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## Exploring the phenomenon of hope in adult illiterate Haitians

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# Exploring the Phenomenon of Hope in Adult Illiterate Haitians

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## Abstract

Snyder's hope theory depicts hope, through the frame of positive psychology, as a cognitive construct with the perceived sense of goal-directed, pathways, and agency thinking (Snyder et al., 1991). Hope levels have been measured in various countries; however, no research to date focused on Haitians. This study, conducted in Petit-Goâve, Haiti, addressed this gap by investigating hope, pathway, and agency levels derived from 135 Haitian-Kreyol adult literacy course participants. This manuscript reports scores of illiterate Haitians' hope levels utilizing Snyder's Adult Hope Dispositional Scale; the scores are explained by Snyder's hope theory taking Haitian cultural and social landscapes into account. Despite the challenging environment and illiterate conditions, Haitian participants reported just below average hope levels, average pathway levels, and low agency levels. These findings suggested this population garnered hope in their everyday lives, despite difficult obstacles.

**Keywords:** hope, Snyder's hope theory, adult illiteracy, Haiti

## Introduction

A driving question of this manuscript hinges on hope as a psychological, cognitive construct based on Snyder's hope theory (Seligman, 2002; Snyder et al., 1991): Can hope exist in an impoverished and illiterate environment? Snyder and Lopez (2002) define hope as neither an emotion, religious, nor cultural concept, but rather a cognitive construct that can be measured and studied. Through statistical examinations of more than 100 hope studies, researchers have concluded hope leads to a 10% happiness boost for high hope people (Lopez, 2013), thereby increasing their life satisfaction. Extensive research suggests hope is connected to better problem-solving abilities and academic performances (Chang, 1998; Lopez et al., 2000; McDermott & Snyder, 1999, 2000; Snyder et al., 1997).

Previous hope studies have concentrated on diverse groups, including African American, Latino, and Asian (Chang & Banks, 2007); Mexican (Arndt, 2004); Portuguese children (Marques, et al.,

2009); Slovak university students (Halama, 1999); American college students from different races (Munoz-Dunbar, 1993); and South African adults (Boyce & Harris, 2013). The current project was the first to measure hope in adult illiterate Haitian residents. As a member of a university assistance team created by the third author initiated after the 2010 tragic earthquake, the first author witnessed first-hand the resilience and fortitude of the Haitian people. Thus, this manuscript offers a window into the story of Haitians' leveraging the phenomenon of hope, situated in Snyder's hope theory.

### ***Purpose***

The aim of this manuscript was to explore the phenomenon of hope and to report hope levels (Snyder et al., 1991), including pathway and agency levels, of illiterate Haitian adults residing in rural Petit-Goâve, Haiti. Snyder (2000) asserts increased individual hope can improve the larger group hope dynamic. Thus, this paper first introduces the construct of hope as defined by Snyder, and related research. Next, the Haitian context, wherein this population must harvest their hope, is provided. Then, illiterate Haitians' hope levels, including pathway and agency levels, relative to factors such as gender, age, marital status, education, employment, and income are discussed. Finally, conclusions regarding the fulfillment of an important research gap are highlighted.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***What is Hope?***

A discussion of hope would be remiss without understanding the scope and nature of hope. Over the past 50 years, various hope definitions have been posited. Erikson (1964) defined hope as an attribute of healthy cognitive development coupled with faith in the realization of a desire. Staats and Stassen (1985) noted hope emerges when wishes and positive future expectancies interact. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) termed hope as “a multidimensional dynamic life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant” (p. 380). Later, Brazilian educator-philosopher, Paulo Freire, saw hope as “the taking of history into their hands” (1994, p. 176). Seligman (2002), supported by Miller and Nickerson (2007), parsed out a triad of positive constructs aligning wellness to past, present, and future: satisfaction, gratitude, and hope. More recently, Lopez (2013) portrayed hope as “being like oxygen and we cannot live without it” (p 10).

In his groundbreaking work, Snyder and colleagues (1991) defined hope as “a positive motivational state based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 287). Three interrelated cognitive components—goals, agency, and pathways—constitute this model (Snyder, 2000). Therefore, this study utilized Snyder's widely researched and validated hope theory (Snyder et al., 1991) to measure hope (Creamer et al., 2009).

#### ***Goal Setting Component of Hope***

Goals are the essential ingredient of Snyder's hope theory. Goals guide a person's activities (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Goals are critical when developing and measuring hope (Snyder et al., 1991).

### ***Pathway Component of Hope***

Pathway thinking is an individual's *perceived* ability to think of satisfactory paths to accomplish preferred goals (Snyder et al., 1991). Goals, per hope theory, can have several plausible pathways. If perceived pathways are not successful, or are blocked, then hope theory suggests development of alternate pathways (Snyder, 2002).

