

Chapter 2

Other-Oriented Hope Reflects an Orientation Toward Others

2.1 General

Every motive or act falls somewhere on a spectrum between extreme selfishness and extreme unselfishness, depending on the relative weight we give our own interests and the interests of others.

—Jencks 1990, p. 53

In Chap. 1, we underscored the fact that the field of hope studies has given limited attention to hope that is directed toward others. The field's lack of focus upon other-oriented hope reflects, in part, the fact that much research and theorizing has concerned the *process* of hoping more than the *content* of hopes, that is, the nature of hoped-for outcomes or events. For example, Snyder's (2002) goal theory of hope emphasizes the types of cognitions that hopeful individuals manifest, including agency thinking and pathways thinking. Although such thinking processes are ultimately aimed at the attainment of specific goals or outcomes, those outcomes are oftentimes not considered to be of foremost concern. Rather, the act of hoping or the process of being hopeful is deemed most important (i.e., the characteristics and adaptive benefits of being a hopeful person), while the objects of a person's hopes may remain unspecified. At other times, the content of hoped-for-outcomes is constrained by the research context, as in the case of students being asked directly about their hope regarding their academic lives. Nonetheless, enough research concerning the content of people's hope has been conducted to permit an evaluation of the nature of hope vis a vis its self- and other-oriented nature, a topic which we pursue in detail in Chap. 4. In the current chapter, we consider several reasons why we would expect the content of people's hope, upon systematic evaluation, to occasionally or even frequently concern others.

2.2 Psychological Concepts Pertinent to Other-Oriented Hope

There are several well-established psychological concepts that are congruent with the idea that our hopes may often be directed toward the well-being of others. Although the literature on these concepts rarely alludes to hope or, rarer still, to other-oriented hope, we view these concepts as highly congenial with the assertion that the content of hope will not infrequently concern others. These include the concepts of social interest, belongingness, relatedness, social value orientation, the prosocial personality, communion, self-transcendent values, and altruism.

Adler's (1938) concept of *social interest* provides reason to anticipate that hope may frequently be directed toward the well-being of others. Social interest is defined as having "interests in the interests of another" (Ansbacher 1991, p. 37). As described by Leak and Leak (2006):

Social interest, or *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, involves a sense of social feeling toward all humankind, and the essence of social interest is the valuing of something outside the self without ulterior motives: a true absence of self-centeredness, egocentricity, and self-absorption. Social interest is based on one's identification with others and a transcendence of self-interest that results in a genuine concern with and striving for community and human welfare. (p. 208)

Crandall (1980) emphasizes that social interest supplements, rather than contradicts or opposes, self-interest. According to Crandall, social interest influences "a person's attention, perception, thinking about others, feeling such as empathy and sympathy, and finally motives and overt behavior relating to cooperation, helping, sharing, contributing, and so on" (p. 481).

Box 2.1: Hoping and Helping

Regan Holt is an experienced inner-city junior high school teacher. She has long infused her curriculum with an intentional and explicit hope focus, believing that this provides vital life learning and an invaluable classroom resource. She tells a story that invites us to consider the connections between social interest and other-oriented hope. An advocate for her students, she also challenges common social conceptions of youth who grow up in challenged neighbourhoods.

Ms. Holt remembers early in her career taking her class on a walking field trip. They were headed to an activity that had been planned during a class discussion on how the students could offer hope to their community. As the class filed out the school and down the steps of the old brick building, they passed a homeless man slouched by the hand-railing and begging for money. Recognizing a potential incident in the making, Ms. Holt watched, ready to intervene as needed. Rather than a confrontation, she witnessed several of the students stop briefly to give the man loose change as they offered words of concern for his welfare.

Research supports the psychological benefits of expressing social interest. Crandall (1980) demonstrated that social interest is associated with several indices of well-being, such as greater purpose in life and lower physical stress. Leak and Leak (2006) showed, in a first study, that scores on the Social Interest Index positively correlated with a number of markers of adaptive psychological functioning, such as positive affect, satisfaction with life, vitality, and an intrinsic value orientation. In a second study, they showed that social interest positively correlated with measures of prosocial tendencies (e.g., being empathic) and prosocial moral reasoning (e.g., empathic-internalized moral reasoning). Interestingly, Barlow et al. (2009) showed that hope was a specific correlate of social interest.

