out and explore the experience and conceptualization of hope for early adolescent girls. Beyond adding to our current understandings of the development of hope, this research should also inform practice regarding how hope-focused interventions might be applied to support girls during the changes experienced throughout early adolescent development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the development and experience of hope for early adolescent girls experientially and conceptually. It is possible that the conceptualization of hope for early adolescents will have certain parallels to current adult hope theories; however, this study will not use an established definition of hope, but instead will be exploratory in nature and will allow for a description of hope in early adolescent girls to be constructed from the findings.

This research is qualitative in nature, so as to focus on understanding the development of hope in early adolescent girls with both breadth and depth. Qualitative research is appropriate for the purposes of bringing forward and highlighting previously marginalized or silenced voices (Morrow, Rakhsha, & Castaneda, 2001). Given the assumption of sameness despite gender in most

developmental research, as well as the assumption that adult conceptualizations of hope can be applied to early adolescents, one can consider the voices and experiences of early adolescent girls to have been neglected in the current hope literature.

Using a social constructionist framework (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) will ensure that the research is grounded in the understandings of the participants themselves. Social constructionism holds that knowledge is not inherent, but rather is constructed through experience and filtered by previous beliefs and understandings. While I, as the researcher, bring certain understandings to the study, it is only through collaboration with the participants that I can understand hope in early adolescent girls. The youth themselves are the best informants for understanding the experience of hope in early adolescent girls and as such it is important that their voices be adequately represented in the research. I explore and describe each participant's experience of hope and seek out themes common to each of their stories and understandings of hope, while honouring the personal characteristics and context of hope for each participant.

This research is not designed to confirm or disconfirm any particular previously developed beliefs or assumptions about the nature of hope in early adolescence. Rather, the approach is inductive, with the goal of discovering understandings of hope as they arise from the participants themselves. However, an honest portrayal of the social-constructionist epistemology and the corresponding methods employed in this study will mean that the findings are understood as a co-construction between the researcher and the participants.

Further, because hope can be an ephemeral construct to put into words, this research includes photographs taken by participants in order to capture the aspects of hope that may be difficult to verbalize. This study alone is not intended to provide a definitive or comprehensive understanding of the development and experience of hope in early adolescent girls, but rather seeks to lay a foundation for our knowledge that is grounded in the young women themselves, that arises from their context and that is true to their experience.

Research Questions

This study is the first to examine hope in early adolescent girls. As such, my research questions are broad in nature and seek to establish a description of hope for girls during this developmental period. This research asks the primary question:

> How do early adolescent girls understand their own hope, both experientially and conceptually? In attempting to understand the experience and conceptualizations of hope for young adolescent girls, I will explore certain subquestions:
>
> - What are the participants' experiences of hope – what thoughts, feelings, sensations, or images are associated with hope in the participants' awareness?
> - What do the participants understand and believe about the nature of hope?
> - What roles do the participants understand hope has played in their lives?

Definition of Terms

In understanding the aim of this research, it is important that the reader be familiar with the definition of certain terms used throughout this document.

Definition of early adolescence. Early adolescence has been generally defined as a developmental period which can be as wide as age 12 to age 16, during which individuals undergo rapid changes (Djang, 2011; Kagan & Coles, 1972). For the purpose of this study, early adolescent girls will be defined as girls between the ages of 13 and 15, given that early adolescent development can occur at different rates and given that some individuals transition into, or out of, early adolescence at different ages (Manning, 1993).

Terms for participants. I struggled with how to label the participants in this study, as well as the larger group from which they are sampled – early adolescent girls. Ultimately, I decided that "girls" was appropriate, as the participants are not yet "young women". Throughout this document, I use the terms "participants", "early adolescent girls" or simply "girls" to refer to the participants. I use "early adolescent girls" or "early adolescent females" to refer to the larger group from which the participants are sampled.

Hope. At the outset of this project, the working definition of hope is informed by a range of adult definitions and conceptualizations of hope, as no definitions of hope for early adolescent girls existed previously. Hope is tentatively defined as a *presently experienced, future-oriented state towards an outcome which is desired but uncertain*. The research and theory origins of this definition are elucidated in Chapter 2. This study itself provides a more nuanced description of hope as experienced by early adolescent girls.

Use of Qualitative Methods

In order to answer these research questions, I completed in-depth, semi-structured, photo-assisted interviews with a sample of four early adolescent girls who were between the ages of 13 and 15 and from a community after-school organization. Employing basic interpretive inquiry methodology (Merriam, 2002), I identified themes in each participant's experience of hope along with threads common to all participants. I deemed basic interpretive inquiry as appropriate for the current study because it is a methodology which is useful to explicate individuals' experiences of a phenomenon, as well as how that experience informs the world which they construct, and the meanings they attribute to that experience. These goals for understanding are well suited to an inquiry on hope, as experiences and understandings of hope are embedded in an individual's context, and hope is often incorporated into an individual's understanding of the world and his or her place in it (Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1999).

Researcher as Instrument

Creswell (2007) emphasizes the role of the researcher as the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry whose "own background shapes their interpretations and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (p. 208). As researcher on this project, the findings of this study are presented as interpreted through my own understandings, and as such it is important to address the role of researcher and my position within the research explicitly.

This study is part of a Master's degree in a Counseling Psychology, in which I am being trained as a psychologist. I began to develop an interest in hope after working in the community with high-risk youth and noticing that a great many of the youth with whom I worked were extremely resilient despite facing great adversity, and were able to be hopeful about their futures. Following from these experiences, I began to develop a curiosity around when and how this apparent sense of hope developed for these youth. In my readings on the subject, it became clear that there is a gap in the literature when it comes to developmental understandings of hope. Further, most extant examinations of hope in childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood, do not account for gender differences in development. Girls have not been given their own voice in hope literature, and in order to understand the experience of hope for females during the stage of early adolescence, I am driven to conduct this research.

I also come to this study as someone who was once an early adolescent girl. My own experience was one of challenged hope during that time in my life, and this experience of struggling to hope is a partial motivation for me in exploring this subject matter. Furthermore, parallel to the young women who have contributed their own understandings and stories to this research, and their process of developing an identity, I am in the process of forming an identity as a researcher. During my reading of the literature on female development for this thesis, I developed an interest in women's studies, and as a result, the field of women's studies is an area within which I hope to continue to read and study.

I offer these statements to the reader to provide some background to my own position in the research. Further, my awareness of these important aspects of my position is an essential preconception for this study. They are preconceptions I have explicitly named as I attempt to limit their potential influence during interpretation and to attempt to see the elicited ideas from participant interviews with fresh eyes. Further, social constructionists remain aware that it is impossible to fully divorce the process of analysis from the individual conducting it, and so I acknowledge my own important and inextricable role in the conduct and interpretation of this study. Throughout this document, I will use the first person to refer to myself as the researcher, with the intention of being transparent about my own place in the research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to embark on understanding the experience of hope in early adolescent girls, it is important to have an understanding of research that has already been conducted in this field and the current theory. In this chapter, I will examine the extant literature important to the study of hope in early adolescent girls. In an attempt to provide a thorough literature review, the following databases were searched: Psycinfo, Proquest Dissertations and Theses, Hope-Lit Database, Web of Science, and Cognet. Several search procedures were utilized in consultation with librarians at the University of Alberta, mainly focused on searching the terms "hope," "early adolescence," and "development." First I will examine the distinct developmental stage of early adolescence, and what we know about psychosocial development and needs during this stage. I will also discuss extant literature on gender differences. I will then discuss what we currently understand about hope as a construct in adulthood and in adolescence, and how existing influential models of hope can serve as a basis for this exploration. This is followed by a brief discussion of how hope is languaged. I then offer a discussion of the evidence quantitative studies are able to provide for the importance of hope in early adolescent development. Finally, I will discuss the findings from qualitative research that speak to qualities present in hope for early adolescents.

Early Adolescent Development

Early adolescence is described as a "bridge between childhood and adolescence" (Gross, 1987, p. 47), with individuals in this stage "moving back and forth between the world of childhood and the world of adolescence" (Schave & Shave, 1989, p. 5). Developmental theorists posit that it is important to understand the process of normal development in order to nurture positive psychosocial development and address developmental challenges (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Therefore, a basic understanding of early adolescent female development will be important in framing this research. Early adolescence is a time of immense change physically, psychosocially, and intellectually (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987). This period of transition from childhood to adolescence tends to have a significant impact on development of adult identity, as well as impacting the trajectory of an individual's life (Crockett & Beal, 2012). Further, early adolescence is defined by rapid changes in hormones, cognition, and social expectations, which can be experienced as both exciting and overwhelming (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).

In this section I describe the developmental tasks common in early adolescence. Then, I provide a brief summary of major developmental changes in pubertal development, cognition, and psychosocial development, along with the challenges inherent in these changes. Lastly, I discuss gender differences in early adolescence and potential implications for female experience of hope during this stage. Understanding both that the stage of early adolescence differs from what comes before and after it, as well as how it differs has potential implications for understanding the role of hope in development.

Developmental tasks of early adolescence. There are specific developmental tasks of early adolescence, which define the primary concerns for early adolescent girls. This section will outline the major developmental tasks, as identified by seminal developmental theorists and supported by developmental research.

Schave and Schave (1989) suggest that the period of early adolescence is unique from other stages of development, and that various changes create a distinct early adolescent "psyche." In particular, they argue this arises from certain new developmental tasks directed towards differentiating themselves as individuals separate and apart from their family of origin. Erikson (1982) first suggested that the primary developmental concern in early adolescence is identity formation, and working towards a more adult permanent sense of self. The process of identity development involves integrating one's activities, roles, and relationships into a cohesive self, while simultaneously deciding how to navigate expectations that others have for you (Harter, 1999). Concurrent with formation of individual identity, there is a shift towards both awareness of self, as well as what some argue is a preoccupation with the self (Damon & Hart, 1982). For instance, Elkind suggests that early adolescents are fundamentally selfish, given the dramatic shifts in environment and the sustained focus on individual growth in this stage (1967).

It has been suggested that there may be gender specific patterns for the tasks involved in early adolescent development, with girls more focused on interpersonal development and identifying the self in relation to others, with the

hope of enhancing success for both self and others (Thorbeke & Grotevant, 1982). In their study of the adolescent self-image, Larsen and Larsen (2004) found similar differences between genders, with girls' identities being more often relational and boys more often instrumental. The same study found that hope appeared to be an aspect of identity development for both genders. This suggests that hope is related to the process of identity development, but that there may be significant gender differences in how identity development and hope are experienced.

There is a certain amount of pressure associated with these developmental tasks. Early adolescents experience growing independence in their daily life, but also have more expectations placed on them by peers, teachers, and parents (Caissy, 2002). Early adolescents are expected to make independent decisions and can no longer rely on consistent parental support in day-to-day activities. These shifts towards increased responsibility coincide with accelerated physical, emotional, and psychological changes.

Puberty. During early adolescence, pubertal development causes significant physical and hormonal changes. Girls enter puberty approximately 18 months sooner than their same-aged male peers (Susman & Rogel, 2004), and are widely acknowledged to mature earlier than males. Puberty involves a growth spurt, which causes early adolescents to look older and more mature than their pre-pubescent counterparts. This more adult physique can elicit greater expectations from authority figures (Wentzel, 2002).

The reproductive system also develops during puberty, which leads to both primary and secondary sex characteristics, as well as an increased interest in, and in some cases alienation from the opposite sex (Feiring & Lewis, 1991). These rapid physical changes can cause early adolescents to be self-conscious and clumsy (Gutheinz-Pierce & Whoolery, 1995). The changing physique is a visual reminder for early adolescents that they are maturing into adults, and frequently elicits bullying from peers when pubertal development is "off-time." The overt physical changes run parallel to similarly drastic internal processes of development, as described below.

Cognitive development. Early adolescence also signals development of new cognitive abilities and faster brain processing (Casky & Ruben, 2003). As hope lies partially in one's cognitions, the following section will outline potential implications for hope in terms of the cognitive changes experienced during early adolescence. As early adolescents' brains develop, there is a shift towards what Piaget (1969) termed formal operational thinking. As a result of these changes, students gain capacity for mature intellectual thought while retaining exuberance (Djang, 2011). Early adolescents are newly able to think abstractly, to imagine situations that could be, even if they have not happened yet, and to be self-reflective (Keating, 2004). Acquiring formal operations during early adolescence enables a person to formulate hypotheses that are contrary to fact, and to mentally explore many possible courses of action (Elkind, 1980). While aspects of childlikeness linger, early adolescents also develop the ability to think morally and reason out their decisions (Manning, 1993).

Given that hope is commonly associated with the capacity to imagine possibilities (Simpson, 2004) and is future-focused (Cutcliffe, 2004), these types of thought processes are all extremely relevant to hope and suggest that the period of early adolescence may be one in which the structure, content, and function of hope is prone to change as well. Recent research suggests that the fundamental structures of the brain are changing during early adolescence, down to the level of a reorganization of synaptic connections (Keating, 2004). This has implications for developmental hope researchers in that: (1) the experience of hope is likely to be unique during this cognitive restructuring, and (2) it is possible that patterns of cognitions established in early adolescence could persist into later development.

Although this period of rapid development and restructuring brings new cognitive abilities, certain cognitive structures are not yet in place. The prefrontal cortex, which controls emotion, self-control, and planning does not fully develop until early adulthood (Keating). This means that decision-making skills develop less quickly than higher-level reasoning skills, a trajectory theorized to lead to more engagement in risky behaviour. Early adolescents are newly able to generalize ideas and to reason abstractly, but are not yet able to apply those reasoning abilities to their own decision-making and tend to be more vulnerable to the impact of emotions (Furby & Beyth-Marom, 1992). As a consequence, while cognitions relevant to hope are changing from childhood, there will likely still be differences between how early adolescents and adults think about or understand hope.

Cognitive time perspectives in early adolescence are also unique to other developmental periods, as youth begin to appreciate a future focus but still regard states as more stable and enduring than adults. For example, early adolescents are more likely to feel as though a difficulty is impossible to overcome, although they are able to imagine a future in which that difficulty is no longer present (Vander Stoep, et al., 2009), a characteristic which clearly holds possible implications on hope for the future.

Social and emotional development. Together with internal cognitive and hormonal changes, early adolescents face new challenges in their social and emotional development, and they begin to exhibit new patterns of behaviour. Psychosocial developmental changes during early adolescence lead to changes in how individuals see themselves and how they view relationships with others (Caskey & Ruben, 2003). Social relationships with peers take on a new importance (Oberle, Schonert-Reichl & Thomson, 2010), often replacing bonds with parents or caregivers as primary relationships (Collins & Russel, 1991). Additionally, early adolescent girls face new and difficult emotional obstacles such as higher depression and suicidality, at rates two times that of their male peers (Hankin et al., 1998; Petersen et al., 1991). In a study of gender differences in depression, Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus (1994) found evidence to support claims that early adolescent girls begin to exhibit substantively higher levels of depression due to an intersection between higher psychosocial stressors and fewer pathways available to combat these difficulties. Some studies have found that the gender differences in depression during early adolescence entirely accounts for

gender differences in adult depression (Kessler, McGonagle, Swartz, Blazer, & Nelson, 1993). This suggests that there is a fundamental shift in terms of mental health and outlook that is established in early adolescence, with potential links to how hope may play in the individual's conception of their ability to overcome difficulties now and in the future.

Social pressure from media and peers for females to maintain socially acceptable standards of physical beauty also elicits distress about physical appearance, sometimes culminating in the development of disordered eating (Stice & Shaw, 1994; Wertheim, Paxton, Schutz, & Muir, 1996). Additionally, girls face other psychosocial stressors at much higher rates than their male peers, including sexual harassment and assault (Cutler & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; McMaster, Connollt, Pepler, & Craig, 2002). Clearly the new psychosocial burdens associated with female early adolescence are significant.

Gender distinction in early adolescent development. Beyond differences in psychosocial stressors, research indicates that the developmental trajectory is very different for females than for males. Females enter into puberty earlier, are more self-reflexive, more self-aware, and much more verbal (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Further, girls begin to place more value in interpersonal relationships, whereas boys tend to focus more on their personal abilities. Some feminist theorists suggest that while boys are socialized to focus on the "doing" aspects of life, girls are socialized to focus on the "being" aspects, and are more aware of what they are to others than what they do (Gilligan, 1982). This has several implications for development. For instance, depressive problems in early

adolescent girls are most related to not being liked by others, whereas depressive problems in boys are most related to having difficulty playing sports (Ormel et al., 2007).

