"I Am a Puzzle":
Adolescence as Reflected in Self-Metaphors

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ABSTRACT

Given growing interest in narrative counselling, narrative theories of the self have received much attention. In this study, adolescents describe self through the construction of self-metaphors. The project explores the relationship between narrative developmental assumptions and the adolescents' own self-descriptions. Three themes are revealed: (a) multiple self(ves), (b) self as complex, and (c) embodying hope. The adolescents' self-portrayals reflect assumptions present in both traditional and narrative developmental theories. Hope emerges as an implicit aspect of self. Further, self-metaphor construction proves to be a task of fruitful self-reflection. Implications for counselling and school guidance are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Étant donné l'intérêt grandissant pour la thérapie narrative, les théories narratives du moi ont fait l'objet de beaucoup d'attention. Dans cette étude, des adolescents se décrivent en consruisant des autométaphores. Le projet explore la relation entre des hypothèses narratives développementales et les descriptions que les adolescents font d'eux-mêmes. Trois thèmes sont abordés : (a) le moi multiple, (b) le moi en tant que complexe et (c) l'incorporation de l'espoir. Les autoportraits des adolescents reflètent les idées présentes dans les théories traditionnelles et dans les théories développementales narratives. L'espoir se manifeste comme un aspect implicite du moi. De plus, l'autoconstruction métaphorique du moi s'avère une tâche d'autoréflexion fructueuse. Les répercussions pour la thérapie et l'orientation scolaire sont discutées.

The nature of the self and of identity lies near the heart of counselling theory and practice. Yet theorists and researchers concur that the development of the self is difficult to discern (Moshman, 1999) and that the nature of development is subject to various understandings depending on one's theoretical perspective. To illustrate, narrative counselling with adolescents has received much attention of late (e.g., Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997). Narrative therapy is predicated on specific assumptions about the self and human development. These assumptions grow out of narrative theory and social constructionist thought. While theoretical conceptions can help to guide practice, it is also crucial to explore how individuals experience and describe self. As practitioners, it is important to explore the relationship between self-understandings and those reflected in developmental theory.

Adolescence is identified by developmentalists from many theoretical perspectives as a crucial period of transition from childhood to adulthood (Erikson, 1982; Harter, 1999; Hayes, 1994; Moshman, 1999). Because narrative therapy is an approach of interest to many practitioners working with adolescents (e.g., Chang, 1998; Parry & Doan, 1994; Walsh & Keenan, 1997; White & Epston, 1990), this research focuses specifically on the theoretical foundations of narrative theory and the adolescent self. The project explores adolescent self-understandings and how these understandings may or may not illustrate narrative developmental theory.

The article begins with a brief description of some important considerations in adolescent developmental theory. Next, a description of the research method is provided. Findings of the study are presented as three primary themes revealing evocative self-descriptions and unexpected findings. The relationship between the participants' descriptions of self and theoretical assumptions about the self are then discussed. To conclude, implications for counselling and future research are provided.

A BRIEF DEVELOPMENTAL OVERVIEW

William James was one of the first to formally theorize on the consciousness of the self (James, 1950), yet formulations specific to the adolescent self are commonly seen as originating with Erik Erikson. Erickson's ground-breaking work (Moshman, 1999) spawned research and theoretical formation on adolescent self development that continues today. A key aspect of Erikson's theory of adolescent personality development is the centrality of identity formation. In contrast to Freud's focus on biology and sexuality, Erikson (1982) highlighted the power of social and cultural contexts in the development of the adolescent self. For Erikson, adolescence was a critical period of life most necessary for the development of a coherent self-identity (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Harter, 1999). Key questions continue to be raised by both Erikson's followers and those who conceptualize adolescent development differently. For example, Grotevant (1987) asks to what degree an individual's identity can change from one domain to another.

FOUNDATIONS OF NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

Grotevant's question foreshadows an important issue pertinent to the study of adolescence from a narrative theoretical perspective. Social constructionism provides the foundation for narrative theoretical perspectives.[1] In keeping with Erikson's formulation, context is seen as essential to an understanding of the self from a social constructionist perspective. Yet important differences also exist. Where Erikson contends that a cornerstone of development includes a self increasingly understood as a unitary entity, that is, an explicit theory of self as a person (Moshman, 1999), narrative theorists offer an alternate understanding.

