

Experiences and Meanings of Hope for Adult Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual
Abuse: A Narrative Exploration

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

University of Alberta

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Abstract

Male childhood sexual abuse (MCSA) is an issue that remains in the recesses of our social awareness. Only recently has the impact of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) on adult male survivors begun to receive research attention. The landscape of literature on MCSA has served to highlight the plethora of the often persistent and long-term psychological struggles experienced by many adult male survivors. While this research has greatly contributed to our understanding of this under-studied population, little is known about the experiences of hope for male survivors. Researchers and clinicians alike speak to the importance of hope within the healing process for survivors of CSA; however, there are virtually no studies specifically exploring hope for male survivors. As such, the purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of hope in the lives of men who were sexually abused in their childhood.

This study employed a narrative analytic methodology to examine the experiences and meanings of hope for 6 adult male survivors of CSA. Methods for gathering data included: (a) initial in-depth research conversations; (b) photo-assisted conversations, (c) follow-up conversations; and (d) a researcher journal. Polkinghorne's (1995) *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* approaches provided the primary guiding framework from which the research conversations were interpreted. In addition, the interpretation process was informed by aspects of the discourse analysis tradition. From the blending of these analytical orientations, 6 individual chapters highlighting participants' unique stories of hope are presented. In addition, the thematic threads common across participants' accounts are discussed.

Within the separate participant chapters, a number of captivating narratives on hope and CSA emerged, providing a faceted understanding of hope, distinct to each participant. Across narratives, several shared thematic threads surfaced, including: (a) Thinking Hope; (b) Embodied Hope; (c) Hope in Action; and (d) Hope in Relationship

and Connection. In addition, the thematic idea of hope in relation to healing from CSA was a theme unique to the experience of hope for participants. Potential implications for working with male survivors within the context of counselling and therapeutic practice are offered. Possible directions for future research are also presented.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Sherry Rodrigues Antonucci. No part of this thesis has been previously published. This thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Exploring hope with adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, ID. 225, 20/04/12.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the six participants in this study. You all have generously given of your time to share your experiences, struggles, and hopes. Your strength and courage have inspired my own hope and your words have continuously propelled me forward throughout this research project. To each of you, I am deeply thankful.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my vovô, Jose Luis Viveiros. Mere words cannot express how much you are missed. Your sense of humor, playfulness, and appreciation of the arts has been most influential in my life. I thank you for sharing your love of storytelling with me and I am forever grateful for you and our time together.

Acknowledgments

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and contribution of several individuals to whom I am tremendously grateful. First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Denise Larsen. Her insight and guidance are interwoven in the thoughts and words of this document. I am deeply thankful for her patience, unwavering encouragement, and positive regard for my work. I will forever be honoured to have been supervised by such an exceptional clinician, researcher, and mentor.

I also am sincerely thankful to all the members of my dissertation committee for their support and guidance: Dr. Rosemary Foster, Dr. Sophie Parkins, Dr. Ronna Jevne, Dr. Frank Peters, and Dr. Helen Massfeller. Their insights, questions, and critiques have ultimately strengthened the quality of this work.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the unconditional love, patience, and support of my dear husband and life partner, Angelo. During the writing of this document, we were blessed with two precious gifts, our sons, Matteo and Ottavio. From them, I have learned to love deeper than I thought possible, to live in the present, to play with abandonment, and to engage with hope in ways I had never anticipated. I am also deeply grateful to my parents Grace and Arlindo Rodrigues. Without exception, they have supported me in my endeavors to attain the highest standards of educational and professional achievement. I am especially thankful to my greatest friend, my mom, who has tirelessly walked with me throughout this long and challenging journey. She embodies all that I hope to be as a mother. To my extended family and friends, I am grateful for their encouragement throughout this experience. To an incredible woman, esteemed colleague, and dear friend, Easter Yassa, her enduring support and loving

presence has helped me through each and every challenge presented to me in the writing process of this dissertation.

Finally, I extend my deepest appreciation to the participants in this study for their willingness and support in further understanding and learning about the phenomenon of hope. I am inspired by their wisdom, indomitable spirit, and stories of hope.

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Chapter One: Introduction

With hope we can find meaning in how we respond to what has happened to us.

(Jevne & Miller, 1999, p. 11)

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Men who were sexually abused during childhood represent a highly stigmatized, marginalized, and under-researched population (Easton, Renner, & O’Leary, 2013). Adult male survivors often struggle with the aftermath of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in silence, secrecy, and shame (Kia-Keating, Grossman, Sorsoli, & Epstein, 2005). Long-term effects often associated with male childhood sexual abuse (MCSA) include depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations, self-injurious behavior, post-traumatic stress, interpersonal difficulties, low self-esteem, sexual difficulties, and confusion around sexual orientation (Briere, Evans, Runtz, & Wall, 1988; Collings, 1995; Davis, 2005; Dimock, 1988; Dhaliwal, Gauzas, Antonowicz, & Ross, 1996; Dorais, 2002; Easton et al., 2013; Etherington, 2000; Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Gartner, 2001, 2005; Gill & Tutty, 1999; Gold, Lucenko, Elhai, Swingle, & Sellers, 1999; Hunter, 1991; King, Coxell, & Mezey, 2002; O’Leary & Gould, 2010; Olson, 1990; Ray, 2001; Spiegel, 2003; Tremblay & Turcotte, 2005). Considering the potentially profound negative impact of childhood sexual abuse, male survivors commonly experience a sense that their future is trapped in a silent and painful past (Etherington, 1995). Furthermore, researchers indicate that men who have experienced sexual abuse as children are at risk of experiencing a sense of hopelessness in adulthood (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Camino, 2000; Etherington, 2000; Haatainen et al., 2003; Joiner, 2005). It is thought that the absence of hope can have a detrimental effect on the healing process (Allen, 2005; Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Frank, 1973; Hafen, Karren, Frandsen, & Smith, 1996; Herman, 1997; Jenmorri, 2006). Thus, one could argue that the experience of hope for male survivors may be important as

they journey through their healing. To date, the struggles associated with male childhood sexual abuse have led the research; however, the experiences that engage and draw survivors forward in their healing process has not been examined through the lens of hope.

Hope

The field of hope research has grown exponentially over the last three decades (Elliott, 2005), illustrating that hope is consistently associated with positive psychosocial adjustment across the lifespan (Benzein, Saveman, & Norberg, 2000; Cheavens, Michael, & Snyder, 2005; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Valle, Huebner, & Suido, 2006). In particular, social science researchers and theorists have explored the nature, structure, meaning, and effects of hope (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990; Beavers & Kaslow, 1981; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Elliott, 2005; Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995; Jevne, 1991; Nikolaichuk, Jevne, & Maguire, 1999; Menninger, 1959; Miller, 2000; Snyder, 1994; Stotland, 1969). Hope is often described as a multifaceted, dynamic, future oriented, personally significant, and goal oriented (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farren et al., 1995; Hinds, 1984; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Nikolaichuk et al., 1999; Snyder, 1995). From these works, we have come to appreciate hope as a critical component in the human experience and an interpretive lens through which we can understand our existence (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Jevne & Miller, 1999).

Cheavens, Michael & Snyder (2005) note that even in the face of challenging life circumstances, “higher hope virtually always is related to more beneficial life outcomes” (p. 127). In terms of trauma and more specifically CSA, researchers studying hope are just beginning to indicate that hope is an important element in the psychological healing process for sexual abuse survivors (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Erdem, 2000; Jenmorri, 2006; Sutherland, 2009; Sympson, 2000; Wilkes, 2002), but none have addressed hope

for male survivors specifically. Despite the emergent body of literature addressing hope and childhood sexual abuse separately, there is no research exploring the experience and meaning of hope for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

At the inception of this study, it was my thought that exploring hope from the unique perspective of male survivors of CSA would add to and enrich the current field of hope research. In addition, I sensed that an understanding of participants' experiences of hope would also offer important information to be considered by professionals (i.e., psychologists and/or counsellors) working with male survivors.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was: *What are the experiences and meanings of hope for adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse?* At first, this research question can appear deceptively simple. But as I discovered, the meanings and experiences of hope for participants were unique and abundantly complex. Each participant was the sage teacher regarding hope in his own life and I, the eager student hoping to learn how he experienced and understood hope. In addition to exploring the research question, I hoped to engage in a respectful and meaningful relationship with each participant. My overarching intention was to create a safe space for participants to share and voice their narrative accounts of CSA and hope.

Methodology

*But every man is more than just himself;
he also represents the unique,
the very special and always significant and remarkable point at which the world's
phenomena intersect, only once in this way and never again.
That is why every man's story is important, eternal, and sacred...*

(Hermann Hesse, 1992, p. 105)

I chose a narrative methodological approach informed by discourse analysis to explore the experiences and meanings of hope for male survivors. The narrative orientation is a powerful means of gaining an in depth understanding of personally

significant stories and accounts which are commonly associated with conceptualizations of hope (Bruininks & Malle, 2005; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Elliott & Olver, 2002; Farran et al., 1995; Jevne, 2005). Throughout the evolving process of this qualitative study, I came to an awareness of the often subtle and nuanced discursive qualities inherent within participant narrative accounts. As such, I elected to blend Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative tradition and specific features of Wood and Kroger's (2000) approach to discourse analysis. From this blending, individual participant chapters reflecting our co-constructed research conversations on hope are presented. I believe that this approach was not only appropriate to the topic of study, but has led to rich descriptions of hope for male survivors.

Reasons for the Study: A Personal Narrative

Researchers Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encourage beginning a narrative study with the researcher's personal account of their orientation to the inquiry. This study evolved out of several experiences which at the time, seemed like separate and unconnected threads; however, in hindsight these threads were all very much a part of the same tapestry of experience. My introduction to hope and MCSA began to take shape during my undergraduate career, in what might seem like the most unlikely place: a federal penitentiary for female offenders. During a conversation with a woman serving a life-sentence and a survivor of several unimaginable traumatic childhood violations, including CSA, I asked: "What keeps you going in your life?" To this she replied: "Hope... I've lost and suffered so much, but I haven't lost hope." Among our many other sessions primarily saturated by stories hopelessness and abandonment related to her childhood sexual trauma, this one particular conversation initiated a flood of reflections during which I began to consider the connection between hope and CSA. It was a pivotal moment that informed my experiences that followed.

Because of the overwhelming number of female offenders I worked with, whom were also survivors of CSA, I decided to look earnestly into learning more about sexual abuse. Months into my internship at the prison, I found myself not only immersed in several books on CSA, but also considering how I could gain more direct experience with survivors. Volunteering at a Sexual Assault Centre provided such an experience and introduced me to the multitude of issues relevant to supporting survivors. However, it was also through this work that I began to notice a general preconception grounded in a belief that men were predominately perpetrators of sexual abuse. This underlying framework, while reflective of the dominant literature available on CSA, failed to represent the comparatively silent and neglected segment of the survivor population: the male survivor. Once I observed such a demarcation in the literature and quite frankly, in several support services offered to survivors, my interest in understanding the experiences of CSA for males was propelled forward.

During my master's research examining the experiences of counselling for male survivors (Antonucci, 2004), I became fascinated in the stories of hope participants alluded to, and in some cases made explicit, but were left unexplored given the parameters of that particular study. It was as if hope was nudging on the periphery of our conversations but did not receive in-depth attention. This early research project served to solidify my interest in exploring hope for male survivors. From then on, my goal in undertaking this present study has been to gain an understanding of *the experiences and meanings of hope for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse*.

Comments on Terminology and Language Usage

In the interest of clarity and to ease readability, a brief description of the terms utilized throughout this document is provided:

Hope: By way of broad overview, the description of hope offered by Stephenson (1991), serves as the guiding definition for this study: hope is “a process of

anticipation that involves the interaction of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating and is directed to a future fulfillment that is personally meaningful” (p. 1459).

Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA): Broadly conceptualized, childhood sexual abuse is considered a type of abuse that involves any act of a sexual nature imposed by an individual on a child where there is an imbalance of power and control (Wilken, 2003).

Male Childhood Sexual Abuse (MCSA): Abuse that involves any act of a sexual nature imposed by an individual on a male child where there is an imbalance of power and control.

Male Survivor: Refers to an adult man over the age of 18 who has experienced sexual abuse as a child.

I purposefully employ the term *survivor* rather than *victim*. For one, this was the language used by participants and I felt it was important to stay close to their actual expressions. In addition, the term survivor has been widely used in the literature on sexual abuse. Connoting a sense of empowerment rather than victimization, the word survivor has supplanted the term “victim” in much of the literature (Dennig, 2009).

Overview of Research Text

The organizing structure of this study deviates slightly from the traditional research dissertation format. Guided by my intention to enhance understandability and reflect the narrative methodology of this study, I have modified the overall structural presentation of the dissertation from the traditional format. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two is an exploration of the literature as it relates to MCSA and hope. Chapter Three is a presentation of the research methodology. It reviews the narrative methodology and interpretive approaches, as well as the specific aspects of discourse analysis employed in this study. Chapters Four through Nine present individual participant narratives of hope. Chapter Ten offers a further layer of analysis that

represents the thematic threads across participant accounts. In addition, a discussion of relevant research on hope and CSA are embedded within this tenth chapter. The eleventh and final chapter highlights some of my final thoughts and conclusions. Given the narrative nature of this study, my own perspective replete with reflections, understandings, personal experiences and stories will be made explicit and threaded throughout this document.

Chapter Two: Exploring the Literature

This chapter explores the relevant literature in the areas of male childhood sexual abuse (MCSA) and hope. Although there is a notable dearth of literature examining the qualitative experience of hope for male survivors, I endeavour to highlight the current understandings and conceptualizations of these two distinct bodies of literature (i.e., hope and MCSA) and how they intersect. This chapter begins with a review of the definitions, prevalence rates, and long-term impact associated with child sexual abuse (CSA) in general as well as for male survivors in particular. This is followed by a discussion of hope, specifically its definitions, models, and its relationship to hopelessness. The literature review concludes by exploring the connections between hope and CSA.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Within the last few decades, public awareness and interest in CSA has begun to surface and generate a growing number of research studies, books, and resources (Draucker, 2000; Price, Hilsenroth, Petretic-Jackson, & Bonge, 2001; Sonkin, 1998). Despite this apparent public acknowledgment of the impact of CSA, the sexual abuse of young boys in many ways still resides in the dark corners of public and professional consciousness (Day, Thurlow, & Wooliscroft, 2003; Lab, Feigenbaum, & De Silva, 2000; Mathews, 1996; Spiegel, 2003). Anderson (2013) notes recently, the “striking inertia” in the discourse of the sexual abuse of males within the field of abuse studies (p. 232). As a researcher and helping professional, I anticipate that this study will not only add to the discourse regarding male childhood sexual abuse (MCSA), but also shed light on the meanings and experiences of hope for this understudied segment of the population.

What is childhood sexual abuse? A myriad of definitions of CSA exist. In fact, researchers note that few studies employ consistent definitions (Beitchman, et al., 1992; Bolton, Mooris, & MacEachron, 1989; Colarusso, 2010; Draucker, 1992; Easton, 2012; Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Gartner, 2001, 2005; Goodyear-Brown, Fath, & Myers,

2012; Spiegel, 2003). Since the late 1970's several criteria have been considered in the development of an operational definition of CSA (Goodyear-Brown et al., 2012). Finkelhor (1979) places emphasis on the age of discrepancy between the child and abuser. Russell (1983) focuses on the exploitive nature of the sexual act. Gold (1986) includes both age discrepancy and/or physical force as part of his distinguishing criteria. Finkelhor and Hotaling (1984) later suggest that the criteria for sexual abuse should include: "sexual contact that occurs to a child as a result of force, threat, deceit, while unconscious, or through exploitation of an authority relationship no matter what the age of the partner" (p. 31). Fater and Mullaney (2000) define CSA as a type of abuse that involves developmentally inappropriate or coercive sexual contact. More recently, Goodyear-Brown et al. (2012) have delineated CSA as "any sexual activity involving a child in which the child is unable or unwilling to give consent" (p. 4).

Across the many definitions of CSA, a differentiation is often made regarding behaviors involving contact or non-contact between the child and the abuser (Bolton et al., 1989; Gartner, 2005; Goodyear-Brown et al., 2012; Leserman, 2005). Contact abuse entails a physical interaction (i.e., forced touching, penetration, stimulation etc.), whereas non-contact abuse addresses a wide range of other sexual behaviors, including: sexualized talk, exposing a child to pornographic material, photographing a child for sexual purposes, exposing genitals to a child, and masturbating or otherwise being sexual in front of the child (Gartner, 2005; Hunter, 1990). Overall, the various definitions of CSA tend to include the following elements:

...a child, directly or indirectly, is obliged to participate in sexual acts...sexual abuse always implies a sexual relationship imposed by an adult or an adolescent on a child or a younger adolescent, against the latter's will, or by obtaining his participation by ruse, lies, force, or fear (Dorais, 2002, p. 7).

Despite the many attempts at devising a clear classification of CSA, there is currently no uniformly accepted definition (Beitchman et al., 1992; Bolton et al., 1989; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Hunter, 1990; Wilken, 2003). While all of the previous definitions have contributed to our current conceptualization of childhood sexual abuse, researchers suggest that in addition to having a general framework, we must be open to survivors' accounts of their experiences (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999). For the purposes of clarity in this study, I employ the following guiding definition: CSA is any act of a sexual nature, imposed by an individual upon a child where there is an imbalance of power and control (Wilken, 2003). Although broad in scope, this definition provides space for multiple accounts and experiences of CSA. Rather than imposing specific age discrepancy criteria between the abuser and child or specifying the presence of contact versus non-contact abuse, the experience of feeling sexually violated as a child provides the meaningful boundary for this study.

Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse. Researchers generally concur that the prevalence of CSA is much higher than once believed (Draucker, 2000). Numerous studies have investigated the prevalence of CSA and findings tend to indicate a wide range of prevalence rates for both male and female populations (Bagley, Wood, & Young, 1994; DeJong, Hervada, & Emmett, 1983; Dennig, 2009; Dhaliwal et al., 1996; Dimock, 1988; Dube et al., 2005; Easton, 2012; Easton et al., 2013; Finkelhor, 1984; Holmes & Slap, 1998; Hunter, 1990; Jones, Finkelhor, & Kopiec, 2001; King, Coxell, & Mezey, 2000; Peters, Wyatt, & Finkelhor, 1986; Risin & Koss, 1987; Russel, 1986; Sarafino, 1979; Walker, Carey, Mohr, Stein, & Seedat, 2004; Wurr & Patridge, 1996; Wyatt, 1985). In the first national prevalence study of CSA conducted in the United States, Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith (1990) identify that 27% of women and 16% of men experience sexual abuse in their childhood. In a review of several large-scale studies involving college and community samples, prevalence rates range from 7% to

62% for women and 3 % to 16% for men (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992). Walker et al. (2004) reported that world-wide studies reflect prevalence rates as low as 0.6 % for boys and 0.9% for girls, and as high as 15.1% for boys (slightly lower than the 16% found in the US study conducted by Finkelhor et al., 1990), and 33.8% for girls. Despite the varying prevalence rates of CSA for both men and women, the bulk of the studies have reported rates that reinforce and highlight the recognition that the sexual abuse of children is a significant issue meriting further attention. When considering these studies investigating CSA prevalence rates, it becomes apparent that a substantial proportion of men are sexually abused as children.

Specifically examining the prevalence of male childhood sexual abuse, Holmes and Slap (1998) conducted a comprehensive review of 160 prevalence studies published between 1985 and 1997 and found that the sexual abuse of boys ranges from 4% to 76%. In a Canadian study surveying a total of 750 adult males, 15.5% reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact before the age of 17 (Bagley et al., 1994). Consistent with the results reported by Bagley et al. (1994), Dube et al. (2005) indicate that 16% of adult male members ($n = 7970$) of a San Diego Health Maintenance Organization experienced contact sexual abuse as a child. A meta-analysis, compiling information from 65 articles, spanning 22 countries revealed that 7.9% of men had experienced sexual abuse as a child (Pereda, Guilera, Forms, & Gomez-Benito, 2009). More recently, researchers have extended this meta-analysis conducted by Pereda and colleagues by combining prevalence figures of CSA reported in 217 studies published between 1980 and 2008 (Stoltenborg, van Ijzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). The overall estimated CSA prevalence among male participants is consistent with results found by Pereda et al. (7.6%).

Similar to the research literature on the prevalence rates of CSA for both male and females, there is also a notable variability in reported rates specifically related to

male childhood sexual abuse. In fact, some researchers suggest that the reported rates for males who experienced CSA are a gross underestimate of their actual prevalence in the general population (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Crowder, 1995; Mendel, 1995; Violato & Genuis, 1993). A number of possible factors are said to contribute to the apparent variability in these prevalence rates. For instance, researchers cite the presence of methodological discrepancies, such as different sampling procedures and varied understandings of CSA defined by both researchers and survivors (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Easton et al., 2013; Finkelhor, 1986; Holmes & Slap, 1998; Hunter, 1990; Hunter, 1991; Mendel, 1995; Pereda et al., 2009). Studies that utilize different sampling methods and categorizations of CSA make the comparability of findings from one study to the next challenging. Additionally, these methodological variations within the literature render the determination of the actual occurrence of MCSA, with any amount of precision, particularly difficult.

Silence, shame, and male socialization patterns are identified as some of the potential reasons for the lack of disclosure and underreporting of MCSA; thus, potentially skewing the reported prevalence rates (Dhaliwal et al., 1996; Dimock, 1988; Etherington, 1995; Goodyear-Brown et al., 2012; Harrison & Morris, 2001; O'Leary, Coohy, & Easton, 2010; Romano & DeLuca, 2001; Sorsoli, Kia-Keating & Grossman, 2008). A qualitative study by Sorsoli et al. (2008) exploring male survivors' experiences of disclosure, indicates distinct personal (e.g., lack of cognitive awareness, emotional readiness, shame, and intentional avoidance) relational (e.g., potential relational consequences), and sociocultural (e.g., lack of acceptance for men to experience or acknowledge sexual victimization) explanations for their struggles with disclosure. Several other factors influencing the process of disclosure of CSA for males and therefore impacting prevalence rates have also been identified within the literature, including: family dynamics and roles, intra-familial communication and social isolation (Alaggia &

Kirshenbaum, 2005); developmental level, relationship to the perpetrator (Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003); and, expected or actual support (or lack thereof) by the non-offending caregiver (Allagia, 2004). Because of the various issues related to disclosure of CSA and the noted underreporting (i.e., less than 10%) of cases to authorities (Lyon & Ahern, 2011) not only are males, especially as children and youth less likely to disclose the abuse (Pappas, 2011), but many adult survivors never disclose or delay disclosing for years (Finkelhor et al., 1990). Researchers have recently identified how the process of disclosure and the response of others to the disclosure in childhood may impact the survivor's long term mental health functioning in adulthood (O'Leary et al., 2010).

The long-term impact of childhood sexual abuse. Several authors indicate that the long-term impact of CSA is variable and unique to the survivor (Ewako, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2010; Hunter, 2006; Martsof & Draucker, 2005; O'Leary & Gould, 2010; Owen, Quirk, & Manthos, 2012; Price, Hilsenroth, Petretic-Jackson, & Bonge, 2001). Researcher and health psychologist, Kendall-Tackett (2012) contends that survivors of CSA do not demonstrate one common syndrome, but instead are potentially vulnerable to a wide variety of psychological and emotional difficulties. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that CSA does not invariably lead to long-term psychological problems (AI & Park, 2005; Hunter, 2006; O'Leary & Gould, 2010; O'Leary et al., 2010; Walsh, Fortier, & DiLillo, 2010). While some who report CSA may experience difficulties later in adult life (Easton, 2012), not all survivors develop mental health or personal adjustment problems (Hunter, 2006; O'Leary & Gould, 2010; Putnam, 2003; Walsh et al., 2010).

Over the last two decades, scholars and researchers have amassed research evidence revealing the significant psychological distress and deleterious effects often associated with the experience CSA for adult survivors (Abdulrehman & De Luca, 2001;

Andersen, 2013; Beitchman et al., 1992; Briere & Elliott, 2003; Briere & Runtz, 1993; Cahill, Llewelyn, & Pearson, 1991; Collings, 1995; Dhaliwal et al., 1996; Dimock, 1988; Draucker & Petrovic, 1996; Easton, 2012; Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Gill & Tutty, 1997; Gold et al., 1999; Goodyear-Brown et al., 2012; Hunter, 1991; Kendell-Tackett, 2012; King, Coxell, & Mezey, 2002; Kwako, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2010; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1996; Myers, 1989; Nelson et al., 2002; Nurcombe, 1999; Olson, 1990; Pierce & Pierce, 1985; Ray, 2001; Urquiza & Capra, 1990). Of note, much of the research exploring the effects of CSA has been focused on female survivors (Denov, 2004; Dorais, 2002; Easton, 2012; Easton et al., 2013; Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997; Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Spiegel, 2003). While this information has been valuable, the literature on the aftermath specific to MCSA has comparatively lagged behind. In the following section, I explore some of the common long-term psychological sequelae particular to male survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Depression. Depression is among most prevailing long-term effect identified by adult male survivors (Finkelhor, 1986; Hill, 2003; Kendall-Tackett, 2012; Nelson et al., 2002; Paolucci, Genuis, & Violato, 2001; Spiegel, 2003). Studies suggest that there is a significantly higher rate of depression in adult survivors compared to individuals without histories of CSA (Nelson et al., 2002; Zlotnick, Mattia, & Zimmerman, 2001). Furthermore, some studies find that adult males abused as boys are significantly more likely to require hospitalization for symptoms of depression compared to their non-abused male counterparts (Bagley et al., 1994; Bartholow et al., 1995).

Bagley et al. (1994) conducted a quantitative study aimed at identifying the mental health consequences of CSA in a Canadian community sample of adult males. Several psychological scales were utilized to measure the long-term mental health sequela of male CSA (e.g., Mental Health Questionnaire and Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale). Findings indicate that 6.9% of the total adult male sample (*N*

= 750) who experience multiple events of CSA report various indicators of poor mental health, including depression at a significant level.

Results from a random sample of the United States population illustrate a statistically significant relationship between CSA and the subsequent onset of major depression (Molnar, Buka, & Kessler, 2001). The Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) was employed to assess potential psychopathology associated with childhood sexual abuse. Findings reveal that 82% of men ($n = 2945$) reporting the experience of CSA meet the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder, including major depression. After controlling for other childhood adversities, sexual abuse is found to be associated with a number of mood and anxiety disorders, as well as substance abuse issues.

Some researchers have sought to gain a qualitative understanding of depression from the perspective of the male survivor (Denov, 2004; Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Ray, 2001). A study by Fater & Mullaney (2000) takes a phenomenological approach to describe the lived experience of male survivors who allege CSA by clergy. Overwhelming bouts of depression and suicidal thoughts are themes identified by male survivors in this study (Fater & Mullaney, 2000). Further, in Ray's (2001) study, experiences of depression are reported by male survivors in a study exploring their perspectives of incest and CSA (Ray, 2001). In a content analysis study, male survivors describe the negative impact of their depression on their sense of self (Ray, 2001). In addition, Denov's (2004) qualitative study sheds light on the experience of depression for 5 male survivors. Depression for the male survivors in this particular study tends to be characterized as a "depressive breakdown" often leading to suicidal ideation and periods of hospitalization (p. 1146). While these studies are valuable, further qualitative explorations of depression experienced by male survivors would be important in future research.

Throughout the literature on the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse, depression is highlighted as a common experience among survivors. In an endeavor to explain the development of depression for male survivors, researchers note that the experience of sexual abuse may result in feelings of loss, helplessness, and powerlessness (Camino, 2000; Joiner, 2005). In short, male survivors may have difficulty in seeing a future within which they belong and with which they wish to be engaged. These feelings can be overwhelming and can contribute to depressive symptoms that pervade many areas of life for the adult male survivor.

Suicide. An emergent body of research has found that CSA is a salient risk factor for later suicide attempts among adolescent and adult males and females (Bedi et al., 2011; Dube et al., 2005). Among male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, suicidality is reported nearly 11 times more often than non-abused males, and 5 times more often than female survivors of sexual abuse (Garnefski & Diekstra, 1997; Molnar, Berman, & Buka, 2001). In comparison to non-abused males with histories of suicidal tendencies, male survivors experience an earlier age of onset of suicidal ideation and behavior, with the highest likelihood of initial suicide attempt occurring at ages 12 and 15 (Brodsky et al., 2001). Males with histories of CSA report a rate of suicidal behavior that ranges from 10% to 55% (Bagley et al., 1994; Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1997; Friedman et al., 2002; Lisak, 1994; Mendel, 1995).

Recently, Easton et al. (2013) sought to investigate the potential factors associated with recent (i.e., past 12 months) suicide attempts among adult male survivors of CSA. Findings reveal five variables related to an increased risk of recent suicide attempts in male survivors, including: frequency of the sexual abuse, use of force during the abuse, high conformity to masculine norms, level of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. Consistent with previous studies and theories (Joiner et al., 2007;

Molnar, Berkman, & Buka, 2001; O’Leary & Gould, 2009), Easton and colleagues conclude that men sexually abused as children are at increased risk for suicidality.

Posttraumatic stress disorder. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is thought to be one of the most common and frequently assigned diagnoses for males survivors (Spiegel, 2003), with studies reporting rates between 25% and 35% (Ackerman, Newton, McPherson, Jones, & Dykman, 1998; Forbey, Ben-Porath, & Davis, 2000; Ruggiero, McLeer, & Dixon, 2000; Widom, 1999). O’Leary (2009) identified that men with a history of CSA are ten times more likely than men without a history of CSA to be diagnosed with several mental disorders, including PTSD. Spiegel (2003) argues that even if a male survivor does not meet the full criteria for PTSD, he is nonetheless “likely to manifest a constellation of its re-experiencing, avoidance/numbing, and/or hyperarousal symptomology” (p. 76). In addition, some believe that young boys, adolescents, and adult male survivors of CSA are more vulnerable than non-abused males to develop symptoms related to the diagnosis of PTSD (Spiegel, 2003); however, they may not necessarily manifest the disorder itself (Ackerman et al., 1998; Bagley et al., 1994; Brown, Lourie, Zlotnick, & Cohn, 2000; Fondacaro, Holt, & Powell, 1999; Widom, 1999). It is also thought that adult male survivors “...may suffer from long-term posttraumatic stress symptoms that may interfere with many aspects of daily life, such as employment, family and peer relationships, and self-regulation” (Wolfe, Francis, & Straatman, 2006, p. 210).

Interpersonal difficulties. The CSA of males is thought to have a long-term negative impact on interpersonal interactions, as it typically occurs in the context of what is considered by the child as a safe and trusting interpersonal relationship (Easton, 2012; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Herman, 1992; Kia-Keating, Sorsoli, & Grossman, 2010; Whiffen & MacIntosh, 2005). The experience of CSA is one that is believed to have a detrimental impact on the development of fulfilling adult relationships, especially those of a romantic

or intimate nature (Crowder, 1995; Easton, 2012; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Urquiza & Capra, 1990; Kia-Keating et al., 2010; Whiffen & MacIntosh, 2005). Several authors highlight that male survivors experience many interpersonal difficulties, including feelings of uncertainty about themselves in relationships, conflicts and struggles between trust and mistrust, discomfort around authority figures, and fears about the confrontative and aggressive behaviors of self and others (Gartner, 1999, 2005; Gill & Tutty, 1999; Lisak, 1994; Spiegel, 2003).

Male survivors tend to have more difficulty in initiating and maintaining friendships with both men and women as compared to non-abused males (Colman & Widom, 2004; Jacob & Veatch, 2005; Ray, 2001; Robin, Chester, Rasmussen, Jaranson, & Goldman, 1997). In addition, they are more likely to be removed and distant from their families (Ray, 2001), are apt to experience conflict within their relationships, have difficulty with authority figures (Colman & Widom, 2004; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Hunter, 1991), and struggle with being authentic within their relationships (Whiffen & MacIntosh, 2005). Easton (2012) posits that a potential reason explaining male survivors' difficulties in developing and sustaining relationships may be due to unresolved feelings related to CSA (i.e., betrayal and mistrust).

Lisak (1994) also points out that when abused by a female, male survivors may experience a sense of helplessness in his anticipation of future interactions with women. This could be interpreted as a loss of hope in the possibility of engaging in future meaningful relationships. Conversely, when the sexual abuse is perpetrated by a male, the male survivor may feel a sense of inferiority, emasculation, and shame (Hunter, 1991). A general feeling of anxiety in social situations is also frequently reported by male survivors (Gill & Tutty, 1999; Spiegel, 2003).

A recent qualitative study, examined the relational challenges and the processes by which 16 adult male survivors improved their capacity for seeking and participating in

supportive relationships over time (Kia-Keating, 2010). Findings reveal a number of relational challenges connected to their experiences of CSA, ranging from a lack of secure relationships available to them in childhood to feeling removed from their capacity to emotionally engage and connect to others in adulthood. Several men also described an “all-encompassing sense of isolation... that originated in childhood” (p. 679). Consistent with other literature (Easton, 2012; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Herman, 1992; Whiffen & MacIntosh, 2005), these results highlight the struggles many adult male survivors experience in developing emotionally intimate relationships.

Sexuality. The area of sexuality has received considerable clinical and research attention in relation to CSA (Aaron, 2012; Chu & Bowman, 2002; Draucker, 2000; Easton, Coohey, O’Leary, Zhang, & Hua, 2011; Schwartz & Galperin, 2002). The literature reveals a number of possible sexual responses to CSA, ranging from withdrawal and dysfunction on one end of the spectrum to hypersexuality and compulsion on the other (Aaron, 2012; Easton et al., 2011; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Kia-Keating et al., 2005). When compared to non-abused males, adult male survivors tend to have a greater dissatisfaction with sexuality (Spiegel, 2003), have many concurrent sexual partners, have unprotected sex, and are more likely to engage in high risk sexual activities with strangers or casual acquaintances, (Bartholow et al., 1994; DiIorio, Hartwell, & Hansen, 2002; Lisak, 1994; Paul, Catania, Pollack, & Stall, 2001). Gartner (2001) highlights that male survivors are likely to perceive sexuality as “interpersonal currency” (p. 202), making it the basis for their self-esteem, which can result in having sexuality permeate all interpersonal encounters. It is believed that many adult male survivors “have difficulty in considering, identifying, and protecting their sexual boundaries” (Spiegel, 2003, p. 90). Additionally, sexual activity in adulthood may also be a trigger for anxiety and feelings of guilt, shame, and helplessness (Trembley & Turcotte, 2005). As a result, some survivors respond with an absolute and extreme

rejection of sexuality as a whole (Lisak) or avoid sexual activities for extended periods of time (Gill & Tutty, 1999; Kia-Keating et al., 2005). One may interpret that male survivors use sex in the hope for an interpersonal connection; however, experience a sense of isolation and hopelessness in the wake of sexual contact.

In addition to general difficulties with sexuality, it has been suggested that male survivors may have pervasive concerns regarding the impact of their CSA history on their sexual identity and orientation (Romano & DeLuca, 2001). In a content analysis of interviews with adult male survivors, Lisak (1994) reports that many male participants are fearful of potentially having homosexual tendencies. These concerns appear most evident when the abuser is male. Spiegel (2003) claims that some of the apprehension associated with homosexuality may be due to the nature of the sexual abuse experience, particularly if the abuser(s) was male (Romano & DeLuca; Violato & Genuis, 1993). Same-sex abuse is often interpreted as an indication of the survivor's and/or the abuser's homosexual orientation, particularly if abused male experienced physiological arousal during the abuse (Pescosolido, 1988; Gartner, 1999; 2005). Additionally, sexual abuse perpetrated by females may also contribute to concerns around sexuality for males. Denov (2004) infers that male survivors abused by women in their childhood may struggle with a sense of confusion around their self-concept and identity. As a means of dealing with the emotional confusion brought on by the abuse perpetrated by a female, some males reframe the experience as an act of initiation (Trembley & Turcotte, 2005), a coming of age experience (Gartner, 1999, 2005). In doing so, it may be felt that a more active sexual role was taken, which tends to be a more socially acceptable notion regarding male sexuality (Trembley & Turcotte, 2005). One of the most difficult issues facing a male survivor who has been sexually abused by a female is coming to terms with the disparity between feeling violated and the perceived social and cultural beliefs that males are to welcome sexual experiences with females (Gill & Tutty, 1997; Hunter, 1990;

Lew, 1990; Mendel, 1995). This discrepancy may leave the male survivor with a deep sense of uncertainty and ambiguity around their sexual orientation and their future intimate relationships with women.

Substance abuse. Researchers and authors alike suggest that male survivors often turn to illicit drugs, alcohol and other substances such as nicotine as a means of coping with the psychological and emotional impact of childhood sexual abuse (Hunter, 1990; Kendall-Tackett, 2012; Lew, 2004; MacMillan & Munn, 2001; Mate, 2008; Nelson et al., 2002). When compared to female survivors of CSA, males who have experienced both sexual and physical abuse have a significantly increased likelihood of illicit drug use (Moran, Vuchinich, & Hall, 2004). Researchers have also found that male survivors are up to 12 times more likely to inject drugs intravenously as compared to their non-abused counterparts (Zierler et al., 1991). Renowned author and physician specializing in the study and treatment of substance abuse, Gabor Mate (2008) posits that addictions are most often rooted in a painful childhood experience or trauma, such as childhood sexual. According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, one of the largest investigations ($n = 17337$ HMO members) ever conducted to examine the association between childhood maltreatment and later-life well-being, indicates that those individuals who had experienced child sexual abuse were three times more likely to turn to alcohol as a way of self-soothing and regulating negative emotional pain (Dube et al., 2006).

A gender comparison. In an effort to gain a fuller understanding of the impact of childhood sexual abuse, researchers have comparatively explored the long-term effects for both male and female survivors (Dube et al., 2005; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Gold et al., 1999; Teram, Stalker, Hovey, Schachter, & Lasiuk, 2006; Ullman & Filipas, 2005). Interestingly, a great deal of literature indicates that many of the reported psychological, behavioral, and social outcomes related to CSA are similar for both male and female survivors (Denov, 2004; Dube et al., 2005; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Romano & DeLuca,

2001; Teram et al., 2006). Despite these similarities, other research has revealed some notable differences in the long-term mental health manifestations connected to CSA for male survivors in particular (Denov, 2004; Hopton & Huta, 2012; Putnam, 2003; Ullman & Filipas, 2005).

Hunter (1991) reported that in comparison to their female counterparts, male survivors presented with “heightened levels of anxiety, worry and rumination, particularly related to identity issues” (p. 215). In a thematic analysis of interviews with 14 survivors of CSA (seven men and seven women), Denov (2004) identified that some male and female survivors differ in the experiences of anger, where men tend to direct their rage towards the abuser and report having fantasies of harming them. Findings from this qualitative study suggest that male survivors may be more likely than female survivors to develop externalized aggressive characteristics in adulthood. The sexual abuse experience along with the coping strategies and dynamics around disclosure of the abuse can also be experienced very differently for male survivors (Ullman & Filipas, 2005). While female survivors seek and receive emotional support more readily than male survivors, Ullman and Filipas postulate that our social and cultural gender norms contribute to the proscription of men engaging in vulnerable emotional expression. Subsequently, the coping approaches, the act of disclosure, and the response that male survivors often experience can vary considerably as compared to female survivors.

Although some gender differences may exist, it is important to keep in mind that survivors, whether male or female, have unique stories of how this childhood experience impacted them (Etherington, 1995; Herman, 1997; Lehman, 2005; Sanderson, 1995). As a researcher studying the experience of hope for male survivors, I feel it is of the utmost importance to appreciate each survivor in his own right and listen to his story with openness, respect, and sensitivity.

Struggles with masculinity. A discussion of MCSA would not be complete without exploring issues related to masculinity that tend to hinder the healing process for many men. One of the key obstacles for many male survivors of CSA concerns the struggle of reconciling their experiences of sexual abuse with their inner vision of what it means to be a man (Andersen, 2011; Kia-Keating, Grossman, Sorsoli & Epstein, 2005; Teram et al., 2006). Socially accepted notions of masculinity are constructed, communicated, and instilled in and by our culture (Anderson, 2013; Hopton & Huta, 2012; Kimmel, 2006; Philaretou, 2004; Struve, 1990; Tremblay & Turcotte, 2005). Although these societal expectations have begun to change for men, at least in Western society, over the last few decades (Anderson, 2013; Kia-Keating et al., 2005), many men may still feel the pressure to conform to specific gender role conceptions (Dorais, 2002; Easton et al., 2013; Mejia, 2005; Romano & De Luca, 2001; Teram et al., 2006). One study vividly captures a male survivor's struggle with his masculinity:

I felt like I was victim, and for a man to be a victim is an embarrassment.... A real man is not a victim, a real man is always in charge, always resists, and is always in control. A man who is a victim is a failure. In that respect, I felt like I had to hide the fact that I was a victim (Denov, 2004, p. 1149).

These concepts and expectations about masculinity are not only perpetuated but are culturally reinforced in the popular culture (Dimock, 1988; Dorais, 2002; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Kimmel, 2006; Lew, 1990, 2004). It can be argued that the socially-constructed blueprint of maleness ultimately shapes the psychological, emotional, and interpersonal aspects of how male CSA is viewed and experienced.

Lisak (1994) reports that male survivors commonly experience feelings of isolation, shame, humiliation, helplessness, loss, self-blame, and guilt in relation to their childhood sexual abuse. He goes on to note that most of these internal experiences violate the socially entrenched rules of masculinity that the sexually abused man tends to

internalize; thus, leading to the perception that he is “not a man”. In essence, the masculine “ideal” requires that men remain emotionally restricted and avoid exposing potential vulnerabilities (Philaretou, 2004). Kindlon & Thompson (2000) identify that males are often expected to embody a stoic shield, which prevents male survivors from expressing their internal experiences and realities. Paradoxically, many claim the path of recovery from abuse is one that traverses the emotional territory of which men are culturally encouraged to avoid (Gartner, 1999, 2005; Lisak, 1994; Spiegel, 2003; Wilken, 2003). Emotional expression and awareness is regarded to be facilitative of healing from trauma (Herman, 1997; Pennebaker, 1997). In a study by Fater and Mullaney (2000), male survivors identify that their ability to finally express and accept their feelings related to the abuse is an experience of empowerment, enhancing their capacity for emotional growth. Despite the value of emotional expression for male survivors (Dorais, 2002; Gartner, 1999; Wilken, 2003), many are held captive by the disjuncture between masculine ideals and the experience of childhood sexual abuse; thus, inhibiting the psychological processes necessary for healing (Kia-Keating et al., 2005).

Adherence to traditional masculine norms is said to be positively related to psychological distress for male survivors of CSA (Easton et al., 2013). Mahalik, et al. (2003) posit that conformity to masculine norms is related to specific mental health issues, including: depression, somatization, hostility, and anxiety. An explanation offered by Mahalik and colleagues indicates that CSA violates many socially sanctioned gender expectations in Western culture, such as: dominance, heterosexuality, emotional control or stoicism, pursuit of status, and a drive to win. Rather than engaging with the internal conflict between the experience of CSA and views of masculinity, some male survivors may adopt hyper-masculine stance within their lives (Dorais, 2002; Lisak, 1994). In such cases, Easton et al. (2013) contend that male survivors often tend to “guard the secret of CSA through behaviors designed to prove or reassert their masculinity according to

stereotypical norms” (p. 381). Teram et al. (2006) argue that Western male socialization patterns not only contribute to male survivors’ difficulties in acknowledging their abuse experiences, but also can impede their willingness to seek support in dealing with the aftermath of CSA. Furthermore, researchers highlight the potential impact of socially constructed notions of maleness or manliness on helping professionals’ assessment, treatment, and general response to male survivors (Andersen, 2011; Dorais, 2002; Teram et al., 2006).

Summary. In exploring the literature on the long-term impact of childhood sexual abuse, it is evident that male survivors often experience significant psychological, emotional, and interpersonal difficulties in adulthood. Socially constructed beliefs about masculinity also appear to further complicate a male survivor’s ability to acknowledge and find healing related to their experiences of CSA. The following, is an early excerpt from my research journal. I wrote these reflections as I first began to consider and engage with the notion of hope related to the experience of CSA for male adult male survivors.

Reading and learning about the various psychological difficulties and pathologies often associated with CSA for males has not only been eye-opening for me in these initial stages of my research journey, but I’m also left wondering and interested in the relatively less articulated narrative of hope. Surrounded by the many piles of books and articles on MCSA, I feel overwhelmed... exhausted... and quite honestly... a sense of detachment... Sitting and reflecting on this notion of detachment, I realize that I feel disconnected from the lived experience, from the human entity within the research, from the voice of the male survivor, and from hope - both the male survivor’s and my own. In surveying the hundreds of articles invading all the available surface space of my desk, I am struck by the realization that the majority of the research studies I have in front of me

are focused on hypothesis testing, are researcher driven, and are grounded in apriori understandings of CSA. Without question, these studies offer valuable understandings of MCSA; however, the male survivor's voice is so faint within the literature that it threatens to become overshadowed by the mammoth body of research on the negative impact of childhood sexual abuse. So... this leaves me wondering...Where is the hope?... A minute passes and I decide to engage in a little experiment. I take each of the books I have on CSA and MCSA and begin perusing the indexes for any reference to hope. One by one I search and find virtually nothing. At very best, hope is mentioned as a fleeting concept or is interspersed in the text of books on treatment approaches for male survivors... Just as male survivors' perspective is underrepresented, it seems that the story of hope is also absent within the literature on MCSA. It appears researchers, theorists, and clinicians alike have been primarily concerned with the negative legacy of CSA experienced by men. As such, I contend that we have unwittingly created and contributed to a pathological focus; thereby, arriving at a partial understanding of this phenomenon. And so I'm left wondering... I wonder about the alternate understandings, experiences, and stories of MCSA that have not been highlighted, but potentially remain on the margins of our awareness. I wonder about hope...

Hope

My understanding of hope has been, and continues to be, shaped by both my personal and professional experiences, as well as the substantial literature on hope. In the sections that follow, I will begin by presenting descriptions and models of hope that function as the theoretical underpinnings of this study. A brief discussion of the value of hope within psychology is then offered. The relationship between hope and hopelessness is also summarized. Lastly, the intersection between trauma, CSA, and hope will be presented.

What is hope? Throughout history, numerous fields and disciplines have taken an interest in exploring and understanding hope. Elliott (2005) argues that the literature on hope has burgeoned particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. During this time, researchers, theorists, and clinicians have debated the origin and meaning of hope (McGee, 1984). Erikson (1964) describes hope as “the earliest and most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive” (p. 115). Marcel (1962) suggests that hope is beyond the self and is occasioned during times of trial and despair. Schmale (1964) identifies that hope may be genetic, and Valliot (1970) states that hope arises when personal resources are depleted. Godfrey (1987) observes that hope can be understood as a verb, noun, and adjective. Additionally, Stephenson (1991) believes that hope is essential for life, noting the ancient proverb, “where there’s life, there’s hope.” Waterworth (2004) understands hope as an “everyday kind of phenomenon, as common as laughter and tears” (p. 3). Evidently, there are many understandings of hope all of which add multiple layers and textures to the tapestry of hope.

Definitions of hope.

I’d rather have hope than be able to define it.

(Godfrey, 1987, p. 248)

In beginning to understand the construct of hope, I found myself rifling through several books and articles exploring what many before me had written about hope. What I discovered were numerous and somewhat disparate definitions and conceptualizations of this seemingly intangible phenomenon. As yet, no universal definition of hope exists (Cutcliffe, 1997; Duggleby, 2001; Elliott & Olver, 2003; Jevne, 2005, Simpson, 2004). In fact, some argue that rather than searching for one particular definition of hope, it may be more useful to consider a taxonomy of hope (Elliott & Olver, 2003). Specifically, the absence of a consensual description of hope is perhaps a reflection of its dynamic, complex, and multi-faceted nature.

While descriptions of hope may vary depending on the specific research context or field of study, most qualitative research offers multidimensional definitions of hope that merge around particular common elements (Austin et al., 2013). Gleaning from the vast literature on hope, these defining elements suggest that hope is considered: *future oriented*, (Benzein & Savemen, 1998; Cutcliffe, 1997; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Dufrane & Leclair, 1984; Gaskin & Forte, 1995; Herth, 1991; McGee, 1984; Miller, 2000; Nowotny, 1989; Stephenson, 1991; Stotland, 1969), *directed toward the attainment of a goal* (Farren et al., 1995; Forbes, 1994; Gaskin & Forte, 1995; Hinds, 1984; McGee, 1984; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Owen, 1989; Snyder, 1995; Stotland, 1969; Waterworth, 2004); *a motivational life force* (Averill et al., 1990; McGee, 1984; Menninger, 1959; Stotland, 1969), *a rational and cognitive process* (Averill et al., 1990; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran et al., 1995; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Snyder, 1995; Stephenson, 1991), *an emotional experience* (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran et al., 1995; Godfrey, 1987; Nikolaichuk, 1999; Stephenson, 1991); *a way of behaving or acting* (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Nowotny, 1989; Snyder, 1995; Stephenson, 1991); *a spiritual connection* (Farran et al., 1995; Gaskin & Forte, 1995; Hall, 1994; Herth, 1990; Marcel, 1978; Nikolaichuk et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989), *and experienced within relationship* (Benzein & Saveman, 1998; Cutcliff, 1997; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran et al., 1995; Hall, 1994; Herth, 1990; Jevne, 1991; Larsen, Edey, & Lemay, 2005; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Nikolaichuk et al., 1999; Nowotny, 1989; Scioli & Biller, 2009; Valliot, 1970). As suggested by Jevne (2005), the definition of hope has traversed “goal and soul, doing and being, process and outcome, state and trait” (p. 266). From the many nuanced understandings of hope, it is Stephenson’s (1991) seminal review of hope that serves as the principle encapsulating definition guiding this study. According to Stephenson, hope is “a process of anticipation that involves the interaction of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating and is directed to a future fulfillment that is personally

meaningful” (p. 1459). This definition, although broad, reflects the gestalt of hope, as it captures many facets and understandings of hope.