### ***Agency Component of Hope***

Agency thinking, the *I can do this* mindset, involves the cognitive energy to commence and use pathways through all stages of goal pursuit (Snyder, 2002). It is essential for positive advancement for achieving goals (Lopez et al., 2003). Agency thinking and motivational self-talk can assist a person to find a substitute pathway when experiencing goal attainment blockage (Snyder, 1994). When agency thinking increases, the likelihood that pathways will result in success increases. Successful goal pursuit and attainment perpetuates the cycle of setting and attaining more goals (Snyder, 2002). Hope is not equivalent to motivation, but it can motivate. These three components contribute to measuring levels of hope.

### ***Levels of Hope***

Hope, measured on a continuum from high to low, is contingent on levels of hopeful thinking. Snyder et al. (1991) identified a high hope person as one experiencing high pathway and agency thought during the goal cycle, whereas low hope persons are defined as slow and cautious during the goal sequence. People with high hope appear less fearful when they experience difficulties (Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder (1995) wrote, "high hope people see roadblocks to their goals as being a normal part of life" (p. 357). High hope people act more decisive than low hope people (Snyder, 1995). High hope individuals set distinct goals and develop various strategies for achieving their goals. Low hope individuals are less clear about their goals or hesitant to set goals (Snyder, 1994). Low hope individuals struggle with developing strategies for achieving goals (Snyder et al., 1997). High hope individuals are more inclined to remain attentive to their goals and monitor their progress, and continue despite obstacles (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). High hope individuals modify their routes to reach a goal when needed. Low hope individuals find generating different paths difficult (Snyder, 1994). Lopez (2013) found hopeful individuals spread hope. Snyder (2000) noted people operate within a social milieu and measuring hope at the individual level is "only as valid as the hope that exists at the social level" (p. 22).

### ***The Haitian Context***

Given prior research showing positive effects of high hope in challenging situations, this research studied the hope levels of illiterate adults in Haiti, who have historically faced severe challenges. Included in this study is the cultural context in which this population must harvest hope such as Haiti's geography, historical background, and cultural and social landscapes. Members of the author team contributed to the descriptions of Haitian context from their lived experiences as either native residents or volunteer literacy teachers who witnessed first-hand the resilience and strength of the Haitian people.

## **Geography**

Haiti is situated on Hispaniola Island in the Caribbean Sea. Tropical coastal climate and semi-arid mountains often contribute to Haiti experiencing frequent hurricanes and torrential flooding, resulting in land erosion and economic hardships. The present investigation involved adult Haitians residing in a rural area known as Petit-Goâve, located 42 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince on the Atlantic coast. The population is approximately 12,000.

## **Historical Background**

Haitians have withstood oppressive situations (i.e., slavery, political dominance, war, and poverty) which often impacted their educational system, literacy rates, economy, health, and living conditions (Hornbeck, 2010). France acquired western Haiti in 1697 and captured slaves from West Africa for plantation work. Sugar production made Haiti, *the Pearl of Antilles*. From 1697 to 1802, Haiti produced 40% of the world's sugar. In 1804, Haitian slaves fought to form their own republic (Farmer, 2012). However, war and revolution left agricultural interests decimated.

Boyle, a Haitian leader for 25 years, continued to aggravate division of the two classes by adopting laws requiring all Haitians, except aristocrats, officials, artisans, and soldiers, to work the land. Without the consent of a judge, children of landowners could not attend school. Public education did not advance during Boyle's 25 years of presidency (Leyburn, 2004). Later, Francois *Papa Doc* Duvalier and his son, Jean Claude *Baby Doc*, ruled with corrupt, police-enforced, government-induced fear for over 30 years, refusing to help the Haitian working class (Farmer, 2012).

Over the decades, Haitians survived frequent earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes. In fact, Petit-Goâve was devastated in the 2010 earthquake. With international assistance, Haiti initiated a 10-year recovery plan targeting institutional rebuilding (Taft-Morales, 2012). Today, Haiti experiences a semi-presidential republic, the lingering result of decades of earnest struggle and turmoil (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

## **Cultural and Social Landscapes**

According to Haitian Danticat (2011), Haitians laugh and have boundless creativity. They value hard work and resent laziness. Haitian women are great entrepreneurs; with some selling water and vegetables at the market to help finance their children's education (Danticat, 2011). Communities work together to share resources. Family is the strongest institution. Haitians regard their elders as wise counselors. All aspects of life involve the family, often extended family, including sharing financial, emotional, and social burdens (World Health Organization, 2010). Rural Haitians desire to be in tune with nature as nature sustains them. Haitians respect the mountain people for their wisdom about life. Haitians focus on their daily struggle for survival, rendering planning for the future more difficult. Many Haitians, through informal education, develop strategies essential to household functioning and well-being. Their understanding of agriculture economics, childbirth, traditional medicine, and child-rearing are passed down orally from the elders through generations; however, those who can read utilize written material on these topics.

