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Celebrity and performance in the hopes of children

Abstract

How children engage with contemporary culture in a globalised world is contested. While it is argued that children should be protected from the vagaries of capitalist consumerist and celebrity culture, this idea co-exists with the notion that children should be encouraged to be the 'authors of their own lives'. Importantly for our research, engaging with contemporary culture can provide space for children to have a voice about who they are and what they wish to become. This paper reports on a project where children were asked about their hopes for the future. The Tree of Hope project, undertaken in 2006 through a partnership between local government, local schools and the University of Tasmania, Australia, aimed to address the absence of children's voice in debates about issues that are crucial to their future. To explore the ways in which children express ideas about their impending lives, the research team asked: How do children think about their future? What hopes do they hold?

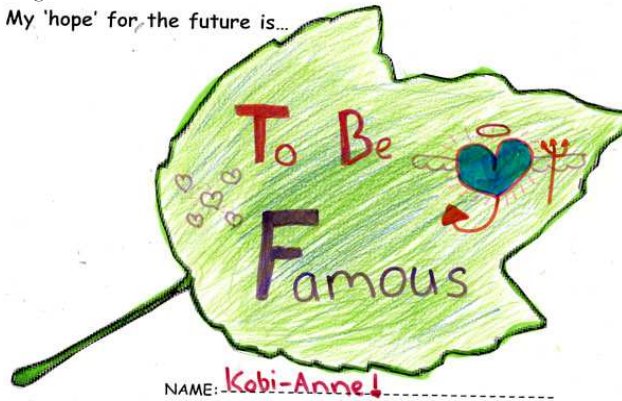
The project was undertaken in 45 primary school classrooms in 15 schools in a regional centre of Tasmania, Australia. A total of 1071 children participated. A class room activity that began with a group discussion about the general ideas of hope and the future set the scene. Children were then encouraged to individually write down their hopes for the future on a paper leaf, and to decorate their leaf with a drawing that reflected their hope. Emphasis was placed on providing support and encouragement to children as they worked. Children's hopes for the future ranged from global concerns about the peace and the environment, hopes for their country, hopes for their local community, and personal hopes for their future. A key way in which personal hopes were expressed was through identification with local and international celebrity and sporting heroes. Children wanted to be like their cultural and sporting heroes and perform in ways that would attract similar celebrity status. Culture in this regard was expressed in a performative way, from identification with the skills of Australian sports stars and establishment of rock bands for the boys, to expressions of dance and beauty that are viewed as desirable in celebrity culture for girls. At a time when globalised entertainment is a defining part of children's lives, it is important to acknowledge the relevance of celebrity and sporting culture to the values, aspirations and hopes expressed by children. Valuing children's voice may take many forms: from providing opportunities for them to express their views; to incorporating study of celebrity and sporting culture into the learning processes in the formal education system.

Keywords:

Children, voice, hope, celebrity, culture, famous

image 1

My 'hope' for the future is...



Introduction

Hope is important for quality of life and wellbeing (Bland, Renouf & Tullgren 2009; Swinton 2009: 83). While it is taken for granted that children have hope and aspirations for the future, rarely are their hopes 'taken seriously' by adults (politicians, teachers, professionals) (Baraldi 2010: 279), or utilised to inform policy and administrative decision making processes. This can be partly attributed to the prevailing view of children as 'becoming' adults (Qvortrup 1994: 2). Defined in contradistinction to adults (Mayall 2002: 159), children remain predominantly viewed as incompetent; their views and hopes as 'unrealistic'.

The *Tree of Hope* project (2006) responds to this discourse, specifically, to the growing awareness that '[f]ew children have participated in projects which effectively give them a voice' (Baraldi 2010: 276). As a response to the absence of children's voices in discussion about issues that are crucial to their future, our main concern was not just to listen to children but to respect, value and utilise what they have to say. Our aims were threefold. First, to provide children with an opportunity to publically express their ideas about, and hopes for, their impending lives; second, to document and analyse the different ways in which children think about the future, to gain further knowledge of the social/personal nexus, and third, to develop a flexible research design that can be applied to various social groups and used to inform policy makers in various tiers of government.

The children's hopes were wide-ranging and included global, local and personal issues. In this paper we specifically report on the way children draw on ideas of 'celebrity' to craft hope for the future. The key argument we pursue is that celebrity culture is an important 'resource of hope'. Within public commentary and academic literature there is often a focus on the negative influence of media in children's lives, particularly its role in perpetuating gender stereotypes. We argue that positive conceptualisations of celebrity as a social and cultural resource are not given sufficient weight in the literature and that it is possible, and important, to capitalize on children's identification with celebrity.