Knox, Funk, Elliot, and Bush (2000) conducted research on the possible future selves imagined in adolescence. One finding particularly relevant to hope is that while both boys and girls can imagine a vast array of possible selves, early adolescent girls are more likely to believe that their feared imagined future self states will come about. Further, girls' feared future states are mostly related to interpersonal relationships (such as rejection), whereas boys' feared future states are more related to general failure or inferiority. This finding suggests that girls in adolescence see limitations related to the self as an object evaluated by others rather than the self as an active entity.

Socialization patterns begin to differ drastically in males and females during the period of early adolescence. These differences span from how aggression is displayed to the purpose of building relationships (Leaper, 2002). For example, boys are more physical and girls more relational in their aggression. Boys tend to build relationships for personal gain, whereas girls build relationships for communal benefit and acceptance. Classical developmental theorists highlighted the relational style of early adolescent girls. Erickson (1968) went so far as to claim that females will not feel defined in their identity until they have a mate. This observation seems extreme in current academic discourse, but illustrates that girls have been seen to resolve the tasks of early adolescence in a

very relational way, while also highlighting the very gendered way in which adolescent development has been viewed.

Various studies on female development suggest that, beginning in early adolescence, girls face social punishment for deviating from prescribed gender roles, which require them to be nice, popular, and physically attractive (Hill & Lynch, 1983). This social pressure is likely to be significantly felt, and potentially integrated into the hopes a girl imagines for herself, given the importance that early adolescent girls place on relationships.

Summary of early adolescent development. From bodily changes to cognitive restructuring, and from new emotional experiences to unique developmental tasks, early adolescence is essentially a snapshot in the lifespan, unique to what comes before or after. Additionally, girls seem to have a different experience of early adolescence than their male counterparts. Within this process of early adolescent development, there are many potential threats to hope. The development of identity also appears to be conceptually related to hope, insofar as hope is about imagined and desired future possibilities, and so, is likely to be foundational for many aspects of the self in later adolescence and into adulthood. Though virtually no inductive research specific to hope and early adolescence has been done, the relevant literature reviewed here suggests that: hope in early adolescence may be an important component relevant to development of a positive adult identity, that hope is likely to change given the significant changes associated with early adolescent development, and that there are many threats to hope present in early adolescence, particularly for females.

Hope as a Construct

Hope has been associated with, and thought to impact, several facets of an individual's functioning at all points along the lifespan (Hinds, 1984). Hope research is not confined to one academic discipline, but spans fields of study including philosophy, nursing, psychology, and health sciences. Each of these fields offers one or more perspectives on hope as a concept, and they all suggest that hope is fundamental to human experience and our capacity to thrive (Obayuwana, 1980). However, beyond the importance of hope, the multifaceted and nuanced nature of hope as a construct has led to considerable debate among researchers who strive to define it. Hope has been described as an emotional attitude (Simpson, 2004), a set of goal setting behaviours and thoughts (Snyder, 1995), and an orientation (Benzein et al., 2000), among other things. Discursively, the word "hope" has been found to serve different meanings being both a verb and a noun as well as both present and future-oriented (Elliot & Olver, 2002).

The Christian philosopher Macquarrie (1978) describes why hope is both vital and nearly impossible to conceptualize when he writes, "we shall try to grasp the nature of human hope as a universal phenomenon, one which appears in many forms and has many objects from the most trivial to the most profound" (p. 2). Part of this struggle to define hope in a universal way lies in the fact that hope is a personally significant and subjectively understood construct (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Morse & Doberneck, 1995). Attempts at a comprehensive definition of hope, such as Snyder's emphasis on goals and pathways (1994) have been met with criticism for being overly reductionist (e.g., Webb, 2007). Given

the subjective and complex nature of hope, an understanding of hope as concept is perhaps best reached by avoiding a strict adherence to any one theory of hope, but rather triangulating several understandings of hope.

In this section, I explore four current understandings of hope based on theory and research in order to provide a foundation for the current study. These four major understandings of hope all inform an aspect of hope in early adolescent girls. First, I will discuss the basic criteria for hope to be present, from a philosophical understanding. I will then discuss Snyder's cognitive-behavioural hope theory which has been used extensively in research with children and adolescents given his development of the Children's Hope Scale (1997). I will then explore Scioli, Ricci, Nyugen and Scioli's (2011) broader and more nuanced theory of hope which presents hope as consisting of four channels, each operating in concert, and the potential impacts of early adolescent development on these channels. Last, I will discuss the research of Benzein et al. (2000) who developed a hope theory based on interviews with healthy adults. The adult participants in their research provided significant retrospective information about hope throughout development. These four perspectives of hope should provide a sufficient basis for understanding the concept of hope, and all have specific relevance to hope in early adolescent girls.

Basic criteria for hope. In a theoretical exploration of the concept of hope, Petit (2004) argues that to define something as hope, it must meet some basic, necessary, criteria. First, it is necessary that the outcome of the hoped for situation is uncertain. That is, we cannot be sure that it will come about, nor can

we know with certainty that it will not come about. Secondly, hope must involve a desired outcome, or something that the hoping individual wants to come about. When these two criteria are fulfilled, one can then choose a hopeful orientation towards the desired state or object, suggesting that hope is subject to agency or choice. Petit goes on to suggest that this hopeful orientation allows our actions and mind states to be somewhat stable in working towards the hoped for outcome, despite pragmatic evidence that suggests it will or will not come about, which may fluctuate by the hour or day. Hope provides a stable emotional state towards something that is both uncertain and desired. As such, hope is fundamental to our desire to continue to engage in our lives, something often first threatened in early adolescence, as discussed earlier (Petersen et al., 1991). Given that the particular challenges of early adolescence can make it difficult to believe in a future that is different than the difficulties of the present, this process of imagining a possible positive outcome, even if not accompanied with optimism about its likelihood, could be very important in sustaining an individual. Therefore, it would appear that hope may be particularly essential, but also potentially threatened, during this stage in life.

Snyder's hope theory. One popular and enduring perspective on hope, which is used frequently in the field of psychology, is Carl Snyder's hope theory (1995). Snyder describes hope as the process of thinking about one's goals, together with having both the determination (agency) to work towards them and the capacity to plan ways of reaching them (pathways). He further posits that hope is a trait and individuals are consistently either low-hope or high-hope in their

orientation. The implications of hope being inherent suggest that hope is not particularly susceptible to intervention or changes in circumstance, although Snyder suggests that an individual's dispositional hope can be increased through long-term, educational or psychological intervention. A common critique of Snyder's goal-based hope theory is that his work narrowly focuses on the goals aspect of hope, but perhaps misses the essence or more holistic experience of hope (see Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002).

One of the benefits of Snyder's hope theory is that hope is conceptualized in such a way that it is easy to reliably measure, thereby contributing greatly to our knowledge of how *level* of hope impacts various realms of life. However, it does not present hope as a complex or nuanced concept. This is considerably problematic given that virtually all qualitative explorations of hope consistently find it to be both multi-faceted and complex (e.g., Dufault and Martocchio, 1985; Elliot & Olver, 2005).

Notably, Snyder's work speaks specifically to the concept of hope in childhood and adolescence. Snyder and his colleagues (1997) developed the Children's Hope Scale for individuals between the ages of 8 and 16 years. The scale operationalizes Snyder's goals orientation to hope using his *a priori* theory about hope as a motivational construct related to goal setting and goal achievement. Further, he explicitly assumes that children are goal-oriented, and that based on his own theory of hope with adults, children's orientation to hope should be parallel. Therefore, Snyder's conceptualization of hope for early adolescents is neither differentiated from that of children or older adolescents, nor

is it understood as being distinct from the structure of hope for adults – none being assumptions he directly tested. Snyder's Children's Hope Scale uses language that is more accessible for children. Snyder has applied his theory of hope in adults to a younger population, assuming that hope does not have a developmental trajectory, but rather is stable across the lifespan. Due to the attractiveness of its empirically sound construction, Snyder's scale has been used for a vast range of quantitative studies examining hope in the context of childhood and adolescence. As a result, certain understandings and assumptions about hope throughout development have been made on the basis of these findings, with hope seen developmentally as a goal-based experience.

Channels of hope. Scioli and colleagues (2011) criticize the singularly goal-centered perspective on hope to the exclusion of other elements. Rather than viewing hope as a unitary construct, they see it as a network of four "channels" which they term the attachment, survival, mastery, and spiritual dimensions of hope. These channels develop semi-autonomously but work in concert with one another to support an individual's hope. Scioli et al.'s *mastery channel* is similar to Snyder's concept of pathways and agency towards goals. In addition, Scioli et al. offer an additional three channels of hope, each of which may be more or less developed depending on the individual. The *attachment channel* is grounded in interpersonal experiences, the *survival channel* is related to the individual's capacity to protect themselves, and the *spiritual channel* is the hope an individual experiences through their spiritual and religious beliefs. These channels are all

strongly related to overall hope, but distinct from one another and vary among individuals. Therefore, hope is seen as both complex and individual.

Having four channels of hope provides points of access to hope not available within the Snyderian model, meaning that intervention is potentially more widely possible. Scioli et al. see hope as "constructed by biological, psychological and social resources" (p. 97). One implication is that given the significant changes in the domains of biology, cognition, and social systems in early adolescence, if hope is composed of these elements, it is very likely to differ for early adolescent girls compared with other developmental cohorts.

Benzein et al. and hope in healthy adults. Another important model of hope to consider is that of Benzein and colleagues (2000). They conducted a study using in-depth interviews of healthy non-religious adults and presented themes that appeared across participants. The resulting model of hope informs our understanding about hope in a healthy population and is particularly salient as it uses the experiences and thoughts of participants themselves to build an understanding of hope, similar to the approach utilized in the current study. Six themes were presented in the study, which categorized hope into simultaneous, co-informed internal and external processes. The study also found that hope is related to the life process for participants. The external process of hope, or "hope related to doing," that they present is more similar to Snyder's hope theory, in that it is largely related to goals and attainment of concrete hopes. However, the inner hope, or "hope related to being," is less goal-based, and rather is presented as a sustaining emotional experience which provides the individual with a will to live

and is based on the awareness of potentials and choices. The authors present six themes of hope based on the interviews that highlight hope as both internal and external processes that interact reciprocally and change throughout the life process of development. Participants did not see hope as a stable entity. In one finding relevant to this current study, participants described hope as particularly salient during periods of transition.

Further, based on retrospective reflections of their adult participants, Benzein et al. suggest that the nature of hope varies throughout childhood and adolescent development. Adult participants in Benzein et al.'s study reported that their hope was different in adolescence, and that when they were younger they had hopes that were more varied in type and more short-term in nature. Participants also noted retrospectively that in adolescence they began to hold some longer-term hopes that were not present in childhood. While the retrospective nature of these recollections suggests that they may be prone to the effects of memory and quite removed from the original experiences, they still suggest that there is a quality in hoping during adolescence, however simple, that is different than hope in children or adults. Finally, given that early adolescence is essentially a protracted period of transition, hope should be of great importance during this time period.

Summary of hope as a construct. The models described above are not comprehensive, nor are they definitive. However, they do provide us with significant understanding of the structure, function, and content of hope for adult populations, and support the importance of understanding hope in childhood and

adolescence. Taken together, the extant research on hope and girls' development suggests that it would be unfortunate and unfair to simply apply an adult conceptualization of hope to early adolescent females, given the unique qualities in the social networks, cognitive stage, and time perspectives in early adolescent girls.

The Language of Hope

The above theories of hope each present different facets of hope as a construct, and I will now discuss the language of hope. While the current study is not discursive in nature, from a social constructionist perspective, the language that we give to constructs impacts our understanding of them. As such, how hope is used discursively is important to address. Discourse analysts argue that the fabric of our experience is in part woven by how we, individually and as a culture, communicate about that experience (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In addition, hope is used as a noun, verb, and adjective (Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995), as well as an adverb (Elliot & Olver, 2002), suggesting that hope serves many purposes.

Elliot and Olver's (2002) seminal study on hope in cancer patients' discussion of their do not resuscitate (DNR) decisions analyzed the various ways in which hope was languaged, and implications for the cultural understandings and beliefs about hope. When hope was used as a noun, it was alternately objective or subjective. Objective hope was reified in such a way that participants saw it as a concrete entity outside of one's control (e.g. the doctor said there is no hope). When hope is discussed in this way, it can be seen as a discrete variable, suggesting that one can have "no hope," and that hope can fluctuate in amount.

Subjectively held hope (as a noun) resided with the individual, but was vulnerable to the impact of objective hope. Lastly, hope as a verb (the action of "hoping") was impacted by the degree or amount of objective or subjective hope and lack of objective hope could cause one to "stop hoping." It is important in the current study to attend to how the participants language their discussion of hope, and the potential implications of how hope is communicated verbally.

Impact of Hope on Developmental Trajectory

The evidence that hope is an important aspect of the transition through early adolescent development is becoming incrementally more well-established. Researchers continue to test hope in relation to processes and outcomes of development, consistently finding that hope has a significant impact. There is good reason to believe that hope in early adolescence is essential to healthy development and in navigating the difficulties of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. This section will outline some of the research that establishes the importance of hope in early adolescence.

Hope appears to have a wide-ranging impact. Ciarrochi, Heaven and Davies (2007) in their study of the impact of hope, self-esteem and attributional styles in early adolescents, found that higher levels of hope over time predicted better grades, more positive adjustment as rated by the youths' teacher, fewer emotional and behavioural problems, less sadness, and significantly more joy. Higher hope has also been shown to be associated with lower levels of violence in early adolescents with poor school involvement (Stoddard, McMorris & Sieving, 2010). In support of hope as a unique and significant factor in development, a

recent study on positive youth development found hope to be more predictive of positive future outcomes than goal setting and resource-optimizing behaviours (Schmid et al., 2011). Further, the same study found that level of hope in early adolescence was predictive of level of hope in later stages of development, including adolescence proper and early adulthood, after controlling for socioeconomic factors. This indicates that the level of hope cultivated during the developmental stage of early adolescence tends to persist throughout later adolescent development – a time during which important decisions are being made and patterns are being set. This is consistent with the finding that gender differences in depression in adolescence account virtually entirely for gender differences in depression in adulthood, and suggests that what is happening with hope and threats to hope in early adolescence is extremely important.

Brackney and Westman (1992) found that individuals coming out of adolescence proper, or finishing their developmental journey through adolescence, were more likely to have advanced through later stages of psychosocial development if they had higher hope. As such, hope appears to be tied to the actual process of development. David Smith (1983) conducted a comprehensive review of hope discourse and research, and based on his findings, he argues that hope is an essential component for adolescents to transition successfully into adulthood. He further argues that it is necessary to resolve threats to the self within this process of development, and hope is a mechanism for resolving these threats. Indeed, when hope was examined in relation to psychosocial stressors in a longitudinal study with adolescents, hope emerged as a

buffer moderating the impact of psychosocial stressors on negative internalizing and externalizing behaviours (Valle, Huebner, & Sudo, 2006). This is important, given the evidence that psychosocial stressors play a large role in the higher levels of depression for early adolescent girls. Douvan and Andelson (1966) contend that an adolescent's ability to integrate their future hopes into their present experience and actions guides their adaptation and psychosocial development. This integration of the future self with the present self is conceptually related to the developmental task of identity development, which presents the challenge of how the adolescent can merge the person they hope to become with the person they currently are.

Research on how adolescents report their future orientation has found that their reports about their future fall into two main categories: perspective life course and existence (Seginar, 2005). Perspective life course describes task-oriented future outcomes such as family, career, and education. In short we might say, "What I hope to do." The existence category addresses future non-specific moods, experiences, and emotions. In other words, addressing the question, "Who I hope to be?" Further, the author posits that the impact of difficult experiences on future orientation is mediated by hope as an emotional experience that sustains positive future outlook, despite adversity. Therefore hope can support adolescents in their visions for their future.

The impact of hopelessness. The importance of hope can also be well illustrated by examining the inverse experience, that of hopelessness. Hopelessness has been consistently associated with a negative impact on outcome

measures. Barowsky, Ireland, and Resnick's (2009) longitudinal study which examined hope for the future and risk-taking behaviour, suggests that an early adolescent's hope to live into adulthood is important in their decision-making and has repercussions for the individual well into adulthood. When an individual has low hope, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, potentially due to a sense there is "nothing to lose." This is contrary to the popular belief that adolescents engage in risky activities out of a sense of invincibility. The researchers found that up to one out of seven adolescents did not anticipate living into adulthood. The individuals who did not anticipate living into adulthood (i.e. low hope for the future) had higher instances of substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, AIDS acquisition and failing to graduate high school.

Other researchers have also found that low hope in early adolescence is a determinant in important outcome factors. For instance, Stevens, Morash, and Park (2011) found that low hope for the future in early adolescent girls was a predictor of later delinquency. Although there may be other factors influencing development of hope which in turn impact the likelihood of engaging in delinquent and risky behaviours, both studies described above controlled for socioeconomic factors. Indeed, hope appears to act as a protective factor for those experiencing adverse circumstances in adolescence, and loss of hope is potentially detrimental to development. This understanding of hope as important to thriving in early adolescence is further strengthened by research indicating that hopelessness creates a lasting vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and behaviours in

adolescents when facing depression or difficulty (Dori & Overholser, 1999). Therefore, hope may be integral to life itself in early adolescence.

