



CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON
College-Workforce Transitions

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Radical Hope: Career Interventions for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education



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Abstract

The nature of work is in a constant state of flux, and this trend is expected to persist in the future (Allen et al., 2021). These changes affect workers by providing less job security, which significantly impacts their overall wellness (Allen et al., 2021). Therefore, higher education institutions should pay attention to their efforts as they prepare students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for the workforce. This brief discusses the experiences of underrepresented students in higher education and proposes the use of radical hope as a career intervention to support students in their career exploration process. It includes examples of career interventions that employ a radical hope framework.

Keywords: Radical hope, career intervention, underrepresented students

Discussion

The nature of work has undergone significant changes over the past few decades, which has made it more unstable and uncertain for many people (Allen et al., 2021). It is crucial to prepare students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, for this unpredictable landscape of work. Students from underrepresented groups often face additional barriers, such as discrimination, even while studying in college, and these experiences continue even after they graduate (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007; Mishra, 2019). To prepare these students for the world of work, we can look to the concept of radical hope. Radical hope refers to the courage and creativity to face devastation and see beyond despair, moving forward into an unknown future with the belief that something good will emerge (French et al., 2020). Radical hope could serve as a protective factor to ground students as they engage in coursework, explore potential career options, and prepare to move into the world of work. It would enable them to be successful despite the challenges it may present.

This report explores radical hope and its benefits for marginalized individuals and their communities. Furthermore, it will discuss how this concept can be utilized as a career intervention for underrepresented students, given the unique and challenging experiences they encounter while in college. The following sections will provide an overview of underrepresented students' experiences in higher education settings, define the term "radical hope," explain how it can positively impact career development, provide research evidence to support the benefits of hope, and suggest recommendations for incorporating radical hope-based career interventions.

Underrepresented Students in Higher Education Settings

Research has shown that students from underrepresented groups face numerous challenges and obstacles in higher education compared to white students. These challenges negatively impact their career goals and intentions to persist in their studies. Studies have found that underrepresented students are often subjected to racism and discrimination on a daily basis while in college (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007; Her & Thompson, 2020). They also tend to have less information about various careers and job opportunities and lack career networks to gain more insight into different career paths (Fouad & Brown, 2000). Furthermore, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less access to economic resources, resulting in higher levels of career indecision and lower levels of self-efficacy (Thompson & Subich, 2011).

These experiences have a significant impact on the well-being of underrepresented students in higher education settings, as they often feel out of place and unwelcome (Greer & Brown, 2011; Housee, 2011). Research has shown that being in an unwelcoming academic or career environment can cause feelings of self-doubt or imposter syndrome (Sengkhamee et al., 2017; Wright-Mair et al., 2023), as well as feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and despair (Clark & Mitchell, 2018). These emotions can lead students to question their sense of belonging in higher education, ultimately impacting their decision to leave or change their college majors. Ultimately, these negative experiences can hinder students' ability to achieve their educational and career-related goals (Betz & Gwilliam, 2002; Her & Thompson, 2020).

Given the experiences of underrepresented students in college and the current uncertain career landscape, interventions promoting hope can benefit underrepresented college students. Hope could serve as a resilience factor and coping strategy for students during their career exploration (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006). It can also help to combat feelings of hopelessness and serve as a buffer against despair and adverse health outcomes (Mosely et al., 2020). Several studies have noted the importance of hope for students' academic success and overall well-being in higher education institutions (Akdeniz & Gültekin Ahçı, 2023; Mosely et al., 2020; Snyder et al., 1991;). Cultivating hope could enhance students' academic, vocational, and personal wellness.

Radical Healing & Radical Hope

Radical hope is a component of the psychological framework of Radical Healing (Mosely et al., 2020), and it offers a way for People of Color (POC) to heal from racial trauma while resisting oppression and moving toward liberation and wellness. The framework is grounded in liberation psychology, Black psychology, ethno-political psychology, and intersectionality. Radical healing is defined as being "able to sit in a dialectic and exist in both spaces of resisting oppression and moving toward freedom (French et al., 2020, p. 24). The psychological process of healing within this framework consists of five anchors: critical consciousness (i.e., raising awareness of oppressive systems), radical hope (i.e., envisioning a better future through fostering hope), strength and resistance (i.e., strength and resilience are needed to resist oppression and resources are needed to overcome adversities), cultural authenticity and self-knowledge (i.e., returning to ancestral roots; French et al., 2020), and lastly collectivism (i.e., the power of connection and belonging in one's ethnic group).