A discursive understanding of hope. *Hope* is a term commonly used in everyday language. Jevne (2005) identifies that we not only employ the word readily in conversation, but that we also understand hope based on our personal experiences and life stories; thereby, rendering the exploration of hope through conversations with male survivors of CSA a valuable addition to hope studies. Awareness of the often subtle and nuanced discursive properties of hope has been an important interpretive lens with which I have approached participants’ narrative accounts of hope. As such, I underscore two seminal research studies that have greatly contributed to recent understandings of how the word *hope* can function within conversation (Bruininks & Malle, 2005; Elliott & Olver, 2002).

Bruininks and Malle (2005) undertook a quantitative analysis across three studies examining the differences between folk (i.e., everyday use) understandings of hope and other associated affective states. Their analysis reveals that hope, as a folk concept, is regarded as a future-oriented emotion with motivational and coping-oriented aspects. In addition, results indicate that hope possesses qualities distinct from other constructs or states, such as wishing and optimism. When compared to wishing, Bruininks and Malle suggest that although both concepts share the common aspects of desire and uncertainty, hope, however, involves a greater expectation of attaining a positive and personally meaningful outcome despite the odds. They infer that “being hopeful enables people to maintain an approach-related state despite their present inability to reach the desired outcome” (p. 338). In short, one’s connection with hope can be maintained even though the desired outcome is perceived as unlikely to manifest and over which one perceives little personal control.

Based on their analysis Bruininks and Malle (2005) also report key differences between hope and optimism. Hope is typically identified as an emotion associated with a specific outcome, whereas optimism is understood as a comparatively broad or generalized cognitive set. In addition, optimism appears to be related to a sense of personal control and increased likelihood that the outcome will be attained. Conversely, hope is experienced even when the outcome is uncertain (Bruininks & Malle, 2005).

In a study by Elliott and Olver (2002) examining the discursive properties of hope during conversations with terminally ill cancer patients about end of life issues, it was found that the term *hope* often surfaced spontaneously. Furthermore, hope held multiple meanings and was grammatically used as a noun, verb, and adverb. As a noun, hope was employed in two different ways. Firstly, hope was referred to as an entity independent of the patient (i.e., there's no hope), typically determined by an external source (e.g., doctor), and outside the patient's control or agency. Secondly, hope as a noun, also reflected a personal and subjective hope belonging to the patient. When subjective in nature, hope had the potential to fluctuate and become vulnerable depending on the patient's perceptions, but was nonetheless, valuable to the patient.

Elliott and Olver (2002) concur that when patients utilized hope as a verb, "the active, positive voices of participants contrast markedly with the absolute solutions demonstrated with the noun version ('if there's no hope, finish it')" (p. 184). Additionally, as a verb, hope also took on a more subjective quality, given that the patient engaged in the act of hoping (Elliott & Olver, 2002, 2007). Hoped for objects or outcomes were determined by the patient and did not need validation from external sources. Elliot and Olver also noted that when hope functioned as a verb, it allowed for a social exchange of hope: "Hope functions to value both the desired object, and the one desiring it" (Elliott & Olver, 2007, p. 145). From this relational perspective, hope was

shared by both the person naming his/her hope and those whom offer support and affirmation of this hope.

The work exploring hope through the lens of a folk-concept (Bruininks & Malle, 2005) and within the discursive context (Elliott & Olver, 2002, 2007) aptly underscores the multiple aspects, functions, and meanings of hope. As a researcher interested in understanding the narrative accounts of hope for male survivors of CSA, I have often returned to these studies for guidance when reflecting on the differing understandings and narrative constructions of hope shared by participants in this inquiry.

Models of hope. The complexity inherent in the concept of hope is also reflected in the various models aimed at further clarifying the nature of this sometimes, elusive and yet seemingly essential life force. Hope models are typically conceptualized as being of a uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional nature, depending on the level of complexity associated with the description (Larsen, Stege, & Flesaker, 2013). While there are several comprehensive and valuable hope models available to draw upon (Dufault & Martocchio, 1995; Farran et al., 1995; Hinds, 1984; Miller, 1986; Miller, 2000; Nekolaichuk, 1990; Scioli & Biller, 2009; Snyder, 1994), an extensive review of these conceptualizations is beyond the scope of this chapter and thesis. Instead, I highlight the specific frameworks, both uni-dimensional and multi-dimensional, which have significantly contributed to my understandings of hope and have shaped my engagement with the hope narratives shared by participants in this study.

Uni-dimensional concepts of hope. Some of the early understandings around the construct of hope are fashioned according to an action oriented and goal achievement perspective (Keen, 2000; Nekoliachuk, 1990). Stotland's (1969) theory of hope is an example of a uni-dimensional perspective on hope. He describes hope "as a shorthand term for an expectation about goal attainment" (p. 2). Through the use of cognitive and schematic processes, one's hope is determined by the "probability" of reaching a

particular goal: “The degree of hopefulness is the level of expectation or the person’s perceived probability of achieving a goal” (p. 2). This uni-dimensional conceptualization of hope, although limited in its focus on goal attainment, has greatly contributed to other frameworks and continues to influence many hope scholars including that of C. R. Snyder and colleagues.

Without question, Carl Snyder, a cognitive psychologist, was one of the most prolific researchers in the area of hope within the field of psychology. According to Snyder’s Hope Theory, (Snyder, 1994, 1995), hope is the sum of mental *willpower* and *waypower* that one has in order to attain a particular *goal*. Specifically, goals are “any objects, experiences, or outcomes that we imagine and desire in our minds” (Snyder, 1994, p. 5). Willpower is the energy and motivation needed to engage in hopeful thinking and waypower is the mental planning that directs how one will achieve the desired goal (Snyder, 1994). In other words, hope is “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287). Agency and pathways are necessary to activate high-hope cognitions. Furthermore, neither the agency nor pathways alone are sufficient to generate high hope (Snyder, 1995).

While this model is clearly cognitive in focus, Snyder (1995) argues that it does not imply that emotions are unimportant. Rather, he suggests that “the quality of emotions reflects the person’s perceived level of hope in the particular situation” (p. 355). For instance, higher-hope persons have an elevated sense of agency and pathways for situations and approach a goal with energy, an overall positive emotional state, as well as a focus on success. On the other hand, low-hope persons tend to approach a task with perceptions of inadequate or faulty agency and pathways, a general negative emotional state, and a concentration on potential failure. As such, emotions are the derivative of

one's cognitive assessment regarding a particular situation. Although this hope model is uni-dimensional in scope and goal focused, it is nonetheless an important framework that has yielded a great deal of research and has held sway within the field of psychology.

Multi-dimensional concepts of hope. Within hope literature, both the uni-dimensional and multidimensional perspectives co-exist and inform our understanding of hope. The following is a presentation of multidimensional frameworks that have greatly influenced hope research.

Dufault and Martocchio. Originating with their qualitative research on hope with elderly cancer patients, Dufault and Martocchio (1985) have developed a multi-dimensional model of hope serving as a launching point for hope researchers across many disciplines (Elliott, 2005; Farran et al., 1995). They conceptualize hope as “a multidimensional dynamic life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant” (p. 380). Hope is believed to be comprised of a complex array of thoughts, feelings, and actions that change over time (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985). Their model of hope differentiates between two spheres of hope, generalized hope and particularized hope. Within each sphere are six common yet discrete dimensions that illustrate the elements that structure the experience of hope (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985).

Generalized hope is seen as “an intangible umbrella that protects hoping persons by casting a positive glow on life” (p. 380). It is “broad in scope” and is not associated with any specific object of hope (p. 380). Generalized hope offers a “broad perspective for life” and promotes one's ability to face life's challenges with “flexibility and openness” (p. 380). Dufault and Martocchio (1985) note that generalized hope is often expressed in statements such as, “I don't hope for anything in particular, I just hope” (p. 380). Alternatively, particularized hope is concerned with a specific “valued outcome”,

“state of being”, or “hope object” (p. 380). A hope object (i.e., what is hoped for) may be of a concrete or abstract nature, as well as explicitly or implicitly stated (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985). The sphere of particularized hope is based on a number of assumptions including the following: “what exists in the present can be improved”; “what a person does not have at this time can be attained or received”; “the desired circumstances surrounding an event will occur”; “what is valued in the present can be part of the hoping person’s future”; and “unfavorable possibilities will not occur” (p. 380-381). Hope in this sphere not only acts as a reference point for evaluating progress towards a hope object, but also imparts the necessary motivation to cope with obstacles and formulate alternate means of realizing the object. Dufault and Martocchio highlight that both generalized and particular hope preserves, maintains, and restores the meaningfulness and significance of life.

The spheres of hope consist of six dimensions including affective, cognitive, behavioral, affiliative, temporal, and contextual. Together, these conceptual elements of hope are “the gestalt of hope” (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 381). The affective dimension consists of “sensations and emotions that are a part of the hoping process” (p. 382). In other words, the affective dimension focuses on a broad range of feelings, rather than one feeling or group of feelings that permeates throughout the hoping process (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985). The cognitive dimension refers to those processes by which an individual imagines, remembers, thinks, and interprets in relation to hope. The behaviors and actions one may take to either directly influence the desired outcome, to attain a hope, or to engage in actions based on by his/her hope is considered to be the behavioral dimension. The affiliative dimension pertains to the relationships that occur beyond the individual self in relation to hope. The hoping person’s experience of time (past, present, and future) is characterized as the temporal dimension. The sixth and final dimension consists of the contextual life situations and circumstances “that surround,

influence, and are a part of a person's hope" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 388).

Dufault and Martocchio contend that a change of emphasis among and within the six dimensions characterizes the process of hoping. This multidimensional model of hope indicates that hoping is a process rather than a trait-oriented phenomenon.

Farran, Herth and Popovitch. With backgrounds in nursing, Farran et al. (1995) explore hope from their experiences as professionals within health care. Based on a thorough exploration of hope in relation to philosophy, theology, psychology, and sociology, Farran and colleagues (1995) define hope as:

...an essential experience of the human condition. It functions as a way of feeling, a way of thinking, a way of behaving, and a way of relating to oneself and one's world. Hope has the ability to be fluid in its expectations, and in the event that the desired object or outcome does not occur, hope can still be present.

At an emotional level, hope is thought to be an "energizing force" that inspires forward movement despite adversity (p. 5). As a thought process, hope is considered to be a "sense of fortitude" and an "assumed certainty" in terms of the future (p. 5). As a behavior, Farran et al. conceptualize hope as a seeking of alternatives and a resolution to current circumstances.

According to Farran et al. (1995) hope is summarized having four central elements: (a) an experiential process, (b) a spiritual/transcendental process, (c) a rational process, and (d) a relational process. From an experiential perspective, a deep sense of hope is engendered once an individual has experienced hopelessness or has had his/her hope challenged. Hope as a spiritual or transcendental process is characterized as "faith in oneself and others, a conviction about something that has not yet been proven, or a sense of certainty about that which is uncertain" (p. 7-8). In other words, hope is maintained regardless of unknown outcomes, as the ability of moving beyond the "status quo" (p. 8), and focusing on possibilities rather than absolutes. The rational process

refers to the cognitive aspect of hope or the “mind” of hope (p. 9). Farran et al., created the acronym GRACT which serves to clarify the rational components (G- Goals for motivation, R-Resources to provide energy, A- Active moment towards the goals, C- Control of one’s future or destiny, T- Time as an element that influences one’s hope). Finally, the relational process of hope pertains to “something that occurs between persons” (p. 10). In this sense, hope manifests through interpersonal sharing and communication.

Nekolaichuk. Drawing on Dufault and Martocchio’s definition and model of hope, Nekolaichuk (1999), a counselling psychologist, further conceptualizes the meaning of hope within the context of health and illness. This theoretical model is derived from a research study examining hope for three sample populations including: nursing professionals, healthy adults, and persons living with a chronic or life-threatening illness. Nekolaichuk’s model of hope is multidimensional, dynamic, and consists of three interconnected dimensions, which include: personal spirit, risk, and authentic caring. *Personal spirit* is characterized by a core theme of meaning (Nekolaichuk, 1999). This particular realm is comprised of a personal sense of meaning in life and how one makes sense of their world. The element of *risk* pertains to the experience of hope that is influenced by the predictability of a situation and a person’s boldness. According to Nekolaichuk, risk is how one handles uncertainty in life and the ability to consider possibilities. The final dimension of hope is that of the interpersonal realm of *authentic caring*, which represents the experience of hope within relationships. It is said that relational hope is influenced by comfort, caring, and credibility in relationships (Nekolaichuk, 1999). This particular model is based on the underlying assumption that hope is a unique experience and that an individual has his/her personal meaning of hope. Essentially, hope is personal, complex, and is interwoven with other experiences, including compassion, trust, meaning, uncertainty, and despair.

Summary of Hope Models. The models discussed herein represent the various conceptualizations of hope that have been considered throughout the process of this study. The uni-dimensional conceptualization of hope is anchored in the notion that hope is the expectance of goal attainment (through the process of planning, organizing, and setting goals) and involves the ways in which one works towards reaching that particular goal (i.e., agency and pathways) (Snyder, 1995, 2002). The multi-dimensional models offer a rich, dynamic, and open theoretical base from which to understand hope. While the uni-dimensional framework articulated by Snyder is relatively narrow in focus, it is nonetheless a complementary model to the multi-dimensional approach of hope. Both these descriptions of hope were integrated in my interaction with participants' narratives of hope.

Value of hope. Hope is a powerful process that “makes a difference” (Moore, 2005, p. 104) and affects human healing (Post-White, 2003). The impact and value of hope has been studied for a number of years, from multiple perspectives and methodologies, and across many disciplines (Elliott, 2005). The vast majority of research and hope literature regards hope as vital to human living. Correlational studies examining hope in relation to academic performance, physical health, and psychological well-being indicate that even in the face of adverse and challenging life situations, “higher hope virtually always is related to more beneficial life outcomes” (Cheavens, Michael, & Synder, 2005, p. 127). Given that helping professionals, such as psychologists are likely to work with men who have a history of CSA (Alaggia & Millington, 2008), the following section briefly describes hope related to the fields of psychology and counselling.

Hope in psychology. The connection between hope and psychology is not new. In fact, Jerome Frank, a renowned psychiatrist who wrote on hope in the 1960s and 1970s, is credited as a seminal thinker exploring hope as a core agent in psychology and

across psychotherapy approaches (Snyder, Ilardi, Micheal, & Cheavens, 2000).

Exploring placebo effects, Frank (1973) argues that “hopelessness can retard recovery or even hasten death, while mobilization of hope plays an important part in many forms of healing” (p. 136). Drawing from Frank’s contributions, Snyder and his team of researchers have significantly furthered our understanding of the relationship between hope and psychological adjustment, specifically through the previously noted uni-dimensional lens. Snyder (1995) states that individuals with high levels of hope can find the “will and the way” to process and deal with life’s challenges. Conversely, individuals with low-hope have difficulty in conceiving other possibilities and ways to get around obstacles or adversities. Higher hope is associated with elevated feelings of confidence, energy, and (Snyder et al., 1991), self-worth (Chang & DeSimone, 2001). Furthermore, research findings indicate a relationship between higher hope and decreased psychopathology (Chang & DeSimone, 2001; Cheavens et al., 2005). Potential explanations for these findings may be that higher hope individuals face life stressors as challenges to overcome rather than insurmountable obstacles (Cheavens et al., 2005). It is also possible that “high-hopers” may perceive benefits from stressors (Tennen & Affleck, 1999). Alternatively, the link between hope and psychological well-being may be that higher hope individuals have a strong support system of family and friends (Barnum, Snyder, Rapoff, Mani, & Thompson, 1998; Cheavens et al., 2005). Overall, hope appears to be a sustaining factor in one’s ability to adjust psychologically to life’s challenges (Clarke, 2003).

Hope in counselling. Research has consistently illustrated that hope is an important variable contributing to therapeutic effectiveness and client change (Frank, 1968; Hanna, 2002; Larsen, Edey, & Lemay, 2007; Lopez et al., 2000; Orne, 1968; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1999; Yalom, 1998). Meta-analytic reviews offer evidence for hope as one of the four common factors which account for client change regardless of

the specific counselling approach utilized (Asay & Lambert, 1999). The common factors model of therapy stresses that the commonalities among therapeutic approaches exert a greater influence in regards to effectiveness than their differences (Asay & Lambert, 1999). In fact, support for the value of hope in therapy has become so strong that some believe that hope is a common factor that provides a unifying framework across most therapeutic approaches (Snyder et al., 1999). Lopez et al. claim that “whatever system of psychotherapy, beneficial change may be attributable, in part, to hope” (2000, p. 389.)

Research also indicates that hope plays a pivotal role throughout the psychotherapy process (Hanna, 2002; Irving et al., 2004). Specifically, hope is described as an active agent responsible for early and subsequent improvement in counselling (Hanna, 2002; Irving et al., 2004; Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999). This research highlights how hope may act to support, strengthen, and empower a client to believe that a better future is possible (Hanna, 2002). Considering the importance of hope and its potential benefit within the counselling process, researchers have recently focused on the intentional uses of hope within counselling conversations (Larsen et al., 2007; Larsen & Stege, 2010a; Larsen & Stege, 2010b). Utilizing the qualitative approach of basic interpretive inquiry, hope researchers, Larsen and Stege (2010a, 2010b) explored the hope-focused practices of 5 hope-educated psychotherapists with 11 clients early within the therapeutic process. This exploratory study generated a large program of research on hope and psychological practice.

From this research program, several understandings have emerged related to the use of hope in counselling (i.e., implicit and explicit), as well as client and therapist experiences of hope in therapy. The use of various common psychotherapeutic techniques was found to implicitly impact client hope and perspective as well as the therapeutic relationship. Explicit hope practices utilized by therapists addressed multiple dimensions of client hope (i.e., cognitive/goal-focused, behavioral, emotional, and

relational), the importance of naming hope, teaching about hope, and framing difficulties as threats to hope (Larsen & Stege, 2010b). Results from this study also suggest that a safe, accepting, and understanding therapeutic relationship, where the therapist is committed to the therapy process, offers clients a sense of hope. In addition, developing a hopeful sense of self and recognizing possibilities through perspective change also fostered clients' hope. Exploring the therapist's perspective, Larsen et al., 2013, also identify how therapists' own hope is impacted by their own self-influence, their perceptions of the client, and their experience of the therapeutic relationship. In addition, psychologists' hope is closely connected to their belief that therapy is making a worthy difference for the client. This body of research exploring hope in the therapeutic process has ventured into territory not previously studied. In doing so, a more nuanced understanding of the use of hope within psychotherapy has been rendered. Further, an appreciation of client and therapist experiences of hope in the early stages of counselling has been enhanced.

Hope and trauma. Helping professionals working with people who have experienced trauma and significant loss indicate that hope is a key component in the healing process (Allen, 2005; Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Yohani, 2008). Cheavens et al. (2005) contend that an individual's connection to their current sense of hope is related to past experiences, specifically traumatic experiences. A shattered belief in a world that is safe and one's capacity to survive in the face of a traumatic experience can often lead to a sense of a foreshortened future or an inability to envision a meaningful future that one wishes to engage in (Yohani & Larsen, 2012). For adults who suffer from PTSD, a foreshortened future is identified as a diagnostic characteristic (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Hope researchers, Yohani and Larsen (2012) indicate that on one hand, a short-term narrowing of future orientation may act as a temporary mechanism to protect a person from experiences of despair. On the flip side, they also note that a

continued sense of a foreshortened future and a diminished hope can hinder healing; thereby, contributing to feelings of hopelessness and isolation.

Taking a hope focused perspective, researchers Benzein, Saveman, and Norberg (2000) point out that the *future* aspect of hope can be perceived as risky, given that the future is uncertain. As such, to engage with hope, one must also engage with the notion of trust, despite the future's uncertainty. However, one's capacity to trust is greatly threatened by the experience of sexual abuse, particularly given that perpetrators are often known to the survivor and in a role of authority and trust (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Gartner, 2005). In view of this connection between trust and hope, considering how a trauma survivor is able to envision a meaningful future is imperative (Yohani & Larsen, 2012).

Hope and childhood sexual abuse. While there is virtually no research specifically exploring the experience and meaning of hope for male survivors of CSA, there is research however, offering some promising hints about the connection between hope and childhood sexual abuse in general. A dissertation study by Erdem (2000) explored hope for three sexually abused children within the context of play therapy. A number of themes emerged from the study including: "He stole my hope, without hope you have bad feelings and thoughts, hope is having the bad things go away, exploring hope isn't hard, hope is being safe, hope is believing that good things will happen in the future, hope is having people who care, wishing helps you hope, hope is seeing bad people punished, hope is a wise person, hope is magical" (p. 6). From the perspective of these participants with a history of CSA, it seems that hope was an essential element in their meaning making process and healing journey. Being a researcher invested in understanding the narratives of hope for male survivors in particular, this thesis has offered an important scaffold in my appreciation of the possible threads connecting hope and CSA.

In her master's thesis, Wilkes (2002) explored hope experienced by therapists working with survivors of CSA. Although this study did not look at survivors' perceptions of hope, one particular finding of this research provides a potentially valuable facet to our understanding of hope for male survivors. Specifically, Wilkes notes the importance of therapists to keep in mind that even though survivors of CSA may not possess early hope role models or experience hopeful childhoods as a result of the abuse; they are nonetheless capable of becoming "hope-filled adults" (p. 142). This conclusion points out that while there may be an absence of a connection to hope as children, hopeful experiences in adulthood are still within reach for survivors.

Specific to male survivors of CSA, Fater & Mullaney (2000) conducted a qualitative study examining the lived experience of 7 participants abused by members of the clergy. Interestingly, survivors identify that experiences of hopefulness enhanced their capacity for emotional growth. While hope is expressed as being important in the healing process, the experience and meaning of hope is not explicitly addressed within this study and no implications discussed. Despite the fact that hope was not the focus of this study, it underscores hope as being a potentially fruitful area for further exploration.

Further, a phenomenological study by Alaggia and Millington (2008) offers some important insights into the lived experience of men sexually abused as children. From interviews with 14 participants, findings indicate that male survivors can often struggle with hope and feelings of loss in relation to the abuse. Interestingly, Alaggia and Millington mention participants' experiences of hope connected to their self-perceived capacity to remain strong and resilient in the face of the CSA. While the theme of hope was identified, it was not the focus of this study nor did the authors sufficiently elaborate the connection between hope and the experience of CSA for male survivors.

In his doctoral dissertation study, Sutherland (2008) drew some interesting linkages between hope and the experience of CSA for male survivors. In total, 103

participants were recruited to investigate the connection between coping, hope, ego development and psychopathology for male survivors. Sutherland concludes that the male survivors with positive coping strategies were found to be more hopeful according to Synder's State Hope Scale. Additionally, results reveal that survivors who reported experiencing neither anxiety nor depression were more hopeful than those who were depressed, anxious, or co-morbid. Further, those survivors who were anxious were more hopeful than those who were struggling with the co-morbid symptomology of depression and anxiety. Although this study presents valuable information on hope and MCSA, the quantitative methodology and a-priori framework employed, does not provide the opportunity for an in-depth understanding of hope from the perspective of the survivor himself.

Conclusion

The literature indicates that male survivors of CSA often experience persistent and long-term psychological maladjustment. While there has been some discussion on the importance of hope in the healing process for survivors, there is a paucity of research explicitly exploring hope for adult male survivors from their perspective. As such, I contend that we are in beginning stages of understanding the experiences and meanings of hope for this under-studied and often marginalized population. Hence, this study ventures into territory that has yet to be examined. In addition to honoring and learning from the narratives of hope for male survivors, I believe this research adds to the compendium of hope literature with specific possibilities for enhanced understandings for treatment when working with male survivors. It is with these thoughts in mind that attention is now turned to an exploration of the methodological aspects of this study.

Chapter Three:

A Journey of Journeys: Traversing the Qualitative Landscape

*The qualitative research journey [is] enticing
though 'full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails...*

(Finlay, 2002, p. 209)

*On the whole, my experience of the research journey has been replete with several smaller and individual journeys, some triumphant and exciting and others difficult and trying. Driving home after a long day of writing, and not a particularly productive one I might add, I began reflecting on my experience as a qualitative researcher. The image that came to mind was that of a desert-like terrain stretching for miles and miles, with me as the researcher trying to negotiate this unfamiliar and challenging territory. While I know there is an endpoint to my journey, I can't always see it nor feel that it's within reach. And yet I keep walking... Although most often I embrace this voyage wholeheartedly and with enthusiasm, other times the heaviness of the desert sun on my back leaves me weary and drained. And yet I keep walking... As new peaks and valleys are made by my every footstep, my perspectives and interpretations have also taken on new forms and shapes. And yet I keep walking... At times a windstorm of thoughts, questions, and emotions funnels around me, leaving me feeling clouded in vision and panic stricken. And yet I keep walking... Once the dust finally settles, and it always does, I am left with my initial intention and question that propelled this journey in the first place... **What are the experiences and meanings of hope for adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse?** With this as my guiding compass, I keep walking...*

While at times I did not have a clear direction and could not feel the solid ground beneath me, my purpose in conducting this research study has remained strong. My overarching interest in understanding hope for male survivors led me to further explore how hope was engendered and challenged in their lives. Learning of the connection between hope and CSA for participants was also an additional aim of this study. With these research objectives in hand, I set forth on my journey.

When first embarking on this research endeavour, I came upon Crotty's (2003) description of the research process and found it to be especially helpful in navigating the vast landscape of qualitative inquiry. As a starting point, he explicates the importance of outlining one's position in relation to four basic elements inherent in any research study, which include: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Each of these paradigmatic facets informs the other, as the researcher's underlying assumptions and beliefs guides the study from design and data collection to the interpretation and presentations of the findings. Constructionism is the epistemological basis for this study. From this position on the theory of knowledge, I have drawn upon the interpretivist, and more specifically the hermeneutic theoretical perspective, to guide my methodological choices. The narrative approach best describes the methodological framework of this inquiry and steers the selected data collection methods and primary analysis process. To further enrich my analysis, I have also drawn from discourse analysis.

Chapter Outline

Within the following chapter, I address several issues related to choosing narrative methodology, as well as blending analytic procedures consisting of both narrative and discourse analysis approaches. This chapter is structured into three main sections with the intention of providing a description of the main decision points that have framed and supported this research. The first part sets the philosophical and theoretical backdrop anchoring my choice of the narrative methodology. The specific

narrative methodology, methods, and approaches to analysis based on Polkinghorne's (1995) descriptions of *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* follow in the second section. The second part also includes an outline of the aspects of discourse analysis from which I have approached and understood the research texts. Lastly, I present issues relevant to research legitimacy, evaluation, and the ethical care of participants.

Part I

A Philosophical and Theoretical Backdrop to the Research Journey

Throughout this research inquiry, I have continuously engaged in a process of questioning and naming my assumptions on the theory of knowledge and the philosophical ideas grounding this study's narrative methodology. As a result of this conscious effort, the foundational pieces supporting this study have become increasingly clear to me.

Epistemology

Grappling with issues around epistemology, or "how we know what we know" was, in large part, what fundamentally informed my selection of narrative research methodology. Constructionism, as I have come to understand it, is the appreciation that there is "no objective truth waiting for us to discover" and that meaningful and multiple realities are socially co-constructed and transmitted (Crotty, 2003, p. 8). From this perspective, experiences are rendered meaningful only when meaning is constructed by conscious beings as they interact with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 2003). Furthermore, our experiences are not interpreted "in isolation, but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, [and] language" (Schwandt, 2003, p. 305). Given that hope is uniquely experienced and is often engendered in relation to someone or something (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Elliot, 2005; Farran et al. 1995; Jevne, 1991; Jevne & Nekolaichuk, 2003; Nekolaichuk et al., 1999), I believe the constructionist

orientation is particularly compatible with gaining an understanding of the experiences and meanings of hope for male survivors.

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretically and philosophically, this study draws upon the hermeneutic tradition which is considered to fit under the umbrella of interpretivism. The interpretivist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). Hermeneutics is a particular way of representing the notion of interpretive understanding and is considered to provide the theoretical basis for most qualitative research done from an interpretive perspective (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; McLeod, 2001; Merriam, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Although hermeneutics has its roots in ancient Greek mythology and in the interpretation of biblical texts, the concept has been expanded and reconstructed to apply to literary texts, historical periods, and human understanding (Baronov, 2004; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Chessick, 1990; Crotty, 2003; McLeod, 2001; Moules, 2002; Schwandt, 2003; Smith, 1993).

At its core, hermeneutics seeks to understand the meaning of human experiences through a historical and cultural lens (Baronov, 2004; Chessick, 1990; Gadamer, 1975; McLeod, 2001; Thorne, 2008). In other words, we cannot separate ourselves from our history and culture; rather, our past is joined to our present and continuously informs and transforms our understanding of the phenomenon under study (McLeod, 2001; Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1989). From the hermeneutic perspective, we arrive at an understanding of the world based on what we already understand and the experiences we have had (Packer & Addison, 1989). As such, I acknowledge that my interpretations of participant accounts have been filtered through my position in the world as a woman in her mid-thirties, a Ph.D. student, a psychologist, a qualitative researcher, an only daughter, a wife, and a mother. Along with my cultural and historical experiences, my

personal and professional pre-understandings of hope and CSA have undeniably influenced and shaped this research and the findings herein. Additionally, those who read and engage with this document will also have unique pre-understandings rooted in their own historical and cultural positions, which in turn will inevitably inform their reinterpretations of the research text.

Within this research, I also embrace the hermeneutic notion that my cultural, historical and social position serves as my 'horizon' from which I make sense of participants' accounts of hope (Gadamer, 1989; McLeod, 2001; Scott & Usher, 1999; Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1989). The same applies for each participant, as they too have their own 'horizon' or viewpoint that is constantly in the process of formation and being shaped by their pre-understandings situated within their own cultural and historical experiences. Given that we each hold unique horizons, a 'fusion' of these horizons then occurs in the understanding of what is grounded in both the position of the participant and my own position as the researcher. Throughout the narrative analytic process, I was especially mindful of this theoretical perspective, and as a result chose to present the findings by explicitly revealing my viewpoints, as researcher, alongside participant's narratives of hope.

Language is another key principle in hermeneutics, as it is thought to permeate all interpretation (Gallagher, 1992; Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1998). It is through language that we experience the world and share our understandings (Baronov, 2004). Within language, lives our cultural and historical context and it is the vehicle by which understanding develops between people (Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1998). In research, meaning is co-constructed in the exchange of language between the participant and the interpreter. From my communication with participants, to the words chosen during our research conversations, to the analysis and interpretation of participants' accounts of hope, the ways in which participants speak and share their accounts of hope, and even

further to the presentation of their narratives in the research text, language and its usage was an integral component of this inquiry.

Part II

The Narrative Thread Connecting Methodology, Methods, and Analysis

*People in every tradition and location have created
community and continuity through stories
and transmitted wisdom through their telling and repetition...*

(Gannon, 2009, p. 73)

Outlining the constructionist epistemology and hermeneutic theoretical perspective anchoring this study provided the basis from which I chose the narrative analytic methodology to explore the meaning of hope for male survivors in this study. Bearing in mind that all methodologies are constructions, it is therefore not possible to fully capture the experiences and meanings of hope for participants. Rather, generating a new understanding of hope for male survivors was the primary focus. The next section describes the methodological framework, namely a description of the narrative tradition, the narrative features germane to this research, and the reasons for choosing the narrative approach to address the research questions. The data collection procedures including, participant selection and recruitment are also presented. Finally, the primary interpretative approaches of *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* are discussed and implementation procedures outlined. In addition, the principles of discourse analysis that have allowed for a further understanding of participants' unique viewpoints on hope are discussed.

What is Narrative?

The notion that "people make sense of their experience, and communicate their experience to others, in the form of stories" is a central theme in narrative inquiry (McLeod, 2001, p. 104). Many have argued that narrative reflects the natural way in which we, as human beings, bring meaning and understanding to our lived experience

(Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993, 2008; White & Epston, 1990). Others have described narrative as being “central to human existence” (Gannon, 2009, p. 73). Additionally, narrative can be understood as offering a means of understanding human action, of arranging and synthesizing life events into a meaningful whole, and of finding connection between these actions and life events over time (Bruner, 1986; Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 1993, 2008). As Bruner (1986) writes, “narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intention” (p. 16) and attends and explicates the meaning-making process inherent in human experience. Related to the understanding of hope, Jevne et al. (1999) highlight that “when people are asked about hope, they commonly tell a story” and it is their narrative and experience that informs us of hope (p. 17). Given that hope and the experience of CSA is constructed in personally-meaningful ways, narrative inquiry was a particularly fitting approach to exploring participants’ experiences and understandings of hope.

Features of Narrative Methodology

Upon reviewing the considerable body of literature on narrative inquiry, I came across several methodological ideas that served as guiding posts for this study. A brief description of the particular ideas and features within the narrative tradition informing this research are presented, including temporality and relationality.

Temporality and narrative. The aspect of time in narrative inquiry is especially important to the meaning-making process (Brooks, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gannon, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1984). As Polkinghorne (1995) indicates “narrative ordering makes individual events comprehensible by identifying the whole to which they contribute. The ordering process operates by linking diverse happenings along a temporal dimension, and by identifying the effect one event has on another” (p. 18). In other words, narrative attempts to capture the temporal facet of experience by

describing how people construct and create a sense of order to their life events; thus, arriving at a coherent account of who they are, their experiences, and the meaning of those experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that an experience or a life-event “has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future” (p. 29). As such, narratives not only reveal past actions, but also the meanings and understandings attributed to those actions over time (Riessman, 1993, 2008).

Along with the notion of temporality, is the “process of ordering or reordering, recounting, telling again what has already happened or is taken to have already happened” (Miller, 1995, p. 71). As participants recount their experiences, they are actively ordering and shaping their narrative for the researcher and purpose for which they share the story (Gannon, 2009). Furthermore, the researcher is also engaged in a deliberate ordering of these experiences and attending to temporal connectives. Given that both the participant and researcher are intently involved in synthesizing, ordering, and reordering events and life experiences, a narrative is a form of representation rather than a tidy and linear representation of the temporal order of events (Gannon, 2009; Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). Not surprisingly, in this study, participant experiences of hope were not communicated and shared in a neat and chronological order. Instead, accounts were colourfully vivid with some temporal connections between life experiences and the meaning of those experiences made more explicit than others. Moreover, the research narratives herein are a representation of how I arranged and ordered participant experiences of hope and my understandings of those experiences on a temporal dimension.

Relationality and narrative. While temporality is important in narrative, the sole ordering of events is not enough in the meaning-making process. Rather, a narrative must go beyond temporal ordering to demonstrate or imply a human connection (Salmon & Riessman, 2008, p. 78). It is for this reason that narrative theorists speak of the

relational and constructionist nature of the narrative tradition (Gergen, 1991). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) indicate that the narrative orientation to research is by nature collaborative and co-constructed. For instance, the researcher is not engaged in the inquiry in a detached manner; instead, the researcher is an integral part of the narrative process. Furthermore, “the two narratives of participant and researcher become in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (p. 5).

To extend the notion of narrative as a co-constructed endeavour, the reader also interacts with the research text and therefore engages in the meaning-making process. Ricoeur (1991) asserts that narratives are created in a relational space and are “not completed in the text but in the reader” (p. 26). From this point of view, the reader enters into a relational interaction with both the participants and researcher’s narrative. In this relational process between reader and research text, Gannon (2008) asserts the importance for the narrative to have an emotional or affective impact on the reader. It is likely that by being emotionally moved, the reader is then able to invest and connect more deeply in making sense of the narrative text.

Why Narrative?

Since I can remember, stories have always fascinated me. Some of my fondest childhood memories are of the times I would sit and listen to my vovô (grandfather) tell and retell stories about his courtship with my vovo (grandmother), his time in the army, his life challenges as a carpenter raising four young children, and his experience of adjusting to Canada as a new immigrant. I believe that within those experiences, my initial interest in pursuing a career dedicated to listening and understandings others’ life stories began. Those storied moments I shared with my vovô have also drawn me to learn and eventually utilize and implement narrative research methodology.

Before I knew what methodological direction to take in answering my research question, I knew the directions I was not interested in taking. Fairly early on in the

research process, I decided that I did not wish to generate a theoretical model of hope, nor did I desire to reduce participant experiences to its essences (Creswell, 1998). Instead, I was mindful of entering into this research endeavour with “openness, humility, and genuine curiosity,” as well as a willingness to witness and engage with participants’ stories and experiences of hope (Ellis, 1998, p. 18). With this as the underlying current, a narrative research orientation was the means by which I came to make sense, understand, interpret, and analyze participants’ narrative accounts of hope in their lives.

In view of the significance of this choice point, I felt the need to return to the philosophical and theoretical principles anchoring this inquiry. As a constructionist, I appreciate that human meaning making is shared, relational, and socially constructed (McLeod, 2001). In this vein, the theoretical perspective of hermeneutics is also about the sharing of meaning between communities and individuals positioned in relation to time, place, gender, and culture (Scott & Usher, 1999; Smith, 1999). Given that the narrative approach is fundamentally a collaborative, relational, and co-constructed tradition that appreciates our contextual and historical connections (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), I chose the narrative methodology to be my primary guide in understanding participants’ accounts of hope.

Methods for Gathering Data

In my quest to gain an understanding of the experiences and meanings of hope for participants, a number of data collection procedures were used to clarify meaning and enhance the narrative interpretation. Methods for gathering data included: (a) initial in-depth research conversations, (b) photo-assisted conversations, (c) follow-up conversations, and (d) a researcher journal. I appreciate that my research question could have been explored in a variety of ways; however, provided my epistemological understandings, theoretical perspective, and the benefits of the narrative analytic approach, the selected research methods were deemed to be suitable.

Throughout this document, I have chosen to utilize the word *conversation* intentionally, as it implies the co-creation of a narrative dialogue between individuals; whereas, the term *interview*, as commonly utilized in the qualitative tradition (Clandinin & Donnelly, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Thorne, 2008), suggests a uni-directional, neutral and even detached exchange of asking questions and receiving answers. In alignment with the constructionist framework of this inquiry, each conversation involved an active process that led to a contextually-bound and co-created story of the meaning of hope for participants (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Initial in-depth research conversations. In the interest of facilitating a rich exploration of the meaning of hope for male survivors, each participant was invited to share his experiences of hope in an initial in-depth research conversation. The aim of this initial meeting was to engage in a purposeful dialogue about hope. While the research conversations were guided by open-ended questions, I was especially interested in creating the space for a naturally evolving exchange. These guiding questions were primarily used to elicit participants' narrative accounts of hope and the meaning of those accounts in the context of their lives (see Appendix C). In an effort to remain present and open to participant accounts, I often deviated from the conversation guide when appropriate. Furthermore, while many of the research questions were focused on illuminating the meaning of hope for male survivors, I was also mindful of two important issues: (a) that all stories are embedded in the context of participants' lives, and (b) that it was important to provide the space and opportunity for participants to share their accounts of low hope and/or hopelessness.

Prior to our first research conversation, the purpose of the study was reviewed and participants provided their written informed consent. All conversations were conducted in person at Clinical Services on the University of Alberta campus. One initial research conversation was completed with each participant, with the exception of two

participants with whom I had an additional follow-up conversation. The length of the research conversations ranged from approximately one hour to two and a half hours. Three recording devices (one digital recorder, one hand-held mini recorder, and one cassette recorder) were used to maximize audio-clarity and to avoid any potential loss of recording. For the purposes of organization, participant initials and the date of each meeting were written on the audio-cassettes. Digital files of the conversations were converted and transferred to an electronic version. All conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

At the end of the initial in-depth research conversation, each participant was provided with a 24-exposure colour film disposable camera and invited to take photos of things that represented hope for them (see Appendix D). After approximately two to three weeks, participants and I met briefly at the Education Clinic on the University of Alberta campus to exchange the disposable camera. Film was developed at the researcher's cost. While the intent of the first research conversation was to engage in an open dialogue of hope, the subsequent photo-assisted conversation offered the opportunity to have a more focused discussion of hope with the guidance of the photos taken by the participants.

Photo-assisted conversations. As a research tool, photography has been widely used in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Banks, 2008; Collier & Collier, 1986; Prosser, 1998; Ziller, 1990). Hagedorn (1994) explains that photography has been adopted as a means of exploring and interpreting accounts of the human experience. Considering the constructionist perspective, the meaning of a photograph is constructed by the maker and the viewer (Collier & Collier, 1986). Photography within the research process can facilitate a collaborative interaction between the researcher and participant. Additionally, photographs can act as a launching pad for a storied exploration of the context and meaning of the photo. Collier and Collier explain that photography

“reinforces the message that the function of photographs is primarily the creation and maintenance of meaning and to this end a hermeneutic approach, which concentrates on the meaning woven around a photograph, is desirable” (p. 77). Not only does photography invite one to engage in the meaning-making process, it also reveals insight that may not otherwise be accessible using other data collection methods (Banks, 2007).

The use of photography in this study served mainly as a non-verbal account of the experiences and meanings of hope for the male survivors in this inquiry. The aim of the photo-assisted conversation was to provide participants an opportunity to assign language to this non-verbal representation of hope. Photos also functioned to stimulate and guide further in-depth discussion. A number of guiding questions were used when appropriate (see Appendix C); however, an open dialogue about participants’ understandings of hope depicted in their photographic images was my main objective.

Before delving into the photo-assisted conversations, participants were provided with a few moments to review their photos. At this point I reiterated the following: (a) that I had not seen any of the photos, (b) that they could bypass any image they did not wish to share, and (c) that the order in which they chose to explore the photos was up to them. Each participant took a varying number of photos (i.e., two participants took over 20 photos, two others took between 10 and 20 photos, and the remaining two took under six photos). Each photograph was scanned onto a CD and all photograph negatives were kept by the researcher, while participants were offered a hard copy of the photos. All photo-assisted conversations were also conducted in person at Clinical Services on the University of Alberta campus. The length of these conversations varied from approximately one hour to just under two hours in length. For the purposes of organization, all photographs were dated and numbered according to the order in which the participant described them during our photo-assisted conversations.

Research journal. Who I am as a researcher has changed with time and experience. Along this research journey, I have experienced loss, despair, joy, and hope. All this has impacted my beliefs, my assumptions and my understandings of hope. Being mindful that I bring with me an array of experiences and perspectives to the research process, I felt it was of the utmost importance to articulate these and place them alongside participants' accounts of hope. As Butler-Kisber (2010) indicates, "In qualitative inquiry, no apologies are needed for identity, assumptions, and biases, just a rigorous accounting of them" (p. 19). For this study, I chose to place my thoughts, interpretations, reflections, and questions in a researcher journal.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that the research journal provides documentation of the research process and the meaning associated with that process as it is shaped by the participant-researcher relationship. They go on to indicate that "the researcher's notes are an active reconstruction of events rather than a passive recording..." (2000, p. 5). McLeod (2001), another advocate of the researcher journal, not only recommends that keeping a personal research journal is an critical element of any qualitative method, he also explains that the research journal is designed to "capture personal and intuitive dimensions of the process of 'meaning-making' as they occur" (p. 133). He also points out that in keeping a journal, the researcher engages in a practice of reflexivity, which implies "a capacity for self-reflection and 'turning back' one's awareness on oneself" (p. 195).

Even prior to actively beginning the formal research process, I had made a commitment to the reflective practice of journal writing. In these initial journal entries, my early questions and apprehensions about the overall research process were documented. In keeping with the hermeneutic theoretical principles guiding my work, I also reflected on my own pre-understandings about childhood sexual abuse and hope. As the research process began to unfold, the journal then held my evolving understandings,

curiosities, and experiences in relation to participants' accounts and meanings of hope in their lives. With the intent of making as clear as possible my historical and cultural positions from which interpretations were filtered, excerpts from my researcher journal begin each participant chapter and are woven throughout this document.

Research Participants

In the following section, participant selection and recruitment procedures employed in this study are outlined. Specific provisions in selecting participants from a previous research project are also presented. At the end of this chapter, I provide a brief synopsis of each research participant.

Participant selection. Participants were selected through the process of “purposeful sampling,” which is “based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61; see also Patton, 1990). In order to gain an in-depth and rich understanding of hope for male survivors, participants were drawn from a previously established research pool of interested male survivors. Specifically, upon the completion of my Master’s thesis several participants from that study indicated an interest in further contributing to research exploring aspects related to male childhood sexual abuse. A list of interested individuals was kept and referred to when recruiting and selecting participants for this study.

In addition to participant willingness and interest in further taking part in research, participants were also selected on the basis of whether or not they met the following inclusion criteria: (a) were adult males over the age of 18; (b) self-identified as having a history of childhood sexual abuse; (c) were able to articulate and communicate thoughts, feelings, and experiences; and (d) had a desire to reflect and provide an in-depth description of his experiences of hope and the meaning connected to those experiences.

Participant recruitment. A total of nine participants who had previously indicated an interest in furthering their research involvement were telephoned. Of the nine, only six could be reached. The remaining three participants could not be located, as their contact information was no longer valid. The six participants that were contacted subsequently chose to participate in the study. During our initial phone conversation, participants were offered a verbal explanation of the study and all six indicated an interest in receiving more information. A description of the purpose and nature of this project was mailed electronically to five participants and via regular post to one participant (see Appendix A). Participants still wishing to be involved were asked, as per the study description, to contact me either by telephone or email. All participants chose to contact me via telephone to indicate their interest in pursuing their research participation. Upon participant-initiated contact, participants were then screened to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria, verbal consent to take part in the study was obtained and arrangements were made for the initial research meeting. Given that I had previously met and worked with these participants for my master's research, a reconnection of rapport was paramount. As such, participants were encouraged to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding the study prior to our first research conversation. Two of the six participants contacted me with specific questions regarding the photography portion of the study.

Research relationship. While the focus in my master's study was on exploring helpful and unhelpful counselling experiences for male survivors, the topic of hope was often implicitly and sometimes explicitly mentioned. From this project, not only did my interest in hope further develop, but I had the honour of connecting and working with participants dedicated to researching the experiences of male survivors.

Selecting participants with whom I had already worked introduced some advantages as well as some specific considerations. On one hand, our previous research

relationship seemed to easily facilitate an opportunity for re-connection and open conversation about hope. Butler-Kisber (2010) indicates that the development of a rich narrative account about any facet of human experience requires a prolonged and trusting relationship between researcher and participant. Having met with and talked with participants in the past, appeared to have enabled a sense of safety and perhaps even furthered the depth of our exploration into their experiences of hope.

Along with the benefits of our former working relationship, I was also mindful of potential ethical issues, such as participants feeling pressured or coerced into participating. Additionally, I made the specific effort of clearly outlining the boundaries and nature of our newly established working relationship. I was also especially aware of my perceptions of each participant based on our previous contact and worked to reflexively journal these impressions before our first research conversation and throughout the research process.

Responding to the Data: A Blending of Analysis Approaches

I repeatedly pencil a bold check mark next to the words “complete transcribing” in my agenda. A momentary sense of relief and accomplishment sets in, only then to be followed by feelings of anxiety and apprehension. I look at the thick stack of transcripts still warm from the printer. “Now what?” ... This question being the first in a long line of other queries... “Where do I start? What do I pay attention to? What do I leave out? How do I represent participant stories so not to lose any context and yet engage in my role as interpreter? Where does my voice as researcher fit? How will I make space for both the participant perspective and my own as a researcher?” With that as my last question, I close my computer, file away the transcripts, and leave my office in an attempt to avoid the overwhelming feelings rushing through me.

It took me several days, if not weeks, to return and wrestle with these questions. Of course on some level, I knew that the interpretation process was well underway and that data collection and analysis are not mutually exclusive activities (Riessman, 1993; Merriam, 2009; Moules, 2002). Despite this, I felt unsure of how to proceed. As I searched the literature with the hope that I might stumble on a “how to” manual outlining a straightforward analytic process, I ended up with more questions than answers. With no such manual available, I found Polkinghorne’s (1995) work extremely valuable in answering some of my questions and in understanding and implementing the narrative analytic process. Specifically, his distinction between *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* provided the guiding light I needed to see my way along the seemingly dim and unknown path ahead. In addition to Polkinghorne’s ideas, I also kept specific principles inherent in the discourse analysis approach at the forefront of my mind during the interpretation process. As an additional tool utilized in this study, discourse analysis offered a means of attending to participant’s language and the ways in which they shared their narrative accounts of hope (Edley, 2001; Willig, 1999). While discourse analysis was not the primary lens from which I approached each participant’s narrative (i.e., the *narrative analysis*), it was nonetheless, an additional and enriching means of understanding hope for male survivors.

In the sections that follow, I specifically outline Polkinghorne’s (1995) *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* approaches from which I chose to interpret the research conversations. In addition, I will highlight the discursive analytical principles that informed me as I engaged in the narrative analysis of participant’s individual accounts of hope. Prior to describing each analytical orientation, I first share how I came to employ and blend aspects of both narrative and discourse analysis.