Multiple Selves

Rather than thinking of the self (adolescent or otherwise) as a unified continuous whole, a social constructionist perspective offers the possibility of a

multiplicity of selves. As Polkinghorne suggests, "the real is not a single, integrated system … the self is not a unified whole, but a complex of unintegrated images and events" (1992, p. 149). Self is not typified by a single unitary self-theory or coherent narrative. Neither is it sought. According to narrative theorists and practitioners Drewery and Winslade (1997), "who people are is a matter of constant contradiction, change, and ongoing struggle … [we] prefer to talk about subjectivities rather than identities" (pp. 38–39). For narrative therapists, the difference between various subjectivities is understood to hold potential benefit. Because the self is understood in various ways by an individual, the client has the opportunity to select preferred ways of being (White, 2001).

Construction of Multiple Selves

Narrative theory draws on the assumption of multiple subjectivities or multiple selves (White & Epston, 1990). This multiplicity of selves is a result of changing social contexts. The contexts of language, personal and cultural history, and setting are integral to an understanding of self and the meaning of experience. Where traditional developmentalists tend to claim that *social context impacts how a unified self is understood* (Moshman, 1999), narrative theorists and social constructionists tend to see shifting *social contexts as creating multiple selves* (Gergen, 1991). From a social constructionist perspective, who we are is profoundly influenced by those around us and by what has been "called out" in us from an early age. Shotter (1998), a developmental psychologist coming from a social constructionist perspective, states that at any given point in time, "instead of seeing the organizing centre of our children's actions as solely within them alone … we can 'see' them as being shaped by the relations between them and us, by what we do, or do not, 'call out' in them" (p. 281). Hence, language, relationship, personal history, and place have the power to create selves that differ based on context.

While painted in broad brush strokes, this overview highlights two key issues in adolescent developmental theory. First, the role of social context and its magnitude of influence differ between traditional developmental perspectives and narrative theory. Correspondingly, issues of unity versus multiplicity in understanding the self come to the fore.

With these issues in mind, we wondered how adolescents' own self-descriptions might or might not be illustrated within developmental theory. We became interested in how adolescents saw and described themselves. Because of the strong interest in narrative theory and therapy, we focused particular attention on the nature of relationships between adolescence self-descriptions and key aspects of narrative theory.

THIS RESEARCH INQUIRY

Given the social constructionist theory undergirding narrative theory, we became curious about whether adolescents' self-descriptions would provide good illustrations of narrative theoretical assumptions. We wondered what implications this might offer for practice. Consequently, in this research we sought to (a) learn

about adolescents' own understandings of self, (b) explore how adolescent self-descriptions may illustrate assumptions of narrative theory, and (c) articulate implications for narrative counselling with adolescents.

The Study

Seeking a non-clinical sample of adolescents, we invited a class of tenth-grade English students from a large urban high school to participate in this study. Following an English lesson on the construction and use of metaphor (see Wilson, 1987), students were asked to create two lengthy (extended) metaphors of self. We employed this strategy for several reasons: (a) self-metaphor is generally easier for students to author than attempting to represent self in lengthy written narratives,[2] (b) metaphor is understood by both empirical cognitivists and social constructionists as a key way in which the self is conceptualized (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Wickman, Daniels, White, & Fesmire, 1999), and (c) provincial tenth-grade curriculum required the study of metaphor and practice of self-reflection.

Similar to Michael White's original concept of "double description" (Monk, 1996), participants were asked to develop two extended metaphors of self. By developing two extended metaphors of self (double description), the participants had the opportunity either to identify similar aspects of self across both of their two self-metaphors or to provide distinct aspects of self within each self-metaphor. No expectations were given to students regarding the content or contextual elements (i.e., place, time, or relationships) that might be depicted as important in the self-metaphors.[3] Once written, students were asked to visually represent both self-metaphors on a sheet of poster paper and to include the text of their self-metaphors on their poster. To close the assignment, students were invited to reflect in writing on the project. Here, students' writing was guided by two open-ended questions provided by the researchers: "What have you learned as a result of creating your self-metaphors?" and "What was it like to be part of this research project?" All participants chose to respond to this invitation. In summary, the sequence of the classroom self-metaphor project included: introducing the concept of metaphor via a story (Wilson, 1987), developing two extended self-metaphors, creating a visual representation, and closing with reflective writing on the project. This process spanned four 80-minute class periods.

