Feelings of gratitude and envy are familiar to people of different ages, backgrounds, and cultures. For thousands of years, gratitude and envy have been applauded and decried, most notably in the Bible (New International Version, e.g. envy is mentioned in two of the Ten Commandments) and by ancient philosophers (e.g. D’Arms & Kerr, 2008; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). Although gratitude and envy are ubiquitous and embedded in daily life, empirical investigation of these topics remains underdeveloped and especially scarce regarding children and adolescents. Here, we attempt to characterise the experiences of envy and gratitude for a group of adolescents from the Midwestern US through interviews and qualitative analysis. We describe their narrative accounts of feeling grateful and envious, as well as being recipients of gratitude and envy; we frame adolescents’ experiences with those emotions in terms of their roles in social and identity development.

Gratitude
Gratitude is a social emotion, in which ‘people (beneficiaries) respond with gratitude when other people (benefactors) behave in a way that promotes the beneficiaries’ well-being’ (McCullough et al. 2001, p. 250). Feeling grateful is closely associated with multiple indicators of well-being; adolescents who expressed more gratitude had higher levels of overall well-being, prosocial behaviour and optimism (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009). In experimental studies, early adolescents assigned to a gratitude condition in which they recorded five things they were grateful for every day for two weeks, rated their

ABSTRACT
Although the ubiquity of gratitude and envy would suggest they are important in the daily lives of adolescents, those social emotions have been relatively unexplored by psychologists. Interviews of 25 adolescents (ages 14 through 16) from the Midwestern US provided narrative accounts that revealed the contexts, antecedents, consequences and meanings of gratitude and envy in their daily lives. Transcripts were coded using an established procedure in the literature, and we present the findings at the thematic level. Adolescent gratitude was characterised by feeling cared for and special, while envy was driven by the desire for material possessions. Both emotions may reflect cultural individualism and contribute to social and identity development; for those adolescents gratitude provides recognition and validation of one’s personhood, and envy creates negative social comparisons that can either diminish self-worth or provide the impetus for improvement.

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school experiences and their upcoming weeks more positively compared to both a hassles group who recorded five irritants in their lives and a no-treatment control group (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008).

In gratitude essays, 5- through 12-year-old children most often wrote about feeling grateful for the people in their lives including their parents, teachers, friends and pets, as well as for basic material needs (Gordon, Musher-Eizenman, Holub, & Dalrymple, 2004). Girls included a greater number of themes in their essays and were more likely to be more grateful for people (e.g. family, friends, teachers/school) than boys. In contrast, boys were more grateful than girls for material objects. Like girls, older children (ages 9 through 12) included more gratitude themes than younger children (ages 5 through 8 years), suggesting a wider and more diverse level of thankfulness.

Adolescence may be a particularly important developmental period for gratitude understanding and expression because of the advances in perspective taking and identity development that occur during this period. According to Selman (1980), social perspective taking is the ability to recognise and understand the perspective of other individuals (oftentimes realising that they are different than one’s own) in an applied, social situation. Empirical investigations suggest increases in these abilities during adolescence, such as cognitive empathy (i.e. one's ability to understand how others feel) and an increase in other-centred thoughts (Crone & Dahl, 2012; Van der Graaff, et al., 2014).

Envy

Another understudied, but salient, psychological construct during adolescence is envy, which is defined as ‘an unpleasant, often painful emotion characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment produced by an awareness of another person or groups of persons who enjoy a desired possession, object, social possession, attribute or quality of being’ (Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 47), occurring only in ‘domains of personal relevance’ (DelPriore, Hill, & Buss, 2012, p. 317). Researchers have distinguished between malicious envy and benign envy (Smith & Kim, 2007). The former is characterised by attempts to worsen the position of the envied person, while the latter is free of harmful intent and motivates the envier to try harder (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2012). Also, envy is not jealousy. Jealousy, in contrast, involves three individuals and is often felt when one of the three is concerned about losing the attention of another member of the triad to the third person (Smith & Kim, 2007).

The popularity of films like Mean Girls (Waters & Messick, 2004), frequent comparisons on social media giving way to Facebook envy, and the obsession of many girls to keep up with the latest fashion trends endorsed by friends and celebrities suggest envy is a daily struggle in the social world of adolescents (Lewis, n.d.; Prudente, 2012; Shea, 2013). In one of the few studies on envy with children and early adolescents (ages 7 through 13 years), Steinbeis and Singer (2013) induced envy and schadenfreude (a feeling of pleasure when something bad happens to another person) by manipulating the results of a computer game between children and anonymous peers. Younger children and those reporting higher levels of envy and schadenfreude after the computer task were less generous with their tokens (i.e. kept more for themselves) than older children and those scoring lower on those emotions. Envy and schadenfreude were less common with increasing age. The conclusions are somewhat limited by the fact that happiness and sadness after the outcome of the game served as proxies for envy and schadenfreude.