Bricolage: A blending of analytical orientations. The analytical approach to this inquiry is akin to what Wood and Kroger (2000) refer to as a “made to order” rather

than an “off the rack” endeavor, or in other words a *bricolage* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The notion of *bricolage* is one that denotes a complex strategy of mindfully drawing upon resources, ideas, and techniques from different orientations as appropriate to the specific inquiry at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Wood & Kroger, 2000). A *bricoleur* is described as an individual who is flexible, creative, and responsive to the research process as it emerges and works to produce a pieced-together and interwoven set of practices, understandings, interpretations, and approaches to the phenomenon under study (Crotty, 2003). The product or bricolage is that of a “sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.11). From this perspective, my orientation to the research conversations is best described as an exercise of bricolage, mainly influenced by the narrative approach to analysis, as well as, being informed by the principles of discourse analysis.

During both the research conversations and my engagement with the individual participant narratives, I became aware of my tendency to attend to both the content, or *what* participants said about hope, as well as the process, or *how* (e.g., behaviours/actions, emotions, patterns of thought and language) they shared their experiences of hope. Similarly to what I would be attuned to in my work as a therapist, I found myself being drawn to the subtle ways in which the research conversations began to unfold and the discursive nature inherent within the narrative accounts. Therefore, in addition to engaging with the research data through Polkinghorne’s (1995) narrative lens, I chose to be mindful of the basic assumptions outlined by the discourse analysis approach when creating the narrative accounts reflecting participants’ meanings and understandings of hope. The particular principles of both a narrative analysis and the discourse analysis orientations are outlined in the sections that follow.

Narrative analysis and analysis of narrative: An overview

A narrative or story is “a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful.”

(Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

Polkinghorne draws a distinction between *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative*. In the former, data are collected as “actions, events and happenings” and the analysis ‘produces stories’ using ‘narrative configuration as its primary analytical tool’ (p. 6). In the latter, multiple stories are collected and analyzed to produce “paradigmatic typologies and categories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5) common in many qualitative methodologies. The analytical descriptions of *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* offered by Polkinghorne correspond to Jerome Bruner’s (1986) notions of *narrative* and *paradigmatic* cognition respectively. Briefly, *narrative* cognition refers to understanding human action by attending to the particular, temporal, and complex interaction between life events. These life events are linked or configured into a unified whole along an explanatory theme (Polkinghorne, 1995). On the other hand, *paradigmatic* reasoning refers to the construction of categories and is “defined by a set of common attributes that is shared by its members” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). Paradigmatic mode of understanding brings a sense of order to experience by seeing individual events as belonging to a similar instance or category. Both modes of reasoning and corresponding analytic approaches not only generate important understandings, but also encompass the human meaning making process and cognitive repertoire (Polkinghorne, 1995). As such, I chose to implement aspects of both *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative* in interpreting the experiences and meanings of hope for male survivors in this study.

Discourse analysis: An overview. As an analytical tool, discourse analysis falls under the rubric of constructionism that anchors this research and as such, was ideally

suited as an additional means of interpreting participants' narrative accounts of hope in this study (Willig, 1999). From the lens of discourse analysis, it is posited that language (both text and/or speech) employed in conversations or discussing events, concepts, or objects does not represent a neutral description of an objective world with an objective reality; rather, the world and how it is experienced is socially constructed and communicated through language (Burman & Parker, 1993; Elliot, 2006; Wood & Kroger, 2000). In alignment with the hermeneutic theoretical perspective shaping this study, the analytical tool of discourse analysis also acknowledges that one's understandings of the world, including social interactions and use of language is informed and impacted by one's cultural and historical experiences (Burman & Parker, 1993; Parker, 1992). Discourse analysis also postulates that language is action-oriented and is utilized in different ways, at different times, to achieve different purposes and functions (Potter, 2003; Wood & Kroger, 2000). As such, discourse analysis is an interpretive tool that attends to "both variation and the function and consequences of language" (Elliott, 2006, p. 32). As previously mentioned, the analytical tool of discourse analysis was not the primary means of interpreting the research conversations; however, it did provide an additional layer of exploration and understanding.

The Interpretation Process

Narrative and discourse analysis process. Polkinghorne (1995) identifies that a narrative is a story with a distinct beginning, middle, and end, where participant experiences and life events are presented in their original context and sequence. Narrative analysis seeks to present and reveal how individuals create meaning of their experiences (Riessman, 1993, 2008). To begin, narrative accounts informing the research question are collected. This is then followed by a process of synthesizing the vast amount of information collected into a coherent developmental narrative capturing the meanings embedded in their accounts (Polkinghorne, 1995). The *narrative analysis*

process involves the task of integrating and transforming the “raw” textual data into a narrative that brings about a unified meaning to each participant’s story of hope (Polkinghorne, 1988).

While the *narrative analytical* process described herein at first glance may appear fairly clear and linear in fashion, in reality I revisited and moved through and between the following interpretation activities several times:

1. Audio-recorded conversations (i.e., both initial and subsequent photo-assisted conversations) were transcribed verbatim. I sent a copy of the transcripts to each participant for verification of accuracy.
2. Once participant conversations were completed and transcripts sent out, a hard copy of the transcribed text was printed. With the intent of creating an initial openness to meaning, I read and re-read each transcript several times. This careful and detailed reviewing of the text allowed me to bring forth my general impressions, while also attending to familiarities, differences, and distinctive resonances within each individual’s narrative. At this point, elements within the textual data contributing to a detailed understanding of hope for each participant were underscored, using a coloured highlighting pen. More specifically, I began to pay attention to context and connections of influence among events, the participant’s inner struggles, and meanings ascribed to the experiences shared by the participant.

At this point of analysis (as well as throughout the interpretation process) I looked specifically to the discursive guidelines offered by Wood and Kroger (2000), researchers and authors in the area of discourse analysis. For instance, in addition to attending to participants’ use of spoken language, I also noted various forms of nonverbal communication, including: tone of voice, pauses in speech, moments of silence, hesitations, absences (i.e., what was not said) and emotional responses to what was being shared. I was also aware and noted any repetitive descriptions and changes or

discrepancies in participants' narratives on hope. The general unfolding of each research conversation (i.e., beginning, middle, and end) was an additional point of interpretative interest. In considering these discursive aspects, this provided a further opening into a rich exploration of participant's narrative accounts of hope.

3. As the re-reading of the transcripts continued, I began to make notes beside each portion of highlighted text indicating what aspect of the story the text pertained to, including: (a) meanings of hope, (b) significant elements of hope, (c) challenges to hope, (d) sources of hope, (e) connections between sexual abuse and hope, and (f) hopes for the future. I also reviewed and organized participant generated photos according to the corresponding aspect of the participant's account. Duplicates or very slight variations of any one photo were removed and an electronic copy was placed in a Microsoft file folder for reference.

4. Another Microsoft Word document was created for each participant entitled, "Key Elements of (participant's pseudonym) Hope". As suggested by the title, this is where all the key elements I considered essential or meaningful to the participant's narrative of hope were written out. Particular attention was given to the progression in which these "key elements" emerged within each conversation, as well as the relationship to any other significant aspects of the participant's narrative. Janesick (1994), a qualitative researcher, asserts that "staying close" to the data and how it unfolds "is the more powerful means of telling the story." As such, the narrative analysis presented for each participant has been structured so as to reflect the conversations themselves.

5. In preparing to compose the narratives, I engaged in ongoing reflective activities which took the form of journal entries, photography, and personal stories to explore and deepen my understandings related to the participant's accounts of hope. Drawing upon my own experiences, pre-understandings of hope and CSA, I engaged with and noted my thoughts and emotional reactions to participant transcripts and photographs. After allowing a

significant amount of time to dwell in this initial interpretive process, I gave myself space and time away from the data so that I could re-engage and re-examine these interpretations with openness to gaps, contradictions, newness and echoes.

In the process of writing the accounts, I came to recognize that research conversations themselves were narrative forms, co-constructed and replete with participant perspectives, as well as my own. Therefore, I worked to construct narrative texts in a way that both the participants' voice and my developing understandings would co-exist alongside one another. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) speak to this intersubjective meaning making process and indicate that the "researcher needs to be aware of constructing a relationship and story in which both voices are heard" (p. 4). As such, both my personal narratives and experiences of the research process in general were woven alongside participant narratives.

6. Each research conversation was re-read, re-visited, and re-edited in an effort of creating an understandable and meaningful representation of participant's narratives of hope, as well as my evolving interpretations. Although the back and forth iterative process of interpretation and writing was at times daunting and frustrating, it also provided an opportunity to creatively engage and respond to the data. Writing my personal narratives in relation to the data was the primary way in which I made sense of my emergent understandings. Some of these writings will be included throughout this final research document.

7. Once a draft of each narrative conversation was complete, it was offered to participants for review and feedback. Any changes and comments were incorporated and integrated and a final conversation narrative was created.

Analysis of narratives process. During both the research conversations and my interactions with each participant's textual data and photographs, particular features of hope common and unique across participant narratives began to surface. The process

described by Polkinghorne (1995) as the *analysis of narratives* was employed as a framework from which to reflect on and highlight emerging themes. Analysis of narratives is the process of interpreting the data from a paradigmatic perspective. Polkinghorne states that a “paradigmatic analysis of narrative seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected” (p. 13).

With Polkinghorne’s (1995) description as my guide, I re-examined all six narrative research conversations in search of common and unique features across participants. During the *analysis of narrative* process, I often returned to the notion of moving back and forth from a narrow to a wide angle of view and understanding. In particular, I went from closely studying each participant’s individual understandings of hope to then seeking out the shared and distinct aspects of hope across participant narratives. As a result, the connective features as well as the unique understandings and experiences of hope shared by participants were derived inductively, were noted, and labelled in an effort to capture the thematic threads of hope across participant narrative accounts. More specifically, the *analysis of narrative* process consisted of reading and re-reading each participant narrative. Then utilizing a color-coded system, I highlighted any emerging points of similarity and difference across the six participant accounts. I began to organize and ascribe portions (e.g., phrases, sections of text or research conversation) of the research conversations into sub-thematic categories (e.g., Hope and Choice) and subsequently created main thematic categories to which the sub-themes corresponded (e.g., Hope in Action). It is noteworthy to mention that some features of hope were particularly unique and sometimes specific to one participant (e.g., Hope and Forgiveness); however, I felt it was important to feature these distinct understandings of hope, as these accounts were rich in nature and enhanced the overall narrative of hope for male survivors. Once the analysis of narrative was written, a draft of the emerging thematic threads was offered to participants for review and feedback.

Part III

Study Legitimacy

Evaluating a narrative study “cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or standardized technical procedures”

(Riessman, 1993, p. 68)

A multitude of approaches to evaluate qualitative research exist and are utilized differently depending on the nature of the particular study (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Thorne, 2008). To further complicate matters, the guidelines created to establish the legitimacy of a qualitative study are continuously evolving with new terms, conceptualizations, and principles (McLeod, 2001). Despite this ongoing emergence of terminology, many qualitative researchers have come to evaluate an inquiry based on its trustworthiness (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The concept of trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are worth attending to (Given & Saumure, 2008) and are useful to other researchers in their own process of theorizing (Mishler, 1990). Upon reviewing the many ways available to adjudicate the legitimacy and trustworthiness of this qualitative study, I considered Riessman’s (1993) evaluative descriptions especially germane. The following is a brief outline of the principles I employed in the appraising of this inquiry: Persuasiveness, Correspondence, Coherence, and Pragmatic Use.

Persuasiveness

Persuasiveness is the extent to which the researcher’s interpretations are reasonable, convincing, and supported by participants’ accounts. In other words, is the interpretation believable and credible? This is a question I often asked myself when writing each narrative account. With the notion of persuasiveness in mind, I chose to present the findings in a way that reflected the research conversations themselves. In this way, I hoped to make the line of logic between participant accounts of hope and my emergent interpretations transparent, thereby assisting the reader in determining the

study's persuasiveness. Ultimately, I acknowledge that the aspect of persuasiveness is historically bound and primarily rests on the readers' response (Riessman, 1993). What may be the most believable and persuasive interpretation of the participants' account of hope at this point may not necessarily hold the same credibility at later time. As such, interpretation and meaning making is "partial, open to interpretation by others, and both culturally and historically constructed" (McLeod, 2001, p. 189).

Correspondence

Correspondence refers to the degree to which the narrative text is recognizable and adequately represents participants' accounts. In the case of this study, correspondence pertains to the extent that participants agree with their particular narrative account. To this end, I invited each participant to reflect and comment on a final draft of their individual narrative. I presented them with four questions to consider as they read and reviewed their narrative:

1. Do you see yourself in this narrative/research text?
2. Does the narrative/research text resonate with you?
3. Does the narrative/research text capture aspects of your experiences of hope and the meaning you make of them?
4. Would you add or change anything to your narrative/research text that would better help me understand your experience of hope and its connection to childhood sexual abuse?

Participants were also offered a draft of the emerging thematic threads and invited to share their thoughts in writing via email or telephone.

Coherence

The notion of coherence is concerned with the extent to which thick and rich descriptions of the researcher's beliefs and assumptions, as well as the research process, including methodological procedures are clearly outlined (Riessman, 1993). Coherence

also pertains to how the findings fit together, makes sense, and can be inspected for inconsistencies. In working towards the utmost degree of coherence, I documented my viewpoints and suppositions on hope and childhood sexual abuse in the form of a researcher journal throughout the inquiry process. These beliefs and assumptions have been purposefully embedded throughout this document. To further adhere to the evaluative principle of coherence, I detailed the inquiry process (i.e., methods, procedures, decision points, etc.) through the use of an audit trail, which consisted of: (a) transcripts, (b) data analysis procedures, and (c) process and methodological notes. The audit trail was particularly valuable in establishing coherence, as it facilitated a process of transparency in explicating the rationale for research decisions and procedures. As a result of the detail and attention given to the various aspects of the audit trail, I seek to offer the reader necessary information to appraise the research text for consistency and overall comprehensibility.

Pragmatic Use

Riessman's (1993) concept of pragmatic use addresses the degree to which the narrative text becomes the basis for another's work. This particular evaluative principle was especially significant for me and one by which I would hope most readers, including researchers of CSA and hope, judge the value and worth of this study. One of my main intentions in undertaking this inquiry was, and continues to be, that the findings yielded will be meaningful and significant to those who participated. Additionally, I hold great anticipation that helping professionals reading these pages will question their personal understandings of hope, feel emotionally impacted, and see ways to apply these findings to their own work with male survivors. In a sense, I hope this research acts to create both a "smile of recognition" in the reader, while also generating new connections and insights (Angen, 2000, p. 391).

Part IV

Ethical Care of Participants

Canadian Code of Ethics

The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, 3rd Edition (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000), clearly indicates the ethical principles, values, and standards of practice that serve to guide the variety of roles associated with the discipline of psychology, including that of a researcher in the field of psychology. While I aspired to uphold the principles of the code throughout this study, there were particular ethical standards that merited specific consideration.

Consent

In compliance with the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (CPA, 2000) and the University of Alberta, Faculty of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board, all participants were informed of the nature and purpose of this research study, as well as their rights to confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix B). In addition to establishing informed consent at the outset of the study, I revisited, explained, and obtained consent throughout the research process. Due to the past research relationship established with participants (i.e., Master's project), I did not want participants to feel pressured to take part in this study because of their prior involvement or previous indication of interest in further pursuing research. As such, I utilized Munhall's (1988) concept of *process consenting* and Grout's (2004) description of *negotiated consent*. Process consenting refers to the ongoing establishment of consent throughout the research inquiry; thus, providing participants increased protection and freedom of choices (Munhall, 1988). Negotiated consent describes how the participant and researcher engage in an ongoing dialogue and discussion around the issue of consent. Process consenting and negotiated consent were particularly suitable for this qualitative inquiry, as it was virtually impossible to completely predict all potential risks associated with each

stage of the study. Participants were asked to provide their consent at various points throughout this study. Informed consent was also obtained in written form before commencing our first research conversation. Subsequent to the initial research meeting, participants provided verbal consent indicating their desire to continue their involvement in the photo-assisted conversations and any follow-up conversations.

Anonymity

Pseudonyms were employed in all hard copy and electronic copies of transcripts and photographs. To ensure privacy and anonymity, any identifiers, such as names or other specifics that could be linked to any participant in particular were appropriately altered. To protect any third parties, such as family members all identifying information was changed or excluded altogether. Given that photography was a vehicle in exploring the meaning of hope for participants, it was of utmost importance to preserve the anonymity of any individuals who were identified in the photos. Therefore, participants were informed that any photographs identifiably capturing their image or the image of others would either be altered or not be used at all in any future publications; however, a description of the image with no specific identifying information could be utilized. Images that partially captured individuals, including the participant (i.e., people in the background or distance) were utilized only if the anonymity of those in the photo could be maintained.

Original documentation, including audio tapes, photographs, electronic copies and hard copies of transcripts was safely stored in a locked facility, monitored and accessible to only the researcher. All electronic and hard copy documentation related to this research will be kept in secure storage for a minimum period of five years.

Potential Risks of the Study

In qualitative research, we aspire to, but cannot fully guarantee that the participant will not be harmed (Magolda & Weems, 2002). As such, I took several

precautions to ensure that participants were at a minimal risk as a result of their involvement in this study. Any known potential risks of participating in this study were explained to all participants. Given the sensitive nature of this study, I reminded participants that if they felt uncomfortable, we could stop the research conversations or alternatively their overall participation at any point in the study. All participants were also debriefed at the end of each meeting and referral information for accessible, low-cost, and appropriately qualified counselling was offered (see Appendix E). None of the participants indicated feeling the need to pursue support services as a result of their participation.

Part V

Participant Descriptions: A Snapshot

With a picture in hand of the research methodology, I offer a brief glimpse into participants' lives and background. Collectively, participants represented a span of cultural or ethnic backgrounds, levels of education, and age. Participants self-identified as being of Native Canadian, French, Irish, Germanic, Ukrainian, and of French-Canadian heritage. All participants indicated having some post-secondary/college education. Participants ranged in age from late 30s to their mid50s. At the time of this research, four participants were engaging in ongoing counselling. The following is a short description of participants' demographic information.

Roderick

Roderick was in his early 50s and worked in the construction industry. Divorced and the father of 5 children, he described himself as being a Native-Canadian and a non-religious, but highly spiritual person. As a child, Roderick had 4 sisters, all of whom lived at home with both his mother and father. The sexual abuse he endured began at the age of 4 and was perpetrated by a boarder living in the family home. The abuser was male and was in his 30 to 40s. Roderick could not recall how long the abuse went on for;

however, indicated that it stopped shortly after it began and upon disclosing to his mother.

Ben

At the time of the research, Ben was in his late 40s, divorced, with no children, and worked as a truck driver. He self-identified as being of Ukrainian cultural background. At the time of the abuse, he lived with both his parents and two younger siblings. Ben indicated that the sexual abuse began when he was 7 years of age and continued until he was 10 years old. Ben was abused by a male neighbourhood babysitter in his mid to late teens. The sexual abuse ended once Ben's family no longer required babysitting services.

Arnold

Arnold described himself as being of Germanic cultural background, in his mid-40s, married, with two children, and an inventory manager when we began our research conversations for this study. Arnold was sexually abused by his uncle for over 10 years. He indicated that it first began when he was approximately 5 years old. Arnold shared that the sexual abuse finally ended once he was able to confront his abuser and challenge what was happening to him. From that point on, Arnold's uncle no longer sexually abused him.

Kevin

At the time of the research conversations, Kevin was in his early 40s, single, had no children and worked as a computer engineer. Kevin identified himself as being Native Canadian in background. Kevin's female babysitter was the perpetrator of the sexual abuse that began when he was 9 years of age and lasted for approximately a year. Concurrent to the sexual abuse, Kevin was also severely physically abused by his mother and grandmother to the point where he required hospitalization. It was after needing

medical intervention that the physical abuse ended. The sexual abuse stopped once Kevin's mother began to suspect the babysitter.

Jason

At the time of our research conversations, Jason was in his late 30s, divorced, with two young boys, and working in the oil industry. He self-identified as being French and Irish in cultural background. The sexual abuse at the hands of his father began at the approximate age of 4 until he was 15. Jason indicated that the abuse stopped because he decided to violently confront his father and demanded it to end. While he was unsure if his other siblings (two brothers and one sister) were also sexually abused, Jason suspected so. Jason also revealed that his mother was well aware of the abuse and essentially "played nurse" after each incident.

Paul

During the time of our research conversations, Paul was in his mid-50s, divorced, the father of three children and worked as a Manager for a large retail company. He self-identified as being French Canadian in background. The sexual abuse Paul endured was perpetrated by his teen brother and an adult man who was a virtual stranger to him. Paul was sexually abused by his brother for several years, beginning at the approximate age of 8 and continued on well into his late teens. The stranger sexual violation was a one-time occurrence. Paul indicated that the long-term sexual abuse ceased when his brother relocated out of the family home.

Going Forth in the Journey: Presentation of Narratives

Just how I would present the findings from this study was not pre-determined. In fact, I explored several ways in which to represent both the participants' stories, as well as attempting to find a place for my voice as a researcher. Amidst the numerous drafts, the one thing that remained clear for me was that above all, I wanted to preserve the voice of each participant. Considering the notable void of the male survivor's perspective

within the existing literature on hope and CSA, creating a document honouring participants' experiences and stories was of paramount importance to me. As such, I chose to construct a stand-alone narrative account for each participant, giving voice to his experience of hope and CSA. Chapters Four through Nine present these individual participant accounts and the narratives themselves are denoted in italicized bold faced text. These chapters also include my initial thoughts, reflections, and understandings of hope as they emerged in relation to each research conversation. My voice as researcher is presented in both regular and italicized text. My interpretations are further examined in the subsequent chapter, Chapter Ten, entitled "A Discussion of the Shared and Unique Threads of Hope." This particular chapter reveals the common and distinct ways in which participants described the meaning of hope in their lives. Further, these features are also discussed and situated within the existing body of hope research in Chapter 10. We now turn our attention to the individual participant narratives.

Chapter Four: Conversations on Hope with Roderick

Our conversation comes to an end and after exchanging our good-byes, Roderick closes the door behind him. I sink deeply into my chair. I take a deep breath and notice the quiet but perceptible rhythmic throbbing in my head... Not really a headache but rather a feeling of heaviness or fullness more aptly describes the thump... thump... thump... surging from my temples. In attempt to silence the noise, I close my eyes, sit, and allow thoughts and feelings to surface as they will... Several minutes pass... Then several more minutes pass... I finally feel ready... I open the computer file named “Research Journal” and write the following entry:

Among other things, hope for Roderick is an internal experience, as well as an outcome. Hope is about human connectivity. Hope is about honouring self. Hope is about healing. Hope is about choice even when the choice is related to suicide... While his understanding of hope seems to encompass all of these aspects, there are numerous other shades, dimensions and depths of meaning to his hope that have greatly enhanced my understanding of hope for male survivors. For this, I am deeply grateful to Roderick.

Realizing the rather broad brush strokes outlining the meaning of hope for Roderick, I consider how I might approach, organize, and represent our conversation on paper. With the clatter in my head gradually subsiding, I begin to sketch out Roderick’s narrative of hope.

Hope and Childhood Sexual Abuse

As a child victim of physical and sexual abuse, hope took on many forms and was experienced in ways that primarily focused on Roderick’s self-protection and survival.

Hope for Survival

As we begin our conversation and prepare to traverse Roderick’s narrative of hope and childhood sexual abuse, I ask: *What was your experience of hope before the sexual abuse started?*

Long before I was sexually abused, I was already a victim of violence. My father was an extremely violent man. He was a rage-aholic and I was his target. For the most part, I think my hope got squashed because hope became more of... “I hope he doesn’t beat me today” or “I hope that I don’t do something wrong today.” I mean, from a very young age, hope became a really twisted thing it wasn’t something I experienced... it was more of a hope for something... like my hope was to live through the day. It wasn’t hope about, “Wow, I wonder how I’ll get to live today”... Instead, I lived in fear and terror about what was coming around the corner. I had no opportunity to really explore myself and to find out who I was... I had to be what my father wanted me to be from day one and that squashed my hope.

During his childhood, hope for Roderick was anchored in the need to be vigilant and keep himself from his father’s physical abuse. Rather than hope being connected to an experience of wonder, curiosity, and self-development or exploration, Roderick’s hope was necessarily focused on maintaining his safety in an unpredictable world rife with “fear and terror.” The inability to experience a childhood characterized by the possibility of safely exploring his self-identity and the world around him seems to have negatively impacted Roderick’s sense of hope at the time.

In listening to Roderick describe his early experiences with hope, I am reminded of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. Being that Roderick’s basic need for personal safety and security was in constant threat as a child, it made it difficult for him to move beyond and engage with other facets of his being, including his desire for personal growth and self-understanding.

I make a note of Roderick’s descriptions: “a hope for something” and “[hope] wasn’t something I experienced.” Embedded within these phrases seems to be an important distinction between hope as an outcome and hope as an experiential phenomenon. I fold the corner of the page in my notebook as a reminder to later unpack this difference with Roderick.

A Fleeting Hope

With a sense of Roderick’s experience of hope before the sexual abuse, I invite him to reflect on hope and/or hopelessness during the abuse. Roderick is silent for

several moments and I wonder if perhaps he is not ready or willing to talk about his experience of sexual abuse. Before I could check in with him, he delves in and says:

Because the abuser was a boarder living in our house, when my father found out what was happening I remember him yelling at the guy and throwing him down the stairs. And I remember thinking “Wow he’s sticking up for me... What the hell’s with that?”... But it was a confusing thing to me... because at the same time, nobody talked to me. My dad never came to me and held me in his arms and said, “Wow, that was really awful, that must have really hurt... are you OK?” His sole focus was to beat the other guy up. So while there was a glimmer of hope when I saw this guy coming down the stairs, there was an instant feeling like... “Oh... okay, so this is the same as always. There is still no one looking after me... No one is showing love to me.” I experienced sheer hopelessness at that time... [long pause]... Sure, he was looking after the situation, but he didn’t look after ME. He didn’t come to me and hold me or express his sorrow at my misfortune at the hands of this other guy that HE invited into our home. I was utterly alone in it all. After that whole thing happened, I ran away. At the time I remember hoping that I could get away and find a better family. I was looking for love and a sense of belonging and somewhere safe because it wasn’t safe to be where I was... Other than that brief hope and just hoping to get through the day without a beating, I don’t remember having hopes for the future or experiencing much hope during the abuse. And after the abuse... hope was about running away and getting the hell out of there.

What initially and momentarily was “a glimmer of hope” for Roderick was soon thereafter extinguished. Not only did Roderick’s experience of sexual abuse go unacknowledged, the absence of a meaningful and caring connection with his father seems to have created a deep sense of hopelessness at the time. I find it particularly striking that at this point in Roderick’s narrative, he shares his experience of running away with the hope of finding a different family. It seems that hope for Roderick went from the desire to be taken care of by his father, to creating and seeking out his own source of hope in a way that made sense to him as a child.

Hopelessness and Sexuality

Before moving on in our conversation, I briefly turn my attention to the sensation of a knotted ball wedged in the middle of my chest. Attuned to the powerful effect of Roderick’s narrative on me, I notice a deep sense of sadness, disbelief, and anger I feel for what he experienced as a young boy. I take a long and slow breath with the hope of

releasing some of the heaviness that has seemingly travelled and settled further down into the pit of my stomach. With some relief, I go on to invite Roderick to share his experience of hope once the abuse ended. He says:

After the abuse, I'm not sure I really felt much hope. In fact, I became more connected to my sense of hopelessness rather than hope. Because of the abuse, I think a part of my sexual-self never really developed. For a big chunk of my adulthood, I didn't feel beautiful or unashamed and clean in a sexual way... Sexually, things turned into a compulsion or obsession, which of course was pretty shameful, confusing and just down and out hopeless.

While Roderick's sense of hope after the abuse seems unclear, his connection to hopelessness is relatively more certain. For him, hopelessness is associated with negative feelings towards himself and particularly in relation to his sexuality. Roderick's description of the confusion and shame around the abuse experience and the development of himself as a wholesome sexual being underscores a similar struggle that several survivors I have worked with, both male and female, have expressed.

The "Soul" and "Ego" of Hope

Roderick goes on to share his insight regarding the after-effects of the abuse on his hope:

I think my sense of internal power, my passion to live life, and my hope all reside in my soul and that has taken the biggest hit from the sexual abuse... not the ego, but the soul. My ego stepped in so that I could survive, but it was never a real and full life... no real experience of hope or passion or love... After the abuse, my life was more about hope at that ego level. I spent most of my time focusing on getting through another day, which involved my addictions and other unhealthy behaviours. Being violated and molested as a child assassinated my world... my soul...my hope...

I am taken aback by the Roderick's evocative description of the degree and depth to which the sexual abuse impacted his experience of himself and of hope. Within his narrative, Roderick sheds some light on an important difference in his understanding of hope. There seems to be a qualitative difference in the hope he perceives as residing in his "soul" versus the hope he identifies as "ego" bound. Roderick's soul-oriented hope is not only of a personally meaningful nature, but also encompasses his inner strength and a

desire to live a life worth living. While Roderick acknowledges that his “ego” hope contributed to his ability to manage and survive in the aftermath of the sexual abuse, there seems to be an empty, numb, and lifeless quality to his experience of this form of hope. Reflecting on Roderick’s narrative from a slightly different vantage point, he also seems to highlight a distinction between a *being* and *doing* orientation to hope. Whereas the “soul” or *being* approach to hope appears connected to a significant internal experience; the “ego” or *doing* orientation of hope seems to be focused on immediate goal achievement of survival that Roderick sees as less meaningful or fulfilling.

A Community of the Past

At this point, I wonder if Roderick continues to feel that hope in his life is still preoccupied with a sense of survival or if he has reconnected to the soul of his hope. We begin to explore Roderick’s current experience of hope in relation to sexual abuse:

Today when I think of my experience of sexual abuse, it takes me to a place of deep sadness and hopelessness that goes all the way back to when the white people came here from Europe and annihilated the Native culture. At one point the Native people had hope and a great society. Their way of living was in perfect harmony with nature and the land. Then someone came in and violated that. It was an extreme act of hostility. That’s very similar to my experience and I feel a deep sense of rage for that violation... for that kind of selfishness and disregard for something so innately beautiful. It reminds me of me... I feel very connected to the Native people and their experiences... [Roderick becomes very quiet, almost inaudible]... Sometimes, I feel trapped in the past... and the only way out for me has been through my spirituality.

Roderick’s shoulders are heavy and appear slumped over as if carrying the weight of his own abuse and a long history of violations. There is an intergenerational or community-based aspect to his present experience of hope and sexual abuse. Said differently, Roderick’s narrative account of hope in his life profoundly and painfully connects him to many generations past. In a way, Roderick becomes imprisoned by a sense of hopelessness in relation to the abuses he and Native people experienced. The quiet sadness hovering around Roderick seems to lift slightly when he mentions how spirituality has been his only solace in removing the shackles of despair.

Hope and Healing

Taking a cue from Roderick's last comment, I become curious to understand how his spirituality might have been important in healing and contending with his experience of childhood sexual abuse.

Spirituality

As Roderick thoughtfully searches through his photos, it seems important that he find a photo to go along with his narrative of hope and spirituality. With an image in hand, he begins:



Figure 1: Powerful parts of me.

This picture represents a time when my healing was focused on my spirituality. Many of the Native spiritual practices helped me learn about myself and gave me a lot of hope that I could connect to all the different parts of myself. Here [points to Figure 1: Powerful parts of me] is a leather armband I made when I was going to sweats and fire walking. I attached it to these eagle and hawk feathers. The eagle feather represents spiritual insight and the hawk feathers represent the ability to receive messages from spirit... So how does that connect with my hope? I'm not totally sure... other than I know those are both powerful parts of me. This photograph really speaks to a time when I was able to experience a full range of emotions and in the past that was a very hopeful thing for me... These days, I don't wear them anymore, so I'm not really connecting or even honouring my spiritual power and myself in that way... It makes me now wonder, "Where is the hope in my spirituality?"... I don't know... so they just hang in my office reminding me of the past.

Engaging in meaningful native spiritual practices has, in the past, provided Roderick the opportunity to experience, value, and honour his authentic and deeply feeling self, which inspired a great deal of hope for him. In addition to a powerful and healing self-connection, this photo also speaks to a time in which Roderick was connected to something important and beyond himself. The divergence between Roderick's past and present experience of his spirituality is striking to me. What was once a source of hope now seems to be a reminder of a significant disconnect for Roderick. With this in mind, I invite him to reflect on what has seemingly changed for him in relation to hope and spirituality. He shares:

For the longest time, I'd say my hope was mostly rooted in healing and overcoming the things that I perceived weren't going well for me in my life... I had so much hope that I could find different ways to act, react, and respond to people and situations. But, I have to say that now I often think... all that stuff is a bunch of hooey... You know, what has it got me so far? All the sweats, the workshops, the facilitators, the books... I'm not sure I am further along in the healing process or feel more complete as a person. So, what have I gotten out of it all??? It feels hopeless sometimes... Other than being in a place where I can now look at myself and go... "Who is this creature?" I can suspend judgement and just observe myself and try and figure out who I am... I guess that's what I've really gotten from the healing that I've done.

When Roderick's hope is related to a particular outcome, such as feeling more "complete as a person," this leaves him disappointed and more vulnerable to hopelessness when those hopes are not fulfilled. It seems that because outcome-oriented hopes were, in the past, connected to his spirituality, Roderick has consequently distanced himself from both. It is as if he went from trying to find hope and healing from sources outside himself (i.e., "the sweats, the workshops, the facilitators, the books") to finding hope from within. In some ways it seems that hope went from being primarily attached to the goal of healing to a more refined approach to hope anchored in witnessing himself as a person.

In the process of questioning the progression of his healing, Roderick pulls a thread of meaning that holds my attention. I take what feels like a bit of an interpretive risk and share with him a reflection of mine: *Although you may not feel a sense of completeness, it*

seems that you are in a place of witnessing yourself and looking inwardly with curiosity and wonder. I go on to say: Maybe, the ways in which you engaged in the healing process in the past, have enabled you to now be in a place of self-discovery, something you seemed to have really wanted as a child. He takes a moment and says:

I guess that's another way of looking at it... I haven't really thought of it like that... but yes I guess... interesting... I'll have to think about that...

Significant Elements of Hope

Our conversation at this point takes a turn and we begin to explore the aspects Roderick views as important to hope in his life.

Hope and Connection

Despite an early painful rupture in his relationship with his father, Roderick expresses how hope is inextricably attached to the importance of experiencing meaningful interpersonal relationships:

Hope is all about connection. We can't escape connection. We're all connected. Even with my family, sure connections weaken, but there are still connections. My hope is that my connections can be loving and life-giving, not narcissistic, self-serving, manipulative, controlling, violent, or abusive. I've had enough of those kinds of connections as a kid. I've been on a path in my life for a while to try and establish genuine loving connections. For me, feeling connected to another human being gives me a tremendous amount of hope...

Experiencing loving relationships with others is both what Roderick hopes for, but is also what inspires an experience of hope for him. In addition, Roderick desires to create and experience interpersonal connections that enhance and are additive to his life rather than a reflection of the abusive and uncaring relationships he had as a child. Interested in learning more about the importance of connection for Roderick, I ask: *Can you share an experience in where you have felt that authentic loving connection with another person?*

Risk It

In response to my question, Roderick describes how a past relationship not only provided him with the opportunity to take risks, but also greatly contributed to his experience of hope in his life:

Well several years ago, a friend of mine and I were involved in a lot of different spiritual traditions and we would actually practice being in connection with one another. This is a picture of three broken arrows held together by rubber bands. I keep them on my desk with a Post-It note that says, "RISK IT!!" It really represents a time in my life when I was really practicing making those connections in my life.



Figure 2: Risk to hope.

He continues to explain how hope is related to risk and trust:

So, we would put an arrow between our throats and I would have the pointed end and he would have the blunt end. Then we would make eye contact and when we felt a certain connection, we would both step forward. So for me... risk has a lot to do with hope. During those moments, I really hoped that the arrows weren't going to puncture my neck and yet there was this level of trust that would allow me to risk it. In my experience, hope really comes down to connection and the risk in making those deep connections with someone. When I can connect with another human being and I can see inside of them that they are not hostile towards me or intending to be violent with me, then I can really trust and that gives me hope.

On a fundamental level, Roderick's account relates hope to a particular outcome (i.e., "I really hoped that the arrows weren't going to puncture my neck"), as well as a dramatic experience of human connectivity. Beyond that, his narrative vividly reflects the elements that are important to his perception of hope, namely: safety, trust, and risk. Upon feeling a level of interpersonal and emotional safety, Roderick is then able to trust, be vulnerable, and take a risk to connect with another person. Furthermore, Roderick also seems to highlight how risky he sees deeply connecting with another can prove to be. Within his description of risk is also the notion of agency. In order for a meaningful connection to happen and Roderick's hope to surface, he needs to actively engage with another, even in the face of the unknown and the very real threat to his sense of safety. I find Roderick's last comment especially poignant. Given the significant betrayal of trust often experienced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the subsequent vigilance and cautiousness when entering into a relationship may serve as a means of self-protection.

Hope in Action

In our exploration of Roderick's understanding of risk and its association with hope, enters the notion of action:

If there is hope for something or something gives us a feeling of hope, then we're willing to risk and do whatever it takes to embrace that hope... The way I see it, it's not like hope shows up and everything all of a sudden changes. There's some sort of action required to make it a reality and for that to happen you need to take a risk. If there's no hope, there's no need to take a risk, and there isn't anything to act on. The bottom line is that you actually need to do something... it would be irresponsible to just hope that something will change or that somehow you'll reach some sort of objective and then not actually work on making it happen.

Within this portion of Roderick's narrative, the element of personal accountability and agency are further fleshed out. More specifically, hope in the form of an outcome or internal experience, while important, does not in and of itself render that initial hope a reality. Roderick's description has some points of similarity to several models of hope that speak to the notion of action. For instance, Snyder's (1994, 1995) model of hope

underscores how one's *willpower* or agentic energy is necessary and imperative in order for hope to manifest. In addition, the work of Dufault and Martocchio (1985) as well as Farren et al., (1995) come to mind. In both orientations, it is thought that among other features of hope such as emotions and cognitions, action or way of behaving is an important aspect of hope.

Challenges to Hope

With a developing understanding of the important aspects (i.e., interpersonal connection, risk, and action) inherent to the meaning of hope for Roderick, I pose the following question: *What challenges hope for you?* Roderick quickly and forthrightly shares how *he* is often the barrier to his own hope. Judging by his immediate response, it seems that while Roderick views himself as the agent in actively creating hope in his life, he also sees himself as the biggest challenge to his hope.

My Own Thoughts

Roderick goes on to highlight how his negative self-perceptions deplete his sense of hope:

I'd have to say that it's my own thoughts... how I work inside, how I handle information and how I view situations and myself that challenge my hope. People tell me how beautiful, how powerful, how wise, and how strong I am... It's nice for others to have those thoughts of me and maybe momentarily it helps, but then I look at myself and I don't really see that, so I end up questioning the value of what they say... Instead, I see my father the bastard, I see cruelty, harshness, intolerance, and inflexibility. I see all of the things that aren't what I consider to be fine qualities and it makes it hard to feel hope or joy... instead, I end up feeling the hopelessness.

Here, I get a sense how Roderick's father interrupted or damaged Roderick's relationship with himself. Rather than seeing what others appreciate about him, Roderick's self-appraisal is filtered through his perceptions of his father which places a strain on his own hope. I am reminded of the literature highlighting the connection between hope and self-perception. Specifically, I consider Roderick's narrative in relation to the research, indicating how hope can influence one's ability to process and manage challenging life

situations (Snyder et al., 1991), as well as impact one's view of self (Chang & DeSimone, 2001). A recent study identified a connection between the experience of hope and understandings of self as good or worthy of a good future (Larsen & Stege, 2012). With respect to my understanding of Roderick's narrative, it seems that his self-perceptions and negative feelings of worth conflict with his access to hope.

Feelings of Abandonment

Roderick's narrative regarding his self-perceptions and hope takes our conversation in the direction of exploring his experiences of loss and abandonment:

My perceptions of myself, my life, and not feeling any hope or happiness has led to complete devastation and abandonment. In the past, because of the crap I was dealing with, some of my family and friends ended up walking away because they couldn't handle the pain I was in. Because hope involves allowing myself to trust I say, "Okay... I'm going to build the courage and interact with something outside of myself – with someone else." So I take the risk and get down to the nitty gritty of what I've been through and who I am at a core level, but they can't take it... so they scatter and that has left me totally hopeless. Those were instances where I really thought of leaving this world and really felt like my hope was shattered. Today, in many ways I feel disconnected from most of the people that I've felt close with. Other than a couple of close friends, I guess I don't want to get close anymore, I don't want to be left, ignored, or forgotten anymore, I don't want to feel abandoned anymore... I had enough of that as a kid...

The loss of important adult relationships in Roderick's life not only threatens his hope, but also seems to trigger what sounds like a very similar childhood experience. In his account of childhood sexual abuse, Roderick was also rejected, left alone, and had little support in processing his traumatic experiences, thus bringing about hopelessness. Similarly to his means of surviving the sexual abuse, Roderick appears to be engaging in ways to protect himself and his hope by closing himself off to particular interpersonal relationships and possibly re-experiencing that sense of abandonment.

The aspects of courage and risk which Roderick identifies as key to his hope also appear to render his hope more vulnerable. From Roderick's point of view, in connecting and revealing his "core" self to another, both courage and risk have not benefited him, but

instead have threatened his hope and elicited an experience of hopelessness. By the same token, meaningful interpersonal connection is important to Roderick's hope; however if, within that relationship, he feels rejected, his childhood experiences re-surface and despair emerges. Put simply, there seems to be a double-bind element to hope for Roderick, particularly in relation to his experience of interpersonal connections in his life.

Hope and Hopelessness

Subsequent to our conversation on the experiences that threaten Roderick's sense of hope, we take a closer look at the link between hope and hopelessness in his life.

Hope: A Double-Edged Sword

Roderick describes how hope in his life has inevitably been followed by experiences of hopelessness, thereby rendering his connection to hope more tenuous:

Hope for me is a double-edged sword because hot on the heels of hope or often along with hope, I'm also getting in touch with all my past hopelessness... The experience that created the hope somehow turned out to be hopeless. I think of some past events in my life when I was so hopeful and then faced something that shattered it all. Each time it happens, my vision of hope becomes dimmer and the gloom of hopelessness gets immense...

Hopelessness not only tends to follow hope, but the two seem inseparable in Roderick's experience. Roderick's experience of the co-existing nature of hope and hopelessness is also echoed in the hope literature (Larsen, Edey, Lemay, 2007). In the interest of gaining a better understanding of the relationship between hope and hopelessness and how it plays out in his life, I ask Roderick: *Can you share an experience of how hope and hopelessness are related for you?* To this he replies:

Well, when my daughter announced to me that she was pregnant with my first grandchild, something inside me woke up and all of a sudden it was like, "Wow, here is another opportunity!" I felt so hopeful at the time! I really thought that together with our awareness around what has happened in our family already, we could make a difference in my granddaughter's life... [Long pause]... However, the situation between my daughter and I is difficult and we struggle to communicate, so it prevents me from actually seeing my granddaughter and that brings in the hopelessness... I guess the thing about hope is that it can be easily shattered... So as a result, I tend to be on the lookout for that inevitable storm that's coming. I have to say, it is extremely

hard for me to stay hopeful. It's like I want to let myself hope and feel happy, but then my mind says... "Hey wait a minute, remember last time"... There are times that I feel terrorized and taunted by the visions of what I thought I had or could have, of what I thought I could do and the person I thought I could be.

Roderick identifies a fragile aspect to his understanding of hope. While he can momentarily experience hope, when the circumstances do not support his hope, hopelessness sets in. The notion of caution and restraint is embedded in Roderick's account. In order to protect himself, it seems as though Roderick anticipates and prepares for a "storm" of hopelessness to arrive, thus making it difficult for him to fully engage with his hope. In some ways, it is not safe for Roderick to hope because of the wealth of evidence in his life that indicates hopelessness is around the corner.

Keenly aware of my desire to invite an alternative storyline into our conversation where Roderick might have been able to "stay hopeful" in the past, I ask: *Has there ever been a time when that storm didn't come?*

No. Every experience of elation, hope, connection with another person, and seeing life take off and soar has ended in complete hopelessness. Whether it's a romantic relationship or friendship, the hopefulness that is first there and is based on a level of trust and safety has eventually been violated or betrayed on one level or another... and that really chips away at my hope. And regardless of the work I put into my relationships, or into understanding myself and making ME better, it always ends up in total abandonment of everything and everyone. That has been a repeat pattern for me... over and over again.

I am a bit surprised by the definitive tone in Roderick's response. With each relationship rupture, his childhood abuse experiences seem to become activated and hopelessness emerges. At this point, the work on hope-focused counselling by Edey, Jevne, & Westra (1998) comes to mind. In particular, the idea of the *boomerang effect* seems particularly relevant. Despite Roderick's initial hopes for a relationship and his attempts at personal development, he is consistently met with hopelessness. In other words, from Roderick's perspective nothing he does or hopes for seems to lead to a different outcome.

Hope Hasn't Completely Left Me

Roderick continues by underscoring an important connection between hope and his desire in gaining insight into his existential purpose:

Recently, I've come to realize that I've spent the better part of my life feeling like I have nothing to live for. Even as a young child and particularly after the sexual abuse, I began on a path of self-destruction doing things that were essentially killing myself... you know by going out and getting drunk or stoned. It's funny, but I've never really given in to the idea of making a conscious plan of suicide... A part of me is not totally ready to go... In all these years, I have felt a deep sense of incompleteness in myself and in this journey. So despite everything I have experienced, all the abuse and crap, I'm still here. And I ask myself... "What the hell's with that?"... I guess the only thing is that hope hasn't completely left me... It pisses me off because there are times that I just want to leave this world and yet I'm still here, suffering at times and living what I would consider to be mostly an unfulfilling experience of life. There are times that I feel like nothing is really pulling me through except for some dogged determination to make sense of this life of mine...

In my experience of working with survivors of trauma, sexual or otherwise, there is often a personal investment in ascertaining some significance and bigger purpose to their suffering. This seems to be a similar case for Roderick. While hopelessness seems to have coloured much of his perceptions of his past, the hope in making meaning of his existence propels him forward, keeps him engaged, and choosing to live life. In addition, Roderick's comment highlighting his sense of feeling incomplete suggests to me that, on some level, he is relentlessly hoping and searching for a life narrative that feels coherent and whole. Before moving on, I take a moment to consider what seems to be an implicit, yet interesting and important aspect to Roderick's description of hope. Specifically, I make a note of the idea that for Roderick, hope can have a somewhat irritating quality to it, given that it pulls him back to life, even when it does not seem sensible to him.

Suicide: A Choice

While Roderick has not explicitly drawn the connection between the notion of choice and hope, I wonder if and how the two might be related. As such, our conversation takes a turn in this direction:

A while back, I was in a conversation with a friend of mine and I told him, “I’m going to leave this world at the point when I feel a deep sense of love and connection with another person in a romantic way... I’m willing to do that one more time and when I’m feeling all those wonderful things and like life can’t get any better, that’s when I’m choosing to leave”... [long pause]... The thing is, is that I don’t want to leave this planet like some dog with its tail between its legs or like someone who has just gotten the shit kicked out of him. I want to ride out of here on a wave. I’m going to leave at the height of perfection... not grovelling and whining from the torture and shit... I’m going to decide. THAT is loving me... [long pause]... Yeah, somehow hope is attached to that, I’m not sure how, but it is...

At first, I am not sure how to respond or make sense of what Roderick has just shared. I quickly write out some questions that surface for me: *Is hope about choice, even if that choice is suicide? ... or ... Is hope about ending the pain and/or hopelessness? ... or ... Is hope connected to both?*

Initially, I consider choice in relation to hope. In my understanding, choice is the ability to exert some control over one’s life. By Roderick choosing the way in which he wants to end his life (i.e., “at the height of perfection”), he is able to impact and direct his life’s outcome. In a way, Roderick’s experiences of sexual abuse and its aftermath has left him in a position of disempowerment and, as such, deciding the terms under which to end his life is a potential means of connecting to his internal power and strength. I also get the impression that it is important for Roderick to not “leave this planet” feeling or looking pathetic or pitiful, but rather to end his journey with his own sense of self-respect and dignity. Feeling unsure of my understanding of hope in relation to suicide, I ask Roderick to further elucidate the link:

Actually, I’m not sure it brings in a lot of hopeful feelings for me, but it does in some ways deal with the hopelessness. How exactly, I’m not sure... I guess realizing that suicide is an act of loving me, I am then in my power... I have the power to choose to act or not act however I want and that feels good for me, not necessarily hopeful, but like I said it helps me with the feelings of hopelessness.

Reflecting on what Roderick shares here takes me back to one of the questions I initially asked myself: *Is hope for him about ending the pain and/or hopelessness?* Roderick

currently sees choosing to kill himself as a loving act because it ends the pain and his feelings of hopelessness. I find Roderick's comments about hope and hopelessness particularly striking. While choosing to kill himself does not necessarily leave him experiencing a great deal of hopefulness, it does however somehow attend to his feelings of hopelessness. I get the sense from Roderick's perspective that hope and hopelessness are not opposites of one another in that ridding himself of the hopelessness does not necessarily leave him with hope. Returning to my earlier questions on hope and suicide, it seems that Roderick's thoughts on suicide are not necessarily about hope, but about both choice and loving himself enough to end the experience of pain and hopelessness in his life.

Meanings of Hope

Moving from our exploration of hope and hopelessness, Roderick begins to describe the meaning of hope in his life and its inherent complexity.

