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Andrew J. Howell
Denise J. Larsen

Understanding Other-Oriented Hope

An Integral
Concept Within
Hope Studies

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An Integral Concept Within Hope Studies

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Other-Oriented Hope

1.1 General

If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us.

—Viktor Frankl, *Man's search for meaning*, 1992, p. 48.

Appearing in a book renowned for its compelling illustration of the life-sustaining and life-transforming process of maintaining hope and discovering meaning within the direst of circumstances, this statement by a concentration camp inmate and friend of Frankl reveals the potential importance of another, distinct psychological asset: hope directed not to one's own good fortune but rather to the good fortunes of others. Indeed, this example reveals several potentially important aspects of what we term *other-oriented hope*: First, the prisoner's expression of hope for the comfort of his spouse and those of his comrades suggests that other-oriented hope concerns those with whom we feel a connection, including those very close to us and those more remotely associated with us; thus, *degree of relationship* may be pertinent to other-oriented hope. Second, the expression of hope is directed toward both the spouses' well-being, on the one hand, and their lack of awareness of the plight of their husbands, on the other; thus, other-oriented hope has *approach and avoidance qualities*. Third, the example illustrates that hope held for others can be independent of whether one is able to exert an influence on desired outcomes; thus, other-oriented hope may involve relatively *low controllability*. Fourth, other-oriented hope, in this instance, surrounds desired outcomes of relatively low likelihood (i.e., given the imprisonment of the spouses); thus, this form of hope concerns outcomes that are *possible even if improbable*. Fifth, hoped-for events are separated in time or, as in this case, in space from the hopeful individual; thus, other-oriented hope is characterized by a *future time orientation* or, more generally, by *uncertainty*. Sixth, other-oriented hope may facilitate commitment on behalf of the inmate to persevere in his own circumstances, reflecting in part a desire to bear witness to potential realization of other-oriented hope; thus, other-oriented hope may induce a *general*

motivated state of engagement or vitality. Finally, the example is an instance of hope directed toward others despite catastrophic conditions experienced by the inmate; thus, other-oriented hope may often be a *response to adversity*, including adversity of both the hoping individual and those who are the targets of such hope. The fact that even the most imperiling personal circumstances do not preclude other-oriented hope suggests that this form of hope, too, springs eternal.

This monograph introduces, defines, exemplifies, and characterizes hope that is directed toward others rather than toward the self. In Chap. 2, we conceptualize other-oriented hope (or, synonymously, *vicarious hope*) as an aspect of the higher-order concept of *other-interest*. Building directly upon definitions and characteristics of self-oriented hope identified by past researchers and theorists, in Chap. 3 we construct a definition of other-oriented hope (*future-oriented belief, desire, and mental imagining surrounding a valued outcome of another person that is uncertain but possible*) and we identify various of its characteristics (e.g., future-orientation involving uncertainty). In Chap. 4, we review domains in which other-oriented hope has emerged in the research literature, and provide numerous examples of such empirically documented vicarious hope. These domains include hope held by parents of ill children, by informal caregivers, by professional caregivers, by teachers, and by individuals experiencing terminal illnesses; we also consider more general instances of other-oriented hope. We then strive, in Chap. 5, to understand other-oriented hope within theoretical frameworks emphasizing other-interest, self-transcendence, mental balance, and ecosystem versus egosystem motivational orientations. In Chap. 6, we address the fact that vicarious hope is likely to be associated with, and to require differentiation from, related concepts of compassion, empathy, love, caring, and worry. We argue that each of these, along with other-oriented hope, can be viewed as a constituent of the broader concept of other-interest. In our final Chap. 7, we examine several outstanding issues surrounding other-oriented hope (e.g., whether other strengths of character may manifest in a manner expressive of other-interest; the basis in realism of other-oriented hope); moreover, we identify ways in which other-oriented hope might be leveraged intentionally, such as in therapeutic situations, and we offer suggestions for the numerous directions which could be taken in future quantitative and qualitative research on other-oriented hope. Throughout, we employ examples of vicarious hope taken from research, clinical settings, and the authors' personal experiences in order to illustrate and apply other-oriented hope within real-life contexts. Throughout, we also critique the strengths and shortcomings of the available theory and research on other-oriented hope.