According to French and her colleagues (2020), "radical hope" refers to having the courage to face devastation and move forward into an unknown future with the belief that something good will emerge. They argue that hope is essential as it gives people a sense of control to make positive changes. Essentially, hope motivates individuals to continue striving, knowing that a better future is possible. It allows individuals to persist in the face of adversity and not give up. Lastly, hope is considered radical because it transcends one's ability to envision and believe that the future offers a chance for change and something better (Mosely et al., 2020).

Radical hope has two components (collective memory and faith agency) and four orientations (collective, individual, past, and future; Mosley et al., 2020). Collective memory captures a group's shared history of struggles and victories, while faith is the belief that positive change for the collective is possible (Mosely et al., 2020). Agency is the idea that POCs can take action to improve their wellness individually and collectively (Mosley et al., 2020). The four orientations inform the strategies needed to attain the desired outcomes to promote psychological wellness among individuals and communities (Mosely et al., 2020). The author posits that radical hope becomes possible through the flexible and reciprocal practice of moving among the four orientations. Moreover, through one's ability to be oriented in all these orientations, the individual can develop the strategies to obtain their goals and create a better future. A person who possesses radical hope is "in the present moment, aware of both components and simultaneously oriented toward multiple pathways" (Mosley et al., 2020, p. 4).

Radical Hope as a Career Intervention

Centering radical hope as a career intervention for underrepresented students allows higher education institutions to consider the impact of societal issues, such as racism and discrimination, on the students' present educational and vocational experiences. It could help students process and make sense of difficult feelings (i.e., anger, frustration, and disappointment) associated with adverse experiences (i.e., racism and discrimination) without derailing them from their goals. Radical hope is focused on the root causes of inequality while acknowledging and incorporating the collective flourishing and the capacity of POC communities to transform oppressive forces into a better tomorrow by acting in the present (French et al., 2003). As such, through radical hope, students can begin to feel empowered to make career decisions in the present that can change the future for themselves and their community.

Interventions focusing on radical hope can help students move toward actionable goals rooted in their self-knowledge, cultural identity, and ancestor pride. By embracing their cultural identity, students can use it as a strength to overcome challenges and achieve their objectives. They can begin to own their self- and community knowledge as an asset rather than a deficit. Research has shown that cultural wealth, which encompasses marginalized groups' assets, strengths, and capital (Yosso, 2005), is strongly associated with academic and career success among underrepresented student groups, such as first-generation college students. (Garriott, 2020).

Lastly, intervention through radical hope can help students develop a sense of internal control and enhance their resilience. Locus of control refers to an individual's belief in their ability to control their life and make decisions. Internal locus of control means the power to control one's life comes from within the individual (Rotter, 1966). Research studies have found that students holding an external locus of control are more likely to view their future career as a matter of luck, timing, or as too distant to focus on – these attitudes have been associated with career indecision, especially for African American college students (Lease, 2004; Taylor, 1982). Therefore, using radical hope to increase internal locus of control would empower students from underrepresented backgrounds to write their own career narratives, regardless of societal expectations.

Research Support of Hope

The most popular and well-researched concept of hope in psychology is provided by Snyder (2002) in his theory of hope. This theory emerged from the positive psychology movement and defined hope as a positive motivational state (Snyder et al., 1991). Hope reflects individuals' perceptions regarding their capacity to (a) conceptualize goals, (b) develop pathways toward achieving goals, and (c) utilize strategies to achieve goals (Snyder, 2000). Snyder argued that hope differs from other constructs, such as optimism and self-efficacy (Snyder, 2000). He noted that optimism, according to Seligman and colleagues, focuses on distancing an individual from adverse outcomes.

On the other hand, hope is centered on achieving positive goals in the future. Hope is also different from Bandura's self-efficacy in that goals are not specific to a situation or a person's capacity (whether they *can*) to perform the tasks required to achieve the goals. Instead, the

goals may be enduring, cross-situational, situational, goal-directed thoughts, or all three. Moreover, hope revolves around the idea that the individual *will* initiate a goal, take the necessary steps to achieve the goal, and keep going.