Two Kinds of Hope

From Roderick's perspective, hope not only has two forms but also encompasses two distinct levels or depths of meaning, namely that of a surface hope and a more intangible, yet profound and integral kind of hope. He says:

Based on my experiences there are two kinds of hope. One is more a superficial hope and the second is a real deep kind of hope... like a soulful hope... the kind of hope that's about a person's soul longing to be free and experience who they really are... it's an energy kind of thing I feel in my body... it's not out in the world somewhere... it's very internal. To me, it has a lot to do with feeling an emotion... it's a very experiential, personal and a quite creative process actually... You know, when we connect to something that inspires us in one way or another, it triggers hope because we start looking at possibilities and I think that hope can rise out of that. Hope as an experience is life-enriching...

In reflecting on what Roderick describes as a "soulful" hope, I get the sense that this type of hope is both experiential, as well as existential in nature. It seems that hope as an experience comes from an internal "felt-sense" kind place that is deeply meaningful and

generates creativity, openness, and awareness to possibilities. Existentially, this “soulful” hope seems to have a boundless or liberated element, in that Roderick is free to engage with his sense of personal identity and experience an authentic sense of self.

I find Roderick’s delineation of hope as two different entities interesting and invite him to share some examples of both:

In some ways, it’s hard to put it into words, but that deep hope is more than... “God I hope it gets warm soon so I can go out and ride my motorcycle or I hope to get my health back or I hope that each project at work is going to be interesting or I hope that my ex-wife can stop doing drugs and get herself back on track again.” I hope for all of those things, but to me those hopes are more superficial... Those two kinds of hope for me are very different in my experience... they are both part of it but also different...

He goes on:

The way I equate that deep kind of hope in my life is when I look out my kitchen window at my dog that pretty much lives outside. And I see in him that underlying hopefulness that I’m going to come out and play with him. He’ll often spend hours out there, but his hope that I’m going to come out and throw that ball never goes away. In many ways, my experience of hope in that deep kind of way has never really left and there’s a part of me that is connected to that, even though it can get pretty fragile at times, but it does not die. It will not go away and that to me is that deep hope.

Here I get a more nuanced understanding of what Roderick regards as a “superficial” and “deep hope.” At its more “surface” level, hope seems to be outwardly focused and attached to a desired outcome, such as “I hope to get my health back.” In contrast, Roderick’s description of a “deep hope” suggests that it is more inwardly oriented and lasting even in circumstances when hope becomes challenged or the desired outcome is not realized. Despite the apparent difference, both understandings and experiences of hope are meaningful and important to Roderick.

A Grounded Hope

In the past, Roderick’s experience of hope has oscillated and been impacted by his emotional state, leading him to make decisions that in the long run did not serve him well:

For most of my life I have been either in a place of real depression where I couldn't see hope and was so far down that nobody could reach me or I was in complete mania where I was so high up nobody could reach me there either. In the past, that superficial hope has shown up when I was in the mania. In those manic periods, I would really start to hope, even if my perceptions of those situations were grossly out of whack. For example, I was in a relationship with a woman who had several children. Because of all those superficial hopes, I ended up living with her and her kids. Even though I had friends who tried to get me to see the red flags that were there, but I was blinded by my hopes for the relationship... At the time, I hoped that I could do things differently and express myself differently. I felt I had grown as a person and that I was strong and in my power. But after a while, my hopes began to diminish because things weren't working out. Even after all the work I had done in trying to heal from my past, in the end it fell apart... So, in a nutshell I learned that if I'm not careful, particularly during the manic times, I can be led astray by hope... And because of those kinds of experiences, I've chosen to stay alone right now because there is just too much risk to embrace that kind of hope again... it's too painful.

Implicit in Roderick's narrative, is a relational aspect towards hope itself. Given that he feels he was "led astray" by his hope of a lasting relationship, this renders him more attentive and cautious towards having that same hope in the future. In other words, the risk in engaging in that "kind of hope" is too great and considering his past experiences, Roderick is less trusting in that "superficial" hope. In some ways, it seems that the surface level or outcome based hope is vulnerable particularly if the desired outcome is not realized. Upon further reflection, I take notice of Roderick's first comment about feeling unable to see hope during his experiences of depression. Given his earlier narrative highlighting how that deep sense of "hope has never really left" him, I wonder if at those times of depression, whether that "soulful" hope still existed on some level, albeit less visible, but perhaps still present.

At this point, Roderick shares his current emotional experience and its relation to hope:

I think my experience of hope has become more grounded in the last couple of years... I am not really in a depressive or manic place with hope... What I am experiencing now feels more like a realistic hope... Now, I try not to set expectations on my hopefulness because I've found out that that's one of the easiest ways to become disappointed. When we expect things and they don't happen we get disappointed. So basically, I feel that my experience of hope is

far more realistic and I'm not bouncing back and forth between manic hopefulness and utter depression. I mean it's not like I get up every day and go "Wow, today's really hopeful" you know... But I'm paying attention to the little day to day stuff and realizing ... "Oh, that's kind of hopeful. How cool is that!" I guess I'm witnessing myself in the experience of hope, which has made me more comfortable assessing a hopeful experience moment by moment or day by day ... particularly if it involves another person. I'm not as easily blinded by getting involved with someone and just hoping for the best. I'm not letting myself get carried away. So right now I'm alone and focusing on me and spending time with ME. I'm not depending on anyone else to influence my hope, so it feels much more internal and realistic for me. I'm noticing that I feel more centered and like I am no longer being led astray by hope... that is huge for ME. Yeah, I'm experiencing that deeper kind of hope and that feels a lot more realistic, honest, and safer than it ever did before...

The notion of a "realistic hope" seems to reflect how Roderick has currently found an emotional balance in his life. While Roderick's "grounded" sense of hope is not necessarily experienced within an interpersonal relationship, it is however experienced in relation with himself. By taking an inward focus, he is able to engage in a safe and deeply meaningful experience of hope. In addition, it seems that Roderick is able to sustain a hopeful perspective in witnessing and honoring himself and the "little" things that support his internal experience of hope.

Sources of Hope

Sensing that we were approaching the end of our conversation for the day, I felt the need to gain some understanding of what inspires hope for Roderick, particularly during the difficult times in his life.

Valued by Others

Roderick describes how his work has had a significant effect on hope and his feelings about himself:

During the really hard times in my life, I would say that my work and my business was a huge source of hope that got me through in a lot of ways. I felt that my clients appreciated me and respected me. My work really helped me with my self-esteem, my confidence, and feeling like my gifts were valued. From that, I was able to see myself in a positive and hopeful light

Feeling capable and having a sense of purpose has contributed to Roderick's appreciation of his self-worth. In addition, the acknowledgement of his importance at work by others seems to have also provided him with a sense of meaning and hope during the trying times in his life.

Relationship to Others and Self

Rather than solely relying on others to support his hope, Roderick is now a significant source of his own hope:

In earlier years, my friends used to keep me going and they met my needs in a lot of ways. Often times when I was stressing out, I would kind of dump my stuff on them, which was probably really hard for them... But now that has shifted for me quite a bit. Because I've not felt understood or like I had to be something other than myself, there have been some pretty significant ruptures in those relationships. So, now I don't look to those relationships to keep me or my hope going. Now, I feel more honest in this area of my life. I'm exercising my ability to choose my relationships and how much time I want to spend with them or invest in them. I've become much more comfortable and familiar with myself and that feels more hopeful than it ever has.

Along with Roderick's ability to choose and exercise his personal agency in how he involves himself with others, there seems to be a new found authenticity and personally meaningful experience of hope. In a sense, the interpersonal boundaries Roderick has created in his life seem to have allotted him the opportunity to then enter into a connected relationship or friendship with himself, thus impacting his hope. Rather than relying on others to sustain his hope as he might have in the past, Roderick has now become much more his own anchor of hope.

A Living Hope

Together with his internal source of hope, Roderick also finds hope in witnessing growth and newness in nature:

Another significant source of hope for me is when I see a blooming flower or a new leaf on a plant. Nature has a way of going on, always living, always thriving and I feel hopeful in that. Because my healing experiences and life experiences are so different from that, I can look at that and go, "Wow! That's really neat!"

There seems to be a lasting quality to what Roderick understands as hopeful. While the personal life experiences he describes are different from the “living and thriving” he sees in nature, he is able to appreciate those aspects nonetheless. At this time in our conversation, I find myself tempted to comment and highlight Roderick’s own endurance and perseverance in light of his physical and sexual abuse experiences. Being mindful of this, I recognize that this is my perception and not necessarily his. As such, I turn my attention back to inviting Roderick to further reflect on the relationship between hope and nature for him. He shares:

I love plants and right now I have many houseplants that I’m rooting. About a month ago I hacked this one huge and unruly plant to bits. Then I re-rooted and re-potted it. Well, just a few days ago I saw a new leaf! How cool is that? That’s hope for me, in the aftermath of complete destruction, there is life. It’s indestructible. That for me represents hope on a very deep level... it’s a source of real hope in my life right now. It’s not that there isn’t some risk involved. Actually, it can take a long time for certain plants to root in water and if I were to take the risk and plant them in dirt without rooting them, there is a good chance that they’ll end up dying. So it’s risky business... But when I see a root develop, I go “yeah this one is going to live!”

In listening to Roderick, I am reminded of the age-old quote by Cicero: “While there’s life there’s hope.” Somehow, this phrase seems to fit with Roderick’s understanding of hope in relation to witnessing his houseplants grow. Specifically, Roderick experiences a profound sense of hope in the fact that despite the potential risks or extreme challenges to their existence, it is still possible for his plants, and ultimately for life to endure. On another note, I find it interesting how Roderick appears to be very much involved in creating his own source of hope by way of nourishing and caring for his plants.

Hope in Connection

Before he continues, Roderick directs my attention to a photograph in his hand and says:

This is one of my favourite plants... it’s my fig tree. It used to be quite big, huge in fact. A while back, it died. But before it died, I had taken a cutting off of it and given it to my daughter so she could root it. The last time I saw it, it was doing amazingly well. This is one of my favourite plants... it’s my fig tree. It

used to be quite big, huge in fact. A while back, it died. But before it died, I had taken a cutting off of it and given it to my daughter so she could root it. The last time I saw it, it was doing amazingly well. Actually, the more I think about it, the more this tree fits as a symbol of hope for me in a lot of ways... So, when mine died, my daughter ended up giving me a cutting off her tree for me to re-root. Even though the original plant ended up not living, fortunately I had given some of its life to my daughter to look after... [he hands me the photo]...



Figure 3: A gift of hope.

This is really profound, holy crap... [long pause]... Then when I needed some more of that life, I was gifted it back from the same plant. So this is the grandchild of my original plant. In thinking about it now, somehow even in our family's dysfunction, we are still managing to sort of stay connected. Sure, I don't get to see my daughter or my granddaughter, but I do get to interact with this granddaughter plant... I would say there is some hope in that connection...

The new insight that surfaces for Roderick seems to highlight that a meaningful relationship with his daughter and granddaughter is still possible, no matter how seemingly small or slight the connection. Roderick's ability to maintain an indirect life-line to those relationships inspires a sense of hope for him. Embedded within Roderick's narrative is the notion that hope can be given and received within a relationship. As such, there is a reciprocal facet to Roderick's experience of hope, which appears to further accentuate his understanding of hope as a connective phenomenon. By inviting Roderick

to explore hope, he makes this poignant insight and discovery into hope and its connection to relationships in his life.

Hope for the Future

Roderick takes a long look at a photograph¹ of a baby girl sleeping and bundled in layers of white blankets. Proudly, he says:

This is a picture of my granddaughter right after she was born. When I look at this picture it gives me hope. I see an opportunity to end the tendency for violence and hostility that was in my family... [long pause]... At times, the fact that she's my daughter's daughter is whittling away at that hope a bit because my daughter and I are not on good terms right now, and it makes me think... "God, let's not be passing this stuff on... Let's deal with it now." And yet I can only do what I can do for me. I can't do anything else to make it better.

Roderick's hope for his granddaughter is future focused and involves her living a life different from his own past. Despite this hope, he is unable to directly impact or affect change in this particular circumstance. In the interest of gaining a better understanding of how Roderick's hope might be impacted, I ask: *In what way is your hope influenced by not being able to remedy this situation with your daughter?* To this he replies:

It's interesting actually because a friend said to me the other day "Well, you know, we're pretty tribal and maybe your time in that tribe is done. Maybe you've done everything you needed to do in that particular tribe." And I kind of went "Yeah, that's totally possible." Somehow that made it really easy to say, "Okay, I don't need to hurt and feel wounded by everything that I'm not involved with... my daughter and even my other kids and grandkids... My children are all well-educated and at least I did something right there." So, I take that as a gift that they keep giving me whether they want to or not [laughs]... That's a hopeful way of looking at a situation that doesn't feel necessarily great... That shift in my way of thinking makes a huge difference for me.

Within a short span of time, Roderick goes from describing how his hope is challenged, to finding a sense of hope by shifting his thoughts about an otherwise negative situation. His recognition of positively contributing to the lives of his children allows him the

¹ Note: A photo of Roderick's granddaughter is not presented in order to protect her anonymity.

opportunity to disentangle from his “tribe” and this appears to nourish his hope.

Regardless of the current state of his relationships with his children and grandchildren, Roderick is able to find meaning and adopt a hopeful perspective that acknowledges his positive influence within his family.

A Bank of Hope

Roderick’s experience of a wholesome and almost spiritual connection with “a total stranger” serves as an unexpected source of hope for him:

A while back I was given the advice to practice falling in love like fifty times a day... so that idea has been with me for a while. And so talking about sources of hope... On my way here today, I was in line at the bank and noticed this one woman in particular. I kept noticing her and just letting my energy out... Then I started realizing that I could easily fall in love with her, not in a romantic kind of way or anything, but I was falling in love with her presence, her energy, her being. And I was just witnessing all of this without judging. I didn't feel any need to share that with anybody, it was totally cool just to experience it for myself. It didn't feel dirty or anything, I just felt totally clean and honest... and I realized that wow, I can let myself love and appreciate this total stranger and all these other people. You know. And I'm doing it from the safety of where? Me. And that's pretty cool. It wasn't something I anticipated, but it really boosted my hope.

This narrative account highlights an interesting aspect to the interpersonal nature of Roderick’s experience of hope. While a relational connection is important, it is not necessary for it to be direct. Similar to his current relationship with his daughter, it seems that a meaningful interpersonal connection can inspire hope and exist within him regardless of whether Roderick or the other person is actively involved in the relationship or not.

I take an opportunity to reflect the impression that this hope inspiring experience has a perspectival quality to it and I share a curiosity of mine: *I wonder had you entered the bank without the openness to ‘falling in love’, would your hope have been so greatly impacted?*

Not likely... I think my perception of things has a huge influence on whether I experience hope or not... All I know is that it was a very, very powerful experience of hope because I fell in love like four times in the bank today!

Roderick seems buoyant with energy and both of us agree that we have arrived at a good place to end our conversation. As we part, he jokingly comments:

Who knew that I would find my very own bank of hope?

Chapter Five: Conversations on Hope with Ben

Needing to leave promptly after our interview, I do not have a chance to engage in my usual journaling ritual after my conversation with Ben. I walk briskly to the LRT station hoping to make the next train. As I find a spot in one of the back cars, I am glad to have several empty seats around me... Ahhhhhhhh... I can finally sit, collect my thoughts, and review the experience of my conversation with Ben. Before I get too far in my thinking, I take out my pocket journal that I sometimes carry with me. While not as sophisticated as my laptop version, this little journal works like a charm in a pinch or when thoughts come to me at random times during the day. Resting my pen on the page, one of Ben's photographs comes to mind. He described it as a log church he was especially fond of (Figure 4: Hope exemplified). When I asked him about this particular photo in relation to hope, he replied by saying:

Well, this is one of my goals... to build a log cabin for myself one day... so in that way it's all about hope.



Figure 4: Hope exemplified.

Looking beyond my reflection in the window, I am struck by the idea that this image speaks not only to hope as a symbol of Ben's goals, it also represents other meaningful aspects of his hope... And so my pen begins to glide across the page:

Hope is a process of setting goals and achieving them. Hope is about having a sense of confidence and is connected to agency so that goals become a reality... Hope takes courage and involves risk taking. Hope has its challenges,

particularly when the desired outcome might not be attainable. Hope is about leaving a legacy that others can be proud of.

Not only is building a log home (similar in structure to the log church in the photo) a meaningful future goal for Ben, it also speaks to what is currently threatening this hope: the state of his physical health. Beyond the notion of a goal, this image also reflects an existential aspect to his hope that is connected to a sense of pride and legacy. As I continue to reflect on our conversation, I make a note of the thoughts and early understandings that surface; many of which are highlighted herein.

A Window into the Meaning of Hope

It seems that Ben's understanding of hope has undergone a progression. While he associates hope with serious life circumstances, Ben also perceives it as being connected to choice, free will, and agency. Furthermore, he views hope as a positive influence in his life, as well as a process of attaining his dreams and goals.

Initial Understandings of Hope

Ben shares how the notion of hope was first introduced to him as a child:

Growing up, we'd say: "Let's have hope for that person"... or "I hope he survives and gets better"... So even now, when I hear the word hope, the first thing that comes to mind is when someone is really sick and close to dying.

Although Ben's childhood perception of hope and to some degree, his present sense of hope, is associated with illness and death, he also expresses feeling disconnected to hope in that way:

Right now, I don't think of myself in that kind of situation, where I'm ill and on my death bed. So, I don't need to have that kind of hope... I guess it sounds a bit pathetic...

It seems that Ben's early understandings of hope do not currently fit for him. I am struck by his portrayal of the need for hope as having a "pathetic" quality to it. To clarify what he means, I invite him to explain further. He goes on to say:

That kind of hope is pathetic to me because really no one can do anything for the person who's sick. No one can do anything to help them get better or save them from dying.

The inability to affect change appears to be central to how Ben understands hope as having a “pathetic” aspect to it. I find his subtle but notable distinction in his description of “that kind of hope” interesting, which suggests to me that there might be other or multiple meanings of hope for him. As such, we continue to explore the ways in which he has come to understand hope as relevant and personally meaningful in his life.

Something that Affects Us

Ben further discloses his thoughts on hope as being rooted in an internal desire and as having the potential to positively impact his life:

Hope is something that affects us... it's something we want and that would have a positive effect on our lives. Anything from... I hope I win the lottery... to... I hope my nephews get a good education so they have choices in life... If they are able to choose the course of their life and do the things they want, that would be one of my hopes come true. So, it varies from those two things and everything in between.

While some of Ben's hopes are extraordinary and grounded in chance, others are relationally anchored and are based on a deep interpersonal caring. Ben's hopes for his nephews and how they relate to the notion of “choice” becomes the focus of our conversation.

Having Choices

I ask Ben to further describe how he understands hope to be connected to the idea of choice:

In my life, I have come to realize that having a choice makes hope so much easier... Whether we realize it or not, every situation we're in is because of the choices we've made... Let me put it this way, if I were in a situation where I had no choice and I could only do one thing then my hope to make my dreams and goals a reality would not come as easily.

Ben explains that having options and agency renders hope more easily available to him.

In other words, the ability to choose between potential alternatives provides Ben with the hope that his “dreams and goals” are within reach and that he has the capacity to attain them.

The Process of Dreams and Goals

I begin to understand that dreams, goals, choice, and action all play an important role in Ben's understandings of hope. To get a further sense of the potential relationships between these elements of hope for him, I invite Ben to continue describing how he sees the connections:

The way I see it, hope is mostly about dreams and goals and that's how I live my life. First, it starts off as a hazy kind of dream and then for the actual process of goals... you have to write them down and have pictures of your goals. There is something that changes in your thought process when you write down your goals and see them in a picture on a regular basis... it makes all the difference in the world. So...in a nutshell, hope for me is about going through that process of making your dreams and goals come to reality.

Hope, as it is linked to dreams and goals is a way of life and appears to be a way of being for Ben. His reference to hope as a "process" suggests that while it may be directed towards a specific object, certain actions such as writing and photography are essential in attaining his dreams and goals. At this point, I get the sense that Ben has come to a very keen understanding of how this hope process unfolds in his life. He knows what he needs to do for himself in order for his goals to manifest into action and, thereby, become realized. Ben goes on to share a time during which he engaged in the process of rendering his dreams and goals a reality:

As a teenager, I was in the air cadets and during that time, it became a dream of mine to learn how to fly a helicopter and be able to fly on my own. For a long time, I thought that was all it was going to be – a dream. But then I learned the goal setting process and things changed. I decided to apply for a student loan to go to helicopter school. It was tougher than a bugger to save the money, but I maxed out my credit cards and did whatever I had to do to make it happen. Because it was a goal of mine, it was something that I kept my focus on and it became doable... It was amazing when I finally started helicopter school. One day we were flying over a large lake when the instructor asked me to do a solo flight. While I was climbing to altitude, I was just screaming out loud... here was my whole life's dream coming true in that moment, it was just so exciting! I think that excitement really gets me going and working on reaching my goals.

While it was not without challenge, it seems that Ben's focus and determination are closely connected to his understanding of hope and have been imperative in the

realization of his life-long aspirations. At this point in our conversation, I become interested in exploring what is specifically involved in Ben's goal setting process. As such, I invite him to share how he has come to comprehend and experience hope as process by which his dreams and goals become achievable.

Arriving at the Hope Process

Ben indicates that in addition to learning from others, his goal setting process has been primarily developed by engaging in a self-disciplined method of creating and attaining goals.

Learning from Others

Ben shares how he came to learn about the meaning of his hope in relation to some of his childhood experiences:

When we were growing up the idea of dreams and goals wasn't something my parents encouraged. Being from a farming community, it was the old adage of get a good education, go work for some company for the next thirty years, and then retire hopefully with a decent pension. The mentality back on the farm was basically: "Get your head out of the clouds and get your head in the books." Even though I didn't know any different, there was something about that mentality that I didn't like.

It seems from a very young age, Ben disliked the somewhat pre-determined life plan endorsed by his family and community. Interested in further understanding that experience, I ask him to clarify: *What didn't fit about that way of thinking?* He says:

I've seen too many people go through life with no ambition and I think gosh, there's more to life than just going to work and getting a pay cheque. You know, I want to continue travelling and do things that I love. That's why I forced myself to take those goal-setting courses and develop my hope process. I always felt like there was a lot more to life than going that route.

Ben explains that in witnessing others' lives unfold, his personal perceptions of hope and what he wants for his own life have become solidified. Not only are the goals that motivate others different from Ben's, he also sees a disparity in the quality of his life objectives and those of others. Rather than follow the path that seems to be a life-course

“with no ambition,” Ben focuses on seeking out personally fulfilling and meaningful experiences: these are his hopes.

A Learning Process

Ben goes on to outline the self-directed learning process by which his dreams have become tangible and achievable goals:

I literally forced myself to take a whole bunch of goal setting courses and after a while, I finally developed this goal process and learned how to write and create goals for myself. You might start by making short-term goals, like daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly goals... and then when they start working... man it's exciting! For example, right now I have a picture of me sitting in a Kayak on the water with the word Tofino written above it... That's one of my long-term goals and I know I'll be there... it's just that simple.

Ben has taken great efforts in engaging and incorporating this practice of hope into his life. The clarity with which he explains his understanding of hope as a “simple” process of goal setting holds my attention and so I ask: *Have you always experienced the goal-setting process as ‘simple’?* To this he replies:

To be honest, every goal that I've had in my life to date, I've achieved... there really hasn't been anything that has stopped me. It's amazing when you throw yourself into the process and start to see that it works... It's not that reaching my goals doesn't take effort, it's just that once I've set my goals, I know I will get them done... simple as that.

Ben's trust in this understanding of hope leads him so strongly that virtually nothing seems to impede his advancement towards his goals. While Ben acknowledges that attaining his goals requires “effort,” once fully immersed in the process, he sees his goals as being well within reach.

The Materials Necessary to Build Hope

After exploring Ben's experiences and understandings of hope in relation to dreams and goals, our conversation begins to center on the features he deems fundamental to hope.

Realistic Goals

Ben expresses how creating a “realistic goal” is connected to his sense of the hope process:

In the whole process of hope, first things first...goals have to be realistic. I wouldn't write a goal that I want to be Prime Minister of Canada for example... that would just totally be an unrealistic goal. I wouldn't even dream of something like that because that isn't even a desire for me.... So for me, a goal is unrealistic if there is zero desire to achieve it. First you have to want something for it to be a dream and then from there you make it into a goal.

Interestingly, Ben equates the concept of what he understands as a “realistic goal” with the notion of desire. For him, a goal is considered “unrealistic” if there is a lack of wanting that particular objective. As I listen to Ben, I get a sense that a viable goal is something that *he*, himself, perceives as realistic independent of what others might view as a feasible goal. In other words, a realistic goal or hope for Ben is personally created, evaluated, and shaped.

Believing in Self

Ben continues by identifying the importance of possessing an affirmative outlook within his process of hope:

Having a positive attitude is another big one and you need to do whatever it takes, like go to counselling for example, to feel sure of yourself and get that attitude. You need to believe in yourself and then you can do whatever you desire and achieve those goals.

A belief in self and a sense of confidence seems crucial to Ben's understanding of hope. At this point in our conversation, I am reminded by Stephenson's (1991) conceptualization of hope as a process comprised of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating, directed towards personally meaningful outcomes. As such, it seems that Ben appreciates the involvement of thinking positively, believing in himself, feeling confident in relation to himself, and having the agentic energy and motivation to attain the outcomes or goals significant to him.

Taking Action

Ben goes on to explain that it is not enough to hope without also engaging in some sort of action that would support and create his desired outcome:

The other thing that goes along with having a positive attitude is that it's not enough to just say, "Geeze, I hope I reach my goals and that things work out." You have to be prepared to do something about it and take some action so your hopes and goals come to reality.

While the action of thinking in a positive and hopeful way is important, it also appears that the aspect of acting or behaving hopefully is equally as important to how Ben understands hope.

Courage and Risk

Ben goes on to share that both courage and risk are significant and interconnected aspects to his sense of hope:

The thing about hope is that you can't be afraid of taking risks. You have to have courage in order to take risks so that you go for your dreams and reach your goals. So for me, I guess risk and courage go hand in hand when it comes to the whole hoping process. Some risks might be scarier than others, especially when we are out of our comfort zone... and it's stepping out of that zone that takes courage.

For Ben, engaging in the hope process involves moving beyond his fear and embracing risk. He also acknowledges the significance of "stepping out" from what is known, secure, and comfortable to a "zone" that is unfamiliar and perhaps uncertain in order to reach his goals and dreams.

Believing in the Process

In listening to Ben's account of how courage and risk function within his goal-based hope process, I pose the following question: *How are you able to step out of that comfort zone?* He responds:

Above all, you have to believe in the goal setting process in order for it to work... Years ago, I would sit in those goal setting courses and I had a hard time believing, but I just kept at it and after a while it becomes ingrained... It's the best feeling ever when you accomplish something you set your mind to.

By learning and coming to believe that hope as a goal focused process can make a tangible difference seems to allow Ben to engage earnestly and whole-heartedly in it.

Challenges to Building Hope

With a sense of what Ben considers to be the critical aspects (i.e., Realistic Goals, Believing in Self, Taking Action, Courage and Risk, and Believing in the Process) to the meaning of hope for him, I ask: *Has there been a time during which your understanding or experience of hope has been challenged?* After several moments, Ben reflects how a negative relationship and his current physical health difficulties impact his connection to hope.

Lack of Support

Ben shares his experience of feeling unsupported by his brother and the subsequent effect it has on his hope:

The thing I find challenging is if someone is constantly in my face putting me down and saying, “You can’t do that.” For example, I have a brother who doesn’t know how to set goals and has a really negative attitude towards me. He knows what buttons to push and how to rub me the wrong way... So I find it challenging to be around someone who isn’t supportive...

It seems that Ben experiences a threat to his hope when someone, like his brother, does not believe in him, as he believes in himself. Given that Ben’s brother knows “what buttons to push,” I invite him to further explain how this impacts his ability to strive towards his dreams:

It really doesn’t stop me from going for my dreams and reaching my goals because I am able to stay focused and stay on track.

Ailing Health

As he continues to explain what aspects challenge his hope, Ben draws my attention to an image of a log home in its early stage of construction (Figure 5: A halt on construction).



Figure 5: A halt on construction.

As I said before, one of my goals is to build my own log cabin in the near future. So, I keep pictures of log cabins just like this on my fridge so I keep focused on that dream and goal [long pause]... The only thing is that right now my physical health is a huge challenge. I'm dealing with a couple of serious health related issues that seem to be getting worse... [long pause]... I really do hope that my health improves so that I can build again... [Ben becomes tearful]... I can't live like this anymore... the pain depresses the hell out of me... When I feel depressed, these are the moments when there isn't a lot of hope because I'm not able to do the things I love... I can't believe how much this is bothering me... We're really hitting the nail on the head here... yah, I'm scared right now and that is one of the biggest things that's stressing my hope.

For the first time during our interviews, Ben's emotions clearly surface and are visible.

The presence of this emotional reaction appears to take Ben by surprise, as well as confirm what is currently threatening his hope. It dawns on me that this is also the first instance in our conversation in where Ben's experience of his hope process is vulnerable and significantly threatened. Up until this point, Ben has described hope as a rather "simple" process of creating goals and engaging in activities to make those goals a reality. Even in circumstances where he might experience a lack of interpersonal support, Ben is still able to maintain his goal-focused hope; however, in the case of building his log home, something seems different. Put simply, Ben's previous understanding and experience of his goal-focused hope does not appear to fit or apply to a situation when there is a great deal of uncertainty and an inability to control the outcome. The possibility that Ben's goal may not materialize seems to deeply impact him and his connection to hope.

Several moments pass in silence. It seems important to me to stay with what Ben is feeling. Wondering what other experiences might also be placing a strain on his hope, I eventually ask Ben: *Are there other areas in your life or circumstances that are currently “stressing” your hope?* In a muted voice, he goes on to share how the sexual abuse he endured as a child continues to affect his hope.

A Stressing Hope

Ben describes the distress he experiences when considering the prospect of reporting his abuser to authorities:

For years I’ve thought of reporting the guy who abused me to the police but something is holding me back from doing it... I think about it all the time, but I don’t end up doing it and it puts a huge stress on my hope...

Ben’s connection to hope is presently challenged as he struggles with the idea of reporting the abuse. Aware of a pull within me to validate Ben’s struggle, I share: *In my research and experience of working with survivors, it is often the case that deciding to report or disclose the abuse to authorities is a difficult process for many.* He goes on to say:

Yah... It’s like something is holding me back ... I think it’s because I have to bring another sibling into the whole thing. My brother was involved as a witness and he never went through any kind of therapy like I did, he just blocks it out... So, I think that’s what’s preventing me from going ahead with this... it’s one of the few things in my life that is stressing me right now... [pause]... I shouldn’t even talk about it again... I just need to get it done, but I’ve been saying that for years...

A level of frustration seems to emerge, as he continues:

You know this really bothers me... I haven’t approached this like one of my goals, but maybe I should... Because when I write things down and have a photograph of my goals, they get done. The only trouble is that I don’t want somebody coming to my apartment and seeing that... So, that’s why it’s not written down... I don’t want anybody else to see that. So, a lot of times it’s just forgotten about I guess.

Ben’s strong desire to protect both himself and his brother seems to be a significant obstacle in the way of reporting the abuse. Similar to Ben’s hope to build his log home,

here again, he finds himself unable to engage in the goal-focused hope process he is accustomed to.

A Stronger Hope

Interestingly at this point in our conversation, Ben spontaneously chooses to return to a place of hope and goes on to highlight how the abuse itself has ultimately strengthened his hope:

Even in the face of all the stress, I have to say that in some ways the abuse has made my hope much stronger. Especially when I think of my hope for my nephews... I have such strong hopes that their childhood will be infinitely better than mine and that they won't go through what I did.

Ben's experience of abuse has led to a "strong" sense of hope that goes beyond himself and is particularly connected to his nephews and the kind of childhood he would like for them. Notably, despite Ben experiencing a threatened hope in relation to the abuse (i.e., inability to report), he is nonetheless able to remain engaged with hope for his nephews, which he identifies is borne out of the abuse itself.

Staying Focused on Building Hope

Following our exploration around the impact the CSA on Ben's experience of hope, we begin to engage in a discussion on what has supported him during the abuse, as well as other times of hardship.

During the abuse, Ben indicates feeling no connection to hope, and as a result he does not have a clear idea of what helped him get through that time in his life. He says:

You know... I really have no idea of what helped me get through the abuse. I was just a kid... I can't remember having dreams or goals at that age. My memory around that time is not so good... It's a part of my life that I really don't have many memories of... Who knows maybe not remembering that time has helped... maybe it's been a good thing...

I find it interesting that as an adult reflecting on his childhood, Ben sees hope through the filter of goals, which fits with his current understanding of hope in his life.

Therapeutic Interventions

Ben goes on to share how several therapeutic approaches worked to sustain him during a severe bout of depression:

Years back I was diagnosed with major depression and it got to a point where I needed to be hospitalized. It was a time of real hopelessness for me. The only things that got me through that time were therapy and antidepressants. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what was going on for me and get a better understanding of myself. After several months, I finally was able to feel like me again and get back on the path of my dreams and goals.

In his account, Ben relates hopelessness to his experience of depression. Furthermore, he seems to associate the absence of hope with a distinct separation from his sense of self.

A Sense of Knowing

Ben continues by describing how his strong belief in his ability to accomplish his goals is important in helping him through difficult times:

I have to say that knowing that I can do whatever I set my mind to and reach my goals has been a huge help... The other thing that I know, is that time will heal me. I've been through many relationships and have been really hurt, but regardless I know that things will get better. Somehow knowing that I have dreams and goals and that time will heal has been really important.

Given Ben's earlier account of the challenges he is presently experiencing in relation to his goal of building his log cabin, I am taken aback by the resurgence of confidence in his understanding of the hope process as it relates to goals. Furthermore, the passage of time seems to be another implicit source of hope for Ben. Together with a sense of knowing and trusting in his dreams and goals, the passage of time appears to be an important element that helps Ben move through and beyond adversity.

Building Hope for the Future

At this point in our conversation, Ben indicates looking forward with a sense of excitement and commitment to making some of his future goals a reality. Apart from his short and long-term personal goals, Ben shares his hopes for his nephews and generations to come.

Short- and Long-Term Hopes

As Ben starts to share his short- and long-term goals, the enthusiasm and animation in his voice appears to grow:

My next short-term goal is to take a vacation. I'm not sure yet whether it's going to be a guided horseback trip for a week in the mountains, or a fishing trip up north in the Arctic, or a kayaking trip out in the west coast... I'm also working on another big long-term goal right now. Basically, it's a five year goal to build a log fishing resort. I've already been looking for a piece of land... and I keep pictures of log cabins on my fridge... I'm really excited about that one... [long pause and appears pensive]...

I find it striking that despite the current challenges (i.e., his physical health) to Ben's hope of building a log home, he is still able to hold a similar hope for the future. To me, this underscores the notion that not only can hope fluctuate for Ben, but there is also an abiding quality to his goal-focused hope. So much so that Ben has already begun to engage in his short- and long-term goals, which not only incites a great deal of excitement, but also appears to trigger another thought process within him. Curious about what Ben is currently experiencing, I invite him to share his thoughts. With heaviness in his voice, Ben's reflects on his hope for his nephews and generations to come.

Something to be Proud of

Building log homes appears to be Ben's evidence of his own hope and the legacy he wishes to leave for his nephews:

When I think about it, building log homes is the one thing I can do and have all the pride in the world... and I want my nephews to be proud of me. I just love them so much. Years from now they can tell their kids... "My uncle built that way back when"... [Ben becomes tearful]... It gives me so much hope that they will have pride in what I've accomplished.

It seems that hope for Ben is not only connected to a sense of his own pride in his accomplishments, but also the desire to have his achievements remembered and held in high esteem by his nephews. He goes on to say:

Whenever I see them, I try to encourage them to dream and work towards their own goals... I want to teach them how hope has worked in my life... [Ben continues to be tearful]...

Ben takes an active role in contributing to his future hopes, as he takes all available opportunities to inspire hope and share his experience and understanding of hope.

Embedded in Ben's account, is a relationship between goals and deeper existential issues, which seem to have emerged as a result of our conversation on his hopes for the future.

At this point, I make a note of observation based on this interpretation and say: *It looks like it is really important that your nephews appreciate who you are, what you love to do, and what you have accomplished in your life.* To this, Ben simply nods and wipes the tears from his eyes. Moments later, he describes his amazement at his emotional response to our conversation:

Wow, I have a lot to think about. I had no idea that talking about my hopes and dreams and my goals would have brought up so much in me. I mean, it's great to get this stuff out... I just didn't expect it.

Before ending our conversation, I check in with Ben to see how he feels. He assures me that he is fine and expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to share some of his current challenges, as well as his hopes for the years to come.

Chapter Six: Conversations on Hope with Arnold

After reviewing the audio recordings of our conversations for several hours and reading through the many pages of transcript, I begin to envision how I might best represent Arnold's narrative of hope. This is typically the point in the interpretation process I find both exciting and anxiety provoking. On one hand the co-constructive retelling is a wonderfully creative and intriguing endeavour; and yet, on the other hand, I am often plagued with worry and uncertainty as to how I will honour and join both the participants' voice and my perspective as a researcher. Keenly aware of those initial feelings of uneasiness, I find some solace in writing in my journal and reflecting on the aspects that seem to punctuate Arnold's journey of hope and healing:

My conversation with Arnold is unique and unlike some of the others... The metaphor that comes to mind is that of a taking a road trip, with Arnold in the driver's seat, and I, in the passenger's seat next to him. My role is to follow his lead and occasionally invite Arnold to consider different aspects of the healing journey and how they may be connected to hope. As he shares his experiences and understandings of hope in his life and specifically with respect to his healing from sexual abuse, it's as if, on some level, he has an internal map of how the story of hope has unfolded in his life. A quiet confidence resonates throughout Arnold's narrative, which seems to have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. His photographs not only act as sign-posts along his journey but become central to his account of hope.

In the course of our road trip, I learn that for Arnold, hope is about goals and the process of achieving those goals. I learn that the meaning of hope in his life is closely tied to his desire for self-understanding and personal growth. I learn about the significant impact of sexual abuse on Arnold and his hope. I learn how during more than a decade of ongoing abuse, Arnold is able to find hope in creating a protective self-image that in many ways is incongruent with his inner experience of self. I learn that early on in his healing, hope is an unknown, distant, and yet present entity. I learn that despite his fear, Arnold is able to work towards his hope of recovering from the abuse. I learn that from the depths of despair, he finds hope in a spiritual relationship that helps him move beyond the hopelessness. I learn that choices, perspective, and awareness of self and the world around him are central to Arnold's experience of hope. From Arnold, I learn about hope...

It never ceases to amaze me how writing can crystallize my thoughts and emotional reactions to my conversations with participants, as well as provide me with a direction that propels me and my work forward. With Arnold as my guide, we enter into

a broad exploration of hope, which later leads us to a more defined narrative of hope within his journey of healing.

Meanings of Hope

To open our conversation, I begin by asking: *When you hear the word hope, what comes to mind?* In response, Arnold highlights the multiple layers inherent in his understanding of the meanings of hope.

Hope as an Outcome and Process

The first layer of meaning to Arnold's perspective highlights hope as both a goal and a process of attaining that goal:

Hope for me in a way is a derogatory term in my mind because it makes me feel like you haven't started that path or the journey to healing yet, but you want to. Having something that you're looking for down the road or like a destination that you've set your sight on is hope... I think hope is also in the journey of healing... I guess if I were standing at the bottom of a well, I would hope to get out. So getting out would be the end of that journey in that situation... but the journey itself or the events that transpire for me to get half way up or three quarters up or almost all the way out you know that's the journey... In a lot of ways, I feel like I am further along the path and I have the hope that I'm going to get better, but of course I know full well that there is no end to my healing journey...

Initially, Arnold's description of hope as "derogatory" takes me by surprise because I do not typically consider hope as a negative concept or experience. With an awareness of my own understandings of hope and how they may differ from Arnold's perspective, I become especially attentive and curious to learn more about the meaning of hope for *him*. When looking and listening more closely to what Arnold shares, it seems that he understands hope as being rather pejorative if there is solely a desire to heal with no particular movement or action towards beginning the journey of change. From Arnold's viewpoint, the meaning of hope appears to have two important elements and his metaphorical description of being at "the bottom of a well" beautifully illustrates these aspects. One, hope is about having a specific goal or desired outcome (i.e., getting out of the well). Two, hope seems to be about the process of working towards attaining that

particular goal (i.e., what has to happen to be half way or three quarters up the well).

Arnold's last sentiment regarding the ongoing or endless nature of his healing journey leads me to wonder how that might influence his sense of hope. As such, I ask: *Knowing there is no end to your journey, how does that impact hope for you?*

Well years ago when I first began on my journey, every time I would sit down with a different counsellor or a different doctor or a different group... I would think, "This is the group or this is the person that's going to help me understand what I'm experiencing and then it will be all over, the pain will be gone, and that will be the end of it"... But that of course never happened, instead I had to do it myself and find my own answers, nobody could give them to me. So, in a way that began my journey without hope because I knew and still know that it will never be all over. I will always have the baggage that comes with being a survivor.

Underlying Arnold's narrative account, I get the impression that hope in the form of an outcome went from being externally created to internally generated. Arnold's early hope is focused on others being able to provide him with greater understanding and therefore his healing would be complete. This hope was challenged with the understanding that not only is his journey an individual and internal one, but that he is the primary agent of his own healing process.

Early on in the process of addressing his experience of sexual abuse, it seems that Arnold's hope is centered on ending the pain and suffering and that he could rid himself of the "baggage" associated with the abuse. For a moment, I try to imagine how the possibility of completely freeing himself from the hurt and anguish of the abuse would be so appealing and hope stirring. However, given that this hope is not realized, this leaves Arnold with a sense of hopelessness knowing that his journey of healing is a continuous one.

Finding Hope in Self-Understanding

The notion that Arnold will forever have to deal with his sexual abuse on one level or another seems to bring about a sense of hopelessness. With this thought in mind, I reflect the following to Arnold: *Knowing that you will continue on your personal*

journey with that baggage sounds like it might take a take a toll on your hope. To this he says:

Well, sure it's hard to hope sometimes because there is a lot of pain in the healing and I know that the baggage of the abuse will be with me in some way throughout my life... But at the same time, I actually feel good and hopeful to know that each day I can learn something about myself and each day I can grow and understand myself a little bit more. No matter what the situation is, even if it's in my job, I know I'm never going to stop learning in life. Even though I walk with the baggage of sexual abuse, I know I will continue to learn and work on myself without anybody's help, because nobody really understands that part of me... and so when I do understand something or why I had certain feelings... that's very rewarding for me... there's a lot of self-gratification and there is hope in that for me.

On one hand, Arnold struggles to engage with hope given the difficult and seemingly endless nature of the abuse aftermath; however, on the other hand this also presents as an opportunity for self-learning and understanding, which positively impacts his experience of hope. At this point, I am reminded by what Arnold previously shared about the journey or process of working towards his goal as being important to the meaning of hope for him. I now begin to understand a key aspect to that process: introspective discovery and self-insight. I am struck by the sense of personal mastery and confidence in Arnold's experience of self-understanding. His own capacity to make meaning of his life experiences is not only perceived as worthwhile and fulfilling, but also as hope inspiring.

Hope and Sexual Abuse

In light of exploring Arnold's sense of hope in relation to the long and arduous process of healing from the sexual abuse, it feels like a fitting time to invite him to further share what the experience of abuse was like and its impact on hope.

A Simple Hope

Arnold describes how he remembers the quality of hope in his life prior to the sexual abuse:

Well before everything started my hope was that of a five year old I guess. I remember at two years old being in the hospital for pneumonia and I wanted to ride my car down the hallways and not understanding why they wouldn't let me

do it. My hope was you know “I’m gonna get out of this crib!”... And I did that a couple of times... Hope was simple... It was looking for new and exciting things!

As a child, hope for Arnold seemed unbridled and uncomplicated. Hope was about possibility and the thrill of exploration. I find it interesting that even at a young age, Arnold’s memory of hope is connected to setting and attaining a goal, even if, at the time, it meant escaping the confines of his crib. For a moment, I notice a slight grin as he remembers that seemingly simple childhood hope.

Creating an Outward Appearance

Arnold’s early hopeful experiences seem to have undergone a significant transformation as a result of the childhood sexual abuse:

The sexual abuse started when I was five years old and went on for about 10 or 11 years. Nobody knew what was happening. I was holding that secret, which was kind of hopeful because at least I was in control of something in my life. You know I had to appear normal and confident to the people around me, which by the way, I never really was. But even still, I became the over-achiever and excelled at everything I did, it was how I coped. I basically focused on the day to day stuff. So, I didn’t have hopes for my future. I couldn’t see past the day I was in. My focus was on how I could get better at doing what I did...

In my work and readings, it is not uncommon for survivors to attempt to find ways in which they can regain some sense of control and agency in their lives as a means of processing the lack of control they experienced during the abuse (Gartner, 2001, 2005). For Arnold, keeping the abuse from others is a way in which he retained that sense of control, and thereby remain connected to hope.

Within this portion of narrative, it appears that the abuse limited or narrowed Arnold’s ability to envision a hopeful future: he focused on the day to day and no further. In addition, Arnold’s hope at the time was centered on appearing strong, successful, and self-assured. It seems to me that creating what Arnold refers to as a “normal” outer image would have been an important way of surviving, particularly given that the sexual abuse spanned over the course of several years. Arnold’s brief statement, “I never really

was” captures my attention. In my understanding of what Arnold shares, it seems that as a child he grappled with a sense of incongruence between his internal experience of himself and what he chose to portray to others. As such, our conversation takes a turn in exploring this aspect of survival.

Keeping up the Façade

Arnold describes how he was able to process his emotional responses to the abuse while also managing to retain the veneer of normalcy:

Looking back on it with all the understanding I have now... Like if I was in trouble with my father for instance, and he would hit me or he would spank me, I would attach the feeling I had in that event to the abuse. Because I wasn't allowing myself to feel during the abuse, I would let it out at other times. So I would cry in response to my father hitting me and he would think that I was crying because he hit me, but that wasn't actually the case at all for me... the two weren't related... There were even times when I would tell myself there's a movie on TV that's maybe kind of a tear jerker, so I would watch it and cry way too much, but it was my outlet to get the emotions out... It was a way of getting through. There were times that I actually felt a bit more hopeful because after having the release, I would feel better and was better able to keep on with things and keep the façade up for everyone...

I find it remarkable how, as a child, Arnold was creative and resourceful at discovering ways to safely engage in expressing the emotions he so intently suppressed. During the abuse, Arnold's hope seemed to be very much connected to a sense of surviving and of having some control over when and how he would experience his emotions. Along this vein, hope also surfaced as a result of feeling significant emotional release; thus, allowing Arnold to continue regulating and managing his outer appearance to those around him.

Now What?

Wondering how the abuse finally came to an end and how Arnold might understand its impact on hope for him, I invite him to reflect on that experience:

Well I confronted him and that is how the sexual abuse actually stopped. I was 16 at the time and I was already driving and felt in control of my life as far as I knew. So, one day without much thought, I just pushed him aside and told him... "You touch me again and I'm gonna call the police!" I'm not sure what drove me to do that at that particular point... but after the confrontation, I was literally numb, my fingers were tingly and I didn't know what I'd done, I didn't

know the implications... All my life, the secret of the abuse was something I owned.... it was mine and nobody knew... but after that point, I remember thinking... "Okay now what?"... I just didn't know.

And by your ability to stop it, how was that related to hope for you?

It gave me one more level of control because it put me on a path and gave me a direction towards starting my healing journey. I would call that hope – someone in control of their life and knowing where he's going... I mean don't get me wrong before I felt like I really had a direction, I first went through a long period of time where life was mostly chaotic.

While acting on his own behalf provides Arnold with another layer of influence in his life, at the time it seems to have also shaken him, as he no longer held the secret of the abuse. What had been familiar and known to him for so many years finally ends and this seems to have awakened Arnold's fear of the unknown. It is striking to me that, as a result of the taking action to stop the abuse, Arnold's view takes a longer-term future focus and he begins to envision a direction or a goal orientated future. This seems to be in line with Arnold's earlier description regarding the meaning of hope being associated with having a desired outcome and a sense of beginning to work towards that outcome.

Loss of Control

Wondering about the period of chaos he describes, I ask Arnold to share how hope might have been experienced during that time:

After the abuse stopped, everything kind of went downhill fast. It was the point when I lost all control. I was starting to feel things I couldn't understand. Everything was too much for me to handle... even the everyday stresses, like my job for example, I just couldn't deal with it all... Then as soon as I was old enough to drink, alcohol became my focus. It was the way I coped and dealt with things from day to day. You can call it alcoholism, or workaholism... or promiscuity... they're all the same coping mechanism for me. It got me out of what I was feeling and allowed me to focus on what I was doing, whether it was work or whatever... It was a time when my demons took over in my life and I really had no understanding of anything that I was experiencing. It was like my life didn't seem like it was mine anymore...

From Arnold's narrative, I get a vivid picture of the overwhelming confusion and loss of control he experiences following the end of the abuse. Not only is Arnold's personal power and sense of self-understanding compromised, his connection to hope is also

threatened. Akin to Arnold's experience during the abuse (focus on his daily survival), he again finds himself attending to the ways in which he gets through another day. Rather than experiencing his emotions, Arnold discovers ways in which to keep those feelings at bay and continues to cope in the face of the chaos. As I consider sharing this particular thought with Arnold, I see him take note of the envelope holding his photos. He begins to flip through them, and with that I get a sense that our conversation is about to take on a slightly different direction.

