

The Role of Proactive Coping Strategies, Time Perspective, Perceived Efficacy on Affect Regulation, Divergent Thinking and Family Communication in Promoting Social Well-Being in Emerging Adulthood

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Abstract The study analyzed the influence of time perspective, proactive coping strategies, perceived self-efficacy in affect regulation, divergent thinking and perceived quality of family communication on social well-being in a sample of 232 emerging adults. Social well-being showed positive correlations with proactive coping strategies, future-oriented time perspective, expression of positive emotions and regulation of negative emotions, divergent thinking, open communication with parents. A problematic family communication and a present-oriented time perspective were negatively correlated with social well-being. A forward Ridge step-wise regression model was conducted, evidencing four significant positive predictors of social well-being: proactive coping, perceived efficacy in affect regulation and open communication with parents; on the contrary, present oriented time perspective contributes significantly but negatively to social well-being.

Keywords Emerging adulthood · Social well-being · Proactive coping · Affect regulation, time perspective · Family communication

1 Introduction

Research on positive development over the last decades has placed growing emphasis on well-being and overall positive functioning (Hawkins et al. 2009). Understanding the characteristics of healthy psychosocial growth has recently become a particularly salient issue during emerging adulthood, a phase which extends from the late teens to the early twenties and is defined as a new phase of life where young people have to take up new adult roles and create a constructive relationship with society (Arnett 2004).

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Masten et al. (2004), identified the role of *individual agency* as one of the most important predictors of successful transition to adulthood and defined four dimensions of this construct: coping abilities, achievement motivation, future orientation and planfulness.

The substantial changes that are occurring in our western society, defined by Beck (1992) as the “risk society” (characterized by a process of individualization of life course and a growing uncertainty about the future) require a new, complex set of resources in order to successfully deal with the challenges posed by these transformations, especially for young generations.

Hawkins et al. (2009) proposed a multidimensional model of positive development and identified its five important domains at 19–20 years of age: social skills (successful social relationships, helping individuals to meet everyday functional demands, social participation); life satisfaction (sense of contentment and feelings of congruency between wants or needs and accomplishments or resources); trust in and tolerance of others; trust in authorities and institutions; civic engagement (the role of being a citizen).

In emerging adulthood social participation and life satisfaction represent two fundamental facets of well-being and positive functioning (Keyes and Waterman 2003). One of the central components of overall positive functioning is social well-being, that could be seen as one of the most important indicators of the relationship’s quality between individual and society (Cicognani et al. 2001).

1.1 Social Well-Being

The theme of well-being has received considerable attention over the last 30 years from empirical research. Subjective well-being and psychological well-being, are two dimensions investigated by Positive Psychology across life-span (Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryff 1989; Keyes et al. 2002). According to Keyes (1998), these two constructs take into account the individual level of well-being, while ignoring that an overall positive functioning must also include the ability to build up a satisfactory relationship with proximal and distal contexts of life (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Keyes (1998), maintains that social well-being is a fundamental part of human functioning and consists of five dimensions that, together, indicate whether, and to what degree, an individual is functioning well in his/her social life: *Social Integration* (the evaluation of the quality of one’s relationship to society and the community); *Social Contribution* (the evaluation of one’s value to society and the belief that one is a vital member of society); *Social Coherence* (the perception of the quality, organization, and operation of the social world, including a concern for knowing about the world); *Social Actualization* (the evaluation of the potential and the trajectory of society); *Social Acceptance* (the overall acceptance of society through the character and qualities of other people as a generalized category). Cicognani et al. (2001) noted a positive relationship between social well-being and sense of community, social support and life satisfaction. Moreover, those who were committed to voluntary social work have higher levels of social well-being than those who were not. Cicognani et al. (2008), conducted a cross-cultural study aimed at assessing the relationships between social participation and sense of community and their impact on social well-being. They demonstrated that social participation positively predicts social well-being among Italian students. Crocetti et al. (2008) demonstrated that social well-being is influenced by the quality of parental attachment and peer attachment during adolescence and young adulthood. They also confirmed the growing relevance of peer attachment on social well-being from adolescence to young-adulthood.

