

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF ADOLESCENCE: DESCRIPTIONS OF  
SIGNIFICANT ADULTS AND THEIR QUALITIES WHICH AIDED  
IN THE TRANSITION INTO ADOLESCENCE

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## **Abstract**

Adolescence has been described as a tumultuous transition where problems heighten and self-esteem plummets. One positive relationship in an adolescent's life can decrease the chances of severe problems and, in some cases, enhance this transition. A qualitative study explored the nature and qualities of significant relationships with adults during the transition into adolescence. This author applied Gilligan and Arvay's "Listening and Reading Guide" to uncover stories and themes surrounding six relationships with adults. The adolescents were selected through the use of an advertisement displayed in various community centers in Vancouver and by word of mouth. Unstructured interviews with open-ended questions were used to discover adolescents' perspective on relational experiences with adults and qualities of significant adults. All adolescents spoke about the meaningful and positive effect these adults had in their lives. They clearly defined eight important qualities in adults that made a difference: Open Communication, Messages about Feeling Special, Sense of Belonging, Involvement in Important Activities, Connection, Role Model, Challenges and Family Foundation. Listening to the voices of these adolescents provided valuable information for teachers, counsellors and parents concerned with enhancing this transition and establishing more effective support.

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TO MY HUSBAND

MATTHEW

AND

TO THE SPIRIT THAT

GUIDED ME

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

*As the alarm clock awakes me, I am filled with anxiety. I do not want to go back to school today. I think about what happened yesterday and my stomach tenses up. Perhaps I can pretend to be sick. I already did that once this week and I don't think my mom will go for it again.*

*I venture to my friend's house to pick him up but he has already left for school. Once again I am walking to school alone. Up ahead I see my two best friends from elementary school. We used to hang out all the time playing basketball, games and bike around our complex. Unfortunately, ever since high school started they don't talk to me, look at me or even acknowledge my existence. In high school, the fact that I am Caucasian and they are African American all of a sudden seemed to make a difference. Race has become a barrier to our friendship. Even though I yearn to run up to them and give the old hand shake, I stay far enough back that they don't notice me and walk in silence.*

*As I walk up to my school, I see the two police cars. Racism is all over our school. I don't understand why we all can't be friends like in elementary school but we can't. Even the color of shoe laces is important because it tells everyone what race group you belong to. During recess and lunch you have to be really careful where you hang out because at any time a fight could break out. For me, I don't understand why people are mean to each other and the racism scares me. So, I walk around each day hoping just to melt in with the crowd.*

*As I walk through the halls at school, some guy pushes me into the lockers. Another guy whispers wimp. Glancing around, I am filled with an intense feeling of complete loss and solidarity. I get to my locker and wonder if it might be possible to squish myself into the locker and shut the door. Oh that would be grand. I stand around briefly talking to my friends and the bell rings.*

*I rush to class because my classroom is all the way across the large school and I know with this teacher I can't be late. I miss my elementary teachers. I remember the day my elementary science teacher picked me up on my way home from high school...as if any teacher would do that now. The elementary teachers seemed to know what was going on in my life and cared about my well being. At times I wonder if these teachers even know I exist.*

*At lunch, every clique eats in a different classroom. No longer are we one cohesive group, rather, many small groups and cliques. I venture from one classroom to another chatting with all the groups but never really fitting into one particular group. One group is talking hot girls and clothing. I hate shopping and am not really into learning the newest "pick up line". Laughter is heard in another classroom where a group is talking about the great party on the weekend and how drunk they were. They would go on to discuss whose parents weren't home that weekend or what park they would sneak to for some drinks. Other groups talk about the internet and new information on computers. As a floater through the groups, I never completely bond or am a part of any group.*

*Without any close friends and no significant adult in my life I walk around the school completely lost, as lost as one could be...*

This hypothetical example has been repeated each year as students move into junior high schools. The movement from elementary school to junior high school is symbolic of a transition from childhood to adolescence. Adolescents walk through the large school doors filled with questions and insecurities. At the same time, there is an excitement as they embark on a mysterious journey to develop and maintain a sense of self. "Self-esteem gradually grows into a conviction that the ego is capable of integrating effective steps toward a tangible collective future, that is developing into a well-organized ego within a social reality" (Erikson, 1994, p.49). In this sense, self-esteem and identity development are inexplicable linked. As adolescents search for a sense of self, the way they perceive themselves and relate to others within society directly affects their positive or negative personality development. This desire to define self is difficult, especially when teenagers face daily peer pressure, social anxiety, self-doubt, and confusion. Adults can play a crucial role in supporting and assisting adolescents during this transition. Listening to the voices of adolescents will provide a deeper understanding concerning the complexity of adolescence and provide valuable insight for teachers, parents, counsellors and other adults working with adolescents.

### **The Problem in the Study**

Overwhelming statistics portray the tumultuous transition and severity of problems adolescents' face. Researchers in the U.S., Donmoyer and Kos (1993), Dryfoos (1990), McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter (1993) and Schorr (1988) provide these staggering statistics:

- 700, 000 students drop out of high school each year in the U.S.

- 500, 000 teenagers give birth each year

- 24, 000, 000 children live in poverty
- 14, 000, 000 children are being raised by a single parent
- 2, 000, 000 children suffer from some form of abuse each year
- 3, 000, 000 students and teachers are victims of crime each year
- 500, 000 robberies, burglaries, assaults and rapes are committed in schools each year; and
- 7, 000 teenagers commit suicide each year

(cited in Capuzzi and Gross, 1996)

An increase in the number of problems and variety of problems signifies a shift in today's society. Adolescents have more barriers to face and more problems to overcome. The world in which adolescents live today differs immensely from our experiences. We need to change our support network to fit the needs of adolescents.

Along with these statistics, the AAUW Report (1992) on "How Schools Shortchange Girls" revealed other important adolescent issues. Eighty-five percent of the girls said they were sexually harassed at school. One third of these girls reported not wanting to go to school and not wanting to speak up because of the harassment. By high school half the boys and less than one third of the girls reported being "happy the way I am." Two thirds of the girls stated that they had a negative body image. These girls are more likely to experience low self-esteem, depression and develop eating disorders. The authors reported that teenage girls were more likely to express feelings of sadness and helplessness and four out of five times more likely to attempt suicide. Approximately 40% of girls under the age of nine started dieting. Up to 55% of middle and junior high

school students had engaged in sexual activities. Of these students, girls were more likely to regret this decision (Orenstein, 1994).

These statistics are overwhelming and show that it is time to adjust our programs and support networks in order to address these problems. If there is agreement that society is changing swiftly and the world in which adolescents live is not what was encountered years ago, it is imperative that we communicate with adolescents. We need to ask them what they need from us and listen to their responses.

### **Rationale**

Research has indicated an increase in the amount of problems faced by adolescents and the effects of these problems on personality development. One of the most poignant effects on personality development supported by research is the decrease in self-esteem. As problems increase and self-esteem decreases, adolescents are vulnerable and need support. The research that has been done identified help seeking sources as parents, teachers and friends (Gibson, Westwood, Ishiyama, Borgen, Showalter, Al-Sarraf, Atakan, Guimares, Guisti-Ortiz, Robertson, Shafir, De Weerd, Velazco, Baker, Dikaiou, Gaby, Kashyup, Lee, Felce Di Paula, Ngunangawa, Talyzina, 1991a). Some research has shown that one positive adult in an adolescents' life can deter delinquent behavior and/or adolescent suicide (Cappuzzi and Gross, 1996; Reasoner, 1992). These studies indicate the importance of relational experiences. Within this quantitative research, adults predetermine the answers. These answers are sufficient for the purposes of the research however, adults assume that their language is congruent with adolescents. At times, adolescents' interpretation of language is not compatible with ours. As adults we have defined terms such as trust, openness and encouragement. In

what situations have adolescents felt adults were trusting, open and encouraging? Are adolescents' definitions of these terms similar to adults' definitions? Adolescents' answers to these questions could reveal novel information. Providing specific examples of experiences with adults could enlighten adults in the way adolescents perceive these definitions.

Exploration of adolescents' perspectives regarding significant adults is scarce. Discovering adolescent experiences with adults and qualities of these crucial adults provided valuable information relevant to teachers, parents, counsellors and other adults working with adolescents. This insight has begun to close this gap in research enabling those working with adolescents to become momentous people in the lives of adolescents.

Given the overwhelming statistics and the large amount of evidence provided by quantitative research methods, there is a need to study the thoughts, feelings and experiences of adolescents. Through this exploration, we have begun to understand adolescents' language and the important role adults can provide during this transition. By exploring adolescents' experiences, we have begun to better comprehend which qualities in adults are meaningful.

The information gathered through this research project is aimed at providing information regarding positive experiences adolescents had with significant adults. From this, adults are able to gain some insight into qualities adolescents seek for in them. Adults then are able to adapt their relationship to fit the needs of adolescents. In this sense, it is my hope that more adults will become available for adolescents to turn to during difficult situations.



### **The Purpose Statement**

The main purpose of the study was to listen to the voices of adolescents in order to understand the relational qualities they look for in adults. I was interested in exploring adolescent's relational experiences with significant adults in their life who aided them through the transition into adolescence. Detailed descriptions and stories about these significant relationships were encouraged. Unstructured interviews and open-ended questions guided the discovery of novel information regarding significant adults during the transition into adolescence. Gilligan's "Listening and Reading Guide" (1992), the method of data analysis, sought to intensely listen to the adolescent's words and experiences. The aim of providing an opportunity for adolescents to speak and be heard was to develop a deeper understanding of adolescents' personal experiences with positive adult relationships. By sharing relational experiences, adolescents provided examples of situations where adults aided them. These examples portrayed various qualities that are significant to these adolescents. Also, Gilligan (1992) and Arvay's (1998) "Listening and Reading Guide" stresses the importance of listening to both the participants' and researcher's perspective and its influence when shaping the analysis. The emphasis on voice and reflexivity enabled readers to have a more enriched understanding of the research while simultaneously validating the participant's experience.

### **The Research Question**

The essence of the research was to gather information about significant adults in adolescents' lives. The research questions were open-ended and semi-structured in order to encourage adolescents to speak their minds. Initially, I asked the adolescents to think about the period of grade seven and eight. Adolescents were asked to provide

challenging or problematic situation where an adult aided them. After finding out information regarding the situation, I asked questions about the qualities of these adults and how their assistance aided the transition process. Other difficult situations were explored based on the adolescents' experience. Asking adolescents to share experiences of significant adult relationships during this transition provided useful information. I expected the research question to evolve and change during the study.

### **Significance of Study**

A large amount of quantitative research has examined adolescence revealing increased problems, diversity of problems and help seeking sources. More qualitative research is needed to provide a deeper understanding of the meaning adolescents make of their lived experiences. Allowing adolescents an opportunity to speak freely using their own language provided new definitions and experiences surrounding adolescence. This new information has enable adults to better support adolescents during the transition into adolescence. Two cross national studies (Gibson, Westwood, Ishiyama, Borgen, Showalter, Al-Sarraf, Atakan, Guimares, Guisti-Ortiz, Robertson, Shafir, De Weerd, Velazco, Baker, Dikaiou, Gaby, Kashyup, Lee, Felce Di Paula, Ngunangawa, Talyzina, 1991) examined help seeking qualities and portrayed the importance of adults in the life of adolescents. Research regarding what qualities adolescents look for in adults has added to present knowledge. Most importantly, carefully listening to adolescents allowed a unique opportunity for their voices to be heard.

Information adolescents revealed provided a deeper glance into the lives of adolescents and the experience of adolescence. Experiences shared by the adolescents regarding significant adults allows us to learn about the importance and qualities of adults

during this transition. The adolescents have clearly defined qualities in adults that are important and they have provided examples of positive experiences. As parents, teachers, counsellors and adults working with adolescents, we could use this valuable information to assist adolescents during the transition into adolescence.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

What do we know about adolescent development? What are adolescent problems and how do they effect development during adolescence? Do adolescents need help during the transition into adolescence? If so, who do they choose for this help? In this chapter I will attempt to answer these questions. Within adolescent development, there is agreement with the literature that adolescents are searching for an identity. Much of this research has defined an increase in amount and variety of problems and their effect on self-esteem during adolescence. When seeking support, it appears that parents or friends are named as helpers. Qualitative studies regarding adolescent experiences is noticeably absent from the literature on adolescent development. Also absent is the answer to the question-why do adolescents seek certain people and not others? This literature review will attempt to provide background information needed to understand the context of adolescent development.

The beginning of this chapter will focus on four different views of adolescent development. Following this, I will review the context adolescents are living in presently. Next, I will present literature that addresses the impact adolescence has on self-esteem. I will then review the variety of adolescent problems today and the increase in adolescent problems, and the impact this has on self-esteem. To conclude, I will review the literature that further outlines adolescent problems and help seeking sources.

#### **Identity Development**

According to Erikson, eight stages of psycho-social development occur throughout the life span. As the name suggests, these stages connect social and physical

development with personality development. A crisis occurs within each of the eight stages and the outcome of this crisis affects preceding stages. Adolescents are in Erikson's fifth stage, "Identity and Role Confusion". The primary task of this stage is to establish an independent identity through the "organization of the individual's drives, abilities, beliefs, and history into a consistent image of self" (Woolfolk, 1995, p.69). Three components are necessary for this identity development: a sense of self, consistency and continuity of this self through time, and an interconnection between self and society. The process of establishing an identity will have positive or negative repercussions for the next development crisis. Erikson's "Identity versus Role Confusion" stage recognizes adolescence as a journey where colorful and unique identities develop.

Like Erikson, Marcia believed developing identity is a journey however, this journey requires exploration and commitment. "Exploration provides greater adaptiveness, generalizability and viability of commitment made following genuine exploration of alternatives contrasted with those made with no period of questioning" (Marcia, 1993). Marcia purported that individual identity is a set of values, beliefs and vocational directions. Building upon Erikson's paradigm, "Identity and Role Confusion", Marcia outlines four main categories or "statuses" of identity development; identity achievement, foreclosure group, moratorium group, and identity diffusion. The optimal development is Identity Achievement where a person establishes an identity and commits to it after exploration. Foreclosure refers to people who have made a commitment to an identity without exploration. These individuals are unable to depart from childhood ascriptions. Close family ties are conditional as they depend on one's adherence to

family rules. Exploration is a threat because these individuals feel safe and comfortable with these childhood identities. Moratorium consists of people experiencing a crisis. They are exploring but suffering negative consequences. As the process of exploration is uncertain, these individuals are frightened. Diffusion Identity is a category for people who are uninterested in exploring their identity and have no commitment to create or establish an identity. They live with an unstable identity. As described, each status has its own defining characteristics. Unlike Erikson's polarity where one must live in darkness in order to achieve an identity, Marcia believes one travels through non-sequential four statuses at any time during adolescence.

Josselson (1994) stated that development theories tended to accentuate self-assertion, separation, self-awareness and agency. Unlike these past development theories, Josselson believed that adolescent identity was related to separation from the child-parent relationship. Similar to other developmental processes emphasis is placed upon a shift from independence to autonomy. In this sense, growth occurs when one separates from parents. As children enter into adolescence, the child-parent separates causing the relationship to go through its largest evolution. Parents must be able to set adolescents free in order for them to develop and experience adolescence.

In addition, for three years Josselson applied Marcia's four identity status groups to college women. During this longitudinal study, she defined different attributes for Marcia's identity status groups. For her, Identity Achievement occurred when childhood was reworked to comfortably define individually chosen paths. Individuals in the Moratorium status left home in search of a feeling of "absolute rightness." These individuals were emotionally sensitive and in conflict about what to be and who to

believe. Individuals incapable of leaving home were within the Foreclosure status. They were rigid and moralistic, hard-working and high achieving. As these individuals felt completely safe and secure within family life, there was no need to explore identity. Diffusion included individuals with a wide range of pathological problems and early development conflicts. As they acquired no resources along their journey, they were unable to address serious developmental decisions. Josselson's addition to Marcia's identity development model marked a new beginning in adolescent development accentuating the importance of relationship.

Kegan's Constructive-Developmental Theory (1982) also diverged from the traditional "narrow" developmental theories. He believed growth did not only occur through differentiation and autonomy but also in terms of integration and interdependence. In his theory, individuals are born with two human yearnings, to be distinct/separate and to be included/attached. Five stages are divided in accordance with emphasis on separateness in stages two and four and emphasis on inclusion in stages one, three and five. As one travels through these developmental stages, he/she tries to balance these two yearnings. Each stage resolves this balance in a different way. "The extent to which a person tends to stay at each stage or balance, may be related to social-environmental expectations and demands, life events, experiences, and conflicts" (Bar-Yam, 1991). During Erickson's "Identity verses Role Confusion" stage, individuals are in Kegan's "Institutional Balance" stage. Here, individuals are beginning to define a sense of self by becoming more self-dependent and taking ownership of self. As individuals change from interpersonal to institutional, they do not lose interpersonal relationships, rather, understand a new context of their place in "a personal self-system"

(Kegan, 1982, p.101). The “personal self-system” is a self-organization that derives meaning as opposed to having the meaning derive its organization. As this organization defines “truth and source” (Kegan, 1982, p. 102), it can be influenced by groups or factions of people who support its ideology. Therefore, during adolescence, individuals seek to create and balance their institution. This balance will lead to a more integrated and interdependent development, the goal of Kegan’s Development Theory.

As development occurs, the context in which the adolescents are striving to survive is significant. The next section describes three books that explain the reality of the context of adolescence development.

### **Context**

In Reviving Ophelia, Pipher (1994) examined the pressures female adolescents face daily and their repercussions. Through a qualitative study based on counselling experiences and interviews, Pipher’s goal was to share her thoughts with educators, parents and professionals working with adolescents. The book was also written for the girls. Here, for the first time, are girls’ unmuted voices from the front lines of adolescence, personal and painfully honest (Pipher, 1994). The stories vividly portray the effects of adolescence through eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, violence and abuse within families. Some of the reasons for these effects stem from media, developmental issues, family structure, interactions and our basic culture. These stories revealed the intensity and effects of female adolescents’ experiences on self-esteem. One of Pipher’s most poignant conclusions is concerned with creating a better “culture.” A culture that not only enables these girls to become stronger, tougher but also supports and guides them through adolescence.



Similar to Reviving Ophelia, Schoolgirls, written by Peggy Orenstien (1994) outlined various problems faced by girls during adolescence. Orenstien was inspired to write this book after reading an article, "Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America" that depicted a plummet in girls' self-esteem during adolescence. While observing two schools, Weston and Audubon Middle School for a year and collecting qualitative data through interviews, she investigated gender inequality in the classroom and its effects on girls' self-esteem. The two schools were chosen because of their differences; one was a middle-upper class school and the other was lower socioeconomic school with more at-risk students. There were some differences in problems such as volume of eating disorders and parental pressure in Weston Middle School versus treacherous home life, lost girls due to dropouts, gangs and violence in Audubon Middles School. Similar problems included silencing girls, lack of sex information, sexual harassment, girls seen as objects of desires and lack of participation in classrooms especially math and science. These significant findings revealed the volume of problems female adolescents face daily and lack of female's voice in the classroom. Orenstein stated, "Without a strong sense of self, girls will enter adulthood at a deficit: they will be less able to fulfill their potential, less willing to take on challenges, less willing to defy tradition in their career choices, which means sacrificing economic equality." Similar to Pipher, Orenstein recognized the importance of establishing a strong, positive sense of self during adolescence.

William Pollack (1998) also used his experiences of working with boys and men in counselling programmes and research to write a book entitled Real Boys. He revealed the problems faced by boys during childhood and adolescence. Although boys appeared to be fine on the outside, they suffered confusion, isolation and despair on the inside.

This conflict between the inner self and outer social expected self cause boys to detach from themselves. They lived behind a mask of masculinity and bravado with feigned self-confidence hiding their feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness and isolation. This unwritten “Boys’ Code” was “a set of behaviors, rules of conduct, cultural shibboleths (meaning a long-standing doctrine or phrase held to be true by a party or group), and even a lexicon, that is inculcated into boys by our society – from the very beginning of a boys’ life” (Pollack, 1998, p.xxv). Pollack revealed the damage of the “Boy’s Code” in an array of arenas; home, school, sports where the repercussions include conflict, low self-esteem violence, depression and suicide.

The problem is not that we introduce our boys to the world – that’s what parents should be doing – it’s how we do it. We expect them to step outside the family too abruptly, with too little preparation for what lies in store, too little emotional support, not enough opportunity to express their feelings, and often with no option of going back or changing course (Pollack, p. xxiv).

Pollack’s most powerful conviction was that as a society, we needed to revise this “Boy Code” and create a “New Boy Code” that respects what today’s boys are really about: honesty rather than fear, communication rather than repression, connection rather than disconnection (Pollack, 1998).

Similar to Pollack, Michael Gurian has written two books, The Wonder of Boys (1996) and A Fine Young Man (1998), which examined male childhood and adolescence. In his first book, Gurian explored the biology and culture of boys, the needs of boys and techniques to assist raising boys. Rather than stifling boys with their natural inclinations towards competition and aggression, society at large needs to recognize the importance of

mentors, media and the community in modeling inclusion and empowerment. Gurian suggested the need to set boys as a priority. In this sense, time should be spent building a strong first-family foundation with a surrounding extended family. Additionally, Gurian expressed the importance of developing males' spirituality. A Fine Young Man builds on his first book by discussing the tremendous challenges these boys face during adolescence. Gurian purported that adolescent boys are the most overlooked at risk group in our society as they face the highest incidence of addiction, violence, mental illness, and emotional neglect (Gurian, front flap). In this book, Gurian addressed the emotional lives of adolescence, their journey into male adolescence, educating adolescent boys and caring for the spirit of the fine young men. Revealed is the overall culture of the boys created in adolescence that stresses rules, test and rituals. Similar to his first book, he emphasized the need to nurture the spirit of our youth. In this sense, the core of manhood: compassion, honor, responsibility and enterprise need to be refined. By recognizing what boys need, parents, educators and others working with boys can better support and raise boys to be strong, responsible and sensitive men.

Gilligan and Brown's (1992) ten-year study represented in the book Meeting at the Crossroads examined the significance of relational experiences in adolescence. The authors travelled through inner city schools, private schools, large urban high schools and boys and girls clubs in culturally diverse neighborhoods. Using Gilligan's "Listening and Reading Guide" (1992), they interpreted the importance of relationships during adolescence. A turning point occurred at the beginning of the second year. The authors met at one of the schools to discuss their initial findings regarding the psychological development of adolescents and the effectiveness of their conversations to educate and

investigate. During the discussion, one of the teachers stated, "How can we help girls learn to deal with disagreement in public, when we cannot deal with disagreement in public ourselves?" (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, p.12). This comment and discussion initiated a multi-layered change in the method they were using to investigate their findings. The primary goal of this new method was to establish a collaborative and relational method that developed a relationship between researchers and participants. The "Listening and Reading Guide" method originated from listening to the audience, recognizing the importance of relationships and making adjustments to fit the participants' interests.

In addition, these authors purported that an "inner sense of connection with others is a central organizing feature of women's development and psychological crises in women's lives stem from disconnections" (Gilligan, 1992, p.3). Connection and responsive relationship are essential to psychological growth in adolescence. During adolescence, there is a disconnection and adolescents experience a "connection crisis." They desire authentic connection, experience disconnection, have difficulties speaking, do not feel heard and are unable to convey or even believe in their own experiences. The result of the disconnection is a loss of voice and relationship. Society and culture are accustomed to unconsciously encouraging this "connection crises," debilitating adolescents' psychological development.

Similarly, Marshall and Arvay (1998) used Gilligan's Listener's Guide (1992) to investigate the various perspectives on voice and sense of self with thirteen adolescents both male and female. The researchers interviewed thirteen adolescents both individually and within groups, which gathered rich and diverse information. Using eight original

research questions from Brown and Gilligan (1994), they addressed adolescent issues regarding not listening/self-silencing, future orientation and their views on societal and personal values regarding gender. The results indicated that both boys and girls experienced difficulties in each of these areas however, there were gender differences with regards to the meaning of their experiences. As much research has indicated the importance of females having a connection with others. One of the most poignant results of this study was the need for adolescent boys to have a similar connection with others. A significant caveat was to be cautious with emphasizing gender differences. We need to recognize potential differences and at the same time be aware of individual differences. Another significant assertion was that adults working with adolescents need to assist them in "striving for balance in the development of voice, autonomy and connections" (Marshall and Arvay, 1998, p.22). This will aid adolescents to develop a positive, healthy sense of self. More research needs to explore these differences between males and females and elaborate on the type of connection each gender desires.

### **Self-Esteem**

As the three books have indicated, self-esteem is a prevalent issue for both males and females during adolescence. A large volume of research has been conducted on defining self-esteem and portraying changes in self-esteem as one enters adolescence. Self-esteem plummets after elementary school especially with females (American Association of University Women, 1992). Through a longitudinal study of self-esteem, using repeated measures analysis, Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope and Deilman (1997) revealed the largest cluster that decreased in self-esteem was sixth to eighth graders. Other research depicted lower self-esteem in females throughout high school (Chubb,

Fertman and Ross, 1997). Harper and Marshall's (1991) results indicated that not only did girls have lower self esteem, but also girls had significantly more problems with interpersonal relationships, personal adjustment, health, and family issues. Less, if any, research has been done to analyze why there is this plummet and discrepancy in self-esteem.

The California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (1990) was formed to study the effects of self-esteem on adolescence. After three years, the task force found many correlations. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear parents, teachers, and politicians blame poor school achievement, risky sexual behavior, insolence, psychological and emotional distress, drug and alcohol abuse, and delinquency on children's flagging self-esteem (California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal Responsibility, 1990). Self-esteem is the likeliest candidate as a social vaccine, something that empowers us to live responsibly and that inoculates us against the lure of crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure (Borba, 1993). The significance of these findings was the fact that self-esteem is one area effected during adolescence.