The study of hope has received significant attention from theorists, researchers, and practitioners over the past 50 years (Elliott 2005), some of it spurred on by, and indeed spurring on, the emergence of the field of positive psychology, or the *science of well-being*. A conceptual limitation of much (but by no means all) theorizing and research on hope is that, unlike Frankl's poignant example, it largely ignores other-oriented hope, instead casting hope in a singularly self-interested light. As an example, Snyder's (1994, 2002) highly influential and generative goal theory of hope conceptualizes hope as involving two key cognitive appraisals:

Agency thinking is the belief that one is capable of executing the means to attain desired ends, whereas *pathways thinking* is the belief that one is capable of generating those means (i.e., the ‘will’ and the ‘ways’ of hope, respectively). Although it has been suggested that Snyder’s theory is incompatible with the idea of other-oriented hope (Bruininks and Malle 2005), nothing in these appraisals suggests that the desired goals toward which one is hopeful could not concern others in addition to, or indeed instead of, the self. Indeed, Snyder and Feldman (2000) discuss drawbacks of uniformly self-focused hope, stating:

“There must be limits in the degree to which individuals pursue their personal goals If our most rewarded goals continue to involve status and the acquisition of money, many individuals may pursue these goals to the comparative detriment of other people. Hope, in this context, may fuel the individual’s pursuit of egocentric goals, yet contribute to an inattention to the have-nots in society” (p. 410).

Snyder and Feldman (2000) also discuss the importance of the pursuit of collective goals; that is, goals reflecting shared or common aims of many within a group or society. Nonetheless, while recognizing the limits of self-focused hope and the possible importance of shared hope, other-oriented hope per se typically goes unrecognized in the literature on Snyder’s goal theory of hope. Moreover, the goals studied by hope researchers operating from the perspective of Snyder’s goal theory tend to be self-oriented ones, such as students’ strivings to meet their own athletic and academic goals (Curry et al. 1997; Feldman and Dreher 2012). And, items on hope measures reflecting the theory are most readily interpreted as self-oriented (e.g., “There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now”; Snyder et al., 1996). Just as the dominant, fruitful, and well-supported hope theory of Snyder has afforded limited attention to other-oriented hope, so has the field of hope studies more generally.

In contradistinction to the more typical focus upon self-oriented hope, contemporary hope theorists have, on occasion, explicitly contrasted self-focused forms of hope with instances of hope directed toward others. According to Day (1969), the phrase ‘hoping that’ can be directed toward the self or others (e.g., *I hope that my brother passes his exam*), whereas the phrase ‘hoping to’ is self-directed (e.g., *I hope to get several chores done today*). Gottschalk’s (1974) scheme for coding hope content from brief verbal samples gives equal weight to hope expressed toward others as to hope expressed toward the self. Godfrey (1987), in his integration of various philosophical views toward hope, distinguishes between hope aimed at one’s own benefit (*hope-for-me*), hope aimed at another’s benefit (*hope-for-another*), and hope aimed at a relationship with another (*shared life*, or *hope-for-us*). Hinds (1988) and Hendricks-Ferguson (1997) both note that a positive outlook for self or others is a critical attribute of hope among ill adolescents. McGeer (2004) contrasts egocentric hope with hope that instead reflects “altero-centric concerns of care” (p. 123). Wong and Heriot (2007) use the term *vicarious hope* in the context of parental hope held for ill children. Haase et al. (1992) identify *toward others* and *toward self* as two forms of goal orientation characterizing hope. Similarly, Elliott and Olver (2002) identify *focused on the self* versus *focused on*

another as an important dualism within the study of hope. Finally, De Pretto et al. (2011) distinguish between personal hope, relational hope, and social hope, with the latter two forms of hope described as including *hopes for good things for significant others* and *hopes for good things for unrelated others*, respectively. Like positive psychology more generally, the study of hope stands to benefit from attempts to consider a greater focus upon others (Wong 2011).

