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Flint's Children: Narratives on Hope

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Abstract

Hope plays an important role in resiliency, well-being, and buffering against adversity. To explore children's experiences with hope while developing in low-income communities, we conducted interviews with twenty-one children residing in Flint, Michigan, ages 9-12 years. Research questions focused on the specific hopes children have, the importance they ascribe to different hopes, and their experiences of feeling hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes. Children expressed interrelated hopes across multiple social-ecological domains, including hopes for themselves, hopes for their interpersonal relationships, and hopes for the community. Children placed particular importance on their hopes of helping others, which included providing for their families and aiding others in the community. Children, however, expressed uncertainty regarding their hopes related to career aspirations, academic achievement, financial stability, and obtaining basic needs. Our findings expand upon what is known about children's internal dialogues with feeling hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes in low-income communities. These findings can enhance community and school-based programming so they further align with the specific hopes that children have, and attune to areas in which children in impoverished communities are most in need of hope-engendering strategies.

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Hope plays an important role in resiliency, well-being, and buffering against adversity. To explore children's experiences with hope while developing in low-income communities, we conducted interviews with twenty-one children residing in Flint, Michigan, ages 9-12 years. Research questions focused on the specific hopes children have, the importance they ascribe to different hopes, and their experiences of feeling hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes. Children expressed interrelated hopes across multiple social-ecological domains, including hopes for themselves, hopes for their interpersonal relationships, and hopes for the community. Children placed particular importance on their hopes of helping others, which included providing for their families and aiding others in the community. Children, however, expressed uncertainty regarding their hopes related to career aspirations, academic achievement, financial stability, and obtaining basic needs. Our findings expand upon what is known about children's internal dialogues with feeling hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes in low-income communities. These findings can enhance community and school-based programming so they further align with the specific hopes that children have, and attune to areas in which children in impoverished communities are most in need of hope-engendering strategies. Keywords: Hope, Poverty, Minority Youth, Positive Psychology, Urban Communities, Thematic Analysis

The adversity faced by children in low-income environments is widely studied with attention to exposure to numerous risk factors and the development of behavioral and emotional difficulties (Reiss, 2013; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). Literature on resilience and positive psychology, however, is instrumental in moving beyond the study of maladaptive behavioral patterns, turning instead to an investigation of adaptive outcomes in the face of adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Reed, 2002; Rutter, 2006). To date, a number of individual, family, and community factors that promote resiliency have been identified (for review, see Luthar, 2006). Hope is one central factor that is thought to "buffer well-being from the effects of negative life-events, shielding us from adversity, [and] protecting us from stress and sadness" (Lopez, 2013, p. 57).

A comprehensive literature review of the construct of hope identifies 49 definitions and 32 measurement tools (Schrank, Stanghellini, & Slade, 2008). The most prominent conceptualization of hope for the past two decades, however, is Snyder's hope theory (1994). Adopting a cognitive-based, but emotion-integrative model, Snyder and colleagues (1991, p. 287) define hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)." Pathway thinking refers to a person's perception that they are capable of formulating pathways for achieving their goals. Agency thinking refers to an individual's perceived ability to utilize identified pathways until goal attainment occurs. An individual's positive perception of his or

her ability to generate routes to goal attainment increases his or her perceived ability to follow these pathways, which iteratively serves to facilitate even greater pathway thinking. Successful goal completion is also accompanied by the experience of positive affect; these emotions cycle back to further enhance an individual's pathway and agency thinking (Snyder, 2000; Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002; Snyder et al., 2005).

According to Snyder's hope theory (1994), hopeful thinking can influence how individuals appraise and cope with encounters of adversity or obstacles to goal attainment. Individuals with higher levels of hope are more likely to view obstacles as challenges rather than setbacks. Empirical research finds that hope is linked to greater problem-solving skills (Peterson & Byron, 2008), higher productivity (for review, see Reichard et al., 2013), and higher academic performance (Day et al., 2010). According to Snyder (1994, 2000), individuals with higher levels of hope also have greater flexibility in their use of diverse coping strategies and a greater tendency to generate alternative pathways to achieving their goals. Conversely, individuals with low hope are found to utilize more avoidant coping strategies (Chang, 1998), which are associated with maladaptive outcomes that include depression, anxiety, and psychological destress (Shapiro et al., 2012).