These traditional approaches to social well-being focused only on the importance of groups and social institutions, overlooking the individual dimensions that could help in improving the quality and the strength of the relationships between individual and society, therefore not capturing the individual dimension that could be connected to this feature of well-being.

The Second modernity, also called “the society of individualization and pluralization of life-projects” (Gielen and Chumachenko 2004) is characterized by a growing need for individual skills and strategies in order to successfully get through it and to establish constructive and productive connections with proximal (e.g. community) and distant society.

In this study authors are approaching the issue of social well-being in the emerging adulthood introducing several individual factors that could improve it. Social skills as perceived efficacy in affect regulation (expression of positive emotions and regulation of negative emotions), strategies for managing contemporary world complexity as proactive coping and divergent thinking, time perspective as cognitive frame that influences the motivational energy devoted to life-projects and the type of projects that are chosen, and the perceived quality of family communication are dimensions not yet previously taken into account in approaching social well-being. Authors maintain that they could help the emerging adults to create better social relationships, a stronger sense of integration to community and to identify new and original ways to give contributions to society, that are the core dimensions of Keyes concept of social well-being and life tasks that pertain to this stage of life.

1.2 Proactive Coping Strategies

Lazarus (1993) defined coping as the changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage psychological stress: in the process-oriented approach to coping put forth by Folkman and Lazarus (1985), coping is seen as a response to demands in stressful situations. Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) highlighted the role of coping strategies in positive and adaptive outcome in adolescence, defining them as part of a complex adaptive system that include stress, resilience and competence and that can promote positive overall functioning. Whilst in the past coping strategies were regarded mainly as a reactive set of strategies (problem focused, emotion focused, avoidance focused) that were to be used in order to manage stressful events already occurred, more recently coping is being seen as something one can do before stress occurs (Aspinwall and Taylor 1997).

Proactive coping integrates a positive and an agentic approach to dealing with stressors. This type of coping is set in motion with the aim of preventing negative events or modifying the life-context and creating the best conditions for actualizing projects and ideas (Greenglass et al. 2002). Proactive coping is defined as a set of multidimensional and forward-looking strategies that integrates processes of personal quality of life management with those of self-regulatory goal attainment. According to Schwarzer (2000), there are four types of coping: Reactive coping (the stressful events have already taken place); Anticipatory coping (an effort to deal with imminent threats); Preventive coping (an effort to build-up general resources that reduce the severity of the consequences of stress); Proactive coping (efforts to build-up general resources that facilitate the achievement of challenging goals and promote personal growth). Aspinwall and Taylor (1997) assert that proactive coping is a process through which one prepares for potential future stressors, possibly averting them altogether, and not only a strategy for successfully managing the challenges posed by the environment.

Previous research has shown that high scores on the proactive coping scales are positively correlated with an internal locus of control, self-efficacy and life satisfaction (Greenglass et al. 1999; Greenglass 2002). Moreover, proactive coping is associated with professional efficacy and protection from job burnout and depression (Greenglass et al. 2005). Uskul and Greenglass (2005) confirmed the protective and promotional role of proactive coping strategies for psychological well-being. Gan et al. (2007) confirmed the role of both proactive and preventive coping in reducing the impact of stress on college student engagement.

Proactive coping could be an important strategy for improving social well-being in emerging adulthood. With its agentic quality it could build-up resources and to prevent negative events and stressors, which could help the actualization of individual potentials into society.

1.3 Time Perspective

Time perspective plays a central role in mobilizing the motivational energy aimed at goals and objectives (Nuttin 1981). Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) defined time perspective as a fundamental process in both individual and societal functioning. Time perspective is regarded as a nonconscious process whereby the continuous flows of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help to give order, coherence and meaning to those events. These cognitive time frames are used in encoding, storing, and recalling experienced events, as well as in forming expectations, goals, contingencies and imaginative scenarios Zimbardo and Boyd (1999). Zimbardo and his colleagues designated five fundamental time dimensions: past positive (a positive evaluation of the past, perceived as bearing the values and experiences that are associated with happiness); past-negative (which reflects a negative and traumatic view of the past, with not yet elaborated events); present-hedonistic (an orientation toward present enjoyment, pleasure without sacrifices today for rewards tomorrow); present-fatalistic (a belief that the future is predestined and uninfluenced by human actions that leave individuals without hope for managing the present effectively); future (efforts to plan for achieving future objectives). Recently, Boniwell and Zimbardo (2004) have introduced a new construct, the balanced time perspective, which hypothesizes that an imbalanced time perspective (one that focused too much on one of the time dimensions, past, present or future) can compromise the ability to promote well-being. Balanced time perspective is defined as the mental ability to easily switch between Time Perspective dimensions, depending on task demands, situational considerations, and personal resources.