Because vicarious hope remains a relatively neglected topic within hope theory and research, the current work aims to provide, for the first time, a robust conceptualization of other-oriented hope, and to review and critically examine existing literature on other-oriented hope. Constructs superficially resembling other-oriented hope but differentiable from it are not included herein. For example, although many theorists and researchers have commented upon the *relational* or *social* aspects of hope (e.g., Godfrey 1987; Snyder and Feldman 2000), that term typically does not refer to hope held by one person for another, but rather to the more general phenomena of one's hope being shaped by the hope of others, shared or collective hope, the achievement of one's goals depending upon the support of others, hoping that one will be accepted by others, or hope directed toward good relationships with others. On other occasions, hope is characterized in a manner which conflates self- and other-oriented aspects, blurring the status of such hope as other-oriented. We restrict our focus upon instances of hope held regarding the outcomes of another person when we employ the term *other-oriented hope*.

This treatise reviews both quantitative and qualitative research on hope and other-oriented hope. This inclusiveness reflects two generative traditions in hope research (Elliott 2005): quantitative research often conceptualizes hope as a unidimensional concept and focuses upon scale development and establishing generalized correlates of hope (i.e., focusing on differences in hope *between persons* and the correlates of those differences), whereas qualitative research typically conceptualizes hope as multidimensional in nature, and concerns hope as a lived experience and the application of hope to contexts such as medicine (i.e., focusing on hope *within persons* and the unique experience of a particular individual's hope in real-life settings). Both traditions yield data and theoretical insights in support of other-oriented hope. Moreover, investigations that yield some of the strongest evidence in support of other-oriented hope are those that combine quantitative and qualitative methods (i.e., mixed-methods research such as that by Averill et al. 1990 and by Herth 1990, 1993). Finally, the quantitative and qualitative research reviewed herein is multidisciplinary in nature; the empirical review draws upon the work of researchers within the academic disciplines of nursing, medicine, social work, psychology, counselling, and others.

With this brief introduction to other-oriented hope, we next provide a framework for understanding the place and role of hope that is directed toward others. Specifically, in Chap. 2, we examine the idea of *other-interest* and position other-oriented hope within this psychological dimension.

But first, let's consider an example of other-oriented hope:

Box 1.1: Other-Oriented Hope and Suicide

I (A. H.) recall my own experience of other-oriented hope in relation to the publicized suicide of a 19 year-old undergraduate psychology student in Edmonton, Alberta, in February 2014. According to news reports, the man, who experienced bullying as a youth in relation to having epilepsy, jumped in front of a commuter train. Adding to the tragedy, another teen, a young woman, stole the deceased man's backpack from the train platform after witnessing the man's death. The discordant image of one tortured soul taking his life and, unmoved, another taking the dead man's backpack was massively unsettling.

Imagining the man as a student in one of my own psychology courses, I recall a profound feeling of regret over the man's lack of hope, revealing an underlying form of other-oriented hope, a kind of *hope that another might have hope*. Such other-oriented hope is also revealed in societal-wide suicide prevention tactics, such as signage on bridges stating, "There is always hope. Call the Distress Line", shorthand for "We hope that you will find the hope you need to get through these extremely challenging times, and we want to help" or, based on Jevne (2005), "We hope that you can envision a future in which you want to participate".

I also experienced other-oriented hope toward the young woman, hope that she would see the error in her ways, experience compassion for the deceased man and his loved ones, and return the backpack to the family. Behind such hope was empathy for the woman's dire personal circumstances, including substance dependence, and the belief that the woman could redeem herself and start a new, more hopeful, life if she could face-up to her transgression. Indeed, within a few days of the tragedy, the young woman and her family returned the backpack to the grieving relatives, who responded with appreciation and forgiveness. I experienced my own heightened hope as a result of the woman making amends for her wrongdoing in honour of the deceased individual and the family responding with such compassion of their own. Importantly, the young man's journal, contained within the backpack, confirmed that his death was a suicide. Said his stepfather, "He was overwhelmed by so many things and he just wanted peace. We hope he finds it now" (Edmonton Sun, February 2014). Poignantly, the family's hope toward their son persisted even beyond his death.

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