Participants

A purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of tenth-grade English students engaged in learning about metaphor were selected. We sought both parental consent and student assent to participate. At the outset of the project, all 26 students in the classroom received parental consent to participate. In addition, all but one student assented to participate in the research. Twenty-three of the 25 assenting participants completed all written aspects of the project. Two students did not complete the extended self-metaphors and reflective writing. Of these two

students, one was away ill for much of the in-class work. Consequently, a total of 23 participants contributed work to this research report. Student participants were 15 or 16 years old. Eleven participants were female and 12 were male.

Approach to Analysis

Like counselling theories, research inquiries are predicated on various philosophical assumptions about reality, the self, and truth. Immersion and crystallization (Miller & Crabtree, 1994), an approach to inquiry considered compatible with social constructionist thought, was employed. Like other qualitative methods, immersion and crystallization involves a period of prolonged and recursive engagement with the text (Stiles, 1993). Identified as a useful approach for researching the integration of teaching, practice, and research, it is characterized by an "open-edit" flexibility that leads to descriptive categories.

A three-stage process of analysis was conducted. First, *within-participant analysis* consisted of identification of common themes within each metaphor and across each individual student's pair of metaphors. Second, *across-participant analysis* included identifying common themes across all student metaphors in this study. Finally, *thematic analysis of all participant writing* was also sought when examining students' unstructured written reflections following the completion of the self-metaphor project.

Note that all metaphors, individual thematic analyses, and final categories were reviewed by a teacher-researcher, a Foucauldian scholar, a hope scholar, and two qualitative researchers. Meaning nuances were discussed, and, while multiple meanings will always remain a possibility, overall thematic clustering was consensually verified.[4,] All student self-understandings and overall findings are understood to be culturally and historically situated.

<center>FINDINGS</center>

Three primary themes on self emerged across the 46 extended metaphors gathered from the 23 students who completed their written projects. Within each of these primary themes are a number of secondary themes on the self (see Table 1). The primary themes are titled: (a) multiple self(ves), (b) the desire to be understood, and (c) hope embodied. Each theme is discussed below.

Multiple Self(ves)

Student participants in this study readily provide various depictions of self; that is, they depict the self in multiplicity. Of the 23 participants, only 6 reveal essentially similar qualities of self in both of the metaphors they wrote. As suggested by the ambiguity of the heading above, it is unclear whether the adolescents experience themselves as multiple selves, whether they experience multiple aspects of self, or possibly both. Multiplicity of the self is reflected by participants as spanning emotion, opinion, attitude, and actions. The following example illustrates this awareness of multiplicity.

Table 1

Primary and Secondary Themes in Participant Self-Metaphors

Primary Theme	Secondary Theme
A. Multiple Self(ves)	Contrasting selves
	Context and relationship
	The boundaried self
	Integration
B. The Desire to be Understood: Self as Complex to Others	
C. Hope Embodied	Engagement in life
	Seeing good in me
	Feeling capable
	Freedom

> I am a scalene triangle. I have three separate sides, each one being straight. However, no three sides of me are the same. They may seem the same at first glance, but after a closer analysis, it is clear that they aren't.

Contrasting selves. Strongly contrasting aspects of self, though often evident in the self-metaphors, are rarely depicted as problematic by participants. The students openly relate their awareness of vastly divergent ways of being. Consider the following representation:

> I am a wave … I can be very powerful or extremely weak. I can be fairly fast or very slow. I can be very large or I can be very small.

Context and relationship. While participants clearly reflect a multiplicity with respect to aspects of self, this multiplicity is most often understood to be contextually bound. In reflective writing about their metaphors, 15 of the 23 students state that their metaphors reflect ways of being in different situations—most commonly either at school or at home. Differing social contexts draw different selves forward as depicted by this male participant:

> I am a race car … a race car is loud just as I have a loud and outgoing personality around the right people.

An aspect that demonstrates how social relationships are crucial to self-construction is reflected in the ways in which students describe how subtle influences, judgements, and expectations of others had a profound impact on self. For example,

> Others influenced my metaphors chosen by making me the person I am today.

> Other people [a]ffect these metaphors drastically because they judge you.

The boundaried self. Several of the students also reveal a belief that certain aspects of self are to be protected and revealed only within safe relationships. These aspects are most often depicted as "inner" and "outer" selves. In the interest of self-protection, judgement by others and social expectations necessitate the expression of different contextual selves.

> I am a sandcastle … sand castles have a big door and small windows. I let some people inside me and let them understand me, but they have to go through a lot to do that.