Envy among adolescents may also be linked to materialism, an issue that has spurred more psychological study (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011). Adolescents who attempt to build a reputation and bolster self-esteem through acquiring objects made desirable because of peers’ endorsement are expressing materialism, but those actions may also foster envy. In the quest for more of any given object, there are likely to be individuals who have less of it, but desire more. Although envy and materialism involve social goals, they may give rise to the breakdown of positive social interactions (Belk, 1985; Smith & Kim, 2007). During adolescence (as well as other life stages), possessions can serve as status symbols (Chaplin & John, 2007). Peers’ evaluations and opinions that may be heavily dependent on material signs of status are an important source of self-esteem among teenagers (Harter, 2012).

Envy and gratitude: opposite ends of the same spectrum?

In many ways, the emotions of envy and gratitude are opposite of one another. Envy is a highly negative and unpleasant emotion. Gratitude, on the other hand, is a largely positive experience. As Roberts...
expresses so clearly, ‘the deeply grateful person will participate less, or even not at all, in the miseries of envy’ (p. 75). He notes that envious people are likely opposed to feeling indebted or inferior in any way, while those who are grateful repay the kindness of another with expressions of gratitude. Essentially, the former focuses on what one does not have, but wants, while the latter is a feeling of appreciation for what one does have. Subsequently, these emotional experiences either tear people apart or bind them together.

Thus, gratitude and envy can be seen as opposite ends of the same spectrum. A limited amount of empirical evidence supports this relation. In adolescents, higher levels of gratitude were associated with lower levels of envy; gratitude and materialism were negatively associated with one another (Froh et al., 2011). Feelings of gratitude predicted higher GPA, higher life satisfaction, higher social integration and absorption, and lower envy and depression (Froh et al., 2011). The opposite pattern of results was found with materialism as the predictor.

Cultural context of gratitude and envy

Although gratitude and envy have been explored with a limited cultural scope, available research suggests they are best understood in a cultural context (Foster, 1972; Layous, Lee, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Quintanilla & Jensen de López, 2013; Washizu & Naito, 2015). For example, a gratitude intervention with Korean and US adult participants revealed that while US participants’ well-being benefitted greatly from a gratitude expression exercise over 6 weeks, Korean participants did not show the same gains in well-being (Layous et al., 2013). Conversely, other research with adolescents suggests gratitude is associated with the same positive aspects of well-being experienced by US adolescents (e.g. Chan, 2012; Sun & Kong, 2013).

With respect to envy, Foster (1972) explained that envious feelings are particularly problematic for those in the US because admitting envy implies the envier is inferior on a valued domain. Results from a study with indigenous Mexican Zapotec and Danish children revealed that 4–5-year-olds Zapotec children commonly used social rules as explanations for the hostile act, while Danish children referred to the character’s internal motives for the hostility (Quintanilla & Sarriá, 2014). US university students reported greater enjoyment when they had something others wanted (i.e. the role of the envied) than did Spanish students (Mosquera, Parrott, & de Mendoza, 2010).

Those differences have been tentatively attributed to the individualistic/collectivistic cultural dimension. The individualistic orientation of the West and the collectivistic orientation of the East have become a common way to broadly differentiate among cultures (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). As the names imply, the individual’s needs and desires are paramount in an individualistic culture compared to collectivistic cultures in which group harmony and obligations are critical. With gratitude, for example, the collectivistic orientation and sense of obligation to others may mean feelings of indebtedness and or guilt inform how gratitude is experienced (Washizu & Naito, 2015).

A tenet of an individualistic culture is the desire to emerge as superior to others (Oyserman et al., 2002); by definition, envious feelings are an indirect admission of inferiority (Smith & Kim, 2007). Foster (1972) hypothesised envy would be a particularly unpleasant feeling for those from an individualistic background in which being superior is valued. Thus, we could hypothesise envy may be experienced privately in the US. This idea is consistent with the results of the Mosquera et al. (2010) study in which US emerging adults reported more positive feelings associated with being the envied (i.e. in the superior position) than did Spanish participants.

Identity development during adolescence

Identity development is often described as the central task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Marcia (1980) defines identity as a ‘self structure – an internal self-constructed, dynamic organisation of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history’ (p. 159). When individuals have a good understanding of their identity, of who they are, they can better define their strengths and weaknesses in comparison with others (Marcia, 1980). In other words, they have a better sense of how they fit into the world around them and what they can contribute to it. In this sense, gratitude and envy may impact identity development.
Described as ‘a time of self-exploration,’ identity development during adolescence involves negotiating social relationships with both parents and peers (Steinberg & Morris, 2001, p. 91). Consequently, both parents (Sartor & Youniss, 2002) and peers, inform adolescents’ identity (Grotevant, 1987). An essential feature of identity and self-worth is knowing that one is valued and recognised as a person by significant others (Harter, 2012; Pinel, 2009). The people in our lives (namely family and friends) who affirm our sense of self-confirm our identity and sustain our self-worth (Pinel, 2009). Self-affirmation theory posits that maintaining one’s self-integrity is paramount, especially in negative, threatening situations and self-affirmation interventions lead to a variety of positive outcomes (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). Positive interactions then with family and peers are likely sources of affirmation for adolescents that nurture their self-worth.