Social interest resembles a more recently studied social psychological construct, that of *belongingness* (Ansbacher 1991). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that humans have a fundamental need to belong with others, a need viewed as innate and universal and as evolving because of the survival and reproductive advantages of cooperative and collective living. Baumeister and Leary identify two key features of the need for belongingness: people have a need for frequent positive interactions with others, and people have a need for relationships of ongoing and mutual affective concern.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) go on to identify several lines of evidence consistent with viewing belongingness as a fundamental human need, such as evidence that we form bonds with others readily and we break them only reluctantly. A further line of evidence supportive of the belongingness hypothesis, one most pertinent to the current context, is that the need for belongingness has significant effects on cognition, or thinking processes, and hence possibly on the content of people's hope. Baumeister and Leary review evidence that a significant amount of cognitive processing is devoted to our interactions and relationships; that self-serving biases in our cognitive processing are often extended to close others; that our optimism often 'spills over' to colour our views of close others' futures; that we at times selectively forget undesirable behaviours committed by those close to us; and that, in general, our explanations for events often emphasize interpersonal as opposed to impersonal causes. In other words, much of our thinking life revolves around others, and much of the favourable thinking we engage in about ourselves is generalized to those with whom we have relationships. As stated by Baumeister and Leary, "Concern with belongingness appears to be a powerful factor shaping human thought" (p. 505). While no research on hope was included by Baumeister and Leary in advancing their belongingness hypothesis (indeed, very limited research on hope was available at the time), it is nonetheless a logical extension of their view to argue that one's hope should reflect concern toward others in a manner similar to one's causal attributions or one's memories. That is, if human thought is shaped by our concern for belongingness, so too should human hoping, as hoping is, at least in part, future-oriented thought.

The concept of *attachment* is also pertinent to the notion of other-oriented hope. Bowlby (1969) argues for the importance of establishing a secure attachment with others when it comes to developing adaptive emotional regulation and coping strategies. Positive relationship experiences during infancy allow for the proper

development of socio-emotional skills, and for positive representations of relationships that are carried forward to new experiences, including the later ability to provide care to one's own offspring. Mikulincer and Shaver (2012) review evidence that securely attached individuals also develop a greater sense of interest in caring for the well-being of others. In an earlier pronouncement of this viewpoint, Mikulincer et al. (2003) state that:

On the one hand, persons who hold a chronic sense of secure base or persons whose sense of secure base is contextually activated in a specific situation would have more available resources to attend to others' needs and to provide adequate help and care...On the other hand, doubts about having a secure base may inhibit concern for others' welfare. Insecurely attached persons may be so egoistically self-focused on their own attachment needs and distress that they may lack the necessary resources to attend to others' needs and to engage in caring behaviors. (p. 301)

In a series of studies, Mikulincer et al. (2003) found support for these hypotheses; for example, they showed that priming a secure attachment base increased the endorsement of universalism and benevolence values, that is, values considered to transcend the self in their focus upon others (see below).

Another important theoretical advance is the work of Bakan (1966), who distinguishes between *agency* and *communion* as two key life orientations. Agency describes a drive to manage one's environment with efficacy, whereas communion describes a drive to befriend and care for others. Cislak and Wojciszke (2008) argue that agentic qualities are associated with self-interest, whereas communal qualities are associated with other-interest:

Communal properties are other-profitable because other people...directly benefit from such traits like kindness, helpfulness, or honesty and are harmed by their opposites...In the same vein, agentic qualities are self-profitable because they are immediately rewarding for the acting person: whatever one does, it is better for him or her to do it efficiently. (p. 1104)

Cislak and Wojciszke (2008) showed that when behaviour is perceived as serving self-interests, inferences of agency are derived, whereas when behaviour is perceived as serving other-interests, inferences of communion are derived.

In a similar vein, Abele and Wojciszke (in press) argue that the two major dimensions underlying social cognition are communion and agency, wherein communion concerns relationships and group functioning whereas agency concerns competence and task completion. These dimensions are conceptualized as being independent of each other. This model is congenial with the idea that hope content could reflect either agency or communion and therefore be relatively self-oriented or other-oriented, respectively.