*Spiritual Beliefs.* Most Haitians are Protestant or practice a mixture of Catholicism and Vodou. Vodou suggests life is dependent upon the will of God or gods, and their relationships to Him,

acknowledging humans are powerless to change that path of life (Corbett, 1988). Vodou plays an important role in comforting and encouraging the disadvantaged and in helping find meaning in their lives (Desmangles, 2012).

*Income.* Poverty is predominant in all of Haiti, with a substantial number of poor, rural Haitians, a small middle class, and even smaller elite class. Over 70% of its population lives on less than \$2 per day (Hornbeck, 2010). Currently, Haiti is listed among the least developed countries (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

*Education.* High Haitian illiteracy rates have been historically common, although literacy is valued by Haitians. While education is compulsory by law, persisting economic conditions and natural disasters often leave Haitian students unable to attend school regularly. Primary school enrollment has improved by 85%; nevertheless, the average Haitian age 25 years or older has less than five years of schooling (Todres, 2020).

*Literacy Rate.* Haiti's literacy rate is 52.9% (53.4% men and 44.6% women), with an estimated 3 million illiterate persons (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). The literacy rate is 45.36% in the rural population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). However, the government attempts to implement adult literacy centers throughout Haiti.

*Natural Disasters.* A 7.3 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, leaving estimated damages of between 8 and 14 billion dollars (Margesson & Taft-Morales, 2010). Out of a total population of 9.949 million, an estimated 316,000 were killed, 300,000 were injured, and 1,000,000 lost their homes (Margesson & Taft-Morales, 2010). Many survivors had multiple losses of loved ones, homes, and pets.

## **Methods**

Because high hope levels are found to be predictors of educational success, greater problem-solving abilities, and overall life satisfaction in other populations, these authors sought to explore the hope levels of illiterate Haitians to provide a baseline hope level for this Haitian group. Therefore, the following sections provide descriptions of the participants, instruments, and procedures undertaken to measure adult illiterate Haitians' hope, pathway, and agency levels in this study.

### ***Participants***

A sample of 135 rural, illiterate Haitian adults (18 or older) from six literacy centers in and around Petit-Goâve, Haiti provided data for this study. Since two of the authors had prior knowledge of the relative illiteracy rate of these Haitian participants and of these literacy centers from volunteer experiences, this purposive sample was chosen due to available access through established international relationships. The Literacy Center Co-Director categorized 66 participants as preliterate (having no prior access or skills in literacy) through demographics and literacy pre-tests. Using the same measures, 69 participants were designated as non-literate (having access to literacy, but with little or no skills or prior literacy education). All participants were from Haitian rural populations where typical illiteracy rates were higher.

Hope levels of these adult illiterate Haitians, including pathway and agency scores, were analyzed. Demographic data, including gender, age, marital status, and other factors, were collected for each adult Haitian student who participated in Petit-Goâve's Haitian-Kreyòl literacy classes. Descriptive statistics indicated a female majority (81.5%). Only 5.2% of the participants were between the ages of 19-28, 11.9% were between the ages of 29-38, 40% were 39-48 years old, and 42.2% were over 48.

Adults self-reported that 90.4% possessed a fourth grade or below education, with 5.9% completing fifth to eighth grade, and 3% completing ninth to eleventh grade. However, the Literacy Center Co-Director, a longtime resident, stated that although 122 participants reported a fourth grade or below education; in fact, they had no record of ever attending formal schooling. Of the total, 54% identified as employed and 45.2% as unemployed. Annual income levels disclosed 60.7% had \$0-\$5,000 levels, 30.4% had \$5,001-\$10,000 levels, 3.7% had \$10,000-\$15,000 levels, and 4.4% reported over \$15,001 (U.S. equivalents) per year. Approximately 59% of adults were not married and 40% were married.