The paper takes the following structure. First, we discuss salient aspects of the 'new sociology of childhood' literature (James and Prout 1997) and appraise key critiques of contemporary mass media/celebrity culture. Second, we outline the methodology underpinning and processes surrounding our research and finally we present an analysis of the children's celebrity-oriented hopes for the future. While recognising that the global children's culture industry may have negative elements, children's active engagement with celebrities and consumer culture can also be healthy and productive; it can play a constructive role in creating hopeful visions and aspirations for the future.

The child: social actor and competent citizen

While slow to emerge as a legitimate sub-discipline (Sirota 2010: 251), the sociology of childhood recognizes age as a salient aspect of social stratification and emphasises the differences between the way children and adults interact with, and are conceptualized and treated within, social institutions and structures (see Qvortrup 1994). Age is a key structural marker shaping children's experiences, beliefs and behaviours and their uniquely marginalised social status. Inspired by feminist theory (see, for example, Oakley 1994, 1998) sociologists have traditionally focused their efforts on explaining children's marginalised position.

The research informing this paper, however, reflects the 'new' sociology of childhood. Utilising social constructionist theory, this literature deconstructs dominant notions of the 'nature' of childhood (see Cook 2004; James, Kenks and Prout 1998; Prout 2000a, 2000b) and highlights children's agency. Children are recognised as social actors who actively construct their life worlds, create meaning through their social interactions (Bass 2010: 338) and shape local and global structures and cultures, while simultaneously being shaped by them (see Corsaro 1997; James and Prout 1997; James and James 2004; Mayall 2002). Children's 'active citizenship' and participation rights are also increasingly recognized in academic, policy, governmental and community circles (van Krieken 2010: 243). Such rights include having their views both heard and given due weight in legislative and administrative decisions that are of direct import to their future (Shier 2001; Sinclair 2004).

In this approach, children are viewed as able agents with competence in understanding themselves, negotiating complex social situations and cultural discourses and in reflecting on and making sense of tensions and ambiguities within these (Jans 2004; Wicks, Nairn & Griffin 2007). Such competencies are increasingly required within our detraditionalized and individualized society where children (like adults) must become increasingly autonomous in mapping out their futures (Jans 2004: 28) and in reflexively constructing their own biographies (see Giddens 1991).

Children: precious little agents

The current positioning of children nonetheless remains highly ambiguous (Moran-Ellis 2010). The 'child as actor' model sits paradoxically with potent ideas of children as innocent, vulnerable, dependent and in need of help and protection (Jenkins 1998, in Langer 2004: 345; Moran-Ellis 2010: 194). Alongside discourses emphasizing children's rights and abilities is increasing anxiety over the impact of the current globalised, commodified, 'risk society' (Beck 1992) on children. Specifically, there are concerns that children are now more exposed to risks (Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall 2004) and are 'growing up too quickly' (Zeiher 2010: 294). It is feared that childhood itself is 'disappearing' (Postman 1982). This at-risk rhetoric hinders the recognition of children as 'child-sized' citizens (Jans 2004: 28) who are interested and keen to participate in society and hopeful about the future. Rather, due to their (perceived) endangered status, they have become even more 'precious'—even 'priceless' (Zelizer 1985) and 'sacred' (Langer 2004: 251). The desire to 'preserve' childhood has emerged, evidenced in criticisms of the 'children's culture industry' (Sirota 2010: 264) and more specifically, celebrity culture.

Sociological studies have long examined the influence of mass media on children (Baraldi 2010: 273). Because new technologies and globalization processes have created new ways for children to explore and share entertainment, they are now far more exposed to media/celebrity culture—and to material hitherto restricted to adults—than ever before. Furthermore, the children's consumer culture industry, characterized by aggressive marketing to children, has emerged. This is frequently criticised (see Cook 2004; Marshall 2010), with some authors suggesting that media and consumption now define childhood (Buckingham 2003; Jing 2000; Langer 2004: 260). Celebrities occupy a powerful role in this cultural space. They are exploited to endorse products and increase sales and have become dominant role models (Kellnar 2004; Langer 2004), forging unique relationships with their audiences and affecting our everyday lives (Marshall 2010).