Another area affected by self-esteem is academics. Presently, our school systems are organized in a way that promote academic competition at all ages. A close relationship between low self-esteem and low levels of success in reading and academic achievement has been well documented (Edwards, 1990). Some empirical evidence suggests that females with low self-esteem have more difficulties obtaining successful academic achievement. Earle (1986) showed the repercussions of this while studying the close relationship between low self-esteem and dropouts among females.

Berndt and Keefe's (1996) study on the effects of friendship during adolescence supported a correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement. Additionally, they emphasized a correlation between self-esteem and friendship. There were 297 seventh and eighth graders who answered two questionnaires in the fall and spring. One of the correlations depicted supportive friendships during the year enhancing students' self-esteem and competency in scholastic endeavors. Other variables were consistently correlated to the hypothesis that stable friendships effect self-esteem. The questionnaires were comprised of 26 questions that were answered about two different friends. Surprisingly, 91% named three friends and only 1% named one or no friends. If friendships were perceived as positive and significant, both friends experienced higher self-esteem. Relationships contained high and low points that were intensified during adolescence. Adolescents' temperaments swung with these friendships. If the friendship was stable, there was an enhanced perception of social acceptance, behavior conduct and general self worth. Hence, the study demonstrated the importance of friendship stability as a moderator of the relations between friendship quality and self-esteem. Edwards expressed the importance of at least one positive relationship. For both females and males, the failure of close interpersonal relationships is often the major factor precipitating a suicide attempt (Edwards, 1990). The researcher believes that this close interpersonal relationship could be with adults. This study has provided evidence to support this statement.

Chubb, Fertman and Ross (1989) examined changes in locus of control and its effect on self-esteem during high school. Each spring for four consecutive years, 236 ninth grade students were surveyed. In the end, 174 students remained from the initial

group. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1979) and Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (1973) were administered and two-way ANOVAS were used to analyze changes in locus of control and self-esteem. Throughout four years, males had significantly higher self-esteem than females. Students gradually felt more empowered during the four years. As external locus of control became less significant in grades ten and eleven, self-empowerment increased. More emphasis on internal control allowed students to believe in themselves without the influence of external variables. This study showed the critical years for self-esteem are earlier in high school. More research is needed on the development of self-esteem during this period. The homogeneous and relatively small sample size is a limiting factor in this study. Although the study concluded that gender differences are influenced by different messages sent from media and teachers about adequacy, other reasons for this discrepancy need to be explored.

Much research has outlined strategies for enhancing self-esteem. Gunderson (1999) believed the foundation of self-esteem includes an aggregate of success, acceptance, belonging, acknowledgment, recognition and encouragement. Reasoner's (1982) five components that individuals with high self-esteem appear to possess are the building blocks for these activities. These include the feelings of security, identity, belonging, purpose and competence.

### **Adolescent Problems and Self Esteem**

As the literature regarding context and self-esteem suggests, adolescent problems and self-esteem are linked. Simultaneously, as adolescents search for an identity, they can be influenced by the problems surrounding them. This section will show that as



problems increase and vary greatly, the way adolescents' perceive themselves can be effected.

Kaplan's (1976) theory suggested that low self-esteem influences a person to adopt delinquent behaviors that deviate from the norm (Capuzzi and Gross, 1996). Adolescents are trying to find their own identity. If they suffer from low self-esteem, they may resort to any group that will accept them. Simultaneously, belonging to a deviant group enhances self-esteem because there is a sense of identity and feeling of acceptance. At risk behaviors affected by self-esteem relate to one's emotional well being. Low self-esteem can precipitate into anxiety disorders, depression and suicide. Furthermore, early pregnancy is a gender-specific outcome of low self-esteem due to the lack of assertiveness to buy contraceptives or lack of ability to say no (Edwards, 1990). In contrast, youth with high self-esteem report less tolerance for deviance and less susceptibility to peer pressure (Zimmerman et al., 1997).

In a correlational study, Harper and Marshall (1991) investigated problems and self-esteem among 201 middle adolescents. Using two measures, Mooney Problem Check List (1942) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1979), the authors found boys and girls differed in types of problems, amount of problems and the extent of concern regarding problems. Also, girls showed lower self-esteem than boys. Additionally, both boys and girls reported high concern for adjustment to schoolwork and low concern for educational-vocational future. Harper and Marshall's significant finding was that as girls searched for identity, they became confused and conflicted due to inconsistent social expectations about their behavior. Research on girls and self-esteem, supported these patterns of lower self-esteem and more problems than boys. Social expectations for girls

are not as clear as boys causing confusion. Understanding why girls perceived more problems than boys and how they felt during this conflicting period is relevant information for teachers and counsellors.

Using a non-recursive linear structural equation model and data from "Youth in Transition," Owens (1994) compared the relationship between global self-esteem and adolescent social problems. In the first form self-esteem prevented adolescent problems. The underlying assumption was that youths with high self-esteem would behave in more socially acceptable ways than those with low self-esteem, would in general have higher achievement in conventional pursuits and greater socio-emotional well-being. It was argued that low self-esteem placed youth at risk for problems due to their vulnerability and deleterious influences. The lack of self-esteem was central to more personal and social ills plaguing our province and country.

In 1998, Lynch, Forssman-Falck, Kilmartin, Kliewer and Myers, in a written narrative study, examined gender and age patterns in body image, emotional expression, and self-esteem among 209 adolescents. Using a written survey, the authors claimed over time boys found it more difficult to express emotions than girls. Girls in late childhood and adolescence were both more negatively and more positively influenced than boys by body image. Additionally, boys' and girls' feelings about themselves were primarily influenced by gender-stereotypes. The authors claimed the importance of their study was the fact that these adolescents spoke and were heard. Research topics dealing with boys' and girls' age and gender patterns indicated that there are significant differences especially during adolescence. Most research measured these differences quantitatively, therefore with predetermined answers. Allowing adolescents to

participate in determining these differences created novel information significant for adults working with them. Adolescent research frequently dismisses the contribution of adolescents in defining the answers. Similar to the authors, I believe an important contribution in this study was the information adolescents provided when they spoke. More qualitative information regarding what types of problems adolescents' face and how that impacts their lives is needed to further enhance our understanding of adolescence.

### **Help Seeking**

As adolescents' problems increase and self-esteem plummets, who do adolescents turn to for help? I will now look at the literature that addresses this question. As shown, multicultural adolescents turn to similar people for assistance during this period.

Research has shown that male and female problems cross culturally are similar. Two multi-authored projects (Gibson et al, 1992a; Gibson et al, 1992b) compared and contrasted reported problems, coping strategies and help-seeking of male and female adolescents. A questionnaire was used involving open-ended questions asking the diverse multicultural participants to describe three main problems that cause them stress, the strategies they use to cope with these problems and the types of help they select. Although there were differences in the percentages, the main three problems reported were family issues, identity and school. Individual problem-solving was the most frequently cited coping strategy. The helpers adolescents sought were most often friends and mothers. The significance of these findings was the identification of help sources and problems. This study also portrays an unrevealed question: Why do adolescents seek

these people? What qualities does a friend or adult have? More research is needed from a variety of sources to reveal patterns and themes surrounding this question.

In a quantitative, descriptive analysis, Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996) examined demographic and psychological associations for seeking help and coping with emotional problems during early and middle adolescence with 229 upper-middle class adolescents. They found that more female and middle aged adolescents sought help from their mothers, friends and professionals than males and early adolescents. Middle aged adolescent males were more likely to seek help from their fathers than their younger counterparts. Differential patterns were revealed when using a stepwise discriminant function analyses determining the extent of age, gender, self-worth, self-consciousness, and locus of control in predicting who seeks help. Adolescents who seek help from one source are likely to try other sources. An important contribution of this study is the important role of mothers in providing help. In accordance with the authors, I believe more information is needed regarding the path of seeking help.

In a study by Boldero and Fallon (1995), 1013 adolescents were questioned about types of problems they experience and whether or not they ask for help. Using a self-administered questionnaire, adolescents selected a "personal problem" that had caused them considerable distress during the past six months. The authors predetermined the categorical answers, but if adolescents did not see their problems, they could identify others. Adolescents also rated the perceived seriousness of the problem. Those adolescents who asked for help indicated whom by either checking predetermined categories of people or listing missing categories. Similar to previous articles, the most prominent problems outlined were related to family, interpersonal relationships,

education and health problems. People who were sought out to help the most were parent and friends followed by teachers and professional. Types of problems connected with gender and age. Females reported more problems with family and interpersonal relationships whereas males indicated problems regarding education. Younger adolescents faced more family problems and older adolescents faced various interpersonal problems. Problem type and gender but not school year influenced help seeking behaviors. The findings showed that females asked for help more than males. Interpersonal problems were predictive of asking for help whereas family problems were not predictive of asking for help. Adolescents' choice of help sources was influenced by all four factors. The most significant finding was the complex picture this study indicated regarding the process of help seeking for adolescents. It portrayed the social and cognitive difficulties adolescents' face when seeking help from others.

### **Summary**

In summary, all four developmental theories discussed are in agreement that adolescence is a journey. Additionally, identity development involves both individual dynamics and social organizations. Although different stages were outlined in various theories, each theory acknowledged individuals' struggle to develop their identity and sense of self. The diverse experiences during adolescence make the identities unique.

The reality of the current context in which adolescents live is overwhelming. Females face more eating disorders, depression, sexual harassment and lack of participation in classrooms whereas males face problems living under the constraints of an unwritten "Boys' Code." Both females and males face problems connected to

violence, gangs, lack of sex information, vulnerability and isolation. Also, they both crave relational experiences.

While most of the literature on self-esteem portrays a steady decline during adolescence, different reasons for this decrease have been suggested. The California Task Force outlines co-relations such as crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure. Lower academics and unstable friendships have been repercussions of low self-esteem proposed by many researchers. Internal control allowed adolescence to experience higher self-esteem because they did not depend upon external variables. Other literature presented by Gunderson (1999) and Reasoner (1982) outlined strategies for enhancing self-esteem.

Current research indicates a link between self-esteem and adolescent problems. Gender differences were uncovered. Consistently, girls have shown a more pronounced decrease in self-esteem. Also, generally speaking, girls are more concerned about their problems than boys. Qualitative research by Lynch (1998) portrayed the significant contribution adolescents' voices can make in adding to our understanding of adolescents' experiences.

Further research needs to explore why adolescents chose specific adults to help them through adolescence. Discovering information about relational experiences with adults along with descriptions of these adults has added to our understanding of what qualities are important. More research is required to explain the discrepancy in self-esteem between males and females. There is enough evidence to show a difference and more research should question why this occurs. Females' lower self-esteem and greater concern for problems might be the result of mixed messages, lack of voice or varying

amounts of reinforcement. Allowing adolescents to share positive and negative experiences has provided valuable information regarding self-esteem, problems and important qualities in adults.

Given this literature review, it is important that the research question is consistent with the literature gap. Qualitative research is a relevant addition to the literature on adolescent development. Simultaneously, exploring significant adult relationships enhances our understanding about the qualities that are desired by adolescents. The research question addresses the importance of a significant adult through challenging situations during adolescence. Further information regarding the qualities of this adult and how adults aid adolescents are essential components to understanding this vital relationship.

## CHAPTER 3

### Method

As the Literature Review has shown, adolescence is a challenging transition where problems increase and self esteem decreases. Adolescents try to manage their difficulties, either alone or with assistance from others. Some researchers believe adolescents only need one positive relationship to enhance their adolescence experience (Yanish & Battle,1985). Adolescents need an opportunity to share stories about relational experiences with adults that were positive. Understanding what characteristics adolescents desire in a positive relationship is valuable information for adults working with adolescents. Allowing adolescents to have a voice and express these qualities that they desire in adults will positively impact their growth and esteem. The qualitative method chosen addresses these fundamental concerns. Adolescents need a method that allows them to have a voice and be heard.

### Assumptions of this Qualitative Design

Five underlying assumptions of this relational qualitative design will be discussed. Jane Flax (1994) succinctly stated, "Post-modern discourses are all 'deconstructive' in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for Western culture" (Olesen, 1994, p. 161). Reality of situations has multiple perspectives. Each belief concerning knowledge, power, the self and language are interpreted by various consciousnesses within participants and the researcher creating multiple perspectives. With this notion of numerous perspectives, I do not want to discover one single truth. In fact, I believe there



is no “real” truth because it is being created all the time. Instead, I am seeking to listen and understand divergent perspectives hoping to attain verisimilitude - an approximation or closeness to the truth but not the essence of truth. Second, the process of research, quest for knowledge, is more important than the outcome or product. Within the research process, the adolescent and myself will be changing and through intensive listening and discussing they will identify as many changes as possible. Third, I am curious to find meanings, hidden or explicit, about experiences. Emphasis has been placed on how people make sense of their own lives, experiences, power, culture and relationships. Fourth, the primary instrument for analysis of the data is myself, the researcher. Interviewing the adolescence, collecting and analyzing the data was completed by myself. In this sense, I am the instrument used to interpret the adolescents’ stories. Finally, I interact with those being researched. The research is descriptive and interpretive as I am interested in the process, meaning and understanding (Merriam, 1988) of adolescents’ relational experiences with adults.

### **Self-In-Relation Theory**

Children’s healthy resistance to disconnection – the intense human desire for relationship which now is generally taken as foundational of psychic life – thus tends to lead children into a political struggle. Boys in early childhood resist leaving the comforts and pleasures, as well as the discomforts and pains, of their relational life: They want to stay with the people who have been with them. And girls at adolescence resist leaving the rich relational tapestry of their childhood. This resistance calls into question the prevailing order of social relationships and calls forth counter-pressures to enforce that order in the name, currently, of

psychological health, as well as for the sake of civilization ( Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991).

Several feminist researchers at the Stone Center (Jean Baker Miller, Carol Gilligan and Judith Jordan to name a few)) developed the self-in-relation theory. This developmental model emphasizes the importance of relational experiences. In fact, the definition of “self” evolves by relational experiences and their context. Self-in-relation growth is constant and continuous. Here, there is a shift from theories regarding the “separate” self. This theory states there is no need to separate oneself from relationships while developing the self. The self is formed in its relation to others.

This model began as a response to scientific and traditional models of development where there is movement towards separation. Scientific models emphasize mastery over nature, objectification and distance. Traditional models of development portray the movement from dependence to independence. Our western culture’s socialization process stresses the desire for independence. Classical Freudian Theory views relationship as secondary to primary drives such as sex and survival that are individualistic. The Object Relational Theory primarily focusses on aggression and there is movement from infantile dependence to mature dependence or mutuality.

Although the self-in-relation theory takes something from each model, mutuality is emphasized. In the past, women have been seen as deficient or second class or unhealthy adults. The first step was to listen to the voices of women. Most of scientific research involved male participants. Models that didn’t fit with women were pathologized for being too emotional, or in need relationships. When female participants were studied, it was noticed that when in distress, unlike the male flight notion, women

moved towards others and connection. Self-in-relation theory elaborates on this “connected” relationship in the form of a movement from dependence to interdependence. Interdependence is the result of growth that addresses vitality, empowerment, develops clarity, greater sense of worth and feeling a greater sense of connection.

Self-in-relation theory recognizes different male and female paths of development. As infants, males and females are emotionally connected to their mother. During early development, females are encouraged to explore their feeling states. In this sense, they continue to experience an emotional connection with the mother. Conversely, males at a very early age learn to separate both physically and emotionally from their mother. They lose a sense of emotional connection and are not bound to their mother’s feelings and states. Sharing the emotional connection, which occurs with females, provides a sense of mutual understanding and bonding with their mothers. However, male’s early separation fosters a sense of disconnection and disidentification. This author purports that even though females develop this mutual relational sensitivity and caring, males also desire relationships and connection.

Relationships and connections have two characteristics: relationship-differentiation and relationship-authenticity. Relationship-differentiation does not mean growth through separation or dissociation rather, growth occurs when there is increased levels of complexity, choice fluidity and articulation within relationships. Here, the individual does not break ties but instead, growth occurs within relationships. The “oscillating self-structure” is how the self grows and develops. Fluctuations and alterations in the interaction with others cause growth. Maintaining connection, fostering

adaptation to and change with growth occurs with each other. Relationship-authenticity “describes the ongoing challenge to feel real, connected, vital, clear and purposeful in relationship” (Surrey, 1991, p.60). Conflict, the expression of a full range of affect, provides seeds for growth.

Relationships are defined as the “experience of emotional and cognitive inter-subjectivity: the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to continuous existence of the other or others and expectations of mutuality in this regard” (Jordan et al, 1991, 61). “Good” connections and relations are highly valued in self-in-relation theory. Emotional sharing, understanding and regard are directly related to how one feels about one’s self. Separation or inaccurate mutual empathy can lower self-esteem. For both males and females, “good” connections that foster relationship-differentiation and relationship-authenticity enhance individual’s self-esteem.

### **The Relational Method**

Traditionally, researchers asked a list of questions, participants briefly responded and researchers then interpreted meanings. There was a sense of role and authority as the researcher was “in charge.” Subjectivity was not addressed. The relational method seeks to minimize the power relationship and work with participants to have their voice heard. Instead of the traditional method, the author wants “collaboration and a relational method that, rather than upholding the usual line of division provides a way to come into relationship with another person” (Gilligan, 1991, p.15).

The relational method stresses the importance of working with and developing relationships. During adolescence, there is a “relational impasse” (Gilligan, Rogers & Tolman, 1991, p.23). This is a period where individuals are giving up previous

relationships for the sake of new relationships with others and the surrounding world. Adolescents fear being judged by others and protect themselves. Fear of judgment from authority figures is acknowledged by myself along with its impact to potentially distort interpretations. Therefore, built into the relational method is a space that encourages speaking one's voice. This encouragement begins when building a comfortable environment in the screening interview and continues throughout the process to the end where I ask for adolescents' verification.

The process of research includes adolescents, our contexts and myself. Multiple perspectives and interpretations of the psychological experience are unavoidable. Recognizing this potential barrier, the relational method seeks to "capture the layered nature of psychological experience and also the relational logic of psychological processes" (Gilligan, 1992, p.11). I am trying to understand the complex associations people make with conflicts in relationships, the different relational experiences and their multiple perspectives.

Relationships pronounce the importance of voice and reflexivity. Voice is used to communicate thoughts, feelings and experiences. Variation in tone, sounds, vibrations and language are essential components of the communication process. There is voice in relationships and experiences. The speakers' point of view, the type of descriptions, relationships and perspectives are important components of the relational story. Voice is inherently relational, it requires one to be heard or responded to.

Listening to the voice of the adolescent is as important as understanding and acknowledging my voice. I need to know what I brings to the interview, my subjectivity and biases. In this sense reflexivity is defined as "a position of a certain kind of praxis

where there is a continuous checking on the accomplishment of understanding” (Hertz, 1997, p.151). Reflexivity is a process of monitoring one’s subjectivity throughout the process does not necessarily eliminate distortions. As I connect to participants’ fundamental principles, I uncover these premises via reflexivity. When there is conflict with notions, barriers may be noticed and addressed. There is an emphasis on listening more and talking less in order to discover connections and disconnections. Ideally, stressing voice and reflexivity, I aim to equalize the participant-researcher relationship by acknowledging and minimizing the power differentials in the research relationship.

As adolescents have experienced little to no voice in research, it is important to create a forum for them to speak. A relationship is built upon a shared responsibility for words, concepts and ideas. A commitment to building an open relationship with the participants in this method is an essential asset to this study and requires focussing on listening, sharing and being genuinely interested. An open loosely structured research methodology is more suitable for adolescents who need flexibility and freedom. I learned more about the adolescents, their world and concepts by creating this environment.

The relational method used is inductive and its’ design is constantly emerging. The primary purpose of the relational method is to “attend to relational dimensions of our listening, speaking, taking in, interpreting, and writing about the words and the silences, the stories and narratives of other people” (Gilligan, 1991, p.22). There is emphasis placed on listening intensely for the voice of the participant along with myself. Reflexively, the adolescent and myself work collaboratively to define themes and patterns. Verifying these patterns with the adolescents creates accurate and reliable data.

### **Statement of Problem Area**

“What experiences and descriptions do adolescents share regarding significant adults during the transition into adolescence?” At the heart of this question are relational experiences; descriptions of adult characteristics. This is an important question to ask adolescents because as adults we may recognize terms such as “trust” and “open” but adolescents may have their own definitions. It is essential to recognize language differences between adults and adolescents. What we as adults believe to be important attributes to a relationship might be completely undesirable for adolescents. Additionally, sharing positive experiences about adults will add to our understanding of important qualities in building relationships with adolescence.

Asking adolescents to share their experiences with a significant adult during adolescence will provide an opportunity for them to have a voice. Using their own language, they will be able to describe experiences of challenges they faced and how they managed with or without the assistance of adults. These unfiltered voices will provide valuable insight for adults working with adolescents. The purpose of this study is to understand the adolescents’ experience with positive adult relationships using Gilligan’s “Listening and Reading Guide.” The results will provide descriptions and attributes of these adults.

### **The Process**

Together the participant and the researcher are on a journey. They are observing the surroundings and experiencing their adventures. As a traveller, I am interested in finding out as much as she can about adolescents’ relationships with significant adults. Before travelling, they need an opportunity to get to know each other and break the ice.

Simultaneously, I feel it is important to be aware of personal barriers that might block their travels along the way. While travelling with someone else, I need to be flexible and conscious of opportunities where I can follow interests of the fellow traveller, in this case, the adolescent.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

I, the researcher, am of European-Canadian heritage presently completing my master's degree at UBC. My interest in adolescence stems from my personal difficulties during high school and lack of adult support. More recently, I have coached and taught various adolescents and am intrigued by the diversity of adolescent problems, the lack of self-esteem and lack of significant relationships adolescents have with adults. Today, for many adolescents, adult role models and adult-adolescent relationships are few and far between. Yet, adolescents crave this opportunity to share their experiences with others and look for positive role models. I believe the most significant role of the researcher is to provide an opportunity for adolescents to speak and be listened to.

While in the presence of the adolescent, my role was to establish a collaborative, open relationship through caring and empathy. I shared with adolescents the fact that together, we were co-participating in a journey. On the same note, I was be conscious of potential unwanted power relationships due to age and role differences.

During the data analysis, I listened for the voices of the adolescents, the researcher's voice and the adolescents' relational experiences with adults during a difficult transition. As I believe there is no real truth, I am hoping to attain verisimilitude and gain a deeper understanding of adolescent experiences with adults. I interpreted the data and was aware that the stories written were my perceptions of the adolescents'



stories. I acknowledged the fact that I decided what words and language are significant in creating patterns and themes. However, I used the adolescents' own words in my findings. My role in selecting the sample, creating a comfortable, relational setting, interviewing, analyzing the data and co-participating were all a part of a larger purpose to discover a deeper knowledge and understanding of adolescents' experiences.

### **The Participants**

The participants in this study are six late adolescents or young adults (ages 17 and 22). Two methods were used for finding adolescents. First, an advertisement for was posted in three Vancouver community centers and in two university residences. Second, adolescents were found via word of mouth. The adolescents were equally represented in gender with three boys and three girls. The adolescents had experienced a positive adult relationship during the transition into adolescence (ages 12 and 13). It was necessary that they could verbally communicate about this adult. Late adolescents aged 17 through 22 were chosen because according to Piaget, cognitively, by age 17 and 19 adolescents are in the formal operational phase where they will be perceptive and introspective. As they were recollecting situations that occurred at age 12 and 13, their retrospective insight provided more information and allowed them to better articulate their experiences.

### **Screening and Informed Consent**

Advertisements were distributed to community centers and university residences. Interested adolescents who called the researcher were screened either in a brief, person to person meeting or through a phone call conversation. During this meeting or phone call, I shared the purpose of the research study and explained its significance. The research process was explained along with the role of the adolescents' expectations. I discussed

the reasons for the initial meeting, interview and follow up meeting. Each adolescent was told that they would be discussing their thoughts and feelings about their personal experience with a positive adult during the initial transition into adolescence. They were told there are no right or wrong answers and that their personal experience was valuable. I mentioned that the interviews will be audio-taped for data analysis. I made sure that each adolescent met the criteria required for the research. This criteria included age 17-22, the presence of a significant adult during a difficult situation and ability to verbally communicate. If the adolescents were interested and met the criteria, they were given one informed consent form to be signed by them and if necessary their parents. A date was set for the initial research meeting.

### **The Interview**

Using Rubin and Rubin's metaphor (1995), interviewing is like a vacation, there is an overall idea about what one wants to do and places one wants to go. Some people have an itinerary, but they are not locked to it. There is a flexibility to explore along the way. One may bring guidebooks and maps but may not be sure how or where it will be useful. Plans can change when new interests arise. Unstructured interviewing is similar to this definition of a vacation. There is an overall notion that the researcher would like to explore adolescents' positive experiences with adults. However, this is not carved in stone. Questions are open-ended and the interview followed the interests of the adolescents.

Like a vacation, interviewing is an adventure. Each step within the interview opens a new window of opportunity to reveal new experiences and information. The primary purpose of the interview was to listen intensely to learn about adolescents'

thoughts, feelings and experiences. Throughout the interview, adolescents were encouraged to use their own language, words and definitions. By listening, I was able to probe and find the interests of the adolescents. I facilitated detailed descriptions of adolescents' experiences in their cultural context. Significant adults and surrounding events were explored and stories were shared. Each time the process of asking questions was repeated, I came closer to verisimilitude.