Although an individual process, identity development is also informed by culture. For example, the cultural dimension of individualism–collectivism has implications for how the self is constructed (Guitart & Ratner, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002). Both micro- (e.g. interpersonal relationships) and macro-systems (e.g. ideologies, politics) reflect cultural factors and inform identity development (Guitart & Ratner, 2011). In an individualistic environment, the formation of a positive self-view as a unique individual is important in creating an identity (Baumeister, 1998; Oyserman et al., 2002; Oyserman and Markus, 1993). In a collectivistic environment, understanding oneself as a member of a group is essential for identity development (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002).

The current study
To address the gaps in the literature regarding the antecedents and consequences of gratitude and envy, a qualitative investigation was designed to enhance researchers’ understanding of these emotions in the lives of US adolescents. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the lived experiences of these emotions for adolescents. Given the qualitative design, central questions were more appropriate than hypotheses (Creswell, 2007). The central questions in the current study were, ‘how do US adolescents experience gratitude and envy and how do those experiences affect their feelings and actions?’ The qualitative approach was used to capture details and context, such as why, how, or with whom adolescents feel grateful or envious, details that have not been addressed by correlational and intervention studies (e.g. Froh et al., 2008; Froh et al., 2011). The in-depth interviews were expected to reveal the meaning of these social emotions for teenagers as they navigated the tasks of social and identity development.

Method
Participants
Participants were 25 freshman and sophomore high school students (52% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 14.68$ years, $SD = .63$) attending a private, Catholic school in a Midwestern city. Forty-eight percent of participants were Caucasian, and 48% were African American. One participant failed to report race/ethnicity. See Table 1. A sample of 25 was used because saturation had been reached. In qualitative research, saturation is defined as the point in data collection in which no new ideas are emerging (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Materials
Interview questions
In a semi-structured interview, three questions addressed gratitude and three addressed envy.

Gratitude
The first question in the gratitude sequence was ‘Tell me about a time or experience where you were grateful or felt gratitude recently (i.e. approximately in the last months)?’ The second question was ‘Keeping that same gratitude situation in mind, tell me how it made you feel. Also, did you act on your feelings in any way?’ The third and final question about gratitude was, ‘Tell me about a time or experience when someone was grateful to you recently (i.e. approximately in the last six months)?’
Envy
The envy questions paralleled those for gratitude. Participants were asked, 'While it may be uncomfortable to think about, everyone experiences envy at some point in their life. Tell me about a time when you felt envy recently (i.e. approximately in the last six months),’ ‘Keeping that same envy situation in mind, tell me how it made you feel. Also, did you act on your feelings in any way, ’ and ‘Can you tell me about a time when someone (e.g. a classmate or friend) was envious of you?’

Demographic questionnaire
The demographic questionnaire, completed by a parent (80% mothers), was used to assess a variety of standard demographic factors including race/ethnicity of the participant, religion and family income.

Procedure
Written informed consent was obtained from a parent of the participant prior to the start of the study. Parents who granted consent for their child’s participation completed a demographic questionnaire. Before the start of the interview, verbal assent was obtained from the adolescent. A female interviewer individually interviewed participants in a quiet room at their school; the sessions were audio-recorded. Participants were interviewed once; the interviews were relatively brief, ranging in length from 8 to 15 min and lasted about 10 min on average. In an attempt to minimise bias, the order of the questions was counterbalanced such that half of the participants discussed their experiences with envy first, while the other half began with their gratitude experiences. At the start of each section, each emotion was defined to ensure that participants were using the same definition as the researchers and to avoid confusion between envy and jealousy. Gratitude was described as, ‘something you feel when somebody does something nice for you. Also, gratitude and thankfulness have the same meaning’. Envy was