It is feared that celebrities are 'bad' role models for children. While Rojek (2005: 86) finds some empirical support for this, the idea that contemporary children are 'in crisis' (Mayall 2002: 162) is critiqued as an overstatement that does not take account of how children positively draw on contemporary media. Adults (academics included), tend to swiftly critique young people's hopes for glamour, riches and notoriety as evidence of media saturation and the 'impressionable nature' of children. Despite being established in the media literature that adults are not cultural dopes, there is little exploration of how children, too, negotiate, critique and reinterpret cultural images and ideas.

Children's hope: what do we know?

We do not know enough about children's hopes (or Australian children's hopes in particular) and what we do know tends to come from marketing agencies (Eckersley 1997: 244). According to Lindstrom and Seybold's (2004: 7) research into the 'minds of today's global kids and their relationships with brands', is that 'they want to be loved'. They also want to be rich and famous. More than half the children in their sample stated that they 'wanted to be famous' (Lindstrom & Seybold 2004 p.25). Academic social research into young people's 'preferred futures' (Hicks 1996a; Eckersley 1999) has mainly been conducted by educational researchers who typically focus on youth—usually teenage students—although occasionally they include young and very young children in the sample. The focus is often on young people's responses to the current postmodern 'age of chaos' (Rushkoff 1996) and, pertinent to this paper, rarely is gender considered as a key variable (for example, Hutchinson 1999; Ono 2005).

Despite this dearth in knowledge, themes are evident in the 'futures' literature. Some of these reflect the psychological paradigms informing the perspectives on childhood outlined above, for example the assumption that children's 'ability to think about the future is not very well developed' (Hicks 1996b: 11) and that young children cannot actually grasp the concept of 'the future' (see Page 1998). Researchers in this area also tend to focus not only on hope but on fear—typically finding that many young people are worried, fearful and pessimistic about the future (Gidley 1998; Eckersley 1997). In 1999, Eckersley found that most of his 100 participants did not expect life to be better in 2010, rather they saw a 'continuation and even worsening' (1999: 73). Young people's concerns are also emphasised as being increasingly political and global: about war, poverty, the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees and environmental destruction (Hicks 1996; Jans 2004).

Children's concern with issues beyond themselves was not unexpected during analysis and is certainly a theme within the *Tree of Hope* data. Children are immersed in a culture of twenty-four hour media reporting of global issues and while very young children are often labelled completely ego-centric, they are also able to empathise with others (see Page 1998). It is important to recognise children's concerns and fears. They can impede personal well being and may have wider social implications for the future. What is also needed is a better understanding of how optimism and hope shape children's view of the future.

Methodology and Methods

Our research took a strengths perspective (Rapp et al 2005) which emphasises skills and capabilities rather than telling children which cultural values or celebrity identities were appropriate for them. The aim of our analysis is to highlight the importance of listening to and valuing children's voices, regardless of our views about the sources and content of these hopes or how temporary or trivial they may sound. Providing children with spaces where they can articulate their hopes, safe in the knowledge that these are not being trivialised, is paramount. This is particularly important given the current lack of knowledge regarding children's hopes for the future.

The project was facilitated by a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Launceston City Council. All primary schools in the local area were invited to be involved. Fifteen

local schools took part, with 1170 school age children (grades 1-6), from 45 class groups, participating in the projects activities. The research was guided by three key questions:

- (1) How do children in 2006 think about their future?
- (2) What hopes do they hold?
- (3) What can we learn from these hopes to assist in maximising children's opportunities to participate and be listened to, in the future?

To answer these questions the project employed an inductive qualitative approach, seeking to uncover themes as they emerged during the process of data collection and analysis (Babbie 2005:53; Walter 2010). Central to the aims of the project was to work with children in a participatory way. This commitment provided children with a secure platform from which to articulate their hopes for the future and for their voices to be heard. This strengths-based approach entails an optimistic attitude towards children's assets, knowledge and capacities (Healy, 2005) which contrasts deficit perspectives that locate children as 'problems' (Qvortrup 1987: 3), as 'at-risk' (Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall, 2004) or as otherwise lacking 'adult' abilities. Project activities were designed to take a 'least adult role' (Mandell 1991; Shier 1999) and particular strategies were used to reduce the social gap between the researcher (adult) and child. Locating the child as expert and minimising adult authority helped reduce the likelihood that the children would perceive the researcher as holding a position of 'master status' (Wyness 2006: 188). Children were empowered to choose whether or not to participate in the project and whether or not they would like to have their hopes displayed in the *Tree of Hope* exhibition, held at a local museum.