### **Transcription**

Audio-tape recordings of interviews were used to transcribe the dialogue between the researcher and participant. I listened to the interview and typed it out verbatim. Participants' names were coded and after the name, I recorded what was said. The complete non-interpreted dialogue was recorded. Communication used both oral and body language. In this sense, what was being said and how it was being said were important elements of the communication. Additionally, during and after the interview, I noted body language and variations in voice that stood out. During the write up, I used descriptions to capture the adolescent's body language and voice intonations. "The process of transcription is both interpretive and constructive" (Lapadat, 1999, p.72). As Lapadat noted, while observing the body language and voice intonations, I began the process of interpreting the data. Simultaneously, this interpretation commenced my understanding of the adolescent's experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the tapes using Gilligan's Listener's Guide (1992) and Arvay's guide for narrative analysis (1998) which emphasized listening to the voices of the participants, adolescents. "Voice, because it is embodied, connects rather than separates psyche and

body; because voice is in language and it joins psyche and culture” (Gilligan, 1992, p. 20). Along with being voice-center, this method is relational.

Voice is inherently relational-one does not require a mirror to hear oneself-yet the sounds of one’s voice change in resonance depending on the relational acoustics: whether one is heard or not heard, how one is responded to (by oneself and by other people) (Gilligan, 1992, p.20).

This Listening (1992) and Reading (1998) Guide included an interview and four listenings for data analysis. The interview began by explaining the process of the interview. There were four specific questions asked to each adolescent and after responding about one adult, they were given the choice to speak about another adult experience. During the interview, the questions were open, providing flexibility to move where the adolescents wanted to go. Probing questions were aimed at revealing deeper meanings, the adolescent’s truth. Also, the process recognized that adolescents enjoy telling stories about their lives. The questions needed to make the adolescents feel as if they had a sense of having a voice. Each interview ended the same by asking if he/she wanted to include an important question or if he/she had any information to add. Throughout the interviewing and data analysis process, I was developing a deeper understanding of the adolescent’s experience.

After the transcription, I began the process of data analysis. There were four listening and readings during the analysis (Arvay, 1998): the narrative, the self, the qualities of adults, gender and power context. While listening, I used different colored pens corresponding to the listening number and underlined words, phrases, metaphors, recurring words and images, contradictions or inconsistency in style, changes in voice.

Color-coded themes from each of the listening procedures were created while analyzing the data.

While listening to the audio-tape and reading the transcription, I first used a black pen to underline, note questions, make notes on the side and change typos. The first listening attended to the plot, story or narrative told by the adolescents' experience(s) with significant adults. I was visualizing the drama of the story and outlining important events, people and places. Additionally, I was examining the transcript to change the text in terms of typos and making sure confidentiality was not breached. Statements within the text that required further explanation were noted. After listening and reading for the content of the story, I summarized my thoughts regarding the story line. During this listening, I reflected on her self and how I was interpreting the information. There was an awareness of a potential power difference and its repercussions on the adolescent. I wrote down in a journal my own thoughts, feelings about what was happening, how or why I could identify or not identify with the adolescents. This deepened my understanding of how I might be affecting the interpretation.

In the second listening and reading, I attended to the "self" or "I" relationship. I used a blue pen to make side notes, underline phrases or sentences regarding this "self" of the adolescent. At this point, I was focussing on the voice of the adolescent, attempting to understand the adolescent's thoughts, feelings and culture. The questions asked to each participant were: "Who is the person telling this story? How is he/she situated in this story? What is he/she feeling? What are his/her struggles? What does he/she mean? How does he/she present her/himself? What parts of the self does he/she choose to portray and what are the hidden parts? (Arvay, 1998) After listening and reading for the

“self”, I summarized her interpretation of the narrator. Listening for the voice of the adolescent was a crucial component to this method of data analysis. As Gilligan (1992) wrote, “It brings us into relationship with that person, in part by ensuring that the sound of her voice enters our psyche and in part by discovering how she speaks of herself before we speak of her” (p.28). By opening the connection with myself and adolescent, the relationship is constantly being reframed and restructured.

During the third listening and reading, I attended to the qualities of adults and their relationship with the adults. The adolescents were asked these questions: “What meaning does the narrator make of this struggle? How does he/she make sense out of his/her experience? What is said-not implied? What are the contradictions between his/her words and actions or interpretations? What are the paradoxes? What metaphors does he/she use? How do they help with the meaning beneath the words?” (Arvay, 1998) I listened carefully and spent time on this reading to uncover deeper meanings. Qualities of the adult were noted along with metaphorical stories or phrases. More time was spent understanding the meanings behind phrases or stories. After using a red pen to underline important phrases or words and make notes on the transcript, I summarized the struggles and what they meant to the narrator. I listened for qualities and attributes of these significant adults.

I was listening for the gender and power context during the fourth listening. I attended to any political resistance or time of struggling. Questions asked were: “In what ways does the narrator struggle with issues regarding gender and power? Where is he/she silenced? When does he/she use her voice? Is he/she conscious of the power or political imbalances in her life and of the influences of culture? How do I, the researcher

understand his/her socialization process? How is her “reality” changed?” (Arvay, 1998)

A green pen was used to underline, make notes regarding gender and power issues that arose. Attention was paid to power issues or challenges along with inequalities. During this listening I focussed on the cultural tale of the story. I was looking for any connections and disconnections, being valued or devalued, having a voice or being silenced in relationship. I listened for relationships that either allow adolescents to speak freely or constrained them. If there was a silenced voice or strong voice, I questioned why in the cultural context of the story.

After I had listened and read four times, I established repetitive or significant themes. The analysis was reorganized into these themes with supporting words, phrases, metaphors and images. I also looked at my journal notes and added these where they were applicable. At this point, I called a professor and asked for assistance regarding how to write the stories. The professor explained that due to the transcription and four listenings and readings, I should be ready to write the story in the first person. When I had completed the story using as many of the adolescent’s words as possible, the adolescents should read it and make any necessary changes to validate the story. Following the conversation with the professor, I felt prepared to write her interpretation of the adolescent’s story.

After I had listened five times to the adolescent’s story (including the transcription) and written notes, she began to write the story of the narrator. I wrote the stories using as many of the adolescent words from the transcript as she could. When I had finished writing the story, I emailed or mailed the story to the adolescent. Included in the email or mail was a note that asked the adolescent to read the story and change any

ideas, thoughts or parts of the story that did not make sense to him/her or did not capture his/her perception of the relationship and/or situations. The adolescents read their own stories, edited and changed the stories so that the story revealed their perceptions and interpretations. For a few of the adolescents, I called to clarify some of the changes that were made and gathered their interpretations of the story (See Appendix D-I). Therefore, the data analysis and story writing was an interactive process involving both the researcher and the participants.

### **Criteria used to Measure the Worth of Study**

I emailed or mailed each adolescent her interpretive story about his/her experience with the adult. If the story did not resonate, we worked on the story to make it more accurate. This process was not only to allow the adolescents' interaction with the story but also an opportunity for them to validate the information.

Patterns and themes common in the adolescents' stories were determined and supporting quotes from the stories were placed into these themes. I sent the quotes and themes to the adolescents to verify the connection of quotes and themes. If their quote did not fit into a theme, the adolescent was asked to come up with a theme that best described the quote. Additionally, an adolescent outside the participants was given the quotes and asked to arrange them according to the themes. This was to further test and prove the themes to validate the results.

Altheide and Johnson (1994) have written about assessing interpretive validity in qualitative research. They state that:

All knowledge and claims to knowledge are reflexive of the process, assumptions, locations, history, and context of knowing and the knower. From



this point of view validity depends on the 'interpretive communities', or the audiences – who may be other than researchers and academics – and the goals of the research” (p.488).

My purpose was not to provide the truth, rather to describe the adolescents' experiences of their perceived reality.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent from both adolescents and their parents were obtained and I did not continue the process until I had received both signatures. The adolescent's confidentiality and its limits were addressed during the screening interview.

### **Possible Limitations**

There is an assumption that adolescents can provide accurate information regarding their experience however, this assumption in previous research has been challenged. When seeking the thoughts and feelings about previous experience in the transition to adolescence, I assumed that the adolescents have the ability to perceive and be retrospective about their experiences. Some adolescents might not be at Piaget's "formal operational stage" (Woolfolk, 1996) and the information gathered might be limited. Simultaneously, at this age, there is an assumption that the adolescents will be able to be introspective with regards to earlier experiences however, there might be some memory loss or lack of introspective ability causing disparity while recollecting.

I have tried to honor gender equality but there might be a discrepancy dependent on which adolescents are interested in this topic. Also, the adolescents' age criteria is in-between 17-22 years. Therefore, the adolescents involved in the research will be late adolescents. Younger adolescence were not studied. The chosen adolescents were from

an urban community and not rural. There is a potential for scant diversity among the adolescents. There were only two cultures represented, Caucasian and African-Canadian. All of the adolescents were either in university or planning to attend university the following year. Therefore, there is a socio-economic limitation with the adolescents in this research. I am only generalizing for the specific group being studied.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

What were the significant qualities in adults that adolescents desire? What were the difficult situations in which adults helped? What words or actions from the adults made a difference to these adolescents? Who were these significant adults? In this chapter the unmuted voices of six adolescents, three boys and three girls will be presented. They have co-written their story with the researcher (Appendix D-I) that describes themselves during this transition, explains qualities they look for in adults and provides examples of challenging situations where adults assisted them. In this chapter you will read about various themes which emerged from these stories regarding adult qualities. Major themes are outlined followed by related ‘mini themes’ (See Table 1). Each theme will have an introduction briefly outlining the results, adolescent examples and a summary of the meaning. Most of the adolescent examples are real however, qualities that the adult didn’t have were expressed through unreal characters like an ideal big sister. Following, the meaning for these adolescents to have a significant adult in their lives during this time will be addressed.

### **THEMES**

When analyzing the question “What are the qualities in adults you look for during the transition into grades seven, eight and nine?”, eight main qualities emerged from the participants’ responses. The main qualities were: Open Communication, Feeling Special and Important, Sense of Belonging, Involvement in Important Adolescent Activities, Sense of Connection, Role Model, Challenges, and Family Foundation. There were nine

**TABLE 1: LIST OF THEMES**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Number of Adolescents</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><u>Open Communication</u></b>	6	3M/3F	100%
Listen To Us	2	1M/1F	33%
Trust	2	1M/1F	33%
Table Talk	2	2F	33%
<hr/>			
<b><u>Messages About Feeling Special</u></b>	5	2M/3F	83%
Building Confidence	3	1M/2F	50%
<hr/>			
<b><u>Sense of Belonging</u></b>	5	2M/3F	83%
Religion and Faith	2	2F	33%
<hr/>			
<b><u>Involvement in Important Activities</u></b>	5	2M/3F	83%
<hr/>			
<b><u>Connection</u></b>	5	2M/3F	83%
Sense of Humor	2	2M	33%
Genuine Interest	1	1M	16%
<hr/>			
<b><u>Role Model</u></b>	4	3M/2F	66%
Calm During A Storm	3	2M/1F	50%
Unconditional Love, Care and Acceptance	4	1M/3F	60%
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<b><u>Providing Successful Challenges</u></b>	3	1M/2F	50%
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<b><u>Family Foundation</u></b>	3	1M/2F	50%
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M=MALE

F=FEMALE

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other qualities that related to these main qualities: Listening, Trust, Dinners, Confidence, Religion, Sense of Humor, Genuine Interest, Challenges, and Calm. The main qualities are in an order relating to the amount of support (in numbers) from adolescents starting with the most (all six adolescents) and moving to the least (one adolescent).

At this point it is important to acknowledge the significant adults. Grace discussed three important adults in her life, a brother, grandmother and parents. For Megan, her dance teacher and mother were significant adults in her life during this transition. Tim's father and mother were significant adults in his life during this period. One of Jackson's cousins who lived with the family during this transition became a significant adult. A hockey coach, two teachers and his parents were significant adult in Blair's life who assisted him during this period. Without her parents, Julie does not know who she would have become. Whether is was a parents, teacher, coach or relative, each adult had specific qualities that assisted these adolescents during the tumultuous transition. Now, these qualities will be discussed in more detail.

### **Theme One: Open Communication**

Open communication with an adult was the most prominent theme. All six adolescents spoke about this quality and its importance in their relationship with adults.

Some of the adolescents spoke about a warm, comfortable atmosphere created by the adult which allowed adolescents to share their concerns. Others spoke about adults creating open communication by initiating conversations regarding personal or private issues such as menstruation periods and masturbation. A couple of adolescents shared their open communication experiences with coaches where the adolescents were a part of the feedback process. One adolescent revealed a story of how open communication began with an adult. Another adolescent showed a difference between open and closed communication with two different adults. Within each of the relationships with adults, the adolescent portrayed the importance of open communication. Following are two quotations that illustrate open communication.

#### Example 1

Tim's dad has always been open. In fact, it is this openness that has allowed Tim to feel like he could go to his dad at anytime and talk about anything. *"He's really open. He's just cool with things. He knows what to talk about and has a tendency to talk about things so that's cool, it lets you know he cares and that he's cool about stuff. In grade eight there were sex chats and he was cool and understanding. I remember with my brother and I he used to sit down with us every once in awhile and he would try to see what was up and talk to us about little things. So that was cool, he just wanted to know things. Also, he would share his views on different things and how they were alternative to what you were hearing from other people. I found his views interesting."* Not only was Tim's dad open where Tim was interested in hearing his dad's opinion, but also, his dad was open and initiated conversations regarding sexuality. *"I remember my dad talked to us about masturbation once. It was really funny. It was just cool knowing he*

*had actually thought about it. Like you know he had thought about it and it was a relief to know that. He's not the smoothest talker (laugh). We were just playing cards or something at the cottage and he put his book down and started talking. We were laughing at him so hard. We couldn't believe he was talking about that. It was unbelievably funny but he got the point across. It was cool knowing he's out there and watching out for us."* Tim was relieved to know that his dad was willing to talk to him about masturbation and this opened the door for future conversations about issues around sexuality.

Also, when talking about situations, Tim felt it was helpful to receive feedback from both his mom and dad. *"Another thing that I think is important is to have an equal balance of a mom and dad. Especially with mine, having a masculine and feminine perspective helps with girlfriends and everything. It's definitely good to have a sense about what's going on for both sides of the fence."* Being able to have two different gender perspectives made Tim respect the differences and assisted him to understand girlfriends.

### Example 2

Another open communicator was Owen, Jackson's cousin. He always talked to Jackson about different aspects of his life including sensitive issues. *"Usually friends or girlfriends would come over, a girlfriend and he would try to get to know them because he lived in the house and wanted to know what was going on. Even the little things you would bring up, he would be open and just sit there and listen."* Jackson felt he could ask Owen any questions. *"I could ask him any question even if he had no knowledge. Whenever I asked a question, he would make me find the answer. Making me find*

*answers allowed me to realize my strengths.” Jackson experienced less open communication with his dad especially concerning studying. “He wasn’t so good sometimes like when I would ask for help on my homework. He would be more than willing to help but I would get the feeling that my work was no good. He would say, ‘Why don’t you do that?’ which was brutal because then my sister and I were reluctant to show him homework. However, we figured we wanted good marks so we sucked it up and asked him for help.” There was a difference for Jackson between his father and Owen’s relationship. Due to his father’s harsh reaction, Jackson was more reluctant to speak openly with him. However, with Owen’s openness, Jackson felt comfortable asking him any questions.*

### Example 3

*Both of Julie’s parents were very open. “My parent’s were really open so I could say to my mom I’m really sad or I’m feeling this and that and she would say, ‘What do you think?’” However, it took Julie some time to become this open with her parents. “It took awhile for me to talk to my parents about everything. I think it began one time when I was out at my friend’s house and she was staying home, she said, “I love you.” I was like oh. It was always, “Good night sweetheart...sweet dreams.” When this happened, it changed our process of saying goodbye. And then my whole family just started doing that and now it’s like I say I love you mom ten times a day. Then in grade ten, I was always kind of older but my sisters had already gone through their stage of drinking and I got under the influence of alcohol at a grade ten party. I was sick in my bedroom all by myself. The next day I told my mom there was a stain on the carpet because...and she told me I should have come and got her because she would have helped me. I said I*



*thought she would have been mad and she told me she would have been disappointed but she would help me if I was sick. I was like "oh" and we just started speaking about it. Now when my brother goes to a party she's like, "Eat some pasta here...I don't want you passing out drinking on an empty stomach. It took awhile and I think we have to be mature enough and they have to be willing to accept that we will be doing those kinds of things. I'm definitely going to do that with my kids because then there is less guessing."*

For Julie, sharing the reason for a stain on the carpet allowed her to test out her mother's reaction. Due to the fact that her mother was honest and non-judgmental, Julie felt that she could share future situations with her mom.

#### Example 4

The word 'open' for Grace meant that she was able to talk to her brother about anything. *"Just having someone open like him to talk to helped. Sometimes when you talk about things, it relieves a lot of stuff and the upset feelings you have. The venting about my friends and stuff made me more stable when I went into the situation. My initial concerns went away because I had the responses, 'Look at the kind of person you are...look at the experiences you have had and how you can embark on this new task in your life successfully.' I felt more prepared going into it so I was less scared and I was less emotional."* Having someone in her life to talk to allowed Grace to vent her feelings, which made her become more stable, prepared, and less scared with the situation.

Whether the open communication was with a father, mother, brother, relative, coach or dance teacher, these adolescents believe that being able to converse openly is an extremely significant part of a relationship with an adult. The purpose of communication might have been to provide feedback, to vent, to initiate discussions, to recognize

strengths or to become close. Whatever the purpose, it is through this open communication with an adult that the adolescent is able to have a voice and be heard. At the same time, they begin to understand relationships better and gain a sense of self.

### **Listen To Us**

Having people who listened was an element of open communication that two adolescents acknowledged. One adolescent spoke about the significance of listening and suggested that there are ways to tell whether or not someone is listening. The other adolescent revealed that listening helped him to communicate.

Grace's brother was a good listener. *"I think it is important to feel like somebody is listening to you. Having someone listen to you makes you feel that you are someone who is important. I think people show they are listening by picking up on the subject matter again in another conversation. Showing an interest that reaches beyond one conversation. How they listen is important too. Some people flip the conversation around so that it no longer shows an interest in you but you have to care for the other person. The response, immediate and after, can make you feel heard and in this way special."* Listening does not just happen in the present conversation but it happens when people address the topic in future conversations.

For Tim, his mom listened well which made her an easy person in whom to confide.

### **Trust**

Trust was a fundamental aspect of communication for a few adolescents. Tim's mom talked to Tim about the crazy teenage years which made him feel like she understood him. This opened the door for Tim to feel like he could trust his mom.

Similarly, Julie discussed the complete trust she felt with her mom. One of the most important qualities in Megan's 'ideal sister' was the fact that she could completely trust her. In Megan's house she was unable to trust anyone because whatever she said could come back to haunt her later on. Megan's example has been chosen to exemplify the importance of trust.

#### Example 1

In an ideal world, Megan would have experienced an older sister. One of the most important aspects of this "big sister" was the trust in the relationship. *"When I was having difficulties, I would be able to go to her to talk about specific details and she would offer support. Trust would be a large part of the relationship. I would be confident in the fact that I could confide everything to her...she wouldn't tell anyone else."* This was a dream for Megan because *"in my family you had to be careful with what you said because you never really knew when it may come right back in your face. I struggled with this much of adolescence. There was a large part of me that wanted to tell the truth but sometimes when I told the truth my parents freaked out. My parents made me feel like I couldn't be trusted when I went over to friends' houses because they would just say no I couldn't go to someone's house without any explanation."* It would have been ideal for Megan to experience complete trust with a family member. She did not like the fact that she was unable to speak her truth in her own house for fear of her parents' reaction. Therefore, she dreamed about this "big sister" and the trust that she would feel in the relationship.

Each of the three adolescents who spoke about trust included dialogue regarding communication. When the adolescents felt they could trust the adults, they were more likely to communicate their thoughts and concerns.

### **Table Talk**

Two adolescents discussed the dinner table as a venue for good communication. Grace knew that dinner was an important time of the day because her dad always made sure he was home. As Julie sat at the dinner table, her parents initiated discussions of world issues.

#### **Example 1**

The dinner table was the place where Julie began to value other people's opinions. *"I see my parents have always thought out their decisions and are really wise in what they think and therefore provide us with a lot of insight. At the dinner table they would bring up interesting things because they were so interested in the world. So it wasn't a boring meal there was always something interesting going on. I always felt they would support us and always had the feeling of unconditional love. I think that will do more for a kid than anything else will. I never felt like I couldn't go to them for something serious which was good."* Connecting with her parents and hearing different perspectives made Julie able to communicate with her parents about serious issues.

The dinner table was a place these adolescents gathered as a family and discuss issues. It was through this communication that they felt a sense of family connection and love.

### **Theme Two: Messages About Being Special**

Some of the adults in these adolescents' lives made them feel important. Five adolescents spoke about situations and experiences with adults that made them feel special. Two coaches believed in adolescents and gave them 'personal attention' which challenged and improved their skills. A choice to become a mom instead of pursuing a career made Julie feel important. Grace's grandmother selflessly provided her with special attention at a time when she really needed it. Next are a few examples of situations when an adult made an adolescent feel special.

#### **Example 1**

During the trip to Europe, Megan's dance teacher created opportunities for her to grow as a dancer. *"My dance teacher made me feel special because she included me in all the shows even though I was only 13 and everyone else was 15. For the Europe trip, she asked me to be in a duet and that was amazing. She believed in me as a dancer and that made me start to believe in myself."* Placing Megan in some duets during the Europe trip and believing she could perform made her start believing in herself.

#### **Example 2**

No one had ever given Blair the 'personal attention' that his coach provided. *"My defense coach made me feel like he was looking out for my best interest and improving my skills so that I could continue playing on the team. Really this coach gave me personal attention. Even though there were six defensemen, he really made me feel special, like I was the only one he was helping. He took the time and was committed to making me better. It was meaningful to me because nobody had done that yet. I hadn't had that attention given in hockey or really anything else. In school there are so many*

*people, in gym sports there are so many people and on any team there are so many people. But that personal attention, one project, one goal made me feel successful."* The coach spent time helping Blair improve his skills. This attention not only assisted Blair to be successful but also allowed him to feel special.

### Example 3

During her mother's illness, Grace's grandmother made her feel like she was helping her family. *"My nana made me feel very important and made me feel like I was helpful. She would compliment me by saying I was the bright eyes in my mom's life and I was really going to help her get through this. She would tell me I was helping my dad by being close to my mom. Somehow, she made me feel like I was the anchor of the family. A lot of people may think that is stressful but it was a more positive thing...like I believe in you and I know that you can do this and you can really have an impact on how it goes in the family. So it all comes back to me feeling important."* By placing emphasis on the helpful role Grace had during her mom's illness, she felt like she was having a positive impact on the family and this made her feel important.

A dance teacher provided Megan with opportunities to grow and develop her skills as a dancer. These opportunities showed Megan how much her dance teacher believed in her abilities as a dancer. Another coach, Blair's defense coach, provided him with personal time and attention, which aided the development of his hockey skills. Words of affirmation from Grace's grandmother made her feel like she was a helpful and important part of the family during a difficult family period. All of these adults spent time and gave these adolescents attention in a way that made them feel special and

important. Feeling important as an individual allowed these adolescents to face difficulties during adolescence.

### **Building Confidence**

As adults encouraged these adolescents to feel special, their confidence expanded. During the difficult transition into adolescence, adults who emphasized strengths, vocalized beauty or made special efforts with these adolescents increased their confidence. Here is a story about how an adult helped increase the confidence of one of the adolescents.

#### **Example 1**

A friend of Julie's had a mother who would constantly tell her to wear make up before going out of the house. This was the exact opposite from her mother's words. Julie believed this affected their confidences in different ways. *"With all that we go through, especially girls, I think it's really important to have confidence. Like what's going on with your body and some of my friend's parents saying, 'Don't leave the house without makeup.' They would tell their kids this. Now my friend will not see people without makeup. She's scared, she doesn't think she's beautiful without makeup. The reinforcement when she was younger did not build her confidence. I think family can build confidence in your kids. My mom would all the time say, 'Oh honey you're so beautiful. You're this and that.' Not to the point where I was like gag me but enough that I knew."* These adolescents loudly and clearly heard messages parents imply. In Julie's example, her friend heard the message you are not beautiful without makeup whereas Julie heard you are naturally beautiful.

The comparative messages Julie's friend received from her mother compared to Julie's positive beauty messages from her mom allowed Julie to recognize the power of words. Julie along with other adolescents revealed not only the importance of building confidence but also ways one can help to build confidence in adolescents.

### **Theme Three: Sense of Belonging**

Belonging to a group or family was pertinent for these adolescents' growth during the transition. There were five adolescents who spoke about their experiences with belonging or not belonging to a group. A few adolescents spoke about feeling excluded from groups. All of these adolescents explained that during difficult times, a group to which they belonged assisted them: dance studio, air cadets, hockey team and family. Megan, Blair and Grace stories explore the importance of belonging to a group.

#### **Example 1**

Even though Megan was the youngest in the group of dancers, the teacher always made her feel like she belonged by having her perform in every dance routine. The dance teacher really worked on creating a close knit community with all the dancers.

*"Everyone worked hard in the studio. When people were having problems with their families or friends we would talk about it and then dance together. The dance studio was a very tight knit community and I think that was what she wanted. At school because I didn't fit into one group and was not into friends liking me one week and not the next, I really floated from group to group. Having my dancing girls made me feel like no matter what was happening at home or school, I belonged to the dancing group."* Although Megan felt like she didn't fit into any groups at school, she felt a sense of belonging to



the dance studio which included her teacher and the dancers. This community of dancers gave her strength and stability when other situations were difficult.