Mechanisms of hope. Hope should not only be seen as important in the context of outcomes or future decisions. Because hope is experienced in the present (Benzein et al., 2000), it is also fundamental to supporting the day-to-day emotional and mental health of early adolescent girls, many of whom are facing serious emotional turmoil for the first time. Gilman, Dooley and Florrel (2006) found that hope in adolescents was significantly and positively related to global life satisfaction and personal adjustment, and negatively correlated to indicators of psychological distress and school maladjustment. While this study did not focus exclusively on early adolescents, the sample did include a large proportion of youth between the ages of 13 and 15, suggesting that the findings would likely hold for this population. Further, hope has been found to be a buffer against the negative impacts of classroom competition allowing students to better cope during the middle school years (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entermont, 2012). Finally, adolescents scoring high on dispositional hope were found to be more successful at using coping strategies during stressful experiences (Roesch, Duangado, Vuanna, Aldridge, & Villodas, 2010).

These findings suggest that hope serves as a mechanism that allows for better functioning during emerging adolescence, as well as impacting later life outcome measures. The implications of this are that interventions with hope in early adolescence could have both immediate and sustained positive impact.

Gender differences in early adolescent hoping. The stakes for hope in early adolescence appear to be high. While some posit that hope is always present (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985), it seems to be particularly vulnerable in early adolescent girls. This section will outline what we currently understand about gender differences in hope during early adolescence.

Unfortunately, most studies do not differentiate between boys and girls when looking at the impact of hope. However, significant differences in level of hope between the genders in early adolescence have been established. Cantrell and Lupinacci (2004) found that hope is higher for boys than for girls throughout adolescence. Interestingly, Heaven and Ciarrrochi (2008) found an interaction effect in gender and hope in early adolescence. Their research found that level of hope decreases throughout adolescent development for both genders, and that although girls enter early adolescence with higher hope than their male counterparts, their hope is significantly lower by the time they transition into adolescence proper. These studies suggest that hope is impacted during early adolescent development, particularly for girls, but does not provide an answer as to how or why.

In keeping with the developmental literature reviewed earlier indicating that girls in early adolescence are more relationally focused (Gilligan, 1982), research on goal directed behaviour and future orientations in adolescent girls suggests that girls may take cues from others in their environment about what is possible for the future. For instance, in their study of impact of parental beliefs on gender roles, Seginer and Mahajna (2004) found that Israeli adolescent girls'

beliefs about their future academic achievement is predicted by their perception of their fathers' beliefs about gender roles. The more strict that they perceived their father to be about traditional gender roles, the less likely they were to see themselves as capable of attaining educational goals, although their father's beliefs about gender roles did not impact their own beliefs about gender roles. This study suggests that the imagined futures of adolescent girls are vulnerable to the expectations of significant others, and therefore restrictive beliefs of others may reduce their capacity to see hope for themselves, despite their own progressive belief systems. When taken in concert with research that suggests girls are limited by societal pressure and expectations, and that girls experience more psychosocial stressors than boys, the drop in hope for early adolescent girls is perhaps not wholly unexpected. However, we still do not understand the mechanisms that underlie this drop, and how early adolescent girls experience hope.

Hope as a Construct in Early Adolescence

Hinds (1984) outlines two characteristics of hope that are most often studied in adolescents: the *degree* of hopefulness and the *dynamism* of hopefulness (that is to say, how hopeful the adolescent is at the time of measurement, and how vulnerable the adolescent is to fluctuations in hope). Hinds and Gattuso (1991), in their quantitative study of hope level in adolescence, argue that studies of hope in adolescence need to move beyond simply presence, absence, or level of hope, and to examine quality of hope. Although quantitatively established characteristics of hope can provide valuable information about how

stable and high hope is, they do not speak to the more qualitative aspects of hoping: what, why, and how, which go beyond simply how much and when. The qualitative studies that have been conducted to explore the concept of hope in adolescence are outlined in this section, and connections relevant to hope in early adolescent girls are made.

Content of hope in early adolescence. Perhaps the most fleshed out area of research when it comes to understanding the experience of early adolescent hope is the question of what early adolescents hope for. Hinds and colleagues (1999) asked a group of adolescents with cancer to list what they hoped for. They found significant differences between the genders in what individuals hoped for, finding that girls were more likely to hope for relational outcomes, whereas boys were more focused on agentic or practical outcomes. Very few participants in the study included any hopes related to unknown others, what might be termed "altruistic hope." Girls would list hope for significant others such as parents or friends, whereas boys would not. Participants listed hopes that were immediate as well as long term and that were superficial as well as deeply personal, suggesting a multiplicity of hope.

One important finding based on early adolescents' mapping of their future selves suggests that they have less concrete and more unfettered hopes for the future than adults. Shepard and Marshall (1999) found that early adolescents tend to be aspirational when thinking about their future, and imagine themselves to be very successful. Further, this research established that boys tended to focus more

on obtaining objects and being physically successful, whereas girls would imagine both positive and negative relational outcomes.

Qualities of hope in early adolescence. Hope has been described as relational in its nature for adolescents going through an illness, and highly susceptible to the influence of the attitudes and behaviours of other individuals (Hinds, 1988). The same study found that older adolescents see hope as conceptually different than wishing, and more grounded in reality. The distinction made by the adolescents in Hinds' study suggests that adolescents have the capacity to be self-reflexive about hope and to reflect on hope as a construct based on their personal experiences. Hope in adolescence can be fundamental to the process of creating possible future selves, one of the fundamental tasks of adolescent development (Markus & Nuris, 1986), and plays a role in planning for the future (Nalkur, 2009).

Limitations of past qualitative studies. Past qualitative studies tend to be based on distinct cohorts of individuals facing exceptional circumstances such as cancer, and do not tend to differentiate between stages of adolescence or gender. They do, however, provide some initial impressions of how hope might be experienced for early adolescent girls. Hope in adolescence has been studied in the context of homelessness (Herth, 1998), cancer treatment (Juvakka & Kymla, 2009), or refugee status (Yohani & Larsen, 2009). This previous research has generated some initial insight as to the experience of hope in early adolescence. In Herth's study of homeless children and youth, most of the adolescents involved in the study felt their hope was connected to a sense of inner strength and

overcoming obstacles. In Yohani and Larsen's research on refugee youth, researchers found that the youth experienced hope as "a dynamic and enduring trait" (p. 258) that is consistently impacted by the child's context. Motifs of growth and inner strength were evident in several of the participants' narratives. In all of the above studies, participants provided imagery or metaphor to describe their hope, which supports the use of photography in concert with in-depth interviewing to elicit rich descriptions of youth hope.

Summary of qualities of hope in early adolescence. While these studies do inform us about the experience of hope in early adolescence, they do not address what hope looks like in early adolescent development in particular. Rather, they speak to the specific questions of how hope in early adolescence can function in the face of cancer, persecution, homelessness, or poverty. The development of baseline understandings of the qualities and experience of hope in early adolescent girls is needed, both to contribute to the literature of hope and to contribute to our understanding of adolescent development.

Summary

Hope in early adolescent girls has not yet been explored in the research, and this study will attempt to describe and understand hope in early adolescent girls, experientially and conceptually, with depth. Early adolescent girls go through a period of major transition and experience change physically, mentally, and socially. Furthermore, substantial psychosocial obstacles first introduced in early adolescence appear to lead to increased instances of depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and academic disengagement. There are important differences

in development between girls and boys, and girls appear to fare worse throughout early adolescence than their male counterparts, including in the trajectory of hope.

Hope has been shown to act as a buffer for psychosocial challenges and is linked to a host of positive outcomes such as better school performance, higher life satisfaction, better relationships, and significantly better health outcomes. Conversely, hopelessness is linked with a range of poor outcomes, even producing a lasting vulnerability to suicidality during times of depression. Hope decreases for both genders in early adolescence, and girls experience significantly lower hope than their male counterparts. While these quantitative studies examining levels of hope and links between hope and outcome factors are extremely important in facilitating our knowledge of the function of hope, they do not provide a fulsome picture of what it is to hope in early adolescence, which would surely inform attempts at intervention.

I have presented hope as a construct through theory and research arising from different disciplines. Four hope models were introduced in order to present a comprehensive understanding of hope, and links to adolescent hope were established throughout. Petit (2004), Snyder et al. (1991), Scioli et al. (2011), and Benzein et al. (2001) all contribute to the working definition of hope in this study as a presently experienced, future-oriented state towards an outcome which is desired but uncertain.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative methods are generally understood to be the best way of engaging in an exploratory analysis where the intention is to make sense of complex phenomena, to learn from the participants, and to understand phenomena in detail and context (Morse & Richards, 2002). This study provides a description and understanding of hope, as experienced and conceptualized by early adolescent girls, and embedded in the context of their lives. Included are themes of hope identified across the participants, which can contribute to our understandings of how hope develops in early adolescent girls. Accounts of hope from early adolescent girls were collected using one-on-one, in-depth interviews.

This chapter on the research methodology is presented in sections. First I will describe the theoretical framework and epistemological assumptions underlying the methodology. I will then discuss participant recruitment, and the process of data collection and analysis. Lastly, I will address ethical considerations relevant to this research, and claims of trustworthiness and credibility in this research.

Theoretical Framework

There are multiple methodologies within qualitative research, and each methodology has its own set of assumptions (Creswell, 2007). These assumptions establish a particular worldview including the legitimacy of various knowledge claims, the philosophical stance which informs the research, and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome (Neuman, 2000). Qualitative

research methods tend to be inductive, aimed at describing the subject with breadth and depth, and developing ideas based on what is discovered (Merriam, 1998). However, choosing a methodology is a complex process of matching the researcher's worldview with the appropriate assumptions and analytic techniques for the research question. As this study is preliminary and descriptive in nature, it requires a flexible and responsive research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Sociologist Michael Crotty (1998) argues that it is important for a researcher to be reflective and explicit in their justification for choosing a particular set of research methods. The qualitative researcher must continually re-examine his or her epistemological views and the fitness of the research methodology as the research evolves. Crotty provides a structured framework for evaluating fitness of research methodology with the researcher and the particular project. His framework progresses inwards from the largest philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge (epistemological stance), toward the particular qualitative paradigm (theoretical perspective), which leads into the choice of methodology, and finally to the specific research methods used. Crotty presents this as a logical progression, with each decision informing the next, ideally leading to a cohesive methodology consistent with the researcher's worldview. The following section will be structured according to Crotty's framework and will outline the epistemological and theoretical assumptions used in this research, followed by the more specific methods used in conducting this research.

Epistemology. Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as "the theory of knowledge that defines what kind of knowledge is possible and legitimate." This research is situated within a social constructionist paradigm. Social constructionism holds that knowledge is "constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially human context" (Crotty, p. 42). The social constructionist paradigm holds certain presuppositions: that there are multiple realities (relativist ontology), and that knowledge must be co-created between individuals (subjectivist epistemology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Consequently, there is no inherent meaning, and there are multiple valid perspectives rather than one inalienable truth (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The social constructionist stance "maintains that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Feast & Melles, 2010, p. 4). Therefore, knowledge is constructed rather than discovered, and this knowledge is informed by the wider social context, the perspectives and understandings of the research participants, and the researcher's own perspectives and understandings (Harre, 1993). The goals of this particular study are consistent with this worldview: to allow each participant to take an active role in sharing her perspective and understanding of hope, and then contextualizing that perspective within that participant's history and experience.

Social constructionism is an appropriate epistemological framework for this study because the focus of the research design is to share how early adolescent girls construe something within their experiential world, namely hope.

This means that the process of constructing meaning is both subjective and active. Participants draw on their personal background and knowledge to make sense of hope in their world. Furthermore, hope is generally understood to be a socially constructed phenomenon (Webb, 2007). According to Webb's interdisciplinary review of hope theory, "the form [hope] takes – the mode in which it manifests – at any particular time, in any particular culture, within any particular group is the result of a complex process of social mediation" (p. 67).

Although the concept of hope is indeed personal, its socially constructed nature suggests that there will be commonalities in the hope experience of those who share developmental experiences, historical time periods, and culture. Based on this understanding, there is reason to believe that there will be commonalities in the ways that early adolescent girls understand and experience hope, and that it is important to acknowledge these understandings as, in part, social constructions. Previous qualitative studies on hope have observed strands of similarities that tie together different individual's experiences of hope (e.g., Turner, 2005). Given the personal and social aspects of hope, this study attempts to find commonalities while simultaneously retaining unique personal perspectives and contexts of each participant.

This research attempts to embed each participant's perspective within the context of that participant's life circumstance and background so that her subjective worldview can be understood through the circumstances that inform it. This research was a process of exploration in which I attempted to avoid reaching a predetermined conclusion, but rather allowed the findings to emerge from a co-

construction of understandings, which ensures that they are grounded in the experiences of the early adolescent girls themselves.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective is a philosophical stance which draws from the epistemological perspective and informs the methodology (Crotty, 1998). Within the constructionist epistemological position, there are a range of theoretical perspectives available, all of which have different implications for the research. This study uses a hermeneutic approach, which comes out of the interpretive tradition. Qualitative research is broadly rooted in interpretivism (Draper, 2004). Interpretivism holds three major assumptions: (1) meanings are constructed by humans as they engage with the world they are interpreting; (2) humans make sense of the world based on historical and social contexts, which are shaped by their own experiences and backgrounds; and (3) the generation of meaning is always a social process. Interpretivism is conceptually in line with social constructionism, and will allow for methods that honour the socially constructed understanding of hope.

Hermeneutics specifically attempts to understand and interpret experience through the lens of society and history. A hermeneutic perspective attempts to situate the researcher outside the participant's experience, while assuming an underlying commonality. This stance allows the researcher a means of "addressing something that is in some way strange, separated in time or place, or outside of one's experience, with the purpose of rendering it familiar, present, and intelligible" (Palmer, 1969, p. 12-13). In this research, I am attempting to

understand the experience of hope for early adolescent girls through conversation with the participants, but I am inherently separate from the actual experience of hoping as an early adolescent girl.

Hermeneutics attempts to understand text (in this case interviews) by interpreting it in the appropriate cultural context, without which, it is not meaningful. This process is negotiated by using the hermeneutic circle as an interpretive tool (McLeod, 2001). The hermeneutic circle consists of the researcher constantly moving between parts and whole in attempting to understand the data from multiple perspectives and develop a comprehensive picture. It is through engaging with the larger cultural perspective, the participant's experiences, and my own understandings from previous research that I am able to filter the data through my own perspectives to make it meaningful in an academic and clinical context. The ultimate goal of hermeneutics is to move beyond the horizon of one's own culture-based understandings by immersion in the text being studied, and with an attempt to achieve a fusion of horizons, "permitting the world expressed in the [interview] to speak to our world" (McLeod, p. 57). I interpret the experiences of the girls in this research through the photos they took and the interviews I conducted with them, in order to make sense of their experiences in a way that is relevant to academic discourse. As such, my own place as interpreter is vital. I have attempted throughout this process to be aware of my distinct place in the research, as the experiences of the participants are filtered through my own social and cultural perspectives and understandings.

Methodology

This study utilizes a thematic methodology known as *basic interpretive inquiry*. Merriam (2002) stated that a basic interpretive study "exemplifies all the characteristics of qualitative research, that is the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researchers as instrument, the strategy is inductive and the outcome is descriptive" (p. 6). Basic interpretive inquiry seeks to understand not only the individual's experience of a phenomenon, but how that experience informs the world which they construct, and what meaning they attribute to that experience. These goals for understanding are well suited to an inquiry around hope, as hope has no apparent practical application as an abstract concept without an individual incorporating that understanding of hope into their world and their place in it.

Basic interpretive inquiry is most appropriate for this project, because I seek to understand the phenomenon of hope and how hope manifests in the lives of my participants. These methods will add value through the use of deep description, inductive understandings designed to leave intricacies intact, and discovery by way of participants' perceptions and perspectives (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Data Collection

For data collection, I used photo-assisted interviewing. Each participant was given a 24 exposure disposable camera for a period of time (between one and

two weeks) with instructions to take pictures of what hope means to them, and what reminds them of hope. Each participant was instructed to focus on her own experience of hope, and to photograph anything that is hopeful to *her*. This is somewhat divergent to what has been done in photo-assisted qualitative research around hope in the past. Turner (2005), in her photo-based study of older adolescents' hope, asked participants to imagine that they were being paid to mount a photographic exhibit of hope and take pictures with that objective in mind. However, because the current study seeks to understand the meanings of hope for each participant individually, as opposed to determining the essence of the hope phenomenon, instructions which lead the participant to attempt to capture a general rather than individual concept of hope could perhaps obscure the objective of this research. Therefore, the instructions directed participants to capture their personal understanding of hope, and participants were instructed that there are no right or wrong images and no correct answers. After the film was developed, as researcher, I conducted a semi-structured, open-ended interview based partially on the photographs and how they represent hope for the participant.