There is emerging support for a relationship between communion and hope, including other-oriented hope. In recent research, Larsen et al. (2014) examined client experiences in hope-focused group treatment for people with chronic pain. Employing qualitative methods, a key category in the findings was entitled *communion*, and was comprised of themes related to group members experiencing (a) creation of community, (b) support from others, and (c) hope for others.

Hope for others included both hope for specific hoped-for objects for another (such as an upcoming trip the other had planned) and hope that other group members could find hope itself.

Another theoretical concept of potential relevance to the notion of other-oriented hope comes from the theory of self-determination (e.g., Deci and Ryan 2000; Ryan and Deci 2001). According to this view, the key psychological needs that humans require to be met in order to experience well-being are the need for autonomy (or, self-governance), the need for competence (or, self-efficacy), and the need for relatedness. *Relatedness*, similar to belongingness, concerns humans' inherent proclivity to forge meaningful, supportive relationships with others. To the extent that this need (in conjunction with the remaining two) is well-met, individuals will grow and flourish in their lives. To the extent that this need (in conjunction with the remaining two) goes unmet, individuals' thriving will be impeded.

Self-determination theory argues that these psychological needs can be met most directly through the pursuit of intrinsic aspirations, which are first-order or non-reducible aspirations that are inherently healthy for humans, such as affiliating with others and striving to improve one's community. Such aspirations can be contrasted with extrinsic aspirations, such as wealth, fame, or status, which are indirect, less efficient, and more problematic routes toward the meeting of psychological needs. If good relationships are key to our mental health, if others need our support and love to foster *their* well-being, and if good relationships can be facilitated through aspirations such as affiliating with others and contributing to a better social climate, then it is likely that the outcomes that we hope for on a day-to-day basis, and indeed our general outlook on the world, will frequently concern the welfare of others. So, although no research within self-determination theory has concerned the extent to which our hope refers to others' welfare, it is reasonable to suppose that directing our hope towards others will be a frequent experience.

Another concept associated with our relationship to others is *social value orientation*, a concept chiefly studied in the area of decision-making. As a counterpoint to the position that rational choices will always be directed toward the maximization of gains only for the self, social value orientation conceptualizes a range of individual preferences for decision making, including preferences for choices that are selfish or individualist, competitive, and prosocial (Bogaert et al. 2008). Bogaert et al. describe prosocial individuals as being willing to cooperate because they view cooperation as intelligent (as opposed to irrational) and of high moral standard. Research has shown that prosocial individuals cooperate more and are more sensitive to the impact of their behaviour on others (Bogaert et al. 2008). Also, research by Van Lange et al. (2007) showed that prosocial individuals make more donations, such as buying something for a good cause or donating used clothing. Moreover, whereas prosocial individuals were more likely to donate to third world organizations or to charity and societal organizations than either individualists or competitors, no differences occurred concerning donations to health organizations, church organizations, sport organizations or education organizations. This pattern suggests that prosocial individuals are characterized especially by their greater willingness to

give to others under conditions in which they are unlikely to benefit directly and the recipient is unknown to them.

Interestingly, Murphy et al. (2011) present evidence that the prosocial response type, as assessed with three different measures of social value orientation, was the most common response type, characterizing 59 % of their sample of young adult Europeans. Research has also considered the origins of the prosocial orientation to decision-making. Van Lange et al. (1997) showed that prosocial individuals, relative to individualists and competitors, are more likely to evidence a secure adult attachment (e.g., finding it easy to trust and to get close to others) and that prosocial individuals are more likely to have a greater number of siblings, more older siblings, and more female siblings than individualists and competitors.

Prosociality has also been considered by personality theorists. Penner et al. (1995) devised a measure of *prosocial personality* comprised of two factors: The first factor, other-oriented empathy, includes thoughts and feelings regarding the well-being of others. The second factor, helpfulness, concerns the tendency to be helpful toward others in one's behaviour. Caprara et al. (2012) showed that having a prosocial disposition is associated with the personality trait of agreeableness, with self-transcendent values of universalism and benevolence, and with self-efficacy beliefs concerning the ability to be attuned to others' emotional experiences.