Our aim was to counterbalance the previous adult-centric research with children (Page 1998). In-class activities were therefore task-based, to enable a sense of comfortability between the children and researcher (Punch 2002). They involved three key elements. First, the researcher sat with students (usually on the floor, not standing at the front of the class) and opened dialogue about the importance and relevance of the children's views. Second, a group discussion, or 'democratic circle' inspired conversations between the class group about what a hope for the future might look like and the different ways that future aspirations could be thought about. Children were encouraged to think about hope however they saw it: about themselves, their families, friends or neighbours, about their local communities, about Australia, or about the world. Finally, each student was invited to express their hope for the future through both writing and creative expression, by drawing on and decorating a paper leaf.

We employed content analysis techniques to detect the presence and frequency of celebrity in children's hopes. This provided a method for capturing both explicit and implicit instances of celebrity in an objective and systematic way (Sproule, 2010). Words such as 'famous' and 'star' were coded as explicitly related to a desire for celebrity status. Increasingly, sporting identities are finding themselves popular figures in cultural contexts previously reserved for stars of film, music and television (Nalapat & Parker, 2005: 433). Therefore hopes about being elite national or international sports stars were also coded as either explicit—for example, 'To join the NBA and be as good as Vince Carter ...', or as implicit, 'To be a pro-basketballer'—references to celebrity.

Similarly, achieving celebrity status in contemporary society requires the performance and management of a fashionable, beautiful, glamorous image (Marshall 2010) and thus fashion designers, beauty 'experts' and 'hairstylists to the stars' play an integral role in the production and consumption of celebrity culture. We therefore coded the children's hopes to perform roles such as actor, singer and model as implicit instances of celebrity in the data. While some of the children's hopes contained both explicit and implicit references, each instance was counted only once during the coding process. Regardless of how they expressed their desire to become famous, their engagement with celebrity culture informed their discursive construction of hope.

Findings and discussion

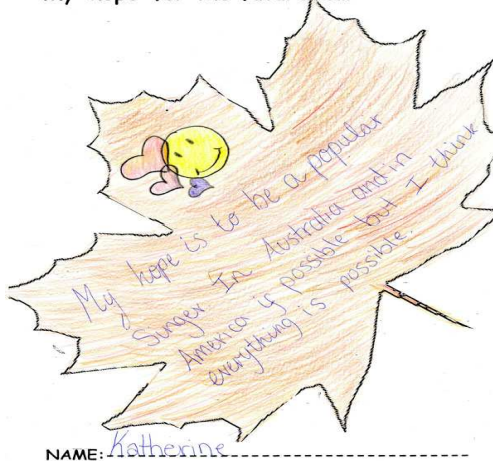
The children have positive and hopeful understandings of the future. While they do discuss global issues such as war and poverty, many have hope in, and believe that we will find solutions to, these problems in the future. Such belief in positive futures transpiring, is fundamental to a sense of wellbeing. Our findings highlight the way in which contemporary celebrities provide a resource for such hope. From a total of 1170 participants we found that 79 children explicitly referenced celebrity in some way. A further 276 children—both boys and girls—implicitly identified themselves with the wealthy stars that they admire, and hope to enjoy similar futures. While both boys and girls identify with celebrity in some way, the means of attaining celebrity status that they envision are gendered. Analysis of the children's drawings—their 'leaves' for the Tree of Hope—also reveals gender differences. However, the futures these children imagine are certainly not one-dimensional and do not reflect traditional, conventional gender stereotypes. Rather, they ambitiously hope to develop varied skills and abilities and to combine multiple and social roles and identities.

The children's high hopes

While celebrity glitz and notoriety is a key theme in the data, the children's positive aspirations also extend far beyond the self. Some children hope for "A positive future 4 all" (male, Grade 6), others wish that we will "all have jobs" (male, Grade 2/3) and that "Everyone is happy" (female, Grade 3). They also present diverse personal hopes, from 'camel rider', to 'hat designer' and for "peas to be vanished off earth forever". Some of the younger children also express hopes that adults tend to label as whimsical and not particularly meaningful. One boy aimed to "create a formula that allows me to shape-shift and make me younger" (Grade 1/2) and a young girl hoped to "be a bird so I could fly and see the beautiful world beneath me" (Grade 1/2). Such hopes may not be taken seriously by, or considered useful to, policy makers and adults alike. However, we take them as meaningful, as representing children's optimism for a positive future—a future where almost anything is possible and where, we argue, hope will remain a useful attribute.