Hope and Healing: Finding Order in its Absence

Arnold comments that perhaps the best way to further explore hope in relation to his experience of abuse and healing journey is by looking at the photos he took. He goes on to say:

I didn't purposely take them in any particular order but as I look through them, I actually took them in almost a chronological order from the beginning to now, through my healing from the abuse... To me it's a story of my life journey through the years.

I find it remarkable that while there was no conscious intention, as Arnold revisits his photos he finds a temporal order to them that reflects the way in which he has come to make sense of his experiences of hope and sexual abuse. It seems noteworthy to me that this is one of the few instances thus far in the research, where the participant identifies and outlines a distinct temporal sequence to his photos and how they depict his hope and healing process.

A Light of Hope

Arnold places the first photo on the small table between us and indicates: ***This is where it all started...***



Figure 6: A comfortable haze.

I took this photo at about 5 o'clock in the morning. It's an overcast morning and the fog is thick. It's really hard to see anything and there is some confusion. I don't really feel much and in some ways it's peaceful and I'm comfortable in the haze because I've spent so long here. This is my life early on after the abuse stopped... before the healing really started.

Where is there hope in this photo?

There's a little bit of light way back there... you can barely see it, but something is there. I don't know what the light is or where it comes from. I don't know what's between me and the light, but I do know it's there and that is the hope in this picture... [pause]... Looking at this photo now, I can say that this part of my life is gone... you know the confusion, the haze is gone. I have more clarity in my life now. I know that I've moved beyond this point and I am moving closer towards the light. This is now a very hopeful and powerful picture for me.

In Arnold's reflection regarding his early experience of healing from the abuse, the details of hope are unknown; however, he has a sense of certainty and confidence in its presence nonetheless. While hope can be intangible, subtle, and almost imperceptible, Arnold experiences it as a real and substantial entity. Hope also seems to be connected to a progression from what *was* to what *is*. This photo not only serves Arnold as a reminder of the past, but of how much he has grown and moved along in his healing journey and this inspires a great deal of hope for him now.

Hope in the Distance

With the hope of healing from the abuse still present, Arnold also seems to experience a great deal of fear in connecting with that hope, leaving him in a state of paralysis:



Figure 7: The unknown.

In this photo there is a bit more detail than the previous one, but there's really nothing happening. There is a lot around me that's unknown. Everything is just kind of sitting there... Each of those boxes or crates represent each member of my family and my friends. And I worry that any one of those boxes could fall on me... If I let my family and friends in and let go of the secret of what happened and what I am going through, I worry how they might treat me or interact with me differently. I'm not prepared for that or to venture beyond where I'm standing. Sure the light or hope is still there at the end of that doorway. Again, it's barely noticeable. Even though I want to move towards the hope, I'm not willing or even ready to really start working on myself and try to get a handle on healing or go for that hope... but it's still there... This photo represents the point in my life when things begin to get really bad and I am giving into my vices, like the drinking and overworking... this is when the chaos is at its peak.

Here I begin to get a slightly different and more nuanced understanding about Arnold's need to hold the "secret" of his abuse. Previously, it seems that withholding that information allows Arnold to remain in a place of control and influence in his own life; however, it also appears he is acutely aware of the potential risk in disclosing the abuse. It is not unusual that victims and adult survivors of abuse often find themselves struggling with the decision of disclosure. Researchers in the area of childhood sexual abuse often indicate that children may be embarrassed to talk about the abuse, or feel as though they are to blame for the abuse (Alaggia, 2010). In addition, many victims have been sworn to secrecy or even threatened by the perpetrator to not disclose the abuse.

While there is a desire to engage in his hope of healing, the risk and fear associated with moving towards Arnold's hope is overwhelming. In order to deal with

that inability or lack of readiness to connect with his hope, Arnold resorts to his “vices. At this point, it occurs to me that in the previous photograph (Figure 6: A comfortable haze), hope was represented in the form of a distant light; however, Arnold was uncertain of what this hope consisted of. In contrast, hope now takes on a more distinct form and direction: healing from the abuse.

Creating a Spiritual Connection

Curious to understand how Arnold’s experience of hope and healing continue to unfold, I ask: *How did you move beyond this point of chaos in your life?* Arnold says:

I came to realize that I had to submit and give into what was trying to overwhelm me... you know the stuff from all the abuse... So, I turned to God and my spirituality... I finally came to a place where I said, “This is it. There’s nothing else. I’m done. There’s nothing left on this planet for me”... I had just given up on myself completely. I gave up all hope and I didn’t want to go on. I could no longer see that hope in the distance, like in those first couple of photos. I just felt so empty and numb... And for about a day or two, I was in a place of no hope. I didn’t even turn to any of my coping mechanisms or vices. I just sat there with myself and did a lot of praying... Somehow, by expressing myself to God and having a connection to something bigger than me, I felt a release and hopeful... From then on, I realized that it didn’t kill me to give up control like that. I was still here and that was hopeful to know that.

Looking for more clarity I ask: *Can you tell me a little more about how that experience of release and giving up control is connected to hope for you?*

Well by being at rock bottom I felt like I at least had a place to start and that I wasn’t lost... that was a moment of hope for me when I realized that. I remember thinking “Anything I do is better than what it was yesterday... I have to be going forward in my journey. I may not know exactly where I’m going, but I’m moving and I’m just going to deal with the details of my day to day functioning.” That was very hopeful for me.

There are a couple of aspects that I find especially noteworthy in this dialogue. For one, I am struck in how a new sense of hope arises from its perceived absence during a time of devastation. This brings up the notion of the intricate connection between hope and hopelessness. Farren et al. (1995) argue that in order to learn and understand hope, it is important to also learn and engage with hopelessness. In Arnold’s case, this idea seems

to fit. In a sense, by hitting “rock bottom” this provides Arnold a frame of reference and a point to push against, as he moves forward in his healing.

Second, there appears to be a relational aspect to Arnold’s narrative of hope during this very difficult time in his life. While in that “place of no hope,” Arnold resigns to something beyond himself, thereby creating a meaningful spiritual relationship that is hope inspiring. Within that relationship, Arnold is able to be vulnerable in the presence of a perceived other without a need to protect himself or resort to his “vices.” In doing so, Arnold comes to a realization that he can endure and survive being transparent, which also stirs a great deal of hope and agency.

A Choice to Look Forward

Taking cue from Arnold’s description of finding hope in his ability to move forward, we go on to explore how choice is associated with hope for him:



Figure 8: What is to come?

Throughout my journey I’ve asked a lot of questions, like: “What’s under the snow cap?” or “What’s out there?”... Again, in this picture, nothing is really alive yet. Everything is still dormant... When I took this picture I was thinking that something might grow there someday soon. It’s been such a long winter and my life had been like this for so long. I know spring is on its way and there is hope in knowing that. So even though I’ve been in that desolation, there is something better to come. I could have stayed in that state of despair I suppose, and I know some people who have, but to me I have the ability to make a choice to move forward... that’s where the hope is.

In the midst of several unknowns, Arnold begins to entertain possibilities of what the future might hold. Within Arnold’s account, it seems he is certain that something better

will come or some change and growth will soon take place. In short, Arnold is looking forward and has hope for the future. I make a note of the time related aspect to how Arnold describes hope here.

I also find it significant that along with a future oriented hope, Arnold comes to a realization that he has the choice to embrace a hope that the future can look different than the “desolation” he has experienced in the past. Feeling the need to further expand my understanding of this aspect of hope for him, I invite Arnold to continue to share his perspective on the connection of personal choice and hope. He goes on to reflect:

I think choice is hope. If I lose hope, I make bad choices. For me, I went through a long period of time when I had a lot of hopelessness in my life and because of that I chose to run away from my emotions and chose to drink and whatever else. That was my life for a long time. But eventually, I chose to stop drinking and move forward in my life... that's when hope came back into my life...

For Arnold, it appears that hope and hopelessness are intricately tied to choice. Hope is connected to choices that are life enhancing or life-affirming. Alternatively, hopelessness is connected to choices that, for him, are life-depleting. From Arnold's experience it seems that hopelessness does not leave him without choice; it is that the quality or direction of those choices that, in the past, has not served him well and have eclipsed hope.

A Perspective of Hope

At this point, our conversation regarding hope and choice continues and takes on a different photographic representation:

Now in this picture there is a sky and it's starting to break up. Instead of keeping my head down and looking at the pain and difficulty of the situation I'm in and asking the same questions over and over again, there is now a depth to my life...



Figure 9: Looking up.

This to me is so interesting, because this is really the same picture as the previous one, but the camera is turned up. Now that is hope – you know having a different perspective. Now there are more choices because I can choose where to stand, what to look at and even go out into the world if I want to.

Arnold broadens and shifts his focus, thereby allowing other viewpoints and possibilities to emerge. Rather than absorbing himself in the details of his suffering, he chooses to change his vantage point and in doing so, hope surfaces. In other words, hope is about a perspectival look at the world, one in which choices and the capacity to make those choices is available.

Signs of Hope

Following Arnold's description of choice and hope, he shares a photo that portrays a representation of himself and an important relationship in his life and healing process:



Figure 10: Coming to life.

Here I'm starting to feel pretty good about my life. This is the first picture in where I am actually present... Even though I am this vulnerable tree without any leaves or life on me yet, at least I have some support. Up until now, I'm not present in any of the other pictures. Instead of hating myself so much that I don't even want to look at myself, I can now see ME and even like ME and that is a sign of hope... [pause]... When I took this picture, I was thinking a lot of my wife because she's the one who was there supporting me without knowing why, but she was still there for me. I'm very lucky because I met her at my absolute worst She was the one person that could respond to me and not necessarily do anything, but she was just there for me no matter what and that gave me so much hope to know that I wasn't alone, but that someone was with me and cared for me.

This photo seems to capture an important and defining moment or point in Arnold's healing journey from his sexual abuse. For one, this is the first photograph in which Arnold himself is visually represented in his narrative. Acknowledging and honouring himself serves as a distinct sign of hope to Arnold. This photo also seems to signify a perspective shift and an emotional softening towards his self-identity. In other words, Arnold is able to appreciate who he is and relate to himself in a compassionate way without the veil of negativity and self-loathing.

In addition to his sense of self-acceptance, Arnold identifies the importance of a supportive relationship to hope in his life. There seems to be a qualitative difference

between the type of support he receives from his wife and the form of support he sought earlier in his healing. Previously, Arnold describes a time when his hope is primarily directed towards other professionals, such as counsellors or doctors fixing or providing him the answers to what he was experiencing. In contrast, here the care Arnold perceives as connected to hope comes from his wife's presence and unconditional love.

The Fight Within

Before he places the photo (Figure 10: Coming to life) in the pile in front of him, I notice Arnold taking a closer look at the image. It seems he is not finished and so I offer him the opportunity to say more about the photo. He goes on to say:

You know that tree still hasn't changed since I took the picture of it. I saw it yesterday and there weren't even buds on it yet... I guess that's the nature of the journey in healing from the abuse... there's always the possibility of things not getting better and sometimes giving up seems like an option... I mean, sure you have to accept where you are in the journey but you also need to want to work harder. At least that was true for me. Having something to work towards and having the fight within me, which was important, that IS hope... There are a lot of survivors who have stopped fighting or stopped hoping and have chosen to end their life... and to be honest, that was a real possibility in my life at one time. I remember in some counselling sessions, we would talk a lot about suicide and I came to a point and said, "You know what, that is not an option for me... By ending my life like that, the abuse would win and beat me and I am not willing to accept that as an option." Wanting to heal and defeat this, and not stay stagnant no matter what... that gives me hope...

In order to remain engaged in the healing journey, Arnold describes that hope is connected to the acceptance of his history of abuse, as well as his internal drive to overcome it. Within this portion of Arnold's narrative, he again clearly indicates his understanding of hope: hope is active and involves having both a goal and the capacity to prevail over the challenges associated with recovering from sexual abuse.

Little Steps of Hope

As Arnold looks at the next photo, he smiles and looks warmly at the image he holds. Before he even says a word, I get a sense that there is something uniquely different or significant about the photo he is about share:



Figure 11: New to the world.

That lonely little boy there is my son and in my mind, he represents me at the point when I came to life. Here, I've got some life to me now, I've got some skin, and I can breathe. Even with that transformation, I am still a little boy in the world. I've just realized that I can almost support myself, but I am still wobbly.

And how might hope be connected to this photo?

This is when I started taking several little steps from day to day. Like I would set goals daily and at first, my goal would be to get one thing accomplished. After that... two things a day and after that... three things a day... and eventually I was feeling good and back to a full day of doing stuff and that was really important for me, my healing, and my hope. This is also the time in my healing journey when I began taking steps in really becoming aware of myself without hiding behind my drinking or my work or whatever... This is when I learn to walk and explore the world for the first time and look around me without having to hide behind anything... [pause]...Yeah, everything is very different at this point. I'm really starting to see things more clearly and I'm starting to feel... I'm feeling things that I've never felt before and I'm being more open with myself and others... It's a very hopeful time because I'm more focused on just being and experiencing...

This photo seems to represent a truly transformative aspect of Arnold's life where many changes are apparent to him. For one, returning to feeling capable and successful in accomplishing his daily and incremental goals is significant to Arnold's sense of hope. Second, this photograph captures the point at which Arnold becomes increasingly more self-aware and open to safely discover the newness, wonder, and possibility inherent in the world around him. Rather than experiencing a sense of fear or the need to protect himself, Arnold is able to safely engage in the process of exploration with transparency. Lastly, he describes hope at this time as being connected to an in-the-moment *experience*,

rather than a cognitive exercise of understanding or meeting a goal. Said differently, it appears that Arnold went from being primarily motivated in cognitively making sense of his past experiences to also valuing his in-the-moment emotional self. At this point, I share my appreciation of what seems like a fundamental change in Arnold's life. To this, he enthusiastically nods.

Hope in Integration

Arnold goes on to share how the next photo² depicts another integral aspect of the change that he has begun to experience in his healing journey:



Figure 12: Joining in.

Now, I'm actually choosing to be out in society and see things happening. I could be anybody in this picture... I'm just part of the game now and I can blend into society. The hope is in the integration into society. Sure I may not be a very good player but I can still join in and get better as I experience more of life. I'm also choosing to surround myself with people who are players who want to join me and watch me as I learn to play and go about my life... I feel like I'm working on things and realizing that the abuse is a part of me and who I am... You know, I've lived with it for most of my life, but now I can live well with it and that gives me a lot of hope. Wow, this is amazing to me how this, the photos, the story all evolved...

Here, hope for Arnold is about a sense of belonging and having a valued place in the world. Not only is Arnold actively participating and experiencing his life, he is also choosing to engage with others who are supportive and willing to witness his personal

² Note: This photo was taken in a public park. No identifying image of the participant is captured in this photo.

growth. In addition to hope being connected to a sense of interpersonal “integration,” it seems that Arnold has come to accept and assimilate his experience of sexual abuse into his life and personal identity. Furthermore, Arnold has come to realize that he is capable of living a fruitful and meaningful life alongside a difficult past, which inspires his hope.

A Further Look at Hope

Interested in understanding what else Arnold might have gleaned from the experience of sharing his perspective on hope, I ask:

In taking a look back on our conversation, what do you make from sharing your photos and the story of your experiences of healing and hope?

I guess the kernel of truth for me is that hope is really about having a relationship with ME that is based on self-awareness and understanding ... Even though I still have some struggles today, at least I am working through them and learning from them. To be honest, I'm still being triggered, not regularly, but it still happens and when it does, I can identify it for what it is... I mean as late as yesterday, I was in a situation where all of a sudden, the abuse and all of my past issues around the abuse kind of stared me in the face. I didn't want to feel what I was feeling because it was scary to me and almost foreign, because it's been so long since I've felt all of that stuff – but there it was. I mean I was able to recognize it for what it was and after thinking about it for a while, I found a way to deal with it.

When you feel triggered by the abuse, how does that impact hope or hopelessness for you?

I know as long as I'm looking for answers as to why I'm feeling the way I feel, I have hope... Now I am at a place in my life where I am fighting for myself and I want to protect myself without masking it or covering it up the way I used to with my vices and all... So, as long as I can do that, there is hope for me.

At the core of Arnold's understanding of hope is a willingness to engage in self-awareness and self-protection. Embedded within Arnold's narrative, I get the sense that he sees himself as worthy enough to undertake the task of continuous self-learning and addressing his personal struggles related to his experience of abuse which, as a result, keeps him in contact with his hope. Before moving on, I take a moment to consider the great deal of internal strength inherent in looking head-on at the impact of the abuse and share this thought with Arnold. He replies:

Sure. It takes a lot of strength, but I now feel like I have the strength I need in order to do it and that makes all the difference.

From Pain Comes Hope

At this time in our conversation, Arnold goes on to highlight how, in retrospect, coping with the aftermath of the abuse has contributed to the creation of personal qualities, which currently serve him well and provide him with hope:

In looking back on the whole healing journey, I've come to realize that I've gained some good things from the abuse. Like for example, I'm very good at what I do and for years that's what I was known for... I was the youngest and hardest working guy out there. I started working full time at the age of 13, so at that time the more I worked, the more tired I was physically and the more I didn't deal with the feelings I had. But out of that I developed a work ethic that I don't see in many people and that really gives me hope, I know I can survive physically and financially, no matter what my emotional state... So, at the time, it was a coping mechanism and now I realize that I'm making it work for me again.

What was once a means of silencing his emotions associated with the abuse is now a positive and important personal resource in his life. In addition to a strong work ethic, it seems that Arnold has also gained a sense of trust in his capacity to take care and provide for himself despite any life difficulties that may arise. This certainty or confidence in his ability to endure appears to be significantly connected to Arnold's hope.

Challenges to Hope

Wondering about any potential challenges or threats to Arnold's sense of hope, I invite him to reflect on these experiences. At first, it seems somewhat difficult for him to respond to my question. Mindful of allowing Arnold time to process his thoughts without interruption, I wait... He then goes on to say:

I guess in thinking about your question, I think my hope gets a bit weakened when I think that the sexual abuse of children happens every day... And when I see something on the news about another abuser or pedophile getting charged, it's like the whole world is up in arms and so concerned about protecting the rights of the abuser... but what about the child? Somehow, there seems to be less concern about the rights of the child or helping support that child and their family. Even as an adult, there is so little out there for survivors. I can't tell you how much I struggled to find a male survivors group or a good psychologist who could understand and was educated about

childhood sexual abuse. It was really hard to find and get help at times. So that really brings up a lot of hopelessness in society for me...

There is a broader social-political slant to what challenges his hope. Arnold's perception on society's lack of acknowledgment and resources available to victims and survivors' of abuse is intricately tied to his experience of hopelessness. In other words, Arnold's personal connection to hope is threatened when he thinks of those beyond himself, namely, the children and families impacted by sexual abuse. Wondering how Arnold makes sense and meaning of that hopelessness, I ask:

How do you manage that strain to your hope?

You know, I'm not sure... [pause]... It's interesting because my hope is not just for myself anymore, but for my son, for other people, and for other survivors in general... I have hope that I can pass on some of the lessons I've learned to somebody else for their benefit. I think that's really healing for me to know I can make a difference to another survivor's life for example... With that all said, sometimes I really struggle because I know that my experiences of healing could be helpful to others, but at the same time I don't feel ready and I don't have that outlet right now. So, I guess it makes it hard, but it's something I hope to do in the future.

I get the sense that hope for him, has somewhat expanded in focus. From being centred primarily on his healing journey, hope for Arnold now also embraces other people and causes he regards as important and meaningful. Moreover, out of the hopelessness in relation to his perceived lack of societal response to childhood sexual abuse, Arnold finds a source of hope within himself and in his experiences of healing from the abuse. Said differently, the hopelessness he experiences has served to activate Arnold's desire to make a difference in the lives of other survivors. While Arnold is agentic in thinking about his hope to help others, he is not yet ready to act on those thoughts and this seems to create a struggle within him. Despite these difficulties, Arnold is nonetheless able envision a future in which he is working towards realizing his hopes. Upon ending our conversation, I share my admiration in Arnold's desire to draw upon his past in order to

help others and contribute to changing society's awareness and response to childhood sexual abuse. He smiles and says: *That's the hope.*

Chapter Seven: Conversations on Hope with Kevin

Days after meeting with Kevin, I decide to revisit his photographs so as to further engage with some initial thoughts that had surfaced during our conversation. Placing all the photographs in front of me in the order that Kevin presented them, I reflect on my understandings of what they reveal about his hope. Paying attention to the photographs that seem to continuously hold my attention, I write the following in my research journal:

Again and again, I find myself drawn to two particular photos: one, a bike frame (Figure 13: Stripped) and the other a sea of derelict and dismembered vehicles (Figure 16: A wasteland). From my understanding, both photos capture Kevin's experience of childhood sexual abuse, as a deeply painful, disorienting, overwhelming, and in many ways, a fundamental experience of hopelessness. And yet, despite Kevin's sense of despair, helplessness, and relentless search to understand his past abuses, hope emerged in our conversation. Particularly in relation to the photo entitled "A wasteland" (Figure 16: A wasteland), hope for Kevin seemed to surface when he was able to gain insight into a different way of approaching his pain and his healing. The more I think about my conversation with Kevin, the more apparent it seems... hope, in his case, became more available to him when he was able to generate an alternative storyline or narrative of what is possible in his life. As a researcher and as a therapist, I sit amazed and incredibly hopeful in Kevin's capacity to connect to hope, despite his long struggle in making meaning of his abuse experiences.

With all the photos in hand, I begin to consider how our conversation unfolded and how I might best represent what Kevin has shared about his hope. I quickly come to the conclusion that Kevin, himself, clearly delineated the launching point of our conversation by handing me the first photo saying: ***Let's start at the beginning...***

Stolen Parts

As such, we begin by exploring the profound effect childhood sexual abuse has had on Kevin's life:



Figure 13: Stripped.

You know, I've walked by this bike frame for over two years and I when thought of taking pictures of hope, this image came to mind and I had to go and take it... If you really look and think about this picture, there's a whole bunch of things that have gone wrong... First of all, somebody has locked up their bike in good faith thinking it was safe and instead they came back and discovered all the pieces had been taken off. I mean why would anyone steal all the nuts and bolts? Usually a bike will have a few pieces stolen or it'll be just smashed to pieces, but this is different because it's absolutely stripped – there's nothing left – not even a bolt. There's something absurd about that. It reminds me of being abused as a child... In a way, I see myself as this bike frame. You think you're safe and yet people come and they take these bits and pieces off of you. There is a sense of betrayal because it should have been looked after and been safe, but it wasn't. The bike frame looks raped... And afterwards it's just left there alone... quiet... and an ugly site... [pause]... No one gives a shit to do anything. The city that presumably is supposed to look after the bike rack hasn't done a thing about it. There's no police around, there's nobody around... they just allowed this to happen. It's like either no one knows or talks about it or they just don't care to bring it up... so they just leave it there. It's got this stench of denial around it... People just walk by and ignore it all the time. I look at this and I can connect with emptiness....

Kevin's evocative description reveals how he, as a child, experienced and perhaps to some degree, still struggles with the vulnerability, neglect, loss, and pain connected with the sexual abuse. His words, "raped... alone... quiet... ugly site" profoundly communicate the depth of neglect and abandonment he experienced. A sense of anger and disappointment seem to surface as Kevin describes the multiple betrayals by those who abused him and those who were entrusted with his safety. The denial and indifference he perceives others having in regards to this discarded bike frame, and ultimately to CSA leaves him feeling vacant, or as though he is missing an important aspect of himself.

Not completely sure if and how hope might be connected to the photo and/or to Kevin's experience of abuse, I pose the following question: *Where is the hope in this photo?* Kevin goes on to say:

I keep asking myself that actually... should I hope that we can just go and find all the parts needed to reconstruct the bike? And then part of me is going... I don't know about that... It could be done, but – [pause]... I don't know if I really found much hope in this situation or this picture. I certainly see more hopelessness than hope.

A sense of ambivalence about hope emerges for Kevin when he considers the possibility of rebuilding the bike. While a part of him wants to connect to hope, hopelessness seems to resonate more strongly. With the intention of creating space to explore and further understand hopelessness for Kevin, I ask: *Tell me more about that hopelessness...*

An Experience of Hopelessness

Kevin sinks deeper into his chair and takes a laboured breath before delving into his experience of abuse and hopelessness:

The abuse, some of which was also physical, was an experience of darkness for me. I remember feeling completely unwanted as if I was some sort of hideous beast, like Frankenstein. I felt like I had nothing, like nobody cared... there was no one safe I could count on... I felt like I wasn't worthy of life on the planet. Those are the moments of true hopelessness and despair.

Kevin vividly expresses how the abuse has left an impression on his perceived sense of self-worth. Hopelessness for Kevin is connected to feeling as though he does not belong on this earth, is worthy of the space he takes, or the life he has. Experiencing a sense of isolation and a lack of a trusting relationship serves to further add to Kevin's struggle with his self-worth and feelings of hopelessness. Without pause, he goes on to say:

I couldn't do anything about the abuse, so I had to fend for myself and cope with it until it ended. And because I couldn't take care of myself, it made me feel that life was bigger than me and something to be afraid of. Life was asking me to be completely independent, but I was too young and incapable... I felt like I wasn't doing well in the world and that made me feel very hopeless... To be honest, I don't remember really hoping for anything or feeling like I had a direction to go in...or even having any feelings of hope because there was such a strong sense of powerlessness... [pause] ... I guess, if I really stretch it, in some ways I hoped that someone would've have come around or something

would've changed, but when that didn't happen, it kind of smashed my hope in a way... Now many decades later, I don't know if I believe in hope because the hope I had back in those moments didn't really come through.

Reflecting on Kevin narrative, the one word that surfaces for me is agency, or more specifically, the lack thereof. Kevin draws a distinct link between hopelessness and his inability as a child to take action for his own good and protect himself from the abuse. In addition, Kevin highlights feeling overwhelmed when called to life tasks that were beyond his developmental years. Keenly aware of this divide between his abilities and what “life was asking” of him, leaves him feeling helpless. Both Kevin’s lack of capacity to help himself and his experience of an unfulfilled hope that someone could or would have acted on his behalf, seem to be at the crux of his hopelessness during the abuse. Given Kevin’s past, he experiences doubt or ambivalence with respect to hope in his life.

Happily-Ever-After: A Lie

Wondering what else may have contributed to Kevin’s current hesitation or uncertainty around hope, I invite him to comment on other childhood experiences where his sense of hope might have been threatened. Kevin shares:

I used to watch those Sunday night Disney shows where everything was happy and wonderful. Lassie didn't get hit by a vehicle or the horse broke its leg, but he got better. There was always a good outcome and I bought into that, I believed that as a child... I guess you could call it the happily-ever-after kind of hope.... But then experiencing otherwise... you know all the abuse and whatnot, it really made me realize that all of that was a lie... a fantasy of some sort... it burst my so called bubble...

As a child, Kevin trusted in the possibility that even stories with potentially bad conclusions ended up “good”; however, as a result of “the abuse” he became disillusioned with this understanding of hope. Within this portion of Kevin’s narrative, there seems to be an undercurrent of disappointment and even anger in feeling somewhat misled by those early constructions of happiness and hope.

Identity and Abuse

At this point, I reflect to Kevin the following: *It sounds like many of your beliefs about the world were called into question because of the abuse.* Kevin nods in agreement and says:

Yeah, I mean before the abuse, I was pretty cheerful and lively and overall just a happy-go-lucky, carefree kind of kid. But when the sexual abuse started I remember a huge change within me. I became really quiet, reserved, and withdrawn. I think even a caregiver noticed the shift. I don't think I have ever been the same since. I have never really been able to get that fearless part of me back.

The experience of sexual abuse not only appears to have stifled Kevin's carefree nature, but fundamentally changed his self-identity and way of being in the world. Recoiling within himself was one of the ways in which Kevin responded to the fear that the abuse introduced into his life. He lowers his eyes to the ground and we both sit in a long pause of silence.

Surrounded for Protection

Sensing that Kevin is ready to continue, I ask: *What kept you going at that time?*

I would surround myself with the neighbourhood kids. My whole back yard would be full of kids playing. Something about that seemed to help. I think I felt safe if I had a bunch of people around me, rather than just having one person who was going to abuse me.

The notion of safety-in-numbers seems to fit for Kevin, as his perception of potential abuse was lessened if more people surrounded him.

Hope in Safety

Wondering how the idea of safety and hope might be related for Kevin, I ask: *At those times when you felt protected by having the other kids around, how was your hope impacted?* Kevin explains:

Well actually we were always outside and I think that had a lot to do with it. I loved the space and openness of the outdoors, especially because the abuse always happened behind closed doors and usually in the house... So being outside, I felt safe... I always knew that I could run and I think that really kept

me going... I guess in some ways it kept my hope going because I felt safe. Even today, I feel much safer outdoors.

Hope for Kevin, is associated with freedom from confinement or more specifically, the possibility of escaping to the outdoors in an effort to protect his well-being. Embedded in Kevin's account is the notion of control and the capacity to act on his own behalf. In believing that he could remain safe by "running" from potential danger, it seems Kevin could connect with his personal sense of agency, which inspired some hope for him as a child and continues to do so today.

A Friend

At this point in our conversation, I ask Kevin: *What else kept you going and moving beyond the abuse?* He reflects:

I did have one good friend. He was a loving man... very creative and well educated. He was accepting and didn't judge me. I think that relationship opened my eyes to a totally different experience of a person for me. Once I let some love in between us, we had a great friendship. He taught me that a loving connection was something I needed in my life. I learned that people can be loving and kind and they're not all going to abuse me in some way.

For Kevin, this friendship was, and perhaps still is transformative in that it highlighted possibilities he had not known existed. Not only did he experience a completely different interpersonal reality than he had in the past, Kevin also learned that a loving, trustworthy, and emotionally safe relationship was possible and important in his moving beyond the abuse.

Numbing the Pain

Wondering what else may have sustained him, I invite Kevin to continue sharing the ways in which he was able to get through the abuse:

I would say that for about fifteen years I used drugs to get through. That would be one way I coped with all the emotional turmoil, the pain, and the confusion. I was trying to numb the pain out and keep the strange emotions at bay, not necessarily a hopeful way of managing things. I started in junior high, as a teenager, and then just partied and got wasted all the time and kept doing that. It was a rough kind of life – living in the fast lane. People went for harder drugs... there was a lot of poverty, crime, and violence. A lot of my

friends were dying from OD'ing and I started seeing that it went nowhere other than down. And at the same time I had this sort of spiritual thing going on inside of me and so I decided to follow that instead. I decided that that was a more powerful calling than destroying myself. I never felt good about destroying myself. I guess I've always liked myself enough that I didn't want to wreck me. And after a while, I realized that my spiritual experiences were worth something. You know, they weren't just some freak things that I tried or did – there was something there.

Despite the temporary reprieve drugs provided Kevin, he came to a realization that this means of coping had little to offer his future. Instead, a meaningful spiritual connection served as alternative sustenance and support. Kevin's spiritual experiences held enough worth for him that he chose to connect with his self-value and decided to pursue his spiritual path, rather than "wreck" himself. I reflect to Kevin my amazement in his ability to identify and access a sense of self-worth, especially given his drug use and how the sexual abuse seemed to have threatened his sense of hope.

A Way of Connecting the Pieces: Hope and Spirituality

Other than drugs, Kevin's spiritual connection appears to have provided him with another means to cope and move forward in the midst of horrendous emotional pain. Interested in learning more, I ask Kevin: *How might your spirituality be connected to your sense of hope?*

A Warm and Fuzzy Feeling

He begins by sharing a contextual and historical background to his spiritual experiences:

My stepfather was a Native Indian and very much into the native spirituality – the sweat lodges, the teepees, and the fasting and all that stuff. So when I was really young I was involved with that, but I didn't know what it was. At the time, I didn't really value it or think there was much to it until later in life. From my experience, the Native Indian ceremonies are pretty extreme – like you go camping in the middle of nowhere in the mountains and put some willows together and make a little dome. And there would be some really old Indians there and a Shaman who didn't speak any English. They had a little medicine bag and pipes and they would perform ceremonies. So, basically you would fast for four days and four nights without any food or water. In the native tradition, the fasting and being in isolation is considered a return to the womb where you don't need anything and everything is looked after for you.

You don't need water or food and you are alone in this little dome. It was really hard, but somehow I got a sense of spirituality in that and I can tune into that.

He goes on to say:

I don't know that I would call it [spirituality] hope because it doesn't give me a direction... go here or do this... like this is my passion and I should be pursuing my dream. I don't have that at all. It's more like... hmm, how can I explain it... Imagine somebody who's never eaten a chocolate bar in their whole life and they've just eaten really bland food. Then all of a sudden you have a taste of that chocolate bar. So spirituality for me is like this sort of sweetness, this warm kind of fuzzy feeling that I can connect with and feel.

At this point in his discussion, Kevin describes how he understands hope and spirituality to be different. While Native Indian spirituality is connected to an inner sensation of warmth and “sweetness,” hope is anchored in a sense of “passion,” and the pursuit of “dreams.” I find it interesting how Kevin renders spirituality as an in-the-moment bodily and emotional experience that is akin to discovering the sensation of a sugary confection. Whereas, hope is a future oriented and a direction bound construct imbued with an emotional and passionate quality.

A Gentle Reminder

As Kevin continues to describe another spiritual experience there seems to be a shift in the initial distinctions he makes between hope and spirituality:

One day I was meditating on a wood deck overlooking the ocean when this hummingbird flew up to a flower right in front of me and then just stopped and actually landed on the flower. I watched the hummingbird grab some nectar from the flower and fly off. I was so amazed at how peaceful that was... I'd never seen that before. I didn't even know that a hummingbird ever stopped and landed, their wings are usually always fluttering. Those are the moments when I realize that there is peace and tranquility. These spiritual experiences are a reminder that there are gentle, loving places, and beings on the earth. Not everyone is an abusive monster and life is not always going to be bad and dark all the time... So, in some ways that's kind of like hope... knowing that the world can be tender and safe and just different.

For Kevin, this spiritual experience presented him with an unexpected piece of evidence related to the softness and peacefulness the world has to offer. Moments such as these appear to confirm and draw Kevin's attention to the aspects of life that are profoundly

wholesome and available to him. Further, the “gentle reminder” imparted by these spiritual experiences highlights the possibility that his present and even future may not be completely dimmed by the darkness of abuse, but that good is possible and accessible to him. Previous to this, it seems as though Kevin understood hope and spirituality to be different entities; however, here he begins to acknowledge that his awareness of those tranquil and gentle instances is connected to hope for him.

Restoring a Connection

Taking a cue from Kevin’s experience of watching the hummingbird, I invite him to share any other unexpected spiritual moments that may have inspired a sense of hope for him. He reflects:

One year we were fasting in the mountains on this sacred ground. I was walking along with the Elder and he looked up at and asked if I wanted to set up my dome in what looked like a bird’s nest kind of thing up in a tree and so I did. While I was fasting in this tree, it started raining in the middle of the night. I quickly realized that it was not really a good place to be because there was no roof and I didn’t know what to do. I got really scared and worried because I thought I was going to get soaked and it was getting cold. It kept raining all night and I remember feeling quite terrified, but then the rain became so gentle. It was a teeny weeny misty kind of rain that would just sort of touch your face and dry off right away. At that moment I felt so blessed because the rain was so gentle and loving. And here I was terrified of the rain and yet it was this beautiful force. In that experience I realized that the Spirit does love me and I have a place in the world somewhere.

What initially was an experience of anticipatory fear, turned out to be a “gentle and loving” instant, fundamentally connected to Kevin’s sense of worth and belonging.

Holding back the emotion, Kevin clears his throat and continues to share the impact of this experience:

It was a scary experience and I felt really alone up in that tree... and yet somehow I still felt kind of held. It was as if something was holding me in its arms. Those feelings give me some reference to love and the good stuff here. It’s almost like a window into another world where it’s full of love, hope, blessings and the good stuff. And every once in a while I can peek through that window and then I pull back and see the abuse and how it still affects me even now, and I realize there is a huge difference. In those moments I realize that there is a better way or a different way to live... Yeah, I can appreciate that

things might be different as time goes on. I think my spiritual experiences restore some connection for me with myself, with nature, with Spirit, and with the ability to feel all the good stuff about the Creator... I think that gives me some hope.

Feeling cared for while in the midst of isolation and fear offers Kevin “a window into another world” that is different from what he often experiences. Said simply, Kevin learns that there are other ways of living and being. In addition, through this spiritual experience, Kevin comes to different self-understanding and can appreciate that he *does* matter and is worthy of love and a good life. Not only does hope appear to take on a deeply meaningful connective quality with self, nature, and Spirit, hope also seems associated with the possibility that the future holds experiences other than those veiled by the abuse.

A Way of Connecting the Pieces: Hope and Relationship

Kevin’s spiritual connection makes me wonder about other relationships in his life and their potential influence on his hope. This becomes the focus of our conversation.

A Father’s Legacy

Kevin shares how his father comes to mind when he thinks of hope:

My father was absent in my life and I don’t know him at all. Some people think of it as a loss but I think it’s different than having a father and then losing a father. I never had one so I don’t know a lot of things that a father brings forward. In some ways I feel like that with hope and I wonder... Where does it come from? It’s as if I didn’t get a lot of hope instilled in me from my father when I was little. I guess I just feel lost and not really knowing how to get hope in my life.

Kevin believes not having his father in his life as a child somehow hindered the opportunity for hope to become “instilled” within him. He seems to understand hope as something that is given, obtained, and received within the context of relationship, and more specifically the relational channel of parent to child. As a researcher and psychologist, Kevin’s narrative draws my mind to question the connection between hope

and development and what this might mean for him. Erikson (1982) theorized that children's early attachment to their caregiver(s) was fundamental to the development of hope. When a child's emotional and physical needs are met, they learn to trust, which then contributes to their ability to hope and ultimately shapes their way of being in the world. This line of thinking seems fitting in relation to Kevin's narrative. As a result of not experiencing a meaningful connection to his father as child, Kevin feels "lost" in relation to hope and questions its origin and how to gain access to it.

Travelling to a Strange Country

At this point, Kevin explains how the aforementioned friendship influenced his understanding and experience of hope:

Experiencing that friendship after the abuse was as if I suddenly travelled to a different part of the world. Like I learned about this strange country that was about a loving friendship and I'd never been there before. I don't know if it gave me hope in any way, but it did change me and how I would be with people. I learned how to be more loving and supportive and closer to people. And maybe in a way it did give me some hope because I see people, especially women that I'm drawn to or attracted to and I think having hope is that I feel like I can connect with someone like that. That would have been a hope I got from him and that whole friendship.

Earlier in our conversation, Kevin seemed ambivalent about hope and its connection to this important friendship; however, he identifies that hope *was* indeed something he gained from it. Kevin learns that this friendship was instrumental in introducing him to what he now values in his life and what he views as possible for the future: the hope for a meaningful and close interpersonal connection. Here, the past informs possible hopes for the future – a future he had not initially been able to see given the abuse.

Hope for a Relationship

Kevin reflects on his hope to be in a relationship:

I feel very alone in my life and I don't know what to do with that. I don't know where the hope goes. I've hoped for a loving relationship but I still really haven't gotten it. For instance, say that I'm in a relationship with someone and we have a disagreement and I can see the old stuff coming up, either I'm triggered or she is and we end up haggling over things. A part of me really

loves this person and wants to connect with them in a loving and supportive way, but I'm seeing all this stuff in the way. And I find that it really shatters me and puts me in tears because I don't know how to get through that. I'm left thinking that I don't know how to relate to someone or communicate well or that I have too many issues and it's too painful. Sometimes I think that maybe I can't actually be in a relationship and love the way I'd like to. It feels like my heart is broken into little pieces and I keep trying to glue it back together again and I can't. So I end up back in that place of hopelessness because I don't know what I have or haven't done. I keep asking myself...Where do I have to go? Who do I need to see? Who do I pay money to so they can help me? Is there another book that I have to read? How do I get through this? I just end up getting lost again because I don't know what to do.

Kevin identifies a reoccurring pattern within his relationships and the consequent impact on his hope. At first, Kevin is hopeful in the possibility of engaging in a meaningful connection with someone. However when the relationship goes awry, this elicits feelings of doubt and pain for Kevin, invoked by his belief that relationship experiences early in life have impaired his relational capacities. This is followed by a tendency to give up and the emergence of hopelessness. As the hopelessness sets in, Kevin finds himself searching for understanding and direction, which only ensues a further sense of helplessness. When Kevin's hopes are goal focused or centered on experiencing a "loving relationship," his hope oscillates with the outcome of whether that hope is realized or not.

To Hope or Not to Hope

At this moment in time, Kevin begins to question whether he is deserving of having his hopes for a relationship fulfilled, or if his fate is fixed:

Sometimes I wonder if my hope for a loving relationship is a destiny thing because when I try to go for it, it just doesn't happen. I start thinking that maybe I can't have love in my life or I can't have the sweet stuff. So that's the thing about hope... maybe it's a destiny thing too... So maybe I should just say "to hell with hope" because I've felt so letdown in the past... why go into it again? I'm left asking myself... should I have hope that things are going to get better?...

Given that Kevin's attempts at a meaningful relationship have previously fallen through, he then considers if he should continue to hope that his situation will improve or if he

ought to abandon hope altogether. Engaging in a close interpersonal relationship seems to be a deep existential need that is not entirely under his control, which significantly challenges Kevin's hope for the future.

Pulled Back

During our conversation about his hopes for a future relationship, Kevin shares an interesting insight:

In thinking about hope right now, the biggest realization for me is that when I pursue my hope or my goal of being in a loving relationship and I work towards that and really try to make it happen, it pulls me back to my childhood experiences of life when it doesn't work out. I feel like a kid again who has these problems and doesn't have the power to do anything about them. Back then I really didn't have any deep connections with anyone, there was too much loss and hurt. I remember one counsellor told me that as a kid I couldn't really connect with people around me, it just wasn't safe enough. So the only really safe place for me to connect was up in the sky with the sun shining on me, like to just be off with the spirit all the time. It's hard trying to feel the spiritual, loving connection with whatever's up in the sky, the Creator, God, whatever you call it and then trying to have that with a person. I know I need to find a way around this and having that spiritual connection helps and is what guides me.

When Kevin's hopes go unfulfilled, it is as if he is transported to the all too familiar experience of isolation and helplessness with his spirituality being an important resource that offers him a sense of safety and support.

Resurfacing

At this point, I wonder how Kevin processes those feelings of being "pulled back." With this in mind, I ask: *What happens for you and your hope when a relationship doesn't work out?* He says:

It takes me and any sort of hope a long time to resurface after a relationship ends... It is really hard for me to process it. But after a while I can say okay, "I think I can do this and I'm not a horrible creature... I'm a good person." When I finally get my confidence back again, I feel like I can put myself out there and that it's possible that someone else will love me and that I can share love with them... but it takes many months for that to happen.

Kevin's eventual ability to "resurface" from an unsuccessful intimate relationship experience seems to connect hope to a positive sense of self. When he returns to a place

of feeling self-confident and perceiving himself as worthy of the good things in life, Kevin becomes open to the possibility that his hope to be loved might materialize.

Making Sense of the Contrasting Parts

Kevin glances down at a photo in his hand. He hands it to me and shares:

This one represents the sexual abuse and how hard it's been for me to make sense of it all...

The Extremes of Abuse

He goes on to say... *Yeah, it's really all about contrast...*



Figure 14: Contrast magnified.

I took this picture with the intention of capturing the contrast and extremes I often feel and get stuck in. Looking at this, it's easy to see the contrast in size between this God-awful ugly and dirty car tire and this little toy car. I feel a sense of hope knowing that the little hot rod is actually pretty cool and beautiful. While there is that bit of hope, I'm also reminded of the huge imbalance of power and injustice here. It's like the toy represents a beautiful child who is essentially being squeezed or run over by abuse. There is a real sense of hopelessness in that because as a kid, I didn't have a choice... I couldn't say 'no'... I was up against something that was going to win and have its way with me. If you look closely, you can see that the toy car can't really move and doesn't have the freedom to drive off. I connect with the impossibility of it all. As an adult recovering from sexual abuse, the question is still in my head... "How do I deal with all these feelings?" It's like I have this photo's emotion in me but I don't know what to do with it all and it's crippling...

Though an adult now, Kevin continues to struggle with a sense of entrapment, and futility connected to his childhood experiences. Despite the “bit of hope” Kevin can see in relation to the toy car in the photo and ultimately in himself as a child, the inability to have protected himself from the abuse leaves him feeling hopeless. Kevin finds himself somewhat helpless and in a state of paralysis when attempting to make sense of the lingering and overwhelming emotions associated to his experience of abuse.

Seeking Harmony in Hope

Emotion begins to visibly surface, as Kevin further explains the sense of contrast in his experience and understanding of hope and hopelessness:

The whole thing about hope is that it has many facets... Sometimes I feel hopelessness and other times I feel hope. In talking with you now, I've realized that part of me doesn't believe in hope anymore... but yet another part, still has hope. So, it's as if hope is a part of my life as much as I draw a blank around it sometimes. And I'm glad that hope is still there... But it feels like its fragmented and all over the place. Nothing is integrated and both seem to be in such contrast [long pause]... I haven't found a way to live in harmony with those parts of me and I kind of bounce between hopelessness and hope.

In light of Kevin's description of his disjointed perception of hope, I am drawn to his in-the-moment discovery that hope is indeed still present for him. Despite Kevin's fragmented experience of hope, he is pleased that hope remains to be a part of his life, though he seeks a more integrated experience of it.

Hope and Hopelessness in Co-Existence

Kevin goes on to describe his experience of living with both hope and hopelessness:

Sometimes I'll be in this place feeling no hope, a lot of despair, darkness, you know – and then there's times where I'll wake up in the morning and burn some sage or sweet grass and smudge and pray and then feel okay. I get this sort of warm feeling that grounds me and makes me feel like I have a safe home somewhere... It's hard to have that kind of contrast because if you talk to people about it then they kind of look at you like you're weird, like they don't understand what it's like to have a ton of hopelessness and yet a little bit of hope and be walking through life carrying all that stuff. So, I'm in a place of a

bit of turmoil and restlessness. I don't know where or how to fix that, but the only thing that seems to help or make things okay... is my spirituality.

It seems confusing, frustrating and somewhat isolating for Kevin to live with both experiences of hope and hopelessness. While he experiences both as being in extreme contrast, they nonetheless co-exist. Kevin's spiritual connection seems to be the only way in which he finds a sense of safety and grounding amidst the "turmoil" of experiencing both hope and hopelessness.

Re-examining the Re-construction Process

As our conversation unfolds, it becomes apparent to me that in many ways, Kevin links hope to the possibility of further healing from his experiences of sexual abuse. With this in mind, I ask Kevin: *I'm wondering if you could share your experience of healing or understanding the abuse and how that might be connected to hope for you?*

Avenues to Healing

In response to my question, Kevin reflects:

In my life, I seem to be searching for ways to heal from all my past abuse and that's really my hope. So, aside from survival or laying low and crawling under a rock, I seem to be trying to reach out and grow inside... I'm trying to find the right tools, the right people that will help me. I've spent I don't know how many thousands of dollars on psychologists, group therapy, personal growth workshops, and self-help books. I keep thinking that I just need to find the right tool... Maybe it's not hypnosis, maybe it's EMDR or maybe its guided meditation. And I go through all that and just end up falling flat on my face and giving up. I guess I'm finding life pretty difficult... I constantly question myself and I think it kind of destroys the hope because I'm always in this place of desperation. I don't know what to do, how to change myself or how I feel.

Despite Kevin's relentless search for the right "tool," none of his chosen paths to healing from the abuse have provided him with what he wants or hopes for. His struggle to affect the desired changes in his life and the unyielding search for ways to heal not only takes a toll on Kevin's hope, but it also brings about frustration and confusion. As I listen to Kevin, I can hear that sense of desperation and helplessness in his voice. I take a moment to reflect on the thoughts that surface for me. It seems that when hope for Kevin is

focused on finding *the* way to heal and find a resolution to his past, he experiences a sense of instability, uncertainty, and ultimately his engagement with hope itself becomes a struggle.

Healing Through Restoration

In Kevin's quest to capture images of his hope in healing from the abuse, he was inspired to take several photographs of a dismembered car:



Figure 15: Gutted.

The pick-your-part is kind of an eerie place. The wind is blowing, it's very quiet, and there are all sorts of strange smells of cars and gasoline. Despite that, when I got there, I was like "wow... this is a gold mine!" At first glance, most people just see junk, but I can see the gold... I can see the worth and value in all of these parts. As a kid, I loved knick knacks, car parts and stuff I could find and tinker with. In some ways there is a sense of hope because it's like: "I'm looking for that model, or part and it's here!" It can be found... It was interesting though... because after being there for a while, I got to really thinking about it and I was taken to a few places emotionally. I noticed that I was starting to feel like this car... Like I was looking at the car and feeling sad because it's destroyed... So, I went from feeling really happy, thinking this is great... there are all these good parts... to feeling very sad.

What begins as a positive and hope-inspiring experience at the yard ends on a difficult note. Initially, Kevin is connected to the hope that the parts he searches for can be found; however, he comes to the realization that the car itself is destroyed. The car takes on a symbolic representation of how Kevin also feels broken or "destroyed". Here, I get the sense that Kevin's memories of his childhood abuse remain close to the surface for him. He goes on to reflect:

If you look closely at this picture, it's hilarious... the engine is halfway up in the air, a fender is missing, and all sorts of parts have been pulled off. So I am left with the question: "Should I embrace hope and say okay maybe someday a car collector will come along and pull this car out of the junk yard and actually rebuild and restore it to what it was?" And then a part of me doesn't know about that... I guess it could be done, but it would take a ton of work. I don't know that I found much hope in this situation or picture. The amount of work involved to go ahead and get the pieces to put this back together again seems almost impossible... like it's too much to ask... I mean there is a teeny tiny bit of hope, but I have to say that the overwhelming feeling is hopelessness...