### ***Instrument***

The Snyder Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (ADHS) was utilized to measure hope levels. ADHS is applicable to individuals who are 16 and beyond, and measures beliefs regarding goal acquisition, the ability to acknowledge choices, and the determination for goal-directed planning (Anderson, 1988). ADHS, used in studies of over 10,000 adults in a variety of settings, has been translated into multiple languages, and now Haitian-Kreyòl. ADHS contains four pathway items, four agency items, and four distractor items (Snyder et al., 1991). On an 8-point Likert scale, adults identified the extent to which the item describes them. Probes 1, 4, 6, and 8 measure the pathway thinking hope component. These are (1) I can think of many ways to get out of a jam; (4) There are lots of ways around any problem; (6) I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me; and (8) Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem. Probes 2, 9, 10, and 12 measure the agency thinking hope component and pose the following: (2) I energetically pursue my goals; (9) My past experiences have prepared me well for my future; (10) I meet the goals I set for myself; and (12) I've been pretty successful in life. The total ADHS score is the sum of the pathway and agency levels, which correlate positively with each other. The total scores range from 8 to 64, with between 8 to 47 indicating low hope and between 48 to 64 indicating high hope. Based on previous scoring studies, Snyder (1994) set the average hope score at 48.

The ADHS internal reliability was demonstrated as follows: For the total scale, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .74 to .84 (item-remainder coefficients of .23 to .63). For the agency subscale, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .71 to .76 (item remainder coefficients of .40 to .72); moreover, for the Pathways subscale, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .63 to .80 with item remainder coefficients of .36 to .63. (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 572).

### ***Procedures***

The third author, a native Haitian-Kreyòl speaker, translated the ADHS into Haitian-Kreyòl. These translations were verified for accuracy by the Literacy Center Co-Director, a native speaker and English speaker, who was trained by the first author to administer the ADHS. Prior to the first date

of the adult literacy classes, the ADHS was orally administered to individuals by the Co-Director. The SPSS software was used to analyze the hope scores and demographic information. To ensure internal reliability was unaffected by maturation, the only data collected was prior to the start of literacy instruction (Stanfield, 2011).

## Findings

This study provides an exploration of hope, agency, and pathway levels of adult illiterate Haitians in Petit-Goâve, Haiti. Results revealed 135 illiterate Haitian adults entered the Haitian-Kreyòl classes with hope levels just under the average level ( $M = 45.83$ ); 48 being average, according to Snyder (1994). Adult illiterate Haitian scores revealed average pathway thinking levels ( $M = 24.07$ ), and below average agency thinking levels ( $M = 21.87$ ); 24 being average, per Snyder (1994).

### *Demographic Hope Measures Alongside Goals, Pathway, and Agency Levels*

While none of the demographic information was shown to be significant, the following provides more detailed analyses aligning total hope scores, including pathway and thinking levels, across this population's demographics. Table 1 provides a summary of related data.

#### *Gender*

Total hope scores for males were in the high range ( $M = 49.48$ ); females fell in the low range ( $M = 45.00$ ). Males reported having more agency ( $M = 24.20$ ) than pathway ( $M = 25.68$ ). Females scored higher in pathway ( $M = 23.72$ ) than agency ( $M = 21.34$ ); yet overall males outperformed in pathway and agency thinking.

Statistics regarding hope with Haitians are not consistent with the consensus of gender and hope in previous studies. Most studies found no difference between hope levels in men and women (Lopez et al., 2003). However, hope studies have predominantly been with populations who may hold different worldviews regarding gender. In Haiti, most women work hard to meet their family's needs; often collectively to care for their children. These bonds provide support in offering hope when facing adversity. Haitian men tend toward more lucrative employment opportunities which might account for higher hope scores. In fact, nine of the 21 men in this study reported an income of \$10,000 or more, whereas three reported \$0-\$5,000. Nearly all reported high total hope scores. Snyder's et al. (1991) hope study reported no gender differences.

#### *Age*

Studies show age does not correlate with high hope levels (Chang & Banks, 2007). However, results of this study reveal some differences in hope between younger and older groups. Haitian ages 39-48 ( $M = 45.00$ ) and over 48 ( $M = 45.12$ ) both scored in the low hope range as compared to younger age groups 19-28 ( $M = 48.86$ ) and 29-38 ( $M = 49.31$ ) who both scored at average hope. All age groups scored higher in pathway than agency levels. The younger two groups scored higher on both pathway and agency levels than the older two groups.

One plausible argument explaining high hope levels among the younger demographic might be their inexperience or fewer years of struggle along with future hope of a democratic government,

supportive of positive Haitian change. Also, young adult literacy centers referred to in this study offer a means to gain increasing literacy levels which might improve employment opportunities.