Image 2

My 'hope' for the future is...



Celebrity as a 'resource for hope': the boys

Self-identity is formed through our experiences in the social world, and through our identification with the symbols, values and norms of certain social groups forms part of this process (Bendle 2002: 5; Bradley 1996). Given the pervasive nature of the media, it stands to reason that popular characters, both real and acted, who are frequently publicized in the media have also become a socio-cultural resource that people of different ages, including children, draw on to craft their identities, build their hopes and make sense of the world around them (Wicks et al 2007: 403). The media is an omnipresent, unavoidable influence in children's lives. One of the young boys in the study illustrates this through his hope to own and control many of the radio and television stations in Australia: "Own Telstra. Own Austar. Own SBS. Own TDT. Own Southern Cross. Own 7LA. Own ABC. No more McLeods Daughters [Australian television show]. More South Park" (Grade 3).

While both boys and girls identify themselves with popular and prosperous media stars and express their desire to perform similar lifestyles in the future, boys are more often explicit than girls in their hopes for fame:

My hope for the future is to be really rich. I would like to be a good surfer. I would like to be a famous person (Grade 6).

[My hope for the future is] To be an actor and to live in Los Angeles and to have a lovely wife and two children living the high life (Grade 5/6).

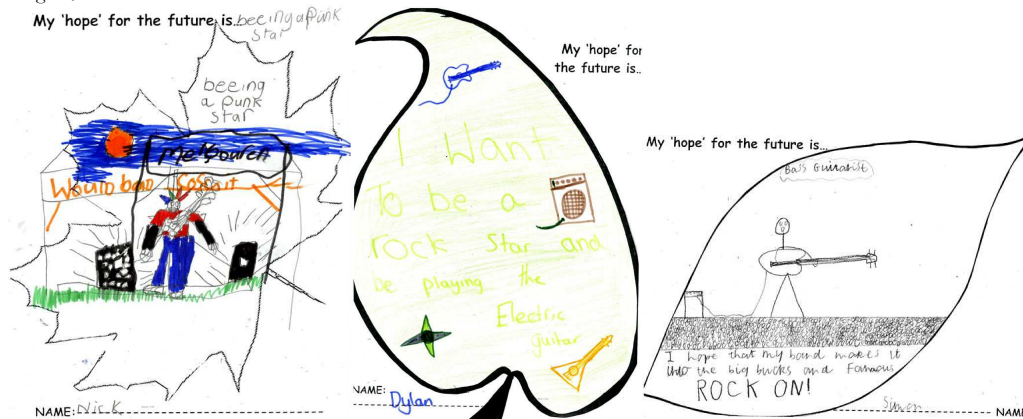
My hope is that my band makes it into the big bucks and famous. Rock on! (Grade 6).

I would like to be rich with a big mansion. To become a well-known musician that plays in a band (Grade 6).

Both boys and girls hope for a future in the music industry and to make "the big bucks [money]". Perhaps, in part, they expect this because as Lindstrom and Seybold (2004: 1) claim, children now have 'more personal power, more money, influence and attention than any other generation before them'. Desire for riches may be labelled superficial, something not to be embraced by educators and social and political planners. However, these children's hopes are not one-dimensional but multivalent and they do not naively expect to 'get rich quick' and without personal effort, but through gaining skills and competencies, such as acting, surfing and using tools and instruments.

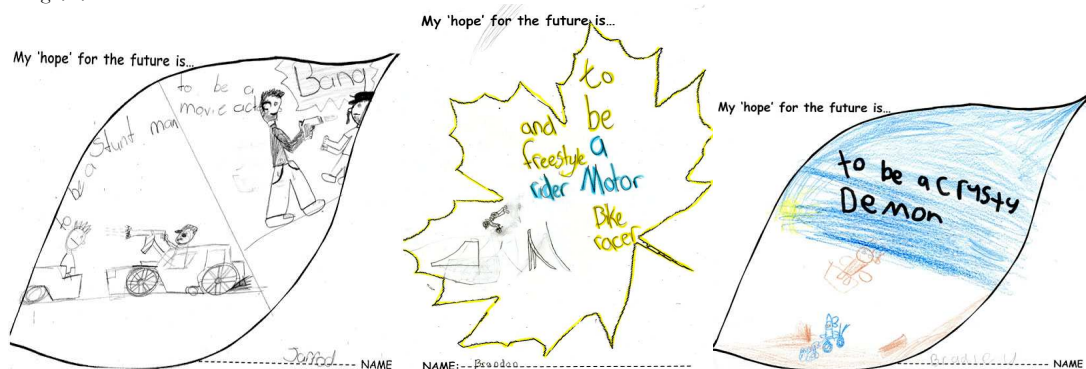
Analysis of the children's drawings reveals that while sometimes drawing themselves performing on stage, the boys do this less often than the girls (discussed below). Instead, they tend to draw the musical instruments that they hope to master in the future. Where they do 'draw themselves in', they almost always depict themselves proficiently playing their chosen instrument—usually a guitar or the drums, as illustrated below:

Images 3, 4 and 5



In their aspirations for celebrity status, boys also identify with what we refer to as ‘sporting spectacles’, hoping, for example “to be a professional wrestler in the WWE and get a lot of money” (Grade 2/3), “to be a Crusty Demon” (Grade 3/4) (part of a team of popular travelling motorbike stunt riders), or to be “a famous race car driver” (Grade 3/4). The boys’ drawings of their hopes to be part of sporting spectacles have a performative element, for example they depict themselves on motorbikes, upside down in the air, mid-stunt. Boys also draw pieces of equipment; their ‘tools of the trade’, such as bikes, racing cars, sporting bats, balls and rackets. The latter introduces the most prevalent celebrity-related theme in the boys data—their identification with, and hopes to emulate, their sporting heroes.

Images, 6, 7 and 8



Masculinity, celebrity and sport

Sport remains a fixture of contemporary global culture, and the achievements, hardships and ‘recreational’ activities of national and international sports stars are common place in the Australian media. The children in our study rarely mention international, commodified celebrities. Rather, they hope in a future where they will perform like well-known Australian athletes—who, for them, are celebrities of the highest order:

I want to be a cricket player like Adam Gilchrist and I want to be a footy player and play for the Kangaroos [an Australian Football League (AFL) team] (Grade 3).

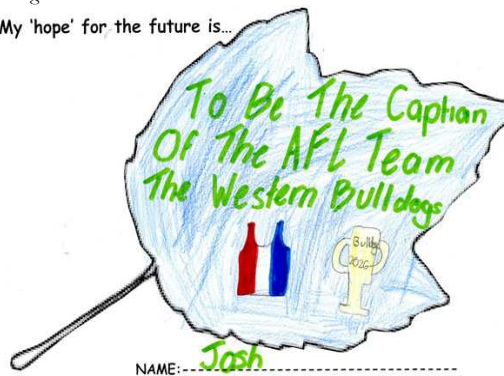
To play cricket for Australia and to play in the ashes and to play for Hawthorn [AFL team] in the grand final and to play for the Socceroos in the world cup (Grade 1/2)

[My hope is] To be a famous football star in Hawthorn [an AFL team] (Grade 5/6)

This indicates that images of hegemonic masculinity (see Connell 2005, 2008) as requiring strength, skill and capability—sporting prowess—remain part of popular culture. However, this finding also reflects the Australian context where, perhaps more so than many other comparable countries, sporting ability is particularly valorised. Indeed Australia has crafted an identity as the ‘sporting nation’. We argue that these hopes provide further evidence of the way in which sporting celebrities can bring a positive ‘sparkle and glamour’ (Biskup & Pfister 1999: 99) into children’s everyday routines, and therein bring hope. Boys often draw themselves performing their future sporting successes. Demonstrating the importance of success and nation tradition in hopes for the future, they also draw [AFL] footballs, football jumpers and the AFL Premiership Cup”:

Images 9 and 10

My ‘hope’ for the future is...



Sport stars can provide children with a point of reference, a means for learning about the many ideas and images they are increasingly exposed to via modern media technologies. It is of course important that academics, educators and adults per se continue to deconstruct notions of dominant forms of masculinity as signified primarily by physicality, strength and sporting success. However, many of the boys in this project hold multiple, diverse and non-traditional hopes and aspirations. Some draw on cultural celebrities and icons to express emotion, care and concern—traits that are more associated with traditional constructions of femininity. One boy, for example hopes “*To save the environment. To protect sea life. To be an electrician. To be like Tom Cruise. To be a national footballer. To join the Salvation Army*” (Grade 3).