Kevin initially considers the possibility of reconstructing the car to its original form and I suspect perhaps more specifically – the possibility or the hope that he himself might be “restore[d].” Although Kevin holds some hope in the rebuilding process, his connection to hopelessness proves stronger. At this point in our conversation, Kevin looks as though he is lost in silent reflection. After a few moments, I invite him to share his thoughts.

Is This the Way to Heal?

Kevin responds by revealing several interesting insights about hope and the healing process itself:

There are times when I feel like this car, sitting there with all my pieces and parts stripped off me. In some ways I think I have a great motor, but I feel incomplete as a person. I guess what's coming up about the whole healing process for me is that it has been about reclaiming the parts that other people took from me when I was abused. So, I've been trying to put my fragmented pieces back together again through counselling, the group work and the workshops... I guess the hope is that it can be done... but there's another part that wonders if that's really the way to heal... to grab all these little parts and pieces and put them back together. There's a great uncertainty about how I'm going to heal or how that really works, even though I've done a lot of work in therapy. I guess I still don't have a lot of confidence in the whole process of recovery or healing. I don't know if it really works yet or not. So I can bounce between, "Oh yeah, I think it's going to work... it's taking me somewhere ... to oh my God, this is never going to end... it's been umpteen years and I'm still here trying to gather the missing parts of myself... that's when the I just give up and hopelessness sets in.

A shift takes place in Kevin's narrative from the rebuilding and restoration process, as it pertains to the image of the car (Figure 15: Gutted), to exploring hope and its connection to his personal healing. Kevin has a keen sense that he is somehow less-than as a person because of the abuse he endured as a child. He poignantly indicates feeling as though

there are key aspects of himself that have been “stripped” away and are “missing.” While on some level, Kevin acknowledges the presence of positive and even “great” parts of who he is, this is often overshadowed by a strong sense of feeling incomplete.

Kevin seems to be contemplating several different, but related aspects of what he perceives as the healing process for himself. He wonders if healing is in fact about finding his missing parts and piecing himself together. Furthermore, Kevin questions the possibility of another way to understand and access healing altogether. Despite all that Kevin has tried in the past, there is a distinct feeling of stagnation related to his healing, thereby bringing about feelings of despair.

Stepping Out

At this point, Kevin closely examines another photo before going on. As he passes it to me, he indicates that the image further highlights his attempt at finding a way to heal:



Figure 16: A wasteland.

I felt the need to take a picture of the top of all these cars because it's kind of like a wasteland filled with people who've been abused. There are hundreds of cars here and they've all been violated. I really connected with the sheer number of people who've experienced childhood sexual abuse. So much so, that it brought me to tears... Yeah, it took me to a place of hopelessness... At the time, the only hope I could connect with was to know that I could just leave the wrecking yard. I've been hanging around this absurd situation for years trying to figure my way out of it, find those pieces of myself... basically I've been trying to live in it and solve it. But in reality, this little microcosm is really an unsolved kind of place. What I'm realizing in talking about this photo is that the real solution is to just step out of it and leave this wreckage altogether,

rather than try to survive and attempt to find the little crumbs of happiness and live in it.... Knowing that I have a choice and can maybe find a completely different way to heal gives me a lot of hope. Yeah, having the choice to get out of here gives me a lot of hope.

For Kevin, the overwhelming experience of connecting with the countless victims of sexual abuse triggers a sense of hopelessness. He comes to the understanding that leaving the “yard” of his personal struggle with the abuse is a possible route to accessing hope. The realization that he is no longer confined to the wrecking yard, seems to have shifted Kevin out of his need to “live,” “solve,” and find the morsels of happiness amidst the “wreckage.” Rather than attempting to salvage his missing pieces or try to make sense of his abuse experiences, Kevin’s hope begins to take on a different focus (i.e., to leave that “unsolvable” place). In discovering the freedom he has to make the choice of “step[ping] out” of the “wasteland,” Kevin’s hope is uplifted and transformed. It is as if, Kevin’s focus has shifted from a past clouded by loss, pain, and confusion, to a future offering him possibility and alternative paths to healing. He goes on to say:

Yeah, it’s kind of interesting actually... Taking this picture and now talking about it has really done something for me and my thought process. I don’t know that I expected that but I’m finding it pretty neat and quite hopeful really...

Capturing the image (Figure 16: A wasteland), and further reflecting on the significance of this photo seems to have deeply and unexpectedly inspired Kevin’s hope. At this point, I’m reminded of the often reported profound value of photography on the meaning making process (Turner & Cox, 2004).

Finding Hope in Leaving the Wreckage

I find it noteworthy that subsequent to Kevin’s choice to leave the “wreckage,” our conversation takes on a decidedly more focused exploration of the features he deems integral to hope.

A Connection to Life and Beauty

Kevin begins by sharing a childhood story that vividly captures his understanding of hope and its connection to life:

Since taking these pictures for this research, I've been looking at some of my old pictures and I found one of me on my second birthday. There was this cake on the kitchen table and I was overjoyed and bouncing around trying to climb up on the table. My grandmother went hysterical and pulled me off, but I would just leap back up on the chair and keep my face an inch away from the cake. I remember feeling happy and cheerful... that to me is kind of like hope. It's an experience of connection to life being about the beautiful and peaceful things... the treats, the sweet stuff, the gifts, and the abundance... that's hope to me.

Kevin's animated description of this memory seems to spur on a sense of excitement and energy within him. In relation to his story, hope is about noticing and appreciating the in-the-moment "sweet" delights life has to offer and indulging in those positive and blissful experiences. I find it interesting that the invitation of taking photos of hope has facilitated a re-connection to Kevin's childhood memories that were not imbued by abuse.

He goes on to explain how he understands beauty as being a facet of hope:

Beauty is the one thing that contrasts all the dark stuff in my life... it's inspiring, it's positive, and hope giving. When I experience the beauty in life like that cake, or in nature, or even when I see a beautiful woman, I feel a shift in my body... you know, I feel uplifted, hopeful, and kind of woken up to the world.

When Kevin connects to what he regards as beautiful, both aesthetically and experientially, this seems to emotionally elevate him. Considering that many of Kevin's past life experiences are shrouded in darkness, his awareness of the beauty around him casts a ray of light that seems to lift his spirits and awaken his hope. Here, I become aware of a notable difference in Kevin's orientation to hope. When Kevin connects to hope as a present-focused experience of the good in life, as opposed to the goal of healing from the abuse, hope seems to be more available to him.

A Belief in the Possible

Kevin continues to reveal how he understands hope to be a belief in the possible:

I think hope is sometimes a couple of threads that you need to hold on to when there isn't a lot of hope. But more than that, hope is a belief that one day things can get better and be better. So that would mean that it's possible to heal, that I can find the resources and that I'm not permanently however I am.

While hope seems to have a fragile and delicate quality, Kevin appears to understand it as something that is called upon and necessary during times when “there isn't a lot of hope.”

He indicates that hope is a belief that it is possible for circumstances to change and improve.

Here for a Reason

Intrigued by Kevin's description of hope as a belief that the future holds possibility, I invite him to explore this further:

There are times when I feel like there's something greater than me. I don't really know what my higher purpose is, but I feel that I'm here for a reason. I mean, if all the abuse was just the Gods wanting to torture me and have some fun watching a little kid terrified and screaming... if that's what they wanted to do, they could've equally and just as easily killed me. But they haven't. I'm alive. So maybe I'm here to, I don't know...to take some of the bad... If I can heal from the abuse and not do it to others... and maybe even help other survivors, then hey... I'm bringing something good to the world and that gives me a great deal of hope.

Given Kevin's awareness and ability to connect to something “greater” or outside of himself, this in turn seems to highlight an existential purpose. He begins to see that his life is more than just the abuse. In Kevin's quest to heal, he acknowledges his capacity to offer something of himself to the world, in a good way, which appears to incite a sense of hope.

The Courage to Risk it

Kevin turns his attention to the remaining two photos in his hand and takes a momentary pause. As he places one of the photographs on the table between us, he

mentions, *I got some interesting insights about hope when I took this one* (Figure 17:

Hope in nature). In relation to the image he says:



Figure 17: Hope in nature.

Winter was just finally clearing up and these plants had just popped out of the ground. I guess I was moved by these plants because I saw them as being very vulnerable. It could have still snowed and winter wasn't quite over yet... you just never know what could happen. But despite that, these plants took all of their energy and resources and just said: "Hey, I'm gonna give'er and bloom" and I got a sense of hope in that... They didn't just sit there paralyzed by fear of what could happen. So, in a way these silly little plants have hope because each of them took a risk and had the courage to come up out of the ground. It's like they have a bit of trust in the universe. I guess I was in awe of that. It's like these plants know a bit more than I do as far as how to live life. If it were me, I'd probably just sit in the ground and say "To hell with this... because last time I got mowed or something ate me... so that's it... I'm going to stay in the ground and just stay in that paralyzed state." After being abused it's really hard to take those risks in life because there are so many unknowns and things have just not worked out in the past for me.

Once again, Kevin's account of hope brings to mind the power and usefulness of metaphor and photography as a means of illuminating hope. By way of this photo, Kevin connects with the notion that despite the uncertainty of an undetermined future, there can be a sense of trust in the universe and the existence of good in the world. The idea of trust seems to be fundamental to Kevin's hope. Although he struggles with the notion of risk given his experiences of abuse, I get the sense that Kevin considers an alternative way of living and being in the world in where trust and hope are possible.

Growth and Looking Forward

Kevin continues to share how these budding plants contribute to his understanding of hope:

I sometimes feel that I'm almost in a winter-like state, where I'm kind of frozen and nothing's really moving or growing. And a lot of times, that's where I am emotionally. I guess in some ways I took this photo because I wanted leave the winter behind. When I saw these green plants suddenly come up out of the ground, it was like, "oh wow... there's newness... there's growth..." I'm hoping to get on with my life, because I feel like the abuse stuff has been like a cold, miserable, and bitter winter. So, hope for me is about growth and looking forward because the seasons will change... things will change. It was interesting because after taking this picture, I went on a mission to find the first flower in the city [laughs]. I knew the blossoms were about to flower, so I went looking.

Witnessing these plants make their debut in the world seems to have jolted Kevin out of that "winter-like state" he sometimes finds himself in. For him, hope is rooted in "growth," "change," and a projection forward into the future. Believing that change is on the horizon seems to have fuelled Kevin's hope at the time of taking the photo. So much so, that these budding plants inspired him to look for further signs of hope. He hands me the last photo and says:

I was overjoyed when I found this first tulip with the sun shining on it and I think this was the most hope I was able to find...



Figure 18: First blossom of hope.

Kevin continues to search, but this time he searches for signs of hope rather than the "missing pieces" he has tirelessly looked for in the past. As our time comes to what feels

like a natural end, we both took a moment to admire this one blossom of hope basking in the sun.

Chapter Eight: Conversations on Hope with Jason

Before I immerse myself in organizing and composing Jason's narrative of hope, I revisit several journal entries I had written both during and shortly after our research meetings. The following paragraph is a journal excerpt summarizing my early impressions gleaned from my conversations with Jason:

For Jason, hope is related to knowing that he has done everything in his power to ensure that his sons will experience a childhood without abuse. Hope becomes challenged with the acknowledgment that sexual abuse is still prevalent and as a way of dealing with that "low" hope, Jason takes action leading to an increased experience of hope. Hopelessness was predominant during the abuse, with intermittent experiences of hope at times he felt safe within his family. Turning his attention outward to alcohol and other people in his life were the ways in which Jason endured the pain associated with the abuse. Jason's relationship with his children is a significant source of hope and something he never seems to disregard or neglect. In the future, Jason hopes for a shared awareness and understanding of childhood sexual abuse.

As I read and reread the passage above, I cannot help but feel as though something very integral is missing from these reflections. While at first it seems rather unclear what particular element is absent, with some time and further thought, it dawns on me. The piece that feels lacking to me is a *felt* understanding or appreciation of Jason's sense of hope in relation to his children: an aspect of his hope that will later be highlighted in his narrative account. In becoming a mother myself since these research conversations, my experience of hope has intensified, deepened, and become more enriched. I can wholeheartedly say that motherhood has been one of the most poignant and meaningful experiences of hope in my life. Keeping in mind that my interpretations of participants' accounts, including Jason's, is continually informed and filtered through my own life experiences and position in the world, I prepare to re-engage with his transcript beginning with an exploration of the meaning of hope for him.

Meanings of Hope

As we settle in the office and ready ourselves for our conversation, Jason shares having anticipated our discussion on hope for weeks. As such, I feel it might be best to

provide Jason the opportunity to begin a dialogue of hope in whatever way he feels inclined, and so I invite him to consider the following question: *When you hear the word hope, what comes to mind?*

Traversing the Highs and Lows of Hope

In our exploration of this question, I learn that Jason understands hope to be somewhat polar in nature and characterized by experiences of high hope and low hope:

For me it's really like two ends of the spectrum. When I think of hope, I can see that there are a lot of good things out there. Like you know, the chain has been broken. The sexual abuse that I experienced won't be repeated with my children so that's hopeful for me to know that. But then hope also goes to the extreme other end. There are a lot of days that I wake up and I see the things that are bad in the world and then I feel kind of hopeless... I don't really find a middle ground when it comes to hope and sexual abuse... it's either really high or really low...

When specifically related to childhood sexual abuse, Jason appears to be well acquainted with either hope or hopelessness. No sense of a “middle ground” or liminal space seems to exist between the two experiences. Jason’s narrative here also hints at the idea of hope being connected to a perspectival look at the world. Depending on Jason’s perceptions or what he takes notice of (i.e., children are safe from sexual abuse or conversely the “bad [things] in the world”), this seems to impact his connection to hope.

The Chain Has Been Broken: Hope at its Highest

Feeling the need to get a better understanding of both “ends of the spectrum,” I ask:

Can you help me understand what you mean by the “chain has been broken” and how that relates to “high” hope? He says:

At first I was very hesitant to have children really because of the abuse. I just didn't know how that would affect me as a father but I knew I didn't want to hurt my children or for them to go through what I went through. And it's interesting because once we had our first baby boy, it was like, “Okay, now I definitely need to seek help to get to the root of this and deal with the abuse, the depression, and the anger so that it DOES stop with me.” So, I became really determined to process that all and did a lot of work in counselling. Now, it's really encouraging to me because I feel that even though I was sexually abused, it doesn't go beyond me. Knowing that my two boys will never feel

those negative feelings that I did because I will never abuse them or hurt them like that... knowing that, is extremely important to me and really encouraging.

Jason's deep care, concern, and hope for his children rings clear to me in this portion of his narrative and for a moment, I too, connect to the love and hope I hold for my own sons. I go on to note that in light of the abuse Jason endured as a child, this seems to have significantly contributed to feeling both an initial trepidation, as well as a strong desire to protect his children from similar experiences. I get the impression that by processing and gaining understanding around his past, this has ignited an inner feeling of empowerment and hope for Jason knowing that he has worked hard to prevent the duplication of his abuse experiences. At this point, I am reminded that it was Jason's father who sexually abused him. This makes me think that perhaps a part of his determination to break the "chain" of abuse comes from a deep desire to be a different father to his children than his own father was to him.

Before going on to explore Jason's experience of "low" hope, I mention my interest in understanding his use of the word "encouraging" and ask him to clarify if, and how, that particular term might be connected to hope for him. To this he replies:

Actually I do seem to put those together, don't I? I guess they're quite interconnected for me... It's hard to explain, but they do go together for me. When I think of encouragement or hope, they both mean believing that a situation or things in general can be better... It's not like hope has to only look or even be a certain thing, it's more than that... it's believing that change is possible and can happen.

Not only are the concepts of hope and encouragement interrelated, it seems that they both hold a similar meaning for Jason. Both are associated with a future oriented belief that circumstances can be improved or positively enhanced. In addition, I find it particularly striking how Jason speaks to the multiple forms or manifestations of hope. Rather than hope being singular in nature or having to "look or even be a certain thing," it seems that Jason understands hope to be relatively broad in meaning and anchored in the possibility of change.

Turning Low Hope into Action

With a clearer sense of the relationship between the terms hope and encouragement, we go on to have a conversation of Jason's "low" hope experiences:

I guess I'm more skeptical when I look at other people and families and it looks like everything is nice and dandy, but I question: "What's really happening when the door closes from the outside world? What's really going on there?" I hope for the best, even though I have to come to grips that what happened to me still happens to other children all the time... it really bothers me and makes me angry at times... yeah, it lowers my hope... But what I've tried to do more recently in my life, and since having my own children, is to become a lot more vocal. You know, I don't mind making the odd comment, even to strangers, and not to embarrass the parents or anything, but I have in the past, stood by some father in a playground and said, "I remember my dad saying those words to me and it really hurt... perhaps you should try this"... and in most cases, they tell me to get lost or something and that's fine and I do... I leave... It's amazing how since I've had my two boys, I really observe people's parenting skills and I can honestly say that I want the best for those children.

And so when they tell you to get lost, what happens for you and your hope?

Actually it's okay because I know the seed has been planted and so... maybe down the road something I might have said will trigger a change for that person... at least that's the hope.

In listening to Jason, it makes me wonder if that skepticism and mistrust in the seemingly positive outward appearance of other families is possibly a reflection of his experience within his own family during the years of abuse. While I did not inquire about this during our conversation, it is a thought that has since surfaced. Another significant aspect in Jason's account is an apparent tension between "hoping for the best" and the acceptance that childhood sexual abuse is still prevalent. In comparison to Jason's earlier description of hope being opposing or polar in nature, here I get the sense that his experience of hope is much more complex and less distinctly "high" or "low." Out of this tension between hope and the acknowledgment of ongoing abuse, Jason chooses an active rather than a passive role by becoming an advocate for children in general with the hope that at some point in the future, his efforts to act on children's behalf will contribute to

change. It seems particularly noteworthy that despite direct challenge and resistance, Jason's hope endures nonetheless.

Hope and Abuse

After exploring Jason's experiences of both "high" and "low" hope, we then enter into the realm of hope and abuse. As I mention my interest in understanding how hope and his experience of sexual abuse might be connected, I get the impression from Jason's deep and laboured breath that we may be tapping into a vulnerable area for him to talk about. With the intention of acknowledging the potential difficulty, I remind him to only share what is comfortable and to take all the time he needs. Jason shifts in his chair and takes another deep breath as if grounding himself before moving into this time of his life. He assures me he is fine and goes on to describe his experience of hope over the course of more than ten years of ongoing sexual abuse by his father.

The Good and Bad Days

Similar to Jason's initial account of high and low hope; it appears, that his connection to hope during the abuse was either present or relatively absent:

The abuse started when I was four and after that... it became all that I knew... [pause] During and right after each time I was abused, it obviously felt awful... But you know days later if we were doing something enjoyable as a family, then there would be a little bit of hope that... "Oh, okay... today is a good day." So there were quite a few good days, but of course there were also the bad days when the abuse happened. And during those bad days, there was a lot of fear. I felt alone and really there wasn't much hope about anything. It was more a hopeless time because I couldn't do anything really to stop it and I never knew if and when something might change and get better or even get worse.

There is a deep sense of sadness that seems to weigh heavily on Jason as he describes his experience of hopelessness during the abuse. The momentary hope Jason experiences as a child is connected to feeling a sense of safety and enjoyment within his familial relationships. It is within those moments that Jason appears to have also experienced some relief that the abuse was not imminent, at least in the short-term. In contrast, fear,

isolation, helplessness, and a future full of unknowns were associated with hopelessness and dominant during the “bad days.”

Hope and Choice

At this point in our conversation, Jason goes on to outline his experience of hope in relation to choice, both as a child and now as an adult:

Growing up I had no choice about anything really... having no choice or control about anything as a child... especially the abuse, made it difficult to hold onto the little hope I might have had on the good days. Sure I had a choice of my friends at school and stuff like that, but that was it... it wasn't really about the important stuff like the abuse or anything like that [pause]... Years later my entire life now is about choice and it feels good to have that control. In my own family, I know enough and can choose which people I allow into my life. Things are up to me now. So, I feel good that way, it's really very hopeful and encouraging for me.

The lack of choice and control in childhood and particularly in regards to the abuse seems to have greatly challenged Jason's ability to stay connected to the slight hope he experienced growing up. Despite having some choice in selecting his peers in school, this does not appear to be the kind of agency that would have been most meaningful to Jason's sense of hope. Fast forward to the present day, Jason is now in a place where he has the capacity to make choices that support his own well-being and safety with others, which seems to inspire a great deal of hope for him. As I reflect on Jason's narrative, I find it extremely hopeful that the agency and choice Jason once lost or was robbed of, as a result of the abuse, is now something he has evidently reclaimed.

Getting Through

Considering Jason's limited ability to act on his own behalf as a child, I begin to wonder how he managed to move forward during that time in his life. I share this query with Jason, which takes our conversation into a further exploration of the ways in which he endured the many years of sexual abuse.

Suppressing the Negative

Jason begins by describing how he was able to navigate through much of his childhood and adulthood by numbing the emotional pain that often surfaced:

During the actual abuse, I went into survival mode to protect myself from what was happening and lessen the impact any way I could. Like for instance, I would find peace and comfort in water. It was a retreat to get into the shower or bathtub and just wash away the unwanted things. Then as I was growing up, like between grades 6 through to grade 10, I drank a lot and would even hide it in my locker at school. The alcohol really worked to lessen the hurt and it was more of a numbing thing. It gave me something else to focus my energy on instead of really feeling the pain I was in... And by about grade 7, I also became an entertainer. I was the one who would make everyone else feel good and make them laugh and I would draw on their positive energy and laughter to make myself feel better. That really carried me through my school years and I guess made me feel like I could get up every day... Once school was over, I didn't feel I had much of a direction in life, so I thought I better get married so that I have someone else to focus on. So, I got married when I was 20... Then throughout my twenties, I focused on working hard and providing for my wife at the time. It made me feel good to provide for her and like that I could suppress all the negative feelings and just keep going day after day...

Jason's insightful description of the various means he utilized to survive throughout the years sheds some light on the influence of the abuse in his life and the importance of keeping his emotions at bay. While Jason does not explicitly make a mention of hope, it seems that in finding other things or other people to invest his energy in, he was able to continue on and face another day. Interested in learning more explicitly about hope, I invite Jason to further share his thoughts about hope and its potential connection to what "carried [him] through the years." He goes on to reflect:

Well ... there wasn't much hope at all... the drinking just helped me keep going without really looking at what I was going through. In terms of providing for others and especially my wife... it made me feel really good to make my wife happy and feel special and loved. I guess I was trying to show her love the best way I could. Even if I wasn't really happy, I didn't express that to her, I just kept it all hidden.

What did that do to your hope, to keep that all hidden?

It was a pretty hopeless time really. There were many times I would ask myself, "Is this it? Is this all there is to life?" You know I work 50, 60, 70 hours a week and make sure that everyone else has what they need and I really don't feel like I matter as a person. My role is to work and provide. And don't get me wrong,

it did make me feel good to provide, but there wasn't much hope in my life then... Yeah, it was a very hopeless time for me because I didn't see another alternative or even think I was good enough to experience any real happiness. During that whole time, I didn't feel like I had much control or even like I had much of a say in my life. I was either really angry or depressed on the inside, but was smiling on the outside. It wasn't until I was about 29, when I felt like I just couldn't hold it in anymore...

Jason's methods of coping and surviving, while purposeful, does not appear to engender a sense of hope, but rather hopelessness. Although Jason experiences positive feelings in relation to taking care of others, such as his wife, this does not sustain him in the long-run and leaves him essentially depleted of his own hope and disconnection to his sense of purpose and self-worth. Moreover, hopelessness for Jason seems to be about a loss of connection to self over time, thereby hindering his ability to voice his experiences and have influence in his own life.

Finding His Voice

Interested in gaining a better understanding of what Jason means by no longer being able to "hold it in anymore," I ask him to further describe this experience. He explains:

Well, I finally came to a boiling point where I just couldn't contain my emotions anymore. So I ended up seeing a counsellor that was able to help me to get to the root of what I was going through. At that point, I can say that I had a lot of hope because I wasn't going to let things carry on as they were. I had to start speaking what I was feeling and so I finally said to my wife, "No, this isn't working, I'm not happy." I finally came to the place where I wanted things not only for others, but for me too. When I actually decided that I AM worthy and I DO have a say in my life, I felt free and hopeful for the first time in my life.

After years of not fully attending to his own needs, Jason is finally able to honour himself and engage in self-expression, which incites a great deal of hope for him. Together with the realization that his future could be different and better, Jason seems to have experienced a renewed sense of self-worth, freedom, and hope.

Important Aspects to Hope

At this point, I become aware of a question that has surfaced for me several times throughout our conversation, but I have yet had the opportunity to inquire about. As such, I invite Jason to describe the features of hope he perceives to be key and meaningful to him.

Finding Balance

Jason begins by explaining the importance of finding a sense of balance in his life and its connection to hope:

While I'm still focused on trying to provide for my boys, I now try to do things for myself too and that is important to feeling hopeful and encouraged. Like a few years ago, I took some flying lessons, which I really loved. So even though I know I need to give my boys what I can so that they have a good start in life, at the same time, I'm making short and long term goals for myself. It doesn't have to be a big thing, it could be something like getting a different rating on my pilot's license or something, but I find it really encouraging to do those little things for myself.

Attaining a sense of balance by engaging in activities Jason has a passion for without losing sight of his responsibilities to his children appears to be a significant aspect to his experience of hope. His brief mention of short- and long-term goals holds my attention and therefore, I invite Jason to tell me a bit more about the potential relationship between goals and hope for him.

Goals Just Beyond Reach

Jason goes on to share his understanding of goals and their importance to his hope:

I really like to feel challenged and so I always try to set up my goals like that... just a little bit out of reach. Like for instance, I just bought a house and I didn't think I would ever pay that much for a house, but I wanted to see if I could do it. And for me it was a challenge to figure how to do it, but it gave me a direction to go in. It's like I feel that encouragement in focusing on my goals and trying to attain them. Yeah, I find hope in planning and attaining my goals. And when I do reach my goals, it makes me feel really good and excited ... It's funny because now that I'm about to get possession of it, I'm already planning for something different. Like now I am thinking maybe I will start

my own business or do something else that will make me stretch a little more but in a different area of my life.

While setting goals for himself is an important aspect of hope for Jason, it seems that the goal, itself, needs to have an attainable degree of difficulty attached to it. In other words, Jason chooses goals (i.e., buying his house) he thinks he may be able to attain, however, he is not completely sure. This brings to mind the work of Bruininks and Malle (2005), researchers in the field of hope studies. Specifically, they assert that being hopeful enables an individual to envision a positive outcome even in the presence of uncertainty or one's present inability to reach the desired outcome. This assertion seems to fit with Jason's comment about his goals being "just a little bit out of reach." Furthermore, in taking on these challenging goals, Jason appears to gain a sense of pleasure and pride when he accomplishes them, especially in light of their inherent uncertainty. Hope or a feeling of encouragement also seems to be connected to focusing on the process of planning and working towards his goals, as well as arriving at the final outcome. I find it noteworthy that when Jason reaches his goals, this renders him motivated to continue to plan for his future and further engage with hope in the goal setting process.

Support of Others

Jason continues to highlight how feeling accountable to others when working towards his goals is an important feature to his experience of hope:

When I set up my goals, I find being accountable to someone else whether it's a counsellor or a close friend or whoever is crucial. It's very easy to stay in those negative feelings or that depressed state and not really do anything... so anytime I set a goal, I end up telling 5 or 6 people at least so that they can constantly remind me... "Hey, how it is that goal going?" I think by telling other people you automatically have a support system around you. So for me, goal setting whether those goals are big or small and staying accountable to others is important to how hope works in my life.

By declaring or sharing his goals with others, this keeps Jason focused and helps prevent him from falling prey to experiencing feelings of negativity. Embedded in Jason's narrative, is the aspect of relationship. Having others in his life who are personally

invested and who care about Jason seems to be closely associated to hope for him. I wonder if recruiting others to share and support his hope serves a deeper purpose other than solely staying accountable to his goals. Including others in his goal setting process seems to provide Jason with an opportunity to create meaningful and emotionally connective relationships. Briefly I am reminded by Weingarten's (2007) thoughts on hope as a practice that is *done* with others in the context of community. I make a quick note of the parallel I see between Jason's narrative and Weingarten's work, both of which seem to underscore the importance of having others' support in the process of attaining goals. With these thoughts at the forefront of my mind, I ask Jason: *Tell me more a bit more about how having a support system or interpersonal relationships in general might be important to hope for you?*

Sources of Hope

To my question, Jason responds: *They are the foundation of my hope...* At this point we go on to have a conversation of the various relationships and people who have contributed to his understanding and experience of hope throughout his life.

Building a Solid Foundation of Hope

Jason goes on to say:

Speaking of foundation, this picture really shows what I mean... So, I drove by this neighbourhood where there's a lot of construction going on and when I saw this, I was really intrigued by the foundation of the house...



Figure 19: A Foundation for the future.

For me, in order to build something that is well designed, of course you need to have a solid foundation to build it on. And what inspires me in this photo, is that I believe that this applies to life and relationships too. You know, I want my children and all children for that matter, to grow up healthy and have a quote-unquote, normal childhood, but in order to do that they need a strong foundation, where they are safe, loved, and cared for no matter what... I believe that we need healthy adults to raise healthy children and it gives me hope that I now have a chance to create a sound foundation for my boys so that they grow up to have a positive and hopeful future. I can't even tell you how much my boys mean to me... They're the world to me.

From Jason's description of this photo, there seems to be an implicit, yet strong interconnection between hope and relationship: both of which are vital to his experience of a positive future. To clarify, Jason indicates that supportive relationships serve as the "foundation to [his] hope" and that by providing a "foundation" of unconditional love to his children, this too, is a significant source of hope for him. As such, the concepts of hope and relationship appear to be deeply intertwined and inextricable.

Children: A Source of Hope

Taking cue from Jason's description of creating a "sound foundation" for his children, I invite him to further elucidate the relationship between hope and his sons:

My boys provide me with so much hope and I just feel so good about being a dad. And as they get older, they see they have a mom that loves them and a dad that loves them and even though we are no longer together we get along as friends. So it's a not a traditional family, you know with a mom and dad who live together, but these boys have a much better upbringing than I had and that is encouraging to me... [pause]... Yeah, my childhood was so different [becomes tearful]... Thankfully, they're not experiencing what I did... [pause]... I just love them so much and want what is best for them... then of course in the same instant I think, why couldn't it have been that way also, you know that traditional family idea, so it's a high and a low hope thing for me [long pause]...

Jason's deep care and love for his children is undeniable. As he describes how his children are important to his hope, I am also struck by the tension that has surfaced in this portion of narrative. On one hand, Jason's hope is positively impacted in knowing that his children are loved and have an opportunity to live a life he, himself, never

experienced. On the other hand, there seems to be a great deal of grief or regret in regards to Jason's life plan he had hoped to provide for his boys, however, was unable to. At this time, I also get the impression that Jason's tears are connected to a sense of loss and pain of being deprived of the kind of childhood he would have liked to experience. Seconds pass and neither of us speak allowing some space for Jason to process his thoughts and whatever else might be surfacing for him.

A Hope Teacher

Seemingly ready to continue, Jason clears his throat and goes on to describe a childhood relationship that inspired a great deal of hope for him:

Growing up, I felt robbed of having a bond and any meaningful relationship with my father... I didn't really feel loved or cared for by him. Or maybe the kind of love he gave me came in a form I didn't like; you know the abuse and all... And because of that I ended up looking for that in life. So during my late teens, I played junior football and the coach ended up being a father figure for me. He was a great man and I really respected him. He taught me not to give up and to push through adversity or whatever pain I was feeling and keep positive. I guess he kind of taught me about hope and really helped me figure out what my future could look like and that was really encouraging having him in my life.

While Jason experienced a significant rupture in his relationship and emotional attachment to his father, he was able nonetheless, to find and engage in a meaningful and hope inspiring interpersonal connection. I find it noteworthy that despite Jason's earlier description of an upbringing often characterized by "hopelessness," this is a story of hope he can hold and turn to from his childhood.

Future Hopes

After sharing a profound appreciation for a significant relationship in his life, Jason and I go on to explore his hope for the future.

Hope for Common Knowledge

He begins by explaining his strong desire to create a widespread understanding of male childhood sexual abuse:



Figure 20: Front and center.

I really wanted to take a picture of a federal building, so I took this one of Canada Place. This represents where change and healing can happen. This is where if more people are educated and willing to talk about childhood sexual abuse, laws can change on a national level. Through education and research, our politicians and people in power can become aware of this issue and stand up for the survivors and really make what's been such a hush hush thing, especially for men, something of common knowledge and public awareness. If I had to put into a nutshell – that is my hope for the future...

As Jason describes his future hopes, he speaks with a sense of determination, passion, and energy that prior to this, has not surfaced as strongly. It seems quite clear that hope for Jason is focused on creating open and public awareness of male childhood sexual abuse in order that survivors are acknowledged and supported. I share with Jason how I, as a researcher, hold many of those same hopes for increased understanding and change for male survivors.

Possibility of Change

My mentioning the word “change” seems to spur our conversation in this direction:

Yeah there is so much potential for change and that is another piece of hope for me. Like for example, this picture is of the high-level bridge and really symbolizes change and hope...



Figure 21: Hope between generations.

In my mind the purpose of a bridge is to fill in a gap. And what's encouraging for me is that just because our parents weren't willing to speak about sexual abuse over here on this side [points to left side of the bridge], it doesn't mean that we can't on this side [points to the right side of the bridge]. So... this bridge represents the change that is possible from generation to generation. There isn't much we can do about the past, but we can do something for the future and I find that extremely hopeful to think about... I can lean on a tree that someone else has leaned on fifty years ago and was afraid to speak about a certain subject whereas today I can lean on that same tree and stand on my apple cart and preach about it... there is change that has happened and can still happen. In my opinion, if we educate our kids about sexual abuse then we are doing something for the future and I think that it helps me and other survivors start to heal from all this and that's very hopeful... At least it's something we can all do and something I already do with my boys.

The notions of change, temporality, and hope are nicely underscored by both Jason's narrative, as well as his photograph. The passing of time from one generation to another allows the opportunity for change in the areas of awareness and action. Jason identifies that while the past cannot be modified or altered, the present holds possibility for taking an active role in educating our children about sexual abuse, thereby potentially leading to changes in the future. I find it remarkable that Jason's hope for increased awareness and future change is something he is already presently engaging in with his children. Feeling as though our time has come to an end, I comment on my admiration of Jason's passion and willingness to take action towards his hopes. To this he says, *"It's up to us to make that change."* With that sentiment, we end our conversation.

Chapter Nine: Conversations on Hope with Paul

Moments after walking Paul out of the office and wishing him a safe drive home on a wintery Tuesday evening, I take some time to reflect on our conversation. Rather than feeling tired after a full day of work and an additional two hour research interview, I feel surprisingly invigorated. Despite how late it is, I figure I should capitalize on this rush of energy and so I turn on my computer, open my journal file, and get ready to write. Not totally sure where to start, I begin by first noticing my own response in meeting with Paul. I type the following words that seem to capture what I'm feeling in-the-moment: "EXCITED"... "UPLIFTED"... "HOPEFUL"... With further thought, I consider how these adjectives also seem to be apt descriptions of how I understand Paul's current experiences of hope in his life. Thinking of Paul's narrative as a whole, I get a strong impression that he has a relatively focused or decided slant towards hope in his life. With that in mind, I continue to write my early interpretations regarding the meaning of hope for Paul:

Hope is expansive, multi-dimensional, rich, vibrant, spiritual, relational, and awe-inspiring. Among other things, hope is about emotion... anticipation... appreciation... passion... remembering... and forgiveness. In many ways, as an adult, Paul has undergone a process of reclaiming, reconnecting, and restoring his sense of hope that was somewhat lost as a child. Paul now seems to live and breathe hope. It's as if hope seeps from his very being... His hope kindles my own feelings of hope for him, for other participants, for survivors, and for the potential impact of this research...

A string of profound experiences, both hope inspiring and hope threatening have contributed to Paul's narrative of hope. Along with his acute awareness of hope, Paul seems equally in tune with the despair he endured as a childhood. Paul's experiences of neglect, abuse, and hopelessness, form the foundation from which his hope later develops and flourishes and as such, this is where our conversation begins.

Hope and Abuse

With the intention of learning about Paul's early experiences of hope, I ask: *Tell me about how hope might have been a part of your childhood experiences.*

Unfulfilled Hopes

To this, Paul paints a vivid contextual picture of his childhood and the painful experiences that challenged his hope at the time:

Before the age of three, I can remember a happy Paul. But by the time I was three, something really changed. Since then, I've really struggled with abandonment and neglect issues. My mother was hospitalized for several years for a chronic health condition. My dad worked sixteen hours a day... So because of all this, all of us kids were sort of fetched out to aunts and uncles. After a while, I literally forgot about my mom and dad... I got so used to being with my aunts and uncles and my cousins, that it felt like my parents weren't in the picture anymore. There were so many times that I desperately wanted my parents to be there for me, but they never really were... I remember being hospitalized as a young boy and sitting in the hospital room alone looking out the window over the parking lot, hoping that my mom or dad would come and visit, but they never did and I would just cry and cry and cry... Basically, as I was growing up I never got much attention or any physical love from either of my parents, but particularly my dad. I never experienced playing or wrestling with him. He never held me in his arms and told me he loved me or that I was his best son... I never heard those words...

In listening to Paul, I can't help but feel emotionally affected by his description of a childhood seemingly characterized by the absence of a meaningful attachment with his parents. The vision of Paul as a child hoping for his parents to visit while hospitalized seems to have been one of many instances where his hopes for connection, physical touch, affection, and the communication of love went unfulfilled. As he sits in silence for a moment, with his head hung low and hands clasped together, the depth of his childhood pain appears almost visible. As a mother myself, it saddens me deeply to think that Paul's hopes were not realized as a child and more specifically, that he did not experience a childhood in where he felt a strong emotional and loving connection with his parents. Wondering how Paul's sense of hope might have been impacted by his relationship with his parents, I invite him to reflect on this:

Well, somewhere along the line, I just stopped hoping... I think I came to recognize that I would never feel a bond with my parents... and that was crushing to any hope I had at the time, even the things that I loved to do, like painting and art, that all died... Overall, my childhood was very hard and I was kind of robbed of the experience of being a child. Growing up, I was given so many responsibilities that went far beyond what I think a child should have to do. I worked basically my whole childhood and it wasn't a happy time, there wasn't much of anything to look forward to... Then when the abuse started, well that's a whole other story of hope...

Given that Paul's hopes had gone unrealized, he stopped engaging with the possibility that he would ever experience the kind of relationship with his parents that he so desperately wanted and needed. It is as if experiencing such fundamental hopes go unfulfilled casted a shadow on his connection to other hopes in his life and the things he felt a passion for. Embedded in this portion of narrative is also the notion that Paul's sense of hope, as a forward orientation to his life at the time, was significantly depleted.

A Dark and Hopeless Time

To understand how the sexual abuse might have further impacted Paul's experience of hope, I invite him to tell me about the "other story of hope." He says:

I don't have a clear picture of when or how the abuse started with my brother. I do know I was about nine at the time, but other than that, I can't remember much. The one thing I can say is that I didn't experience much hope... [pause]... It was a very, very, very, very dark and hopeless time... I remember locking my door, closing the curtains and weeping in the dark because I didn't want anybody to know about the abuse. Being Catholic, I remember trying to comprehend and crying out to God and asking him, "Why do you let this happen? Where are you? What's going on?"...

All at once, Paul appears emotionally composed and yet a certain pain and heaviness seems to accompany his every word. I get the impression that Paul felt quite powerless in relation to the abuse. From that place of helplessness and confusion, Paul looked beyond himself; namely, to his spirituality for understanding and guidance. I can only imagine what an incomprehensible experience this must have been for Paul as a nine year old boy. At this time, I take note of Paul's repeated use of the word "very," which to me, indicates the sheer depth of the hopelessness he experienced as a result of the abuse. In addition, I

wonder about the association Paul makes between hopelessness and the concept of darkness.

Alone in the Hopelessness

Before I can ask Paul to help me further understand the metaphoric connection, he goes on to describe his experience of isolation:

You have to understand, I came from a very devout Catholic home, and there was a lot of pride in the fact that my older brother was going to the Seminary to become a priest, it was like he could do no wrong. So, if I told my parents that my own brother was sexually abusing me, I mean they would've never believed me. They would've called me a liar and I would've been beaten black and blue... And that's not all, my brother, who also had a very violent temper, would've probably given me the beating of a lifetime too... There was so much fear preventing me from telling anybody... I felt like it was too much of a risk to confide in anyone or make it stop and that really intensified the hopelessness for me.

For Paul, there were many significant and understandable factors that prevented him from disclosing his abuse experiences. In my readings of the literature and my work with survivors, children often avoid disclosing the abuse because of the overwhelming fear they experience. They may fear the abuser(s), the potentially negative reaction from others, and/or the consequences of revealing the abuse (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005). While Paul's account seems to echo the literature, he also shares that his fear contributed to feelings of isolation and a sense of hopelessness. In my understanding, Paul's decision not to disclose the abuse was a way in which he could keep himself safe and protect his well-being, even if it meant feeling alone and hopeless.

Finding Hope in the Darkness

Wondering what might have helped Paul through this very difficult time in his life, I ask: *How did you keep moving forward with all those feelings of isolation and hopelessness?* Paul reflects:

Even in the most hopeless and darkest corners of my experiences, there has always been light along my journey... There has always been hope in some form or another. There may have been moments when I couldn't pinpoint it, but whether it was in a strand of determination or in the act of weeping, there

was hope... I mean, in a twisted sense, there was even hope in the act of the sexual abuse... Because I never experienced that physical bond with my parents, the sexual abuse kind of met a deep need and a hope I had. While it was repulsing and generally a hopeless experience, in a warped kind of way, I found some hope in that. I don't think I could've said that then, but now I can see the hope there.

While Paul seems to understand hope as having many forms and manifestations, he also identifies hope as a constant and everlasting force even in situations where it may be difficult to find. Here again, Paul continues to couple his sense of hope to that of a metaphorical “light” and alternatively, hopelessness is connected to “darkness.” As I jot this idea down in my notebook, the notion of time also comes to mind. Although implicit within this portion of narrative, it seems that the passage of time has allowed Paul to find hope in a childhood experience primarily marked by “darkness and hopelessness.” In other words, many years after the abuse, Paul appears to have come to an understanding that his “need” and “hope” for an interpersonal connection was so profound, that despite the fact that it came in the form of abuse, it is nonetheless linked to hope. I understand that Paul does not see his overall experience of abuse as a hopeful one; however, he is now able to pull a thread of hope from what was a horrific and hope threatening childhood experience.

At this point in our conversation, Paul goes on to describe his perception of hope during another childhood sexual violation:

By the time I experienced the second incident of abuse, I was already in the throes of the sexual abuse by my brother. I was about 13 years old and decided one day to hitchhike. A man, who was a total stranger to me, picked me up. He ended up driving me out of the city and that was when I really started to get scared. I had no idea what was going to happen. I went into cooperation mode in fear of my life. I was pretty cold to the actual abuse as it was happening probably because I was used to it... It might sound kind of weird again, but the fact that I knew I would never allow it to happen again was a pretty hopeful thing for me... I knew I would never see him again and I knew that I would never hitchhike again and somehow that gave me hope at the time.

Taking into account Paul's earlier narrative, there seems to be a notable contrast in his experience of hope between this “incident” of sexual assault and his experience of

ongoing abuse. Despite the fear of the unknown, Paul was able to maintain a connection to hope knowing that he could make future choices that might lead to a different outcome; whereas, in the case of the abuse by his brother, this was an experienced marked by “hopelessness” and an inability to act on his own behalf.

Before moving on, I consider the implied sense of responsibility or guilt embedded within Paul’s comment: “I would never allow it to happen again.” I take a moment to share this thought. To which he replies:

No. It wasn’t that I felt responsible or like I was to blame, the hope was more about knowing I do could something differently in the future. Like I had some control...

With greater clarity about his sense of hope, we continue our conversation.

Releasing the Hopelessness

At this point, Paul goes on to describe his understanding of hope connected to the many years of abuse he endured by his brother:

In terms of hope, I guess the only thing I can really put my finger on is that I found a way to release my emotions through weeping and I mean weeping wretchedly, not just a whimper... There were so many nights that I would wait until everybody was in bed to leave the house and I would go down to the park and walk along the river and just weep and weep and weep... That was the greatest outlet or release for me, not really hope stirring, but it was a way that the hopelessness could get out. It was how I coped. Yeah, those tears were tears of hopelessness... [pause]... Today things are very different for me. When I’m stirred emotionally and I feel hope within me, I weep. But now, it’s an expression of hope and joy not sadness or hopelessness.

While Paul's emotional release was not linked to hope per se, it was however, a means of processing and letting go of the hopelessness he experienced in relation to the abuse.

Said differently, I get the sense that hope and hopelessness were not opposites of one another in that releasing the hopelessness as a child, did not necessarily leave Paul with hope. Fast forward to the present, the same outlet of release is now connected to a feeling of hope. Interested in understanding this change, I invite Paul to tell me more about what has contributed his current experience and expression of hope:

It hasn't happened over night and several things have happened in my life that has brought me to a place of hope... It's interesting to me because before hope really and truly entered into my life, hopelessness was what I knew best. Like I can distinctly remember a time when I didn't want to live anymore or see a reason for going on... I didn't want to feel anymore and I just didn't care if I lived or died... If you want to talk about hopelessness... that was certainly a time when I had no hope... So, one day I decided to shoot some heroine, do a line of speed, and drink as much vodka as I could and for about three days after that I don't remember a thing. With all the drugs I put in my body that day, I should have been dead. So, when I woke up in a halfway house, I couldn't believe that I was still alive and that only deepened my despair...

Paul's familiarity with hopelessness seems to have been the precursor to his experience of hope later in life. Here, his narrative reminds me of the notion put forth by Farren et al. (1995) regarding the importance in understanding one's hopelessness in order to fully appreciate one's hope. It seems that for Paul, this is the case in his own experience of hopelessness and hope in his life. While he reveals experiencing an absence of hope at this time, it seems that ending his suffering and pain was a desired outcome. When that outcome did not manifest, disappointment and intense despair ensued.

Going Unnoticed in Hopelessness

Needing some further clarification, I ask Paul: *Would it be okay if we further explore that sense of "deepened despair" you are describing?* Paul nods in response and continues:

Again, this was another instance in where nobody knew that I was hooked on drugs. Nobody had an idea of the condition I was really in. I mean I was less than a hundred pounds... I was just skin and bones. Even the people that were around me all the time, like my cousin who I lived with and did drugs with, never said anything about how bad things were getting for me. So, I guess the experience of hopelessness was that, "Okay... nobody has said anything... nobody cares about me..." At that moment, I felt like nobody would even miss me if I were no longer on this planet... I recall so vividly that morning when I woke up at the halfway house praying to God and asking him for his help... I just didn't know what else to do...

In listening to Paul, I can't help but draw some parallels between this narrative and what he shares earlier about his experience of hopelessness as a child. Similar to when Paul was looking to his parents for a meaningful connection, years later he seems to have a

strong desire for others in his life to take notice and communicate care and concern for him. In both cases, Paul's sense of hopelessness appears connected to feeling alone and as though he and his struggles are inconsequential or do not matter to others. It is noteworthy that as a child, as well as an adult, when hopelessness comes up for Paul, he goes beyond himself and turns to a spiritual entity for guidance. The air of desperation in Paul's description of looking to God that morning makes me wonder if and how his spiritual connection might have supported him in moving beyond the hopelessness.

Beginning to Sow Hope

Paul goes on to explain what helped him find hope following his experience in the halfway house:

Shortly after that incident, I got connected with some people who were very good to me. One fellow in particular was a high school teacher of mine and he took me under his wing. We spent a lot of time together doing things like camping, swimming and we would just talk... For the first time in my life, I experienced tenderness with another human being from someone who was like a father to me. It was amazing because until then, for the most part, I had always just experienced harshness and violence in my life. He was someone who really cared for me and that relationship began to sow hope into my life... The other person who has been so vital to my hope is my auntie, who is like a mother to me. In all the years I was in between rehab or living at youth hostels, she has never rejected me. No matter what state I was in, I knew that if I came to her door she would just hug and kiss me. Without question, I always felt loved by her and like I mattered to her... These relationships not only stirred my hope, but I also began to form a stronger relationship to myself and God...

Hope for Paul, began to emerge in the context experiencing two significant relationships in his life. In some ways, these individuals acted as surrogates for the relationships Paul had hoped for, but never experienced, with his parents. By way of these connections, Paul was introduced to a different understanding of relationships than he had in the past. Experiencing a sense of gentleness, acceptance, and unconditional love within these relationships not only sparked some hope into his life at the time, but also seems to have intensified Paul's spiritual connection. Given Paul's last comment, it feels like a fitting time to further explore his spiritual relationship and how it might be connected to hope.

Becoming a Cared for Son

I pose the following question: *Can you help me understand your relationship to God and how it's impacted hope in your life?* To this he replies:

Becoming a Christian as a young adult has greatly impacted my life and has given me a tremendous amount of hope. When I experienced God coming and living inside my heart, I began a personal relationship with Him and this gave me hope. From then on, I noticed a series of changes. I began to express myself more and more through my music and my writing. I started creating relationships with people around me... I got involved in different things that opened many fruitful doors for me and I've continued to open those doors for over thirty years.