| Table 1. Demographic Information (N = 25). |
|-------------------------------------------|
| Variable                  | n  | %      |
| Participant gender        |    |        |
| Girl                      | 13 | 52     |
| Boy                       | 12 | 48     |
| Participant grade         |    |        |
| 9th grade                 | 17 | 68     |
| 10th grade                | 8  | 32     |
| Participant race          |    |        |
| Caucasian                 | 12 | 48     |
| African American          | 12 | 48     |
| Other (not specified)     | 1  | 4      |
| Religion                  |    |        |
| Catholic                  | 16 | 64     |
| Other Christian           | 9  | 36     |
| Reporter of demographics  |    |        |
| Mother                    | 20 | 80     |
| Father                    | 5  | 20     |
| Parent marital status     |    |        |
| Married/Engaged           | 19 | 76     |
| Single                    | 2  | 8      |
| Separated/Divorced        | 3  | 12     |
| Did not answer            | 1  | 4      |
| Parental education        |    |        |
| Less than high school     | 1  | 4      |
| High school               | 3  | 12     |
| Some college/post-high school training | 11 | 44 |
| Bachelor's degree         | 7  | 28     |
| Advanced degree           | 3  | 12     |
| Income level              |    |        |
| $30,000–$59,999           | 5  | 20     |
| $60,000–$99,999           | 5  | 20     |
| $100,000–$199,999         | 3  | 12     |
| Did not answer            | 12 | 48     |
explained as, ‘something experienced when somebody else has something you want, but do not have’. Participants were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers and were asked to provide any type of experience related to these emotions, no matter how insignificant they may have seemed. At the close of the interview, participants were thanked and given a gift card for their participation. The first author transcribed 16 interviews (64% of the total) and a trained research assistant transcribed the remaining nine transcripts (36% of the total).

Coding
Coding of the interview transcripts was conducted using a modified version of a procedure detailed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003).

Reducing the text
Following Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), the first two steps of the coding process involved reducing the amount of text from the original transcription in an attempt to make the text more manageable. First, the research question framing the investigation was clearly restated and defined (step 1) to ensure that only information related to the research question was retained subsequent steps. All other text was deleted from the transcripts in step 2.

Understanding participant responses
Step 3 consisted of identifying repeating ideas, thoughts that were ‘expressed in the relevant text by two or more research participants’ (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 54). In step 4, the repeating ideas were categorised into themes. The first and second authors sorted the repeating ideas into thematic groups; differences between the coders were resolved with discussion. When similar themes were condensed into the broader categories called theoretical constructs using Auerbach and Silverstein’s method, the level of abstraction of the theoretical constructs obscured the original responses and ideas and resulted in gross generalities. As a result, only the themes are presented here.

Results
The themes that emerged from this qualitative analysis provided a rich portrait of the content, circumstances, and meanings of adolescent envy and gratitude. Forty-nine repeating ideas and nine themes emerged from the data. A complete list of repeating ideas, as they are organised under their respective themes, can be found in Tables 2 and 3. The frequency of the themes is listed there as well. Results are represented at the thematic level below.

Gratitude and feeling cared for and special
Adolescents readily expressed gratitude for the central people in their lives such as parents, teachers and friends. For example, parents and teachers often offered support and encouragement during challenging times. One adolescent girl explained, ‘It made me feel good and really kind of lucky that I have a parent who will support me and try to get me help’. Similar sentiments were offered about teachers, ‘I was having a lot of math trouble and the principal offered to tutor me’. Friends were recognised for things like helping the participant to celebrate her birthday at school by decorating her locker. More specifically, several participants provided examples of gratitude for being included in something or how their inclusion of a friend inspired grateful feelings. One participant noted gratitude for feeling part of the group, while another said ‘I need rides from places sometimes and my friends will pick me up and bring me places. And it just makes me feel good to know I have people there’. In sum, parents, teachers, and friends comprised the ‘who’ of adolescent gratitude experiences.

Sometimes adolescents mentioned gifts as a part of their reasons for feeling grateful. In all cases except one, though, they mentioned the giver of the gift in conjunction with the gift itself, stressing the ‘who’ of the gratitude experience. Several participants noted that there was a special feeling associated with receiving a gift that was exactly what they wanted. In a related manner, several participants were
grateful for and recognised the effort and sacrifice of others on their behalf. Specifically, two adolescents remarked that their parents frequently gave up their weekends to attend and support their children at sporting events. For example, ‘They [his parents] try their best to make it up there [to the game] if they can, but I understand cause they have a lot of work to do, but they try to make it the best they can, even if it’s past halftime.’

Other times adolescents shared that they were grateful for ‘little things’. For example, classmates offered to help with homework, performed random acts of kindness or shared their lunch money. Participants indicated that those actions contributed to their feeling cared for and loved. Although this sentiment of feeling cared for was implied in the participant responses described above, some adolescents noted specifically that their experiences with gratitude directly led them to feel special. When describing an opportunity to go on a special school trip, one girl mentioned that, ‘… I was really happy and grateful that he [her teacher] picked me out of everyone’. In addition, their actions on behalf of others made other people feel special too.