Integration. Of the 46 self-metaphors included in this research project, only 2 directly address issues of integration of self. Two different participants attempt self-descriptions illustrating the ways in which various aspects of self are related and contained within self as a whole. The following self-metaphor provides an example. It is fascinating to note the interplay between the notions of "multiple personalities" and the idea of a unified self.

> I am a puzzle. A puzzle where none of the puzzle pieces are the same. I have different attitudes that are all diverse. A piece of the puzzle is nothing as a single, but as a group it makes an unforgettable image. All my different personalities make me a person. Some pieces are hard to find the correct place for. My personalities are complicated but once figured out they all make sense.

The Desire to be Understood: Self as Complex to Others

Given the multiplicity in self that participants reflect upon in their metaphors, it is not surprising that self is understood as complex in many of the metaphors shared by the students. Importantly, this complexity is primarily expressed as important when in relationships. A desire to be understood by others threads through the self-metaphors. Perspectival understandings are clear in the students' writings. When viewing themselves, they understand complexity as vital to uniqueness and individuality. The participants often claim to find themselves interesting and understandable. Nevertheless, when being viewed by others, many students anticipate that they appear complex. They expect that the self appears cryptic and hint at the potential for a lack of connection with and misunderstanding by others. The message conveyed suggests that those interested in relationship will be rewarded by a worthwhile connection. Consider the following:

> I am a book of poems. You may not get the style right away but once you do you never want to put it down.

> I am a pair of binoculars … I am a sophisticated piece of work, which may seem complex at first, but once you look into it, it's really quite simple.

Hope Embodied

This fascinating theme captures several aspects.[5] At the core of this theme, participants keenly believe that they possess qualities necessary to make good things happen for themselves in the future. This hope-filled perspective pulls them toward engaging in and embracing life. The energy depicted by these participants is more than possessing hope or acting hopeful. It is as if they embody or "are" hope.

Engagement in life. Participants repeatedly convey a sense of joy in the present and excitement in the unfolding of their own lives. The self-metaphors relay a feeling of newness, of excitement, and of being on the edge of something not fully known. When the unknown appears in the metaphors, it is conveyed as something worth looking forward to rather than dreading. A student depicts this vibrant, anticipatory aspect of self as follows:

I am a pond. Full of life and excitement.

Often, aspects of the metaphors include the keen awareness that adolescent life is intimately connected with growth and change. Change is physical and is something to be appreciated.

I am a golf course, ever growing always green.

I am a flower …I continuously grow and flourish.

Seeing good in me. A sense of self-satisfaction or self-valuing lies implicitly in many of the self-metaphors. Other self-metaphors make reference to the ways in which the authors understand that they are valued by others.

I am lyrics in invisible ink … when the lyrics are finally read, something beautiful is found.

I am a gold ring … made of pure solid gold, it doesn't look like much but everyone knows of the value I'm worth.

While evidence of self-worth was relatively abundant in the student metaphors, self-recriminations were far less common. Clear examples of a negative self-appraisal were limited to the writings of a single student.

Feeling capable. Students' metaphors of self reveal that many feel capable across a variety of circumstances. Students disclose a sense of confidence in their own abilities, both social and physical. Where male participants primarily described themselves as having the ability to be productive, females depicted their capability to negotiate social situations well. Employing an instrumental perspective on ability, a male participant writes:

I am an arrow shot from a bow … I am sleek and proper, and fly with determination. I am quite slim in form, but my power should not be easily underestimated. I frequently hit the target and rarely fly astray. When I do miss, I am easily found and shot back on course.

Female participants' reflections on ability include being approachable, possessing a comforting presence, and maintaining integrity in relationship. Overall, these messages convey the belief that the author has a rightful place in relationship and is a valuable companion. The following self-metaphor illustrates this respect for one's self in relationship.

I am a teddy bear … you could cuddle me forever because I am always good for a hug. And F.Y.I. if you don't find comfort in my arms, you won't find it anywhere else.

Freedom. Coupled with a sense of agency and the power to effect positive change is the notion of freedom. Repeatedly, participants write of a sense of being that is carefree or even transcendent. Their self-metaphors depict life as unconfined. They are unrestrainable, often even in the face of difficulties. For many of these students, life has options and they see themselves as possessing the power of choice.

I am a star … I shine, and am very free spirited.

I am a stringless kite. I dance and soar carefree in the sky and no one can control me.