Caprara et al.'s (2012) finding of a role for self-transcendent values in prosociality is conceptually related to Schwartz's (1994) model of human values and the relevance of a subset of those values to the tendency to take into account the concerns of others (see also Schwartz 2010). Schwartz identifies 10 universal human values: universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction. These values are placed (in the order listed) within a circumplex (circular) arrangement, such that values adjacent to each other (e.g., power and achievement) are positively correlated, whereas those opposite each other (e.g., power and benevolence) are negatively correlated, or antagonistic. The values of universalism and benevolence are considered to be *self-transcendent* values, as they involve placing importance on the needs of others. Specifically, universalism involves concern directed toward all of humanity, such as viewing all people as equal, and benevolence involves concern directed toward close others. According to Schwartz (1994), people differ in the importance they place on each of the 10 value types. For example, some may place a great amount of importance on universalism and benevolence, whereas others may place very little importance on these values, but instead may place great importance on opposing, self-enhancing, values of achievement and power.

Keltner et al. (2014) recently reviewed the literature on prosociality, underscoring its basis in the nervous system, intrapersonal processes, interpersonal processes, group processes, and cultural values and norms. Falling clearly in favour of viewing humans as a prosocial species, they concluded that, "The study of prosocial behavior ... has matured enough to produce general scholarly consensus that prosociality is widespread, intuitive, and rooted deeply within our biological makeup" (p. 425).

Addressing the issue of the motivation behind prosocial behaviour, Batson and Shaw (1991) argue cogently that some prosocial behaviour reflects *altruism*, defined as “a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare” (p. 108). Egoism, in contrast, is concerned with increasing one’s own welfare. Batson and Shaw review evidence in support of the role of empathic responding to another’s plight in the instigation of altruistic behaviour toward others. For example, they show that among people high in empathy, but not among those low in empathy, being provided with the opportunity to escape the presence of a suffering individual (i.e., reflecting the egoistic motivation to reduce one’s personal distress caused by exposure to a vulnerable other), does not reduce helping behaviour. Reflecting people’s propensity for prosocial behaviour fueled by altruism, Batson and Shaw conclude that “Other people can be more to us than sources of information, stimulation, and reward ... as we seek our own welfare. We have the potential to care about their welfare as well” (p. 120). The existence of prosocial personality traits or values, and of truly altruistic behaviour, is compatible with the occurrence of other-oriented hope.

A number of additional theoretical concepts which pit processes that are self-focused versus those that are other-focused can be seen to pertain to other-oriented hope; a few will be briefly mentioned here. Dunn et al. (2008) showed that giving away money to others has a bigger impact on well-being than spending it on ourselves. Brown et al. (2003) showed that providing support to others was associated with reduced mortality whereas receiving support from others was not. The concept of *life purpose* has been associated with attending to others, as in this definition of purpose by Damon et al. (2003): “A stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (p. 121).

2.3 The Concepts of Self-Interest and Other-Interest

The theoretically and empirically-substantiated concepts of social interest, belongingness, communion, attachment, relatedness, social value orientation, prosociality, altruism, and universalism and benevolence values point to a strong proclivity among humans to orient toward the interests of others. The social psychologist Brewer (2004) argues that social living requires humans to achieve a *balance* between benefitting the self and benefitting others (see also Gerbasi and Prentice 2013; Korsgaard and Meglino 2008). Brewer states that “humans are not driven either by unmitigated individual selfishness or by noncontingent altruism, but instead show the capacity for variable motivation and behavior patterns contingent on the state of the environment” (p. 109). Similarly, MacIntyre (1999) underscores the notion that balancing self-directed and other-directed motives is integral to our social existence: “...we become neither self-rather-than-other-regarding nor other-rather-than-self-regarding, neither egoists nor altruists, but those whose passions and inclinations are directed to what is both our good and the

good of others” (p. 160). And, Sternberg (2001) argues that wisdom, and thus wise living, is “not simply about maximizing one’s own or someone else’s self-interest, but about balancing various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal) and other aspects of the context in which one lives (extrapersonal), such as one’s city or country or environment or even God” (p. 231).