### Example 2

When Blair was chosen to be on the top level hockey team, he continuously felt as though he didn't have the skills to belong on the team. He constantly questioned his abilities until he worked with one particular coach. *"He probably didn't realize it but he made me feel like I belonged on that team. That's something you question all the time when you're at the top level. I'm sure you feel that at any level. You question, 'Should I have made this team? Do I belong on this team?' By the end of this year, I thought I did belong on the team. I felt like a pro."* This defense coach spent time working on Blair's hockey skills. After receiving the assistance, Blair stopped questioning his abilities and began to feel like he belonged on the team. In this sense, he gained a sense of security as a member of the hockey team.

### Example 3

Even when Grace's brother had girlfriends, he would include Grace by inviting her to see movies with them. *"When he had girlfriends, he continued to pay attention to me. A lot of people would not have cared about a younger sister but he would always say, 'We're going to the movies come with us.' I thought that was really nice. It made me feel included and reassured that I was an important person."* This brother's care and inclusion made Grace feel secure and important.

A dance group, hockey team coach, and inclusive family member helped these three adolescents hold a sense of belonging.

## **Religion and Faith**

The church was one place that two adolescents felt a sense of belonging. A significant adult introduced both of the adolescents to the church. Religion played an important role in these two families. Both Grace and Julie spoke about faith; Grace elaborated on the meaning of faith in her family.

### **Example 1**

Grace's parents and grandparents were involved in the church. Even though they did not pressure her to become involved, she found the environment very positive during adolescence. *"In my family, our Christian faith has been important... My parents are both great believers in God, something that they have brought into our home. We take comfort in the realization that God is in control, something which was a real blessing during the time when my mom wasn't enjoying the best of health. My mom is a real woman of God. And while she believes it herself, she never has forced it on me but would encourage me in my own walk in faith. We would always go to church and I had a great sense of my faith. From a young age 12-14, it wasn't a big factor but it was there. Just the atmosphere of the church itself and the people in the church how they support a lot of people. I had a very good youth group and that was a positive experience. I think at this age you can go one way or the other with rebellion and I think getting involved with things at the church helped."*

The church atmosphere and youth group was a positive experience that provided a sense of belonging during a time when Grace could have rebelled. It was this involvement in the church that helped her to focus on the positive aspects of her life.

#### **Theme Four: Involvement in Important Activities**

Four of the five adolescents referred to their parents' involvement in their life. These parents became involved in the adolescent's various activities: a TV show, sports and the orchestra. While two adolescents felt their mom's involvement in their lives because of a commitment to their activities, other adolescents spoke about a father or coach who was involved in making them better athletes. Each adult made a commitment to be involved in the adolescent's life.

##### **Example 1**

When Megan was chosen to be an actress on a TV show, her mom was not only enthusiastic but also made a commitment to become involved in a way that allowed Megan to experience the unique opportunity. *"I'll never forget the day my mom called me at school to tell me the job was mine. She was so excited it was like she was coming out of the wires. She became my advocate at school when she received permission from the principal and talked to all the teachers about missing school. With homework, my mom bent over backward helping me. During the CBC TV show, my mom would drive me to Toronto, which was about an hour to an hour and a half away, four to five times a week. She became friends with all the other mothers who were on the shoot and came to the opening dinner. Due to her involvement, I felt like it was a shared experience. To this day we still watch the movie together and laugh about it. My mom was just happy and willing to commit time and effort for me to participate and accomplish this journey."* Megan felt a commitment from her mom with the fact that she drove her every week downtown and helped her with schoolwork. Due to her mom's involvement in this

project, Megan felt like this was a special, shared experience and a successful accomplishment.

### Example 2

Both of Grace's parents were involved in many activities in which Grace participated. *"My parents showed a lot of interest in me whether it was music or driving. For example, my mom would drive me on Saturday mornings to the orchestra and she would stay with me the whole time. She wouldn't go shopping during that time, she came in and was there for me. They tried to get me involved in positive kinds of things and would show their interest by becoming involved in what I was doing. I sensed their love with the interest they showed in me. They would come to all my school functions whether it was baseball games or assemblies. They just wanted to do things with me."* This parental involvement in Grace's life allowed her to sense their love.

### Example 3

In hockey, Blair's defense coach became very involved with Blair by helping him become a better hockey player. Even though there were six defense players, Blair felt that the coach provided him with 'personal attention' and time when they worked on 'mini projects'. *"Before I experienced this amazing defense coach, hockey was purely a physical activity. When he coached me, I got right into it and was there in spirit. At the time I wasn't a strong backward skater. As a defenseman, while you're skating backwards, you have to take out a guy. If he passes you and you can't keep up to him backwards or turn quickly enough to skate forward, you're screwed. Of course I kept having guys pass me which is the most embarrassing thing that can happen. So the coach became involved by helping me with my backward skating and the transition turn."*

*It sounds minute but it was a huge confidence boost. The coach never gave up on me. If I was struggling or it took a little longer, he wouldn't pass me up. He helped me to recognize a weak skill and valued my improvement."* The coach's involvement assisted Blair to become a better backward skater, making him feel more confident in his hockey skills. Additionally, the coach never gave up which made Blair feel like a valued player.

There are a variety of ways in which adults were involved in activities important to the adolescent. When Megan's mother was involved in her TV show, the commitment to help her made this opportunity a success. Grace's parents were not only involved in activities like driving her to orchestra practice but also assisted her with homework and accompanied her to the many school events or sports competitions. The defense coach made Blair feel more confident in his skills by spending time working with him to become better at his skills.

### **Theme Five: Connection**

If an adult could relate to an adolescent, he/she would feel a sense of genuine connection with the younger person. This connection was an important part of maintaining a relationship with the adult. One of the adults related to his son simply by being down to earth. Another adult related to the adolescent by keeping up to date with the fashion and news. There were two adolescents who stated that having someone just a little older meant there was more of a chance the adult could relate because they had just experienced this transition. Grace spoke about the importance of being able to relate to her grandmother.

### Example 1

Grace spoke about the special connection she felt with her grandmother. *"I think my grandmother was different because she was 'with it' and so I could connect with her. The connection was significant to me. Even though she was eighty years old, she would read the paper and be up on fashion and she would tell me what she thought was good and what she thought was bad. She had a vibrant mind."* Keeping up to date on fashion and the news made Grace's grandmother "with it" and this established a unique connection. Similar to this "with it" grandmother, Grace could relate to her brother. *"I knew my brother could relate to my experience because he had just gone through the transition to the same school. He's very fun and I can relate to that... If he had been more of a recluse, I probably wouldn't have been as close to him."* The fact that her brother had just experienced the transition made Grace feel like she could relate to him. In this sense, Grace believed that if she was unable to relate with her brother, she would not have experienced this close connection.

Being connected to the adult was important because it allowed these adolescents to experience guidance, wisdom and support. The connection made these adolescents feel close to the adult allowing him/her to talk to the adult about their concerns.

### Sense of Humor

One way to establish a connection was to have a good sense of humor. In school, The funny, easy-going nature of Owen's cousin created a non-threatening environment that allowed Jackson to learn.

### Example 1

Owen's sense of humor eased the pressures Jackson faced during this transition.

*"Owen was a very humorous, fun, easy-going guy and believed in hard work. He liked to have fun but when it came down to work, he did it. When he wanted to get a point across to me, he would say things in a joking manner. For example, I was fairly busy at the time with air cadets and sports and whatnots. His motto was 'no TV'...news was fine but don't sit down to watch anything. I'd be watching TV and he would sit down beside me and start joking and say 'Wow this is really educational.' So we would start making jokes and I knew I was caught. It made me realize what was important and changed my priorities."* In the case of Jackson, Owen's sense of humor created a non-threatening environment that taught him about prioritizing aspects in life.

Having a good sense of humor and being funny allowed some students to talk to a teacher about serious issues and allowed Jackson to learn valuable life lessons.

### Genuine Interest

Another aspect of creating a connection was having a genuine interest in adolescents. Blair described the way a teacher showed genuine interest in his students.

### Example 1

The PE teacher at Blair's school would always ask about various sports activities students were doing outside of school. *"Mr. D. would always ask about other sports people were doing. For example a guy played karate and he'd always ask about it. With me he would always ask about hockey. He was genuinely interested. I really appreciated it because I could see how it could be flipped. A gym teacher could just be like, 'This is how you shoot the hoops'. But he was interested to know what we were up to in and out*

*of school. Also, he was great with names and had a great memory for what people were doing."*

Rather than being a teacher who didn't care, Mr. D. asked about students and it made them feel like he was genuinely interested in them.

### **Theme Six: Role Model**

These adolescents learned a great deal from the role modeling of adults. One adult's entire life was a role model for an adolescent as he listened to the stories of his father's life. Parents provided good examples of ways to deal with situations when teaching an adolescent 'mini lessons' throughout his life. An adolescent spoke about how a relative was a role model by attending university. Also, this relative taught him how to be a positive role model for another cousin. The mother of Julie role modeled how to speak your truth when she intervened at her son's party. Additionally, Julie's mother role modeled how to help others when she was talking on the phone to friends or family. Watching these significant adults was a way that these adolescents learned some valuable life lessons.

#### **Example 1**

By observing his dad's experiences and accomplishments, Tim learned a great deal about life. The most important lesson he learned is that hard work pays off. Also, looking at his dad's life encouraged and inspired Tim to pursue a similar life. *"His (dad's) life has been encouraging. He's sixty and looking at his life and accomplishments, I realize how hard he worked at everything including school where he spent eleven years studying. He doesn't have to say anything to me, just seeing the life he's led makes me want a life like his. He won an Olympic medal, ran major companies*



*and he's done everything. That's just an inspiration for sure. The fact that he has done everything anyone would ever want to do in any aspect of life is inspiring. He covered it all."* Learning about his dad's life and accomplishments showed Tim that it is possible to be intelligent, successful and athletic while at the same time, raise a family.

### Example 2

Julie noticed that many people would call her mom for help and she would listen to the way her mom dealt with them. *"My dad's side of the family is kind of messed up...four marriages and his sisters have always relied on my grandmother. People would phone the house bawling and talk to my mom.. All the time people would come to talk to her about their problems and when you see people doing that with your mom you think she must be doing something to help them."* By observing her mom on the phone, Julie learned about helping others. Additionally, Julie shared the fact that her dad was a good role model for her brothers. *"My dad is a stern tough guy but nice at the same time. My brothers have a good relationship with my dad. So for my brothers I think it's really, really important for boys to have men role models."* There was one specific situation Julie explained which captured her sense of pride in her mom as a role model. During one of her brother's basement parties, Julie's mom addressed a problem. *"In grade nine Mark had a party. He was worried and my mom was like nothing will happen because you know people start drinking in grade seven now. Anyway, I was upstairs with a bunch of my friends and you could hear yelling and swearing from the basement. My mom was also upstairs wondering what was going on. When we went downstairs there was all this loud rude swearing and all the girls were throwing themselves at the guys and everyone was drinking. My mom brought all the girls upstairs and said, 'I don't know why you*

*have to throw yourself at them. You do not have to wear those clothes. They are going to like you without the clothes and if they like you for the clothes they are not worth it. You are all beautiful women and should act it. Respect yourselves.' I couldn't believe she said that. Then she told the boys to get out...they could call a cab or call their parents. She told all of them that she was going to call their parents because she couldn't believe they didn't care. I was proud of that because I feel the same way and obviously their parents aren't talking to them."* This was an example of a situation where an important adult in Julie's life spoke her truth. Watching her mom address the party problems and speak her truth made Julie fill with pride.

### Example 3

Grace's grandmother lived an inspiring life. She also had this amazing positive attitude about everything and Grace believed that she learned from this excellent example. *"Having seen her, the way she dealt with challenges in her life, I think it taught me about life and guided me. My nana always had this bright outlook on things. No matter how bad it was, it could always be worked out. You just have to look on the bright side and be thankful for what you have."* Additionally, Grace's brother was a role model for her. *"Basically, my brother was everything I wanted to be (laugh). He was athletic, funny, good in school and he had friends. He was a leader, he inspired me, he had a good sense of humor and he was compassionate. My brother had many challenges and just having watched him go through them, I developed a respect for him. He paved the way and I wanted to make him proud of me."* Observing all the positive qualities of her brother, Grace felt inspired.

These adult role models were inspirational and motivational. Learning about Tim's father's life and accomplishments inspired him to become the best person he could. By watching her mother speak her truth and help others, Julie was proud and began to learn skills required helping others. Both Grace's grandmother and brother inspired her to be an optimistic and positive person. All five adolescents revealed some positive ways in which role modeling impacted their lives.

### **Calm During The Storm**

A calm adult role model influenced three adolescents. Within the family, if one parent was more calm than another parent, the adolescent would choose to be with the adult who was calm. Not only did this calm adult influence these adolescents to be more calm themselves but it also made them all feel more relaxed and comfortable to share their concerns.

#### **Example 1**

Blair appreciated his dad's calm nature especially when his mom would become upset; it made him feel more relaxed. *"My mom was the over-reactor sometimes. One time she had an emotional spat and wanted to kick me out of the house but my dad said, 'Don't worry, you won't be kicked out.' My dad was the calm one. When I left for university I was living on my own, my mom didn't know anything and I don't know, I kind of loved it. Then she started asking questions and I started getting annoyed but my dad, he doesn't ask questions. He's just like whatever."* Blair's mom would have 'emotional spats' and bother him by asking too many questions. Blair was more comfortable talking to his father because he was calmer and less nosy.

### Example 2

Julie's parents were always calm and that really influenced her temperament. *"My parents were always stable, they don't have tempers and I've never seen them fight or say bad words to each other. I don't yell at people and I don't have a bad temper and neither do my brothers."* A calm temper role modeled by her parents made Julie and her brothers develop a even tempers.

Where the calmness in his dad made Blair feel more comfortable communicating with his dad and Julie's calm parents impacted their temperaments. These adolescents unveiled the importance of maintaining a sense of calm during the storms.

### **Unconditional Love, Care and Acceptance**

Some of the adolescents unveiled experiences with adults that made them feel unconditional love, care and acceptance. Adolescents felt unconditional love, care and acceptance from parents and a grandparent. These adults would say to the adolescent that they loved and/or cared for them, or they would simply be around during difficult times.

### Example 1

As Julie and her mother walked up the stairs, they had a conversation about love. It was during this conversation that Julie felt she really understood the unconditional love her mother felt. *"Just the other day I was walking up the stairs with my mom and she was talking about having good kids and I said, 'Mom what would you do if I turn into a hell child and was like crazy and everything I did you hated.' She said, 'I'm afraid I'd still love you to death.' 'You'd love me to death still?' And she said, 'Yup.' So I said, 'What if dad turned into that?' She was like 'Nope, I wouldn't still love him to death.' I said, 'Would you still love me?' and she was like, 'Yup, no matter what you do I will still*

*love you...I'm afraid so.' And I was like oh. I think a lot of kids don't hear that."*

Hearing these words from her mother made Julie feel lucky and secure that someone would always love her.

### Example 2

Grace felt a love from her grandmother that made her feel strong. *"By her being around during this period, I felt this sense of acceptance and love and that really helped give me the strength, emotionally. Through her helping me make our life more normal, there was stability in my home and my life. She constantly showed an interest in me and that made me feel like I had something to offer the world. I think I became a different person because of that."* As Grace felt this love from her grandmother, she believed that it was this love that made her become a different person with more strength emotionally.

Additionally, Grace's grandmother cared and accepted her at a time when she really needed it. *"By her being around during this period, I felt this sense of acceptance and love and that really helped give me the strength, emotionally. Through her helping me make our life more normal, there was stability in my home and my life. She constantly showed an interest in me and that made me feel like I had something to offer the world. I think I became a different person because of that."* The care and acceptance Grace's grandmother gave her strength and stability at a time when her mom was sick.

### Example 3

Knowing that his dad would stop whatever it was he was doing to talk to his son made Tim feel like his dad cared. *"I think the biggest thing is knowing that my parents care. Even if you don't want to talk, just knowing they would want to hear about it. Even if they are nosy about things and always asking you, it's better than them not caring."*

*And if you have to make the extra effort and go, 'Yo dad, can I talk to you about his and this?' he was always all ears. That's really important for adolescents, to be able to talk to someone."* Initially when Tim's mom would set a curfew he would be angry however, over time he realized how much his mom cared. *My mom is strong with everything compared to other parents. Even in the teenage years when my parents were like you have to be home at a certain time, I would get so mad. But then I would realize that it was just because they cared. They cared more. I'd say well so-an- so can stay out late and then I would start to realize it's because the parents don't care about him. They don't care what he's doing. So it's just showing us how much time and how much effort they put into making our lives so amazing that has really helped us out in relationships. They gave us a lot of time...I think that was a big part too.* With time, Tim appreciated the care his parents gave him which helped him in future relationships.

There was a sense of security Julie felt with the unconditional love her mom spoke about. The unconditional love and care Grace felt from her family assisted her in difficult times and allowed her to blossom as an individual. The time and effort Tim's parents gave him helped him to develop other relationships. The power of love made these adolescents feel strong. During difficult situations, the fact that people cared for these adolescents made them feel supported and not alone.

### **Theme Seven: Providing Successful Challenges**

Some of the adults challenged these adolescents physically or intellectually. Every challenge forced these adolescents to grow and develop in certain areas. Megan's dance teacher challenged her dancing skills in practices and performances. The commanding officer challenged Jackson when he received his corporal stripe. Julie's

parents challenged her to learn about different sports and aspects in life. Megan shared her experience with a challenge given to her by her dance teacher.

#### Example 1

Dancing was a huge part of Megan's life and it required many hours of work. The dance teacher helped Megan blossom as a dancer because she was constantly challenging her to become a better dancer. *"My dance teacher was an adult who helped me blossom as a dancer. She was competent in her dancing skills and constantly challenged me to become better at my skills. The opportunities that she initiated and gave to me brought my dance to another level. During practices and shows, she never doubted my abilities. Instead she encouraged and challenged me."* The continuous dancing challenges Megan was given encouraged her and brought her dancing to another level. Challenging Megan's dancing skills made her blossom as a dancer.

### **Theme Eight: Family Foundation**

Having a strong family foundation allowed Grace, Julie and Tim to feel like they had something to fall back on when times were tough.

#### Example 1

The strong family foundation Grace experienced was one of the most significant contributions of her parents. *"There is a bit of uncertainty during this time and something I got from my family was a strong foundation. I believe with this foundation, I could go out and do other things. Because I had the love of my family, there were other things that came into the picture but I felt I was a stronger person."* There was a family foundation that gave Grace the courage to believe she could accomplish anything. A

strong family foundation gave Grace the security to be adventurous during the insecurities of adolescence.

These qualities are the unmuted voices of the adolescents. Their words and qualities are poignant information for any adults working with adolescents. The results show thoughtful consideration of various attributes adolescents' desire in relationships with adults. I think it is time that we started listening to what they have to say.

### MEANING

With passion these adolescents loquaciously spoke about the importance of having a significant adult in their life and what that meant to them. Whether the adult was a dance teacher, a defense coach, a cousin or parents, having them meant a great deal to these adolescents.

Megan's dance teacher made her feel special because she included her in all the dance shows even though she was the youngest dancer. She provided Megan with opportunities she hadn't experienced before. Her dance teacher was clear and provided her with constructive criticism. The dance studio was a close knit community where Megan felt she belonged. With all of these qualities, her dance teacher *"believed in me as a dancer and that made me start to believe in myself."*

When expressing his feelings about the meaning of the significant adults during his transition period, Blair was initially stumped. However, when he thought about life without the coach, he explained how he felt. *"My defense coach made me feel like he was looking out for my best interest and improving my skills so that I could continue playing on the team. Without this coach, I think I would have really struggled and I would have been unhappy because I wouldn't have been as good. Really this coach gave*



*me personal attention.” Blair also spoke about his parents. “It meant a lot to me to have my parents’ constant support throughout my development...like during my transition into Grade nine. When my two good African-American friends wouldn’t talk to me anymore, my parents were always there for me. Even though sometimes I didn’t use them – for whatever reason – and maybe I should have, I knew they’d be there if I needed them. Having that feeling throughout adolescence was very important.*

Similar to Blair, meaning for Jackson regarding his significant adult was revealed when he thought about where he would be without this person. *“I don’t know where I would be without someone like Owen. I don’t have a clue. Maybe you want to call it something else...helping me learn stuff. All I know is that he put me over the top...like you’re kind of there but majorly helped.”*

Tim spoke passionately about the support and luck he feels having positive experiences with two adults. *“With my experiences with my parents, I feel as though I am more equipped to live life. I’m ready. I feel like I have an advantage. I’ve had a wonderful childhood, better than most people and that is really helpful. I don’t know, it’s really reassuring to know that I have had a good childhood and I think it helps a lot more than people give it credit. Having both of them right together, perhaps I should have focussed on them together. It’s been unreal, how much they have helped with everything. I feel blessed, it’s a blessing for sure. I feel like one of the luckiest kids. My whole childhood, everything has been unreal, no regrets whatsoever. I think it’s been wonderful. I feel incredibly lucky you know, so that’s good. I definitely felt that I was their number one priority for sure.”*

With the significant adults in Julie's life, it didn't matter what would happen at school because she would always have them to fall back on. *"My parents...if I had crappy teachers my whole life it wouldn't matter because I would come home and they would know how to deal with it. I don't depend or really need my friends...if I have a problem, I would go to my parents."* Julie felt strength with the significant parental relationships. With them, she felt she could conquer anything.

Like Julie, Grace did not feel she needed to look outside her family for role models. Grace felt lucky because she would be unable to choose one positive role model outside the family. *"I feel lucky that I have so many people in my family who are role models for me. I think people with broken homes must have a difficult time choosing a role model outside the home. I can't even think of one. I can't imagine if I didn't have these people in my life because I've just learned so much from them. I have an unusual closeness from my family and would be a different person if I had to talk to my friends. I have been blessed with my parents and having them meant everything. I don't even know what it would have been like without them. I was able to deal so much better with whatever was thrown at me. I was stronger emotionally and mentally because of them."* Grace feels blessed to have parents and it meant everything to her.

Having a significant adult during the transition meant to Megan that she began to believe in herself. Without Blair's coach he would have struggled. With his coach, Blair felt important with the personal attention he gave him. Like Blair, Jackson wondered where he would be without this adult in his life and he doesn't know the answer to that question. What he does know is that Owen "put him over the top". With Tim's parents in his life during this transition, Tim was able to develop his whole mind and body. Both

Julie and Grace could turn to their parents and that meant they did not have to look outside the house for positive role models. Additionally, Grace felt that with these parents she was emotionally and mentally stronger.

### **ADDITIONAL RESULTS**

Additional information emerged from discussions with the adolescents that did not fit into the themes described. Three other poignant themes that need to be addressed are climate, gender and power. All of the adolescents spoke about these issues, and in this section their thoughts will be revealed along with pertinent literature.

#### **Adolescent Climate**

A couple of the adolescents discussed the difficult climate at school and some of the pressures they faced. High school was very stressful for Blair due to the racism that occurred. Luckily for Blair, he was able to talk to his parents about how uncomfortable he was with the racism at school. Peer pressure was another area of concern. Jackson was faced with the peer pressure of the whole group to smoke and do petty crime. However, he was able to say no to the peer pressure based on his strong morals. Two adolescent boys discussed the problems they faced with schoolwork. Tim indicated the difficulties he had with violence in hockey and explained how he dealt with it. The girls all mentioned problems they faced with the vacillating relationships with other girl friends. Often they would find themselves alone. As stated some literature has discussed adolescent climate, the aggression in male sports and the vacillating girl friendships. However, the fact remains that with this difficult adolescent climate, all of these adolescents had adults in their lives to assist them.

## Power and Gender

Pipher, Orenstein and Gilligan all wrote about some of the power and gender issues during adolescence. In Schoolgirls, Orenstein (1994) discussed the power and gender differences in the science classes. A few adolescents in Reviving Ophelia (1994) spoke about power struggles between adolescents and parents and adolescents and teachers. Gilligan (1992) addressed societal power difference with men and women. Supported by this research, Megan addressed the societal power and differences she felt at home. Her mother and father fulfilled certain roles which related to the power imbalance in the family. During air cadets, Jackson's commanding officer pulled him aside and used his power to scare Jackson by threatening to take away his stripe. A teacher at Blair's junior high school, changed the power dynamics in the classroom so that there was less of a power hierarchy. The power and gender differences revealed in both the literature and this research recognize its effects on adolescent perceptions. As adults there is a responsibility to be aware of how these differences can affect the development of a healthy sense of self and relationships.

In Meeting at the Crossroads, Gilligan (1992) addressed the lost voices of female adolescents at school and home. Similarly, these adolescents shared experiences of a lost voice. After Blair's mom was kicked out of a hockey game, she stopped coming to games and Blair was unable to tell his mom how he really felt about her not attending his games. Another situation arose during high school where Blair felt he had no voice with the racism that was occurring. Even though Grace's parents trusted her because they cared, she was not permitted to stay out late. Unfortunately, Grace was unable to speak to her parents about this conflict. At home, Megan's voice was silenced throughout a

period of adolescence due to her parents irrational reactions. Power instilled a fear that silenced Jackson's voice with his father and commanding officer. Voices of these adolescents and others have been silenced due to the lack of connection they feel with the adults. If these adolescents felt the open communication they spoke about, they would not be afraid to speak their truth with the adults. We need to be aware of our impact towards silencing adolescent voices.

As the male adolescents experienced the most difficulties seeking help from others, they were the ones who spoke about what they needed. During adolescence one of the three boys turned to his friends for help while the two other adolescents turned to their adult. The main differences were that the one male adolescent stated he was a private guy and didn't like talking to anyone who did not know him well. In this sense, his friends knew him and could relate to his experiences. The other two boys felt they could seek help from these adults because the adult had initiated conversations about private issues and were open to talking about them. For these two adolescents, the openness of the relationship

These adolescents are helping adults by explaining what we need to do. We need to understand their climate. We need to be aware of the power and gender differences. We need to recognize silenced voices. Through this understanding, awareness and recognition, we will be able to develop healthy relationships where adolescents can look to us for guidance and positive role models.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

Adult qualities that make a difference to adolescents have been described. The most poignant information revealed in this study is the fact that adolescents can turn to adults during this tumultuous period if they are given the opportunity. This chapter is divided into three areas: similarities and differences to present research, implications for parents, educators and consellers and implications for future research. Next will be an explanation of the significance of these findings for counselling. Finally, the focus of future research will be examined.

### SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

#### TO PRESENT RESEARCH

##### Open Communication

*"One year we went to Europe to perform a dance. Before the trip, we all got together and talked about the trip and our dance teacher talked to us about 'girl stuff'. I had never talked to anyone about periods but she brought it up and we all talked openly and felt she understood."*

*Megan*

Open Communication was the most prominent theme discovered. Some literature has singled out the importance of communication especially during adolescence. Piper (1994) discussed the importance of female adolescents having conversations with adults. Lynch, Forssman-Falck and Kilmartin (1998) compared female and male expression of emotions. Pollack (1998) explored the societal influences regarding boys and communication. Our findings support this literature.

In her book, Reviving Ophelia, Pipher (1994) stated,

In the past, many young women were saved by conversations and support from a beloved neighbor, a kindhearted aunt or a nearby grandmother. Many women report that when they were in adolescence, they had someone they could really talk to, who encouraged them to stay true to who they really were (Pipher, p.284). Presently in our more chaotic society, adolescent girls have fewer people and less opportunities to talk. It is essential as adults that we find time and create communication opportunities with adolescents. Communication is a way for adolescents to speak their truth and stay true to their selves.

Lynch, Forssman-Falck and Kilmartin (1998) purported that boys have more difficulty expressing their emotions than girls do. Similarly, in William Pollack's riveting book Boy's Code, he acknowledged the difficulties boys face trying to communicate their emotions. Even though all of the adolescents discussed the importance of open communication, it is interesting to note that not all of the boys openly communicated about their feelings. Where the girls addressed openly communicating about feelings, a couple of the boys stated their inability to talk about feelings.

There were two adolescent males who spoke about their inability to talk about their emotions. Jackson has never actually talked about his emotions. These results support Lynch's findings that boys have more difficulty expressing emotions than girls. With regards to emotions, Pollack suggested that as boys hide behind their masks of bravado and live within the societal limits of the Boy's Code, they experience difficulties expressing their emotions. Both Blair and Jackson had difficulties during this transition talking about their emotions. Jackson's response was brief and succinct. *"I don't talk about my feelings, not then and not now."* This statement divulges Jackson's lack of

emotional expression in his life. Conversely, Blair is able to speak to others presently about his feelings however, during the transition into adolescence he did not speak to others. *"I definitely would not have been able to talk to anyone about personal issues like sex or emotions. I'm kind of a private guy."* These adolescent males are additional evidence to Real Boys and Lynch, Forssman-Falck and Kilmartin who suggested the difficulties boys experienced expressing emotions.

At the same time, Pollack (1998) revealed the importance of male adolescents communicating their feelings when he describes when boys don't communicate. Many boys...living behind a mask of masculine bravado that hides the genuine self to conform to our society's expectations; they feel it is necessary to cut themselves off from any feelings that society teaches them are unacceptable for men and boys-fear, uncertainty, feelings of loneliness and need (Pollack, p.5). Society influences males to repress their feelings. Both Pollack and this research argue that boys need to come out from hiding behind masks and reveal their inner selves.

This research compliments the Harper and Marshall (1991) correlational study as the adolescent girls spoke about more problems they had during this period than the boys. Like the study, one of the problems the girls spoke about was relationships and one of the problems the boys spoke about was school work. However, this research dug deeper and revealed other problems girls faced such as confidence, and for boys other problems related to sexuality and friends.

This research supports existing literature that discusses the differences between male and female problems and expressing emotions. However, little research describes the type of communication adolescents desire as "open communication". Using the



adolescents' term, this describes an adult who is non-judgmental, trusting, listens well and connects with the adolescent. When this happens, adolescents in this study felt there was a two-way open communication to talk about anything.

### **Listen To Us**

*"Having someone listen to you makes you feel that you are someone who is important."*  
Grace

Along with trust, it was important for these adults to listen to adolescents. Research like Reviving Ophelia (1994) explored the importance of listening to adolescents and providing them with an open environment and time to communicate. Pipher focussed on respecting and praising what daughters have said when listening. "Parents can help by listening to their daughters, who need as much time as toddlers" (p.284). Evidence from the current study is in agreement with the need for adolescents to have as much time as toddlers. Along with time and listening, these adolescents described the ways adults can show they are listening. Suggestions made by these adolescents were bringing up concerning topics later, asking how things were, using eye contact and one caveat was not to turn the conversation back to the adult. If an adolescent felt the adult was listening, they would continue to talk. A poor adult listener shunted adolescents from further communication. Adolescents may ask adults for their ears during the most inopportune times, however, it is essential for adults to recognize their need to be heard. Both Pipher and this research agree upon the importance of listening as it allows adolescents to feel open to discussing concerning issues.

### Trust

*"I would not talk to my parents because you never knew when it would come back in your face."*

*Megan*

In order for open communication to occur, a few of these adolescents felt there needed to be a sense of trust and an ability to listen well. There was only one female who did not experience open communication with her parents. In place of the missing communication, she created a 'big sister'. The reason she experienced difficulties was the fact that she could not trust her parents to react rationally. Similar to this example, Pipher (1994) stated,

Much of what I know about junior-high girls I learned from high school girls.

Junior-high girls do not confide in me nearly as often or as articulately as do slightly older girls...in junior high the thoughts, feelings and experiences are too jumbled to be clearly articulated. The trust level for adults is just too low.

(Pipher, p. 73)

Although Pipher's words portray the importance of communication, the adolescents revealed their meanings of trust. In addition to the irrational responses of parents causing mistrust, adolescents provided examples of adults telling others. Also, the idea of information backfiring was enough to silence these adolescents, showing the importance of trusting adults before communication occurred.

### Table Talk

*"I think meal times are a very important part of a child's life because those are the times you really connect with the family."*

*Grace*

One of the places for communication revealed in this research, was the dinner table. Within Pollack's book Real Boys (1998), research by Blake Bowden, at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, supported the importance of dinner time with the family. This study found that teens who ate dinner with their parents at least five nights a week were significantly better adjusted than classmates who dined alone. Similar to the significance of dinner time, these adolescents talked about the meaningful conversations they experienced around the dinner table. Having dinner with family members was a way in which adolescents connected with others. Gilligan discussed the importance of a sense of connection for the adolescence psychological development. The dinner table was merely a place where connection could occur. It was an opportunity for families to connect by conversing about various issues and to develop communication skills.

At times it is important for adults to educate and initiate conversations with adolescents. Along with the literature Pipher and Pollack, some of these adolescents spoke about how much they appreciated their parents initiating discussions regarding masturbation, safe sex, social pressures, appearance and menstruation periods.

One of the most profound differences between this research and literature is the fact that these adolescents used the term open communication. Past literature has discussed aspects of communication such as listening, trusting and expressing emotions. In addition, it has discussed societal influences on communication with adolescents.

However, this research has developed a new term for the type of communication adolescents desire, 'open communication'.

Being able to openly communicate with adults was the most prominent theme. This research and literature are in agreement that various aspects of communication are very important. Some of these revealed aspects include the importance of male adolescents expressing their emotions; the importance of being able to trust adults along with adults being able to listen; the significance of meaningful conversations at the dinner table; adults initiating conversations about important topics. New topics disclosed from this research included the term 'open communication' and the adolescents' desire to openly communicate with adults. Even though much of society encourages parents and adults to leave the adolescents to become more independent, they are crying out for us to begin the process of open communication with relevant issues.

### **Messages About Feeling Special**

*"I think Owen took me under his wing and that made me feel important. He kind of realized I had the potential and wanted me to understand."*

*Jackson*

Both the boys and girls revealed the importance of feeling special to an adult. Whether male or female, coach or parent, these adults made the adolescents feel special by providing them with attention and time. Although some of the literature discussed the importance of having a connection with adults, the literature did not discuss the importance of providing adolescents with both attention and time.

### **Sense of Belonging**

*"My dance teacher included me in all the productions even though I was the youngest one there. She wanted a close knit community and I really felt like I belonged to that group."*

*Megan*

Once again, most of the adolescents discussed the importance of belonging to a group. When two of the adolescents did not belong to a group at school, they became a part of dancing, hockey or air cadets where they felt like they belonged. Other adolescents felt a strong sense of belonging to their family and therefore did not have to look elsewhere. Literature supports this desire in adolescence to belong to a group. In his book, The Wonder Boys, Gurian (1996) explored the importance of groups throughout history. Together with Pipher, similarities and differences between male and female adolescents will be discussed. Both literature and these findings portrayed the importance of a sense of belonging during adolescence.

In Michael Gurian's book, he discussed a male perspective of the diminishing male societal groups. Historically men have worked as members of tribal groups. During the agricultural and industrial age, individuals worked however it was with a group of males. Groups began to erode because: "1) the leaders became less service oriented and more ego-oriented; and 2) the followers became more individualistic and less collaborative" (Gurian, 1996, p.62). In the past, the tribe would form the character of the male, and the peer group would test and befriend this character. Today, as society is less group-oriented and more individualistic, male characters are formed by the peer group. Male adolescents look to the peer group to guide their identity and relationship development. As they receive little attention from family tribes, they turn to others for assistance. As Gurian (1996) states, "In order to learn how to live and how to love, boys

need a tribe. If they don't get one from us, they'll make one, and it may be a dangerous one" (Gurian, p.64). Much literature on male adolescents linked males who don't belong to any group being vulnerable to gangs. Our innate desire to belong to a group coupled with a lack of connection to any group pushed boys to become members of a gang.

Similar to males, female adolescents are also influenced by their group. During a time when they are trying to develop their identities, they turn to a group to assist this development. Pipher has written about the influence females have on each other which can vary from clothing to prostitution. As the group is a powerful influence, it is important to recognize the way in which the group is influencing our female and male adolescents.

Much past research and developmental theories have been male dominated. Where male rats and chimpanzees were subjects for past theories, recently female rats and chimpanzees have been studied. The most profound discovery was that when these female subjects were in trouble they would move to a group. In general terms, human females move toward connection in times of strife. They move toward the group for comfort and support. Therefore it is no surprise that these adolescent females consistently desired connection.

Similar to much research, there were a few adolescents who struggled to find a sense of belonging during adolescence. Pipher (1994) wrote about this struggle.

....the demands of the time are so overwhelming that even the strongest girls keel over in adolescence. The lessons are too difficult and the learning curve too steep for smooth early mastery. Strong girls manage to hold on to some sense of themselves in the high wind. Often they have a strong sense of place that gives

them roots...an ethnic group or community...Their sense of belonging preserves their identity when it is battered by the winds of adolescence. (Pipher, p. 265)

The adolescents in this research spoke about having difficulties belonging to a group at school. Vacillating friendships made these adolescents feel insecure however, when they felt like they belonged to a group whether it was dancing, hockey, air cadets or family, the adolescents felt more secure about themselves. Much research has addressed the importance of feeling a sense of belonging to a group (Pipher, Erikson, Marcia and Keegan). Some literature has outlined ways to avoid gangs (Gurian). The adolescents in this study explained how adults helped them to avoid becoming involved in the wrong crowd at school, to stand up for what they believed even if it was against the norm, encouraged them in a way that made them feel like they belonged to a group. Adults influenced the way these adolescents managed dealing with the pressures to belong to a group and yet assisted them to feel a sense of belonging to a specific group.

### **Religion and Faith**

Belonging to a church is one way to feel a sense of inclusion. Pipher (1994) wrote about belonging to an ethnic or religious group. One adolescent in this research spoke about belonging to a church. She passionately described how the church assisted her development by involving her in positive rather than rebellious activities. Her parents would bring her to church with them, simply exposing her to the church and religion. Later on, it became her decision to become more involved. This made her feel like she belonged to the church. Going to church with her family created a strong connection with each other and meant so much to her.

### **Involvement in Important Activities**

*"With my mom there was a total commitment to be involved in our lives. We were her life and that was nice."*

Julie

One of the most prominent qualities these adolescents looked for in adults was becoming involved in activities that were important to them. For the girls, the parents (usually the mom) would drive them to and from practices whether it was orchestra, sports or dancing. The mother would also become involved by volunteering their time at school events. Conversely, the male adolescents found it important for parents (usually the father) to become involved by playing sports with them or helping them with their homework. Literature supported the male adolescents involvement with activities however, little if any literature discussed the importance of adults connecting with female adolescents through shared activities. These findings indicated that there was an increase in confidence when adults became involved in activities and assisted the development of skills.

Although none of the literature on girls discussed the importance of adults partaking in their important activities, Pollack (1998) addressed the need for parents to connect with boys through their activities. All three adolescent boys spoke about the adult participating in sport activities in which they were involved. The parents drove them to the practices, watched them play and assisted them by playing the sport and teaching them skills. Similarly, Pollack's research stated that "frequently fathers show that they care and nurture their sons through action" (Pollack, p.120). Although Pollack referred to fathers, I believe that mothers can also nurture their sons through action. Both Pollack and the adolescent boys in this research discuss male figures however, I believe



that mothers and sons do make the connection through action. For example, Tim's mother would also drive him to sports and knew about the activities he was involved in and Tim spoke about a connection with his mom. It appears to me that the day Blair's mother stopped going to his hockey games was the day the connection broke. Jackson does not even speak about a connection with his mother and only addressed male figures who were involved in his activities. Both the literature and research support the importance of adults becoming involved in the various activities in which male adolescents are involved. Although little research addressed this desire to be involved in female adolescent activities, it is argued that it is also important to become involved in female adolescent activities.

This research suggests that time spent with adults created an opportunity for females to talk to adults. Through communication, a connection is being established and the females can test the grounds for communication. It was during the rides home with adults that the female adolescents began to feel connected to the adult and this time provided opportunities for communication.

Some of the adolescents spoke about an increase in their confidence due to the significant adult being involved in certain activities. For the boys, the adult would help them to develop skills made them play better sports or perform better academically. Harper and Marshall's (1991) study found that boys and girls had a high concern for the adjustment to schoolwork. As the adjustment to schoolwork can be difficult, assisting boys with their work can increase their confidence academically. For the girls, they felt more confidence when they had a trusting adult to talk to about their problems who would provide them with emotional support. Both the male and female adolescents

spoke about an increase in confidence when they were able to participate in the process of feedback and given positive reinforcement and encouragement.

Although little research supported this finding, there is evidence that adolescents appreciated adults becoming involved in various important activities. It was through this involvement adolescents felt connected. Time spent with adolescents opened the door for adolescents to talk to adults. Also, during some activities, adults assisted adolescents with a variety of skills, increasing their confidence. Therefore, when adults became involved in adolescents lives, they gave adolescents more time, helped them develop skills and became more connected.

### **Connection**

Feeling connected to the adult was important to five of the adolescents. There were specific attributes which assisted developing this connection. Pollack (1998) addressed the importance of maintaining a sense of connection during this tumultuous time while Gilligan (1992) discussed the significance of relational experiences in developing a sense of connection. As these adolescents felt a sense of connection with adults, they felt their love and support.

Being able to relate to the adult established a connection. Age seemed to be an influential factor in terms of being able to relate to the adolescent. If the adult was close in age to the adolescent, he/she felt they could relate to the problems that he/she was going through because they had just recently been through adolescence. Some of the male adolescents spoke about the importance of relating through humor and genuine interest. Humor made the male adolescents feel more comfortable and therefore willing to share concerns. A genuine interest made one male adolescent feel there was a

connection due to the interest of the adult. This sense of connection with the adult was significant for both the male and female adolescents as it made them feel like the adult understood and therefore they were willing to speak their truth.

All three boys discussed a connection they felt with the adult. The boys were able to connect to adults if the adult could relate to their experiences or had a good sense of humor or showed genuine interest in the adult. When the boys felt this connection, there was a new kind of closeness established. In support of this research, Pollack discussed the importance of maintaining a connection with adolescent boys during tumultuous adolescence. Even though the period is trying, he believed "it is very important for parents to stay attuned to the voices of their adolescent boys and seek as many opportunities as possible to share the potency of connection" (1998, p.176). It is this connection with the boys that will lay the groundwork for more meaningful relationships with the boys.

Gilligan (1991) discussed the importance of relational experiences in adolescence. Without connection, adolescents are faced with disconnection and a loss of voice in the relationship. A few of the adolescents spoke about situations where their voices were lost and/or at times silenced. The adolescents' examples provide evidence to this relationship between having a connection with an adult and having a voice and not having a relationship and voice being silenced. Blair spoke about how his mother became upset during hockey games, was kicked out of a game and never returned to watch him. Although Blair was very upset and felt neglected he never addressed this with his mom. Instead he would joke around about the fact that she would not go. Megan wanted to address her concerns to her parents about their irrational responses however, she was

unable to speak her truth. For both Jackson and Megan, the lack of connection with the adult silenced their voices.

Both male and female adolescents in this research made reference to feeling the adults love or care for them in the relationship. Tim, Grace and Ra spoke about the love and care they felt from an adult and its importance in providing them with support to take risks. I would take this statement one step further by stating that it is through this sense of unconditional love and care that adolescents feel connected. There is literature to support this connection through love and care. Pollack (1998) wrote "...be nurturing and stay attached...boys are never hurt by too much love!" (Pollack, p.134) He goes on to discuss the effects of providing boys with this love and connection. In agreement with Pollack (1998) but adding female adolescents, I believe, both male and female adolescents need the same love and connection provided for them when they were toddlers. The ways of showing this love and affection may change as they progress through adolescence however, the feeling of love and connection is essential to their well being. I believe this love and connection is one of the main ingredients to establishing a meaningful relationship where adolescents can speak their truth.

Staying connected with adolescents during this tumultuous time is essential. Adolescents do require as much time as a toddler. Both male and female adolescents need relational experiences to feel connected. Without connection, adolescents are unable to speak their truth and become lost in the silence of their voice. With connection, adolescents feel loved and supported.

### **Role Model**

*"Definitely, I think the little life lessons role modeled by parents benefit you. The way I think it benefits me the most is in the future when I am raising kids, I've had an almost ideal example of how to do things."*

*Tim*

Family members were the role models for five of the six adolescents interviewed in this research. This fact portrayed the importance that family members had in the lives of these adolescents. Pipher, Gurian and Pollack support the importance of being aware of the powerful role parents have as role models. Pipher discussed the influential effects of observing equal relationships while Pollack and Gurian discussed the importance of having a role model.

These adolescents spoke about parents and grandparents being positive, inspiring role models. By observing the lives of others, these adolescents learned about university, parenting, speaking your truth and dealing with difficulties. Observing and hearing about the lives of these role models taught these adolescents about life. There were two adolescents who spoke about how the parents role modeled an equal relationship. In fact these two adolescents discussed the influence this role modeling had in future relationships with the opposite sex. Conversely, three adolescents revealed the unequal roles in the family and how it influenced their perceptions of their parents. For example, the two males spoke more respectfully about their fathers' role in the family than the mothers'. Even though a female adolescent valued her mother's role, she spoke about the power imbalance being role modeled. Pipher (1994) also recognized the importance of role modeling with regards to parents modeling respect and equality which they want their daughters to experience in the outside world. "Fathers can model good male-female relationships and respect for women in a wide variety of roles" (Pipher, p. 285).

Once again with parenting, she discussed the importance of becoming aware of socializing gender-stereotypes and the influence their behavior patterns have on girls in particular. Although Pipher focussed on adolescent females, I believe the influence of gender-stereotyping is the similar with boys. Both boys and girls need a tremendous amount of support to resist the cultural gender-stereotyping. "Good fathers are nurturing, physically affectionate and involved in the lives of their daughters. Good mothers model self-sufficiency and self-love and are responsive, but not responsible for their family members" (Pipher, 1994, p. 286). With regards to equality, Pipher explained that ideal "true equality" is difficult to role model in the family but it can be done.

Gurian (1994) addressed the importance of male role models in the "boys' culture". "Without male role models, boy culture feels lost, and human culture in general is put in danger" (Gurian, p.45). Male role models offer boys guidance, direction and teaching regarding issues such as discipline, relationships with girls, empathy and sexuality. Although male role models are important, I believe women can also be role models in the same areas as men. What I believe Gurian is missing is the importance of female role models in the lives of adolescent boys.

In his book, Real Boys, Pollack addressed the impact of family members as role models. Similar to this research, when Pollack asked adolescent boys to describe a hero or heroine they chose family members, grandparents, parents and siblings. Our research provides more evidence that "by and large, they (adolescent boys) feel tremendous admiration for the mentors in their family, and more than any other category of people, they see these relatives as their heroes and heroines" (1998, p.176). Both the literature

and this research are in agreement that boys and girls look to relatives the most for “guidance, love and support” (1998, p.176).

### **Calm During The Storm**

In addition to role modeling specific roles and behaviors, there was another influential attribute role modeled—calmness. Each adolescent who spoke about a calm parent stated the desire to be around the calmer parent rather than the flustered parent. This evidence is supported by this research. Pipher stated that it is important for parents to be reasonably calm during the storms. This provides a sense of order during the chaos. In addition, if there are soothing positive words, Pipher believed the adolescents would internalize these words such as “Nobody is perfect” “Most people feel awkward at parties.” Another important aspect of being calm that Pipher addressed is that calm parents tend to hear more than the less calm parent who talks incessantly throughout the confusion.

There is agreement with the literature and this research that parent role models are powerful. They can affect the way adolescents perceive the world. Role models can impact the way adolescents are in relationships. This research provides evidence that calm parents can influence adolescents’ personalities. During the turbulence of adolescence, whether it is a family member or outside adult, adolescents are looking to role models for guidance, support and love.

### **Providing Successful Challenges**

Challenges created by the adults allowed these adolescents opportunities to enhance their growth and development. Most of the challenges occurred with instructors but the tone was different with each gender. For Megan, her dance teacher provided her

with an opportunity to go to Europe to dance as a duet in a performance. This challenge was exciting and made Megan begin to believe in herself as a dancer. Jackson was given a different challenge, his commanding officer told him he didn't deserve the new position and he better prove it. To prove to his commanding officer that he deserved the new position, Jackson challenged himself to become a leader and more involved in the air cadets. Both adolescents stated that they grew as a person however, the challenges were given in different ways. The importance of challenging adolescents is supported in research. Pipher (1994) stated, "Certain kinds of homes help girls hold on to their true selves. These homes offer girls both protection and challenges" (Pipher, p.284).

Challenge and protection are seen as complimenting each other. In this sense, the adolescent is given affection and structure and at the same time firm guidelines. As Pipher stated, the girls (and boys) hear, "I love you, but I have expectations" (Pipher, p.284).

### **Family Foundation**

*"I just think in general, the whole family support is the best thing. Just knowing I have a really strong family base will help me in life. Emotionally I can always count on them."*  
Grace

Having a strong family foundation allowed the adolescents to feel like they could go out and do anything. Much literature supports the importance of having a strong family foundation. As previously mentioned, Michael Gurian (1994) discussed the importance of males having a tribe which consisted of three families. There was much influence with these families in the formation of the male identity. Simultaneously, these families offered communication, support, positive role models and a variety of adults to turn to during difficult times.



In Real Boys (1994), a study revealed the importance of family relationships:

The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (1996), found that teenagers who felt connected to their families were less likely to experience emotional distress. They were also less likely to engage in violence, attempt suicide, or use harmful substances. The key factors were parents who “shared activities” with teens, who were physically present at key time during the day, and, most important, who expressed warmth, love, and caring (1998, p.310).

Families are just as important to females. “Almost all girls have difficulty with their families...but the healthy girls know that their parents love them and stay connected in important ways. They keep talking and seeking contact. Even if they rage at their parents on the surface, a part of them remains loyal and connected to them” (Pipher, p.265).

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS AND COUNSELLORS**

From these findings, it is evident that there are adult qualities that can enhance their relationship with adolescents. Although adolescents do not overtly look for adult qualities, shared experiences have shown there are specific adult qualities that make a difference. These adult qualities enhanced the sense of connection with adolescents during a tumultuous time. Having a significant adult during the transition into grades seven, eight and nine definitely assisted and enhanced the development of these adolescents. The adults were able to provide stability during a chaotic period.

It is important that parents, educators, counsellors and others working with adolescents begin to acknowledge the variety of adult qualities adolescents need. An important task for adults is to openly address the needs of adolescents and fit these needs.

We need to spend more time questioning the type of open communication adolescents require and provide an avenue for this to occur. For many educators, parents and teachers, it is essential to provide adolescents with a safe, non-threatening environment where they are able to speak their truth. An environment where the adult will not judge the adolescents' actions, rather provide them with a good ear to listen and perhaps in some cases personal experiences or examples of similar situations. The opportunity for communication may occur at the most inopportune moments and it requires adults to stop what they are doing and listen.

The adolescents outlined ways they know if adults are listening. They recommend that adults don't turn the conversation around to themselves. Also bringing up topics later made adolescents feel the adults were listening. Trust was another part of open communication, specifically with the girls. These adolescents did not like when adults would use their conversations negatively later and "bring it back in my face". Adolescents lost trust in adults who would tell other adults confidential conversations. In addition to listening and trust, communication takes time, something in today's society we need to schedule in.

The cry for open communication and attention is interesting as so often we are told by developmental theories or other professionals to leave adolescents alone and allow them to grow independent of us. These findings support the need for adults to be connected to adolescents and provide them with the time and attention they require. Enough evidence shows that an important connection with an adult can make a difference during adolescence. Therefore, it is time we began to educate adults about the qualities they need.