Student Reflections on the Project

In closing the project, it became clear that students were very attached to their work. Their posters and metaphors indeed *were* part of themselves. One student, who had declined assent to participate at the outset of the project, became very proud of his work and approached one of us (D.L.) to ask if he could include his work as research data. On the last day of project work, we asked students to respond in writing to one final open question: "What was it like to be part of this research project?" Two primary themes emerged in response to this question. First, students enjoyed the format of the lesson and the project. Second, 8 of the 25 students were also intrigued with new ways of understanding themselves and their peers. Both reflections are captured in the quotation below:

> I really liked the poster project. It made me realize how I am my own person but to be my own person I need to be surrounded by others.

DISCUSSION

Multiplicity of Self(ves)

At the outset of this research, we set about to further understand the relationship between aspects of narrative theory and how adolescents describe their own self-understandings. One key developmental issue in this exploration was that of unity versus multiplicity (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997; Harré, 1989; Harter, 1999). As Moshman (1999) puts it, "Does the typical person show a sufficient degree of behavioural consistency across contexts to be construed as a unitary self? … Given evidence for both consistency and variability, there is no simple resolution to the issue" (p. 81).

The metaphors written by participants in this research appear to support Moshman's conclusion. Consistent with moderate social constructionist perspectives (Schwandt, 2000), the students' self-metaphors suggest an understanding of self that shifts with context. Further, most often the qualities depicted across an individual's two metaphors differ significantly. Multiple self(ves) are described by the adolescents as situated in the contexts of time, place, and relationship. One student reflected on self in the context of relationship and time, writing, "*Others* influenced my metaphors chosen by making me the person I am *today*." Further, the participants provide no indication in their metaphors that they feel they must choose between differing selves or metaphorical descriptions. This reflects an important consistency with the narrative notion that the self is to be understood through many equally valid self-narratives (White, 2001).

There are also parallels between the traditional perspectives of Erikson and the participant's self-metaphors. In addition to showing evidence of self in multiplicity, the adolescents also consistently use language that suggests an understanding of self as a unified whole. As one student disclosed, "I let some people inside me." Further, consistent with the notion that context does hold influence in identity development, the teens clearly relate that they rely on peers,

teachers, and friends in understanding themselves. One student noted, "I am my own person but to be my own person I need to be surrounded by others." Hence, as the ambiguous title *Multiple Self(ves)* suggests, the participants in this study offer an understanding of self that appears to include an understanding of self both as unified and in multiplicity.

Integrating Effects of Self-Metaphor

An interesting question about the use of self-metaphor arises specifically in relation to the assertion that the adolescent seeks a unified theory of self. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) claim that "our conception of the self … is fundamentally metaphoric" (p. 13). Participants certainly enjoyed the opportunity that this research project provided to reflect on self. Although not a complete theory of self in a traditional developmental sense, it is possible that the use of self-metaphor alone provides a figurative linguistic device that naturally integrates aspects of self. Relationships between aspects of self and the whole are implicit in self-metaphor. It is possible that adolescents may experience the very construction of self-metaphor as an opportunity to develop an integrated concept of self. This may have been part of their source of satisfaction with this project.

Hope and the Adolescent Self

The theme *Hope Embodied* represents a series of ideas revealed in the students' metaphors that were unexpected by the researchers.[6] The strength of evidence for hope in the participants' self-metaphors may suggest important implications for the conceptualization of adolescence. Specifically, the findings of this study lend support for the presence of hope as an integral aspect of the experience of self in school-aged adolescents. This finding is in keeping with research on adolescent "possible selves" that suggests that adolescents tend to have higher hope and more unfettered expectations for the future than adults (Cross & Markus, 1991; Shepard & Marshall, 1999). Furthermore, hope, as described by participants in this study, most closely reflects Dufault and Martocchio's (1985) notion of *generalized* hope, that is, a hope that is "broad in scope and not linked to any particular concrete or abstract objects of hope" (p. 380).[7] Hope researchers have theorized the presence of a "hoping self" in their work with health-challenged adult populations (Dufault & Martocchio). This current research highlights the possibility of an adolescent "hoping self."

Only a limited amount of hope research with non-clinical populations and with adolescents exists. Much hope research has been conducted with those facing adversity, most specifically seriously health-challenged adult populations. In a variety of adverse circumstances faced by both children and adults, the importance of hope has been well documented (e.g., Herth, 1998; Hinds, 1984). Extending beyond situations of adversity, the findings of this research support the notion that hope is an important and, seemingly, pervasive aspect of self during adolescence development, even within a non-clinical sample. Hope may also be an aspect of self that is more implicitly than explicitly acknowledged by self or by others. Because

energizing and affirming effects are commonly associated with hope (e.g., Baumann, 1999; Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995; Jevne, 1991; Snyder, 1994), guidance exercises and discussions that help adolescents draw explicit attention to their experiences and enactments of hope are worthy of exploration.