Although hope is identified as a positive construct that can help support well-being and buffer against adversity, the bulk of existing literature examines hope among adults. Less research examines hope during adolescence and far less explores hope during childhood. Studies have found, however, that during adolescence, hope is positively associated with self-esteem (Cantrell & Lupinacci, 2004), social support (Edwards, Ong, & Lopez, 2007), and optimism (Wong & Lim, 2009). Hope is also linked to life satisfaction, positive affect, positive health practices, well-being, and academic success during adolescence, while negatively related to substance use and externalizing behaviors (for review, see Esteves et al., 2013). Despite strong emerging research in this area, additional research is needed to examine how hope is experienced during different developmental periods, including childhood and adolescence, and across different domains (e.g., academic or social).

Additional studies are also needed with regard to diverse samples and contexts (Stevens et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2010), including children and adolescent's hopes in low-income communities as these children often experience numerous adversities and chronic stress (Bennett & Miller, 2006; Morales & Guerra, 2006; Ozer & Weinstein, 2004). Some adolescents in impoverished environments report reduced expectations regarding their own life expectancy and describe hopelessness about the future (MacLeod, 1987). Among inner-city adolescents living in impoverished neighborhoods, hopelessness predicts risky behaviors such as violence and aggression, sexual behavior, and substance use (Bolland, 2003). Hope, conversely, is positively related to self-concept among low-income African-American children, and hope moderates the effect of exposure to violence on self-concept (Cedeno et al., 2010). Hope is also predictive of subjective well-being (Vacek, Coyle, & Vera, 2010) and is associated with the ability to engage in self-care activities (Canty-Mitchell, 2001). Taken together, scholars suggest that prevention and intervention programs for inner-city youth can be strengthened by addressing feelings of hopelessness and providing strategies aimed at engendering more hopeful thinking about the future (Bolland, 2003).

Emerging literature finds that children often express multiple hopes for the future (Bishop & Willis, 2014). Children in low-income communities, however, may have lower aspirations than children developing in more affluent communities (Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). Qualitative research with homeless youth also suggests that children in low-income environments often use several hope-engendering strategies; these include relying on relationships with others, inner strength, cognitive re-framing, energy, and meaningful inanimate objects (Herth, 1998). Immigrant and refugee children may specifically draw hope

from engaging in cognitive and physical engendering activities, reliable relationships with others, and connecting with nature (Yohani & Larsen, 2009).

Our study expands existing literature by delineating the range of hopes children have in low-income communities, the importance children ascribe to different hopes, and their experiences of feeling hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes. We conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-one children residing in Flint, Michigan. Our study can enhance programming for children developing in poverty, by highlighting the nuances of children's hope narratives and identifying the domains in which children in poverty are most in need of hope-engendering strategies.

About the Authors

Dr. Christin L. Carotta is an assistant professor at South Dakota State University in the Department of Counseling and Human Development. Her research interests stem from her experience teaching in urban education, where she worked with multicultural children and families in low-income communities. Dr. Amy E. Bonomi is chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Michigan State University, with a research background in public health and family adversity. Karleigh Knox, Morgan C. Blain, Brianna F. Dines, and Jaquan Cotton studied human development and family studies at Michigan State University. All authors share an interest in studying and supporting positive health-related outcomes for diverse individuals and families.

Methods

All study procedures were approved by Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board. Recruitment of children, ages 9 to 12, occurred from June 2015 to August 2015 at a community-based facility that supports youth in Flint, Michigan. In Flint, 58% of children under the age of 18 live below the poverty line, compared to the national average of 19% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The general population of Flint is 56.6% Black or African American, 37.4% White, 3.9% Hispanic or Latino, and 3.9% multiple races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In the fall of 2015, shortly after we conducted interviews with children, Flint emerged in the national news for a water crisis that was described as an environmental injustice characterized by neglect on behalf of the local government and failure to protect the health of citizens. After Flint failed the Safe Drinking Water Act (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2004), in October 2015, the city announced that children were testing unusually high for lead. A state of emergency was declared in January 2016, and the National Guard was deployed (MSNBC, 2016).