Another new approach to time perspective is represented by the concept of Mental Time Travel, which is defined as the ability to mentally project oneself forwards and backwards in time, to imagine future possibilities or recall past experiences and stored knowledge (Suddendorf and Corballis 1997).

Several studies have demonstrated the influence of time perspective during adolescence and youth; those who are future-oriented are less likely involved in risky behaviours, while those who are present-oriented are more likely to be involved in several risky activities (Keough et al. 1999; Zimbardo et al. 1997; Zambianchi et al. 2010).

Few recent studies have analyzed the influence of time orientation on well-being. Drake et al. (2008) demonstrated that the dimensions of time perspective influences subjective well-being and mindfulness, a condition in which individuals achieve a conscious awareness of the reality of the present. Past-positive is associated with the experience of happiness, while past-negative shows an inverse relation with happiness. The future does

not play a role in the level of happiness, appearing as a “neutral time”. Boniwell et al. (2010) analyzed the relationship between time perspective and well-being, evidencing that the subjects characterized by a balanced time perspective showed higher satisfaction, lower negative affect and higher self-actualization scores. Zambianchi and Ricci Bitti (2008) demonstrated the positive influence of future oriented time perspective on sense of community during adolescence, while present oriented time perspective showed a negative relationship with this dimension of social-well-being. As stated by Leccardi (2005), emerging adults are nowadays more present oriented because of the progressive “opaqueness of future” and the growing social and job uncertainty. Authors hypothesize that having a future-oriented time perspective enhances social well-being through the visualization of future life projects and scenarios that young people are devoted to accomplish and that triggers motivational energy. A present-oriented time perspective on the contrary could be seen as a risk factor in this stage of life because it limits the research of enriching and productive life contexts that could enhance positive development.

1.4 Affective and Divergent Thinking Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (2001), individuals are active agents whose capacities for self-regulation allow them a vast degree of control over their experiences and life-course. The notion of agency, that is central for socio-cognitive approach, refers to a human’s ability to interact constructively with the environment in order to create favorable conditions to development and to influence the outcome of a situation. Among the mechanism of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs about their abilities to exercise control over the events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs function as an important set of determinants of human motivations, affect and action. A wide corpus of research has confirmed the influence of self-efficacy beliefs on different areas of functioning during one’s life-span (Bandura 2001). The existence of positive relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and positive development is well established: Caprara et al. (2006) have documented the longitudinal and positive relations between self-efficacy and later adolescent’s adjustment; Vecchio et al. (2007) also illustrated the role of academic, social and self-regulatory self-efficacy beliefs in predicting life satisfaction in late adolescence.

Social cognitive theorists have emphasized the role of self-efficacy beliefs in emotion regulation and emotion expression. The common distinction between positive and negative affect and emotions has generated two different constructs, one relates to perceived efficacy in regulating negative emotions and the other related to the ability in expressing positive feelings and emotions (Caprara and Gerbino 2001). Self-efficacy in expressing positive emotions has been associated with empathy and well-being, while self-efficacy in regulating negative emotions has been negatively correlated to later depression and shyness, both in adolescence and young-adulthood (Caprara et al. 2003, 2006). Considering the relevance of the ability in managing and regulating the inner world and affective *states* necessary for the construction and maintenance of positive relationships, authors hypothesize that these two distinct but interconnected abilities positively influenced the level of social well-being.

The capacity to deal effectively with the challenges posed by contemporary post-modern society is related to the possession of complex abilities such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking. As suggested by Miles (2007), creativity is not simply about the production of a creative end-product, but is tied in with the broader aspects of everyday life. Craft (2003) refers to “lifewide creativity” and the fact that creativity operates as a “fundamental attribute to enable adaptation and responses in a fast-changing world” (p. 114).