Giving these adolescents time and attention made them feel special and important. Some time with adults was spent driving adolescents to and from various activities. Becoming involved in adolescent activities can increase adolescents' confidence and allow them to feel supported and cared for. Adults should make it a priority to drive adolescents to their activities or become knowledgeable about their interests. The adolescents felt they could talk with the adult as a result of this adult involvement. As the adults spent time with the adolescents, they felt a deeper connection.

As a sense of belonging was important to these adolescents, the adults assisted in making the adolescents feel like they belonged to a team or family. The adults did this by including adolescents in productions, team or family activities. Supportive words and positive reinforcement encouraged the adolescents to belong to a group and this meant much to the adolescents.

Challenges adults created for adolescents were difficult but also provided opportunities for success. Most of the challenges came from coaches and teachers where the adolescents felt that the challenge was an opportunity for success. The expectations were clear and in reach for the adolescents. Providing these challenges for adolescents allowed opportunities for success and to feel good about themselves.

One of the most prominent parts of role modelling was being positive and inspiring. During difficulties, adolescents saw adults being optimistic about the situation. The adults were able to see the good side of every situation. At times the adolescents observed this situation and at other times, the adults shared their experiences with the adolescents. Other aspects of role modelling that made an impression on the adolescents were gender and power equality and calmness with parents. When the adolescents saw

this, they were positively influenced and believe it affected them. Being consistent with words and actions was important. To be a good role model, adults have to practice what they preach. For example, if you ask adolescents to keep a tidy room or desk, you should make sure that your room or desk is also tidy. As one adolescent stated, "To be a good role model, you have to lead by example."

An interesting aspect of gender is the fact that two of the three girls chose female adults and the other adolescent girl choose two female adults and one male. Similarly, all three boys mainly spoke about a male adult and one boy additionally spoke about a female. What does this mean for adults working with adolescents? In my opinion, it is important to recognize the male and female differences in adult attributes that were meaningful. For the females, trust and being with the girls was important. For the males, joking around and being active in sports was important. The females looked to the adults for assistance regarding relationships and activities they were involved in. Most importantly, these female adolescents wanted to be able to completely trust the adult and tell them everything she was feeling. The males looked for guidance in homework and with issues surrounding sexuality. These results indicate that males and females look to adults for different things. As adults we can recognize these differences and make the necessary changes each gender requires.

A few of the male adolescents were unable to speak to adults about emotions during adolescence however, they provided some perspective and information regarding what adults needed to do in order for them to seek help. One male adolescent stated, "It would take a lot for me to go to someone especially during grade seven, eight and nine." We need to respect the courage of these adolescents by positively reinforcing their

strength and courage should they chose to come to speak with us. If an adolescent chooses to speak to an adult, the adult should feel honored and respect the adolescent. These adolescents described the importance of establishing a connection and relationship through shared and/or relaxed activities. Additionally, one adolescent pointed out, "Building a level of confidence with the things I could talk about is important." We need to educate our boys about feelings and enhance their confidence so that they are able to communicate and seek help from adults.

### **Practical Applications for Teachers and School Counsellors**

As a teacher there are many different ways to assist adolescents during the transition into adolescence. Previously, I have spoken about what adults can do while working with adolescents however, I would like to specifically discuss how teachers and School Counsellors can use this information.

First and foremost it is important for teachers and School Counsellors to have a safe and non-threatening environment. Teachers can accomplish this by establishing a warm, accepting classroom environment where each student is celebrated. Any racial or judgmental comments should be discussed with the students and simply not accepted in the classroom. Teachers can provide opportunities to communicate with students by letting the students know times when they are available for the students. For example; being in the classroom during some lunches, having lunch with students once a week, being around before or after school on certain days. If you hear of issues that are occurring in the classroom, you could initiate discussions around the topics. As a counsellor, you can provide a safe environment for the students by maintaining confidentiality, shutting the door for privacy and allowing no interruptions. For example,

give the student your undivided attention by not answering phone calls (unless waiting on emergencies) or the door. Once again, you can have group or grade discussions about issues that have come up and allow a forum to answer their questions. Let students know your schedule before school, lunch and after school so that they can approach you when they needed to talk.

Both teachers and School Counsellors can show they are listening to the students by having a “check up” with the students - bringing up topics later after conversations. Ask students about their interests and follow up with questions. Providing students with time and attention may be difficult but teachers and School Counsellors can make students feel special. They can give up a lunch, come to school early or stay late on certain days. Teachers and School Counsellors can assist with setting personal goals and helping students achieve the results. Additionally, if teachers or School Counsellors have time or another interest, they can become involved in other activities with students such as drama or sports.

In the classroom, teachers can create a sense of belonging with the students. Teachers at any age level can promote inclusion and have a no tolerance policy for exclusion. Activities that encourage inclusion should be established in the classroom. For example, the students can come up with a group name for the class, students can bring in information about their culture or about themselves, important events in the students’ lives can be celebrated and acknowledged as a group, positive actions like complimenting can be recognized.

As adolescents want to be challenged and successful, teachers and School Counsellors can assist adolescents in setting attainable goals. These challenges can be

different for each child as there are many different ways and rates that students learn.

The challenges can be academic, sporty or personal.

Teachers and School Counsellors can role model positive optimistic behavior. Teachers can focus on the positive behaviors that occur in the classroom. When setting rules and boundaries, make sure you are consistent with your words and actions. Rules, boundaries, expectations and punishments should be clearly explained and the teacher or School Counsellor should follow through.

In order to assist boys in becoming more comfortable with their feelings, teachers can talk about various emotions and feelings as different situations arise in the classroom. Teachers and School Counsellors can create relevant scenarios to act out and debrief the various emotions each character might be feeling. Encourage and positively reinforce some emotions or feelings that occur in the classroom.

As these adolescents discussed a few different gender issues, teachers and School Counsellors can acknowledge these. For example, females may need to feel more trust and require help with relationships and activities. Males may require more assistance with homework and connect with humor to build rapport. This will not always be the case but simply recognize individual differences and make adaptations for each individual.

The meaning for these adolescents to have a significant adult in their life supports Edwards (1990) indication of the importance of at least one positive relationship in the lives of adolescents. Each adolescent stressed how much it meant to be supported and loved by an adult. For many of them, it allowed them to take risks and become the person they are today.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In attempting to embed my themes with existing literature, it became apparent that few authors have written and researched it. As the literature has shown little qualitative adolescent research is available and yet, who is most knowledgeable about adolescents needs than the adolescents themselves. Listening to the voices of adolescents has provided valuable information about adult qualities.

This research has added to the present research in a few areas. Even though research has addressed the importance of communication, listening and trust, these adolescents have coined a new term "open communication" and provided a definition for this term. As almost all of the adolescents used this term, it is one that could be added to our vocabulary when working with adolescents. One of the main ways that these adolescents felt important was when adults gave them time and attention. The notion of providing adolescents with more time is another enlightening addition to research. Much research has claimed that male adolescents connect with others through activities. The female adolescents in this study have shown that adult involvement in their activities provides an opportunity to communicate and to build a connection with them. Also, the males have added to our research about connection by informing us about the importance of humor and genuine interest. Both male and female adolescents spoke about challenges and how they enjoyed when an adult challenged them in a way that allowed them to be successful. Unconditional love, care and acceptance were also additions to present research and when the adolescents felt this it meant a great deal to them.

This qualitative study revealed the experiences of adults identified by these six adolescents. The same qualitative study should be done with more adolescents. More



results would enhance the findings of this research and provide more information and support regarding qualities in adults that adolescents regard as significant. A similar study could be done regarding negative experiences with adults. This information could provide information regarding what not to do.

As the literature review showed, there is some research regarding different aspects that effect adolescents' self-esteem. More research is needed to study the effects of having a significant adult on self-esteem. Once again, if there was evidence to support adults as having a positive effect on self-esteem, adults need to be alerted to their influential role.

## CONCLUSION

*"I don't know where I would be without someone like Owen. I don't have a clue. Maybe you want to call it something else...helping me learn stuff. All I know is that he put me over the top...like you're kind of there but you need a push."*

*Jackson*

Adults can make a difference in the lives of adolescents. The adolescents in this study have shared stories about significant adults and defined important adult qualities. As adolescents search for a sense of self along with all the daily pressures they face, it is not a wonder that they desire some assistance. All of the adolescents interviewed were looking to these adults for some guidance and communication. It is time that we listen to the voices of adolescents and make some changes to become significant adults in their lives.

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## APPENDIX B

Have you experienced a significant relationship with an adult?

A graduate research study  
is being conducted exploring  
adolescent experiences of significant relationships with adults.  
I am a graduate student at the University of British Columbia.  
This study is a part of my Master's thesis in Counselling  
Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. William Borgen. I am  
looking for adolescents interested in sharing their experiences  
with me.

Are you **17-19** years of age and have experienced a **significant adult relationship** during the transition into junior high school?  
Or perhaps you have had a **horrible transition and relationship**  
with an adult and would have liked assistance from a **positive adult role model**?

If either of these situations are applicable to your life please  
join this research. Your **valuable insight** and experience could aid  
other adolescents during this transition.

The **participation** in this study involves:

A total of approximately 4 hours consisting of one brief  
screening meeting, an interview and a follow up meeting.

All the information gathered will be confidential and only used in  
the thesis.

Results will have your direct involvement.

**Your experience is essential to this study.**

For Information please call:

## APPENDIX C

### Unstructured Interview Questions

#### Warm Up

Today we will be discussing how a significant adult helped you during grades seven, eight and nine. Your experiences and insight regarding this adult is valuable information for adults trying to aid adolescents. As adults we need more information to help and support you during this difficult transition. Try to start thinking about your experiences in grade seven, eight or nine...

#### Research Question

1. Can you tell me about a situation where an adult helped you during grades 7-9?
2. Describe the qualities of the person who helped you through the situation. What did they do?
3. What was helpful? What did it mean to you? What support did you need?
4. Is there another situation when this adult helped you? Tell me about the situation.
5. Repeat questions 2 and 3.

#### Closing

4. Is there anything else that you think I should know? Perhaps there is an important question I should have asked.



## APPENDIX D

### Grace's Story

*The end of grade eight proved to be a time of transition for me, as I began to sense the overwhelming change associated with moving from my elementary school, the only school I had ever attended, to a brand new high school. It was a fairly big deal for me, probably more so than for my friends at the time because I was the only person in my peer group who was venturing out on my own, to a different school from all my friends. In looking back on it now, I realize the adventure of it all; however, at the time, the adventure did not come without some feelings of anxiousness.*

*Ever since a young age, active involvement in sports has consumed a significant portion of my time. During elementary school, I was heavily focused on competitive skipping, as my elementary school offered this as an extracurricular activity. The team to which I was a part of performed demonstrations for different local schools, as we worked with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. We also competed at the National level on several occasions. Volleyball, soccer, badminton, as well as basically any and all other sports, were also personal favourites. Active participation in athletics proved to be very rewarding on many levels.*

*In addition to sports, I was very much into music, both at school and privately. During these adolescent years, music was a big part of my life as I became part of an orchestra in the city. Every Saturday, I would commit to going downtown to play in the orchestra, while many of my friends remain at their homes. Thus, music, while a personal interest, required a significant time commitment on my part – and on the part of my parents who supported me.*

*Academics have also been important to me since a fairly young age. Interestingly enough, the pressure never came from my parents, but rather from myself. The expectations that I had for my own self proved to be a real motivating force. Fortunately, I grew up in a very supportive environment where things were never forced upon me. My parents and brother were my fans, demonstrating their support. If anything, they had to pull me back from such high personal expectations.*

*If I was to select a colour that best describes me, I would have to choose yellow. As I see myself as a person who is quite content and happy with the simple things in life, I feel that yellow tends to complement this. I tend to be quite optimistic, and so too would I describe the yellow tones. Even though grade eight was a scary time for me, this kind of yellow personality helped me to see that I was not just setting out into new waters, but into waters that would be exciting because I got to go somewhere new.*

*I am shy when I first meet people. I'm quiet and that comes from my mom but once I know people, I am very outgoing. I tend to have a nice amount of confidence, not too little and not too much.. I love public speaking and those types of things. I have to say that I think a lot of my confidence comes from my family support. Also, my music really helped me because I was in front of people at such a young age.*

*My family has always been very influential and I think one person who I looked to during my transition to high school was my brother. He is five years older than me, which meant that he had experienced many of the same things that I would be experiencing. He had been through the private school system of education, the exact system which I was entering. He was the one who had encouraged me to become involved in sports and he was the one who told me I should get on the skipping team. I*

kind of looked to him for guidance because he had been through it more recently than my parents. He could guide me better as to what to expect. He encouraged me by saying, "Don't worry about it you'll be fine" and then provided advice.

My brother and I have always been close. He did things that helped me. For example, he encouraged me to become more involved and this helped me because I was in a better situation to face the challenges presented. I had experienced much involvement with people. Where a lot of the concern for young people would have been meeting new people, I had already experienced meeting people through sports teams, musical endeavours and camp, something thy brother would remind me.. When I was homesick at camp, my brother would help me by reminding me what I had already done and that I knew how to do this.

My brother tends to be a leader. On the one hand, he is very matter of fact when he speaks; and on the other hand he is this big teddy bear inside. He has this inner strength or something that says, "The past was fun, but focus on the present." He embodied this kind of get up and fight/don't just settle for mediocrity mentality. To me, in this way, he had a motivational or inspirational effect. He's very fun and I can relate to that. Basically, he's everything I wanted to be (laugh). He was athletic, funny, good in school and he had friends. He was a leader, he inspired me, he had a good sense of humor and he was compassionate. Because I wanted to be like him, I did not want to be a disappointment. He paved the way and I wanted to make him proud of me.

When I was having difficulties, he would be compassionate with my feelings. He will listen to me and I knew he would not necessarily hear everything then but he would come back to me after some time so I really knew he had thought about it more. There

*was one year when my mom really wasn't well and I really leaned on him. Our friendship has progressed even further since then.*

*My brother had many challenges and just having watched him go through them, I developed a respect for him. When he had girlfriends, he continued to pay attention to me. A lot of people would not have cared about a younger sister but he would always say, "We're going to the movies come with us." I thought that was really nice. It made me feel included and reassured that I was an important person. His interests in me made me think that I was a worthwhile person, someone that people would want to be friends with. I wouldn't say that by the time I entered high school I was this confident person but I went into high school having this feeling of support and knowing that "hey, at least somebody likes me", and this somebody wasn't just anybody to me.*

*I think it is important to feel like somebody is listening to you. Having someone with a listening ear makes you feel that you are important. I think that people demonstrate that they are listening by picking up on the subject matter again, in another conversation. Showing an interest that reaches beyond one conversation. How they listen is important, too. Some people flip the conversation around so that it no longer pertains to you, but rather to their own self. The response, immediate and after, can make you feel heard and in this way special.*

*Just having someone like him to talk to helped. Sometimes when you talk about things, it relieves the feelings of upset that are harboured within. My initial concerns went away because I had the responses, "Look at the kind of person you are...look at the experiences you have had and how you can embark on this new task in your life*

successfully." I felt more prepared going into it, which meant that I was possibly less scared and less emotional than I would have been otherwise.

I think all this care and compassion relates to the love and support I felt. My brother was compassionate about my feelings with the transition because he had done it before. I didn't feel alone; I felt like someone else was caring. There is a bit of uncertainty during this time and something I got from my family was a strong foundation. I believe with this foundation, I could go out and do other things. Because I had the love of my family, there were other things that came into the pot but I felt I was a stronger person.

One other person I turned to was my grandmother. My mom was not well for sometime so my grandmother and I became very close. I would see her a lot and my grand mother knew a lot about me. She always let me know how proud she was of me. She had this real optimistic outlook on life and was really fun-loving. On a regular basis, I would talk to her on the phone and she would be so excited for me. I don't know if I realized it at the time but when someone who is elderly like my grandmother wasn't well and she had a lot to be down about herself, she was still so excited for me. She would constantly remind me how great things were that I was doing. It was like she was living through me in a nice way. She was so encouraging and happy. She was another positive example for me.

At then end of grade nine when my mom was ill, my nana became a really positive influence in my life. I jumped to a new level of maturity because I did a lot for my brother and dad, a lot of which my nana would teach me. She was always ready to lend a helping hand, even if it meant driving up from the city to simply talk or even prepare a

*meal. My grandparents would make the effort to come up and stay with us. She tried to maintain some sense of stability during this time...they would come up for Sunday meals. Consistency was important to us during this time. My nana helped keep things somewhat normal. She had been ill herself and new the hospital system. She provided me with some sense of contentment and reassurance that it was going to be ok. Even if it wasn't going to be fine, she said she would be there for me.*

*I think my grandmother was different because she was "with it" and so I could relate to her. This connection was significant to me. Even though she was eighty years old, she would read the paper and be up on fashion and tell me what she thought was good and what she thought was bad. She had a very vibrant mind. Having seen her, the way she dealt with challenges in her life, I think it taught me about life and guided me. My nana always had this bright outlook on things. No matter how bad it was, it could always be worked out. You just have to look on the bright side and be thankful for what you have.*

*My grandmother was a wonderful...and was a real woman of prayer. She showed total dependence on the Lord through her own times of illness, and understood the power in prayers. Knowing that so many people were praying for my mom, with my nana being one of them, was a real source of comfort for me.*

*By her being around during this period, I felt this sense of acceptance and love and that really helped give me the strength, emotionally. Through her helping me make our life more normal, there was stability in my home and my life. She constantly showed an interest in me and that made me feel like I had something to offer the world. I think I became a different person because of that.*

*I'm very close to my family and I'm very close to some friends but during this time, my family was really private so when things go wrong, we tend to keep it within the family. So if I couldn't talk to my friends, my nana was someone I could talk to and she knew my situation because it was the same as hers. Although she was reassuring, she would never try to protect me...not to the point that was unrealistic. She never told me nothing bad is going to happen. Instead, she let me know she would be there if something happened. She was very wise and wasn't just anyone to talk to, she was a good model and example for me. So the way she dealt with things, impacted the way I dealt with it.*

*She understood what I was going through and let me know that she would be there for me and would do anything to help. So if that meant they had to drive up here or if it meant I would spend the night down there she would do it. I never got the impression that she was concerned about her own feelings. She always asked how I was doing...just unselfish in terms of how other people felt. She was very, very gracious.*

*Like my brother, my nana made me feel very important. She would compliment me by saying I was a real source of light for my mom, and that I was really going to help her through her difficult time of poor health. She would tell me I was helping my dad by being close to my mom. Somehow, she made me feel like I was the anchor of the family. A lot of people may think that is stressful but it was a more positive thing...like I believe in you and I know that you can do this and you can really have an impact on how it goes in the family. So it comes back to me feeling important.*

*My parents have been wonderful support for me with no strings attached. They would say, "We love you. You are the only thing that is important" and they never put pressure on me...It's always been whatever gifts you have will make us happy. It's not*

*that they don't care. They really really care. They care so much. They have confidence in those things that I will do my best. They trust and support me.*

*While I know that they do trust me, this doesn't come without some conflict, because of their love for me. While they trust in me (laugh), they don't want me to be out until three o'clock in the morning, simply because they become worried for my safety. They don't want me walking the streets. I understand what that means. It's more what they do for me. They give of themselves for my sake.*

*A lot of parents I think take more of an interest in their friends. But with my family, its' always been our family.. Whenever my parents had free time, they would spend it with us. My mom would take us to Canada's Wonderland even if she didn't feel like it and on my dad's day off, he would spend it with the family. They wouldn't go out at night, they would stay home. Circumstances permitted my mom to be home when I was young. I can understand that not every family can have that but I think it really says a lot when your parents are willing to move down to a single income just so there is someone home if you're sick at school. I'm really grateful to my parents.*

*My dad was really busy but always made sure he was home for dinner. I think meal times are a very important part of a child's life because those are the time when you really connect with the family. It sounds ridiculous but it is times when you all gather together and can ask about your day. I don't know...I just think that it was important.*

*My parents showed a lot of interest in me whether it was music or driving. For example, my mom would drive me on Saturday mornings to the orchestra and she would stay with me the whole time. She wouldn't go shopping during that time, she came in and was there for me. They tried to get me involved in positive kinds of things and would*



*show their interest by becoming involved in what I was doing. I sensed their love with the interest they showed in me. I think both my parents were such vital parts of the family and we did things together. They would come to all my school functions, baseball games. They just wanted to do things with me. I think the way your parents treat your friends, I think shows something how they love you. My parents treated my friends very well. I guess if I had crazy friends my parents would be different but they cared about my friends.*

*I think one big thing was there wasn't any pressure for me to be something I wasn't. My parents are encouraging. They want me to do well and do what makes me happy. I think it was a unique but very good approach.*

*In my family, our Christian faith has been important. My parents are both great believers in God, something that they have brought that into our home. We take comfort in the realization that God is in control, something which was a real blessing during the time when my mom wasn't enjoying the best of health. My mom is a real woman of God. And while she believes it herself, she never has forced it on me but would encourage me in my own walk in faith. We would always go to church and I had a great sense of my faith. From a young age 12-14, it wasn't a big factor but it was there. Just the atmosphere of the church itself and the people in the church how they support a lot of people. I had a very good youth group and that was a positive experience. I think at this age you can go one way or the other with rebellion and I think getting involved with things at the church helped.*

*When I think about role models outside my family, I would find it very difficult to choose someone who has the all encompassing qualities that my parents or grandparents*

*have. I feel lucky that I have so many people in my family who are role models for me. I think people with broken homes must have a difficult time choosing a role model outside the home. I can't even think of one.*

*I can't imagine if I didn't have these people in my life because I've just learned so much from them. I have an unusual closeness from my family; I think that I would be a different person if I only had my friends to talk to. I have been blessed with my parents and having them meant everything. I don't even know what it would have been like without them. I was able to deal so much better with whatever was thrown at me. I was stronger emotionally and mentally because of them.*

*My grandmother helped me maintain a kind of stability and my parents have as well because of their consistency. Looking back, when times were difficult, my parents rode the wave. Their consistent demonstration of love and support has meant so much to me, and has definitely helped make me the person I am today.*

## APPENDIX E

### Megan's Story

*One of the best things that happened to me during grades seven eight and nine was being chosen to act on a CBC TV show. I'll never forget the day my mom called me at school to tell me the job was mine. She was so excited it was like she was coming out of the wires. That was the thing with my mom. She was completely enthusiastic and supportive of this endeavor. In fact, she became my advocate at school. She received permission from the principal and talked to all the teachers about missing school. During this TV shoot, my mom would drive me four days a week into downtown Toronto. Everyday we drove down, I really appreciated everything my mom was doing. Even when she was tired and had to do things with my brothers, she continued to drive me without complaining. Due to the fact that my mom had to drive me everyday, it really became a shared experience between my mom and I. She met the whole cast with me and met the other mothers. The whole adventure was a positive experience for everyone.*

*During the CBC TV show, there were qualities in my mom that stood out. The fact that she drove me everywhere was amazing. We travelled to Toronto, which was about an hour to an hour and a half away, four to five times a week. From the first phone call, my mom was completely supportive and encouraging. Her schedule allowed her the flexibility to accommodate my role and I really appreciated her efforts. She understood my sliding academics and the fact that participating in it would be a big transition. Every time I had anxiety she knew just what to say and do. At school, she bent over backwards to help me with the school work I would be missing. The day I received my first D I gasped for air. However, my mom and teachers knew my capabilities and knew*

*that I could do better if I had more time. The experience with the TV show was supported by all the people surrounding me and we all thought it was a once in lifetime experience. Due to her involvement, I felt like it was a shared experience. To this day, we still watch the movie together and laugh about it. My mom was just happy and willing to help participate and accomplish this journey.*

*Camp life was another excitement that occurred during the summer. One of these summers I realized how much my mom wanted to protect me. My grandmother was ill at the time and I did not know the seriousness of her illness. However this specific summer, I was permitted to go to summer camp for an extra session. At the time I was so happy because it meant more time to enjoy the activities and friendships at camp. Later, I learned that I was sent to camp for an extra session because my mom wanted to spare me from watching my grandmother's dementia become worse. She thought I would cope better if I was away and she didn't want me there for all the unrest. The whole time and even now I never thought I was being "sent away". I thought it was really cool that I was able to go to camp for a longer period. In this way she was playing a motherly role and I didn't mind. I felt like she cared about me. When I came back, the whole thing was finished with my grandmother.*

*My relationship with my mom was not "friendship based". When I was handling specific difficult situations, I would not talk to her. More broad situations like why my friends were acting weird in grade 8 were issues I would ask for her advice. However, even with my friendships, she didn't know the details or get involved. She was not a girlfriend to me ...she was a dedicated mom to all the children. My mom was very*

*protective of me which I liked because I felt like it showed she was concerned about me and I thought she knew what was best for me.*

*My mom and I don't have a close, close relationship. We're close but I don't tell her everything. Some of my friends had friendship relationships with their mothers and I often wondered what that would be like. With my mom, I felt like there was no definition of our relationship. In this sense, at times, I didn't know where I fit in the relationship. For me, having a mother daughter relationship like this one meant that we had a "good mutual understanding". My mom did a lot for me going back and forth from CBC. After driving everyday, I knew my mom was tired and I acknowledged this by telling her how much I appreciated her effort and by making her tea. This made my mom feel appreciated and respected. I believe my mom was always looking out for my best interests. I think what I really needed at that time my mom could not provide.*

*What I needed was a big sister, someone who was a little older and wiser. Sometimes I would dream about what it would be like to have an older sister. I always wanted someone with whom I could share everything with and who would be 100% supportive and confidential. This "big sister" would provide that and she would also provide guidance and advice on things that I was going through. She would be able to relate to me because she would have just gone through it herself. A big sister would have been through everything I had been through and therefore would understand what I was feeling. When I was having difficulties, I would be able to go to her to talk about specific details and she would offer support. Trust would be a large part of the relationship. I would be confident in the fact that I could confide everything to her...she wouldn't tell anyone else. She would be a friend but also play an authority role in my life. Due to her*

objective nature, she would be able to help me work on myself as well as the situation. In this sense, she would help me grow as a person. We could chat about parties, guys and whatever I said would not come back to haunt me later on.