Recruitment occurred as follows. A brief information session was held at the community center with children ages 9–12. The study interviewer explained the study, invited children to participate, and provided study information sheets and consent forms to take home to parents. Study information sheets/consent forms were also provided to those who were absent the day of the group information session. Children interested in participating were asked to return their signed parent consent and child assent forms. For their participation in the study, children received a backpack containing a juice box and a few snacks.

All interviews were conducted by the first author in a quiet space at the community center and were audio-recorded. The sample included 10 males and 11 females. Eleven children identified as African American or Black (52%), seven children identified as Mixed Race (33%), and three children identified as White (14%). Children were first asked to complete a short drawing/writing activity where they chose to draw or write about their hopes. Children were then asked eleven semi-structured questions, concentrating on the hopes they have, as well as

their childhood experiences of being hopeful or less hopeful about the future (e.g., Can you tell me about the hopes that you have; Which hopes are most important to you; Are there any hopes you feel less sure about, or worry might not occur?). Children were also asked to provide basic information about their age, grade level, and race.

Interviews ranged in duration from 30–73 minutes, with a mean duration of 45 minutes. Variations in interview length reflected individual differences in children's responses to the semi-structured interview questions. All interviews were transcribed and checked against the audio recordings for accuracy. For our analysis, we examined responses related to three research questions:

  a. What hopes do children have while developing in low-income communities?
  b. Do children feel confident about some hopes and worry about others?
  c. What hopes are most important to children developing in low-income communities?

Our inductive, thematic analysis occurred as follows. Consistent with an inductive approach (Charmaz, 2006), rather than starting with an existing framework, we identified prominent themes based on our analysis of the data. The first author began by iteratively listening to the audiotaped interviews, reading the transcripts, and recording the responses for each question in an open, generative manner (Charmaz, 2006). After an in-depth examination of children's responses, a coding scheme of hope categories was devised with definitions and supporting exemplars (e.g., career aspirations, helping others, academic achievement). The first author then led a team of four coders in double-coding each of the interviews (i.e., two members of the research team independently coded each transcript). To ensure consistency in interpretation, the study team met weekly to compare codes, identify discrepancies, establish consensus, and refine the coding scheme as necessary. In the event that a disagreement arose among coders, the first author was consulted and clarifications were included in the coding scheme. The first and second author also met independently each week to interpret the data and discuss initial themes. A summative table was then generated to denote the themes (see Table 1).

To refine and fully develop each theme, we used a constant comparison process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)—responses and emergent themes were examined and compared across the entire sample (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, children's hopes of helping others were compared across the entire sample. Commonality among children confirmed the identification of consistent themes. Once prominent themes were identified, attention was directed to potential nuances within each theme, including contextual factors and children's experiences with feeling hopeful or less hopeful about certain outcomes (e.g., Who are children hopeful to help?; What importance do children place on this hope?; What contextual factors do children express in relation to this hope actualizing?)

To enrich the analysis, ongoing memo writing was also completed, beginning with the initial, open coding process and continuing for the duration of the analysis. Early memos served to explore potential themes and to document key aspects of each child's personal narrative. Memo writing, during the expanded analysis, helped the researchers to identify nuances within the data and facilitated the expansion and refinement of each theme. The analysis continued until thematic saturation was reached, with no new themes and nuances emerging (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Table 1. Hopes Expressed By Children in Low-Income Communities

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Minutes	Individual Hopes					Interpersonal Hopes		Community Hopes		
					Career	Money & Basic Needs	Leisure	Academic Achievement	Above Average	Support Family	Positive Relationships	Community Improvement	Help Others	Relocate
1	12	F	AA	50	X	X	X			X		X	X	X
2	12	F	MR	49			X				X			
3	12	F	MR	62	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
4	11	M	MR	35	X	X				X	X		X	
5	9	F	AA	33	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
6	9	F	AA	73		X	X				X	X	X	X
7	11	M	MR	36	X	X		X	X	X			X	X
8	11	M	MR	39	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
9	10	F	MR	65	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
10	10	F	W	49	X	X	X	X			X		X	
11	11	M	AA	40	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
12	10	F	AA	36	X		X	X	X	X			X	
13	11	M	AA	38	X	X	X			X	X	X		X
14	10	F	AA	46	X		X		X	X	X			
15	11	M	AA	40	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
16	10	M	W	31	X	X		X				X		X
17	9	F	AA	46	X	X	X	X					X	X
18	11	M	W	46		X				X	X			X
19	11	M	MR	43	X					X	X	X	X	
20	12	M	AA	54	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
21	9	F	AA	30			X							

M, male; F, female; AA, African America; W, white; M, mixed race

Results

Question 1: What are the hopes children have while developing in low-income communities?