Photo-assisted interviewing has previously been used in qualitative hope research (Turner, 2005), and it is defended in the literature as enabling depth of participant responses in the interview, as well as contributing to the ultimate data available to the researcher in analysis (Folkestad, 2000). Furthermore, the nature of the concept of hope makes it inherently difficult to describe (Hall, 1990) and using photographs as a starting point for the interview allows participants a point

at which to begin to articulate their felt-experiences of hope. Collier (1967) argues that photographs enhance the interview process in a dynamic way and that the photographs serve as:

> directional conversation pieces that allow you to draw out the interests and enthusiasms of your informant. The theme of the interview is nonverbally established, and because this photographic feedback creates a sense of awareness, and evokes emotional feelings, the photographs make wordless probes that lead the interview into the heart of your research. (p. 47)

Open-ended interviews informed by the participants' photographic depictions of hope are appropriate to the philosophical assumptions of social constructionism and interpretivism, in that the interview is conversational rather than one-sided and knowledge is seen as co-created in a transparent fashion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

I attempted within the interviews to create a safe and open environment and to ensure participants were as comfortable as possible. Each initial interview lasted between 60 to 120 minutes, and follow-up interviews were scheduled as needed, to clarify my analyses and allow participants to address any additional questions that arose. Interviews were audio recorded. Two follow up interviews were ultimately conducted, one lasting 10 minutes and one lasting 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

Basic interpretive inquiry allows for flexible analysis of data, and is frequently used in concert with thematic analysis, which can be utilized in parallel with a social constructionist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Thematic

analysis involves constructing, interpreting, and reporting themes across the data, while at the same time describing the data set in rich detail. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as an accessible and theoretically flexible method of data analysis that is appropriate for a preliminary qualitative study. I transcribed the interviews, with the exception of one which was transcribed by a professional transcriber, and then read each transcript several times to familiarize myself with the data holistically. Before coding, I began to develop my understandings of patterns within the data, and kept a regular research journal in which I recorded my impressions and initial themes arising from the data, as is considered best practice in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005). These impressions were kept separate from the data during the process of coding and sorting codes. I generated open codes from meaning units within the data, and organized these open codes into larger clusters that were thematically consistent. After revisiting the original transcripts to ensure that each group of codes were truly related, I used the groups to form larger themes and subthemes (as suggested by Braun & Clarke). Subsequently, the process of analysis involved moving back and forth between the data set, the codes, and identified themes to ensure that the resulting analysis was far enough away from the data to inform our understandings, but close enough that it extracted meaning from the participants' experiences rather than my own preconceptions. This constant moving-between during the process of data analysis constitutes the methodological expression of the hermeneutic circle. During this process, I returned to the images elicited in the photo assignment and

attempted to convey the evocative mood of the photographs and the participants' descriptions of these in the themes.

Participant Selection and Research Site

Participants were recruited with permission through the Edmonton branch of a national organization that serves the needs of children and youth. After ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta, a short explanation of the study and an opportunity to be involved was presented to female youth who were between the age of 13 and 15 at various drop-in locations. Interested youth were given further information about the study, consent forms for signature by their parents and/or guardians, as well as the researcher's contact information. Youth were then given the opportunity to assent by actively contacting the researcher, and were required to provide written evidence of parental consent. This requirement of the participant to "buy in" ensures that the participants were not subject to coercion of any kind. Interviews were conducted either at the drop-in centre where the youth were recruited, or at Clinical Services at the University of Alberta. Each interview was conducted in a private room, with sufficient quiet for the participant to concentrate on the interview without distraction.

The age range for this study was limited to the span of two years (13-15) in order to capture a particular stage in development. Early adolescence is typically categorized to last from age 12 to age 16 (Djang, 2011; Kagan & Coles, 1972). However, as youth can be late in their transition into development associated with early adolescence, or early in their transition to behaviours more

associated with middle adolescence (Manning, 1993), constricting the sample to 13-15 year olds ensures that the youth are currently experiencing developmental stages of early adolescence.

Selection criteria were essentially limited to age range, as well as ability and willingness to articulate their thoughts about hope. Because this study is largely based on participants' experiences and understandings, and because the sample size was relatively small, it was important to have a sample which could offer rich data. For this same reason, I also attempted to find a heterogeneous sample of youth with varied experiences and backgrounds. The sample of youth chosen for this study is appropriate because this study is exploratory in nature. Using a generic sample of youth allowed for analysis to examine hope in the context of the youths' age and developmental stage, rather than with respect to specific developmental disruptions, while heterogeneity in the sample ensured rich and varied data. Six participants were recruited, one participant withdrew from the study for reasons unknown, and one participant did not qualify under the inclusion criteria and was not included in analysis.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative inquiry and the understandings of early adolescent hope presented here are only useful to the extent that they are trustworthy. It was important for me to establish trustworthiness at all points during the research process, and to continually re-evaluate my methods and ways of engaging with the participants and the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985), whose analysis of qualitative validation come from a

naturalistic axiom consistent with social constructionism (Creswell, 2007) list four essential aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Due to the inductive, socially constructed approach of basic interpretive inquiry, it is essential that the meanings interpreted by the researcher are consistent with the participant's understandings (Merriam, 2002a). This was assured by ensuring that at each stage of analysis, I returned to the initial transcripts. Further, after analysis, credibility can be validated by ensuring that themes and subthemes are sufficiently supported by direct quotations from the research transcript. Member checks were also carried out (in accordance with Merriam, 2002), in which participants were given the opportunity to review both the original transcript and the meanings inferred through use of their quotes in the themes and subthemes. The opportunity for a follow-up interview was offered for both the participant and the researcher to clarify meanings. Two participants engaged in a follow up interview with no specific revisions or changes to findings requested on the part of the participants. In addition, the use of both photography and transcribed open-ended interviews for data collection served to triangulate the data and enhance credibility (as suggested by Maxwell, 2005). In this research, triangulation is not conceptualized as a means of validating the "truth" of the participants' perspective, but rather a method of enhancing understanding and nuance of that perspective.

Transferability

Transferability involves providing rich, thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order for readers to have the requisite information to conclude under what conditions, and with which populations these findings will be applicable. Because this study aims to provide a useful understanding of the experience of hope in early adolescence, transferability is of utmost importance. Transferability is addressed by offering data that is richly described with sufficient context. This allows for readers to experience a resonance with the participants in this study and to determine whether and to what extent the findings in this study are transferable to other populations. In order to achieve this richness, a description of each participant's background experiences is provided in an attempt to adequately contextualize the results and meet the standard of transferability.

Dependability

Dependability involves presenting findings in such a way that they are defensible and that themes are strong enough that they would arise again given a different researcher. Thoughtfully using an inductive approach, and regularly seeking consultation and supervision on coding and thematizing throughout data analysis is generally sufficient to ensure dependability (Creswell, 2007). During my data analysis process, I met with my supervisor regularly to discuss my thoughts and looked at my code clusters with her while I was in the process of analyzing themes and subthemes. Through supervision I sought to ensure that my interpretations were consistent and that the process by which they were arrived at was sound. Lastly, an audit trail (Creswell, 2007) was developed consisting of my

rationale for decisions made during analysis, developing thoughts throughout the process, as well as further memos and contact notes with the participants.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves ensuring that I draw conclusions which have sufficient evidence in the data. While the nature of social constructionism requires that I have an active role in the research and that part of the resultant knowledge is informed by my background and worldview, it is also important to ensure that the participant's voices are foremost in the resultant findings. Confirmability was established throughout the process of data collection and analysis by writing consistent and detailed memos (Maxwell, 2005). Also, I seriously endeavored to make explicit my own assumptions and biases, so that readers are able to determine what effect they may have had on the analysis of the research. Because I am an inevitable and active part of constructing this knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), making my perspective explicit as opposed to declaring neutrality, was the only genuine method to ensure confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for this study was sought through the formal application process at the University of Alberta Human Research Ethics Board (REB). The REB provided me with permission to carry out this research. Beyond this, it is my responsibility to ensure that the study is carried out in an ethical manner, keeping in mind the best interests of the participants.

In considering the ethical implications of this study for participants, I have adhered to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans 2nd Ed. (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010) as well as the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, which includes standards that refer to research with human participants (CPA, 2000). The primary ethical standard in both of these documents is ensuring "Respect for the Dignity of Persons." Respect for Dignity of Persons requires that all human participants involved in the research are operating under their own free will and are given freedom to make choices about all aspects of their participation in the research (Truscott & Crook, 2004). Subsumed under this standard is the requirement that all participants give informed and free consent.

Consent was addressed by (1) ensuring that participants and their families were provided with a detailed explanation of the research plan, and (2) requiring that participants actively contact the researcher if they wanted to be involved in the study, which ensured that they were truly interested in participating, rather than feeling coerced or obliged to participate. Further, although the participants were not able to provide legal consent (as they were under the age of eighteen), their parents or legal guardians provided written consent after being provided with the details of the study, including an extensive summary of potential benefits and risks. In lieu of consent, the participants themselves underwent a process of providing their assent to participate in the research, which allowed for them to exercise their free choice and agree to participate. Receiving assent from minors

has been highlighted as an important ethic when performing research with children and adolescents (Bray, 2007).

Also included in the Respect for Dignity of Persons is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the privacy of participants. Confidentiality was discussed in full with the participants before the research interviews. Participants were informed that their personal information is confidential and that all identifying information, including names and places would be obscured or removed prior to release of the findings. The names of the participants were changed in the interests of ensuring anonymity and respecting the privacy of the participants. Also anonymised were potentially identifying details such as the organization name to which the participants belong, or the city in which they live, or the schools that they attend. The participant interviews were transferred to a computer directly after the interviews and kept in a password-protected file.

A further ethical standard is Responsible Caring (CPA, 2000), which involves the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence. It is my responsibility to ensure that participants are not harmed physically or emotionally as a result of their participation in this research, and to endeavor to make the experience beneficial, if possible. In order to ensure that participants are not harmed, I viewed their assent as a process rather than an event (Truscott & Crook, 2004), and continually checked in with them during the interview process to ensure that they were comfortable to continue. Because challenges to hope arose in each of the interviews there was material, albeit limited, with the potential to be emotionally triggering for participants. Participants were encouraged to ask

questions and given the opportunity to withdraw their consent or stop talking at any point. Participants were also instructed that they were not obligated to answer any questions if they did not feel comfortable doing so.

Due to my background in counselling psychology, I am fully trained in crisis de-escalation and basic counselling skills and was prepared to work empathically with participants if they were emotionally triggered during the interviews. In two of the interviews, discussions of hopelessness arose to the point that the participants discussed past suicidal thoughts or behaviours. I ensured follow up with the participants. Both participants no longer had thoughts or plans of suicide, and both had sought therapy since their experience of hopelessness. A list of counseling referrals was made available to participants at the end of the interview.

Qualitative research has generally been found to be of little risk to participants (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Because the focus of the current study is hope, involvement in the study was anticipated to most likely constitute a growth experience (Turner, 2005). Participants all reported that the interview was enjoyable, and some participants reported that they were excited and proud to be able to contribute to this research. Corbin and Morse argue that benefit for the participants arising from qualitative studies tend to be underestimated by researchers and research ethics boards.

Lastly, it is important to me to make all possible attempts to ensure that this research is presented clearly to avoid the possibility of misuse or

misrepresentation of the findings and to honour the participant's contribution to this research.

Summary

In this study, qualitative inquiry was used to seek an in-depth understanding of hope in the lives of 13 to 15 year old early adolescent girls. Utilizing Crotty's (1998) practical framework, I laid out my philosophical and theoretical understandings, including the epistemological stance, theoretical perspective, methodological framework, and specific research methods utilized in this research. I described how the research was carried out in data-collection and data-analysis, followed by descriptions of participant selection and recruitment. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with four participants were used to generate data for this study. Data analysis was guided by Merriam's (1998, 2002) basic interpretive qualitative methodology and thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness was established, using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four essential components of trustworthiness in qualitative research and augmented by recent developments in this area. Ethical considerations drew from the standards set out in the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (2001) and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans 2nd Ed. (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010), which were discussed with regard to their application in the current study.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

I felt privileged to be able to share in the participants' stories as they relayed their experiences of hope. Although they spoke like young teenage girls, their speech peppered with "like" and at times laced with conspiratorial tones, there was a depth and importance in what they shared that inspired me throughout the process of compiling this thesis. Some participants described the emotional experience of hope as reminiscent of childhood, when they had fewer problems and unlimited possibilities. This nostalgia betrayed an awareness of life's difficulties that was surprising for a group of girls that seemed so young. As each participant shared, it became apparent that they were all too familiar with how challenging life can be and at times they felt as if they were the only person who wanted things to be better. This was described as a challenge to their hope.

At the same time, the participants never gave up on hope. Relationships were influential, as connection with others had a huge impact on their hope. Additionally, they were able to find hope in their personal identity. The participants discussed ways in which they care about the world and hope deeply, even for people who they don't know. Their hope that the world would be better was audacious. At times, during my interviews with each young woman, she would describe truly difficult experiences which she came up against, from being ridiculed by a parent for her weight to watching a sibling going to jail. As I was transcribing the interviews, I noticed that these descriptions of difficulty would

often be accompanied or followed by a small laugh, as though the participant was trying to show that this experience had not defeated her. During the course of my analysis, I came to wonder about and understand the "small laughs" peppering the transcripts as representative of these girls' hope. In the midst of hopelessness, hope endured, even if it was small and uncertain. Susan illustrated this beautifully when discussing how she saw hope in a picture she had taken of the moon:

> I don't know it was just like bright in a bunch of dark because there [were] no stars and it was really dark and then it was just the moon right there - a big light in the middle of the dark. It made me think about a bunch of people that were sad people and then one hopeful person that will be really happy and just go and help people and be like, "everybody you don't have to be sad, let's get some of this and let's get some of this and we are going to be happy".

All four participants shared their experiences of hope in their own lives through the pictures that they took and the stories that they told. Four common themes were created from these interviews along with several sub-themes which describe common elements amongst the participants. In this section I will first provide a brief description of each participant's story of hope and then I will describe each theme in detail. (1) The first theme explores the experiential aspect of hope which encompasses awareness, emotional, and physical experiences of hope for early adolescent girls, as well as how the participants put their hope into words and communicated their hope through terms of measurement. (2) The second theme encapsulates relational hope and explores the reciprocal nature of how the girls experience hope and relationships. (3) The third theme, discusses the identity related nature of hope. (4) Finally, I will present a theme describing a process of how hope changes from childhood into early adolescence and how the

participants described being able to renew their hope in the face of the challenges presented by growing awareness of difficulty.

The findings in this section are presented with ample quotes from the participants in order to ensure that their voices are framing the research and that connections between their lives and the themes are clear to the reader. The experiences of hope described by the participants are varied and complex. Hope was clearly a personal and meaningful idea to each of the girls, and their stories of hope were alternatively difficult and joyous. I begin by providing a brief description of each participant's hope. I will then present the four themes that arose common to all participants' experiences of hope, along with their associated subthemes.

A Snapshot of Hope for Each Participant

Each of the participant has been given a pseudonym, in order to protect their identity and privacy. The pseudonyms are: Susan, Jane, Chelsea, and Brielle. During the interviews, a personal understanding of hope for each participant arose. While there was significant overlap in the experiences and understandings of hope amongst all the girls, each participant appeared to have a unique story of hope.

Susan. Susan is a 13-year old Caucasian girl living in a major urban center with her family. Susan described a history of financial difficulty in her immediate family unit. Susan's descriptions of hope were always enthusiastic and exuberant. She talked quickly about her many hopes and described how when one hope went unfulfilled she was able to replace it with another. Susan's hopes often appeared

to be quite concrete. While her hopes were tied to emotions and more general hopes for her future, she spent much of the interview discussing her hopes for specific outcomes or objects. Susan described a linear experience of prioritizing hope:

> If I think about something that I don't like . . . not that I don't like but things that I don't like that are happening. First, for those things I hope not to happen and then things that I want I hope that I get. And then things that I want for other people and I hope for that stuff to happen.

Susan described a clear hierarchy of hopes, which consisted of first hoping to avoid difficulty or pain, followed by hoping for herself and lastly hoping for others in her life.