Some readers will interpret wanting to be ‘superhero’ (see below); someone who saves people in distress, as evidence of an emerging hegemonic, masculine identity. We suggest an alternative interpretation—that the quote below illustrates the boys emotional engagement with, his belief in and hope for, the advancement of those less fortunate than him: “*[my hope is] for me to be Spiderman and save/help people of the world. For there to be lower costs for water and oil. For there to be fresh water and food for poor and sick people in countries in debt*” (Grade 5/6). Furthermore, we suggest that gender change and continuity—and more specifically the actual content of these children hopes—is of secondary import. Most salient is the fact they hold positive hopes for the future, and that various types of celebrities and icons of popular culture have helped to facilitate these.

Celebrity as a resource for hope: the girls

There are many similarities between the boys and girls celebrity-related hopes, for example, fame and the fortune is also inspirational for the girls: “*[My hope is] To be rich!!! World peace!!! To be famous!!!*” (Grade 6). However, the girls hopes also demonstrate a greater identification with the industries that enable and support the production and consumption of the glamorous celebrity

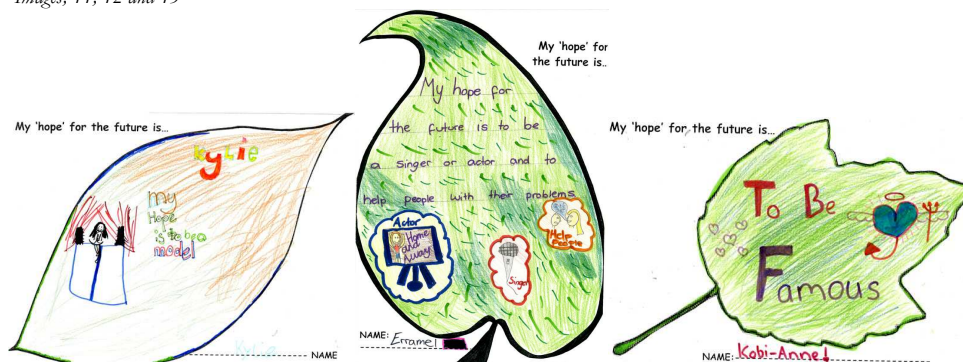
image. More specifically, the majority of girls who implicitly reference celebrity culture, hope to achieve fame and fortune by pursuing careers in the 'glamour industry', for example:

My hope for myself is to be a famous actor and model (Grade 4).

To be a dancer when I grow up and I would like to be rich (Grade 2/3)

I have always wanted to be a hairdresser. I want to have heaps of money. I would also like to be a singer... (Grade 4/5).

Images, 11, 12 and 13



As noted earlier, both girls and boys hope for fame in the music industry. However, the theme of 'mastery over hardware', apparent in the boys drawings, is much less evident in the girls drawings of these hopes. Also, while the girls are more likely to draw themselves performing on stage, none of them actually depict themselves playing a musical instrument. Where boys draw their guitars and amplifiers, girls draw images of microphone, their equivalent 'tools of the trade', but tools that nonetheless require less dedicated practice and skill to master:

Images 14, 15 and 16



Despite some degendering (Beck 1992a, 1992b), the changing nature of the family, and rising divorce rates, girls in this study still have faith in the (heterosexual) institution of marriage. While some hope "To have three kids. To be like my mum... to get married" (Grade 5/6), others plan to combine glamorous careers with wife-and motherhood: "[My hope is] to be a famous top model and to be a beautiful hairdresser. To be a mum with two children and a lovely husband" (Grade 5/6). This suggests that, to an extent, '[g]ender stereotypes are still alive and well whether we like it or not' (Lindstrom & Seybold 2004: 58). However, to focus solely on gender continuity, or gender per se, is to gloss over the

pertinent point: that the girls have positive hopes for the future and that celebrities are increasingly 'a pedagogical aid in the discourse of the self' (Marshall 2010: 36).

We also discovered that many girls do not hold narrow or traditionally feminine visions of their future. Echoing the boys' sentiments, some of the girls tell us that their greatest hope is to become famous for their sporting achievements in areas like athletics, horse riding and to "End up representing the women's Olympic soccer team!" (Grade 5/6). Examining the drawings for these hopes for sporting celebrity, adds an additional layer of insight. The girls are much less likely to actually draw themselves performing sporting feats than the boys. Instead they choose to decorate their leaves, often in the Australian colours of green and gold:

Images 17, 18 and 19

My 'hope' for the future is...