Perceived efficacy in problem solving utilizing creative, divergent thinking, can help the emerging adult and the younger generation as a whole to hypothesize, create, and anticipate future perspectives and to respond to important developmental tasks, such as job search or to proactively participate in social context, enhancing overall social well-being.

1.5 Family Communication

Farrel and Barnes (1993) underline the relevance that received support and quality of communication have for adolescent adjustment. For families experiencing the transition from adolescence to adulthood of one of their members, open communication becomes an important element that can allow the emerging adults to “launch themselves” into the external world (Scabini 1995). Scabini et al. (2006) stated that late adolescents and young adults perceive communication with their parents to be good, very open and largely problem-free, together with a large amount of support. Ben-Zur (2003), Fluori and Buchanam (2002) showed that positive interaction with parents, based on closeness and open communication, provides adolescents with more personal resources that facilitate effective coping with life’s problems and enhance the quality of their adult life.

Emerging adults have to negotiate a new personal independence and acquire sufficient skills and abilities to get by in the complex post-modern society. One of these skill sets is undoubtedly the ability to communicate feelings, ideas and projects, negotiate conflicts and to construct a sense of integration and “belonging” to proximal and distal society. The ability to communicate these life-projects and to share them with family members, or to express ideas or worldview which differ from those of the parents also represents a crucial dimension in a positive individuation-separation process, which is fundamental to acquiring an adult identity that enables the young person to commit to roles and institutions. Social well-being can be enhanced by positive, open family communication through encouragement to take an active role in society and also through the acquired skills that enable emerging adult to communicate in new social contexts in a constructive way. Authors hypothesized that open family communication is also connected with affect regulation because a good set of communication skills is needed in order to achieve it.

2 Aims and Hypotheses

The general purpose of the study was to assess the relationships between the following variables: social well-being, time perspective, proactive coping, affect regulation, creative thinking in a sample of emerging adults. The further aim was to assess the predictive power of these variables on social well-being.

The hypotheses were the following:

- Based on the literature (e.g. Zimbardo and Boyd 1999; Uskul and Greenglass 2005) social well-being was expected to be positively associated with a future-oriented time perspective, proactive coping strategies, affect regulation, divergent thinking, and open family communication.
- Social well-being was expected, on the contrary, to be negatively associated with present-oriented time perspective and problematic family communication.
- Social well-being was expected to be predicted by a future-oriented time perspective, proactive coping strategies, open communication with parents, affect regulation, and creative, divergent thinking.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were 232 emerging-adults (173 females and 58 males, ranging from 19 to 25 years; mean age = 22 years; SD = 3.53). They were recruited from undergraduate students in the Departments of Psychology and Education at the University of Bologna. The students were instructed that the purpose of the study was to evaluate the relationship between social well-being and several individual and family resources. They did not place their name on the questionnaire and gave their consent to the study.

3.2 Instruments

The following self-report questionnaires were administered:

- Questionnaire on social well-being (Keyes 1998; Cicognani et al. 2001). This consists of five dimensions that evaluate the quality of individual functioning in social life: Social Actualization (e.g. “I think the world is becoming a better place for everyone”; $\alpha = 0.76$); Social Contribution (e.g. “I think to have something valuable to give to the world”; $\alpha = 0.80$); Social Acceptance (e.g. “I believe that people are kind”; $\alpha = 0.82$); Social Integration (e.g. “I feel close to other people in my community”; $\alpha = 0.84$); Social Coherence (e.g. “the world is too complex for me” with reverse code), $\alpha = 0.53$.
- Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999; D’Alessio et al. 2003). We used a short version of the original questionnaire considering only two time dimensions: present (9 items; $\alpha = 0.61$) that evaluates how much individuals enjoy relationships with friends and act impulsively taking risks (e.g. “I feel that it is more important to enjoy what you are doing than to get work done on time”) and future (13 items; $\alpha = 0.60$) that evaluates how much individuals are able to delay gratifications and to make plans in order to attain more relevant future objectives (e.g. “I believe that a person’s day should be planned ahead each morning”), with a score ranging from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). We selected the short form instead of the five-dimensions form because of the relevance of present and future time dimensions during this stage of life.
- Questionnaire on proactive coping (PCI) (Greenglass et al. 2002; Comunian et al. 2003). This consists of 7 scales; we selected three scales: proactive coping (14 items; $\alpha = 0.84$) that assesses the attitude toward striving for a better future (e.g. “after attaining a goal, I look for another, more challenging one”), reflective coping (11 items; $\alpha = 0.77$), that assesses the ability to visualize future scenarios (e.g. “I think about every possible outcome to a problem before tackling it”) and preventive coping (10 items; $\alpha = 0.77$) that assesses the processes through which one prepares for potential future stressors (e.g. “I make plans of things to do before bad events happens”), with a score ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (completely true).
- Questionnaire on perceived efficacy on affective self-regulation (APEP-APEN) (Caprara and Gerbino 2001); this uses 14 items ($\alpha = 0.80$) to assess the perceived ability to manage and express enthusiasm and enjoyment (e.g. “I can show that I like a person whom I am attracted”) and to regulate negative affect like anger or rejection (e.g. “I can remain in stressful situations”) with a score ranging from 1(not well at all) to 4 (very well).