Chelsea. Chelsea is a 15-year old Caucasian girl who lives with her father and has limited contact with her mother and extended family. Chelsea described a difficult experience of hope. When I first discussed the project with her, she said that she would very much like to be involved, but that she wanted to tell me up front she didn't really believe in hope. I was curious to see what would come out when I developed her pictures, and it turned out that she had a lot of experience with hope in her life. Chelsea's story was one of challenged hope, but hope nonetheless. She went on to describe struggles with an eating disorder, family difficulty, a diagnosis of depression, and past experiences of suicidal thoughts. Ultimately, Chelsea offered this pragmatic hope for herself:

> I just kind of thought about, if I take my own life now what would my future turn out to be like and how would people react and stuff, so I figured that I may as well just live life for the fullest and see how it turns out.

Jane. Jane is an artistic 14-year old Caucasian girl who was alternately somber and energetic throughout our interview. Jane described that she

maintained her hope largely through seeking out relationships. Jane used frequent metaphors for her hope and stressed that, for her, "hope is helping" other people. Jane elucidated this focus when she said that the "main thing I hope is for the people around me to be happy." Throughout the interview she returned again and again to the idea that she wanted to share her hope with others. Jane often framed her hope in metaphors and was very visual in her descriptions of hope. She described the hope she found in the transformation of spring in the following quote:

> You get that sense of how the snow is melting and the grass is greener, or getting greener and then the leaves are coming back right and everything is coming alive… Hope. When everything is coming alive, it feels like how it brightens your being and it makes you feel better about yourself and things around you.

Brielle. Brielle is a 15-year old Caucasian girl who lives with her family in a suburb and is preparing for the transition to high school. Brielle described that she at first found early adolescence to be a time of significant threat to hope, and described times of depression and suicidality, with very little hope for the future. Brielle was able to re-engage with her hope, however, as she adjusted to early adolescence. Brielle described hope as difficult to find, at times, but also as a sustaining force. For Brielle, hope was an active endeavor, rather than a passive one:

> Brielle: Hope is kind of a transition word for me.
>
> Rachel: It's a transition word; can you say more about that?
>
> Brielle: Well you know, if you're lonely you hope for love. So as it's kind of like praying I guess if you're religious, it's kind of a means to an end. It's like

> your car I guess, like there you are at your house and you want to get to your friends house and your hoping and hoping to get to your friends house and you just need to get in your car and as a means of travelling to getting what you want, you hope for it. So hope in that metaphor, hope is the vehicle, hope yeah hope is the vehicle, it's not necessarily the end it's the reason.

During the interview, Brielle provided vast, detailed, and thoughtful descriptions of her hope and linked hope to many things in her life from the seemingly macabre (graveyards) to the mundane (soap).

Themes of Hope

There were several common themes which arose across the participants' stories, illuminating a compelling picture of hope for early adolescent girls. In the next section, I will explore these themes and subthemes and describe how they related to the participant's experiences of hope in early adolescence. The themes outlined are: (1) *Experiential Hope*, (2) *Relational Hope*, (3) *Hope and Identity*, and (4) *Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed*. The themes and subthemes are presented in Table 1.

Table I

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Experiential Hope	Articulating a new awarenesss of hope
	Hope felt
	Hope embodied
	Hope spoken: Yardsticks of hope
Relational Hope	Connection as sustaining hope
	Outward hope
	Altruistic hope
Hope and Identity	Authenticity
	Personal goals
	Meaning in materialistic hopes
Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed	Hope and darkness
	Hope and choice
	Regeneration of hope

Experiential Hope

This first theme describes the direct, felt experience of hope for the participants. Hope was not just an abstract, impersonal concept related to outcomes or personal experiences, but rather it was described as an experience in and of itself. Most of the participants acknowledged that hope has a personal element to it and as Jane relayed that, "hope means different things to different

people." Further, hope was described as a meaningful experience, differentiated from wishful thinking:

> I think of hope as in not just wishing, not just wishful thinking, you know. Hope is not just hoping for something, it's hoping for someone, it's hoping for love, it's hoping for hope.

As evidenced by the above quote from Brielle, hope is meaningful and unique but can be difficult to describe or explain. Hope was described by the girls as a sustaining emotional and sometimes physical force, which was often confined to the language of measurement despite these phenomenological, personal aspects. While hopes were most often held for the future, the impact of hope was immediately felt in the present. The four subthemes of experiential hope identified are: *Articulating a Developing Awareness of Hope, Emotional Hope, Hope Embodied* and *Hope Spoken: Yardsticks of Hope*.

Articulating a developing awareness of hope. The experiential element of hope involved an awareness of hope. The participants noticed when they were hopeful, and related that they had only newly begun to experience this awareness of their own hope-state. Chelsea described this new introspective awareness of hope as emerging with the transition from childhood to early adolescence:

> I guess I didn't really know what hope was [as a child] and I never really hoped for stuff, it just kind of happened and I'd be like, "Yay."

This suggests that the awareness of hope for participants was related to the growing uncertainty of early adolescence, when the outcome is not always clear or positive. It is clear from the participants' responses that they are very aware of their own hope and that not only do they now know what hope is for themselves, but that they are also active participants in evaluating their own hope.

Hope felt. The participants described hope as having a direct tie to emotional experience. All of the participants mentioned "feeling hopeful," and tied this feeling to other emotional experiences.

Figure 1. Photo of a mural that Susan said, "Just generally makes me feel hopeful."

Most often, hope was referenced in the context of positive emotions. For instance, Susan stated rather emphatically that, "Hope means being happy." Hope was also related by participants to being "excited," "feeling better," "encouraging," and "feeling good." Hope was often related to excitement, especially the anticipation of a hope being fulfilled. Jane shared that, "Hope makes you feel free."

Brielle highlighted the positivity she found in hope:

> Happy… like I think the closest thing to happiness that I've experienced is through hope, you know. When you see something hopeful, you're just like, I appreciate your awesomeness, I'm going to be happy for approximately two minutes and then go back to whatever I was doing, and with a smile on my face now.

Hope was often described as impacting emotions, as well as reciprocally being impacted by emotions. For instance, Jane described how her emotions could influence her hope: "Sometimes on difficult days it's harder to see hope. To see

the brightside." While hope was most often related to positive emotions, the emotional experience connected to hope was not purely positive. Susan stated that "hope can be a happy thing and hope can be a sad thing, it depends." Along with the excitement related to hope, which all of the participants mentioned, there was an acknowledgement that hope is inherently uncertain, resulting in anxiety and potentially disappointment or sadness. For instance, Chelsea described hope as "scary," and illuminated some of the complex emotions associated with hope in the following comment:

> I can't really describe it. It just feels like you're just excited about something and you're always hoping that you'll get it and then it just doesn't happen so then you feel like crap after and you're like, 'kay, well I guess I just shouldn't have gotten my hopes up 'cause I guess I should have known it wouldn't have happened.

Hope elicited other difficult emotions at times. Susan stated that when she was, "hoping that something sad doesn't happen then I just feel like laying down and sitting and thinking or I don't feel that active and stuff kind of." Overall, the emotional experience of hope appeared to be more often positive and linked to contentment or excitement, but with complex elements of uncertainty and even occasionally negative emotions. Hope caused emotional experiences and was also impacted by the participants' emotional state.

Hope embodied. The participants' descriptions of hope suggested that they experience hope viscerally. Hope was consistently related to a sense of physical energy and movement. Chelsea described the physical sensation of hope as "really hyper and energetic and bubbly and just like having fun and hanging out with friends." Hope was described by Jane as an "uplifting rush," and later she

commented that when she is hopeful it "feels like you have a lot more energy and you can do anything you want." Susan related that:

> If it's a good thing that I'm hoping that I get I feel really jumpy and excited and, how I can explain it, like get up and dance, and like "yeah I'm so happy!"

The participants consistently related hope to being physically free, or, as Chelsea said, hope is being able to "let loose."

Conversely, when the participants discussed times of low hope, their descriptions were often heavy and felt devoid of energy. In Jane's words: "It feels like your body is tearing. What I mean by that is like it feels like everything is falling apart." The participants employed words and phrases like "low energy," "tired," and "curl up" when talking about times of low hope. Brielle described "wanting to sleep all of the time and having no energy." Hope appears to act as an energetic force, experienced physically by the participants and allowing them to actively and positively engage with their surroundings. Times of low hope were also experienced physically by a lack of energy and negative somatic experiences.

Hope spoken: Yardsticks of hope. As discussed in the literature review, social scientists have gone to extensive lengths to determine how we can best measure hope. At times, the participants seemed to be acting as social scientists in relation to their own hope, and attempted to understand their hope through various measurements. Hope was described and measured in various ways by participants. First, they could talk about the number of specific hopes they had, or their multitude of hope. Jane stated, "I hope for lots of things" and Susan mused, "And sometimes I hope that… well there's lots of stuff, I think really a lot of stuff,"

whereas Chelsea stated that, "I usually only hope for, like, one or two things at a time." No matter how many hopes the girls reported that they had, they conveyed them in terms of number.

The girls also discussed their specific hopes in the language of magnitude. For instance, various hopes were described as "big hopes" or "small hopes" by participants. Brielle articulated the difference beautifully:

> There are the big things to hope for, like getting a car, getting your driver's license, going to the movies, going on this amazing trip to Italy. There's a hope that you'll you know, graduate high school, get your PhD, those are long term big, big hopes. But there's also hope that you'll have clean laundry, which is great and there are little hopes that you'll see your friends today, or that the flowers will bloom, the sun will rise.

The magnitude of how a hope was described was related to either the timeline for the hope to be realized, the likelihood of that hope, or by personal importance. The "size" of hopes could change based on circumstances. In a story relayed by Susan, in which her hope that she would get to babysit again fluctuated minute by minute depending on how the baby was behaving, her magnitude of hope "depended on what was going on in the moment."

There was also a temporal quality to hope. The participants discussed wanting to maintain moments of hopefulness. Jane relayed the temporal quality of hope when discussing how she felt when she was hopeful:

> You just have that moment in your life or in that day I guess, where you just have everything and you want to keep that moment going on and on.

These *Yardsticks of Hope* suggest that the way that the participants language their hope is largely based in forms of measurement. This quantification of experience may be a form of reducing the sprawling, experiential dimensions of hope into a

quantitative, easily communicated concept. The participants all monitor their hope in this way, and describe when there is more or less of it, when it is bigger or smaller, how long it lasts, and whether the hoped for outcome is something happening soon or in a long time.

Relational Hope

The second theme that arose across participant interviews was *Relational Hope*. For the girls in this study, hope was frequently grounded in their relationships. Relationships play a large role in both informing and sustaining the participants' hopes. Each participant had several images of family and friends in their photographs of hope. People were by far the most dominant theme in the photographs taken. The participants related that these people gave them hope and inspired them to share their hope with others. The three main subthemes of *Relational hope* identified are *Connection as Sustaining Hope, Outward Hope* – which involves *Holding Hope for Others* and *Sharing Hope* – and lastly *Altruistic Hope*.

Connection as sustaining hope. Relationships with family members and friends were described as pivotal in supporting hope. This theme came up several times in each participant's interview. Jane explains how she found hope in a photo she took with a friend:

> Me and (friend), she's helped me through some rough times this year so when she was there with me, smiling, having a great time, walking down, going to places, she made me forget everything that was on my mind and just live. Live freely. Like a bird! Just like flying forward instead of backwards.

Figure 2. A photo Brielle took of a friend who made her feel hopeful.

Relationships sustained the participants' hope in a variety of ways. Respondents noted that it was very hopeful to feel as though they had support and that others made an effort to understand them. Chelsea explained how her relationship with her grandmother is hopeful to her:

> She's just really easy to talk to and she doesn't judge me and stuff so I can just talk to her about my problems. And whenever I do something bad she doesn't really… she will take sides but she doesn't get involved and she doesn't give me crap for stuff.

Jane stated that there is "nothing more hopeful than spending time with your family". Connection with others came in various forms for the participants. Hopeful ways of connecting with others were varied from being "each other's shoulders to cry on" to " just being able to talk it out." Finding similarities with others or having experiences and backgrounds in common was hopeful, and contributed to reducing isolation. For example, not being alone in problems appeared to be a hopeful part of relationships for some of the girls, as Chelsea's comment suggests:

> (Friend) and I have been through lots of similar stuff, like her more than me, but we've been through lots of the same stuff like bullying and stuff

> And we just kind of give each other hope and stuff and give each other advice on how to deal with stuff.

The participants also described finding it hopeful when others would listen or could understand their problems. Two participants mentioned that they found therapy helpful for this reason.

Friendships and peer relationships were also very significant to hope. Friends were discussed most frequently as sources of hope, followed by family members, and finally relationships with supportive professionals. Specifically, laughter and joy in relationships were found to be very hopeful. For example, Chelsea suggested that she found hope in her friends because they allowed her to enjoy life and remember that there was happiness beyond problems. Seeking out friends, or at times family, to combat feelings of hopelessness or to renew hope was a common theme as well.

The hope found in relationships with others was very meaningful to the participants. At times, these relationships were the only form of hope that was available to a participant through periods of difficulty. In an extreme example of the sustaining power of relational hope, Brielle described her hope during a period in which she was sleeping with a knife under her pillow and holding it up to her throat each morning before making the decision to carry on with her day:

> Brielle: And it wasn't really about me dying, it was what, more about, kind of narcissistic I know, but how everyone else would react to me dying.
>
> Rachel: Interesting.

Brielle: Yeah, not that happy. Wasn't a whole lot of hope in that, but there was, there wasn't a lot of personal hope but there was a little bit of hope for you know, for them missing me I guess, a little bit of…

Rachel: Can you tell me more about that?

Brielle: Well you know, I couldn't really hope from my own life . . . but there was a hope that they would miss me, there was a hope that they would notice that I was gone.

Rachel: So you still hoped that they would notice?

Brielle: There was a hope that someone cared.

Brielle highlights that being cared for by or connected to others can be hopeful, despite struggling to hold hope for herself personally.

The fact that relationships are so important in fostering hope may also make hope in early adolescence vulnerable to the potentially negative impact of relationships. The participants reported that when they were having relational difficulty, particularly in significant relationships with family and friends, their hope was negatively impacted. In some cases, this led to the individual cutting herself off from relationships in order to maintain hopefulness. Jane and Chelsea both shared about times that they disengaged from relationships during periods when hope was threatened. Jane said that in times of challenged hope "it is harder to be around my friends." Threats to hope appeared to emerge when relationships change in difficult ways or break down entirely. Chelsea offered an example of relationship difficulties threatening hope:

> And then my Dad had gone through a really bad breakup that summer – earlier in the summer – and he was kind of taking it out on me and he was

> telling me that if it wasn't for me that his relationship could have worked and things would be way easier if I wasn't around and stuff so I just kind of gave up hope.

However, while the girls reported that their hope was threatened by such interactions, they often responded with hoping for the relationship to be repaired. One participant, after having a serious argument with her family stated: "I still kind of hope that maybe eventually my family will start having contact with me again." Similarly, Susan, in reflecting on the breakdown of a close friendship shared: "I hope that we can become friends again and I hope that we don't be worst enemies."

Furthermore, it may be possible to maintain the benefits of past hopeful relationships, even when the supporting relationship is no longer there. Jane, whose brother was in jail and had limited contact with her, still felt hopeful when she thought about times when he had supported her in the past.

Outward hope. Outward hope involved the participants hoping for significant others in their lives. While relationships appear to function as a source of hope for these girls, they also play a large role in the content of the participants' hopes. The participants all discussed holding hopes for significant others in their lives and sharing their hope with others. The subtheme of outward hoping involved others in the girls' lives such as friends or family members. There were two distinct types of outward hoping. In some cases the participants would hold hope for others, which was a passive process. In other cases, the participants would share hope with others, which was an active process.

Holding hope for others. All of the participants reported that they hoped for good things for others with whom they were close. The participants often mentioned that they held specific hopes for others in their lives, as well as having general hopes for others. Chelsea had the specific hope that her brother, "wouldn't be a child of divorce like I was," but also had a general attitude of hopefulness, "I always hope for the better for my siblings." Chelsea held these hopes for her siblings despite the fact that she was not currently in contact with them, and was unable to actively engage with them, suggesting a passive "holding" of hope, rather than an active "sharing" of hope. Other examples include hoping for friends to no longer be bullied, hoping for parents to no longer have financial stress, and hoping for ex-boyfriends to be happy and move on.

Figure 3. A photo that Chelsea took of a stop-bullying campaign linked with her hope that her friends would no longer be bullied.

Hoping for others was both an additional and an alternative way of engaging in hope. In fact, one participant noted that she struggled to hold hope for herself, but she was able to hold a lot of hope for others in her life, including her younger siblings and her friends:

> Yeah I mostly hope for other people. I don't really hope for myself that much because when I hope for myself the things I hope for don't really happen so I mostly just hope for other people for their lives to get better and stuff.