My 'hope' for the future is...



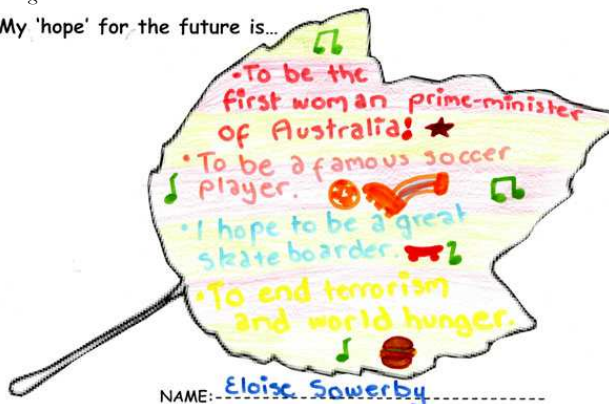
My 'hope' for the future is...



Most often however, the girls express multiple, rather than narrow, singular hopes. They aim to combine success in the sporting arena with good friends, a happy family life, a well developed intellect and a successful career, for example: "To be in the Australian netball team. To be a famous singer... To get married. To have 2 children. To have a happy life. To have really nice friends. To be smart" (Grade 6). Some girls expressed particularly empowered, even subversive hopes for their future: "[my hope is] to be the first woman Prime Minister of Australia! To be a famous soccer player. I hope to be a great skateboarder..." (Grade 6).

image 20

My 'hope' for the future is...



As noted earlier, female celebrities have long been criticized as too rich, thin, beautiful, sexualized and more recently, 'too raunchy' (Levy 2006). Through their commodification,

celebrities are also seen as contributing to the 'sexualization of children' (Tankard Reist 2010) and it thus argued that young girls should not 'look up to' them, or emulate their images and behaviours. Children's agency—their ability to "see through" and form their own views about the images and messages they are exposed to—has become subsumed beneath this discussion. The findings above suggest that many of the girls in our project are aware that the stars they see on the screen are 'unrealistic' portrayals of women; that they are 'constructed' by a host of people working within the glamour industry. They are nonetheless understandably, attracted to this 'glitz and glamour'. While we recognise that the hopes expressed to us by these children may be situated and temporally located, some girls may continue on to pursue careers in the glamour industry.

Conclusion

While children are increasingly encouraged to become the 'authors of their own lives' (see Beck 1992a, 1997), they remain structurally marginalized and unequally positioned within social structure. They do not (and as adults will not all) enjoy the independence or power to fully enact the hopes and wishes that they hold. They are discursively constituted as naïve, vulnerable and to be protected while paradoxically constructed as active, empowered, meaning-making citizens. This leaves children in an ambiguous and liminal space. The *Tree of Hope* project has played a very small part in seeking to redress this situation within Tasmania. We recognise that research with children is an important investment in the future, and that enabling children's participation in what are usually considered to be 'adult' endeavours and activities, is actually a key aspect of their citizenship. Children need to feel that they are not just 'part of' a community but that they are involved in it; they can participate in, contribute to and shape that community.

The project discovered that children in Tasmania are optimistic and have many different hopes for the future. Furthermore, we found that commodified celebrity culture—while frequently criticised as representative of social and moral decline—helps to facilitate their hope. Regardless of whether adults consider them 'good' or 'bad' role models, celebrities have an almost inexplicable, universal appeal (Marshall 2010: 36). It is important to take children's celebrity-related hopes 'seriously' (Sirota 2010: 258); to recognize the 'resources celebrities can bring to bear' (Meyer 1995: 181) and to work alongside children as they continue to draw on and reinterpret this resource.

This project demonstrates that children are capable. They think about their place in a future world—whether through their personal career or for how they can contribute to their community, nation, or world. This capacity for awareness of broader social and cultural images and issues is worth recognizing. Listening to children is also worthwhile because they bring clarity to issues that adults often cloud in complexity and because they are often optimistic and solution-focused in their understanding. Children have a belief that almost anything is possible—from helping the poor and living happy and fulfilled lives, to becoming models and athletes *par excellence*. We recognize that 'listening to children's voices does not solve everything' (Sirota 2010: 264), although listening to these voices has much to teach us. Children have a positive identification with celebrity culture. This opens up possibilities to utilise the "educative power of celebrity culture" (Marshall 2010: 46), to foster more hope in children and to help us to imagine and plan for, a better future.

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