Taken together these repeating ideas suggest that gratitude experiences are intimately linked with adolescent social identity development, helping adolescents to feel deeply cared for, supported, and special. By understanding that the principal people in their lives care about and support them, adolescents may be better able to navigate the challenges and insecurities that accompany this developmental period. Furthermore, these relationships shape adolescents’ understanding of their place in the world. That is, the support may provide affirmation for the identities they are cultivating (Pinel, 2009). The extant literature converges with this idea given the association of both gratitude (e.g. Froh et al., 2008) and self-affirmation (Cohen & Sherman, 2014) with well-being. Perhaps gratitude and self-affirmation

| Themes and repeating ideas | Frequency of theme (Hill, 2012) |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. Envy of material things | Typical (14) |
| Envy of material possessions/wealth | |
| But I really wanted it | |
| B. Gratitude and feeling cared for and special | General (24) |
| Participant does something nice for others | |
| Gratitude for the ‘little things’ | |
| Gratitude for teachers | |
| Gratitude for friends | |
| Participant offers help to a parent | |
| Gratitude for receiving help | |
| Gratitude and feeling special | |
| Gratitude for giving homework help | |
| Participant offers help to a sibling | |
| Participant as a gift giver | |
| Getting what I wanted | |
| Participant offers to help a friend | |
| Participant gratitude for gift or material object | |
| Feeling cared for as a result of gratitude action | |
| Inclusion | |
| Recognition of effort/sacrifice | |
| Gratitude for parents and family (other than siblings) | |
| C. Gratitude for recognition and opportunities | Variant (4) |
| Gratitude for recognition of accomplishment | |
| Gratitude for opportunity | |
| D. Envy of relationships, appearance, personality, popularity, and achievement | Typical (19) |
| Envy of siblings | |
| Envy of physical attributes (i.e. hair) | |
| Envy of girlfriends and boyfriends | |
| Envy of achievement | |
| Envy of personality | |
| Envy of status and reputation | |
| Envy of driving | |

Notes: Frequencies of the themes are based on the following guidelines (Hill, 2012): general (24 or 25 participants), typical (between 13 and 23 participants), and variant (between 4 and 12 participants).
share a common path to well-being, as self-affirmation may be a part of feeling grateful. In sum, narrative accounts of gratitude revealed adolescents feel cared about and special because parents make sacrifices, teachers offer extra help, and friends include each other in different activities. Consequently, a healthy adolescent identity is nurtured by others who validate one’s personhood and provide social support.

**Gratitude for recognition and opportunities**
Adolescents also mentioned gratitude for recognition and opportunities, comprising an additional theme on gratitude content. One girl noted that at a recent dance practice an onlooker suggested to the instructor that she be moved to the front of the group so people could see her more easily because she was doing so well. Other participants shared their gratitude for different opportunities they had received. One boy mentioned that he ‘… was grateful that [name of high school] accepted me here so I can go to high school here’. When considering what adolescents are grateful for, being recognised for their hard work and successes and the opportunities to pursue their interests, are critical. Moreover, these accomplishments and experiences contribute to their self-concept and how they fit into the world around them. Finally, in an indirect way, recognition and opportunities may motivate adolescents’ future activities and heighten their drive for success, contributing to their performance in academic and related domains.

**Envy of material things**
The answer to the question ‘Why do adolescents envy?’ can be largely summed up in two words, material objects. Envied items varied widely and included iPhones, tennis shoes and designer purses. Participants noted that material objects were both reasons that they envied others and that others envied them. One adolescent girl, speaking generally, noted, ‘… There are new shoes or new clothes that other people have that I don’t …’ An adolescent boy talking about a friend remarked, ‘He’s super rich and stuff … He’s like always getting what he wants. He always has these nice headphones, TVs, stuff like
that’: The participant continued, ‘And I guess I envy the things he has because I would like them, but I have to save for it and try to get them myself’.

By and large, the story of adolescents’ envy is that they covet others’ material possessions. The envy was particularly striking when adolescents learned others had the exact things they wanted for themselves. The idea that others owned material goods they wanted, may inform identity in that ownership of an iPhone (or lack thereof) can convey information about status and impact how others perceive them. In other words, status information that is tied to ownership of material possessions contributes to adolescents’ identity by shaping how others view them (Gil, Kwon, Good, & Johnson, 2012). Other research, showing that self-esteem during mid-adolescence is heavily influenced by peer opinion, is consistent with this interpretation (Harter, 2012).

### Envy of relationships, appearance, personality, popularity and achievement

Although material envy was extremely prevalent in adolescents’ experiences, it was not the sole source. Examples of non-material envy were diverse and included domains significant for adolescents such as romantic relationships, physical appearance, popularity, personality and achievement. Several participants noted they were envious of friends who had boyfriends or girlfriends. One girl remarked, ‘… everyone’s got all these boyfriends and I’m just kind of sitting here like by myself’. For girls, their hair elicited envy from others, but this was the only mention of physical attributes or appearance. Personality traits were another reasons adolescents envied others and that others envied them. One boy elaborated saying, ‘I mean I’m not the kind of person that can talk to anybody and when I started high school I guess you could call it envy the kids who can talk to anybody and start a conversation and all that’. When reflecting on a time when someone else had been envious of him, an adolescent remarked, ‘… I can tell when people don’t like my personality and stuff … I don’t like to gossip. That’s why people don’t get me’. Siblings were often the targets of envy for a variety of reasons. One adolescent girl remarked that she envied her sister because ‘… she’s like perfect’. Another noted envy of parental treatment explaining that his dad always gives his brother more money when he goes out with his friends.

