



Comparison of hope and the child–parent relationship of at-risk adolescents at home and in residential care



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1. Comparison of hope and child–parent relationship between at-risk youth who live at home and those who were removed to residential care

Hope is defined as a “positive motivational status” that is based on an instinct that is comprised of positive goal-oriented energy and planning ways to achieve the goals (Snyder, 2000). It is widely understood as an empowering resource that helps persons to cope with uncertainty, loss and major life challenges (e.g. Barnum, Snyder, Rapoff, Mani, & Thompson, 1998; Frederick, Hatz, & Lanning, 2015; Hullmann, Fedele, Molzon, Mayes, & Mullins, 2014; Otis, Huebner, & Hills, 2016). A wide range of studies have documented its power to predict success at school and in sports; to bolster self-esteem and psychological functioning and to buffer stress (e.g. Kashdan et al., 2002; Marques, Lopez, Fontaine, Coimbra, & Mitchell, 2015; Snyder, 2000, 2006; Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006).

Since the early 1990s, there has been growing interest in hope among adolescents. The many and rapid changes that adolescents undergo and the many and varied life events with which they must cope make hope particularly important during the adolescent years (Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995; Westburg, 2001). Studies show that hope serves adolescents as an internal cognitive and motivational resource that fosters expectations of success (e.g. Bennett, Wood, Butterfield, & Goldhagen, 2014; Valle et al., 2006; Westburg, 2001). It has been associated with adolescents' accurate evaluation of situations, successful management of life challenges, and, in consequence, with their self-

confidence, self-actualization, and further readiness to invest active effort to attain success (e.g. Horton & Wallander, 2001). Also, higher levels of hope were found as predicting psychosocial well-being, academic achievement, and athletic achievement (e.g. Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007; Lopez, Ciarlelli, Coffman, Stone, & Wyatt, 2000). In addition, youth who are hopeful may be more likely to engage in a positive and goal-oriented way with their families, communities, and society (e.g. Flanagan, 2003; Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997).

Despite the evident importance of hope in adolescents, only few studies examined hope among at-risk youth and particularly among youth in care (Callina, Johnson, Buckingham, & Lerner, 2014; Schmid & Lopez, 2011). This paper addresses this gap and examines hope among youth who were removed from home to care facilities for youth at risk and at-risk youth who live with their families and are involved in services for youth at risk in the community. Both youth in care and youth who live with their families experienced some degree of abuse and neglect and were exposed to different type of distress. Those traumatic events may have a negative influence on their hope (Rodriguez-Hanley & Snyder, 2000). However, the question whether youth's removal from their neglectful or abusive families influences their level of hope towards a brighter future remained unsolved. Although children' removal from their home to care is always meant to avoid further harm and help them prosper, their departure from their biological families is often perceived as negative and traumatic and causes additional stress including loss, and mental and adjustment difficulties (Corcoran, 2000; Davidson-Arad & Wozner, 2001). Also, it is assumed that children who were removed from their homes experience more severe life threatening circumstances than at risk children who stay with their parents (Shepherd, 2009). In addition, parting from parents can arouse feelings of failure and effect the child's self esteem, as children relate their removal to their “bad behavior” (e.g., Shepherd,

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2009). Earlier studies found that children in care are at higher risk of experiencing violence, abuse and bullying due to their past victimization and the many children and staff they are exposed to in care (Barter, Renold, Berridge, & Cawson, 2004; Gibbs & Sinclair, 2000). Our paper further examined whether there are difference in hope between at-risk youth in care and at-risk youth who stayed with their families.

Hope emerges from a very early age. Snyder (1994) asserted that for hope to properly evolve, children need a supporting relationship with their parents to provide them with security and stability and accommodate their needs. This “safe attachment” leads to a positive “internal working model” in which they develop positive representations of themselves and the environment that leads to unaware hope. This hope allows them to become independent, set goals for their future and explore the world. Literature suggest that at-risk youth who live with their parents or in care often experience impaired attachment relationships with their parents (Tolmacz, 2001). However, more recent studies among at risk youth in care show mixed results regarding child-parent relationships. Some studies suggest that they are worse than those of children who stayed with their parents at home (Courtney & Heuring, 2005) since they experience their removal from home as an abandonment (Ackerman & Dozier, 2005). However, other studies found that despite their removal from home, youth in care report close contact with their biological parents, especially with their mothers and siblings (Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Samuels, 2008). Therefore, another goal of this study was to examine whether there are differences between at-risk youth and youth in care in their relationships with their parents. Finally, since the literature indicates the importance of the relationship with the parents in youth's psychological adjustment and their hope (McCoy, Henrika, & Bowen, 2015; Steinberg, 2005), this study also explored whether the relationships of at-risk youth both in care and those who live with their families, are associated with their hope. Very little work has focused on the link between parent-child relationships and hope, particularly during adolescence (Callina et al., 2014). Learning more about the associations between parent-child relationships and hope among at-risk youth both at home and in care could expand our understanding about the factors that promote youth's ability to cope with stress and adversity (Pezent, 2011; Shepherd, 2009; Valle et al., 2006).