- Questionnaire on perceived efficacy in problem solving (APSP, Pastorelli et al. 2001); this evaluates the ability to generate new and creative solutions to solve problems or to generate new ideas and consists of 14 items ($\alpha = 0.75$; e.g. “I can identify alternative, positive solutions to deal with problems”) with a score ranging from 1(not well at all) to 4 (very well).
- Parents-Adolescents Communication Scale (PACS, Barnes and Olson 1982; Lanz 1997); this scale aims to obtain a description of parent-adolescent communication and consists of two sub-scales of 20 items each: the first one deals with openness in communication (e.g. “when I ask a questions, I get honest answers from my mother/father”; $\alpha = 0.88$) and the second one deals with communication problems (e.g. “there are topics I avoid discussing with my mother/father”; $\alpha = 0.77$) with a score ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). We selected this questionnaire because the communication’s dimensions analyzed can be crucial for emerging adulthood and also because most of young people at this stage of life in Italy are still living with their parents and family exerts an important role in our social context.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

The results were analyzed in four steps. First, we computed descriptive statistics for all variables. In a second step a correlation matrix (Pearson’s product-moment) was calculated. The third step involved the use of Generalized Linear Model (GLM) through which first we evaluated a whole model with all predictor variables and social well-being as outcome variable; as the fourth step we performed a multiple Ridge step-wise regression model to evaluate the predicting power of individual and family variables on social well-being. The Ridge step-wise regression was chosen because it is a variant of ordinary multiple linear regression whose goal is to circumvent the problem of predictors collinearity and it is used when is not possible to utilize the ordinary least square method (Hoerl and Kennard 1970). We perform a forward step-wise selection, that starts with the intercept and then sequentially adds into the model the predictors that most improves the fit.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Emerging-adults show a medium–high level of social well-being ($M = 4.53$; $SD = 0.61$), a high level of perceived efficacy on expression of positive emotions and open communication with parents ($M = 3.50$; $SD = 0.45$; $M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.69$). They show a medium–low level of perceived efficacy on regulation of negative emotions and on use of preventive coping strategy ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.49$; $M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.42$) (see Table 1).

4.2 Correlations Between Study Variables

The pattern of correlations shows that social well-being is positively correlated with future-oriented time perspective, proactive coping, perceived efficacy on affective regulation, perceived efficacy on divergent thinking, open family communication (range $r = 0.17$ – 0.42). Negative correlations emerge between social well-being and present-oriented time perspective, social well-being and problematic family communication. Preventive and

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of study variables

Variables	M	SD
1. Social well-being	4.53	0.61
2. Positive emotions	3.50	0.45
3. Negative emotions	2.51	0.49
4. Divergent thinking	2.99	0.33
5. Proactive coping	2.94	0.41
6. Preventive coping	2.63	0.42
7. Reflective coping	3.06	0.52
8. Open family communication	3.46	0.69
9. Probl. family communication	2.56	0.56
10. Future time perspective	3.35	0.51
11. Present time perspective	2.70	0.52

reflective coping strategies shows higher intercorrelation ($r = 0.54$), while the correlations between these two strategies and proactive coping are not as high ($r = 0.23$). Future-oriented time perspective correlates positively with proactive coping, reflective and preventive coping and with divergent thinking (range $r = 0.31$ – 0.35), while present-oriented time perspective correlates negatively with reflective and preventive coping strategies ($r = -0.39$; $r = -0.20$) (see Table 2).