Envy regarding achievement in domains such as sports and academics were mentioned as well. One girl shared that she won a scholarship and, ‘I guess I was the envy of them, especially the people I was against’. In addition, achievement was a reason that adolescents envied others. For example, ‘My friend won an award for like sports or like spirit and sports and stuff, and I was really envious of that just because … I guess I’ve always worked hard’. Other examples included sports performance and standardised test scores. All of these ‘domains are of personal relevance’ for adolescents and quite consistent with DelPriore et al.’s (2012) definition of envy. A few participants shared that they were envious of their friends’ ability to drive, alluding to the freedom that comes from being able to drive oneself places.

Additional examples of non-material envy came from adolescents’ concern for status and reputation. Specifically, participants mentioned their own popularity and the popularity of others, as well as being invited to or included in certain parties or events. Inclusion was envied and exclusion bemoaned. An adolescent girl offered an example from social media, ‘… Well on Instagram, like there are a lot of people who are like they always have a ton of followers and a ton of likes’. Among adolescents, status may serve to foster self-esteem via non-material envy as well (Harter, 2012).

Although these non-material examples of envy may seem diverse or even disconnected, they all contribute to the fabric of the adolescent experience. These examples point to the centrality of adolescents’ social interactions with peers. Romantic relationships, popularity and personality characteristics emphasise the importance of interpersonal connectedness for youth and the emphasis placed on evaluation by their peers. For example, envied personality traits were centred on likeability and one’s aptitude for making friends. Romantic relationships were often viewed as a type of status symbol as was being a part of the ‘right’ social groups. Finally, envy of achievement is not surprising given adolescents spend so much of their time in school and focused on extracurricular activities. In sum, although envy of material things comprises a major component of adolescent envy, it is not the entire story.
**Conventional responses to gratitude and envy**

Responses to gratitude and envy were also revealed in the narratives. What did it mean for adolescents to feel grateful and envious? Did their experience alter their future feelings or actions in any way? How often did they feel these emotions? There was divergence over how often gratitude was experienced or felt in one’s daily life. With some sharing that they ‘never really think much of gratitude’ and others saying, ‘I know I’m always being thankful … ’ This inconsistency in ideas about frequency surfaced with envy too, as some participants experience it ‘… pretty much any time somebody has something that I would like to have but don’t’. In contrast another offered, ‘I don’t do envy’. This lack of consensus on how frequently adolescents experience these emotions would make an excellent question for future research.

Many of adolescents’ responses to the experiences of gratitude and envy were conventional and consistent with normative, socially anticipated responses. They reported simply saying ‘thank you’ to express their gratitude and that being grateful made them feel happy. Some reported non-verbal acknowledgement, such as hugs and tears. The frequency of these conventional responses suggests that outward gratitude expression is often cursory and superficial.

In contrast, envy sparked unpleasant feelings, including anger, as portrayed in prior literature (Smith & Kim, 2007). For example, one boy shared his envy of his sister, ‘I’m like the kind of person if I kind of get mad or get defensive … I use my words as weapons instead of like fighting them and things’. Verbal expression of unpleasant feelings was rather uncommon, but was an outlet for adolescents to express their negative feelings, most often when envy occurred between siblings or family members.

**Mixed and other negative feelings associated with envy**

In addition to the principal, conventional negative emotions (e.g. anger) associated with envy, adolescents provided examples of more sophisticated and complex responses. Some expressed feelings of frustration and annoyance, both with oneself and with the situation. A girl, discussing her envy of others’ ease in making friends, remarked, ‘I feel like it’s something that I don’t know what holds me back from doing it’.

Envy led to negative comparisons as well. One adolescent, regarding a friend’s nice clothes, remarked, ‘It made me feel … not as good as she was … and it kind of brought me down’. Consistent with prior literature, the findings suggest that social comparisons that are fostered by envy negatively impact how adolescents feel about themselves (DelPriore et al., 2012). We know from Harter’s (2012) research that self-esteem during early and mid-adolescence is particularly fragile and heavily influenced by peer opinion. As evidenced above, mid-adolescents’ envious feelings are sometimes internalised, contributing to a negative self-evaluation. The comparisons surrounding envy may serve as a reminder that the adolescent has failed to measure up to social norms and practices established by peers. In other words, feelings of inadequacy arising from envious feelings may counteract a healthy identity development.