**Table 1.** Summary of Demographic Hope Measures

| Demographic Information | Total Hope Score (M) | Pathway Score (M) | Agency Score (M) |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>           |                      |                   |                  |
| Male                    | 49.48                | 25.68             | 24.20            |
| Female                  | 45.00                | 23.72             | 21.34            |
| <b>Age</b>              |                      |                   |                  |
| 19-28                   | 48.86                | 25.86             | 22.14            |
| 29-38                   | 49.31                | 28.25             | 21.12            |
| 39-48                   | 45.00                | 23.18             | 21.87            |
| Over 48                 | 45.12                | 23.38             | 22.04            |
| <b>Education</b>        |                      |                   |                  |
| Fourth grade or below   | 45.46                | 23.88             | 21.65            |
| Fifth to eighth grade   | 51.00                | 26.75             | 24.25            |
| Ninth to eleventh grade | 48.00                | 24.50             | 23.50            |
| <b>Marital Status</b>   |                      |                   |                  |
| Married subset          | 48.80                | 26.67             | 22.30            |
| Unmarried subset        | 43.71                | 22.27             | 21.51            |
| <b>Employment</b>       |                      |                   |                  |
| Employed                | 49.62                | 27.08             | 22.78            |
| Unemployed              | 41.23                | 20.43             | 20.76            |
| <b>Income Level</b>     |                      |                   |                  |
| \$0-\$5,000             | 44.52                | 22.52             | 21.78            |
| \$5,001-\$10,000        | 45.88                | 25.90             | 20.78            |
| \$10,001-\$15,000       | 53.60                | 29.00             | 24.60            |
| Over \$15,000           | 55.50                | 27.32             | 28.17            |

### **Education**

Participants with the lowest education, fourth grade or below, reported the lowest total hope scores ( $M = 45.46$ ). They scored lower in agency ( $M = 21.64$ ) than pathways ( $M = 24.63$ ). The fifth to eighth grade group scored higher in total hope ( $M = 51.00$ ) than the ninth to eleventh grade group ( $M = 48.00$ ). Both groups also scored higher in pathways than in agency. The two groups with more education scored in the high hope range.

These results are not surprising when compared to the literature relating high hope to greater academic achievement measures (Adelabu, 2008; Chang, 1998; Leeson et al., 2008; Onwuegbuzie & Snyder, 2000; Snyder & Shorey, 2002). Furthermore, research suggests even small hope amounts enhance academic outcomes (Lopez et al., 2009). Haitian adults in this study enhanced opportunities because of their decision to pursue literacy education.

### **Marital Status**

Total hope scores of the married subset were higher ( $M = 48.80$ ) than the unmarried subset ( $M = 43.71$ ). Also, married individuals marginally ranked in the high hope level by one point. Married individuals perceived more pathways ( $M = 26.67$ ) than unmarried ( $M = 22.27$ ). Both married and unmarried individuals' pathway levels were higher than their agency levels. Note the possible, interactive effects as most participants were women, and 61% were unmarried. Typically, Haitian women, often unmarried, work long hours to feed and educate their children. Of unmarried women, 44% reported being in the \$0-\$5,000 income level, 16% were in the \$5,001-\$10,000 level, none in the \$10,000-15,000 level, and one in the over \$15,000 level. Moreover, 67% of unmarried

women in the current study reported a fourth-grade education or below.

These results may relate to cultural nuances of marriage and gender roles in Haiti. Economic burden rests heavily on unmarried women raising children and making major household decisions (World Health Organization, 2010). Therefore, because many adult students in the current study were women, unmarried, and reported the lowest incomes and educational levels; their lower agency scores might be explained by cultural context. However, they did measure higher pathway scores, denoting their perceived strategies to meet their goals or solve their problems, despite these levels in the mid-range. This finding may imply these adult women adjusted their pathway thinking to their circumstances with lower agency thinking.

### ***Employment***

Haitians experience extreme poverty, particularly illiterate Haitians. Unemployment remains high in Haiti. Thus far, no significant relationship between hope and income have been shown (Lopez, 2013). This study is no different. However, total hope levels of the unemployed Haitians scored in the low range of hope ( $M = 41.23$ ); the employed scored in the high range of hope ( $M = 49.62$ ). Pathway levels of both the employed and unemployed Haitians were higher than the agency levels. In addition, employed participants reported higher pathway ( $M = 27.08$ ) and agency levels ( $M = 22.78$ ) than unemployed Haitians. These results may infer that perceptions of hope tend to be higher in those who are employed.

### ***Income Level***

Total hope levels for the two lowest levels of \$0-\$5,000 income level ( $M = 44.52$ ) and \$5,001-\$10,000 ( $M = 45.88$ ) income ranges scored in the low hope range. Participants in the two higher income brackets of \$10,001-\$15,000 ( $M = 53.60$ ) and above ( $M = 55.50$ ) generally scored in the high hope range. Likewise, pathway levels were highest at the \$10,001-\$15,000 income bracket ( $M = 29.00$ ) and lowest at the \$0-\$5,000 income bracket ( $M = 22.52$ ). Agency levels were approximately one point lower than pathways for \$0-\$5000 income level ( $M = 21.78$ ). Agency levels for \$5,001-10,000 income range ( $M = 20.78$ ) also aligned comparatively to their pathway levels ( $M = 25.90$ ). The over \$15,000 income range revealed approximately the same amount of pathway ( $M = 27.32$ ) and agency ( $M = 28.16$ ) levels. Overall, these findings seem to indicate higher income-higher hope levels. Also, most Haitian adults in this study, across all income brackets, scored higher pathway than agency levels; likely evidenced by their literacy program enrollment.