Children expressed interrelated hopes across multiple social-ecological domains, including hopes for themselves (i.e., career, money/basic needs, leisure, academic achievement, and a desire to be above average); hopes for their interpersonal relationships (i.e., supporting their families and having positive relationships); and hopes for the community at large (i.e., community improvement, helping others, and relocating). Each theme was expressed by ten or more children with the following exceptions: nine children expressed hope of being above average, and eight children expressed hope for community improvement or relocating (see Table 1).

Career. Consistent with prior research (Bishop & Willis, 2014), the most common hopes expressed by children were career related. Children indicated a desire for careers they believed they were good at (e.g., lawyer because "I'm a good person like to say they wrong."), and careers that involved activities they enjoyed or activities that helped them deal with negative emotions. For example, one child expressed hope of being a clothing designer, explaining:

> Drawing helps me express feelings … sometimes I have anger problems and I get mad. So I just sit down with pen and paper and I draw it out. And then I draw out a brand new outfit and then it looks amazing.

Children also highlighted the importance of having alternative career plans (e.g., "I have two backup plans if being a clothes designer backfires.") or noted a need for multiple jobs (e.g., "Like if I have a job that's not paying enough … I can get that job [truck driver] at nighttime and work a night shift."). In doing so, children indicated that some of their career aspirations were related to a desire for financial stability.

Money/basic needs. Children also expressed monetary hopes tied to basic needs, such as, "food, furniture, umm, ss-emergency kit, first-aid, s-some type of [inaudible word] for me to survive." Other basic needs included a desire for adequate housing and living space, family health, safety, clothing, and transportation. For example, one child explained: "I'm hoping that we all can just get enough money to buy an actual house that's big enough … We live in a house, but we have like, um, ten people and only three rooms." This child hoped for "a healthier life," which he described as:

> [To] get the right food that we need," and "That we can find a big enough house and … we can get along better because while we're all in one house, just sweating, getting all— it makes it all nasty in there sometimes … [we can] spread out … get each one of our own rooms.

Children's monetary hopes were commonly connected to a desire for basic needs rather than hope for extravagant items.

Leisurely activities. Although children emphasized their career hopes and basic needs, they did, however, also voice hopes related to leisurely activities (e.g., attending a birthday party or going roller skating) and having non-essential material items (e.g., a drum set or an art board). In discussing these leisurely activities, children referenced hope of spending time with others. For example, one child hoped to travel to Disneyland with her grandmother, cousins, and friends, "Because it's gonna be so fun with them." Another child expressed hope of "goin'

to a waterpark" to zip line and ride water slides with her extended family. Children's leisurely hopes were consistently tied to activities they enjoyed and the hope of engaging in fun activities with people they cared for.

Academic achievement. Children also expressed hopes for academic achievement (e.g., "I wanna get good grades.") and for higher education. In discussing academic hopes, some children noted a desire to improve upon previous academic struggles. For example, "In school, I hope that I can be successful … because this year, I was, I ended up in summer school … I just, I wanna be, I wanna be a honor's student."

Hope for higher education was often tied to the belief that a college degree or training was needed to achieve career-related objectives. For example, "I hope to get a good education in school, so I can be a carpenter when I grow up." Some children gave college considerable thought, expressing a desire to pursue a particular line of study, interest in attending a specific university, and discussing these hopes with others (e.g., "My mom said that if I go to [University Name], I could do whole lots of things that I want to do and achieve my goal."). In doing so, children referenced the importance they or their family placed on educational obtainment.

Being above average. Children also voiced hopes of standing out, overcoming odds, or being someone others admire. For example, one child stated, "I don't wanna be one of the people that's doing average … because average, I don't know, like average doesn't get you far in life … and I've been doing average since third grade." He went on to say that he wanted to be "one of a kind," and explained, "I wanna act better than everybody else. Not that I think I'm better than everybody else but I-I wanna act, I wanna act more like a role model, not a follower." Other children shared this desire, expressing hope of making good choices (e.g., better behavioral choices than some of their peers or improvements upon their own previous choices), and hope for their families to be proud of them. When asked why this was important, one child stated, "Because if, if your family not proud, it's no fun of getting—being in a family."