Research supports the critical role of hope as a buffer against despair and adverse health outcomes among POC individuals (Mosely et al., 2020). More specific to students in higher education institutions, studies have documented the importance of hope for students' academic success and overall well-being (Snyder et al., 1991). Based on research across grade levels from grade school to college students, hope correlates reliably with higher academic performances. Hope significantly predicted higher cum GPAs, higher graduation rates, and lower attrition as measured by dropout rates (Snyder et al., 2002). Higher hope is also related to better overall psychological adjustment (Kennedy et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 1991). For example, high hope individuals, compared to low hope individuals, are more prone to find benefits in their attempts at coping with stressors. Among college students, high hope students, compared to low hope, reported feeling more confident, inspired, energized, and challenged by their life goals (Snyder et al., 1991). Moreover, they reported elevated feelings of self-worth and life satisfaction and low levels of depression (Snyder et al., 2002).

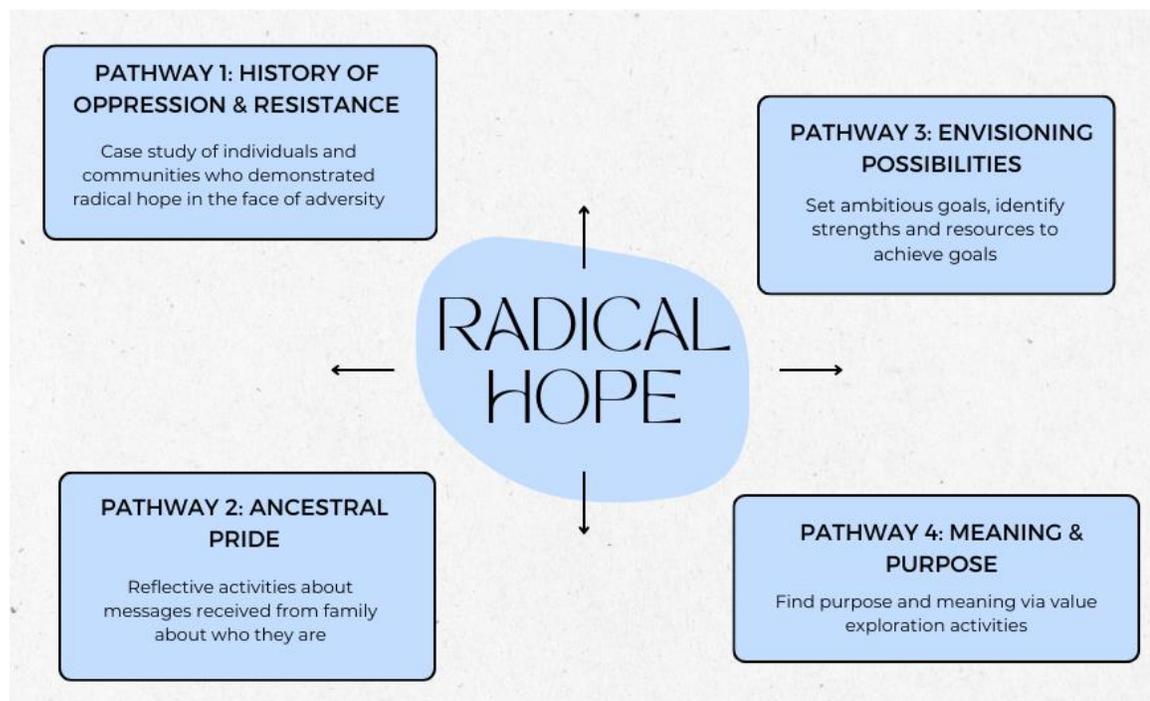
Attending to hope within vocational psychology aligns well with the profession's historical focus on individuals' strengths and emphasis on resilience and coping strategies (e.g., Savickas, 2003). As such, Juntunen and Wettersten (2006) expanded Snyder's theory of hope to career development and created the Work Hope Scale (WHS) to measure this new construct. Work hope is "a positive motivational state that is directed at work and work-related goals and is composed of the presence of work-related goals and both the agency and the pathways for achieving those goals" (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006, p. 97). The WHS has also been demonstrated to relate to several career and educational constructs with diverse samples. In the original development and validation manuscript, the WHS detected differences among college students and college-educated individuals, a group of economically disadvantaged youth, and a group of women receiving welfare (TANF; Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006). In particular, the authors found that the college student/college-educated group had higher WHS scores than the economically disadvantaged youth and women receiving TANF (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006).