Sharing hope. It was a hopeful activity for the participants to share hope with others. This was an active process, and was different than holding hope for others. Sharing hope involved giving hope to others in their lives in various ways. Jane spoke eloquently about her motivation to share hope with others:

> When I feel hopeful I want to share that with everyone. So even when I see anyone try and like look sad I try and make them feel better. And the people that are happy I try to make them feel still better. Because deep inside everyone is still probably very lonely so I try to grab as many people as I can and share it with them.

Ways of sharing hope with others included "guidance, helping, being there, lending a hand," "helping others," "listening," and interfering when someone else was being bullied.

Altruistic hope. Hoping for others moved beyond those who the participant knew personally. All of the participants described holding hope for others with whom they had no personal relationship. Significant time in each interview revolved around a discussion of the participant's altruistic hopes – hopes for the betterment of unknown others or society arising spontaneously from the participant. While there were too many altruistic hopes articulated to list here, the following are some examples. Susan shared, "I hope that people who are in the hospital don't have to be in the hospital forever, I hope they get to see their families" and "I hope that everyone gets to have a good Christmas." Jane expressed hope for:

> Homeless people, I hope for them to find a home. To hope for them to stop living where they are living. I want the hungry to have food to eat instead of

> digging in trashcans. I want people that are starving to have that food and water and to feel the luxuries we have.

Brielle's altruistic hopes were even more wide in scope: "There's a hope that Egypt will figure out whatever the hell that mess is, there's a hope that Russia will be peaceful for the Olympics." Although these international circumstances have very little bearing on her individual life, they have a place in her hopes.

While these hopes were not driven by a pre-existing relationship, they are still relational in nature. Altruistic hopes were either articulated as being held for a specific individual who was unknown to the participant, but appeared to be in need of assistance (in need of food or being bullied), or for certain groups (homeless, hungry, or hurting). Many of the altruistic hopes articulated were passive; however, some of these hopes were related to certain in-person experiences. For example, Sarah described an "hopeful" incident with a friend at McDonald's in which she and her friend approached a homeless man and gave him a coupon for fries: "we just hoped that he would be happy and stuff and it was just a really good feeling".

Other altruistic hopes were more general in nature, rather than targeting a specific difficulty, group of people, or person. The girls described hope for the world in general to improve. In Chelsea's words, "I guess I'm just kind of hoping that people will be nicer and society won't be as screwed up as it is". Brielle articulated a general hope for the world, which was encapsulated in a photograph she took of toothbrushes:

> I hope that everyone in the world will get proper dental hygiene… proper hygiene, running water, toilets, like stop the spread of disease and you know,

> make it better, increase the quality of life for people and make it so they can live longer, live happier lives, live better lives.

Figure 4. Brielle's photo of toothbrushes which prompted a discussion of some of her altruistic hopes.

Holding these altruistic hopes also helped contribute to the girls' hopefulness for themselves or their own lives. Jane stated that after she gave a teddy bear away to a girl in need she realized that, "Giving it to someone else to make them feel better is its own reward".

Further, seeing how others in their lives interact with the less fortunate could have either a sustaining or threatening impact on their hope. Chelsea explained a photo that she took of a volunteer in her neighborhood caring for a severely handicapped individual, and why it made her hopeful:

> I dunno just makes me think that *some* people are good people, and like will help others and like put others in ahead of themselves or whatever.

Figure 5. A photograph Chelsea took of a volunteer helping a handicapped individual, which represented the hope she has that people are good and care for others.

In this case, the individual in the photo appeared to act as a hopeful role model for Chelsea. Alternatively, Susan discussed how others not appearing to care or help was difficult for her:

> And a lot of people are just all like, "Those are other people and they're not me" and some people just don't care and they're just all like and I just feel like nobody hopes for anything and I'm the only one who wants for things to get better sometimes and it just makes me feel really sad.

Watching how others act played a role in altruistic hope for the participants and others can serve as either as mentors for or challengers of their altruistic hope, depending on their actions and attitudes.

Hope and Identity

This theme relates to how participants found significant hope in their current identity and emerging identities. While relational hope was extremely important, each participant's hope was tied to how she found meaning in her individual identity, above and beyond relationships with others. This hope was supported by participants engaging with their sense of self whether present or

future, and included the themes of *Authenticity*, *Personal Goals*, and *Meaning in Materialistic Hopes*.

Authenticity. Participants found hope in being able to express their current identity without judgment. The girls reported that they were most hopeful when they felt that they were able to be themselves or to engage authentically with others. In Chelsea's words, being around others who accept her for who she is makes her "feel like I can continue to be my weird self" and "show who I really am", which makes her "feel more hope that I can make it through life and stuff". Brielle stated that she found it hopeful to be accepted by friends who she could "nerd out with". The important implication of these statements is that if the girls in this study were allowed to be authentic and be accepted for their "self", they found it easier to navigate the difficulties that they faced.

One way that participants expressed themselves and related to their identity was through music. Brielle stated that when things were difficult with her family and friends "hope became fangirling" (or being a big fan of musicians, books, or movies) and she found a lot of meaning and identity tied to the music and bands or artists that she liked. Brielle's photo of her room, which was plastered with posters of bands was hopeful to her because, "it's so uniquely me, it's uniquely mine."

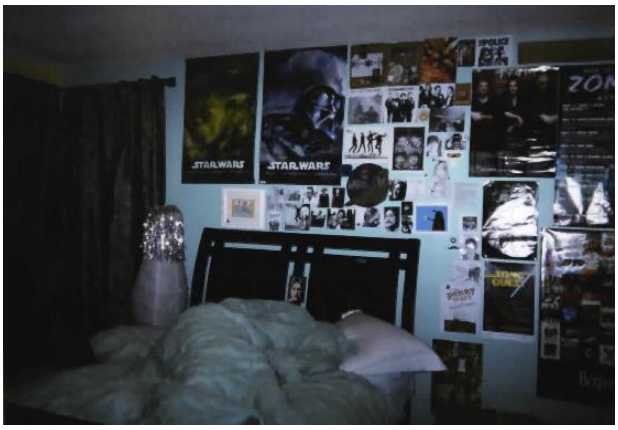

Figure 6. Brielle's bedroom.

Brielle, Susan, and Chelsea all reported that music was extremely meaningful to them and tied music to their sense of hope as well as their sense of self. Chelsea mentioned music throughout the interview as strongly linked to her sense of hope, in a large part because she could identify with the emotional tone and the lyrics of the bands she liked. She stated that she felt a sense of connection and understanding in music. In a story of how she uses music to overcome feelings of hopelessness Chelsea shared that, "Even when friends and family go away I'll always have music". This suggests that connection to music has the ability to ground participant's hope in a way that relationships may not. The participant's musical preferences were personally meaningful and they reported that when others made fun of their musical preferences or were mean about their favorite band or singer, it was a significant threat to their hope. In Susan's words, a friend mocking her love for Justin Bieber "ruined me being happy".

Figure 7. One of two images of Justin Bieber included in Sarah's photos of hope.

Personal goals. Alongside with relating hope to their current identity, the girls also had hopes for what they might accomplish, or personal goals tied to their sense of self. These goal-related hopes were based in the future, either long or short-term, and are identity-related in the sense that they encapsulated who the girls hoped to become. These goals spanned various facets of life. Participants described hopes for good grades, or to make money, or to get a part in a play. Personal goals had varying timelines. As Susan stated, "Sometimes I hope for things that will happen in the next few days and sometimes I hope for things that will happen in the next few years. It depends."

Personal goals for the far future tended to be described in broad, optimistic terms. For example, the participants spoke broadly about wanting to attend college or university, to have good jobs, and to have a happy family life. These longer-term goal-based hopes were always positive but often vague, with the exception of Brielle who articulated specifically what programs she hoped to pursue in university. An example of the broad optimism seen in most of the participants' accounts is the following quote from Susan, describing her future:

> And then when I move out I hope to get my own apartment and share it with somebody, like one of my really good friends or something and then after like a year of living with my roommate, then living in a big house with a nice family and then just – just kind of having a really nice life after that.

These goal-related hopes appear to chart a course for what the participants hope to achieve and who they hope to be, both in the near future and into adulthood.

Meaning in materialistic hopes. The participants all expressed materialistic hopes, which appeared to represent an aspirational identity. Materialistic hopes were hopes expressed for objects or material items such as clothes and electronics or achieving a physical ideal, especially in relation to their body size. Rather than the body-based hopes being based on instrument (what the body could do), they were based on adornment (what the body would look like), in essence converting the body into an object. Upon exploration, most of the material things that the participants hope for were in service of creating their "ideal" personal identity, often based on media or peer role models. The participants were extremely detailed when describing these material, or object, hopes. They were able to effortlessly list hopes for items such as "off-the-shoulder sweaters," "skinny jeans," and "iPods." Further, all of the participants said that their hope was linked with a desire to "lose weight" or "attain the perfect body shape" – also seemingly in service of an aspirational identity.

While I originally saw these hopes as surface level, further conversation with the participants about their materialistic hopes suggest that they are both significant and personally meaningful. Brielle describes the conflict she feels now about her hope to lose weight:

> I think it was a fuel for my hope actually, it was a fuel to hope, it wasn't necessarily a good hope, it wasn't a clean hope, it was a hope. It was a hope that I would be thinner, it was a hope that I would you know, attract someone, or you know, everyone has those hopes.

Chelsea, when asked why the thought of losing weight was hopeful to her answered in a way that suggests that image-based hopes are deeply personal and culturally influenced:

> I dunno I mean I'd feel better about myself and I would stop getting picked on by my parents about [my weight] and I see other girls at my school who are all really tall and thin and pretty and then I look at myself and I just kind of feel like crap and I'm hoping that I can eventually look like one of them and like those supermodels in the magazines and stuff.

The aspirational identity underlying materialistic and image based hopes is markedly different from current or even future authentic selfhood in that it is removed from who the participant currently is and tied instead to an idea of who she should be, arising from societal messages she has absorbed. Similarly, after talking in-depth about how intensely she hopes for certain material things, I asked Susan to say more about why getting clothing or electronics is hopeful for her. Her answer also betrayed a deeper underlying rationale for superficial hopes:

> …like when at school you see some girls and they're kind of popular because they have those kind of shirts and those kind of pants and you think like, "Oh my god I should get these kind of shirts and these kind of pants, like those over the shoulder shirts. Okay I'm gonna find some of those and get that kind of shirt. Oh those skinny jeans? I'm gonna find some of those."
> And so it's like, "I'm gonna find some of those and I'm gonna get some of these," and then I'm gonna be like, "Hey guys" and they're gonna be like, "Hey." And then they're actually going to be nice to me.

Here the hoped-for object is representative of the type of person that the participant wants to be, and if she acquires the object, there is a belief that others would react to her in a different way. Hoped-for objects serve a hoped for

identity. The surface hopes are a conduit for the deeper hopes that the girls hold for acceptance, and they form an aspirational identity, which the early adolescent has not yet attained.

Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed

While hope was an experiential construct which participants engaged both through relationship and personal identity, it was not without challenge. Difficulty having hope at times was common to all four participants. This theme describes the process by which the participants described their hope as threatened in early adolescence, as well as how they were able to resolve those threats and maintain their hope. The major subthemes that arose were *Hope and Darkness, Hope and Choice*, and *Regeneration of Hope*.

Hope and darkness. In describing hope in early adolescence, each of the participants related hope back to times when they had difficulty with hope and an experience of challenged hope. With some participants, like Chelsea, this was explicit in a statement early in the interview: "I don't hope for too much." With other participants, challenges arose throughout their stories of hope, and appeared important to the participant's understanding of hope. For instance, Brielle shared that "it seemed like whenever I got my hopes up for something it wouldn't happen."

The participants described these threats to hope as new. Hope in childhood was remembered as non-threatened. Participants disclosed a growing awareness of difficulty in the world and experiences with disappointment, which made it increasingly difficult to hope. The participants reported that hope has changed for

them since childhood, both in content and experience. One participant recalled the sorts of things that she hoped for as a child as "stupid" and "childish," suggesting that she felt her hopes had matured as she became an early adolescent. Further, the experience of hope, as articulated by Chelsea, underwent a large shift:

> I don't know. Hope feels like I felt inside when I was a kid and I didn't really have to worry about stuff. I just felt like way more good inside I guess, I feel bubbly and like having fun and I felt like going outside and hanging out with friends and stuff. And then as I got older and realized how crappy life is (small laugh) and how much people can suck, I just… yeah.

Jane expanded on this same process of awakening to life's difficulties by noting, *"*Once you see a crack in something it feels like you see a crack in everything.*"* This loss of hope in early adolescence appears to be tied significantly to feeling alone in hope.

Along with new realizations of difficulties and feeling alone in hope, threats to hope appeared, in part, because the girls had experienced instances in which their hopes had not been realized. Chelsea shared that sometimes it was easier to not hope: "like for lots of tests and stuff I'll say yeah I know I failed this and then I do fail it and it's easier than getting my hopes up for getting a good grade or something or making my dad proud 'cause it never happens."

Despite these significant barriers to hoping, the girls described how they were able to "find hope again." Additionally, hope takes on an importance and depth in early adolescence, due to the appearance of these barriers. As Brielle stated, *"*You can't have hope if it's all sunshine and rainbows." Though the challenges to hope made it more difficult to hope, they also made hope more meaningful for the participants. There were two main ways that the participants

described being able to find hope despite difficulty. First, they were able to see hope as a choice. Secondly, they were flexible in their hopes and allowed their hope to regenerate.

Hope and choice. Hope was described as a choice, and choosing to hope was one response to feelings of hopelessness. Participants discussed times where they chose to have hope, even when they were in a difficult situation or when the outcome they were hoping for seemed unlikely. In this way, hope became a personal, internal choice, rather than hope being ruled by external circumstances or likelihood of attainment. In a sense, choice is a way for the participants to orient themselves to hope. Brielle described how seeing hope as a choice allowed her to overcome difficulty:

> Hope is a choice, I believe. You can choose to find hope in graveyards, you can choose to find hope in the love that the family put in to lay that person to rest or you can choose to find anger or sadness that they're dead. Or you could choose to find hope that your body is beautiful, you could choose to find sadness that your body is ugly. You could choose to find hope that you'll make new friends or be sad because you don't have any friends left. You have glass half full, glass half empty, there is a choice in hope, you can choose to be hopeful when sad people don't choose to be hopeful, they need to make that choice. Everyone makes that choice and they can make it a thousand times in their life, but it is made you know.

Brielle articulates that hope is not inherent in objects or circumstances but instead is chosen, and this theme emerged in every participant's interview in different ways. Sometimes, the participants would acknowledge explicitly that hope was related to choice, whereas other times they would simply share a story of hope in which they chose to be hopeful despite reasons not to. Jane illustrated the idea of hope and choice in a metaphor:

> Like going, you know how there's a fork in the road and you pick, you decide which way to go and you're on that right path and you pick it and you are going somewhere instead of stopping at a dead end.

The participants' comments suggested that taking a choice-focused perspective to hope can be "something that gets you through" or a sustaining force through difficulty.

Regeneration of hope. Another way of coping with the difficulties inherent in hoping was by being flexible towards hope and allowing hopes to regenerate. Participants described being able to hope for things to get better while maintaining an awareness of challenges. Chelsea encapsulated this idea in a photo of an acronym she had found on a Facebook site and felt represented her experience of hope: "hold on pain ends."

Figure 8. Brielle's photo of her rendering of the acronym: hold on pain ends.

This new hope for things to get better took different forms. For instance, Susan described hoping for difficult circumstances her family was experiencing to get better, and being able to maintain hope for the future despite the present reality of those circumstances. Jane described hoping to have a new perspective

on difficulties, or seeing things in a new way. While this perspective change could be intrapersonal, it could also be experienced as a shift based on feedback from others. Brielle described her hopeful change in perspective after being told by her psychologist that she was not clinically depressed:

> It was very difficult for me because I had these beliefs and now the professionals are telling me that I'm wrong, and it kind of made me a bit angry because I was like hell you don't know me, you don't know what I've been through, it's none of your business. But then they sort of gave me hope. It was like oh professionals, they know about this stuff, maybe there is hope for me sort of thing.

This new perspective allowed hope to be renewed, suggesting that challenges to hope do not permanently damage one's capacity to hope, and that hope is able to regenerate. Another way in which the participants' hopes regenerated was by one hope replacing another. When one hope was not realized, a new hope could take its place in relation to the same problem or situation. As one participant put it, "Hope is not the result, hope is the reason." The importance of hope does not lie in exactly what one hopes for, but rather that one hopes. Hope could endure despite disappointment; it simply shifted in content. Returning to her analogy of the graveyard and hope, Brielle shared how, during times of challenged hope, a small hope can grow to become more substantial:

> Yeah, if you want to think of it like a string, like you have this one tiny little string to hold on to and that's your only lifeline. But then like you see the sun or something and then you get a little more and you can braid them into a tangible rope and pull yourself up, you know, there's and then on top it's all bright, sunny graveyards.