Some children also wanted to be famous or the first person to accomplish something. They noted that this would make them feel special and allow them to give back to the community. For example, one child hoped to be the first female to play in the NBA. She stated, "Because I'll kinda be like, um, Rosa Parks or something like that, 'cause they was all first person to do something, and … yeah, I wanna be that." She explained that it would make her feel "Awesome … because like everybody, all like little kids … they'll look up to me!" Children's hopes of being above average were commonly associated with a desire to feel good about themselves and for others to view them positively.

Supporting family. In addition to highlighting how specific career choices would allow them to achieve their individual goals, children also expressed hopes of supporting their families. For example, one child hoped to be a doctor. He explained:

> It's a good job to have because you, you have lots of money, and you can make enough money to get your own house and stuff. And then you can pay your mother for all the stuff she did for you … and give if somebody needs somethin' … You can help them out.

Another child stated, "I wanna stay here, close to my mom and dad … and I'll support my mom and dad … like if they have troubles and stuff, I'll support them." Children's hopes for supporting their families largely focused on providing things related to basic needs. Some children, however, also referenced hope for their family's emotional well-being. For example, one child wanted to provide emotional support for his older brother who was "doing bad things

now … like he's smoking now and he's drinking now, but I just wanna turn his life around."
Children expressed hopes of supporting both their family's physical and emotional well-being.

Positive interpersonal relationships. With regards to peers, children expressed hopes for greater friendships or for their peers to be kinder and bully less:

> Like how some people bully you and you don't want to be bullied, and you just have that feeling like … 'I know that so-and-so is going to be there to bully me and tease me and talk about my shoes and stuff. So I'm just not going to go to school.'

Children also hoped for less interpersonal conflict within their own families. For example, one child wanted her father to "be nice … carrying his own weight, cleaning up his stuff and … just like not being mad all the time and not blaming me for things." She elaborated: "We went to the pawn shop to sell my saxophone and, uh, he found the pad that fell off one of them. So it wouldn't work right [couldn't sell it] … and he blamed me for it." She explained that it made her feel, "sad and a little bit annoyed and then … mom and dad got in a fight."

Children additionally hoped to spend more time with those they cared about, especially those faced with geographical separation:

> I hope that I can spend more time with my family, 'cuz my family is, is split … My little sister, we don't have the same mom. So she, she stays in [State Name] … So I only get to see her a little bit a year … I love her and I wanna spend more time with her.

For another child, this included the hope of reconnecting with his mom who had "abandoned him": "I want to live near my mom, but now we're separated through at least five country–five different states." Some children expressed sadness for not having more positive relationships with others who were important to them.

Community improvement. In addition to individual and interpersonal hopes, children expressed hopes for the community at large. Some hopes for the community were global in nature, with reference to societal-level changes:

> The hopes I have is world peace, poor will make it … and animals will find, find homes and we all find a good home instead of living on the streets and, um, living in hotels … Like all the, all the wars and all the people that's arguing with each other, they can just get along and just make the world a peaceful place.

The majority of hopes for community improvement, however, were focused on Flint, Michigan. In discussing hopes for the community, children referenced negative aspects of their community, such as gun violence, drugs, conflict, poverty or homelessness, poor road conditions, and animal abuse. One child explained that "stuff" (e.g., gun violence and missing children) happens every day, stating, "It's not right. There's twisted people here." In talking about these negative aspects of the community, children expressed hope for improvement, particularly concerning safety. For example: "There's really killing and stuff and it's not peaceful like it used to be." She later expressed hope of no longer having to fear or worry that something bad is going to happen:

> The bad feeling is like, like say if you coming from home and you think to go like to, to um, the store or a party or something … you feel that feeling that just hits you that

>something might, bad might happen … so you try to stay close to your parent or guardian.

Children noted the prevalence of poverty and violence within their community and expressed hope for improvement.