2. Snyders' model of hope

Snyders' model of hope has been a central theory within positive psychology that emphasizes research of characteristics and processes that lead to adaptive coping, thriving and resilience among individuals (Cheavens, Feldman, Woodward, & Snyder, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Snyder examined the way planning thoughts are related to one's emotions, with positive thoughts assuming an expectation to achieve goals, and negative emotions assuming an expectation to fail. According to this model, by examining one's thoughts regarding their sense of ability to achieve their goals we can learn about their level of hope. Therefore hope is perceived as a measurable component (Snyder, 2000).

Snyder (2000) defined hope as a “positive motivational status” that is based on an instinct that is comprised of positive goal-oriented energy (agency) and planning ways to achieve the goals (pathways). He argued that hope comprises two appraisals occurring simultaneously: “agency thinking” and “pathway thinking.” Agency thinking refers to the appraisal that one is capable of executing the means to attain desired goals. One has to be well-motivated to execute their goals. Therefore, the importance of agency thinking is the individual's capability to continue their move towards their goals through the paths they chose despite the obstacles that may rise.

While agency thinking is described as an inner willpower that promotes the individual towards their goals, pathway thinking refers to

the appraisal that one is capable of generating the pathways that could lead to those goals. Pathway thinking is the way in which the individual creates an image of their future self and an image of a pathway that ties between this image and their current one (Cheavens et al., 2006). The experience of agency thinking plus pathway thinking is the experience of hope itself. In Snyder's view, hopeful people believe that they are able to do something to obtain their goals (Snyder, 2002).

3. Hope among at-risk youth and youth in care

The literature suggests that at-risk youth might have lower levels of hope than their peers in the general population. For example, earlier studies found that youth who reported many negative experiences in their lives such as maltreatment were less hopeful than those who reported less adversity (Dumain, 2011; Grewal-Sandhu, 2008). Shepherd (2009) found that young adults with lower levels of hope also experienced abuse and psychological neglect as children. In addition, lower levels of hope among at-risk youth were associated with emotional difficulties and behavior problems.

Several reasons might lead to lower levels of hope among at-risk youth. Snyder (2002) asserted that the absence, loss or lack of a parent who would have provided children with opportunities to learn “hopeful thinking” is one of the central reasons. He assumed that the negative experience of neglect and maltreatment by parents, who are supposed to act as role models, is assumed to profoundly influence youths' hope.

Support and stability during youth's development also allow youth to become confident and aware of the social codes that lead to their goals (Snyder, 2002). At-risk youth and youth in care usually act in an unpredictable environment with no consistent rules or experience instability in their placements (Courtney & Heuring, 2005). Therefore, their confidence in their ability to set and reach goals and learn the skills to achieve those goals might be lower (Snyder, 2000).

Traumatic events in childhood could also have an influence on the child's ability to develop their sense of hope (Rodriguez-Hanley & Snyder, 2000). In addition to the experiences of abuse and neglect, at-risk youth deal with in their homes, at-risk youth who are placed in care also experience the traumatic removal from their parents and extended families (Davidson-Arad & Wozner, 2001). During their transition from their biological parents into care, they deal with feelings of loss, emotional lability and adjustment difficulties (Corcoran, 2000). In addition, there is some evidence that these youth may also have experienced maltreatment in care by staff or other youth who reside in care (Colton, Vanstone, & Walby, 2002; Horwath, 2000). Although no study has explored differences in hope between youth in care and at-risk youth who stayed with their parents, based on these reasons we hypothesized that the level of hope of youth in care is lower than at-risk youth who stayed with their parents.

4. Youth-parents relationship and hope

Parent-child relationship refers to the means, actions and behaviors parents exhibit towards their children. The way the children perceive their relationships with their parents influences their emotional and mental development significantly, especially in adolescence (Poulsen, 2010). A wide range of studies has emphasized the important role of parents and family in the future status of the child (Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008; Parke, 2004). Young adults with high levels of hope reported a close bond with at least one caregiver when they were young (Snyder, McDermott, Cook, & Rapoff, 2002). Therefore, it is assumed that the meaningful parental figure became a source of inspiration and motivation, and helped the child in the formation of goals by teaching them the causal thinking necessary to achieve those goals (Snyder, 2000).

Earlier studies found that parents' acceptance was perceived as a main feature in the child's personality evolvment, self-perception

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