See in my family you had to be careful with what you said because you never really knew when it my come right back in your face. I struggled with this much of adolescence. There was a large part of me that wanted to tell the truth but sometimes when I told the truth my parents freaked out. The worst part was that I could not tell what would upset them...sometimes it was a small thing that set them off and other times it was a bigger thing. During times when I was in trouble, I felt my parents were judging me. My parents made me feel like I couldn't be trusted when I went over to friends' houses. I was unable to figure out what to say and did not know what the rules were. Even presently, I don't think my parents really know or understand who I am.

My family consisted of three older brothers, a mom and dad. Growing up in our family there definitely was a two-tier system. The boys did things together and the girls did things together. Come to think of it, it's kind of funny, I didn't really have a relationship with any of my brothers until they went to university. Now I can call them up anytime and speak to them about what's going on. But back then, I can't remember doing much with them or talking to them. My dad was in a position of authority, not a friend. He paid the bills around the house. My mom stayed at home to look after the children and that was just the way it was.

I think that my parents were not consistent with me in certain situations. It might have been because my older brothers were very different. They went through development differently and had different reactions with my parents. For me it started

*when I was with a friend in grade 9 or 10 and we were driving pretty far away to go to a party. I wanted to tell my parents the truth but I wasn't sure how they would react.*

*Especially when my parents wouldn't even trust me to go to a friend's house to watch a movie. They would have to know who the friend was, the address of his/her house, the phone number and she would call the house to make sure that what I was saying was really happening. And their reactions were so difficult to comprehend. Some times things would be a huge deal and they would freak out while other things would be fine. I never knew which ones were ok and which actions/activities were not. Sometimes I would be honest and they would be really mad at me. But then when I would hide the truth, they would get mad at me for hiding the truth. It really was a no win situation.*

*I was a good kid...into sports...did well in school.yet, I would receive the response "NO you can't go to that party." I mean what warrants that decision? When I would ask my parents how they came up with these types of decisions or about my curfew, my mom would mention an article that she had read. I would be thinking "Hello, I'm here what about me??? Don't I have any input into the decision?" I think more communication would have been appreciated around the decision making.*

*I think another factor with my parents was the fact that there was a generation gap and I really don't think they accepted it or acknowledged there was a difference growing up in their time in comparison to my time. I never confronted them because I was anxious about the way it would be perceived. Sometimes I think it would be really nice to enjoy hanging around my parents but I really don't feel that way. I don't like friends coming over and I don't really like to be there alone. I would rather hang out with other friends.*

*If I had to choose a color to represent this period, it would be bright blue. I think I knew myself well during this time but my friends were not representative of my identity... you know the whole girl friend thing where one week she's your friend and next week she's not a friend. A bright yellow would be like these are my girls, this is what I do, this is what's happening...very distinct. That wasn't really who I was. I think I was unique...different from the girls. Blue is more mysterious but still standing out.*

*I liked to be friendly and outgoing. Most of the teachers liked me. I had good rapport with them and never really caused any problems. The only times I experienced some difficulties were with my friends. I didn't really understand what was going on. Most of my friends made really big deals about everything. Some friends would like me one day and not the next so I went back and forth to different groups of friends. In this way, sometimes I felt like an outsider because I didn't really belong to one specific group the whole time. I felt divided. In class I would be seated beside some girls and due to the seating arrangements, I made friends with people who were "not supposed" to be my friends. I didn't want to confront my friends because I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. By grade nine, I would just float in-between friends. My best times were when I had a best friend and I could do my own thing, dancing.*

*Dancing was a huge part of my life that took up a lot of time. When I was younger, I used to be a part of a Dance company where I practised tap, jazz, ballet and acrobats. My dance teacher was an adult who helped me to blossom as a dancer. Even though dancing was very competitive, her calmness created a peaceful atmosphere. She was competent in her dancing skills and constantly challenged me to become better with my skills.*



*One year we went to Europe to perform a dance. Before the trip, we all got together and talked about the trip and our dance teacher talked to us about girl stuff. I had never talked to anyone about periods and stuff before. But she brought it up and we all talked openly and felt that she really understood.*

*My dance teacher made me feel special because she included me in all the shows even though I was only 13 and everyone else was 15. For the Europe trip, she asked me to be in a duet and that was amazing. These opportunities that she initiated and gave to me brought my dance to another level. During practices and shows, she never doubted my abilities. Instead she encouraged and challenged me. When she gave me constructive criticism, she was calm, honest and straight to the point. She would outline my positive and negative skills. This type of open communication made me feel comfortable. She was clear, she would say something, do it and progression would be made. Throughout the practices, she was continually validating my competencies and capabilities. The dance studio was a very tight knit community and I think that was what she wanted. She believed in me as a dancer and that made me start to believe in myself.*

## APPENDIX F

### Tim's Story

*I was really into sports in grade seven, eight and nine. There were three terms and each term I played a different sport. That was a big part of my life. Summer cottage life was something I looked forward to during the school year. Back then I struggled with school a lot. Actually around grade seven, I was kind of coming to terms with everything. In the earlier years I had to work really hard at everything to get decent marks, even fifties, because I had a learning disability. In grade seven and eight I began to realize I didn't have to work as hard to get like sixties or seventies. So I started to slack off and not do much work in school. However, I was getting better marks than in previous years and that was interesting. I was very focussed on school, just trying to get by. Girlfriends are big but I had no girlfriend then.*

*Most of my friends were Italian and I had three close friends. They were all really good in sports too and were big soccer and hockey players. I think we were the jocks type thing. I had a few friends outside of the school too. These friends I slowly met through sports training. That was more in grade nine when I started going to parties.*

*I think I've always been pretty outgoing. With people I don't know, I am not a very open person, I don't really talk to people I don't know. Like my sister can talk to anybody and everyone, I'm not really like that. I've very open with people I knew and I'm cools with other people I just am not particularly close to casual acquaintances. I've always been like that, just a few special friends and that's it. I don't like twenty friends you know. I wasn't a shy kid. I think sports helped out with being more comfortable with people.*

*Red...I just remember red being my favorite color back then. I've always liked red. It was actually in grade nine I was getting into painting too. But red I don't know I just always liked it. There is something about it. I associated red with a lot of things like blood. Blood as it relates to the body after you have worked out and you have a red face and cheeks.*

*My dad is the first person that comes to my mind with everything, sports, any topic and anything. School was my main difficulty when I was younger. My dad helped me by encouraging me a lot but mostly it's always been my work. My parents have not been super stressed at getting marks. They've always wanted me to do well, to do my very best, but they never say, "We'll give you twenty bucks if you get eighties." They have come to realize that I have to work hard to do well and it's just taken me a long time to do that. But my dad with everything, marking papers, he was always there helping me out with stuff. It's just encouraging to know that he has a Ph.D in English and he's definitely qualified to help me. I feel like I have a one up on everyone when it comes to editing papers and stuff.*

*His life has been encouraging. He's sixty and looking at his life and accomplishments, I realize how hard he worked at everything in school, like eleven years. He doesn't have to say anything to me, just seeing the life he's lead make me want a life like his. All the work he put in, he didn't do well in school. He did terribly in high school because he was really sick. But that is fine with him, he didn't get the greatest grades in high school. It really takes the importance off of school. His experiences in school were the same as mine. He had hardship with school too so I can relate to him. When he*

would say it's not the end of the world if I don't do well on a test, there was no pressure. He would just encourage me to study.

Also, he helped us with sports and made us more knowledgeable about sports than other people. He stretched our minds and taught us how to be more prepared for certain events. So I would feel like I had a one up on people when it came to sports knowledge, how to perform well in every sport. Just being on top of things, knowing how the world works in regards to things, I definitely found that helpful.

I think what has helped me is mostly my dad's intelligence, his true intelligence. He's the smartest guy I know. So to have him under the same roof as me and spend so much time with him I feel lucky. He won an Olympic medal, ran major companies and he's done everything. That's just an inspiration for sure. The fact that he has done everything anyone would ever want to do in any aspect of life is inspiring. He covered it all. Maybe it's because he is older, sixty. He's accomplished a lot. At school, he's had a lot more time because of being retired.

He's really open. He's just cool with things. He knows what to talk about and has a tendency to talk about things so that's cool, it lets you know he cares and that he's cool about stuff. In grade eight there were sex chats and he's cool, he was understanding. I remember with my brother and I he used to sit down with us every once in awhile and he would try to see what was up and talk to us about little things. So that was cool, he just wanted to know things. Also, he would share his views on different things and how they were alternative to what you were hearing from other people. I found his views interesting.

*I could relate to him too because after all he's done, he's down to earth. He's definitely someone you learn from just by seeing how they do things and how they've done things. He would tell us stories about how things happened in his day. It was interesting to think about how long ago that was and to look back on it was like wow.*

*I think my mom had a big part in my life too. She's the most amazing person to talk to even more than my dad. She really is a good listener and that helps. Just knowing that someone cares I think is a big step towards trusting them to talk. If you need someone to talk to and know that you have parents there who actually care what's going on and they're asking you always what's wrong you feel important. My mom would ask, "Why are you pouting? Or What's going on?" I felt she was just letting me know that she was still there for me. My mom would talk to me about how teenage years are crazy, that it happens to everyone and that would help.*

*My mom is strong with everything compared to other parents. Even in the teenage years when my parents were like you have to be home at a certain time, I would get so mad. But then I would realize that it was just because they cared. They cared more. I'd say well so and so can stay out late and then I would start to realize it's because the parents don't care about him. They don't care what he's doing. So it's just showing us how much time and how much effort they put into making our lives so amazing that has really helped us out in relationships. A lot of time, I think that was a big part too.*

*There were the little lessons in life too that made a big difference. I remember a situation a little earlier than the teenage years but I was stealing something like a big foot because my mom wouldn't buy it for me. When we were in the car, my mom saw me*

*and she was like what is that because she wouldn't let me have anything. So she made me go back and apologize to the store owner and made it a huge issue. Definitely, I think the little life lessons benefit you. The way I think it benefits me the most is in the future when I am raising kids, I've had an almost ideal example of how to do things.*

*When I was younger I had a lot of temper tantrums. I would act out, spazing out on people and hitting them. The disciplinary technique I liked the idea. I remember once I was just uncontrollable. I thought no one could do anything except my father and mother. One time my brother's friend was over and he was a funny kid (laugh). We were playing or something and they both were getting me mad and stuff. I remember, I kicked this guy in the back and his neck was out and he was all hurt. As soon as I did it, my brother went running to the house and told my dad. I remember I was terrified, just terrified because I had realized what I had done and that my dad would spank me. I was really worried. I remember the whole spanking thing really let me know that there was something to be scared of because if there was nothing of that, I could have gotten away with something like grounding me in my room. It's not like it shouldn't have the same effect, I just think it really helped having something out there that was like woooo, you know really scared. I think my dad did a really good job with that. It wasn't like you're bad and I'm mad at you, it just needs to be done.*

*My parents have supported me with the whole sexuality thing. It didn't hit me until later after I got into high school. I think people get informed about that kind of stuff to early personally (a little laugh). I remember my dad talked to us about masturbation once. It was really funny. It was just cool knowing he had actually thought about it. Like you know he had thought about it and it was a relief to know that. He's not the*

*smoothest talker (laugh). We were just playing cards or something at the cottage and he put his book down and started talking. We were laughing at him so hard. We couldn't believe he was talking about that. It was unbelievably funny but he got the point across. It was cool knowing he's out there and watching out for us.*

*In sports, I played for this one hockey team. I think it was grade nine or something. I was fifteen and probably serious about it. I was pretty good and stuff. I played with this one team and it was just unreal...crazy fights every game. Parents were fighting and everything. It was just a terrible atmosphere. My mom came to one game and she was terrified and upset. I was just talking to them to get their feedback on the issues and it helped give me a broader perspective on how it would be terribly unhealthy. I ended up quitting the team because it wasn't healthy at all. But they helped me realize that it was an ok thing to do in that situation. They taught me how to do it properly, how to deal with coaches and how to quit something and give up something properly without insulting people. Mostly it was great being able to go to both of them to talk and get their perspectives.*

*My parents emphasized being well rounded and encouraged us not to specify too early. Rather, we should have a broad perspective of what's going on and enjoy life. They were encouraging in school. I just think in general, the whole family support is the best thing. Just knowing I have a really strong family base will help me in life. Emotionally I can always count on them.*

*They have helped develop my mind and whole body. In every avenue of like they have been there, done it and they know what it's all about. They are out there to give their opinions, even if you don't take it, it's nice to know how they feel about things.*

*They can relate to what's going on, especially my dad he's a guy except my mom can relate to somethings. He's just a lot cooler with things. When there is a part my mom will get worried and say, "I'm worried, I don't want him to go." My dad's like, "Don't worry go." So he's really cool about that stuff and I think it really helps me develop to my fullest. I leave for university next year and I've started to be equipped for leaving, it's been really helpful. It's also really sad for me. I'm not like most kids who say I've got to get away from my parents. They've helped for sure and I feel prepared for that.*

*I think the biggest thing is knowing that my parents care. Even if you don't want to talk, just knowing they would want to hear about it. Even if they are nosy about things and always asking you it's better than them not caring. And if you have to make the extra effort and go, "Yo dad can I talk to you about this and this", he was always all ears. That's really important for adolescent is to be able to talk to someone. Another thing that I think is important is to have an equal balance of a mom and dad. Especially with mine, having a masculine and feminine perspective helps with girlfriends and everything. It's definitely good to have a sense about what's going on for both sides of the fence.*

*With my experiences with my parents, I feel as though I am more equipped to live life. I'm ready. I feel like I have an advantage. I've had a wonderful childhood, better than most people and that is really helpful. I don't know it's really reassuring to know that I have had a good childhood and I think it helps a lot more than people give it credit. Having both of them right together, perhaps I should have focussed them together. It's been unreal, how much they have helped with everything. I feel blessed, it's a blessing for sure. I feel like one of the luckiest kids. My whole childhood, everything has been*



*unreal, no regrets whatsoever. I think it's been wonderful. I feel incredibly lucky you know, so that's good. I definitely felt that I was their number one priority for sure.*

## APPENDIX G

### Jackson's Story

*The first thing that comes to my mind when I think about myself in grades seven, eight and nine is active sports. At that time, I was involved very heavily in soccer playing on three soccer teams per season. Soccer had three different levels: league, select and then rep. In grade nine I played basketball and volleyball and that was pretty much my life at school. Academics weren't really a problem for me but the bottom line was the fact that I didn't try. I went to school, came home and did not look at my books. I wasn't getting 80's but it was "very good" work. The teachers were always saying, "He has potential but he doesn't try." I just went to class and didn't do any extra work.*

*Family was great. In grade nine, two cousins from Jamaica moved in with us. This meant there were three girls, my sister who was four years older than myself and two cousins who were the same age as my sister. So they were all four years older than me. Three girls one guy...wasn't good. They basically had the house, "Get out." In addition, this year was my first year of high school and I didn't go to the high school closest to my house, I went to my sister's high school where I didn't know as many people.*

*My parents say I was very shy. However, when I got to know people, no problem. I think it's important for me to say that it all changed with air cadets. I became more confident. Grade nine wasn't really a problem, even though I didn't know many people I was fine. People say that I was very confident but I don't really care what other people think.*

*A color to describe me blue...air cadets was all blue. Blue uniforms, blue sky. I felt like I belonged to this group.*

*In grade eight I started air cadets and that is a different side of my life...a huge part of my life. At that time, I was just starting and I didn't enjoy it that much. Basically my father told me to do cadets. My parents always said I was reluctant to try new things so they would have to make me and then I would end up either liking it or not liking it. So my dad basically said you're doing cadets not questions asked. Air cadets are basically like scouts but on a higher level. You participate ages 12-19. It is government funded and basically you are there to learn about citizenship, leadership, responsibility and then about airplane aspects like meteorology. You move up ranks through out the years depending on your involvement and courses completed.*

*I had a specific group of friends but I wasn't really happy about it at the time. We were different in terms of air cadets and stuff. Air cadets wasn't cool and they were concerned with who was cool. So I wasn't really happy with that. I just kept myself busy doing other things and having friends with teams...not really school friends. There was a bit of a problem with my friends because I didn't try anything like smoking and all that kind of stuff. I had made the decision to myself that I would never smoke or try that kind of thing. So I remember that this was difficult because I wasn't into petty crime or anything ~~and~~ all my friends were doing it. I would be the only one who would say, "I'm leaving" and that separated me.*

*During this difficulty with all my friends, I didn't have anyone to talk to. It wasn't really a problem for me. I had made a choice for myself and that was it. I had made the decision previous to my friends involvement so when it came up I was just like see you*

later. It really wasn't a problem for me. If there could have been an adult I think I would want someone a little older than myself, someone who knew me. You can't really go to somebody if they don't know you. I think it's almost like a big brother thing which I didn't really have. I have a sister but I didn't really talk to her, she was a virgo and I was a virgo...not a good thing.

It's funny actually, I think at that point in time I was closed but then I opened up later because I did have someone. A friend of the family actually moved into the basement of our house. He went away to university and when he returned, his parents had moved. We had a finished basement and he moved in. He lived there for seven years. He was well respected by others. He was a very humorous, funny, easy-going guy and believed in hard work. He liked to have fun but when it came down to work he did it. When he came back from work, he would always push me. If I wasn't doing anything he'd say, "What are you doing? You're going to be a lazy bum when you grow up." So he kind of took over the role of my dad. When you get to that age, the relationship with your dad becomes a little different. Puberty hits and you want to talk to someone a little younger. He would say things in a joking manner and would come to me to talk about things. Usually friends would come over, a girlfriend and he would try to get to know them because he lived in the house and wanted to know what was going on. Even the little things you would bring up, he would be open and just sit there and listen.

I think Owen took me under his wing. He always asked about school and he explained that if I didn't get high marks, I wouldn't go to university. I wasn't sure about university and he would open his mouth and say, "Uh oh. You need to get into shape in order to get into university. You need to be prepared." At night he was kind of a pain in

*the butt because he would come home and say, "What did you do for homework?" I knew it was coming and so I would think maybe I should do some work quickly and then pass it off to him. Prior to Owen, I was never really focussed on school. So he would relate why it is important to learn. He would always ask the big questions and narrow it down to what I was doing which was very effective for me. He kind of realized I had the potential and wanted to make me understand.*

*There was one significant moment when I realized how naïve I was. There was this one course in anatomy and physiology which I really enjoyed and spent time studying. My friend and I were memorizing bones and studying for a midterm thinking we were going to ace the exam. Owen pulled out the book to test us, looked down at the book that was titled Anatomy and Physiology and said, "What does anatomy and physiology mean?" We both said, "I don't know" and felt so dumb. At that time we were like holy crap we don't know what we're talking about here. You think you know but you don't. This situation changed my learning style. Instead of focussing on memorizing stuff, I started looking at the big picture. One simple question. My friend and I looked at each other and we like, "Oh we're in trouble."*

*Owen supported me by teaching me the ethics of working hard if you had something to do. There was no procrastination. I was fairly busy at the time with air cadets and sports and whatnots. His motto was "no TV" ...news was fine but don't sit down to watch anything. I'd be watching TV and he would sit down beside me and start joking and say, "Wow this is really educational." So we would start making jokes and I knew I was caught. It made me realize what was important and it changed my priorities. I realized that sports wasn't really the number one priority. Although sports were*

*important, school should not be at the bottom of the list. He would ask me, "What do you want with life? How are you going to get it? What are you going to do today?" He was always looking at the big picture and that helped me prioritize.*

*I could ask him any question even if he had no knowledge. Whenever I asked a question, he would make me find the answer. Making me find answers allowed me to realize what my strengths are and how to learn more. His help in schoolwork made me feel more confident. My dad and he would both say, "Go to school...listen to your teachers they are trying to teach you."*

*It was cool, Owen encouraged me to do things with my cousin who was three years younger, the same age I was when Owen came into my life. He would ask, "Are you going to let your cousin go or are you going to do something about it? How's A doing?" I was like, "I don't know." He would say to me, "Don't you care?" Funny how it's all turned out. So I helped A but he wasn't around me as much so it was more on the phone.*

*It meant a lot to me that Owen was there. I think putting two and two together, you have potential and friendship. He was just always there for me. He'd never say I'm trying to help you reach your potential, he would just try to help me. I think my dad realized that too and maybe they spoke. I don't know but my dad never bothered me about homework ever again. My sister wasn't around; she was at university so it was just like two brothers.*

*I guess my dad was around during those times for sure and he was definitely important. He was involved in all the sports taking me to games and practices. He actually coached a few of the teams I played on. Sometimes my dad and I would go out*

*and play and he would teach mean things. He would encourage me to do a lot of sports. With academics he would ask, "Have you put everything you think you should put into it?" The answer was no and he would ask, "Why didn't you?" Being the boy, he wasn't as hard on me as he was with my sister. He always challenged me and I see this as his strength. Out of the blue my dad would ask me about a situation and challenge me to think a certain way. He wasn't so good sometimes like when I would ask for help on my homework. He would be more than willing to help but I would get the feeling that my work was no good. He would say, "Why don't you do that?" which was brutal because then my sister and I wouldn't like to show him homework. However, we figured we wanted good marks so we sucked it up and asked him for help.*

*My dad interacts well with people. He's definitely a people person, well respected by all. I've never known anyone to not like him or even heard bad things he's done. I continue to have difficulty understanding going throughout your whole life and not having a bad story. We still try to dig for them but never found one. My dad's very honest with people and he speaks the truth. If they want the truth, he will tell people flat out. Coming from him people respect it. I don't know how he does it but he knows everything about everything...it kind of bugs me. If he doesn't know, he will pretend he does and figure it out. We just knew that if we needed anything he would be there to help. So we weren't afraid...pretty much. Most of the time we wouldn't be afraid to ask. He was just there. I think we took it for granted because I think both my parents were always there for us.*

*In the younger ages he was very strict and that caused a bit of tension with my parents because my mom didn't want him to be so stern. He believed he had to discipline*

*us. As kids, we could see that and so if there was ever anything we wanted, we went to mom not dad. However, later he just stopped with the discipline and let us grow. He was there for me and supported me even if I made a bad decision or did something wrong. He didn't get mad, maybe a little upset but not mad and punishing. He never even grounded us.*

*I think I am most grateful to my dad for making me do air cadets. It gave me opportunities to meet different people and travel for free. Learning the things I did at air cadets was very important to me.*

*I guess you always looked up to your superiors in terms of like my dad, sister but I only really looked up to them in terms of things other than air cadets. It was almost like I had two lives. When I went to air cadets, I didn't really know anyone from school or home. I did it on my own. There were different rankings. With the first major rank, I received the rank of LAC. There were a bunch of us at the time progressing through together. Then there were corporals and after that, Sergeants, Flight Sergeants, and Warrant Officers. My commanding officer was very strict, he never smiled. After I received my rank of Corporal, he pulled me into his office and sat me down. He said to me, "You didn't deserve it (the rank). Prove it to me that you deserved it or I will take it away." I was shocked. He was very strict and I was shaking. At the time I thought all my other friends deserved it, ~~and~~ what about me. I thought I was doing fine and I think I was, he just did that to challenge me. So that was a big thing. After the meeting, I began to think that maybe I needed to do some work, get involved, take the leadership role and take charge. So of that group, eight of us got promoted myself included. Each year it*



was a question, who was going to emerge because each year the group became thinner and thinner. So it encouraged me.