Helping others. Children also expressed hopes of helping others in the community and sought careers that would allow them to provide for those in need, particularly the poor and homeless. For example:

>When I become a clothes designer, I wanna like do like this program where you get homeless people, you give them clothes and shoes to wear, and then you give them like some food and a nice place to stay.

Other children had a specific desire to help fellow children in the community, expressing an understanding of how they might feel. For example:

>I would be a Big Brother to help the kids that need a Big Brother that don't really get out the house much … because they always sitting up in the house and they might think they're nothing because their mother don't got money.

Children's hopes of helping others were accompanied by expressions of empathy and an understanding of the adversity others face within their community.

Relocating. In discussing hopes for community improvement, children also expressed hopes of relocating to a better community. For example, "Flint, it's thieves, killers, robbers. In other states, I bet it's so much better there … I bet you could walk down the street to get some juice and walk back home safely without being robbed, or not raped, or sexually raped, or stuff like that." She went on to explain:

>Flint is like, um, an example like a bomb. A real bad bomb and you want to get out of the bomb so you can survive and go to Chicago or somewhere that's not a bomb … Basically, that's what Flint is to me … Flint is people that don't care what you do, how much money you have, they will rob you, kill you, or rape you … You don't want it to happen to you or your family … You can do, you can say, have a speech, a wonderful speech, they don't care. They really don't care. Unless, unless you really know them, they won't care. They will kill you and just steal. They'll do what they have to do. And half of the stuff that you try to do, like provide food for your family, they be trying to provide food for their family and stuff because they're homeless. So they just start trying to kill people. They kill people and try to get, to provide for their family.

Although there was a tendency for children to want to leave Flint, those who expressed a desire to stay emphasized community and family ties. For example, "I was born and raised here" or "I like living in Flint and I got a whole bunch of family over here too."

In summary, children expressed interrelated hopes across multiple social-ecological domains, including hopes for themselves (i.e., career, money/basic needs, leisure, academic achievement, and a desire to be above average); hopes for their interpersonal relationships (i.e., supporting their families and having positive relationships); and hopes for the community at large (i.e., community improvement, helping others, and relocating).

Question 2: **Do children feel confident about some hopes and worry about others?**

Children commonly referenced their career-related hopes. Some children expressed confidence that their career hopes would actualize because of their skills and strengths: "I'm really good at being a doctor … I get the hang of stuff very easily." Other children discussed perceived opportunities or pathways for achieving their career objectives. For example, "Singing…I think that's possible, because like when I get older I can try out for [Television Show Name]… if I make it, like my career might like become like real." Children, however, also expressed self-doubt and referenced potential difficulty in obtaining their career-related hopes; for example, one child explained why her hopes of running track or becoming a cook might not actualize: "If I did try, it might not happen, because it's some people out there that's like probably faster than me … and cooking, people might cook way better than me when I grow up."

Uncertainty regarding career obtainment was also connected to concerns regarding academic achievement, financial stability, and basic needs. For example, "My entire basketball career … that might not happen … It's because like I don't know if I'm like, I don't know if I'm gonna get bad grades or good grades." This child went on to explain a "chain-reaction" style of thinking that was common among children, stating, "If I don't become a basketball player … if I don't got a career, I might get a little bit of money … and I might not get a medium house." Another child stated, "I have a hard time with school," and "If I don't get a good job, then I won't have a lot of money and then I won't be able to take care of them, [my family]."

Children also referenced worries about basic needs and financial stability, independent of their career hopes (e.g., "It seems impossible ta be able ta … make a lot a money … I don't know it just, uh, don't seem like it may happen."). Another child explained, "I worry about to own my own house … I worry about having a big happy family, getting money." Another child noted that her concern for financial stability and education stemmed from perceived racial inequality and contextual obstacles:

> P: Not that many people who are aren't white are rich.
> I: Why do you think that is?
> P: 'Cause not everybody gets a good education.
> I: How does it make you feel?
> P: (pause) Bad.
> I: How come?
> P: 'Cause if you don't get the proper education and you were already planning for colleges and stuff, if you don't have the proper education then how are you gonna get into that college; they're not gonna accept you.
> I: And you feel like it's hard to get a proper education?
> P: With a lot of the stuff that's going on.
> I: What do you mean?
> P: Like a lot of the violence … It makes them feel like ok so if this is happening then I shouldn't really have to worry about … then I shouldn't be that worried about school and stuff. I should be worried about my safety … So they get distracted.