Similarly, adolescents struggled with contradictory feelings regarding their friends’ successes. Paralleling Selman’s (1980) claim that adolescents are beginning to understand that one’s inward feelings do not have to match their outward actions, many participants provided concrete examples of this discrepancy. After a friend had won an award at school, one adolescent girl explained, ‘I was like upset and kind of happy for her at the same time’. After sharing a similar situation another participant commented, ‘I was proud of her and I told her I was and that was a great feeling, but there was that little thing inside of me that I was like darn it’. These duelling feelings created tension in some participants, introducing a conflict with what they truly felt and with what they thought they should feel. Adolescents’ reflections support the idea that envy may be one contributing factor to heightened peer comparison and negative self-appraisal during adolescence. Participant reactions to envy experiences that yield negative self-evaluations and ambivalent feelings for others’ successes may play a role in this decline in self-esteem (Harter, 2012).

**Use of reason**

Still other reactions to gratitude and envy revealed more enduring consequences, with some participants noting how these emotions impacted future behaviour as motivators to improve one’s future
situation. Participants mentioned the use of envy to motivate themselves to work harder, saying for example, ‘I’m trying to get a job so I can get those things [new clothes]’ and ‘… I need to step up my game a bit.’ These statements exemplify benign envy, in which envy motivates enviers to improve by working harder (van de Ven et al., 2012). Like envy, gratitude served as a motivator. For example, one boy reflected, ‘I guess my way of saying thankful [thank you] to the learning consultants is me comin’ out with the good grades because it shows… that they helped with their hard work …’

More complex reasoning and actions were also employed to reduce the unpleasantness of envy. As the envied individual, participants made efforts to make the envier feel better. One girl remarked, ‘I just try to bring up stuff that they have in their life to make them realize how much they have.’ In comparing popularity on social media, an adolescent said to a friend, ‘I know exactly how you feel’ and ‘I’m sorry.’ These efforts impact future interactions as attempts to repair relationships that may have been damaged by envious feelings.

When the participants were the enviers, they sometimes used reason and logic to make themselves feel better. An adolescent, talking about a pair of tennis shoes, reported thinking, ‘… Maybe I didn’t need them, like they look better on him then they would on me.’ Others refused to worry about what others have, ‘I like to think that when somebody has something that I would want … I try to tell myself that I would feel happy for that person and … not be selfish and feel envious.’ These examples are consistent with advanced social perspective taking; adolescents were able to anticipate the feelings of others and attempted to resolve the feelings of envy in their own lives (Selman, 1980). Moreover, these reports provide concrete examples of how adolescents navigate their social world to maintain harmony and interconnectedness in their relationships.

**Reciprocity for gratitude and payback for envy**

Reciprocity and payback were very specific ways in which future behaviour was directed after experiencing gratitude and envy. Given the social nature of gratitude and envy (e.g. McCullough et al., 2001; Smith & Kim, 2007), it is not surprising that social behaviour such as reciprocity following gratitude and payback after envy was among the consequences of those feelings. Concerning reciprocity, benefiting from kind acts by others encouraged the participant to ‘pay it forward’ or do something nice for people in return. After receiving a present from her basketball coaches one girl explained, ‘I ended up goin’ out and getting my coaches gifts for Christmas.’ Another participant remarked that she was more conscientious about doing her chores after receiving Christmas presents from her parents. Reciprocity is one reason that gratitude interactions are helpful in building and strengthening relationships and maintaining a network of care (Froh et al., 2011).

The payback with envy frequently took place via a verbal argument, most often with siblings and rarely with friends. When recounting an argument with her sister, one participant shared, ‘She’ll be like “You’re always so mean to me” or whatever and I’m like “Because you’re perfect and everyone thinks you’re perfect.” I’m just [participant’s name].’ In a rare display of malicious envy over new tennis shoes, a participant explained that, ‘… when we were walkin’ through the hallway she [the envier] would step on my foot or bump between me.’ Rarely did direct attacks occur; strictly verbal confrontations were slightly more common. These situations are in stark contrast to reciprocity driven by gratitude. The examples with envy point to how envious feelings are antagonistic for interpersonal relationships and may undermine social support.

**General discussion**

Gratitude and envy are important in the lives of adolescents for a variety of reasons, as revealed by the lived experiences of these emotions shared by adolescents in this study. Results led to several new insights. First, adolescent narratives of gratitude and envy exemplified advances in social perspective taking consistent with the perspective taking literature (Selman, 1980). Participants readily noted gratitude for sacrifices made on their behalf (e.g. parents spending their own free time at their child’s basketball game), and in stories of envy, adolescents demonstrated the ability say one thing to an individual, while feeling something completely different internally. For example, participants remarked about
the internal conflict when expressing happiness for a friend (i.e. the envied individual), while actually feeling far more conflicted internally about their friend’s achievement that they desired for themselves.