Moreover, A study on work hope among a diverse group of undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution found that psychological distress, racism, and classism were negatively related to work hope. The study demonstrated that higher levels of distress and more experiences with racism and classism were associated with lower levels of work hope for these students (Thompson et al., 2013). Their findings support prior research that psychological wellness is related to hope and that underrepresented students experience greater discrimination, a barrier to their pursuit of educational and career-related goals (Diemer & Ali, 2009). However, work hope has been posited to act as a protective mechanism that could mitigate deleterious effects related to discrimination and oppression (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006). Therefore, intervention to increase hope may be helpful to students.

Recommendation for Radical Hope Interventions

The recommendations for vocational interventions are based on the four pathways of radical hope. These pathways facilitate the development of radical hope through four orientations and two components, as discussed earlier. The pathways include: (1) understanding the history of oppression and resistance, (2) embracing ancestral pride, (3) envisioning possibilities, and (4) creating meaning and purpose (Mosely et al., 2020). The following section provides a brief overview of these pathways and recommendations for vocational interventions that fit within each pathway. These pathways are strategies that underrepresented students can use to develop radical hope and achieve psychological, educational, and vocational wellness for themselves, emphasizing the collective wellness of POC communities.

Figure 1. Career intervention via Radical Hope Pathways



Note. The figure shows the four pathways toward radical hope with examples of career intervention within each pathway. The figure was adapted from the Psychological Framework of Radical Hope from Mosely et al., 2023.

The first pathway is to understand the history of oppression faced by different racial and ethnic groups and acknowledge their resilience in overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges (Mosely et al., 2020). Resistance is "individual and/or collective actions designed to reduce human suffering or promote human dignity and human rights" (Mosely et al., 2020, p. 8). To envision a better future, one must understand how the present has been shaped by the actions of previous generations (Hattam, 2000). By reflecting on past collective actions and the

resilience of previous generations, individuals can find the strength to overcome their current difficulties and create a better future (Mosely et al., 2020).

The activities in this pathway should focus on enhancing the understanding of the history of individuals who share the same or similar identities as the students. Activities can be to analyze real-world examples of radical hope of individuals from their communities or to conduct a case study analysis of individuals and communities who demonstrated radical hope in the face of adversity. For instance, researching famous people who share similar identities as the students in their respective careers or majors may be helpful to make them feel connected to past and current successful individuals in their career tracks. It could also be people in their immediate communities whom they admire. The activity can be similar to an informational interview where students have the opportunity to learn about the person's struggles with systemic issues and how they channel hope toward their work. Learning about and being connected to these individuals can help the students realize that success can look different for different people. By understanding the strategies these individuals employed to overcome challenges, students can apply these strategies to their lives. Additionally, when students see people who look like them in their field, they can begin to envision themselves achieving similar success. Research on career self-efficacy and mentorship supports the finding that students' efficacy can be increased with positive mentorship from mentors who share similar identities or in the same career field (Lent et al., 1994; Pham et al., 2019).

The second pathway is closely connected to the first in that it is about embracing ancestral pride. Having ancestral pride moves a person beyond individual pride of being proud of their identity. It is also about ancestral pride, which is having a positive regard for ancestors' social actions, strengths, and contributions (Mosely et al., 2020). It is about feeling connected to your ancestral roots and learning how to foster that aspect of yourself. Ancestral pride is grounded in the "knowledge, respect, and admiration" one has for previous generations' sacrifices and accomplishments (Mosely et al., 2020, p. 7). This sense of pride is believed to inspire people to strive for success in the present and work towards challenging the status quo while committing to social action for the benefit of future generations (Mosely et al., 2020)