Figure 9. Brielle's photograph of a graveyard which tied to a metaphor she used repeatedly throughout the interview of being able to find hope in a graveyard.

This regeneration of hope leads to the participant re-engaging in their future. Brielle described how she felt when she was able to hope again despite life's challenges: "I guess when I'm feeling hopeful I feel like, yeah I can make it through all this crap like I can live 'til I'm old." While hope does not negate the difficulties inherent in early adolescence, it emerges despite them.

Summary

In summary, participants were interviewed in order to develop an understanding of the experience of hope in their lives as early adolescent girls. Four themes emerged as important to each participant's experience of hope: *Experiential Hope*, *Relational Hope*, *Hope and Identity*, and *Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed*. Experiential hope encompassed a new awareness of hope, experienced as emotionally buoyant and a somatic experience which gave the participants energy. Hope was often communicated by participants using discrete amounts such as level of hope, number of hopes, and timeline of hope. Relational hope supported participants in their hope reciprocally by drawing hope from important relationships and having hope inform those relationships through

hoping for others (both known and unknown). Identity acted as an anchor for hope in the self. It was hopeful for participants to be able to be authentic with those around them, think about the person who they hope to become, and imagine attainment of materialistic hopes in service of an aspirational identity. Hope threatened; hope renewed describes the process by which the participants were able to regain their hope after finding it challenged by circumstances faced first in early adolescence. Participants found hope to be much more challenged in early adolescence than in childhood and described feeling hopeful as a return to childhood. Participants were able to renew their hope by seeing hope as a choice and allowing their hopes to regenerate.

These results will be discussed within the context of existing research in the fields of hope and early adolescent development. Application of findings, future research, and study limitations will be presented.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the experience of hope for early adolescent girls both experientially and conceptually. The research findings demonstrated that there are commonalities to the experience of hope for early adolescent girls, and four main themes were constructed through analysis of participant interviews. Themes of hope that emerged included: *Experiential Hope*, *Relational Hope*, *Hope and Identity*, and *Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed*. The participants' experiences of hope were contextualized by the challenges to hope they faced in transitioning through early adolescence. These challenges to hope also contained many similarities across all of the participants.

Participants shared their stories of hope through interviews and photos, and provided me with an understanding of their experiences of hope in relation to their lives as early adolescent girls. The overall experience of hope for the participants suggests that hope in early adolescence is different from adult hope described in the literature, and participants do report that their hope is different than when they were children. Consistent with quantitative studies (Heaven & Ciaroccho, 2008), hope appears to undergo significant change during female early adolescent development, providing insight into possible hope-focused interventions.

The findings in this study share similarities with some previous research and theory on hope and early adolescent development. I will explore aspects of current hope models and their relevance to these findings on hope in early

adolescent girls. Particularly, the importance of hope in relationships, how hope can be experienced physically and emotionally, and the importance of individual identity in personal hope will be reviewed. I will also draw parallels to developmental research, particularly the context around psychosocial challenges faced by early adolescent girls. How previous research findings are consistent and divergent with the impressions of female early adolescent hope elicited from the participants will be discussed in the following section, and will feed into implications for research and practice. I will then address limitations of this research and directions for future research.

Connections with previous research

In this section, I will first discuss how each of the themes is supported by previous research, and where the findings appear to contribute new ideas or understandings about hope for early adolescent girls.

Experiential hope. Hope was found to be a phenomenological experience, and a consistent portrayal of how hope is experienced for these girls was identified. Four major findings emerged regarding experiential hope. Hope was described by participants as something that they are aware of and experienced both physically and emotionally moment-to-moment. While participants were able to discuss their hope as complex, they often communicated their hope through various forms of quantification, suggesting certain links to previous research about how hope is languaged.

Articulating a new awareness of hope. While hope was held for the future, it was experienced in the present, similar to previous understandings of

hope (Jevne, 1993). The participants described feeling aware of their hope as it shifted and knowing what it felt like when they were hopeful, or had less hope. Awareness of hope is consistent with Herth's (1988) qualitative research with homeless youth, which found that adolescents were able to reflect on hope and held understandings about hope as a construct, separate and apart from wishing.

In this study, the participants reflected that being aware of hope in this manner was new to them, and they did not understand hope in the same way they had as children when "good things just happened". This suggests that a grasp of hope as a construct may begin to emerge differently in adolescent development than it does in childhood. Early philosophers suggested that we become aware of hope when we are in the face of difficulty as this is when we need it most (Menninger, 1959). This supports the finding that the early adolescent girls in this study had a new awareness of hope consistent with the difficulties faced during their transitions from childhood. On a physiological and developmental level, the arrival of formal operational thinking in early adolescence (Schaffer, 1996), which allows adolescents to think critically and abstractly, may help explain the participants' experience of being newly aware of both their difficulties and their anticipated hopes.

Hope felt. The experience of hope was largely based in emotions felt during times of hopefulness. While the emotional experience of hope was largely positive, associated with emotions such as happiness, excitement, and joy, hope was also related to difficult emotional experiences. Higher levels of hope have been tied to emotions such as joy and happiness in previous research (Aspinwall

& Leaf, 2002; Ciarocchi, Heaven & Davies, 2007), supporting the finding that hope may indeed engender positive emotionality. Furthermore, Benzein et al.'s (2001) research, which examined the experience of hope for non-religious Swedish adults, suggests that one major component of hope is an emotional experience. Therefore the link between hope and emotion described by the participants in this study is supported by previous hope research with adults.

However, hope has largely been tied to exclusively positive emotional experiences in previous research. In fact, hope has actually been defined in some research as a "positive emotion" (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002; Danner, Snowdon & Friesen, 2001). This is despite the fact that hope, unlike other positive emotions such as joy, is inherently uncertain and association of hope with difficulty has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Post, 2006). Hopelessness, the inverse of hope, is clearly associated with negative emotions, but hope itself, while primarily positive, was also related to difficult emotional experiences for participants in this study including anxiety and disappointment. Farran and colleagues (1995) have previously highlighted existential pain inherent in hope for adults, arising from clinical observations. As such, it is not entirely unexpected that some negative emotions would be related to hope for early adolescent girls.

Further, some research has suggested that there is a spike in negative emotions during early adolescence (Larson & Amussen, 1991), especially for girls, which may make this population more vulnerable to linking hope, or any other experience, with negative or sad emotions. While the emotional experience for the participants of this study was still primarily positive, it is important to

acknowledge hope for early adolescent girls as a complex emotional experience which is tied to uncertainty, and experienced alongside difficulty or pain.

Hope embodied. The participants all noted that they experienced hope as well as hopelessness physically. The physical experience of hope was linked with having energy and feeling unrestrained. In her study on hope in homeless children and adolescents, Herth (1998) found that energy was one of the five main ways that adolescents engaged with their hope. Further, Benzein et al. (2001) in their study of how hope is experienced in healthy Swedish adults, claimed that energy was an essential outcome in the process of hoping, and that the experience of having meaningful options for the future releases hope into energy, which activates thoughts and feelings. It appears, therefore, to be a reliable finding that hope draws from and contributes to physical energy, which is consistent with previous adult and adolescent hope research findings.

Hope Spoken: Yardsticks of hope. Participants often described their experience of hope in terms of quantity, including magnitude, multitude, and time-span. The way that participants spoke about their hope suggests an objective perspective of hope as a finite resource. This commodification of hope is consistent with Elliot and Olver's (2002) research on hope with terminal cancer patients. They found that hope in adults is often described as tangible (something one can give or take away) and therefore able to be expressed in an amount. It appears that, for the participants in this study, this way of talking about hope has been borrowed from the larger cultural discourse, attitudes, and ideas about hope. While the stories and images of hope that arose suggested hope to be a complex,

experiential, emotional experience, their attempts to describe their hope used primarily quantitative means. I described the participant's as "social scientists" in their approach to thinking about and describing their hope, and their quantitative descriptions of hope do indeed parallel research methods frequently employed in the study of hope.

A troubling implication of this way of languaging hope is that reducing a complex construct such as hope to a numerical expression may restrict the possibilities for what early adolescent girls see in their hope. Rather than a focus on the supportive qualities of hope, this language shifts the focus to the level or amount of hope. Further, if hope is a discrete construct, it is possible to have "no" hope. Michael Polyani, (1967) a prominent social scientist and philosopher proposed the idea of tacit knowledge: that our experiences are sometimes beyond our ability to define them. He famously stated that, "We can know more than we can tell," and it appears that this is the case for early adolescent girls and their hope. Indeed, at times the girls appeared to struggle for the language in order to fully capture their experience of hope. For example, Jane stated that her hope is, "Hard to describe."

Conversely, this tendency for the participants to frame their hope in this numerical language could also have positive implications for research. A wide range of studies have examined hope as a quantitative concept using various scales (e.g. Hinds & Gattuso, 1991; Snyder et al., 1991). However, hope being analyzed and quantified by the hoping individuals themselves has not previously been introduced in the literature. This study suggests that early adolescent girls

have the capacity to understand their own hope, think about it, and notice when it changes. Indeed, one implication for research may be that we can psychometrically assess hope explicitly. Rather than obscuring the meaning in a scale of hope without using the term "hope," and asking questions associated with hopeful thinking or behaviour, as Snyder's (1997) Children's Hope Scale does, it may be possible to simply ask participants about their hope level.

Relational hope. Hope has been shown to be relational in nature or have dimensions rooted in relationships across studies (Cutcliffe, 1996; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran, Herth & Popovich, 1995; Herth, 1990; Nowotny, 1989; Scioli et al., 2011) and early adolescence is a period of relational focus for girls compared to their male counterparts (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991). Therefore, the finding that hope was consistently related to relationships for the participants is congruous with both the consistently identified nature of hope as well as the participants' developmental stage. Scioli et al. (2011) identified one of four "channels" of hope as an *affiliative channel*, informed by and impacting relationships. Their conceptualization was that relationships impacted hope, and hope impacted and focused on relationships. Similarly, in this study, relationships were reciprocally connected with the girls' hope. While relationships sustained hope for the participants, the participants also held hope for close others, shared hope with others, and engaged in altruistic hoping. Relationships were shown to act as a potential threat to hope for participants during times of relationship crisis or breakdown, which is also consistent with Scioli et al.'s understanding that

relationships inform hope; if there is a threat to relationship, there can be a parallel threat to hope.

Connection as sustaining hope. The finding that participants drew hope from relationships is consistent with virtually all previous qualitative research on hope (according to Benzein et al., 2001; Cutcliffe, 2004; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Elliot, 2005; Elliot & Olver, 2002; Larsen & Stege, 2010). Positive social support and connection appears vital to maintaining hope for early adolescent girls as well as adults. In this study, participants discussed how hope was intricately and intensely tied to the well-being of their relationships, and how positive, caring relationships supported hopefulness. The relationship is not necessarily unidirectional. While it has not been established definitively, it is also possible that hopefulness can help to maintain caring relationships.

The significance of relationships to hope is also congruent with developmental understandings of female early adolescent development. Previous research suggests that early adolescent girls place a high value on their relationships, feel more empathy for others than boys, and seek to create and maintain relationships as a large part of their emerging identity (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Given the mounting evidence that identity and hope are interconnected (e.g., Elliot, 2005; Larsen & Larsen, 2004), a more relationally based identity for girls may suggest that their hope is more relational in nature than adults or male peers, although further research would be required to establish this.

Despite the strong presence of peers and family in the participants' stories and pictures of hope, all participants found being supported in itself hopeful, and

these supportive relationships were not necessarily borne out of informal friendships or typical family relationships. For instance, two of the participants explicitly mentioned finding therapy supportive to their hope. This suggests that there are relational qualities, independent of the type of relationship (e.g., friend, sister, father, etc.) that impact hope for early adolescent girls. Cutcliffe (2004) found that "caring" was fundamentally related to the creation and sustenance of hope in populations with significantly threatened hope, such as those who are recently bereaved. Caring takes place within relationships characterized by a sense of acceptance, tolerance, and understanding. This is consistent with the participants' reports that hopeful relationships were largely relationships in which the participants felt supported and cared for. Further, hope has been found to be fostered through affiliation by way of decreasing isolation (Tae, Kang, Lee, & Park, 2001), and social support played a significant role in assuring participants that they were not alone in their problems, but had someone else to rely on.

Importantly, three of the participants shared that relationships could serve as a challenge to their hope, such as when significant relationships went through sudden changes or major transitions. Previous hope research with adults has suggested that a lack of social connection is predictive of lower hope (Bernard, 2006; Jevne, 2003). This could be compounded by the developmental stage of early adolescence. Affiliative stress, such as being evaluated by others or anticipating relationship difficulty has been shown to lead to negative emotions more in early adolescence than in pre-adolescence or adults (Larson & Asmussen, 1991). This finding is consistent with the relational challenges to hope the

participants described and suggests that these relational threats to hope may be more acute during early adolescence for girls, and that early adolescent girls' hope may be more susceptible to relationship difficulty. Given the importance of relationships to sustaining hope as well as the fact that relational difficulty appears to negatively impact hope, it may be beneficial to ensure that early adolescent girls form supportive, consistent relationships either with informal supportive relationships and/or helping professionals in support of maintained hope.

Outward hope. The participants all described holding hopes for others and a desire to share hope with others. Similarly, Dufault and Martocchio (1985), who outline six spheres of hoping, suggest that affiliative hope can involve holding hope for those "beyond self" (p. 386). This is contrary to the model that Snyder (1995) has suggested, which focuses exclusively on goals for the self. If, as Jevne (2003) states, hope "allows an individual to envision a future in which they want to participate", and human beings live in community and relationship with one another, then it is not surprising that hope for the future could encompass other-focused hope.

Hoping for others is not consistent with some older developmental literature, which suggests that early adolescence is a time of significant self-involvement (Elkind, 1967). For instance, Adams, Abraham, and Markstrom (1987) in their study on self-focus in middle and late adolescence suggest that early adolescents have not yet achieved identity are primarily concerned with how events impact the self and have not yet developed the capacity to attend to the

needs of others. However, the majority of more current research on female early adolescent development highlights the centrality of relationships and care for the "other" (eg. Blyth et al., 1982; Kuttler & Greca, 2004), which is consistent with the current findings.

In a study of what adolescents hope for, Hinds (1988) found that early adolescent girls mentioned holding hope for significant others more often than their male counterparts. However, even for girls, others only appeared a handful of times in a list of mainly self-focused hopes. Conversely, the findings in the present study found many hopes for others. This difference in findings may partially be accounted for by methodological differences. In Hinds' study, participants were simply asked to list hopes, whereas in this study, hope was explored in conversation which allowed for a greater depth of understanding a more broad discussion of hope.

In an extreme example of other-based hopes, one participant in this current study disclosed that she holds hope for others more than she holds hope for herself personally, suggesting that not only do early adolescent girls have hope for others, but that hope for others plays a significant role. This fits with Carol Gilligan's (1982) feminist developmental perspective which notes that girls learn to be more outward and caring-focused rather than self-focused, and also suggests that placing hope in others allows hope to be sustained during times of self-doubt. The participants described two forms of hoping for others. *Holding Hope* involved passively hoping for positive outcomes for significant others in their lives, which could be a recourse when the participant saw no avenue to personally

impact the hoped for outcome. *Sharing Hope* involved actively working to share their hope with significant others in their lives, and was particularly strong during times when the participant had high hope themselves.

Altruistic hope. Every participant described altruistic hope, or hope for unspecified and unrelated others which was often related to an awareness of significant global difficulties such as poverty and inequality. The concept of altruistic hope is not new to hope theory and it has been found previously that individuals can hold hope for others to whom they have no relation and no ability to help (Averill, Catlin & Chon, 1990; Bruininks & Malle, 2005). However, this finding is surprising in the context of some developmental literature. While relationships are extremely important to early adolescents, especially girls (Blyth et al., 1982), some suggest that the concern early adolescents show towards others is ultimately self-serving. For instance, in a study examining how adolescents evaluate the quality of relationships, early adolescents were found to be largely concerned with "self-focused, immediate gains" and "social status" (Roscoe, Diana & Brooks, 1987). In this context, hoping for significant others would essentially concern how the other relates to and benefits the self. Erikson (1959) characterized early adolescents as being "sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others" (p. 80). Therefore the overwhelmingly altruistic attitude that the participant's in this study showed provides new, unexpected insight into early adolescent hope, suggesting that early adolescent girls can hope for others despite the apparent lack of direct impact for them personally. This hoping for the less fortunate may be tied in part to the

growing awareness of the world's difficulties, which is addressed in more detail under the theme of *Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed*.