Paul's embodied experience of a spiritual relationship with God seems to have encouraged creative self-expression and allowed him to take some risks in life such as, establishing other interpersonal connections. By means of Paul's spiritual relationship, not only was he able to experience a sense of hope, he also became an active participant, engaged in his own life, seeking self-enriching opportunities and experiences. Before I have the chance of reflecting this thought to him, Paul continues to say:

It's been an absolutely amazing ride because I've also come to realize that I'm His child and have always been loved by Him even during the times that I questioned that... Although I didn't feel like a son to my natural father, I'm a son to my heavenly father and realizing that has awakened my hope... And actually that brings me to another experience that stirred a great deal of hope within me... I really believe it was completely orchestrated by God as a way of helping me start dealing with the abuse.

In re-conceptualizing the father-son relationship to encompass his spiritual relationship with God, Paul comes to an understanding that he has always been valued, loved and cared for by his "heavenly father." In some ways, Paul's relationship with his higher power serves as a secure base or attachment substitute, from which Paul can then approach the world and experience a sense of hope.

A Transcendent Hope

Without pause, our conversation goes on to explore the experience Paul describes as being "orchestrated by God":

Several years ago I had a sort of supernatural experience. I was at a prayer meeting at a fire hall, believe it or not, and I went up in front of the others and said, "My mother and father never hugged me." It was such a significant moment for me that I actually fell on the floor and people came and prayed over me. The supernatural part of it all was that unbeknownst to everybody else, as they were praying for me, I actually went back into my mother's womb. I know it sounds a bit unusual, but it happened! I felt very, very warm and safe in my mother's womb. I physically experienced the amniotic fluid all around my body. Then I felt that sense of being pulled out and coming into another warm place, it felt like I was going into another womb, but it was actually someone holding me and rocking me back and forth in their arms against their chest. For me, this was one of the most significant times that I felt loved and accepted...

I feel almost entranced by Paul's narrative and it seems somewhat difficult for me to pull back from listening to this experience. Noticing my reaction, I take a moment to comment on what seems to be the immeasurable magnitude of this event on Paul's life, to which he says:

It was like an out of this world experience for me... So many amazing changes happened after that... it was like a rebirth for so many opportunities that lay ahead. It was such an exhilarating and hopeful experience!

Together with the act of expressing a significant source of pain and hopelessness in his life to others, the caring and affirming way in which it was received launched a transcendent experience of hope. Although years later and from people other than his parents, Paul finally experiences the physical connection and acknowledgement he had hoped for as a child. This tangible sense of starting over or what Paul describes as a "re-birth" inspires a great deal of hope and presents him with many future possibilities.

Prior to initiating a further conversation exploring the "amazing changes" that followed this experience, I attend to how Paul first introduced this narrative as being something "orchestrated by God". This brings to mind the idea that Paul is not solely responsible for the good in his life. Furthermore, it could be said that Paul's "heavenly father" demonstrates his love and care for him by creating experiences that are both life and hope enhancing. Taking this notion one step further, I consider the group therapy concept of corrective recapitulation posited by the accomplished psychotherapist and

author, Irvin Yalom. Simply stated, corrective recapitulation is a process by which an individual relives an early parental or familial conflict within a supportive group context (i.e., group members), thereby providing an opportunity to re-process and heal from those past relationships (Yalom & Leszcz, 2008). From this vantage point, Paul's narrative seems to reflect a "corrective" experience of those early difficult parental relationships.

Sharing Hope

Interested in understanding the impact of this seemingly transcendent experience, I ask Paul to tell me more about the changes that followed. He reflects:

About a year after, I got involved with a Christian healing program. And since then, I have really begun to see and experience hope in my life. Right from my very first small group experience, when the group leaders shared their own life stories, I felt hope. Keeping in mind that at that time, I had been carrying all of the past abuse with me, so hearing their own stories of abuse, it opened the floodgates of hope for me because I realized I wasn't alone... Being a victim of sexual abuse, I really felt alone like I had no one to turn to or confide in. After that first group session, I was able to slowly take some risks... come out of the closet so to speak, and begin to share my childhood experiences and struggles with others... It's interesting because in the past, I would never take those risks and tell my story, so I would stay alone in the pain. But after these experiences in the healing program, hope was in my life more and more... It's actually funny because most of the group members were male and my abusers were also men, so it also gave me some hope that I could build relationships with men and still be safe...

Rather than continuing to "carry" his experience of abuse in isolation, Paul, in a way, was able to create a sense of relationship and connection with other group members through the listening and telling of the abuse experience. This process of sharing not only removed Paul's feelings of isolation, but also seems to have incited new and significant experiences of hope for him.

Although Paul does not make an explicit connection, I get the impression that taking the risk to be vulnerable with and in the presence of others greatly influences hope for him. For instance, I find it remarkable that not only does Paul take a risk in sharing his past with others, but the fact that the majority of group members are men seems particularly significant to his sense of hope. Where men in the past, may have been

associated with abuse, violence, and a threat to Paul's wellbeing, with men in this Christian healing group, he is able to move beyond that previous association and begin to engage in a different interpersonal experience with men that is safe and hope inspiring.

A “Restored” Hope

At this point, Paul goes on share another experience he understands as instrumental to his hope:

About five years ago, my father passed away. But before he actually passed, I spent the last twelve hours of his life with him and it was such a precious experience for me. Even though he couldn't communicate, I really believe he was listening. And so in those hours, I was able to actually weep and tell my dad all the things I would've wanted him to do with me. I told him I loved him. I kissed him, I don't know maybe hundreds of times. So much of my hope was restored in that experience. In those moments, I found peace and forgiveness...

Although several years later, Paul finally experiences an intimate and meaningful emotional connection with his father: something he had deeply hoped for as a child. This experience seems to highlight the idea of how hope can sometimes become realized unexpectedly. Where Paul's relationship with his father had once been a significant source of hopelessness, through this end-of-life experience, he is able to find hope, “peace and forgiveness.” For a moment, I also consider a somewhat parallel process between Paul's experience with his father, his experience with the Christian healing group, and that of his experience in the fire hall. Specifically, in openly sharing and becoming emotionally vulnerable in the presence and support of others, Paul not only undergoes a transformative or “corrective” experience as Yalom & Leszcz (2008) might put it, but his sense of hope seems to be significantly engendered in each of these cases.

Hope and Forgiveness

Intrigued by the notion of forgiveness, I ask: *Paul, can you help me understand your experience of forgiveness and how that might be linked to hope for you?* He explains:

For so many years I was unable to forgive... it felt impossible. I lived with so much bitterness and resentment towards my parents, my brother, everyone really... But as I mentioned, listening to others' stories of how difficult it was for them to forgive and how they turned to God for guidance, I began to hope that I could also forgive my parents, my abusers, and myself... I prayed and prayed to God to help me by making me willing to forgive. And it's funny because coming from a Catholic background, forgiveness was something my mom talked to us about all the time... She'd say, "you need to forgive... you need to forgive." So, I knew that in my head, but I hadn't experienced how it was to really FORGIVE... The experience of forgiving my brother was much harder because there were so many factors involved. Because of all the neglect and separation with my parents, I was already full of hatred by the time the abuse actually started... I think it was also difficult because the abuse continued for so long and took such a big part of my life... It's taken me a long time to come to a place of forgiveness with my brother and I'm still working on it, but I have come a long way... so much so, that a few years back I called my brother at Christmas to tell him that I forgave him, which was very powerful for me, because I was finally able to start letting go of the anger and the resentment...

In forgiving your brother, as much as you have, how has that impacted your hope?

Paul reflects:

It's been a very, very important part of the healing process for me... [pause]... It's actually done a couple of things. One, it has released him; you know released him to be himself, to get help for himself and deal with what he did knowing that he is forgiven. A part of me has some hope that somewhere along the way we'll reconcile with the past and with each other... The other thing about forgiving him is that it has freed me too. I have come to a place where I can forgive myself and realize that what was done to me was against my will and it wasn't my fault. When I finally really took that in, gosh... I really began to experience hope more fully in my life.

Within this portion of narrative, several thoughts come to mind, especially in relation to forgiveness and hope. Similar to Jevne's (1999) sentiments on the hard work sometimes needed to connect with hope, it seems that forgiveness for Paul, was also experienced as a challenging process that required his concerted effort. In reflecting on the ideas of hope and forgiveness, I also think of the Robert Enright, a psychologist, professor, and noted author in the area of forgiveness. In his work, Enright (2001) describes forgiveness as a letting go of negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors directed towards one who has offended or injured. He also views forgiveness as being a self-enhancing and personally freeing choice, voluntarily made on the part of the victim

in response to a personal injury or injustice. This conception of forgiveness seems to fit with Paul's experience of finding a sense of "healing" and freedom in the process of acknowledging the abuse and communicating his forgiveness to his brother.

Looking more closely at the notion of freedom and its connection to forgiveness, there appears to be two levels of forgiveness embedded in Paul's account: interpersonal forgiveness and a self-forgiveness. In forgiving his brother for the abuse, this seems to foster a hope that a future resolution to their relationship might be possible. In terms of letting go of the self-blame and the perception that he was somehow to blame for the abuse, the experience of hope also seems to emerge "more fully" in Paul's life.

A Fighting Hope

Paul goes on to describe how hope for him, is also linked to increased self-understanding and recalling aspects of the abuse he had previously forgotten:

Even though I am still in my process of recovery and still experiencing new things all the time, I now have a relationship with myself that I invest in and I try to understand myself, my reactions, and some of the things that have happened in my life and this all brings me hope and what is possible in the future... Like a neat thing that's starting to happen more and more is that I'm remembering things... Even the other night, I fell into a very light sleep and a memory came back to me. I was brought back to the scene where I was in a large bed and there were two assailants on me and I remember fighting and wanting to get free... This is the first time in years that this memory has come back... it's been such a mental block up until now. This was a breakthrough and really exciting for me! When the abuse becomes habitual, you kind of get used to it, which is why I always thought that I went along with it. And what was neat about the memory is that I realized that I FOUGHT and that brought me such a feeling of hope. For so long I've always wanted to know what happened... I mean, this doesn't really tell me WHAT happened, but it does tell me that I fought and that I am now open to these memories, which is amazing and exciting for me!

Memories of abuse can often be a negative or an anxiety provoking experience for survivors; however, for Paul these memories now present an opportunity for self-understanding and hope. From Paul's account, it seems that he gains a new perspective of his response to the sexual abuse, offering a more hopeful view of himself than in the

past. Rather than seeing himself as submissive or even possibly complicit during the abuse, Paul comes to an understanding that he acted in his own defense.

A Deeper Emotional Connection

Paul goes on to reveal his healing progression in the areas of emotional expression:

I know that the healing journey is never-ending but it's becoming more positive and more hopeful for me. For example, I'm now at a point where I can actually express what I feel to others in my life, without hesitation or fear. In the past, I wept. Weeping was a way that I could safely manage with what was happening to me, but I really suppressed the deeper-seated emotions behind the weeping... But now, I am more open to experiencing those deeper emotions and I really try to understand them, which is something I wasn't able to do before. This has all really led to a realization that I'm an emotional person after all, which is really hopeful for me to know. And even more than that, I can now truly allow others to see me as I really am and in turn, I can also listen and try to understand who they really are... I feel like there is more hope in me now than there ever was!

Paul's capacity to now experience a range and depth of emotions that in the past were too difficult for him to process adds a new facet to his sense of self. This "openness" to his emotional experiences also allows him to see and be seen by others in ways that feel authentic and transparent. For Paul, these experiences and new ways of being feel deeply hopeful to him.

Personhood

The ideas of self-identity and hope seem related and as such, I invite Paul to further reflect on how these concepts might be connected for him. Paul goes on to express the following:

In recent years, I have come to see that I am COMPLETE, I AM a person, and have always BEEN a person and that has stirred so much hope for me. Early on in my life and especially with the abuse I think I lost that sense of personhood. You know, as a kid I felt like I was just a number or someone that you can push around or tell what to do... I lost my identity and that was a pretty hopeless experience of myself. And actually, the way I feel at my job has really helped me change a lot of those ideas about myself. Where I work I'm not just a number. I'm actually valued for what I do and who I am... I can just be ME and that brings me a tremendous amount of hope for the future and of what I can accomplish. It's very liberating!

The term “personhood” seems to reflect Paul’s acknowledgment of himself as someone who matters and has always mattered, in his own right. By experiencing a sense of innate worth and a freedom to be himself within his work-life, Paul is able to remove those aspects of his childhood identity that have imprisoned him for so long. Hope for Paul is found in honouring a sense of self that feels true to who he is, separate from the past and focused on a future of possibility.

Sources of Hope

Wondering what other experiences might serve as a source of hope for Paul, I ask him: *What else stirs hope for you today?*

A Passion Resurrected

Paul looks closely at a photograph in his hand and expresses his surprise in the way in which the vibrancy of the colors are captured. While still holding the photo in his hands, he goes on to say:

From a very young age, I’ve always loved art and had a real passion for it, but with all that I was dealing with and the responsibilities I had as a child, I didn’t bother pursuing it in any serious way, and by the age of 19 I totally gave it up... that passion just sort of died... [pauses and examines the photo and places it on the table between us]...



Figure 22: A living hope.

But now I am saying, “I’m going to do this... I’m going for it.” My love and passion for painting has awakened from the dead and is now living and that sows so much hope in my life... Here I am in my mid-50s just starting to enjoy life. I feel like I’m now experiencing the childhood I never had and that in and of itself is a real source of hope... [pause]... This photo is actually quite significant

because I am really starting to hope for things, and I'm doing things that get those hopes off the ground... I really feel so much hope in my life right now! It's so exciting!

There is a gleeful determination in Paul's voice as he describes his active pursuit of reviving his passion and joy for art. In a way, reconnecting and engaging with art is an indication to Paul that he can reclaim a part of himself that had been "totally given up" as a child. This notion of reclaiming, both his passion and a part of his identity seems strongly associated with Paul's present experience of hope. As I further reflect on his account, I also glean the following about the meaning of hope for Paul: hope is goal oriented; hope involves working towards attaining things that are meaningful to him; and hope has an experiential quality to it. More specifically, Paul indicates that this photo is a reflection of his goals or "the things [he] hope[s] for" and the importance of "doing" or actively making his goals a reality, which then inspires an experience, or a feeling of hope for him.

Hope in Connection

Paul then does on to describe an image of him kneeling at the foot of a cross. He says:

The cross is very significant to me. Being near the cross and actually physically touching it, is how I find peace and find my way when I feel lost. When I touch the cross I feel loved and totally accepted... I find a real freedom to weep and express myself without hindrance. I can just BE and this stirs hope for me in a huge way. When I touch His cross, I'm connected to my higher power, I feel like He's able to take the load of everything and help me understand what I've experienced in the past and especially the abuse and that is extremely hopeful... For me, God IS hope. He has been a source of hope to me and to so many others... I now have so much hope because I know He is there and I trust that He'll always be there for me...



Figure 23: A spiritual connection.

When connected to or in the presence of a physical representation of his higher power, hope seems to be a grounded and an in-the-moment kind of experience for Paul. Reflecting on this photo³, it seems as though Paul wholeheartedly surrenders to the trusted care of another whom he feels, loves him unconditionally. From a slightly different vantage point, Paul's experience of hope also seems related to a sense of knowing that he does not have to shoulder the burden of his past alone; instead, he will forever be accompanied in his life's journey.

Trust and Hope

The idea of trust in his relationship to God appears vital to Paul's understanding of hope. To explore this notion further, I invite Paul to comment on how he perceives this connection. He says:

Trust is a HUGE thing for me and it's been a big part of my struggle, especially because of the abuse. But in my relationship with God, I have been able to find trust which has started to transfer to other relationships and this stirs hope in ways that I'm not sure I can even describe... [long pause]... I am now living with a friend of mine and we have built such a beautiful relationship because we can communicate on a gut level. He is honest and vulnerable with me and I can be

³ Note: Photo 23: *A Spiritual Connection* has been altered to protect participant's privacy and anonymity.

vulnerable and honest with him. That relationship has really instilled so much hope in me because I am able to trust it... The way I see it, hope and trust are very much related. In some ways, I think trust is actually a stepping stone to hope. Because if you don't have any trust in the relationship, how on earth are you ever going to hope for the future? ...

In my counselling work with survivors of sexual abuse, I have come to some understanding around the difficulty of trusting in others and in relationships themselves. Childhood sexual abuse, particularly when it is ongoing and within a familial context, as is the case for Paul, is such a poignant betrayal of trust that it often renders the survivor distrustful of others and questioning his safety within relationships (Etherington, 1995; Gartner, 2001, 2005; Gill & Tutty, 1999). For Paul, trust within relationship is somewhat of a prerequisite for hope. Said differently, without trust, the future appears uncertain and as such, hope becomes significantly threatened.

A Community of Hope

At this point in our conversation, Paul goes on to highlight how his experience and thoughts around relationship have evolved:

Recently, I have been thinking a lot about relationships and actually I am beginning to expand that idea to the concept of community. Over the years, I've been involved in several church communities where I really felt like I belonged. Just recently I found a Christian community that I am planning to become a part of. During my visits there, I felt the ability to trust, I felt acceptance, love, and like I belonged. You want to talk about hope, I mean I've got so much hope now, I can barely contain myself... it's so exciting!

The community in which Paul plans to join offers him a profound source of hope. Within the broader notion of relationship, Paul seems to experience a unique group oriented experience of belonging, trust, and hope. This sense of sharing with others and having a place in the world brings to mind the following quote by hope scholars, Jevne and Nikolaichuk (2003): "A feeling of belonging to a group of people who care and/or share a common challenge strengthens hope" (p. 205). This community relationship has not only ignited Paul's hope, but also a sense of excitement. For a moment I consider how Paul's accounts of hope (i.e., A Passion Resurrected, Deep Emotional Connections, A

Fighting Hope, and A Transcendent Hope) often seem to be coupled with an experience of happiness and excitement. Wondering if this fits for Paul, I reflect: *Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems that there's a sense of excitement attached to hope for you...*

The Ripples of Hope

With a beaming smile, Paul goes on to say:

Yeah, hope is really exciting... it gives me energy... I mean when I experience hope, I can't help but feel invigorated. I mean I even feel excited about these interviews. For me coming here and sharing my experiences is a source of hope for me... I don't know... The thought that maybe what we are doing today will help someone else like another survivor is extremely hopeful and healing for me... That's one of the main reasons I'm writing my book. Sure writing in itself is a source of hope for me because I can express myself freely, but I also experience hope to think that it might one day give someone else hope... If you think about it, we are sharing hope right now. Not only am I hopeful, but I'm sowing hope within you maybe and when this research is completed, it will contribute to someone else's hope. What happens here carries outside us and our conversation and has reverberations... It's like a cycle, a beautiful cycle that has no end... In the end, I want to help and impact others. I have a tremendous amount of hope that my story will show others that despite the abuse I've endured, it is still possible to live a productive and beautiful life and that things can be different.

While hope itself appears to inspire a feeling of excitement and physical surge of “energy” for Paul, it also seems connected to the process of sharing his experiences both through his research participation and his own writings. The notion of a “cycle” of hope holds my attention. From Paul’s account, it seems he understands hope as a mutually constructed and shared experience between individuals that can have a potentially positive future impact on others. Taking a brief moment to tap into my own experience, I become aware of a rush of excitement within me as well. As I consider the potential impact of this research on Paul, on other survivors, and those who might read these pages, I too feel “invigorated” and hopeful. As a clinician and researcher, I can relate to that desire to positively impact others. It is that hope that has been, and continues to be, a guiding force in my own life and work.

Meanings of Hope

Getting the sense that Paul might have more to share regarding his understanding of hope in his life, I ask him if we could further explore what hope means to him. Almost immediately, Paul flips through his photographs and directs my attention to three images in particular, saying: ***I think these pictures really capture the meaning of hope to me...***

A New Hope

Organizing the photos in what looks like a specific order, he goes on to reflect:



Figure 24: Anticipating hope.



Figure 25: Hope on the horizon.



Figure 26: A growing hope.

Each and every day I experience hope, as I continue in my healing journey... and so these photographs represent the birth of a new hope. When I think of the past few years in my life, with the memories coming back and all, I look forward to what might happen each day and I think that IS hope... These three photos represent the anticipation of the day to come and looking ahead... When I see the sun is about to rise, like in this first photo [Figure 24: Anticipating hope], I can't do anything else but hope! ... Then, when the sun begins to break through on the horizon [points to Figure 25: Hope on the horizon], that's when hope begins to show itself and really grow inside of me... Then finally in the third picture [points to Figure 26: A growing hope], you see the sun come over the horizon and it's so beautiful and powerful. Hope at this point continues to grow. That is why I chose to take these pictures in this way to show how hope can grow because hope is not something that just shows up, it is something that grows.

Wondering how Paul's hope might be impacted as the sun sets each day, I ask: *What happens to hope for you at sundown?* He replies: *It simply rests for the next day. Sure it's dark, but I know it will rise again.*

For Paul, hope is renewed daily and involves looking to the future with anticipation of what is to come. Embedded within Paul's account describing his three photos, is the notion that hope is a powerful life force that requires patience and awareness. I find it interesting how Paul understands hope as developing over time, rather than something that suddenly appears. A sense of certainty and trust in the future is attached to Paul's understanding of hope, as he knows that hope will endure and re-appear, even at times when it may not be visible.

Hope is Limitless

Taking another moment to examine the three images, Paul gathers them, places them in a pile and continues:

What I think is amazing about hope, is that it's limitless...it has depth. Hope can be anything and you can experience it anywhere. For example it can be... well, if I do x, y, or z, then hope will come into my life, but even that is only one part of it... Hope can be taking in the experience of a sunrise or a flower and it can be much deeper yet, like something you feel very profoundly. The one thing I know about my own experience of hope is that it requires something of you, it requires a lot of work in order to keep walking through life with hopefulness, especially during the hard times when you can't always see it ... and the way I've been able to do it, is to walk with God. I think of hope and God as being one within the same. Just as He is always with me, so is hope... I can't tell you how excited I am to be really experiencing hope in my life now... it's all over the place! I am so completely grateful for my experiences, my struggles, and how hope has entered and really flourished in my life... It's incredible!

Not only does Paul beautifully encapsulate his understandings of hope in this portion of narrative, but his account also parallels much of the literature on hope. Specifically, his description speaks to hope as multidimensional in nature, as both outcome (Snyder, 1994; Benzin, Saveman, & Norberg, 2000) and experientially oriented (Dufault & Martocchio, 1997; Farren et al., 1995), as well as involving personal investment to sustain (Bruininks & Malle, 2005). Picking up on Paul's expression of gratefulness, I too share my appreciation in meeting with Paul and learning about his experiences of hope in his life. On that note, we end our conversation for the day.

Chapter Ten:

A Discussion of the Shared and Unique Threads of Hope

With this study, I sought greater understanding of the experiences and meanings of hope for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Guided by Polkinghorne's (1995) notion of narrative analysis and informed by discourse analysis processes, I have, in the preceding chapters, immersed myself in each participant's account, highlighting the uniqueness of his experiences and the meanings of hope shared in our conversations. At this point, I turn my attention to a more paradigmatic approach of interpretation, or what Polkinghorne referred to as analysis of narratives, where shared and common aspects of hope between participants are presented. While I found it both exciting and challenging to engage in the in-depth and ideographic process with each participant narrative, I found it equally interesting and complex to move away from my close relationship with each account and look from a broader vantage point. Throughout this process, I repeatedly asked myself several questions, including:

1. How can the participants' narratives of hope be understood in light of each other?
2. What are the meaningful threads of hope common across participant narratives?
3. What are the distinct and unique aspects of hope across participant narratives which give rise to a rich and perhaps new understanding of hope for male survivors?

With these questions in mind, I again became absorbed in the analysis process, and was reminded of the fundamental assumptions underlying the methodological and analytic approach throughout this study. First, my analytical reflections on the shared experiences of hope are informed and filtered through my experiences with the research participants, the literature, and my own personal understandings and experiences of hope. Second, I fully appreciate that my interpretations are one of many possible ways to understand hope across the participants, and what is offered here is by no means a

definitive work. Third, I also acknowledge that the interpretation process itself is never entirely complete, and that we each have the unique and endless capacity to refine, enhance, and deepen our understanding of hope. As such, readers interacting with the chapter that follows and this overall document will arrive at their own understandings informed by their own experience and position in the world at the time. Together, these assumptions shape the spirit with which the common and unique aspects of hope across participants are offered to the reader.

Believing that it is through the commonalities and differences in participants' narrative accounts that our understanding of hope and MSCA is further enriched, I will therefore highlight both. The purpose of this chapter is not to reiterate what has already been written in previous chapters but to offer an analysis of the "narrative threads" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) shared across participants, as well as the thematic ideas that are unique to particular individuals.

A Multidimensional Framework: A Guide along the Analytical Journey

In the process of reflecting on the themes that resonate across participants, I noticed that these connective threads strongly aligned with a multidimensional view of hope. Thematic threads highlighted in this study are consistent with seminal qualitative studies of hope (e.g., Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farren et al., 1995). In particular, the multidimensional understandings of hope offered by Stephenson (1991) provide a useful framework from which to view the thematic ideas revealed in this study. Based on a comprehensive review of literature on hope, Stephenson defines hope as a "process of anticipation that involves the interaction of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating, and is directed to a future fulfillment that is personally meaningful" (p. 1459). In this discussion chapter, I will attempt to make explicit the linkages between Stephenson's description of hope (i.e., the cognitive, behavioral, affective, and relational dimensions) and the themes apparent in survivors' narratives. The themes presented and a discussion

of the literature germane to these themes are purposefully integrated, which is a common practice in discourse analysis and is thought to offer a meaningful way of representing the findings alongside current research (e.g., Elliott & Olver, 2002).

A Note on Hopelessness

It is noteworthy to mention that in individual participant's narratives and the themes described herein, hope and hopelessness were woven together throughout. While hopelessness was not the focus of this study, witnessing and attending to participants' stories of hopelessness were important to gain a full and rich understanding of participants' experiences of hope in relation to CSA. Scholarship supports this viewpoint when working within a therapeutic context (Farran, et al., 1995; Flaskas, 2007; Hanna, 2002; Jevne, 1991; Jevne & Miller, 1999; Larsen & Stege, 2010a; Larsen & Stege, 2012), and I would argue that this approach is equally as important when conducting qualitative research on hope for MCSA.

Theme One: Thinking Hope

The *thinking* component of hope involves a process of looking forward and visualizing something not yet in existence, an object of hope such as a goal or desired outcome (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Stephenson, 1991). Participants in this study characterized hope as a cognitive construct in two ways: 1) hope was a desired goal or a particular future outcome that was personally meaningful, and 2) hope was perspectival and took into account multiple possibilities. In addition to these two subthemes, participants also shared that their experiences of hope were vulnerable when their goals or desired outcomes did not manifest. Further, when participants experienced a shift in their perspective that allowed for different and, at times, unexpected possibilities, their connection to hope was often strengthened and sustained.

Desired Goals and Outcomes

Common to many, if not all, participant narratives was a reflection on hope as a desired goal or outcome. These goals or hoped for outcomes were indicative of what participants deemed important or valuable in their lives. Ben for instance, clearly articulated hope as “*something we want and that would have a positive effect on our lives. Anything from ‘I hope I win the lottery’ to ‘I hope my nephews get a good education so they have choices in life’*” (p. 106). For Ben, hope was not only centered on a particular outcome that was personally significant to him but also wide-ranging in nature. Throughout Ben’s narrative, hope as a “*goal setting process*” (p.107) was the primary lens with which he understood hope in his life. At first, hope began as a “*hazy kind of dream*” from which Ben then created and engaged in “*making short term goals, like daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly goals*” (p. 107). Many of Ben’s hopes were specific in focus (i.e., attending helicopter school, kayaking in Tofino, and building a log home), were strongly desired, and overall, were appraised as straightforward to achieve. While this “*learned*” process initially took some time and energy to develop, with experience and consistent success, Ben expressed a sense of certainty that he was adept at rendering his goals a reality: “*It’s not that reaching my goals doesn’t take effort; it’s just that once I’ve set my goals, I know I will get them done—simple as that*” (p. 109). Of all the participants, Ben’s narrative of hope more closely aligned with Snyder’s (1994) goal directed conception of hope as a combination of pathway thinking and agency thinking. In other words, Ben not only perceived himself as being able to create possible routes to his goals, he was also certain in his agentic capacity to move along his envisioned pathways to his goals (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, & Adams, 2000).

The thematic thread of hope as a goal- or outcome-based entity was also revealed in Arnold and Jason’s narratives. From Arnold’s perspective, hope involved setting and working towards fulfilling “*incremental goals,*” as well as having “*something that you’re*

looking for down the road or like a destination that you've set your sight on" (p. 120).

Arnold considered his ability to set and attain his daily goals as an indication of feeling good about himself and moving along in his healing from CSA. Jason explicitly indicated, *"I find hope in planning and attaining my hopes"* (p. 173). Reaching his goal of purchasing his first home rendered Jason further engaged with hope and open to other possibilities and goals in his life. Both Arnold and Jason, not only viewed hope in terms of setting and achieving desired goals, they also each expressed that engaging with hope in this way provided a purposeful direction in their lives.

For Kevin, Paul, and Roderick, the narratives were less explicitly saturated by the notion of hope as a goal setting process. While these participants were less goal directed, they did all express their hopes for loving intimate relationships along with hopes for a greater sense of healing and understanding around their sexual abuse experiences, which could be seen as specific desired outcomes.

Desired goals: Important yet vulnerable. While identified as important to participants' understandings and experiences of hope, goal- and outcome-focused hopes were also described as potentially vulnerable. Across participant narratives, the common thread of vulnerability associated with experiencing an unfulfilled goal- or outcome-based hope was revealed. Said differently, in the event that a specific goal did not come to fruition or a desired outcome was not realized, participants experienced some difficulty in their capacity to remain hopeful. In a paper examining hope within the health care context, Simpson (2004) draws attention to the relationship between hope and vulnerability. Specifically, she postulates that "to hope opens one to the possibility of being hurt by circumstances not working out" (p. 442). Essentially, when the avenues to achieving our goals or desired outcomes are threatened, this renders one's connection to hope potentially vulnerable. This sentiment was highlighted by several participants related to their own experiences with goal or outcome based hopes.

The vulnerability associated with hope had its genesis early in the lives of many participants and for Paul and Kevin led to the eventual abandonment of those goal or outcome based hopes. For instance, Paul shared how the persistent experience of having his childhood hopes go unrealized (i.e., experiencing a safe and loving connection with his parents during the years of abuse) led to the detachment from those childhood hopes entirely. As a child attempting to endure and make sense of his experience of abuse, Kevin also hoped for a specific outcome, *“that someone would’ve come around or something would’ve changed”*; however, *“when that didn’t happen, it kind of smashed [his] hope”* (p. 142). Not only did the hope of rescue go unfulfilled and render Kevin’s connection to hope tenuous at the time, but the vulnerability associated with hope continued later into his life: *“Now many decades later, I don’t know if I believe in hope because the I hope I had back in those moments didn’t really come through”* (p. 142). Those early unfulfilled hopes that were related to his experience of abuse not only left Kevin questioning the possibility of a hoped for future but also led him to consider forsaking his overall connection to hope: *“So maybe I should just say ‘to hell with hope’ because I’ve felt so let down in the past... I’m left asking myself, should I have hope that things are going to get better?”* (p. 151). From these participant narratives, we learn that when hope hinges on a single vital need, goal, or outcome, it can often fluctuate and be relinquished depending on the realization of that goal or outcome.

For Roderick and Kevin, the thematic thread of hope as potentially vulnerable continued well beyond their childhood. Roderick revealed that when his hope to be in a caring, intimate relationship goes awry, this *“chips away at [his] hope”* (p. 92). He further described having his hopes unmet as a repetitive experience, and as such Roderick expressed feeling *“led astray by hope”* ... *And because of those kinds of experiences, I’ve chosen to stay alone right now because there is just too much risk to embrace that kind of hope again...it’s too painful”* (p. 97). Because Roderick’s hope has been threatened time

and time again, it appears that his decision not to engage in this particular hope is a way in which he manages his sense of vulnerability. Similarly to Roderick, Kevin too, shared that when his hope for a meaningful relationship did not come to pass, it exposed him to pain and loss. Interestingly, Kevin's experiences of goals or hopes gone unmet, also elicited a re-experiencing of aspects related to his past sexual abuse: "*When I pursue my hope or goal of being in a loving relationship and I work towards that and really try to make it happen, it pulls me back to my childhood experiences of life when it doesn't work out. I feel like a kid again who has these problems and doesn't have the power to do anything about them*" (p. 152). Not only was Kevin's hope threatened when circumstances did not support his goal to be in a meaningful relationship, but he also subsequently experienced a further level of vulnerability, mirroring his childhood trauma.

Desired goals: Down but not out. While for some participants hope became threatened when their goals or desired outcomes went unrealized, for one particular participant there was a continued engagement with his hope nevertheless. Throughout his narrative, Ben continued to abide by his goal to build a log cabin and resort despite his ailing health. With little control over his health circumstances, and faced with uncertainty and the inability to work towards his hope, Ben sustained his connection to this highly valued hope regardless. Based on their research on folk understandings of hope, Bruininks and Malle (2005) pointed out that, "being hopeful enables people to maintain an approach-related state despite their present inability to reach the desired outcome" (p. 338). Similarly, Ben continued to move towards his goal because he deemed it important enough and was willing to engage with what may be possible, even when met with the limitations potentially thwarting his ability to attain his goal.

Hopeful Perspectives

Several participants identified that hope involved a cognitive belief or an effortful looking toward what was possible in the face of challenge. Jason shared that hope for

him involved a belief that *“a situation or things in general can be better... It’s not like hope has to only look or even be a certain thing. It’s more than that...it’s believing that change is possible and can happen”* (p. 166). In addition to hope being directed towards something specific in nature, Jason also identified hope as a more general orientation and openness to change and future possibility. Like Jason, Arnold also expressed that hope for him involved a belief that *“there is something better to come”* despite the *“desolation”* he found himself experiencing early on in his healing journey (p. 130). For both Jason and Arnold, hope was based on a belief that they could transcend their difficulties. This connection is consistent with other research in the field of hope. In a study conducted by Turner (2005) on the experiences of hope for 10 Australian youth, the notion of hope as a belief or confidence that “life would go well” or that one could rise above one’s difficult life circumstances is similar to the description provided by the men in this study (p. 510).

In addition, both Jason and Arnold expressed that hope was future oriented and anchored in possibility. Early definitions of hope tended to underscore the notion of probability related to the hoped for outcome (Stotland, 1969); however, more recent research has emphasized the integral role of perspective and possibility (Bruininks & Malle, 2005; Larsen & Stege, 2012). In their qualitative research exploring client accounts of hope early in the counselling process, Larsen and Stege posited that when clients in therapy are able to identify possibilities, they are more readily able to adopt a hopeful perspective. Along this vein, Roderick shared that his *“perception[s] of things”* or his consideration of what is possible in his life can have an *“influence on whether [he] experience[s] hope or not”* (p. 103). In short, when participants looked to the future through the lens of what was possible, hope became more accessible.

Perspective Shift. Further, a change in the way participants thought or a broadening of perspective was identified as being integral to their sense of hope. Arnold succinctly pointed out this connection: *“Now that is hope, you know having a different*

perspective” (p. 132). In much the same way, Roderick shared that in shifting how he perceived his positive contributions to his family, he was able to identify what was “*hopeful*” in an otherwise unchanged and difficult family dynamic: “*That’s a hopeful way of looking at a situation that doesn’t feel necessarily great... That shift in my way of thinking makes a huge difference for me*” (p. 102). This alteration in perspective for Roderick appeared to come about in response to a reframe. Although nothing had changed in the circumstances around his family, by reinterpreting his role, he came to a new understanding, which provided him a more hopeful perspective. This notion of reframing is one often referred to and utilized in therapeutic or counselling contexts. In a study exploring implicit hope-focused practices in psychotherapy, Larsen and Stege (2012) identified how clients in therapy also experience a sense of hope when their therapist helps them consider new or different interpretations related to their life situations.

Kevin also revealed how experiencing a shift in his perceptions related to his healing from CSA offered him an important and unexpected sense of hope. Throughout much of Kevin’s narrative, he struggled in making sense of his abuse experience and desperately sought out ways to reclaim the “*parts*” of himself that were “*stolen*” as a result of the abuse (p. 141). However, during our research conversations, Kevin came to a realization that there were other possibilities, understandings, and avenues to his healing. In his description of the photo entitled “A wasteland,” Kevin expressed, “*Taking this picture and now talking about it has really done something for me and my thought process. I don’t know that I expected that, but I’m finding it fascinating and quite hopeful really.*” (p. 159). By engaging in a conversation in which he explored his options for moving forward in his healing, Kevin experienced a shifting and a broadening of what he perceived was possible for him, thereby, fostering hope. When Kevin was able to recognize he could let go of his previously held beliefs about what healing meant (i.e.,

finding and restoring the parts of himself that were taken from him), this freed Kevin to consider other ways of healing. In short, hope surfaced through perspective change. While perception is often thought to be fundamental to hope (Knowles, 1986), recent psychotherapy research by Larsen and Stege (2010a) supports the premise that the process of actively shifting one's perception or generating expanded possibilities is important in the fostering of hope.

Theme Two: Hope as an Embodied Emotion

Along with viewing hope as a cognitive construct, participants also described hope as an embodied emotion. This aspect of emotion is common to many conceptualizations of hope (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farren et al., 1995; Nikolaichuk, 1999; Stephenson, 1999). According to Stephenson, the *feeling* aspect of hope is typically associated with “a positive feeling state” (p. 1458). This thematic thread emphasizes participants' hope as an internalized experience, which manifests as an emotion, or feeling, and a sense of physical energy. It is noteworthy to mention that while participant narratives included this embodied emotional experience of hope, this facet was comparatively less prominent across participant accounts. Further, in most cases, hope as an emotion was implicitly woven throughout narratives, rather than being explicitly named.

Hope as an Emotion

For participants including Arnold, Kevin, Jason, and Paul—hope as an emotion was imbedded in their stories and was generally referred to as *feeling hopeful*, *feeling hope*, or *experiencing hope*. Interestingly, Roderick was the only participant who explicitly characterized hope as an emotion; he commented: “[Hope]... it's not out in the world somewhere... it's very internal. To me, it has a lot to do with feeling an emotion...it's a very experiential, personal and a quite creative process actually...Hope, as an experience, is life-enriching” (p. 95). For Roderick, hope was a distinctly inner

emotional experience that, at times, had little connection to anything outside himself but rather was inspired from within. This understanding of hope offers some support for Benzein's et al. (2000) description of hope as an internal process of being. Further, hope as an emotion has been identified by several researchers. Averill et al. (1990), for instance, asserted that hope as an emotion plays a primary role in sustaining an individual's connection to the future. Moreover, in a series of three studies examining the conceptual and psychological differences between hope and other related mental states, Bruininks and Malle (2005) argued that hope is an emotion that is experienced when an individual is focused on an important positive future outcome.

Embodied Hope

For some participants, hope was characterized as an embodied sense of energy or as an energetic shift experienced within their bodies. In short, hope was understood as a distinctly active and physical experience. Roderick, for example, explained hope as "*an energy kind of thing I feel in my body*" (p. 96). At times when Kevin was mindfully attuned to "*the beauty in life*" and the good available to him, he described experiencing the following: "*I feel a shift in my body... You know, I feel uplifted, hopeful, and kind of woken up to the world*" (p. 160). The notion of hope being connected to a sense of embodied vitality has been documented in the hope literature. In an early study on the elderly, Forbes (1994) posited that hope generates energy that supports individuals in their coping with numerous life obstacles, losses, and difficulties. In a more recent study exploring hope in the early stages of counselling, participants also identify hope as a "corporeal experience" (Larsen & Stege, 2012, p. 49). Similar to Roderick and Kevin, both Paul and Ben also expressed hope as an embodied sensation of excitement. Paul shared, "*Hope is really exciting...it gives me energy... I mean when I experience hope, I can't help but feel invigorated*" (p. 197). Interestingly, Ben made a connection between feeling a sense of excitement and becoming further engaged in actively working towards

his goal-oriented hopes. With reference to attaining his goal of flying, he shared, “*while I was climbing to altitude, I was just screaming out loud...Here was my whole life’s dream coming true in that moment, it was just so exciting! I think that excitement really gets me going and working on reaching my goals*” (p. 107). In much the same way, Jason also associated the feelings of excitement when attaining his goals with a further active orientation to other goals in his life. From these narratives, we learn that, for many participants, a facet of hope was the physical sensations of energy, elation, and an active orientation to the world around them.

Theme Three: Hope in Action

A link between hope and action or agency was identified as a common thread across participant accounts. Generally, agency is described as the capacity to take action on one’s own behalf or the ability to impact one’s life in a meaningful way. More specifically, participants described hope as being connected to: (1) the act of engaging in a particular behavior supportive of one’s desired outcomes or goals, (2) having choices and options, and (3) the act of taking risks despite the future’s uncertainty. These findings are consistent with an agentic and active-focused perspective of hope seen across disciplinary and theoretical approaches (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran, et al., 1995; Morse & Doberneck, 1995; Simpson, 2004; Snyder, 1999; Stephenson, 1991). It is important to note that agency can take on different forms. As Austin et al. (2013) point out it, we can think of agency as the cognitive and physical energies of hope in action. According to participants in this study, the capacity to initiate or take action with a purpose was integral to their understandings and experiences of hope. Alternatively, when faced with the inability to be an active agent in their own lives, as in the experience of CSA, participants’ connection to hope was threatened.

Hopeful Actions: Important and Necessary

Action, or as Benzein et al. (2000) frame it, “doing” hope, was perceived by some participants as both important and necessary to their sense of hope (p. 309). Throughout Ben’s narrative, the notion of hopeful action was prominently featured, specifically as it related to his goal setting process: *“It’s not enough to just say, ‘Geeze, I hope I reach my goals and that things work out.’ You have to be prepared to do something about it and take some action so your hopes and goals come to reality”* (p. 111). For Ben, goal-oriented action took the form of engaging in behavioral strategies, such as writing down his goals and devising specific short- and long-term goals. Notably, Ben judged hope to have a rather “*pathetic*” quality to it when unaccompanied by the capacity to “*do*” or act in accordance with his understanding of hope (p. 105). While Roderick also expressed the importance of action, he further connected the notion of personal accountability to his sense of hope: *“The bottom line is that you actually need to do something...It would be irresponsible to just hope that something will change or somehow that you’ll reach some sort of objective and then not actually work on making it happen”* (p. 88). In Ben and Roderick’s accounts, solely having a goal or outcome related hope, while important, was not enough. Rather, it was also critical to undertake some form of action or behaviour to render their hopes a reality. This finding is closely aligned with Synder’s (1994) goal-setting theory of hope, a perspective within which one’s motivation to engage in achieving one’s goals or desired future outcomes is of paramount importance.

Taking a slightly different but related perspective, Paul shared that, in his experience, hopeful action involves ongoing effort and personal commitment: *“[Hope] requires something of you, it requires a lot of work in order to keep walking through life with hopefulness, especially during the hard times when you can’t always see it”* (p. 200). To maintain his sense of hope, Paul acknowledged the need to be active and intentional in

his commitment to hope, particularly during times when hope may be threatened. The notion that hope often involves a personal investment and concerted effort in the midst of life's struggles has been highlighted in the hope literature (Bruninks & Malle, 2005; Jevne & Miller, 1999; Jevne & Nekolaichuk, 2003). Jevne and Nekolaichuk (2003) conclude that when one's commitment to working through challenges is low, one is then "unlikely to intentionally implement strategies for strengthening and maintaining hope" (p. 203).

Hopeful Actions and Childhood Sexual Abuse

The capacity to initiate action for their own purposes or to their own benefit was not only important to participants' sense of hope as it related to their goals, but it was also significant to their understandings of CSA. Often thought of as an experience of extreme disempowerment, CSA can be considered an act that robs a boy of his capacity to act for his own benefit (Allen, 2005; Fradkin, 2012; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Kia-Keating et al., 2010; Lew, 2004). When his will is infringed, his physical body invaded, and his overall sense of agency continually contravened, a sense of powerlessness is frequently experienced (Gartner, 2005; Harvey, Mishler, Koenen, & Harney, 2000). As such, the inability to take action or influence the circumstances around their experiences of CSA (i.e., stop the abuse) had a significant impact on several participants' experiences of hope as children. Jason described experiencing a sense of despair related to his inability to end the abuse: *"It was a more hopeless time because I couldn't do anything to stop it really and I never knew if and when something might change and get better or even get worse"* (p. 168). Together with a great deal of uncertainty about what the future might hold, Jason's perceived lack of personal agency left him struggling with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Kevin shared a similar experience: *"I couldn't do anything about the abuse... I don't remember really hoping for anything... or even having any feelings of hope because there was such a strong sense of powerlessness"* (p.

142). Miller (2000) indicated that “when powerlessness is not contained, hopelessness can result” (p. 525). As children, the pervasive sense that there was nothing they could do to stop the abuse was one of the most significant threats to the participants’ hope at the time.

In circumstances in which participants were able to act or have influence over some aspect of the abuse, hope appeared to be within their reach as children. Paul described feeling a sense of hope in his plan to take action in circumventing potential future incidents of stranger-perpetrated sexual abuse: “*The fact that I knew I would never allow it to happen again was a pretty hopeful thing for me... I knew I would never see him again, and I knew that I would never hitchhike again, and somehow that gave me hope*” (p. 183). Finkelhor and Browne (1985) highlight that, when children are able to exert some control over the abuse in whatever way they can, this may have an impact on their feelings of disempowerment. This sentiment was articulated by Arnold, who during many years of ongoing abuse took action on his own behalf by “*holding*” onto the “*secret*” of abuse. While the circumstances of the abuse went unchanged, Arnold described that the act of inaction (i.e., not disclosing the abuse) was “*kind of hopeful because at least [he] was in control of something in [his] life*” (p. 123). Along this line of thinking, Jevne and Nikolaichuk (1999) postulate that establishing a sense of control in some aspect of a person’s life, particularly in situations in which there is a profound loss of predictability (e.g., CSA), can be an important aspect in one’s experience of hope.

Hope and Choice

Several participants referred to their capacity to make choices in their best interests as a facet of hope-orientated action or agency. Arnold explicitly and simply stated that, “*choice is hope*” (p. 131). He went on to reveal that, for him, hope was strongly connected to life-enhancing choices, such as deciding to address his alcohol addiction and intentionally looking to the future with the anticipation of “*something*

better to come” (p. 130). While Jason shared that he felt he had few choices available to him as a child, he did, however, reclaim his capacity to make choices in his adulthood, thereby inciting a sense of hope: “[M]y entire life now is about choice, and it feels good to have that control... Things are up to me now...It's really very hopeful and encouraging for me” (p. 169). Similarly for Kevin, the capacity to make choices, specifically those related to how he understood his past experiences of CSA, offered him a great deal of hope: “Knowing that I have a choice and can maybe find a completely different way to heal gives me a lot of hope” (p. 158). Together, these narratives revealed how participants’ hope was enhanced when they could identify options and actively make meaningful choices in their lives. This finding is supported by Turner’s (2005) study, in which 10 young Australian participants expressed that having choices available to them in their lives was inextricably tied to their experience of hope and their ability to foresee a future within which they can achieve their goals. Furthermore, in a study exploring changes in hope and power in lung cancer patients, Wall (2000) asserted the presence of “a relation between one’s ability to envision a better future and one’s potential to actualise options through choice” (p. 234).

When engaged in identifying options and making choices, research participants’ expressions were hopeful and expectant of a future full of possibility. However, when those options or choices were limited, their connection to hope was threatened. Ben shared his understanding of how his goal-setting process was compromised in the absence of choice: “If I were in a situation where I had no choice and I could only do one thing, then my hope to make my dreams and goals a reality would not come as easily” (p. 106). For Ben, no choice or restricted choice posed a challenge to his capacity to act and find ways to attain his goal-focused hopes. Participants’ narratives are consistent with Seligman’s (1992) experimental demonstration and discussion of the importance of having choices and options related to hope. Further, in a different but potent context,

Frankl (1959) shared his insights into the significance of having choices and options. Through his observations of fellow prisoners, he portrayed the manner in which their hopes were significantly threatened and, at times, completely lost when few options were present.

Choice and Childhood Sexual Abuse

Children experiencing sexual abuse are most often trapped in circumstances in which they have few or no choices available to them associated with the abuse. Both Jason and Kevin identified how their hope was threatened when faced with the inability to exercise choice related to their experiences of CSA. Kevin vividly described this connection: *“There [was] a real sense of hopelessness... because as a kid, I didn’t have a choice... I couldn’t say no... I was up against something that was going to win and have its way with me”* (p. 153). Jason expressed similar thoughts: *“Having no choice or control about anything as a child... especially the abuse, made it difficult to hold onto the little hope I might have had on the good days”* (p. 169). Inability to identify and make choices as children left these participants struggling with feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness as there was virtually nothing they could do to change their circumstances.