The activities in this pathway should focus on building students' sense of pride in their racial, ethnic, and ancestral backgrounds. Through reflective exercises, students can explore the messages they have received and how they relate to their identity. Having a sense of pride in one's racial or ethnic background is a source of radical hope (French et al., 2023). For instance, they can reflect on questions about the messages they received from parents, grandparents, and neighbors about who they are and how to be proud of themselves as individuals and as part of a larger community. Some questions could include:

- *What messages did you receive as a child about being a/an (racial ethnicity)?*
- *What memory or story do you have about when you were proud to be (racial ethnicity)?*
- *How do you feel about that memory?*

Additionally, as a continuation of this reflective exercise, students can ask themselves what more they want to know about their families, social groups, or communities. The purpose of this activity is to broaden their sense of pride beyond just the individual and encourage them to learn

more about their own families and communities – increasing their sense of group pride. Discussing and making meaning of how families or communities have overcome work-related obstacles can be inspiring, as it can promote resilience. In a qualitative study involving mental health professionals from BIPOC communities, the concept of "radical hope" was explored. One important theme that emerged was the process of making meaning and finding purpose in challenging experiences, such as those related to oppression. Making meaning is crucial to building radical hope (French et al., 2023).

The third pathway involves envisioning and generating possibilities by and for POC to help restore and enhance wellness within their community (Mosely et al., 2020). This pathway enables individuals to imagine what is possible despite their current situation and envision a future free from discrimination and oppression, enabling them to thrive. Developing a radical vision of possibilities is essential because POCs are often surrounded by messages that they are inferior or unworthy (LaMothe, 2018).

The activities in this pathway should empower underrepresented students to explore various work possibilities and set ambitious goals beyond societal expectations. It is vital to help students identify their strengths and use them to achieve their goals. Research examining strengths-based approaches in the context of higher education noted that intentionally enabling students to identify, understand, and leverage their talents, passions, and strengths allows their unique genius to emerge and set them on course for success (Shuskok & Hulme, 2006). Additionally, it would be helpful to guide students toward resources and opportunities to help them build on their strengths or develop new ones to succeed in the job market. Some examples of activities include creating a list of possible future jobs, identifying the pathways to obtain those jobs, recognizing the challenges of getting those jobs, and finding resources to overcome those challenges.

The last pathway centers on creating meaning and purpose for the self while focusing on social change for the collective (Mosely et al., 2020). Meaning-making is about how individuals understand difficult experiences, whereas purpose is about finding and living with a purpose for the future (French et al., 2023). This pathway involves tapping into one's inner resources to develop vocational goals driven by a sense of responsibility to care for the community and be interconnected to all humanity (Mosely et al., 2020). As such, one can achieve radical hope with a sense of meaning and purpose developed through direct connection with oneself and others.

The recommended activities within this pathway should help students find purpose and meaning in their current or future work and identify ways to align their work with their sense of purpose in life. For instance, reflective writing practices such as writing letters to future generations could help individuals reflect on what kind of world they want to see in the future and what they are doing today to contribute towards that future. This practice is a component of radical hope because it allows the individual to strive toward a collective future that is different and more humane (French et al., 2023). Additionally, value exploration activities may help identify personal values and how they can be lived out to benefit both the individual and the larger community. Values are another component of radical hope, particularly valuing the *self*. Participants in a qualitative study on radical hope discussed prioritizing their individual and collective selves to create a better future (French et al., 2023). They talked about being able to

live authentically and having intentional choices about the life they want to live that are culturally congruent. Lastly, within this model, radical hope is not only about hoping and striving but also about restoring energy to keep doing the work toward a more liberated future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is crucial to understand and put into practice radical hope as an intervention to meet the needs of underrepresented students who experience the adverse effects of racism and discrimination in higher education institutions. This is particularly important considering the current ever-changing and unpredictable career landscape. Radical hope can support these students' vocational exploration and prepare them to enter the world of work. Research has shown that hope has several positive benefits that should be extended to the world of work. This report discussed how radical hope can be used as a career intervention to support underrepresented students. It offered various recommendations for career interventions centered on the four pathways of radical hope. These interventions can be adapted into a course or serve as standalone interventions and workshops to support the growth and development of students from marginalized backgrounds.

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