Snyder's (2000) hope theory suggests socioeconomic and environmental factors can affect hope. Interestingly, he noted individuals facing poverty may view achievable goals as restricted and minimal resources as diminishing their pathway levels. However, in this study even though participants scored slightly below average in overall hope scores, their pathway levels suggested they possessed more strategies to achieve their goals, yet they lacked agency levels to move forward toward meeting goals. This finding substantiated Snyder's (2000) claim that individuals who perceived limited goals and routes to achieve them would likely manifest as having less agency to pursue their goals; yet overall, their hope scores were average.

## Discussion

Hope measurements of the 135 illiterate Haitians participants scored in the low range with below average hope levels ( $M = 45.83$ ), with 0-47 being average and 48-64 being high (Snyder, 1994). Comparatively, these scores were within two to three points of hope levels in studies of various cultural groups. For example, mean hope levels recorded by Chang and Banks (2007) for European Americans ( $M = 47.00$ ), African Americans ( $M = 50.14$ ), Latino-Americans ( $M = 50.42$ ), and Asian- Americans ( $M = 47.48$ ). Similarly, Halama (1999) reported mean hope levels for Slovak university students ( $M = 45.00$ ); Boyce and Harris (2013) reported hope levels for South African adults ( $M = 44.38$ ); Gana et al. (2013) reported hope levels for French adults ( $M = 46.50$ ); Abdel-Khalek and Snyder (2007) found hope levels for Kuwaiti university students ( $M = 48.66$ ); and Brouwer et al. reported (2008) hope levels for Dutch psychiatric patients ( $M = 33.89$ ), delinquents ( $M = 42.69$ ), and college students ( $M = 47.32$ ). Finally, Chen et al. (2009) measured Chinese college advisors with mean hope levels at  $M = 46.97$ . Even in a context full of poverty, economic challenges, and sparse resources, the low hope scores of illiterate Haitians require a deeper look. Therefore, the hope levels of illiterate Haitians are discussed according to the three components of hope theory: goals, agency, and pathway thinking.

### *Goals as Related to the Components of Hope Measures*

Goals are foundational to Snyder's hope theory. The context of this study's hard-working participants, many of whom worked multiple jobs while enrolled in a literacy program, did not allow for additional individual interviews, so knowing the specific goals of Haitians was difficult. Snyder (2000) found that socioeconomic and environmental factors impact measures of hope. Additionally, he noted people suffering from poverty may deem even achievable goals as restricted, and their perceptions of minimal resources decrease pathway thinking (Snyder, 2000). While Haitians in this study did not lack pathways; scores reveal lower agency amounts, or motivation to move forward with strategies to meet their goals. Additionally, Snyder claimed if participants viewed they had limited goals or routes to achieve them, they had less chance to display the agency thoughts necessary to reach their goals (Snyder, 2000). Data in this study substantiate this claim because similarly, agency scores were much lower than pathway scores. Therefore, based on these results, these Haitian adults considered possession of pathways as a foundation of hope; yet sought more agency towards their goals.

### *Agency Thinking as Related to the Components of Hope Measures*

Snyder (1994) described people who score average to high on pathways and low on agency as ones who tend to find themselves "partly stuck in the goal pursuit for different reasons" (p. 37). Although many workable strategies to reach goals are present, low agency blocks the determination to try these routes. Snyder (2000) stated one possible interpretation for the lack of agency is "governments that prohibit their people from participating in the policymaking and goals of their nation have the potential to hinder the achievement of personal goals" (p. 405). Referring to Table 1, illiterate Haitians in the study validate Snyder's prior work across these components. Snyder (2000) noted these people are often frustrated and perceive themselves as victims due to obstacle-riddled goals and a culture of low hope characterized by low agency scores, hopelessness, and a tendency to give up (Snyder, 2000). Historically, Haitians have experienced oppression from dictatorial leadership. Many of these leaders thwarted educational goals of the masses. In 2011,

Haiti began experiencing the possibility of a stable, democratic government interested in fostering the development of Haiti and its people. Therefore, one conceivable explanation for persistent low agency scores in this study may be the long-term impact from decades of dictators, corruption, thwarted educational opportunities, and unemployment.