In summary children expressed both confidence and uncertainty regarding their career hopes. Confidence coincided with reference to personal skills or abilities and the availability of pathways to career obtainment. Uncertainty regarding career aspirations, was alternatively associated with self-doubt and uncertainty pertaining to academic achievement, financial

stability, and obtaining basic needs. Some children additionally referenced perceived racial inequality and contextual barriers to obtaining their goals.

Question 3: What hopes are most important to children developing in low-income communities?

When asked which hopes were most important to them, the predominant theme among children was their hopes of helping others. This included supporting their families and helping others in the community. Children also emphasized their career aspirations, noting that employment would provide them with the financial resources needed to support others.

Supporting family and helping others. The importance children placed on providing for their families was tied to expressions of love and concern for basic needs. For example, the child who wanted to "get the best for my family" explained, "My family is the most thing I care about … 'cause I love my family." The importance children placed on helping others in the community was alternatively accompanied by expressions of empathy and in-depth understanding of suffering, particularly for the poor and homeless. For example:

> They're alone. They have nowhere to go. They just stand there and hold signs, and that's just, just cruel cuz some people don't even give them money. Cuz they think they're going to do something bad, but they might not.

Another child explained:

> They have to dig in, um, trash cans to find food. They have to go in dirty rivers to get water to clean their clothes, stay soaking wet for a while, stay naked, do all that and some other people just have fun with their clothes that they can get cleaned and stuff, get new clothes every day, while they're stuck with the same two pairs of clothes.

Career and financial stability. In discussing the importance of helping others, children simultaneously emphasized their career hopes and/or hopes for financial stability, explaining that these were the avenues through which they would have the means to provide for others. For example, one child explained why his hope of being a doctor was very important, stating, "That's the one I can get, um, more money to help people with … That's the one that do help people the most, being a doctor when people are sick."

For some children, the importance they placed on helping others was directly tied to personal experiences of adversity. For example, when asked about his interest in being a doctor, the child explained:

> After my mom got sick, I started getting hopes about helping people, because how they wasn't treating her in the hospital … They let her go home early when she wasn't healed up all the way and they knew it … It was wrong for them to do that.

For another child, finding a cure for cancer was most important. She explained, "I lost my grandma from cancer and there's other people losing their love ones from cancer. So I want them to feel better. Like now no more people have to suffer from this."

When asked how it would make them feel to help their family or others in the community, children commonly indicated that it would make them feel "good for myself." One

child explained, "'Cause, um, like not many would have such an opportunity to do something like that … 'Cause some people want to help them, but then sometimes they really need help too." Children also made statements about the importance of helping others (e.g., "People are supposed to help others, so they can achieve better, they can become better.") and shared moral certitudes (e.g., "If you help somebody out, it comes back in return." or "When blessings come up, blessings come down.")

In summary, children placed particular importance on their hopes of helping others, which included providing for their families and aiding others in the community. For some children, the desire to help others stemmed from witnessing adversity and strong familial ties. Children highlighted their career hopes and hopes for financial stability, as avenues through which they would provide for others and noted that helping others would make them feel more positive about themselves.

Discussion

Our findings provide insight into children's personal experiences with hope in low-income communities, particularly the different hopes they have, the value they place on specific desires, and the degree to which they feel hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes. Our findings are supported by existing literature, which notes that, in general, children have numerous hopes for their careers, for their interpersonal relationships, and for the community at large (Bishop & Willis, 2014). Our findings extend literature, however, by denoting the nuances of children's hope narratives while developing in low-income communities— particularly, the importance children in low-income communities place on helping others and the uncertainty they may feel about their abilities to follow critical pathways in order to do so (i.e., academic achievement, career obtainment, and financial stability).

Children's emphasis on supporting their families is consistent with literature that has examined the concept of family obligation among diverse youth (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Telzer, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2014). Family obligation values refer to the importance of showing respect towards one's family members and a sense of responsibility to provide support (Fuligni et al., 1999). Existing literature suggests that a sense of family obligation may serve as a protective factor from engaging in risky behavior (Unger et al., 2002), but also as a risk factor for emotional distress (Milan & Wortel, 2015; Telzer et al., 2014). Family obligation values may provide a sense of family belonging that deters from negative peer influences during adolescence (Milan & Wortel, 2015), but they may also be a source of stress if an individual engages in care-taking behaviors in response to parental distress (Telzer et al., 2014) or feels burdened and overwhelmed by this sense of responsibility (Milan & Wortel, 2015).