Hope and Identity. Participants described finding hope in their current, future, and aspirational identity. It is significant that participants are able to find hope in their personal identity (intrapersonally), given the significant challenges to hope that can arise from threats to relationships, as related in this study and shown in previous research (Purdie & Downey, 2000). Given the sustained focus on identity development in early adolescent developmental literature on (e.g., Erikson, 1969; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010), and Benzein's et al.'s (2001) finding that, at least during adulthood, hope is especially salient during times of transition, it is not surprising that hope was tied to identity for the participants in the present study. Further, hope and identity have been previously linked for adolescents (Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Larsen & Larsen, 2004).

Authenticity. The participants reported that their current sense of self was intimately linked with their hope, and that being authentic was a hopeful experience for them. Participants found it hopeful when they had opportunities to be authentic and to be what they had termed their "weird self." In Larsen and Larsen's (2004) exploration of early adolescent identity through metaphor, they found that hope arose spontaneously in the identity metaphors of several participants. This suggests a link between participants' perceived current identity and a sense of hope embedded in that identity. Therefore, while hope may be commonly linked with the creation of future identity (who one hopes to become) it can be supported by current identity (who one is). Furthermore, Nekolaichuk,

Jevne and Maguire (1999), in a study on helping relationships in healthcare, found that being authentic in relationships, and allowing for authenticity inspires hope. For example, Chelsea's comment that being herself around others made her "feel more hope that I can make it through life and stuff" suggests that honest expression of present identity may be linked to: (a) Rogerian notions (1957) of unconditional positive regard from others, as well as (b) Snyder's (1995) agency of hope, or belief in one's abilities. Having a strong sense of self in the moment may inspire hope for the self to be effective in the future. It seems that engagement with others in a non-judgmental manner and permission to be authentic can support hope for early adolescent girls in the present.

Personal goals. The participants described goals that they had for themselves or what they hoped to accomplish both in the short-term and in the long term, which contributed to the construction of their future identity. These goal-based hopes are most closely aligned with what would be measured in Snyder et al.'s (1997) cognitive-behavioural, goal-based measure of hope, suggesting that it does represent at least part of hope for early adolescent girls. Previous research has suggested that adolescent hopes tend to be more future-focused than adults (Herth, 1988). Hopes for the future in adolescents have been described as "unfettered" (Shepard & Marshall, 1999), and the adult participants in Benzein et al.'s (2001) research remembered their hopes in adolescence as broad and optimistic, but not necessarily grounded in reality. The participant's hopes for the far future presented here are consistent with this idea. For example, Susan discussed her plans for her future by stating that she planned to move out

with good friends, live with them for a year, and then start her family and live in a large house. The girls appear to have enough awareness of adult life that they can see what they want for themselves, but they do not yet view their future in practical or specific steps, but more in broadly aspirational ones. My sense while interviewing the participants was that the adult that each was striving to become was somehow understood as quite a different individual than the person sitting across from me during the interview.

The participants' hopes for the near future were not consistent with the idea of broad and optimistic hopes, however, and were concrete rather than a far distant vision. These *Personal Goal* hopes that participants shared for the near future appeared to be very grounded in reality. Shorter-term goals were generally well defined and specific, but always contained an element of uncertainty. For example, Chelsea described hoping to get a part in a play, and Susan talked about hoping to see her favourite recording artist. These hopes appear to be related to who the participant wants to be in the near future, and were grounded in the present reality and identity.

Meaning in materialistic hopes. The subtheme *Meaning in Materialistic Hopes* outlined a number of seemingly superficial hopes such as attaining clothing or electronics and losing weight that were ultimately related to an aspirational identity. In this aspect of identity related hope, the participants described holding hope for objects or outcomes such as weight loss, clothing, or electronics. Although what was hoped for may appear shallow, it had deep and personal implications for the participants. As Macquarrie (1978) states, "Hope appears in

many forms and has many objects from the most trivial to the most profound." In this case, it appears that even trivial hopes can be experienced by participants as profound.

While at least one participant discussed being conflicted, and recognized the apparent superficiality of these hopes, all of the participant's found them to be important and strongly tied to their experience of hope. Therefore, one practice implication is that, as clinicians, it is important to treat these hopes as real and significant when they are expressed by adolescent female clients. This does not imply that these specific object-related hopes will endure, but rather they appear to be genuinely related to an aspirational identity which is personally meaningful to the participant at the time. Duke and Kreshell (1998), in their study of how early adolescent girls engage with magazines, suggest that through mass media, young girls receive consistent messages tying material purchases or physical beauty to a socially desirable identity. These aspirational hopes for a desirable identity appear to be well understood by manufacturers of beauty products who appropriate these important identity aspirations in the service of product sales.

There are some worrying implications of the materialistic hopes related to weight management or body-image that were voiced by all of the girls. During analysis I initially struggled to reconcile them within the context of the participants' hope, a concept I acknowledge I conceived of as supportive, or at least not antagonistic to healthy development. Given that fixation on body image in early adolescence can frequently culminate in disordered eating (Stice & Shaw, 2002; Wertheim, Paxton, Schutz & Muir, 1996), it is significant that all the

participants are, or have been at some point in early adolescence, integrating part of their experience of hope with their desire to be thin.

Integrating these body-image hopes into the picture of hope for early adolescent girls suggests that the potentially debilitating impact of cultural beliefs of what women should look like or be can inform their hope. If hope is viewed as a construction based partly in the larger societal narrative, the inclusion of these hopes makes immense sense. The girls' picture of the woman who they hope to become is consistent with societal ideals for women's attainment continually presented to be grounded in image, and more specifically body size. One participant's comment that she "wanted to look like the supermodels in the magazines" underscores the place of societal narratives and media in these hopes. The fact that the early adolescent girls in this study hold image-based hopes as part of their hoped-for aspirational identity simply suggests that they are internalizing larger social narratives. Rather than labeling these hopes as less important or less genuine, we may simply take the opportunity to reflect on the messages that are being communicated to these girls about what their future self should look like.

Hope threatened; hope renewed. This theme presented ways in which the participants found their hope threatened by various circumstances, relationships, and a greater awareness of serious global difficulties. There were process elements to this theme, as participants discussed how they understood that their hope evolved during early adolescence to incorporate this growing

awareness of difficulty. The evolution or development of hope relied primarily on the techniques of seeing hope as a choice and regenerating hopes.

Hope and darkness. The threats to hope discussed by the participants as increasing at the onset of early adolescence are consistent with previous findings that hope decreases in early adolescence (Heaven & Ciaroccho, 2008), and that early adolescent girls face significant psychosocial pressure (Caskey & Ruben, 2003) and increased negative affect (Larson & Asmussen, 1991). The psychosocial pressures outlined in the literature review took on a depth and humanity when the girls discussed them as threats to their hope. Early adolescent girls, through the process of cognitive and emotional development, are able to understand more of the world's difficulties and are integrating those understandings into their experiences of hope, sometimes resulting in challenges to hope. Along with awareness of larger challenges to hope, the participants revealed that not having their hopes realized was a precursor to feelings of hopelessness. Lastly, participants felt their hope was challenged when they felt alone in their hope for a better world, or that no one else cared about what others were going through.

Providing young women with avenues to help others would likely address some of the challenges to hope inherent in perceiving the world as a much more complex and dark place than it appeared during childhood. By allowing young women to engage actively with their altruistic hopes, it may provide them with agency (Snyder, 1995) in face of the darkness challenging their hope.

Hope and choice. Hope as a choice is related to the idea of hope as an orientation (Benzein et al., 2000) in that it focuses on the perspective of the hoping individual rather than the circumstances. Rather than hope simply acting as an agent to change the circumstances, hope can be a choice to maintain agency during challenging circumstances. All of the participants in this study were able to engage with hope, even when the hoped-for outcome was not likely. This choice to hope may function as a way to have agency in situations where one cannot impact the outcome. In *Man's Search for Meaning,* the book written by Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, he introduced logotherapy based on his experiences in the concentration camps. Logotherapy rests on the idea that as human beings, we cannot always control the circumstances, but that we have control in how we relate to the circumstances we find ourselves in, which he characterized as the ultimate choice: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom". This existential concept relates to the current theme of *Hope and Choice* described by the participants. Rather than circumstances determining hope, hope can be an invited or welcome shift in perception of the circumstances.

When the participants found themselves in situations that were not inherently hopeful during their transition to early adolescence, they needed to make the choice to hope. While this hope was potentially more difficult, it also appeared to be more meaningful. Because of this, these girls describe being able to hope even when they were pessimistic about the chances of their hope

becoming a reality due to current circumstances. This is consistent with research conducted with undergraduate students by Bruininks and Malle (2005) which found that hope is not the same as optimism, and that an individual can feel hopeful despite feeling that the hoped for outcome is unlikely.

Hope and choice may be particularly relevant for the developmental stage of early adolescence. While early adolescents are beginning to form habits and preferences, as well as to be judged on their material possessions, they are not yet at an age where they are able to work, and have no income with which to change their overall circumstances. In Alberta, an individual cannot work without a permit before the age of 15 (RSA, 2000). Furthermore, early adolescents face requirements from authority figures at both home and school, which restricts their freedom to make choices beyond their financial limitations. Therefore there is limited capacity for early adolescent girls to act in support of many of their hoped for outcomes. In this instance, hope itself functions as an action towards a goal, when other action is impossible; i.e. it is the decision or choice to hope.

There are clinical implications for this finding. In psychotherapy, or in any helping profession, it is almost always impossible to change the actual circumstances of our client's lives. We cannot force young clients' peers to stop bullying them, or make it easier for them to obtain good grades. However, if we can teach them to engage with hope as a choice, even during difficult times, it may provide them a change in perspective that allows them to engage in their lives in a different way. There are real difficulties inherent in the social and emotional worlds of an early adolescent girl and while hope cannot eliminate

these difficulties, it may provide an alternative for coping with them by providing a window into a better possible future. Hope can be an important resource to provide a positive future orientation and allow early adolescent girls to see past their present difficulty.

Regeneration of hope. The participants reported experiencing a regeneration of both the feeling of hope as well as regeneration of specific hopes. When certain hopes were not realized, participants had the capacity to generate a new hope in relation to the same situation. For example, when Susan realized that her hope to reconcile with her best friend was not going to be realized, she developed a new hope that her old friend would not spread gossip or say mean things about her. Rather than losing hope altogether, the hope shifts in form, despite disappointment. In Johnson's (2013) dissertation on hope in unplanned motherhood, she describes a similar phenomenon wherein an initial reaction to a roadblock is to feel paralyzed by hopelessness – or "oh no" – followed by an imagining of possible futures given the new landscape – or "now what." The participants in this study similarly found that their hope regenerated after periods of difficulty. Brielle stated that "hope is not the result, hope is the reason," suggesting that hope is not about a specific outcome but rather provides an individual with motivation to move forward in a more global sense, and is able to regenerate in the face of difficulty. Ultimately, hope is able to be sustained across time rather than being tied to, and potentially lost to a single outcome.

Implications for research and practice

Overall, hope as experienced by the early adolescent girls interviewed in this study had significant ties to previous hope theories for adults, but also had points of divergence. There are important potential implications for research and practice. Although Snyder's (1995) hope scale is frequently used for quantitative research with children and adolescents, there were marked differences in the hope described by the participants in this study and Snyder's model. The hope described by the participants of this study was significantly more nuanced and complex than the model of hope Snyder has suggested for children and adolescents. One of the major defining attributes of hope in Snyder's model is agency, or motivation and belief in one's ability pursue a set goal. However, the participants in this study often identified themselves as having hope even in instances where they felt they had no ability to change the situation. In these instances, hope arose as a cognitive or emotional action, an alternative to physical action.

Further, Snyder's scale focuses exclusively on goals for the self; whereas the participants in this study had several experiences of hope as an emotional or sustaining experience rather than a goal, and contrary to Snyder's self-focused scale participants frequently hoped for outcomes for significant others or unknown others, even when the outcome would have no impact on the participant personally. Some participants even shared that they had difficulty hoping for themselves, but were able to hope for their relationships, for the world to get better, or for positive outcomes for the people that they loved. This suggests that

although personally-directed agentic hope may indeed decrease in early adolescent girls – as evidenced in previous research (Cantrell and Lupinacci, 2004; Heaven and Ciarocchi, 2008) – hope itself may persist but change in form. It may be necessary to begin to look at hope as conceptualized by adolescents themselves, whether in quantitative and/or qualitative forms.

Study Limitations

The limitations of the present study are an important consideration. The sample size was small due to recruitment challenges. While qualitative inquiry is focused on understanding and exploring phenomenon and experiences with depth and context, it is still important to ensure that the sample is sufficiently large to answer the research question. In this case, the robustness of the research findings may be challenged by the small sample. Conversely, Norman Denzin (1999) argues that in qualitative research it is important to treat "each instance of a phenomenon, for example an interview, as an occurrence which evidences the operation of a set of cultural understandings currently available for use by cultural members" and suggests that due to the complexity of the information obtained in qualitative research, there is no need for even more than one participant, and the researcher must endeavor to answer the research question, without concern for empirical generalization.

Further, because the sample is limited to Caucasian girls who live in a large urban center, the findings may not be relevant across cultures and environments. It will be important when attempting to apply these findings to various populations to return to the context of the participants in this study in

order to ensure that the findings are applicable to the population in question.

Directions for Future Research

These findings constitute a primary exploration of hope in early adolescent girls. While they do have value in providing an initial understanding of hope in early adolescence, they are a starting point. Several research projects could be considered based on the results of this study.

Process elements emerged in this study, particularly around regeneration of hope following threats to hope. This process was associated with new awareness of life's difficulty which adolescents may become aware of during this stage of life. Future research could explore this process further, and attempt to better describe and explain the process behind *Hope Threatened; Hope Renewed*. In order to develop a theory for the process behind hope's regeneration in early adolescent girls, use of a grounded theory methodology with a larger sample of participants is recommended. This research would hopefully produce a cogent theory of the process of hope and changes in hope for girls during early adolescent development which could be integrated into counselling work and research.

While this research has highlighted a particular developmental cohort and explored the intricacies of hope for early adolescent girls, there are still significant gaps in our understanding of how hope functions throughout development. As noted in the literature review, research which attempts to understand the experience of hope for children and adolescents is sparse, despite the fact that hope has been established as an important factor throughout development. Elliot

and Sherwin (1997) argue that understanding how hope develops is the only way that we can know how to foster hope for individuals facing difficult life circumstances or loss of hope. Following from this research, there are several areas which require development. As seen in the subtheme *Articulating a New Awareness of Hope*, the participants in this study saw hope as different in early adolescence than they remember it in childhood, suggesting that there may be changes in conceptualizations and experiences of hope throughout childhood and adolescent development. A large-scale examination of hope across the lifespan would be an extremely valuable contribution to the literature, both in hope and developmental literature, and could potentially have valuable implications for practice in working with children and youth.

Lastly, the question of gender and hope is an important one. This study explored the attitudes of early adolescent girls in depth to determine how hope functions during this important stage in development for females. A parallel examination of hope for early adolescent males would provide insight as to how gender impacts hope during this developmental period.

Conclusion

There were several similar threads in the participants' understandings of hope that aligned with previous research on hope in adults. The participants experienced hope in the moment in their emotions and physical reactions, but they often languaged their hope as a discrete amount. Hope for the girls in this study was often related to relationships, which is consistent with what is known of early adolescent girls developmentally. Surprisingly, the participants were extremely

invested in hope for others, including a significant aspect of altruistic hope. Relationships could be established with caring professionals as well as family and friends. The participants found hope in their current identities, but also held hope for their future goals and an aspirational identity linked to image or material possessions. Lastly, the participants found their hope to be significantly threatened throughout early adolescence due to new awareness of difficulty, and were able to regain their hope through seeing hope as a choice and allowing their hope to regenerate.

The fact that there are significant differences between the hope described by the participants in this study and existing scales which measure hope in early adolescence, suggests that directions of research for hope in adolescence may need to shift. For instance, because the current Children's Hope Scale (1997) does not include hope for others, when one of the participants lost hope for herself and only hoped for others in her life, she would be understood as having no hope even though she was hoping. Furthermore, hope was seen by participants as a way to orient to difficulty when they were unable to act, which would also not be captured by Snyder's scale. While this study was small in scale and targeted a narrow demographic, it provides an initial understanding of how hope in early adolescent girls may look. Future directions for research include: (1) exploring the process behind how hope is threatened and regained during the transition of early adolescence, (2) undertaking a large scale study examining hope throughout childhood and adolescent development, with particular attention to gender

differences, and (3) steps to develop a more inclusive multidimensional scale of adolescent hope.

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