Most participants in this study were unmarried women with the lowest income and educational levels as well as lower agency scores. The challenges of these Haitian women to raise children and bear the household's financial load could explain their perceptions of challenges related to agency to achieve goals or solve problems. However, the average pathway scores of these women seem to show their perceptions of possible pathways to achieve their goals and problem solve outweighed their agency thinking.

Without agency thinking, successful goal pursuit is unlikely (Snyder et al., 1991). Haitians in this study scored low in agency, suggesting a gap might be addressed for improving the need for boosting motivation to pursue goals. Arguably, their economic status appears to affect their power to achieve goals, thus decreasing their motivation. Although pathway scores were higher, prior literature suggests if agency is low, less motivation exists to pursue goals. Agency thinking depends on the individual's belief of inner motivation and empowerment to enact the pathways necessary to reach goals or solve problems (Snyder et al., 2006). To illustrate, Lopez (2009) reported hopeful people often recalled positive experiences from their own memories during difficult times (Snyder et al., 2003). If people do not have positive memories to sustain them, benefits come from assistance in creating their own personal narratives (Lopez et al., 2009). Haitians have endured so many hardships, and perhaps draw from their positive memories developed during those hardships.

### ***Pathway Thinking as Related to the Components of Hope Measures***

Haitian participants scored high in pathway thinking, contributing to their overall slightly below average hope scores. According to Snyder (2000), people who devise multiple pathways for reaching goals increase their chances for accomplishment and reduce the possibility of complete goal blockage. Chang and Banks (2007) explained that racial/ethnic minority groups who face challenges tend to find opportunities for more hope, especially pathway thinking, in later childhood and into adulthood. To date, age has not been a hope predictor. Most Haitian participants in the current study were over 38 years old. Moreover, the current study revealed adult illiterate Haitians had learned critical survival techniques and strategies from their elders, as reflected in their efficacy for producing multiple pathways for solutions. With no other way of life and contexts for comparison, illiterate Haitians managed to deal with crises and life challenges with ancestral wisdom and hope. Therefore, the average pathway scores may reflect the Haitians' persistence and resiliency to develop strategies. Further, Haitians likely perceive pathways as a means of coping with handling problems or meeting their goals.

### **Conclusions**

Conclusions were synthesized surrounding the phenomenon of hope scores for adult illiterate Haitians, relevant to their current cultural and social landscapes and hope levels in conjunction with spirituality, income levels, education, literacy rates, and experiences with natural disasters.

### ***Hope and Spirituality***

Haitian culture is known for its religious roots, with many Haitians identifying as religious or spiritual. Snyder et al. (2002) claimed many spiritual people perceive prayer and rituals as plausible pathways for reaching one's goals. Hope "encourages action in situations where action is possible, and reliance on God's benevolence in situations that otherwise might appear hopeless" (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005, p. 142). Religious persons with high scores have been shown to perceive many spiritual pathways available for reaching their goals (Snyder et al., 2002). Because Haiti traditionally upheld a unique mix of Catholicism and Vodou practices, future hope studies in Haiti might interrogate issues surrounding the ironic concepts of how fatalism and hope might undergird each individuals' hope levels.

Vodou religion includes a premise that life is unpredictable, and planning is pointless (Corbett, 1988); whatever happens is God's unchanging will, so it must be accepted. One might speculate that for Vodou believers, the agency and pathway scores capture the struggle of knowing what must be done, while acknowledging that human actions do not necessarily matter since God's will is at work, not humans. In keeping with Haiti's unique spirituality, future research should explore the possible hope level associations across a variety of religious and spiritual foundations.

### ***Hope and Income***

Haitians for generations have endured poverty and unemployment. In previous studies, income was not revealed to have a positive relationship with hope. In 2009, Lopez (2013) in his study focusing on rich and poor families found no relationship between hope and income. Additionally, the 2009 Gallup Poll measured hope in U.S. elementary and secondary students enrolled in free and reduced lunch programs. Poll results (Lopez, 2013) revealed the hope of students who did not qualify for assistance was no different than students in free and reduced lunch programs. Lopez (2013) explained, "The hopeful don't necessarily have money and the rich aren't necessarily hopeful" (p. 96). Even though many Haitians struggle financially, having high hope likely does not depend on larger incomes. To conclude, Haitians possessed only slightly below average hope levels despite disproportionately high poverty levels. This insight propels future studies to explore more associations across hope levels and poverty or income.

### ***Hope and Education***

Hope has predicted academic achievement in prior studies (Lopez, 2013). Also, students with high hope have reported more academic satisfaction (Chang, 1998). Even with slightly below average hope levels, the adult illiterate Haitians in this study possessed the pathway to attain their educational goals, persisting in the face of poverty and disadvantage. This conclusion aligns with Halpin's (2001) work positing the role of hope to provide pathway thinking for utilizing intelligent choices despite adverse conditions.