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING AND RESEARCH

Our findings show that middle adolescents are able to use metaphor as one method of describing self and that they find this a fruitful self-reflective exercise. The creation of self-metaphor represents a unique way in which both the adolescent and others may gain further insight into adolescent experience of the self. Although this study employed a group format, the construction of self-metaphors could also be explored in an individual setting when working with adolescents in a counselling setting. Without exception, every metaphor or pair of student self-metaphors developed in this study revealed more than one perspective on self. With the construction of these metaphors, many participants appeared to gain new insights about possibilities for understanding themselves. Furthermore, hopeful aspects of self were commonly revealed. Adolescents receiving counselling may find that self-metaphor construction assists them in identifying preferred selves, creating possibilities beyond those that they are currently experiencing, or naming hope that had previously gone unnoticed.

The construction of self-metaphor within high school classroom settings may provide a useful way to integrate mandates of school guidance practice as well as English-language instruction. Regardless of epistemological persuasion, many theorists identify reflexivity (Drewery & Winslade, 1997; Shotter, 1998), or the ability to move beyond an all or nothing approach to the self (Harter, 1999), as developmentally crucial. Though designed primarily as a research endeavour, this project appears to address key aspects of reflective developmental practice. Because the assignment meets requirements for English-language instruction as well as providing a developmental exercise, it may offer a valuable opportunity for the integration of school guidance programs with English curriculum requirements.

One extension of this research would be a study of self-metaphors with individuals of various ages and cultural, economic, and clinical backgrounds. This would permit researchers to explore how understanding of self may shift over time and context. For example, evidence for hope may change across time under these various conditions. Further research could also begin to investigate the content and therapeutic usefulness of self-metaphors developed by individuals presenting for counselling with various referral issues.

In summary, adolescents in this study provide a fascinating view of themselves. While not presenting as theoretical purists, they offer engaging insights into self. Their contributions to this study provide illustrations in support of both traditional and narrative developmental perspectives; both unity and multiplicity of the self. While some may argue that each of these perspectives is unquestionably influenced by the common conventions of language, these conventions also have

the power to influence the ways in which self is understood. Perhaps most importantly, the endemic presence of hope in this study may open recognition and stir new understandings about adolescent engagement in life.

Notes

1. Narrative theory is situated within the context of social constructionist approaches. While there are important differences within social constructionist thought (Schwandt, 2000), they are not essential to this discussion and are beyond the space constraints of this format.
2. This reflection is based on my (J.L.) experience using self-metaphor in the classroom with tenth-grade students over the last four years.
3. The only limitation was that the students' metaphors must be non-living. This delimitation was made to curtail the use of cliché representations such as of butterflies or puppy dogs which might circumvent students actually reflecting upon and depicting their own experiences.
4. As authors, we acknowledge the social construction of this analysis and certain epistemological inconsistencies in conducting an audit process. Nevertheless, the audit process does indicate that the overall categories and themes were salient to multiple observers from various backgrounds. We also acknowledge that our conceptualizations of the research and the language used in this report are influenced by our own social contexts. From a social constructionist perspective, we understand that we employ metaphorical referents in conceptualizing and describing the thoughts and ideas shared within (Schwandt, 2000).
5. While an elaborated discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that discerning hope as central in this theme necessitated a thorough review of scholarly hope literature and lengthy consultation with several hope scholars. Themes from this research correspond closely to scholarship on hope. Briefly noted, *Engagement in Life* is reflected in the work of Dufault and Martocchio (1985), Farran et al. (1995), and Snyder (2002). *Seeing Good in Me* and *Feeling Capable* is reflected in Farran et al. as well as Gottschalk (1974). Finally, clear relationships between the theme *Freedom* and the construct of hope can be found in Farran et al., and Menninger (1959).
6. This research was conducted prior to my (D.L.) consideration of and my appointment to the research directorship at the Hope Foundation of Alberta.

7. This stands in contrast to *particularized* hope that clarifies, prioritizes, and
    "provides incentive for constructive coping with objects and for devising
    alternative means to realize the object of hope" (Dufault & Martocchio,
    1985, p. 381).

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