Hope and Risk

Along with choice, some participants also referenced the importance of risk to their understandings of an agentic hope. Roderick made the interconnection between risk, hope, and action most distinct: *“There’s some sort of action required to make [hope] a reality, and for that to happen you need to take a risk. If there’s no hope, there’s no need to take a risk, and there isn’t anything to act on”* (p. 88). Roderick went on to share how the act of taking a risk was an inherent aspect of his experiences of hope, particularly as it related to engaging in meaningful interpersonal connections: *“In my experience, hope really comes down to connection and the risk in making those deep connections with someone”* (p. 87). In other words, hope for Roderick was about actively engaging

with another despite the potential risks. Similarly, Ben also expressed how risk was integral to his understanding of goal-focused hope: *“The thing about hope is that you can’t be afraid of taking risks... You have to have courage in order to take risks so that you go for your dreams and reach your goals”* (p. 111). Hayenhjelm (2006), an author in the area of risk-taking behaviors and perceptions, offered a framework that accounts for hope as an explanatory factor in individual risk-taking. She argued that “taking a risk from hope can be understood as... the positive expectation of a possible but uncertain beneficiary outcome” (p. 198). In short, to risk is to act in the direction of one’s hopes despite the associated uncertainty of realizing those hopes.

Risk and Childhood Sexual Abuse

As children, risk was often something participants attended to and attempted to minimize. In a sense, risk management became a necessary form of self-protection during their experiences of sexual abuse. For instance, Kevin described assessing the settings that were most conducive to keeping him safe from another potential incident of abuse (e.g., the outdoors). Kevin also shared how his experience of abuse left him feeling *“paralyzed”* and unable to act and take risks given the uncertainty he lived with as a child: *“After being abused it’s really hard to take those risks in life because there are so many unknowns, and things have just not worked out in the past for me”* (p. 162). This notion of uncertainty as it relates to risk and hope has been identified as a situational dimension of hope by Nikolaichuk et al. (1999). In addition, Benzein et al. (2000) noted that the future aspect of hope contains a certain level of risk as the future is unknown and uncertain; therefore, to engage with hope, one must also engage with risk.

As children, disclosing their experiences of abuse to others involved significant risk and many unknown and potentially negative consequences. For instance, Arnold shared his keen childhood awareness of the possible risk associated with the disclosure of the abuse... *“If I let my family and friends in and let go of the secret of what happened*

and what I am going through, I worry how they might treat me or interact with me differently. I'm not prepared for that..." Similarly, Paul shared, *"If I told my parents... they would've called me a liar and I would've been beaten black and blue... There was so much fear preventing me from telling anybody... it was too much of a risk to confide in anyone or make it stop, and that really intensified the hopelessness for me"* (p. 182).

Research on CSA supports the notion that a boy's perceptions of anticipated consequences will impact his decision to disclose the abuse (Omarzu, 2000). Further, Allagia (2005) posits that if a child assess the risks of telling to be greater than the possible benefits, he will likely avoid disclosure. Taking this notion one step further, participant accounts help us learn that the uncertainty and potential danger to personal safety as children was, at times, too extreme, rendering the comparatively safer options (e.g., not disclosing abuse) more favorable; however, a less hope-enhancing experience.

Despite living in a climate of risk as children, engaging in takings risks as adults became a sign of possibility and potentially hopeful outcomes for some participants. Although as a child, Paul felt it was too much of a risk to disclose his experiences of CSA, later in his life he found ways to safely take the risk of sharing and honoring his story, which engendered significant hope: *"It's interesting because in the past, I would never take those risks and tell my story, so I would stay alone in the pain. But after these experiences in the healing program, hope was in my life more and more"* (p. 189). For Paul, beginning to take those risks he had understandably avoided as a child was not only hope-enhancing but allowed him to become a strong agent of action in his life, thereby further inspiring his hope.

Theme Four: Hope in Relationship and Connection

Feeling a connection or engaging in a meaningful relationship with self, with others, and with a spiritual entity was integral to participants' hope. Times when participants experienced a rupture in any of those three connections often left them

struggling for a sense of hope. Within the hope literature, relationships with self, others, and a higher spiritual power have been found to be a recurrent theme and imperative to the experience of hope (Larsen et al., 2007). From a trauma-focused perspective, researchers have posited that to heal from the aftermath of trauma, one must re-establish a sense of safety in the world and reconnect to self and others (Fradkin, 2012; Gartner, 2005; Kia-Keating et al., 2010). Consistent with the literature, feelings of connectedness were repeatedly endorsed as critical to participants' experiences of hope. The relational component of hope was highlighted by Stephenson (1999), who drew upon the notion that a relationship between individuals occurs in the exchange and sharing of hope.

Relationship with Self

The narratives of this study suggest that there are multiple ways for male survivors to foster hopeful relationships with self, including engaging in self-understanding and enhanced self-awareness, developing a hopeful and positive self-appraisal, and nurturing a worthy sense of self. These various avenues to supporting a hopeful relationship with self may each be important and merit attention, particularly if one area of one's relationship with self is more difficult to connect with than another.

Self-understanding. A survivor's drive to understand his or her experience of CSA and integrate it into his or her life story has been cited by researchers as critical to the healing process (Draucker et al., 2011). To some degree, all participants in this study expressed a motivation to enhance their understandings of CSA in their lives. However, only Arnold and Paul highlighted their intentional engagement in a relationship with self through mindful reflection and awareness as being important to their sense of hope. Arnold commented, *"I guess the kernel of truth for me is that hope is really about having a relationship with ME that is based on self-awareness and understanding... I know as long as I'm looking for answers as to why I'm feeling the way I feel, I have hope"* (p. 136). Along with Arnold, Paul also shared that, despite the struggles he continued to face

related to CSA, he found hope in reflecting and learning about his feelings, thoughts, and reactions: *“Even though I am still in my process of recovery... I now have a relationship with myself that I invest in, and I try to understand myself, my reactions, and some of the things that have happened in my life, and this all brings me hope and what is possible in the future* (p.192). Developing new self-understandings was a way in which participants cultivated a relationship with self, thereby inciting feelings of hope in their capacity to move forward in their lives.

Though relatively little research has been done on this aspect of hope, one study exploring hope in academic worklife underscored the connection between hope and “time spent intentionally nurturing a relationship with self” (Larsen, 2009, p. 160). In her narrative study, Larsen found that hope was often enhanced when educators took the opportunity to reflect on self. This thematic thread lends support to research indicating that investing time in self with the intent of enhancing awareness and self- understanding is important to one’s hope (Larsen & Larsen, 2004; Larsen & Stege, 2010).

Self-identity. In this study, participants’ engagement with their sense of self and self-identity was important to the development of a hopeful relationship with self. Reviewing the hope literature across several disciplines, Elliott (2005) posited that “hope does seem to be part of who we deem ourselves to be” (p. 38). It is well documented that the experience of CSA can have a significant impact on the survivor’s personal identity and self-appraisal (Gartner, 1999, 2005; Lew, 2004; Miller, 2002). Trauma researchers, Thompson and Walsh 2010, posited that survivors of CSA often have a fragmented sense of self. Further, Thompson and Walsh claimed that “trauma challenges our very sense of who we are and where we fit into the world. It undermines our identity” (p. 379).

These sentiments were echoed in the narrative accounts of several participants in this study. Paul, Kevin, and Roderick explicitly cited CSA as fundamentally altering their self-identity and thereby threatening their connection to hope at the time. For

instance, Paul commented, “*With the abuse I think I lost that sense of personhood... I lost my identity, and that was a pretty hopeless experience of myself*” (p.193). Like Paul, Kevin and Roderick also struggled with experiences of hopelessness associated with an undeveloped or fragmented sense of self.

When participants perceived themselves to be valued, complete individuals worthy of being cared for by others, they were better able to access hope. For instance, hope surfaced for Arnold when he felt appreciated within his relationships and was self-accepting without negative judgment: “*Instead of hating myself so much that I don’t even want to look at myself, I can now see ME and even like ME, and that is a sign of hope*” (p. 132). Implicit in Arnold’s account is the notion that his relationship with self and self-identity altered over time and this shift offered him a source of hope.

Literature on identity formation underscores the fact that individuals continually construct and reconstruct themselves to meet the needs of different situations, integrating the remembered past, the anticipated future, and the present situation (Bruner, 2004; Singer, 2004). Paul highlighted a reconstruction or shift in his self-identity and the impact it had on his hope: “*In recent years, I have come to see that I am COMPLETE, I AM a person, and have always BEEN a person, and that has stirred so much hope for me*” (p. 193). While Paul noted having previously felt a loss of his personhood or self-identity in relation to CSA, his renewed capacity to see himself as innately valued, engendered “*a tremendous amount of hope for the future*” (p. 193).

Psychological research on clients’ accounts of hope offers insight into the connection between hope and identity. For instance, during the early stages of therapy, positive self-reflections are often described as hopeful moments by clients (Larsen & Stege, 2012). These ways of understanding and relating to the self, offer hopeful ways for clients to be in the world. Larsen and Stege further posited that “these aspects of identity contributed to a sense of purpose and self-worth, offering an anchor to self during

difficult times” (p. 48). In the current study, survivors’ experiences of hope were also closely aligned to their understandings of self and self-appraisals.

A worthy self. Several participants’ highlighted an association between hope and feelings of self-worth. Literature on trauma and MCSA in particular pointed out that a boy’s self-worth is often called into question and compromised as he contends with self-blame, shame, helplessness, rejection, and betrayal (Allen, 2005; Fradkin, 2012; Gartner, 2005; Herman, 1997). Kevin’s comment reflects this conclusion: *“The abuse... was an experience of darkness for me... I remember feeling completely unwanted as if I was some sort of hideous beast... I felt like I wasn’t worthy of life on the planet. Those are the moments of true hopelessness and despair”* (p. 142).

Conversely, at times when participants were connected to their innate worth and value, they experienced a sense of hope. After many years of investing his effort and energy outwardly (e.g., ensuring his wife and children were happy and taken care of), Jason finally came to see that he, too, was important, *“mattered,”* and was deserving of *“real happiness”* (p. 171). This act of self-honoring allowed Jason to enter into a hopeful relationship with self, focused on his own values, wants, and needs: *“I finally came to the place where I wanted things not only for others, but for me too. When I actually decided that I AM worthy and DO have a say in my life, I felt free and hopeful for the first time in my life”* (p. 171). In addition, when participants felt valued by others, this too was a source of hope, particularly at difficult times in their lives. Roderick described how those with whom he worked were instrumental to his hope: *“During the really hard times... I would say that my work ... got me through. I felt that my clients appreciated me and respected me. My work really helped me with my self-esteem, my confidence, and feeling like my gifts were valued. From that, I was able to see myself in a positive and hopeful light”* (p. 98). Similarly, Paul commented that others’ recognition of him as a valuable and worthy individual was important to his experience of hope: *“Without question, I*

always felt loved by [my auntie] and like I mattered to her... [This relationship] not only stirred my hope, but I also began to form a stronger relationship to myself and God” (p. 186). Hope in connection to feeling worthy of another’s love and attention supports the findings outlined by Larsen and Stege (2012), which suggested that a strong therapeutic alliance fosters clients’ self-worth. Larsen and Stege contended that the process of interacting and sharing with the therapist can serve as the “appreciative mirror” reflecting identities and meaningful strengths. In short, positive and supportive interpersonal relationships can highlight and enhance one’s feelings of self-worth and value, engendering hope.

Relationship with Others

Across the hope literature, the experience of meaningful connection to another has been one of the most frequently identified sources of hope (Larsen et al., 2007). In this study, the fundamental importance of relationship and interpersonal connectedness was common to all participants’ experiences of hope, especially during times of difficulty. Whether it was the care and fondness Ben described for his nephews, the commitment and love Jason expressed for his two sons, or the unconditional support Arnold received from his wife, hope was associated with experiencing a meaningful relationship. As Roderick put it, *“Hope is all about connection...feeling connected to another human being gives me a tremendous amount of hope” (p. 86).* Equally noteworthy were participants’ accounts of the depletion of their hope associated with a rupture in important interpersonal relationships. It seems relationships offered participants significant hope but also brought the greatest threat to hope.

Ruptured Connections. By its very nature, MCSA involves a violation and a betrayal of a boy’s sense of trust, most often in the context of a supposedly safe interpersonal relationship (Brier, 1992; Gartner, 1999, 2005; Kia-Keating et al., 2013; Mate, 2008). As such, participants’ descriptions of their childhood relationships revealed

an experience of hopelessness along with a distinct sense of abandonment, isolation, and a lack of meaningful connection with their early caregivers. In addition to contending with his father's physically violent outbursts, Roderick shared how the absence of a nurturing connection with his father in response to the sexual abuse incited feelings of profound hopelessness: *"I experienced sheer hopelessness at that time... He didn't look after ME. He didn't come to me and hold me or express his sorrow at my misfortune... I was utterly alone in it all"* (p. 81). Similar to Roderick, Paul also described the negative impact that of not having a meaningful and connected relationship with his father had on his hope: *"Basically, as I was growing up I never got much attention or any physical love from either of my parents, but particularly my dad. He never held me in his arms and told me he loved me... I never heard those words"* (p. 180). Kevin described similar experiences. With no connection to his father and a perceived lack of hope from that relationship, he questioned the presence of hope in his life: *"It's as if I didn't get a lot of hope instilled in me from my father when I was little. I guess I just feel lost and not really knowing how to get hope in my life"* (p. 149).

Seminal developmental theorist Erikson (1982) argued that early relational experiences of trust between children and their caregivers contribute to the development of hope. Other qualitative research exploring hope in children, adolescents, and young adults have also indicated connectedness and relationship as playing an important role in enhancing hope (Erdem, 2000; Turner, 2005; Yohani, 2010; Yohani & Larsen, 2009). Participants in this study shared a common experience with those in a recent study exploring interpersonal functionality among male survivors (Kia-Keating, et al., 2013). Kia-Keating et al. concluded that male survivors often face numerous relational challenges "ranging from never having had an available, secure relationship in childhood to feeling removed from their emotional capacity to connect and relate to others in adulthood" (p. 679).

These ruptured or challenged relational experiences served as perhaps the greatest threats to participants' hope during childhood and later into their adulthood. Roderick, Ben, Kevin, and Paul all described a strong desire to engage in meaningful relationships in their adulthood. However, when those connections were challenged, they experienced overwhelming feelings of hopelessness. For instance, Kevin questioned his capacity to be in a loving, intimate relationship: *"Maybe I can't actually be in a relationship and love the way I'd like to. It feels like my heart is broken into little pieces and I keep trying to glue it back together again and I can't. So I end up back in that place of hopelessness"* (p.151). Roderick, Ben, and Paul also shared several experiences of hopelessness associated with feelings of interpersonal abandonment, rejection, isolation, and lack of support.

Beacons of Hope. While a ruptured or challenged interpersonal connection was described as hope-threatening, participants also shared that, in the context of supportive, safe, and trusting relationships, their hope surfaced. These hope-inspiring connections offered participants alternate interpersonal experiences that were in stark contrast to their CSA experiences. Jason shared that, despite the abusive relationship he had with his father, his football coach became a *"father figure"* who *"taught [him] about hope"* (p. 176). In a similar way, Paul described his hope-engendering relationship with a school teacher: *"For the first time in my life, I experienced tenderness with another human being...Until then, for the most part, I had always just experienced harshness and violence in my life...That relationship began to sow hope into my life"* (p. 186). In short, these relationships became beacons of hope in the participants' lives. Participant narratives corresponded with the findings outlined by Turner (2005). In her study of Australian youth, Turner claimed that feeling interpersonally connected is not only important to one's experience of hope but is *"central to our very humanness"* (p. 513).

Trust. Given that CSA is often cited as a betrayal of trust, adult male survivors repeatedly describe difficulties in trusting others in their interpersonal relationships (Gartner, 1999, 2005). While participants echoed these sentiments in this study, they also identified a sense of hope when they were able to trust within their relationships. Researchers Benzein et al. (2000) pointed out that, to engage with hope, one must also engage with the notion of trust. For several participants, the connection between hope and trust was prominent. Perhaps Paul said it most clearly: *“Trust is a HUGE thing for me, and it’s been a big part of my struggle, especially because of the abuse... The way I see it, hope and trust are very much related... I think trust is actually a stepping stone to hope”* (p. 196). According to Erikson, trust is central to the first stage of development, and successful resolution of this stage gives way to hope. In this vein, clinical psychologist Allen (2005) contended that “hope rests squarely on the capacity to depend on others,” particularly for those who have survived a childhood trauma (p. 291). Roderick echoed this notion: *“When I can connect with another human being and I can see inside of them that they are not hostile towards me or intending to be violent with me, then I can really trust and connect with them, and that gives me hope”* (p. 87). Herman (1997) also argued that basic trust emerges from experiences of care, which allow one to “envisage a world in which they belong, a world hospitable to human life” (p. 51). In short, experiencing trusting relationships contributes to an individual’s capacity to envision a hopeful future in which they belong and within which they see themselves engaged. This notion corresponds to participants’ narratives. Further linking hope and trust within relationships, Allen (2011) extended this connection to the concept of community.

Connection to Community. Community as an interpersonal relationship on a broader scale was important to participants’ understandings and experiences of hope. Irvin Yalom and Molyn Leszcz, seminal figures in group psychotherapy, affirmed that

hope is a vital aspect of community and overall meaningful relationships with others (2008). Consistent with Yalom and Leszcz's perspective, participants in this study experienced hope when they felt a sense of belonging within a larger community built on understanding, support, and safety. Paul shared his experience of hope in relation to a community he planned to join: "*During my visits there, I felt the ability to trust, I felt acceptance, love, and like I belonged. You want to talk about hope, I mean I've got so much hope now, I can barely contain myself*" (p. 197). Arnold also described his experience of hope when he felt surrounded by a community of people who were invested in supporting and witnessing his personal growth. In brief, his hope was connected to knowing that he was an active member of a community of others who cared for him. These findings underscore the profound hope often associated with a sense of community (Austin et al., 2013; Jevne & Nekolaichuk, 2003; Lemay, Edey, & Larsen, 2008; Weingarten, 2000). Hope scholars Jevne and Nekolaichuk (2003) argued, "A feeling of belonging to a group of people who care and/or share a common challenge strengthens hope" (p. 205). Within the literature on CSA, Kia-Keating et al. (2013) found that male survivors who feel a sense of belonging by locating a community of other survivors with shared experiences report positive recovery processes and a decrease in their isolation. Writing on trauma, Weingarten (2000) also spoke to hope as requiring community. Specifically, she asserted that, through a supportive community, hope is engendered as members share in their history, struggles, and vision (Weingarten, 2003).

Spiritual Relationships. Participants' spiritual connections were a meaningful source of hope. Shults and Sandage (2006) defined spirituality as a "way of relating to the sacred," which they define as persons, deities, entities, or objects of devotion and care. In this study, several participants identified a relationship with a benevolent presence, such as a higher spiritual power or a connection with the natural world, as associated with their experience of hope. For instance, Arnold related that, in the darkest

of times in his life, his hope was inspired by surrendering to a higher spiritual power: *“Somehow, by expressing myself to God and having a connection to something bigger than me, I felt a release and hopeful”* (p. 129). Of all the participants, Paul’s narrative was most imbued with reference to his spiritual relationship with God and the hope this meaningful connection provided him. Unlike other relationships in his life (e.g., those with his parents and brother), Paul’s spiritual connection was one that he could fully and safely engage with, depend on, and find hope in: *“God IS hope. He has been a source of hope to me and to so many others... I now have so much hope because I know He is there and I trust that He’ll always be there for me”* (p. 195).

Participants’ narratives aligned with other research that highlighted the importance of a spiritual connection for adult survivors of CSA (Draucker et al., 2011; Gall, Basque, Damasceno-Scott, & Vardy, 2007; Knapik, Martsolf, & Draucker, 2008). In a study examining the role of spirituality in the psychological adjustment of both male and female survivors, Gall et al. (2007) concluded that a relationship with a spiritual and benevolent entity is related to a greater sense of personal hope, which in turn facilitates an experience of resolution with the abuse. In other words, those participants with strong spiritual relationships are able to sustain their hope as they work to make meaning of past abuse. This finding was particularly echoed in this study by Paul: *“When ... I’m connected to my higher power, I feel like He’s able to take the load of everything and help me understand what I’ve experienced in the past and especially the abuse, and that is extremely hopeful”* (p. 195). Interestingly, this connection with a divine entity has also been found to be a hopeful aspect for children survivors of CSA engaged in therapy (Erdem, 2000).

From a slightly different vantage point, Kevin referenced the natural world as a means of experiencing a hopeful spiritual connection. For example, in mindfully witnessing the flight patterns of a hummingbird, Kevin found hope in the reminder that

“the world can be tender and safe” (p. 147). This and other meaningful spiritual connections with nature (e.g., sitting and fasting in the mountains as a child) provided Kevin an alternate story line to his abuse experiences, which supported his sense of hope: *“In that experience I realized that the Spirit does love me and I have a place in the world somewhere”* (p. 148). Miller and Jevne (1999) suggest that a connection to nature can be a means of relating to one’s spirituality or what one deems sacred, thereby fostering hope. Whether it was the witnessing of a sunrise or the anticipation of a budding plant, both Paul and Roderick also described experiencing hope during moments when they mindfully appreciated and attended to the natural world around them. Erikson (1982) considered this connection to the environment and the natural world as a mature form of hope. The representation of nature as a key source of hope has also been found in the literature exploring refugee and immigrant children’s perceptions of hope during the early years of resettlement (Yohani & Larsen, 2009). Together, these findings and the participant narratives in this study underscore the potential that nurturing a relationship with the natural world has as a means of supporting hope for male survivors of CSA.

Theme Five: Hope in Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse

Hope, as one’s ability to envision a future worth living, is believed to be essential to recovery and healing from trauma (Yohani & Larsen, 2012). In this study, healing from CSA was a unique aspect of participants’ understandings and experiences of hope. According to participants, healing involved: (1) finding ways to cope, (2) experiencing both hope and hopelessness, (3) finding meaning and purpose in CSA, (4) finding forgiveness, and (5) helping others. Overall, healing from the residual grip of CSA was a vacillating process for participants, replete with moments of despair as well as powerful experiences of hopefulness.

Hope and Coping

For several participants, healing involved engaging in a process of coping with the aftermath of CSA. Walsh et al. (2009) defined coping as it “refers to a range of diverse cognitions and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of a stressful or threatening situation” (p. 2). Early coping strategies for all but one participant involved abusing substances in an attempt to anesthetize themselves against the difficult emotions surfacing within them. Although a means of coping, substance abuse did not offer participants much in the way of hope. For instance, Kevin shared that he used drugs to “*numb the pain out and keep the strange emotions at bay*” (p. 145). He went on to explain that, although his substance abuse provided him a reprieve from the “*emotional turmoil*,” this coping strategy did not inspire a sense of hope for him. Similarly, Jason explained that “*there wasn’t much hope at all...The drinking just helped me keep going without really looking at what I was going through*” (p. 170).

These participant narratives support findings indicating that survivors of CSA often employ similar methods of coping (Draucker et al., 2011; O’Leary & Gould, 2010). While there is virtually no research exploring the intersection between healing, coping, and hope for male survivors of CSA, Jevne and Nekolaichuk (2003) offered some helpful insights on these dynamic and interrelated constructs. They suggested thinking of hoping and coping as two axes on a two dimensional matrix ranging from low to high. In their quadrant model of hoping and coping, someone who would be considered high on the coping axis and high on the hoping axis would resolve difficulties relatively effectively and look positively towards the future. However, according to this conceptualization, participants in the early stages of their healing were most often placed in the high-coping, low-hoping quadrant. Jevne and Nekolaichuk pointed out that those in this quadrant would be “flat”, describing themselves as doing fine or managing, but actually “dying on the inside” (p. 204). When coping involved participants’ attempts at suppressing,

numbing, or what O’Leary and Gould (2010) referred to as the strategies related to forms of denial, participants did not experience a sense hope but rather perceived this form of coping as managing the best way they knew how at the time. According to Farran et al. (1995), participants’ early methods of coping were of a “negative emotion-focused variety” and were less consistent with hope (p. 18).

Hope and Hopelessness in Coexistence

It may be tempting to think of hope as dichotomously present or absent (Larsen & Stege, 2013), or as inversely related (Flaskas, 2007). However, for participants in this study, hope and hopelessness dynamically coexisted in their experiences. Paul revealed that “...even in the most hopeless and darkest corners of [his] experiences, there has always been light along [his] journey...There has always been hope in some form or another” (p. 182). With respect to his experience of CSA, Paul further highlighted the powerful and complex interplay of hope and hopelessness: “Because I never experienced that physical bond with my parents, the sexual abuse kind of met a deep need and a hope I had. While it was repulsing and generally a hopeless experience, in a warped kind of way I found some hope in that” (p. 183). Lord (2008), a psychotherapist and CSA researcher, posited that hope and hopelessness are not only a common part of survivors’ experiences, but, at times, survivors’ contend with both concurrently.

As further testament to this idea, Roderick and Kevin also vividly articulated the connection between hope and hopelessness. Roderick said, “Hope for me is a double-edged sword because hot on the heels of hope or often along with hope, I’m also getting in touch with all my past hopelessness” (p. 91). Similarly, Kevin expressed how people in his life sometimes had a difficult time understanding “what it’s like to have a ton of hopelessness and yet a little bit of hope and be walking through life carrying all that stuff” (p. 154). Although Ben did not explicitly identify a relationship between hope and hopelessness, he did convey the fluctuating nature of his hope throughout the course of

our conversations. Ben's health posed a threat to his hope, and yet he remained simultaneously hopeful that he would still be able to build his log home in the future.

Ben's capacity to hold on to his hope despite his present inability to attain his goal is closely aligned to the conclusions drawn by Bruininks and Malle (2005). In their research, Bruininks and Malle asserted that "being hopeful enables people to maintain an approach-related state despite their present inability to reach the desired outcome" (p. 338). Participant narratives supported the research and theoretical perspectives indicating that hope and hopelessness do not exist as opposites. These accounts are consistent with the notion that hope and hopelessness "exist side by side," as maintained by Flaskas (2007, p. 189).

Hope in Meaning

Along the participants' healing journeys, many referred to finding a sense of meaning and purpose in their suffering from CSA as an important aspect to their hope. Philosopher and author Susan Neiman (2002) claimed that hope lies in our refusal to accept a world void of meaning. In short, we are driven to find purpose and "make sense of the world in the face of the fact that things go intolerably wrong" (Allen, 2011, p. 291). Traumatic experiences like CSA can contribute to a destabilization of one's existential meaning (Thompson & Walsh, 2010). In other words, trauma can shatter the assumption that the world is meaningful and benevolent, thereby undermining one's sense of hope (Allen, 2005; Jenmorri, 2006). Both Paul and Arnold echoed this notion. When faced with struggle and the inability to connect to a sense of existential meaning and greater purpose in their lives, they had difficulty finding hope. For instance, Arnold commented, "*I came to a place where I said, 'This is it. There's nothing else. I'm done. There's nothing left on this planet for me...' I had just given up on myself completely. I gave up all hope, and I didn't want to go on*" (p. 129).

Existential psychiatrist and WWII holocaust survivor Victor Frankl (1963) observed that when his fellow prisoners lost hope, they did not live long. Conversely, when individuals remained hopeful, they were much more able to endure difficult emotional, physical, and situational circumstances. From his observations, Frankl (1963) theorized that hope and meaning are necessary for mental health and survival. Further, he posited that hope provides individuals a way of constructing meaning from their experiences of suffering. Kevin and Roderick's narrative accounts, in particular, lent credence to this idea. For example, Roderick said, "*So despite everything I have experienced, all the abuse and crap, I'm still here... I guess the only thing is that hope hasn't completely left me... There are times that I feel like nothing is really pulling me through except for some dogged determination to make sense of this life of mine*" (p. 93). Despite his struggles, Roderick still held hope that he could come to some understanding of the meaning behind his suffering, which kept him engaged in living, even if there were times he would have preferred to give up on his life.

Based on a historical perspective of hope, Elliott (2005) commented on the connection between hope and meaning: "Hope is conceived as able to change lives: either through some link between psyche and some affecting well-being, or by the imparting of meaning or purpose to human existence" (p. 38). Meaning is a common element in many definitions and conceptualizations of hope (Bruininks & Malle, 2005; Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Elliott & Olver, 2002; Farren et al., 1995; Jevne, 2005; Nikolaichuk et al., 1999; Stephenson, 1991). In essence, hope is associated with outcomes that are perceived to be personally meaningful. A recent study by Dogra, Basu, and Das (2011) examining the connection between meaning and suicidal ideation among undergraduate college students concluded that meaning in life can act as a stress buffer, rebuff suicidal ideation, and generate hope in the face of adversity.

Unique across participant narratives was Ben's emotional account of the link between existential meaning and hope: "...*building log homes is the one thing I can do and have... pride in... Years from now they can tell their kids... 'My uncle built that way back when...' It gives me so much hope that they will have pride in what I've accomplished*" (p. 118). The possible continuity of Ben's existence through his log homes and the appreciation of his contribution to generations to come offered him hope. This particular facet of hope and meaning is closely aligned with the results found by Benzein et al. (2000). In their study of hope among healthy Swedes, hope was expressed as "being a participant in the evolution of the earth" and knowing "that things will pass on to the next generation" (p. 309).

Hope in Forgiveness

The aspect of forgiveness in healing was a unique thread of hope across participant narratives. In fact, the connection between hope and forgiveness was highlighted by only one participant, Paul. This interesting facet of Paul's narrative, although specific to his sense of hope, merits thoughtful consideration. Within his account, Paul referenced two experiences during which his hope was significantly strengthened by his capacity to forgive those who had brought about pain in his life, namely his father and brother. After years of not experiencing a meaningful connection with his father, Paul's "*hope was restored*" when he freely expressed his thoughts and feelings to his father, something he had never been able to do in the past. In that instance, Paul "*found peace and forgiveness*" (p. 190). In addition to this experience with his father, Paul's hope was further bolstered when he began to find forgiveness and to release himself from the negativity and self-blame associated with the abuse: "*forgiving... has freed me... I realize that what was done to me was against my will, and it wasn't my fault*" (p. 191). While this was a difficult process to engage in, Paul indicated that forgiving himself and his brother was an essential part of his healing that allowed him to

“experience hope more fully in [his] life” (p. 191). Forgiveness is said to facilitate healing (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), particularly in addressing issues related to CSA (Gartner, 2005; Walton, 2005). As previously noted in Paul’s chapter, forgiveness can be understood as a voluntary choice and process of increasing positive and decreasing negative affect, cognition, and behavior in response to personal injury and injustice (Enright, 2001). While hope and forgiveness have each been widely studied as independent constructs, associations between the two have received very limited attention (Jankowski & Sandage, 2013). Furthermore, male survivors’ experiences of hope and forgiveness have not been explored, highlighting the uniqueness of Paul’s narrative. Among the few studies available, researchers have begun to find a significant positive correlation between hope and forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2005). These early findings support Paul’s experience of a strengthened hope when engaged in the process of forgiveness that furthered his progress along the healing journey.

Hope in Helping

In the model of healing from CSA proposed by Draucker et al. (2011), altruism or helping others affected by sexual abuse was an integral part of recovery and the meaning-making process for survivors. In much the same way, when participants in this study found ways to help and support other survivors, this engendered a sense of hope for them and contributed to their own healing process. For instance, Paul expressed how sharing his experiences of CSA and hope through his participation in this study contributed to his healing: *“The thought that maybe what we are doing today will help someone else like another survivor is extremely hopeful and healing for me”* (p. 198). Jason indicated that his involvement in creating awareness and educating his own children about CSA was critical to his experience of hope and overall healing: *“In my opinion, if we educate our kids about sexual abuse, then we are doing something for the future, and I think that it helps me and other survivors start to heal from all this, and*

that's very hopeful" (p. 178). Arnold shared Jason's sentiments: *"I have hope that I can pass on some of the lessons I've learned to somebody else for their benefit. I think that's really healing for me to know I can make a difference to another survivor's life"* (p. 138).

Austin et al. (2013) asserted that a need and/or desire to take action, to make some difference, is fundamental to our very being. In a study exploring compassion fatigue, helping professionals spoke to the importance of seeing their actions make a positive difference in the lives of others (Austin et al.). Drawing from an emerging body of research exploring hope among helping professionals, such as counsellors and psychologists, Larsen et al. (2013) argued that hope facilitates a helper's capacity to envision a positive future for those whom they support and with whom they work with. This research supports Paul, Jason, and Arnold's narratives about their desire to help and support other survivors as being connected to their hope and healing. Furthermore, in a study examining hope among continuing-care assistants, Duggleby, Cooper, and Penz (2009) concluded that hope has an impact on participant's sense of making a difference and providing better care for their patients. For participants in this study, healing often entailed offering help to others, which impacted their own sense of hope.

Conclusion

While participants in this study had a shared history of childhood sexual abuse, each understood and articulated his experience of hope in a unique manner, reflecting the different ways their lives unfolded. Within these distinct experiences were several commonalities. The thematic threads identified herein are highly consistent with the large corpus of research on hope. Overall, hope was understood and experienced as multi-dimensional in nature and consisting of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational aspects. Unique to participants in this study, healing from CSA was identified as an important facet of their understandings of hope and the meaning they derived therefrom.

Chapter Eleven: Closing Reflections

To date, much of the research and literature available on MCSA has focused on psychopathology often associated with the aftermath of sexual abuse. While these lines of inquiry are relevant and particularly informative for treatment, this focus provides a limited view void of an in-depth examination of hope for men with a history of CSA. The experiences and meanings of hope for male survivors have simply not been studied to date. As such, I believe this study begins to offer an alternative narrative or lens through which to understand MCSA.

Primarily guided by a narrative analytic orientation and informed by aspects of discourse analysis, participants' accounts shed light on many facets of hope from the male survivors' perspective. Individual narratives conveyed an array of unique understandings of hope and meanings made in relation to experiences of CSA. In addition, many common thematic threads emerged across narratives, including hope as a process of thinking, feeling, behaving, relating, and healing from CSA. These themes were strikingly consistent with the hope research already available (e.g., Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995; Stephenson, 1991), further underscoring the integral importance of these aspects of hope. Unique to the participants' perspectives were stories of hope in the process of recovery and healing from sexual abuse. Narratives revealed that, for several participants, healing involved a connection between hope and coping, a simultaneous struggle with experiences of hope and hopelessness, a desire to find meaning, an engagement with forgiveness, and the possibility of helping others. While these connections have been previously identified in the hope literature, narratives shared by participants in this study offered enhanced understanding of hope from the perspective of male survivors.

Implications of this Study

The results of this study have several implications for the development of effective therapeutic and clinical interventions for male survivors. Each individual participant's chapter serves to highlight the unique meanings and experiences of hope in his life. As such, within a therapeutic context, it would be important to make space for explicit explorations of hope that are responsive to the survivor's unique needs. Furthermore, the thematic threads shared by participants offer entry points into possible therapeutic conversations with male survivors about hope. Given that hope was uniquely experienced and understood by participants in this study, it would be incumbent upon a therapist to explore hope in a way that resonates for their his/her client, while also remaining aware of the common points of entry into many possible conversations on hope. Though there are several valuable therapeutic intervention resources and guides for helping professionals working with male survivors (i.e., Camino, 2000; Draucker & Martsolf, 2006; Gartner, 2005; Lew 2004), to the best of my knowledge there are no counselling applications available specifically derived from male survivors' experiences of hope. With this in mind, I offer a brief list of suggestions that a helping professional may wish to consider in his/her work with male survivors. These suggestions are informed by the thematic threads identified in this study and are areas of potential inquiry, rather than specific interventions.

1. Multiple Goals.

Discussions exploring a male survivor's multiple goals and hoped for outcomes may offer various access points to his hope. Rather than hope being closely hinged on one particular goal, collaborative exploration of many potential goals may support and strengthen his connection to hope. In addition, having and working towards several meaningful goals may be beneficial particularly in the

case that any one of his goals or desired outcomes becomes threatened or does not manifest.

2. Embodied Emotion.

Inviting a male survivor to become mindful and tap into his sensory and somatic experiences of hope may provide him with additional information and potentially serve as a valuable source of hope that he, himself, can readily access.

3. Doing Hope.

Exploring various ways in which a survivor may be, or wish to become, agentic in his own life would likely provide him a valuable connection to hope. For instance, supporting him in making meaningful choices and/or taking an active orientation towards his goals may enhance his hope. With a strengthened capacity to attain his desired goals and have influence in his own life, a survivor may experience a greater sense of empowerment and hope.

4. Hope in relationship.

Collaboratively exploring a survivor's various options and means of creating multiple relational connections (e.g., self, others and spirit), may enhance his experience of hope. In addition, deepening his existing connections may also further strengthen his sense of hope, while also potentially attending to his childhood relational ruptures associated with CSA.

5. Finding Meaning

Inviting conversations about a survivor's sense of meaning related to their experience of CSA may be an important access point to his hope. Further, supporting a survivor in exploring the potential purpose behind his struggles and sufferings may help him deepen his insight into his experiences and offer him an additional avenue for healing.

Another noteworthy implication of this research involves the appreciation of hope as multidimensional. As identified by participants, hope had several key dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, embodied/emotional, relational, and functional in the domain of healing from CSA. Given these multiple facets of hope for survivors in this study, a multidimensional approach to working with clients offers various avenues to therapeutically engage with hope. For example, in working with a male survivor who is experiencing a threat to his hope in the relational domain, the therapeutic direction may shift to explore hope oriented on identifying and working towards future goals. This multidimensional way of addressing and working with hope has been outlined and supported by recent research examining the role of hope in clinical and counselling contexts (Larsen & Stege, 2010b). The multidimensional nature of hope identified in the current study lends itself to therapeutically engaging with hope in a multitude of ways for male survivors.

Factors Influencing the Study

Throughout this study and the writing of this document, I have taken care not to imply that the findings of this work can be generalized to all survivors or even all male survivors of CSA. There are notable influences on this study that merit care and consideration when applying these findings to other male survivors. For instance, the pre-existing relationship between myself as researcher and the participants is quite unique. Given that the participants and I had already worked together on my master's thesis, this presents some particular considerations. For instance, our previous research relationship seemed to enable an easy and almost immediate rapport and perhaps a sense of safety for participants, which facilitated open and in-depth conversations in a way that may not have been possible without this pre-existing relationship.

It is also worth noting that all six participants shared certain demographic characteristics that are factors influencing the findings of this study. For instance, all

participants were middle aged (late 30s to mid-50s). Additionally, while participants self-identified as coming from several differing cultures, had I had conversations with men from other ethnic backgrounds, this may have revealed additional facets of hope among male survivors.

Finally, all participants had engaged in some form of therapeutic intervention in their lives that specifically explored issues related to CSA, which may have increased their readiness to discuss and capacity to share personal insights into hope. Together, these participant factors are an influential lens through which they shared their life experiences. The resultant life stories and narratives of hope would likely have been different provided varied demographic backgrounds.

Areas for Future Research

Although the present research adds to the limited body of research on MCSA in general, there remain several possibilities for further research particularly focused on male survivors' experiences of hope. Believing in the richness and power of story, it would likely be beneficial to continue in a narrative tradition so as to collect and represent additional stories of hope from male survivors. A wider cross-section of male survivors across ages, cultures, and other specifics of abuse history (e.g., incest/familial abuse, stranger sexual assault, non-familial abuse, male/female abusers) would likely enhance our developing understanding of this area. Given that this area of research is in its genesis, further qualitative exploration from other methodological orientations (e.g., grounded theory) would also prove fruitful in gaining a foundational appreciation of hope among male survivors. Expanding and enriching what is understood about hope among male survivors is likely to contribute to the development and advancement of therapeutic interventions informed by these understandings.

Throughout the research conversations in this study, each participant shared how his sense of hope was often engendered by engaging in our conversations about hope. In addition, several participants commented on the therapeutic value of being involved in a project where they mindfully examined hope in their lives. While it was not my intention that the research conversations be of a therapeutic nature, for several participants, their involvement in researching hope was therapeutically valuable nonetheless. With the exception of an earlier study by hope researcher Keen (1994), who explored the notion of a “living hope”, within which therapeutic change was observed and experienced by participants during the research process of examining hope; very little is known about how one’s sense of hope may be impacted by participating in qualitative research on hope and intentionally discussing hope itself. This gap in our understanding not only underscores another possible avenue for future research, but also points to an interesting intersection between the process of exploring hope in both therapeutic and research contexts.

Final Reflections

Drawing to the end of this study, I have engaged in a looking back of sorts and in doing so, I have found myself reflecting on the indelible, deeply felt connections and unforgettable lessons I have been privileged to experience. Without doubt I have garnered a greater intellectual understanding of hope, as would be expected in the undertaking of a doctoral dissertation. However, what I did not anticipate was my emotional awakening to hope. From conversations with each and every participant I have taken the opportunity not only to extend my understanding of hope among male survivors but to sink deeper into my own felt sense of hope in my work and in my life overall. I am forever changed by this experience and eternally grateful to the research participants, my sage teachers of hope.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information and Invitation Letter to Participants

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Department of Educational Psychology**

Information Letter

Project Title: Exploring hope with adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Principle Researcher: Sherry R. Antonucci

Research Supervisor: Dr. Denise Larsen

To Participant X:

Hello! I hope all is well. Since the last time we spoke, I have begun my Ph. D program in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta. Currently, I am in the process of undertaking a study exploring male survivors and their experiences of hope. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of hope in the lives of male survivors.

It is anticipated that your participation in this study will result in a strengthened understanding of how male survivors experience and make meaning of hope. This information could benefit other male survivors and those helping professionals interested in working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Moreover, it is my sincere hope that by participating in this study, you will also gain further insight into your own experience.

As a participant in this study:

- 1) You will be given an explanation of the study and be provided with an opportunity to discuss any initial questions or concerns that you may have.
- 2) You will be asked to participate in 2 interviews that will be audio-taped and transcribed. Each interview will be approximately one and a half hours and will be of a conversational nature.
- 3) You will also be asked to take photographs that capture your experiences of hope. Photographs will be returned to you after they have been copied for use in this study.
- 4) After each interview, transcripts of the interview will be given to you to review in order to verify the accuracy of the transcript. Any portions of the transcript that you would rather not include will be removed. In addition, preliminary findings will also be provided for your review and feedback.

All information collected (i.e., audiotapes and transcriptions) will be sorted so that your name is not associated with it. A coding system will be devised to organize the data. This will be done to ensure your privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. The write-up of the

findings will not include any information that could be linked directly to you. Transcripts and audiotapes will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and will be kept for at least five years following the completion of the study. Any research personnel that may be involved in this study will sign a confidentiality agreement and will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants <http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html>.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your involvement at any time. You have every right to opt out of this study without prejudice and any collected data will not be included in the study.

It is expected that this research study will provide new knowledge and reveal the importance of hope for adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. While it is not anticipated that you will experience distress, some people find that talking about hope elicits feelings and memories of low-hope experiences. In this case, you will be provided with referrals to low or no cost counselling agencies in your area.

Given the importance of this research, the findings of this study may be reported in academic journals and presented at conferences. Your name and other identifying information will not be used in any presentations or publications of the study results. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculty of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

I greatly appreciate your past contribution and feel honored to have worked with you. Thank you for considering your participation in this study. ***If you wish to be involved in this study, please contact me at (780) XXX-XXX or email me at sr6@ualberta.ca to indicate your interest.*** Also, if you have any questions or would like more information, contact:

Principle Researcher:

Sherry R. Antonucci
University of Alberta
Department of Educational Psychology
(780) XXX-XXXX

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Denise Larsen
University of Alberta
Department of Educational
Psychology
(780) XXX-XXXX

Thank you for considering your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Sherry R. Antonucci, M. Ed
Ph.D Student
University of Alberta
Department of Educational Psychology

Appendix B: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA Faculty of Graduate Studies Department of Educational Psychology

Consent Form

Project Title: Exploring hope with adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Principle Researcher: Sherry R. Antonucci

Research Supervisor: Dr. Denise Larsen

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and meaning of hope for adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This information could benefit other male survivors and those helping professionals interested in working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

As previously indicated in the information letter, you will be invited to participate in the following:

- 2 interviews that will be audio-taped and transcribed. Each interview will be approximately one and a half hours and will be of a conversational nature.
- Taking photographs that capture your experiences of hope and the role of hope in your life. These pictures will be returned to you after they have been copied for use in this study.
- After each interview, transcripts of the interview will be given to you to review in order to verify the accuracy of the transcript. Any portions of the transcript that you would rather not include will be removed. In addition, preliminary findings will also be provided for your review and feedback.

All information collected (i.e., audiotapes and transcriptions) will be sorted so that your name is not associated with it. A coding system will be devised to organize the data. This will be done to ensure your privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. The write-up of the findings will not include any information that can be linked directly to you. Transcripts and audiotapes will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and will be kept for at least five years following the completion of the study. Any research personnel that may be involved in this study will sign a confidentiality agreement and will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants <http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html>.

Given the importance of this research, the findings of this study may be reported in academic journals and presented at conferences. Your name and other identifying information will not be used in any presentations or publications of the study results. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculty of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

While we do not anticipate distress, some people find that talking about hope also reminds them of low points in their lives. In the case that this study evokes distressing memories or feelings, referral information to low or no cost counselling agencies in your area will be provided.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time. I understand that I have every right to opt out of this study without any penalty and any collected data will not be included in this study.

Having read and understood all of the above, I, _____
agree
to participate freely and voluntarily in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher as Witness

Date

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Principle Researcher:

Sherry R. Antonucci
University of Alberta
Department of Educational Psychology
(780) XXX-XXXX

Supervising Researcher:

Dr. Denise Larsen
University of Alberta
Department of Educational
Psychology
(780) XXX-XXXX

Thank you for your participation in this study. I look forward to beginning our interviews in the near future.

Appendix C: Sample of Interview Questions

Note: These guiding interview questions are intended to be open ended and will be mainly used to elicit participant accounts of experiences of hope and the meaning of those accounts in their lives. Follow-up questions will be asked to obtain more detail and allow for personal experiences and meaning to be shared. The following questions may not necessarily be discussed in this order during the interview process.

Guiding questions for in-depth interview:

- (1) If I wanted to understand what has got you through the difficult moments in your life, what would I need to know?
- (2) When you think of hope, what comes to mind?
- (3) Can you tell me of a time in your life that you felt particularly hopeful?
- (4) Can you tell me of a time in your life in where you hope was challenged or diminished?
- (5) Where do you find hope?
- (6) What engenders hope for you?
- (7) What threatens your hope?
- (8) How has your hope changed over time in your life?
- (9) What role does hope play in your life?
- (10) What does hope mean to you?
- (11) What do you use as evidence that hope is in your life or in the world?
- (12) What ways has childhood sexual abuse challenged your hope?
- (13) What ways has childhood sexual abuse enhanced your hope?
- (14) Is there anything we've talked about that has increased or decreased your sense of hope?
- (15) What was it like for you to participate in this interview?
- (16) Does anything in particular stand out for you?

Guiding questions for photo-assisted interviews:

- (1) What was it like for you to take these photographs?
- (2) What were you feeling when you took the photographs (may refer to a specific photograph)?
- (3) What were you thinking about when you took the photographs (may refer to a specific photograph)?
- (4) Please share with me how these photographs depict your hope?
- (5) What does this say about your hope?
- (6) Where is hope in this picture?
- (7) If you were to choose the 3-5 most significant pictures, which ones would you choose? Why?
- (8) If you could choose 1 of the three 3 pictures, which one would you choose? Why?
- (9) If you were to take an additional photo besides the ones that you have taken, what would it be of?
- (10) Have there been any surprises for you in seeing the photos developed.
- (11) What has it been like to see your photographs today?

Appendix D: Photography Instructions

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Department of Educational Psychology

Project Title: Exploring hope with adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Principle Researcher: Sherry R. Antonucci

Research Supervisor: Dr. Denise Larsen

For this portion of the study, *I invite you take some time to reflect and capture images that symbolize and represent hope for you.* These images might *capture symbols of hope during and/or after your experience of childhood sexual abuse.* You might also *take pictures of things that currently characterize hope for you as a survivor and above all - as a human being.*

It is important to know that there are **no** “right ways” of taking these photos or “right things” to capture in your photos. Again, your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your involvement at any time. I hope that the experience of taking these photos is one that will be insightful and interesting...perhaps even enjoyable.

The date that we will exchange the camera for developing will be _____

Upon the development of the pictures I will contact you to set up our second interview. I will not view these pictures until you and I meet again.

If you have any questions or concerns about the process of taking pictures of hope or the research in general, please contact:

Principle Researcher:

Sherry R. Antonucci
University of Alberta
Department of Educational Psychology

(780) XXX-XXXX

Supervising Researcher:

Dr. Denise Larsen
University of Alberta
Department of Educational
Psychology

(780) XXX-XXXX

Appendix E: Participant Referral List

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA Faculty of Graduate Studies Department of Educational Psychology

This list is being provided in the case you need support and counselling services.

Crisis: *** In a severe crisis, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room***

- Distress Line 482-HELP (4357)- 24 hrs
- Sexual Assault Centre 423-4121 -24 hrs
- Mobile Mental Health Response Team 482-0222

Low Cost Counselling:

- Hope Foundation of Alberta 492-1222
- Catholic Social Services 432-1137
- Cornerstone Counselling 482-6215
- Edmonton Community Services 496-7777
- Edmonton Mental Health Clinic 427-4444
- Gay & Lesbian Community Centre 488-3234
- Pastoral Counselling Group 482-8998
- The Family Centre 423-2831
- Walk in Counselling (Support Network) 482-0198
- YWCA Edmonton 423-9922

Other Services:

- Psychologist Referral Service 428-TALK (4285)
- Information on group counselling
or specialized counselling 211
- Referrals for services outside of
Edmonton 482-INFO (4636)

*This is not an exhaustive referrals list. Please call 211 or visit www.informedmonton.com
for information on further referrals.*