Recently, Gerbasi and Prentice (2013) sought to conceptualize and quantify individual differences in self- and other-interest. They argue that self- and other-interest are relatively independent psychological dimensions underlying behaviour, that they operate in tandem with each other and, as a result, that any one behaviour may be motivated by a mix of both forms of interest. Gerbasi and Prentice define other-interest as a motivational orientation toward “the pursuit of gains for others in socially valued domains, including material goods, social status, recognition, academic or occupational achievement, and happiness” (p. 497). They characterize other-interest as varying between individuals and across situations. And, they allow that behaviour which pursues others’ interests can itself reflect influences that are egoistic (e.g., reflecting one’s inherent interdependence with others) and those that are altruistic (e.g., reflecting personality factors such as compassion). Gerbasi and Prentice operationalize the construct of other-interest with rating-scale items such as, *I am constantly looking for ways for my acquaintances to get ahead* and *I try to help my acquaintances by telling other people about their successes*.

In research validating their operationalization of other-interest, Gerbasi and Prentice (2013) showed that, relative to scores on a parallel measure of self-interest, other-interest scores were more positively associated with the endorsement of benevolence and universalism values. Other-interest scores were also associated with holding a conception of the self as interdependent with others. Conversely, other-interest scores were less positively correlated with achievement and power values and with materialistic leanings. In a subsequent study, the researchers showed that priming prosocial values led to an increase in other-interest scores. Finally, additional studies showed that other-interest scores predicted behaviour that was believed to benefit another person, and that other-interest scores predicted prosocial choices in a computer-based social dilemma game.

This recent work provides support for the distinction between psychological processes behind self-oriented thinking and behaviour and those behind other-oriented thinking and behaviour and, in so doing, provides an empirically-supported conceptual basis to the present attempt to distinguish between self- and other-oriented hope. Other-oriented hope is viewed herein as a specific manifestation of the more general psychological dimension termed other-interest. Other specific manifestations of other-interest would include a prosocial value orientation, the prosocial personality, the need for relatedness, the need for belongingness, and high social interest. Whereas other-interest encapsulates a broad and generalized orientation toward valuing, recognizing, facilitating, promoting, and celebrating positive outcomes for others that have occurred in the past or present, or that may occur in the future, other-oriented hope cleaves that portion of other-interest specific to the harbouring of future-oriented hope for others and (where possible) attendant strivings toward meeting those ends. Moreover, further differentiating other-oriented hope

from the broader concept of other-interest are the unique attributes of other-oriented hope (to be outlined in Chap. 4), including relatively high uncertainty, low control, and low likelihood.

In summary, the social nature of humans means that we have both self- and other-interests, that we strive to find an optimal balance between these interests, and that people will differ in the degree to which they express each kind of interest, with those who show greater other-interest also behaving especially helpfully toward, and cooperating with, others. Other-oriented hope is viewed as a specific form of other-interest, one in which we reveal our interest in the welfare of others by apportioning some of our future-oriented mental imaginings to others' welfare in addition to our own, more self-focused, hope. In the next chapter, we examine the definition and characteristics of hope in both its self- and other-oriented manifestations.

Box 2.2: Hope Reflects Many Interests

Some time ago in my counselling psychology practice, I (D. L.) had the opportunity to work with a professional, Lensa, who had struggled with depression for many years. Her visit to my office was precipitated by several difficult circumstances. Her brother had recently been in serious trouble with the law, she described her workplace experiences via numerous examples of bullying, and a recent intimate relationship had collapsed. Lensa said that she sought therapy to learn that there was still hope. As I learned about her history and the painful experiences she had recently endured, I asked if she might craft a list of her hopes with me. She agreed and we began together. As we talked, her list began to grow. Lensa began with 'big' hopes like the hope to end world hunger, the hope to save child soldiers, and even the hope for global well-being—all other-oriented hopes. I said that I shared these hopes with her. We could both hope for these things together. Nevertheless, on clinical reflection, I was concerned about the broad scope and ambition of her hopes given her long standing struggle with depression. And so, I also reminded her that while some of our hopes can be large, some of our hopes can also be small, some can be serious, some can be fun, some can be short-term, some can be long-term, some can be likely, and some may be unlikely. As we talked, she began to add to her list. She hoped to see her son and his new young family next weekend. She hoped to take dance classes. She hoped her new granddaughter would one day learned to play the violin, and so on. As our session came to a close, we reviewed her hopes and found evidence that some hope still existed in her life and some of it was very likely to be realized. Indeed, she had plans to see her son's family on the weekend. We hadn't finished our work together but we had found a hopeful place to start. As a therapist, I held hope for Lensa, too.

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