Second, we know peer approval is critical in maintaining self-esteem (Harter, 2012). In particular, possessions – from concert tickets to designer handbags – may serve important functions during adolescence. As suggested by the materialism literature, during early and mid-adolescence material goods are ways to make oneself look better in an effort to boost self-esteem (Chaplin & John, 2007). Consequently, the inferiority and resulting envy could be responsible for lowering self-esteem during mid-adolescence when adolescents compare themselves to their peers (Harter, 2012).

**Gratitude and envy inform adolescent identity**

Identity development is central to adolescent development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Elements of adolescent identity emerged during the interviews in discussions of both gratitude and envy. Adolescents’ examples of feeling cared for and special suggested these experiences reaffirmed their identity as people worthy of support in the context of meaningful relationships with family and friends. Feeling loved and special may contribute to a more secure self and help to establish a stable identity (Pinel, 2009).

With envy, the materialism literature suggests that adolescents use material goods as status symbols and these possessions outwardly convey aspects of adolescents’ identity and self-concept (Chaplin & John, 2007, 2010). In explanations of envy, experiences surrounding the possession of certain items (e.g. type of cell phone) and skills (e.g. making friends easily) seemed to lessen adolescents’ sense of self-worth (e.g. ‘it made me feel not as good as she was’) Moreover, the ownership of these objects influenced how others saw them. That is, possession of these items says ‘who I am if I have it’ or ‘who I am if I do not’.

**Gratitude, envy and culture**

US adolescents’ gratitude and envy narratives supported the idea that those emotions are informed by culture. With gratitude, participants noted how kind actions performed on their behalf (e.g. being chosen for a school trip, being included in friend groups) contributed to their positive sense of self and to feeling cared for and loved. As described previously, feeling positive about oneself is characteristic of individualistic cultures like the US (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002). Under the theme of gratitude for recognition and opportunities, individualism was reflected in comments such as being grateful for standing out as a dancer and the opportunity to pursue one’s own interests.

Elements of the individualistic US also manifested in youths’ envy responses. Verbal expression or open admission of envy was uncommon. Although adolescents noted they often felt envy and described feelings of anger and frustration that accompanied the emotion, they had only infrequently spoken about their envy with others. This is likely because admission of envy implies inferiority on some domain, which stands in stark contrast to the tenets of individualism that stress the importance of superiority or ‘being the best’. In other words, envious feelings left adolescents feeling disadvantaged. Thus, these results support Foster’s (1972) claims about the challenges of envy in individualistic cultures.

In a related vein, adolescents’ experiences may provide insight into the malicious/benign envy dichotomy (van de Ven et al., 2012). That is, malicious envy involved hostile intent and a desire to remove the envier’s advantage, while with benign envy, the envious feelings serve as a motivator to achieve the desired advantaged. Although examples of both subtypes were evident in adolescents’ accounts, they were infrequent. Instead a third type was more common in which adolescents acknowledged internally that feeling envy was unpleasant and associated envy with feelings of inferiority. However, those feelings were rarely manifested externally (hostile envy) nor did they often serve as a motivator (benign envy).

In the light of the data and Foster’s (1972) claim that admission of envy is difficult for those in the US, the culture’s individualistic orientation may make it difficult for one to admit envy, suggesting a third, intermediate subtype may better characterise envy in US adolescents. Given adolescents’ experiences with gratitude and envy reflected their cultural background, addressing these emotions with a cultural lens is necessary for understanding their antecedents and consequences.
Strengths, limitations and future directions

The strength of this study is that adolescents described their own experiences of envy and gratitude in ways that were salient and meaningful to them. Thus, the study revealed participants' views of the social environments that provoked the feelings, as well as the consequences. Most of the limitations of the study are common to qualitative studies; the sample was neither random, nor representative of the population of US adolescents. Instead, participants were mostly Christian and from middle class families. Moreover, the structure of the questions undoubtedly influenced the responses of the adolescents. Specifically, the participants who were randomly assigned to answer the envy questions first talked less overall about both their envy and gratitude experiences. Adolescents may have found it uncomfortable to discuss negative envy experiences prior to having the opportunity to discuss positive experiences with gratitude.

Future studies could address some of these limitations by including more diverse samples including students from public schools and more diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, both within and outside the US. Given the results of this study indicate cultural elements play a role in how gratitude and envy are experienced, additional work is necessary to provide systematic investigation of these emotions in diverse cultural contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adolescents partially negotiate their identity and sense of self through the social emotions of gratitude and envy. Specifically, adolescents felt gratitude when others made them feel cared for and special. Those experiences affirmed adolescents' self-worth in their roles as friends, sons and daughters, and students. In addition, adolescents felt envy when others had material possessions they did not. In opposition to gratitude, the social comparisons that arose from envious feelings diminished self-worth, leaving adolescents feeling less than and inferior. Both feelings inform identity development and foster adolescents' growing awareness as social beings.

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