Children's hopes of helping others in the community (namely the poor and homeless) is also noteworthy and related to the concept of "purpose," which Damon and colleagues (2003) define as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (p. 121). Existing literature identifies purpose as a developmental asset that is associated with positive adjustment, well-being (Burrow & Hill, 2011), and life satisfaction (Cotton Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009). Our findings add to literature in this area by suggesting that the roots of purpose may begin in childhood for those developing in poverty and for those experiencing adversity. Additional research is needed to explore the stability of children's hopes of helping others and examines how these hopes may contribute to the development of purpose, well-being, and general hopefulness about the future among adolescents and young adults.

Children also emphasized their career hopes and hope for financial stability, as these were the avenues through which they would have the means to provide for others. While it is

encouraging that children in our sample were able to generate pathways for supporting their families and helping others in the community, their concerns about their ability to follow these pathways are noteworthy. According to Snyder's hope theory (1991), an individual's sense of hope is derived from a "sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (p. 287).

Children's concerns regarding career aspirations, academic achievement, and financial stability are particularly salient, as these objectives are central to the concept of social mobility— an individual's ability to move to a higher social status. Emerging literature on social mobility has found that adolescents' low perceptions of social mobility are tied to more adverse outcomes, such as school dropout and risky behaviors that include unprotected sex, alcohol consumption, and involvement with the justice system (Ritterman Weintraub et al., 2015).

Particular attention is needed for how community and school-based programming for inner-city youth can boost children's hopefulness regarding academic achievement and career obtainment, especially in the current context of achievement gaps in education and income disparities in the United States (Lee, 2002; Reardon, 2013). From our study, one suggestion is to engage in more intentional dialogue with children about the hopes they have and their hopefulness about certain outcomes. Several children in our study expressed gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their hopes or acknowledged the importance of these conversations. For example, in discussing his motives for participating, one child stated, "This is my chance to get thinking more about my hopes."

With regard to academic achievement and career objectives, it is imperative to not simply provide children with pre-prescribed, standard road maps that assume a middle-class starting point (Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Flores & Heppner, 2002). Our findings call for additional dialogue with children regarding their hopes for academic achievement, financial stability, and career obtainment, with specific attention to providing hope-engendering strategies in these areas, and engaging in intentional discussions about "how we get there from here." Strengthening children's locus of control in these areas may serve to enhance positive outcomes in the face of adversity (Kliewer & Sandler, 1992; Leontopoulou, 2006).

While our findings are supported by existing research, some limitations should be noted. First, it is possible that children had additional hopes they did not share or feel comfortable disclosing. Having said this, our analysis showed that children expressed numerous hopes and shared very personal dimensions of their lives (e.g., death of a family member, abandonment, experiences of being bullied, and concerns for safety or basic needs). Second, it is possible that children's responses were influenced by social desirability (for review, see Shuy, 2002), where children provided narratives reflecting what they believed the study team wanted to hear. Many children, however, indicated they had given their hopes considerable thought prior to the interview. Third, while the goal of qualitative research is not generalizability, but rather to provide in-depth insight into the experiences of a specific group, our sample is nonetheless limited in size. Furthermore, other important contextual factors, such as family composition (i.e., single parent vs. two-parent homes) and exposure to violence, could also influence children's personal hope narratives but were not probed in our study. Further studies are needed to explore these research questions within larger samples and to examine how other contextual factors may influence the hopes children have and their experiences with feeling hopeful about the future, especially in the context of poverty.

In summary, our findings extend existing literature by denoting the nuances of children's hope narratives while developing in low-income communities, particularly the importance children place on helping others, and the uncertainty they may feel about their ability to follow critical pathways in order to do so. Our findings can enhance community and school-based programming so that they further align with the specific hopes children have

while developing in poverty, attune to children's internal dialogues with regard to feeling hopeful or less hopeful about desired outcomes, and target areas in which children are most in need of hope-engendering strategies (i.e., academic achievement, career obtainment, and financial stability).

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