### ***Hope and Illiteracy***

Haitians, though lacking high motivation, were not entirely hopeless. This study noted Haitians possessed strong constitutions of resilience as evidenced in their pathway thinking. Perhaps, this particular group of Haitians possessed an important goal pursuit by enrolling in adult literacy classes, influencing higher hope scores. Certainly, this literacy course provided a pathway for adult

illiterate Haitians.

### ***Hope and Natural Disasters***

Hopeful thinking may serve as a psychological buffer for challenging situations, such as Haitians who experienced natural disasters (Valle et al., 2006). High hope should continue to be investigated as it has been shown to enhance coping skills, such as those experiencing Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (Gilman et al., 2012). Similarly, Glass and colleagues (2009) found that, amid survivors of Hurricane Katrina, hope “moderated the relationship between avoidant coping and general psychological distress” (p. 779). Individuals in Glass et al. (2009) with lower hope levels were subjected to more psychological distress as opposed to those with high hope levels. Notably, the authors reported the relationship between avoidant coping and psychological distress was impacted by hope. Similarly, in spite of stressful conditions endured by illiterate Haitians, their hope levels corresponded to prior studies of those who were able to leverage hope to cope with natural disasters.

### **Implications**

The current study applied Snyder’s et al. (1991) hope theory to an adult, illiterate Haitian population, not previously researched. Moreover, their hope levels offer much research and discussion surrounding not only demographics, socio-economic, and cultural landscapes, but also the possible impacts and interactive effects hope levels may have about spirituality, income, education, illiteracy, and natural disasters. Hope levels reported in this study provide strong implications that society, governments, and educators would do well to find ways to bolster hope levels through facilitating, engaging, and practicing each individual’s goal setting, pathway thinking, and agency thinking; thereby contributing to the possible overall improvement to hope in Haitian society (Snyder, 2000).

Exploring the hope phenomenon in this unique population offers powerful insights. While this study’s limitations prohibit generalizing to all people or all Haitians, one can feel the need to respect their strength and hope levels, given the people of Haiti tolerated and survived extreme earthquakes, hurricanes, and political instability. Most continue to abide in some of the lowest standards of living in the world, such as intense poverty and homelessness, sparse electricity, unsanitary conditions, food scarcity and hunger, poor water quality and quantity; and low school attendance, low literacy rates, and low education levels (Arthur, 2002; Central Intelligence Agency, 2021; Crane et al., 2010; Hanemann, 2011; Hornbeck, 2010; Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010; Margesson & Taft-Morales, 2010; New Paltz Institute for Disaster Mental Health, n.d.; World Bank, 2013), all emphasizing the importance of studying hope. No doubt, the hope levels reported in this study provide a foundation for further explorations of the phenomenon of hope theory across all Haitians and all people.

### ***Limitations***

Although the sample size was adequate and purposive, a larger sample size would allow for wider generalizability and be strengthened by repetition of the study with larger samples from a wider range of the Haitian population. However, because study participants were in effect displaying agency and pathway thinking by registering for the literacy course when solicited by the Co-

Director, their hope levels scores may be higher in comparison to all illiterate Haitians. Therefore, if replicated, results may be different if the sample were not afforded literacy course invitations. Despite this limitation, these results offer a baseline measurement of hope levels, from which future research can be conducted.

### **Future Research**

Hope scores from this study showed hope levels reaching a near average that can be garnered in desperate contexts, despite many obstacles. However, this study raises some interesting, unanswered questions. Continued research must undertake the nuances of hope definitions across psychological domains (Miller & Nickerson, 2007; Seligman, 2002; Snyder, 2000). In Chang and Banks's (2007) study of U.S. ethnic groups, differences in the predictors of hope across racial/ethnic groups were found. They determined racial/ethnic differences exist in how hope-related variables were connected with hope elements; for instance, problem-solving behaviors and life satisfaction. The current study with illiterate Haitians should propel further studies necessary to discover important predictors of hope across cultures. Lopez et al. (2000) suggests "the best approach to understanding a person's goals and their hopes is to examine their cultural context" (p. 231). Because cultural studies and variations in hope have not been widely explored, future research is needed to focus on how increasing hope levels might mitigate the overall human condition of Haitians as well as many societies under duress. For the researchers in this study, one monumental takeaway from this study is that all people may be imbued with the capacity for hopeful thinking (Snyder, 2000). Freire (1994) posited the pedagogy of hope is essential to allow oppressed masses to envision a viable future. The researchers note this phenomenon of hope in the face of so many obstacles have the potential to inspire even more hope studies.

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