*Air cadets made me feel like I was on my own. I was really busy and it taught me better time management. It was almost like another school with a lot of activities and there was this thought, you can do anything. So it was trying to balance, school, sports and air cadets. I enjoyed air cadets the most. I met diverse people and it wasn't all work, we had lots of fun. We always wanted to be there. That was a big thing. At school many people didn't want to be there. But at air cadets we wanted to be there and we were motivated to learn and really know the information. In class, we were very attentive. In the summers, I took summer courses. The way it worked was you were selected from your different squadrons to study with other squadrons from all over Ontario. Then you would take your skills back to your squadron and realize how little you knew. That was the kicker. You think you know everything. You have worked really hard and you go there and the other cadets from different squadrons were ten times better. The other cadets were more educated and knowledgeable about air cadet drill and theory. So again, in the summers, it made me move up the scale further. Later, I was selected to go to Alberta which was at the national level. So it's on an even bigger scale and it's like oh my gosh. I learned that even if I was one of the best in my squadron, it didn't mean I'm the best everywhere else. That's when I started studying harder at school for university. I was hard-core working but I wasn't really ever stressed. I've never been like that. After I had seen other squadrons, I would come back to my home squadron and want to improve and take initiative. I wanted more projects and activities. Each year, I kept growing and changing. Then I had my prodigies under me and they*

*came to air cadets hating it just like I had. So I would talk to them and try to get them involved. Air cadets is definitely a big part of who I am today in terms of work ethic and interaction with other people.*

*I guess having friends in air cadets allowed me to develop true friendships. If we're having problems with other cadets or peers we could talk to my Air Cadet friends. That was supportive...leaning on your peers for help and not having to look any higher.*

*I don't talk about my feelings, not then and not now. In terms of emotions, I would say it would be important to talk to someone who treats you with respect, and who is a little older and successful. It would be helpful if he/she was similar to your personality, not too different...like family...someone who understands you. It's difficult to map someone out. Building a level of confidence with life and yourself is important. I don't like to talk about certain thing but. I think it is important to be in a relaxed environment, even talking on the phone or in the front of TV if I am going to talk.*

*Parenting is important. I think when you are parenting you have to be consistent...the way you discipline. Also, they better not contradict what they tell you. For instance if they make you clean your room everyday but they don't...it's not going to have an impact. To be a good role model you have to lead by example.*

*I don't know where I would be without someone like Owen. I don't have a clue. Maybe you want to call it something else...helping me learn stuff. All I know is that he put me over the top...like you're kind of there but you need a push.*

## APPENDIX H

### Blair's Story

*A color to describe me...I would chose red not a solid red but a soft red...definitely not an orange. I was excited, happy and everything felt good. I felt really lucky because things just rolled along for me. Also time flew and I think red is the opposite from what the street sign implies. I think red is a moving color not a go color but a fast color.*

*In grade seven, eight and nine, I was very very physically active. I was always running around playing lacrosse and hockey. Everything I did revolved around school. After school, I played hockey. I had two main groups of friends, at school and at hockey so these were social places. Parents would drive us to hockey and we would play. If hockey was not happening, we would play roller hockey or road hockey. Within hockey and school, I was outgoing and I just loved talking to people. Sometimes I was laid back but most of the time I talked to people. I really didn't like people being excluded. We had the best group in grade seven and eight. Every Friday night we would go to someone's basement...we called it "basement parties"...Everybody would go whether you were the "loser" or "cool" guy. I loved that. Our gym teacher really started this cohesion by having electives on Friday all day. This just gave us an opportunity outside of the classroom to hang out with others. So whether it was school or outside the school I was kind of the social guy...not a social butterfly...not imposing on other people, just genuinely interested in others.*

*Then of course there's always the "girl thing" (said with a laugh). It was the beginning of the girl thing for me. The first girl I went out with was in grade eight and we were quite serious. I don't know why we were serious so young, I'm just like that.*

*I've always been dependent on my family and leaned on them at times. We don't openly express love like I do with my friends but I know it's there at anytime.*

*I believe I matured in grades seven, eight and nine.*

*In grade eight, I remember my mom stopped coming to hockey games. One of her friends had a son who was really small. He was a great hockey player but other players always drilled him. My mother would lose it. Once she was kicked out of the rink. The refs actually stopped the game and kicked her out. I was sitting on the bench saying, "Oh my Lord!" She never came back. I was kind of upset because my dad would come to every game he could as long as it didn't interfere with work. Even though I was upset, I would make fun of the fact that she wouldn't come. At times, I thought my mom was neglecting me because she would go to my sister's sporting events but not mine. Other than that...things rolled along in my family.*

*During this time I would say I was naïve. I wouldn't say I was easily influenced but role models were important. Although I wasn't really looking for them...they were there. Before I experienced this amazing defenseman coach, hockey was purely a physical activity. When he coached me, I got right into it and was there in spirit. At the time, I wasn't a strong backwards skater. As a defenseman, while your skating backwards you have to take out a guy. If he passes you and you can't keep up to him backwards or turn quickly enough to skate forward you're screwed. Ofcourse, I kept having guys pass me which is the most embarrassing thing that can happen. So the*

*coach started working with me on my backwards skating and the transition turn. It sounds minute but it was a huge confidence boost. We worked on it all year and then the next year the project was my slapshot. By grade eight and nine, I did not have a problem keeping up with everyone. The coach never gave up on me. If I was struggling or it took a little longer, he wouldn't pass me up. He helped me to recognize a weak skill and valued my improvement. During games he would say, "How did you feel?" or "You were passed, we'll pick it up next time". In this sense, he was one of the good coaches that placed more emphasis on positive reinforcement rather than criticism. Each year we had a little project that worked on a skill.*

*Working on these little projects each year meant that I had someone looking out for me. Hockey was not only social but it was also very competitive. At the time, I was playing on the top level in the city. During the try outs there were 240 kids trying out for eighteen spots. My defense coach made me feel like he was looking out for my best interest and improving my skills so that I could continue playing on the team. Without this coach, I think I would have really struggled and I would have been unhappy because I wouldn't have been as good. Really this coach gave me personal attention. Even though there were six defensemen, he really made me feel like I was the only one he was helping. He took the time and was committed to making me better. It was meaningful to me because nobody had done that yet. I hadn't had that attention given in hockey or really anything else. In school there are so many people, in gym sports there are so many people and on any team there are so many people. But that personal attention, one project, one goal made me feel successful.*

*He probably didn't realize it but he made me feel like I belonged on that team. That's something you question all the time when you're at the top level. I'm sure you feel that at any level. You question, "Should I have made this team? Do I belong on this team?" By the end of this year, I thought I did belong on the team. I felt like a pro.*

*At the end of the year, there were three Esso awards: MVP, most improved and most sportsmanlike. The worst one you can get is sportsmanlike and I received it twice in a row (laugh). It's definitely the worst medal because you look like the pansy on the team. You never take penalties and you always talk to the refs in a good manner. I was walking up to receive the medal like a "loser" (big L on his forehead). Obviously, that year I wanted the most improve award. It wasn't a big deal but I did think I deserved that award.*

*At school, there were a few teachers who were huge for me in grades seven and eight. There wasn't really any situation where teachers helped me. Rather, one teacher in particular made us feel like we were friends with the teachers. In elementary school there is this divide...teachers and then students. He turned it around so that not only did we look at him as a friend but also we looked at the other teachers as friends. Our whole relationships with the teachers changed and it made them teach us differently.*

*Mr. L was a joker. He would sometimes pick on us but not in a harmful way, in a funny non-offensive way. He was warm and people would go to him to talk about problems. He wasn't a guidance counsellor but students felt comfortable sharing issues with him.*

*Mr.D was the gym teacher and two of his sons played on the Canadian lacrosse team. He would say to us that his son's didn't have anything special, just a love for the*

*sport and they worked hard. If you hear this over and over, you just go for it. He was a very sporty guy and liked students who were exceptional athletes. I think he really cared about the students. But he might have cared a little too much for some students. I remember my girlfriend at the time received extra pressure from Mr.D regarding track. She would be practising hurdles with him down the halls of the school at 6:30 in the morning. In one sense it was great that he took the extra time to work with students but some of the students felt pressure. Therefore, some of the students did not feel the same way as I did. But most of us were inspired by his sports passion. In fact, I played lacrosse only because of his interest in lacrosse. We played it in the gym and then he let us take out the equipment at lunch.*

*Mr. D would always ask about other sports people were doing. For example a guy played karate and he'd always ask about it. With me he would always ask about hockey. He was genuinely interested. I really appreciated it because I could see how it could be flipped. A gym teacher could just be like, "This is how you shoot the hoops" (said in a monotone voice). Instead, he would play with us and run around the court trying to keep up to us. Also, he was great with names and he had a great memory for what people were doing. He really cared about our physical development and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.*

*Going to high school was really scary. We went from having 40-45 students in the class to the biggest class ever in Canada 976. There were thirty-two portables and the teachers really didn't give a rat's ass about you. One day, within my first week at high school, Mrs. M, my old science teacher picks me up. I remember thinking, "Oh I*

*miss my old school so much.” In high school, we would go back in groups of four or six to visit our old teachers and the school.*

*In grade nine I had a major problem at the new high school I went to. I am definitely the opposite from racist...I'm multiracial. I don't use this word much but I often hate people who are racist and experience difficulties talking to them. My past girlfriends have been from Barbados and Japan. I don't know why, perhaps I like exotic girls but I've always liked different cultures. In grade nine it was so racially divided. There were 976 grad nines and half of them were black and the other half were white, Chinese, Japanese and whatever. It was so bad. We had three police cruisers out front of our school every single lunch hour. The cafeteria was called cafrica. If you wore different color laces in your docs, it was a slur against another race. It was bad. There were fights every single day and there were drugs everywhere. The thing that really ticked me off was that two of my best friends in grade eight were black. I mean we danced, we listened to rap and we played basketball all the time. We used to get on our bikes and call on girls. There were eight to ten of us and we would go door to door...that's just something we did. In grade nine we never talked again. They were always hanging around the black guys and we were like the token white guys sitting in the corner. See you later. Even on the walk home, they would walk with each other and not talk to us. The racism threw me for a spin and I had a little bit of difficulty going to school. My parents were helpful because I could talk to them about what was going on. They told me I didn't really have a choice and I was going to have to make do with it and rely on or hang around the people I knew were normal. So basically “tough it” because I was not going to change schools. They didn't really have an easy solution but they*



*allowed me to vent with them and they knew how badly I felt. During this situation, I felt that my parents really cared and loved me. I didn't talk to my parents often but we did have five or six chats. But I think a lot of people talked to their parents. And we talked about it amongst friends. I don't know how I got through it but I did.*

*During these years, my dad was just the constant...constantly supportive. My mom was the over reactor sometimes. One time she had an emotional spat and wanted to kick me out of the house but my dad said, "Don't worry, you won't be kicked out." My dad was the calm one. Financially my mom didn't do anything and my dad was just always there for me. I remember when we moved to a new house, my parents would drive me down to my old neighborhood to play with my friends. I would stay at my girlfriends' house and this was when my dad gave me his one and only sex talk. He was so uncomfortable talking about it. I just had to laugh. He said, "If you are having sex just make sure you are using a condom." I thought it was funny the way he was bringing it up because we didn't really talk about it. I could talk to my dad about girls if I wanted to but I don't do it on a regular basis. Family stuff is something I can say flat out. Sometimes my parents will make a comment about an aunt or uncle and I will flat out stick up for the family.*

*Presently, I think it drives my mom nuts that I don't talk to her about my friends. When they call, she finds out more about me. During high school we had a big basement and all my friends used to hang out. We could entertain twenty kids no problem. So my friends would always talk to her. It is so weird to think back compared to now and where we are here. Anyway, those few years were bizarre and I loved it. When I left for university I was living on my own, my mom didn't know anything and I don't know I kind*

*of loved it. Then she started asking questions and I started getting annoyed but my dad, he doesn't ask questions. He's just like whatever. Girls...I don't talk to my mom about because she gets too emotional and too excited so I just leave it at that. My mom is cool. I can talk to her about a lot of other stuff. Last year she shocked me by saying that she respects me because I just say whatever. I don't normally say things out of line. I'd rather just say it and if it hurts a bit now it's better to hurt a bit now and be pissed off than to drag it out for two or three months.*

*I guess I rely on my friends for girl chats more than I rely on my parents.*

*I didn't really seek help from anyone...I guess in that respect I was kind of shy. I think I'm a really open person but when I need somebody for some reason I don't. When I was a leader of the orientation at university, I remember feeling really surprised and complimented when people came to me for help and advice. But I'm not the type of person to seek help flat out, I don't know why. If I were to go to someone, I think they would have to know me well and have a relationship built with me. It would take me a lot to go to someone, especially during grade seven, eight and nine. Perhaps it would be better to ask a total stranger someone who didn't know me and I could divulge all my information. I think I would either turn to a really good friend or a total stranger.*

*I definitely would not have been able to talk to anyone about sex. In university all the guys around me talked about it but I'm kind of a private guy. When I was leading orientation, I really tried to explain to the students that it is not intimidating to see a counsellor. I think it is important that they don't see themselves as charity cases. And that is sometimes how you feel in grade seven and eight. But if the atmosphere is warm and comfortable where you are not looked down upon it is helpful. For me, I think I did*

*not go to a counsellor because I did not think I needed help, I probably did (laugh). I think people would be more likely to go with their friends. I might have talked to my girlfriend at the time but at that time, I don't think I would have ever talked about family. With Julie, we knew we cared about each other and we knew how we felt about each other. I think I would go to a friend or one of the close friends in grade seven and eight. They can either empathize with me or they can give me advice that might give me good insight about what's going on. I knew my friends really cared about me. I think someone my own age during that time can relate to my experiences. I feel the same way about counsellors and psychologists, they also can relate because they have been through it.*

## APPENDIX I

### Julie's Story

*In grade seven, eight and nine I had a big group of friends and few best friends that changed from one week to the next. I was good friends with one girl in grade eight and nine. I was playing sports and going to school. I didn't really know about drugs and drinking, nothing like that. I had no idea what was going on there...you know a good kid. It hits me all later on.*

*I tend to be shy but its usually just because I'm embarrassed. I don't really like talking about my accomplishments and this makes me shy but everything else I'm fine about. I guess I'm humble. My mom says, "don't talk about yourself", so I don't. Other than that people tell me I'm outgoing.*

*A color that describes me during this time? ...baby blue with a tint of orange in there. Baby blue I just love. When I'm by myself I just like to read and I'm kind of quiet. But when I'm with a lot of people, my friends, I go dancing and partying. I'm not crazy just half and half you know.*

*My parents were always huge role models like my god in different ways.*

*Grades seven and eight, I didn't really talk to any teachers. However, in grade nine I was good friends with Mr. Burly. He was my homeroom teacher. When my grandfather died I walked into school, I was trying to be all cool and he asked me what was wrong with me, my eyes were puffy. I just broke down and cried and he talked to me about it and comforted me. He was a friend. He was young, not like a stingy teacher. He'd say, "Oh I heard this guy such and such and I heard you like this guy." You just get to a level somewhere. It eventually go to the point where I'd be like a few I hate you*

*for that and he's always talking. I liked him as a person but other teachers I just knew he didn't always fit. But he was always a super nice guy to speak with and he really supported me in my athletic endeavors. He would just ask, "How are you doing? What are you up to? If you need any longer runs I'll run with you..." You know stuff like that. In OACs he was my gym teacher and with track meets he'd say, "No problem...see you next week". He was very understanding because he was an athlete too and in gym class he liked the athletic kids. So he'd be like, "Oh that's good how'd you do that?" So he would just talk to you a little more and that helped a little. He was just a nice guy and kids really liked him.*

*He was always cheery and saying, "Hey" and smiled at everyone. Grade nine was a bit of a transition but he was fun because he was never really doing work. He was always talking and he used to have like fun fights with all the kids and we would throw things at him and be totally laughing. It was interesting but fun.*

*One year I wasn't on the basketball team but Mr. B asked me to go to a basketball tournament in Montreal. They just needed another player to go to the tournament. That was fun. He was a good coach in terms of having fun with the team, hanging out and chatting.*

*My school was good because there were so many teachers you could chat with. You could speak to all of them. He was just the younger one with whom everyone hung out.*

*Support...I don't really know what kind of support I needed. I just know I had friends whose families were falling apart and now it shows. They're not stable people...they make rash decisions and decisions that aren't good for them. With all that*

*we go through, especially girls, I think it's really important to have confidence. Like what's going on with your body and some of your friends are wearing clothes that you are not comfortable with. I remember some of my friends parents saying, "Don't leave the house without makeup." They would tell their kids this. Now my friend will not see people without makeup. She's scared she doesn't think she's beautiful without makeup. The reinforcement when she was younger did not build her confidence. I think family can build confidence in your kids. My mom would all the time say, "Oh honey you're so beautiful. You're this and that." Not to the point where I was like gag me but enough that I knew.*

*My parent's were really open so I could say to my mom I'm really sad or I'm feeling this and that and she would say, "What do you think?" My parents made sure we were involved in sports, art and school. They made sure we were reading. They weren't like a lot of parents and at times I would be angry with them because they wouldn't allow me to do things, like going to parties. My parents would say, "You're in grade nine you don't have to do anything." And now I'm glad because I didn't need to experience those things when I was so young. It gave me a good foundation to build myself upon. It's kind of like that song when a child learns to live with whatever, they learn to love and enjoy. I see it in my friends all the time. They're still my friends but I can trace it all back and they all have messed up families. My friend is so dysfunctional and it messed up their life even if the parents don't think it is messing it up. You can watch them change from how their parents are changing. I had a friend in grade eight, really good friend. Her dad travelled a lot. He wasn't around much but it was just two girls so there wasn't any boys to worry about with the dad role model kind of thing. The mom was there for the girls*

*and was involved in everything like working at the school volunteers. The marriage started going down the tubes and the next thing you know this mother is like crazy. She would have boyfriends over and leave the girls alone for weekends at a time. Now my friend is in a relationship with her boyfriend who's yelling at her and this and that and I'm like ahhhh. She won't leave him because she has nothing to look up and say this is right and this isn't right. I shouldn't be treated like this. Her mom goes out with guys who do the same thing to her. I think oh that's so sad.*

*Their mom let them do everything they want. They can sleep over at their boyfriend's houses and they say, "You're in grade ten, you're mature, you're old enough to make your own decisions. You are not I'm sorry (laugh). I was in grade ten too and you make stupid decisions. You don't know what's going on and their moms aren't doing them a favor by not being around. Let your kid hate you for the night. It's not a big deal. They will thank you later. My kids are going to hate me when I grow up. I'm going to be like "Hell no! You're staying home tonight!" They're not going a damn place because I don't know what's out there! Believe me you will thank me later...do your homework.*

*It took me awhile to figure out my parents weren't perfect. They were ideal you know especially in this day and age where there are so many things you could get into and we've all done pretty well.*

*I never felt alone. Both my parents are very bright and so I think it makes a big difference having educated parents. I could come home and they wouldn't make rash decisions. If I brought up a good point and I've be like well we know what you mean. If they were saying no I knew it was for a reason; it wasn't something stupid. Whereas with friend's parents, they were like no and we're not talking about it. You get no answers*

*and get mad for that reason. If anything ever happened at school I could say, "Hey mom don't say this to anyone even dad..." and she wouldn't say it to anyone. She was very trusting. Even with my dad, he pretends like he doesn't know anything very well...he's a good pretender so both of them supported me. I knew they were there to back me up. They would say things like, "Maybe you should think about doing it this way next time."*

*My parents would sit me down and sometimes they would be like we don't like how you are acting. It's called constructive criticism night. You sit down at the table with your head down. They would say, "We don't think that you shouldn't act like this or that you have to do this or that." I used to get mad when they'd do that and they would be like, "Well, this is part of the problem, you're too defensive." I mean just making me think about it...you know it's about you. That was good...I learned how to take criticism better. It's really hard to take criticism about yourself...about your personality...that's the hardest thing. If someone says, "Oh you're wrong about that," it doesn't really matter. But if they say, "You're kind of mean, you do this," you're sorry. So that's something I will definitely do with my kids when they get older. You feel backed up and supported all the time.*

*Just the other day I was walking up the stairs with my mom and she was talking about being good kids and I said, "Mom what would you do if I turn into a hell child and was like crazy and everything I did you hated." She said, "I'm afraid I'd still love you to death." "You'd love me to death still?" And she said, "Yup." So I said, "What if dad turned into that?" She was like nope, "I wouldn't still love him to death." I said, "Would you still love me?" and she was like, "Yup no matter what you do I will still love you I'm afraid so." And I was like oh. I think a lot of kids don't hear that.*



*When I was a kid I was so afraid of getting into trouble and stuff like that. Now getting into trouble is not a big deal because I know it's a decision I made. I know that it comes before you realize it. They're going to love me anyway, you know what I mean. I don't take advantage of it or anything, I just realize. Even with things like pregnancy and all that. We've talked about it because my whole family is kind of like pro life...against abortion. So my parents think that if John or Mark got pregnant or their girlfriends, always have the kid because that's way better. I was saying to my dad, "If it was a year before the Olympics and I got pregnant, what would you suggest we do if I was ready and roaring to go and it was nine months away and I got pregnant." He said, "I'd tell you to give up your Olympics for something much better you know. We'd support and help you" just like that.*

*It took awhile for me to talk to my parents about everything. I think it began one time when I was out at my friend's house and she was staying home, she said, "I love you." I was like oh. It was always, "Good night sweetheart...sweet dreams." So when this happened, oh this and that. And then my whole family just started doing that and now it's like I say I love you mom ten times a day. Then in grade ten, I was always kind of older but my sisters had already gone through their stage of drinking and I got under the influence of alcohol at a grade ten party. I was sick in my bedroom all by myself. The next day I told my mom there was a stain on the carpet because...and she told me I should have come and got her because she would have helped me. I said I thought she would have been mad and she told me she would have been disappointed but she would help me if I was sick. I was like "oh" and we just started speaking about it. Now when my brother goes to a party she's like, "Eat some pasta here...I don't want you passing*

*out drinking on an empty stomach. It took awhile and I think we have to be mature enough and they have to be willing to accept that we will be doing those kinds of things. I'm definitely going to do that with my kids because then there is less guessing.*

*I can talk to my mom about sex. She knows where I'm at. Mark is the worst...he doesn't really communicate with any of us. John and I are blah blah blah but Mark we worry about. He's quiet and I think he talks to his friends. I would rather to my mom or dad for advice than to my friends because they're all mixed up and Mark just hasn't really realized that yet. He's away from home most of the time.... "it's not cool to be home on a Friday night". I'm like who cares, if you're tired stay home. He's like "I have to go to a party." No you don't but it's not cool.*

*My mom helped me with the girlfriend situation because she told me girls move around. You don't just have one around. John always had one friend he hung around with but I would have a bunch.*

*My mom was always there when I came home. When I would tell her what happened, she'd say oh maybe the girl feels this way or that. My mom told me to always be nice to people even when I was in grade four. There was this girl that was always left out at school and she made me invite her over to play. She was actually a really nice girl and ever since that I was always nice to everyone. In my group of friends it's not like that. But I think they're nice people even if they don't go out clubbing or have the hottest boyfriends.*

*If I did well it was always, "Great job you worked hard." If life didn't go the way you wanted my dad would say measure someone's character by if they get up after they fall. It's not how many times you fall if you get up each time that's what makes your*

*character and personality tough. He always made it seem like it's not the end of the world. They never placed too much emphasis on anything. However, I wish they were a little more serious about school. I think the fact that my brothers have had such a hard time, they didn't want to push too hard because it already felt like they were behind. For example, I was horrible in Math. We switched schools in elementary school and somewhere I became a little muddled with fractions and division. So it was a struggle from there. No one really noticed because I got seventies but in grade twelve my mom started saying you guys aren't good in Math... The basic skills we didn't have. If someone was to ask me right now about Math I would have no idea. I just wish I had taken a year over. I know nobody wants to do that at the time but I think it would have helped me.*

*I loved how my parents made us play every sport. I have probably had a lesson in every sport imaginable. We used to fight and fight we hated it because squash and tennis were not the "cool" sports. I wanted to play hockey and soccer. But not I can play any sport. If someone asks me, "Do you want to play?" I can say, "Sure." Also my parents took us to art galleries, cullen gardens and movies with subtitles. I remember we would be driving in the car and all of us would be wishing we were at a party or something like that. So just exposing us to a lot of things. My parents did a lot with charities. Then there was church. My parents didn't start getting back into it until a few years ago. We were really seasonal church goers. But one Christmas my grandmother said she wanted to go to church so my mom talked to people and found out there was one close by. We took my grandmother and now it's more a part of our life than it was before.*

*My dad's side of the family is kind of messed up...four marriages and his sisters have always relied on his mom. People would phone the house bawling and talk to my*

*mom. All the time people come to talk to her about their problems and you see people doing that with your mom.*

*My dad is a stern tough guy but nice at the same time So my brothers I think it's really, really important for boys to have men role models.*

*My parents were always stable, they don't have tempers and I've never seen them fight or say bad words to each other. I don't yell at people and I don't have a bad temper and neither do my brothers. They treat each other respectfully and they always let each other do their own thing. My dad just went to the track with us for a couple of hours and then he came home and wanted to go skiing and my mom's like fine... And when my mom wants to play her squash and do her own thing that's fine. They always go out for dinner together and they never watch tv. I will come up stairs and they will be sitting at the dinner table with their dinner long gone or reading by the fire place just really good together. I will have friends call me with their parents screaming at them in the background. They'll be bawling and ask to come over. I'm like ahhhhh. Yeah oh my gosh. I can't imagine living like that it would be so destructive. Life would be so crazy if you had parents leaving you alone for a few days or chasing you around the house trying to hit you....so destructive. Friends just walk into our house and my mom will welcome them and feed them. They like everyone.*

*In grade nine Mark had a party. He was worried and my mom was like nothing will happen because you know people start drinking in grade seven now. Anyway, I was upstairs with a bunch of my friends and you could hear yelling and swearing from the basement. My mom was also upstairs wondering what was going on. When we went downstairs there was all this loud rude swearing and all the girls were throwing*

*themselves at the guys and everyone was drinking. My mom brought all the girls upstairs and said, "I don't know why you have to throw yourself at them. You do not have to wear those clothes. They are going to like you without the clothes and if they like you for the clothes they are not worth it. You are all beautiful women and should act it. Respect yourselves." I couldn't believe she said that. Then she told the boys to get out...they could call a cab or call the parents. She told all of them that she was going to call their parents because she couldn't believe they didn't care. I was proud of that because I feel the same way and obviously their parents aren't talking to them.*

*I see my parents have always thought out their decisions and really wise in what they thing and therefore provide us with a lot of insight. At the dinner table they would bring up interesting things because they were so interested in the world. So it wasn't a boring meal there was always something interesting going on. I always felt they would support us and always had the feeling of unconditional love. I think that will do more for a kid than anything else. I never felt like I couldn't go to them for something serious which was good.*

*My parents were always there. Whenever I came home from school my mom was there. I understand that not all people have that luxury but she was always there and she wanted to talk about our day and she cared. She wasn't caught up in something else like a job. We were her life and that was nice. My dad was around quite a bit too. My sister's didn't see him as much because he was running the business and then divorced so he wasn't around a lot. But their mom is a bit crazy and they had to move into our house because of that. Their mom isn't really maternal so they liked that. I understand a lot of people have to do the career thing. However, I don't know I think if you have a choice*

*between career and being a mom I would be offended if you chose the career over me. If your mom chose to not be with you that really sucks. Love me come on.*

*I wasn't really one of those kids who had to look for role models outside of the home; you know how some kids do that. I had what I needed at home and whatever I got at school was just extra.*

*My parents....if I had crappy teachers my whole life it wouldn't matter because I would come home and they would know how to deal with it. I don't depend or really need my friends...if I have a problem, I would go to my parents.*