4.3 The Predictors of Social Well-Being

The whole model tested by GLM was statistically significant and highlighted five fundamental predictors of social well-being: expression of positive emotions, regulation of negative emotions, proactive coping, present time perspective, and open family communication ($R^2 = 0.34$; adj. $R^2 = 0.30$; $F = (10) 10.23$, $p < .001$) (see Table 3).

A subsequent Ridge step-wise forward regression model confirmed the predictive power of proactive coping, present time perspective (that contributes negatively to social well-being), expression of positive emotions, regulation of negative emotions, and open family communication for social well-being. Together they account for 30 % of explained variance. It is noteworthy that both whole model estimated with GLM and step-wise Ridge regression reach the same proportion of explained variance ($R^2 = 0.31$; adj. $R^2 = 0.30$; $F = (5.22) 18.39$, $p < .001$) (see Table 4).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Our study analyzed the role of several individual and family factors in enhancing social well-being during emerging adulthood. The relevance of proactive coping as a strategy by which the individual creates the best conditions to realize his/her potential in society highlights the fact that at this stage of life the efforts to build a positive relationship with proximal and distal society are more relevant than efforts to prevent the actualization of negative or stressing events, as evidenced by previous studies (Sohl and Moyer 2009; Gan et al. 2007; Greenglass 2002).

Table 2 Correlations between variables

Var.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Social well-being	-										
2. Negative emotions	0.23**	-									
3. Positive emotions	0.33***	0.04	-								
4. Divergent thinking	0.32***	0.27**	0.30***	-							
5. Proactive coping	0.42***	0.40***	0.36***	0.61***	-						
6. Reflective coping	0.17*	0.19*	0.002	0.31***	0.23**	-					
7. Preventive coping	0.007	0.11	-0.006	0.20**	0.23**	0.54***	-				
8. Open family com.	0.30***	0.06	0.30***	0.12	0.23**	0.03	0.04	-			
9. Problem. family Com.	-0.26***	-0.11	-0.13	-0.022**	-0.28***	-0.08	0.06	-0.64***	-		
10. Future time perspective	0.37***	0.18*	0.21**	0.35***	0.48***	0.31***	0.32***	0.21**	-0.21**	-	
11. Present time perspective	-0.23**	0.06	0.09	-0.001	-0.02	-0.39***	-0.20**	-0.14*	0.18*	-0.43***	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 GLM: whole model: social well-being as dependent variable

Independent variables	β	St. error β
1. Expression of positive emotions	0.171**	0.06
2. Regulation of negative emotions	0.147*	0.06
3. Divergent thinking	0.080	0.07
4. Proactive coping	0.212**	0.08
5. Reflective coping	0.021	0.08
6. Preventive coping	-0.78	0.07
7. Open family communication	0.161*	0.08
8. Problematic family communication	0.026	0.08
9. Future time perspective	0.082	0.07
10. Present time perspective	-0.210**	0.07
Adj. $R^2 = 0.30$		
F = (10) 10.23		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4 Ridge step-wise regression

Independent variables	Multiple R	Multiple R Square	F-to enter	β	B
1. Proactive coping	0.043	0.18	46.98	0.256***	0.334
2. Present time perspective	0.48	0.23	12.92	-0.21***	-0.256
3. Positive emotions	0.52	0.27	10.95	0.180**	0.267
4. Negative emotions	0.54	0.29	6.24	0.151**	0.176
5. Open communication	0.55	0.31	5.34	0.137*	0.114
$R^2 = 0.30$					
F = (5.22)18.39					

Predictors of social well-being

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Time perspective confirms its crucial function during this stage of life, when the need for planning and visualizing life-projects with strong motivational value is of special relevance; on the other side, the phase defined as “emerging adulthood” is seen as a transition from adolescence to young-adulthood characterized by a strong exploration of social environment and by identity construction, processes that can require a complex set of emotional, cognitive and strategic skills (Arnett 2000, 2004; Schwartz et al. 2005). Our data allows us to support the relevance of a future oriented time perspective in emerging adults, due to their necessity to actualize their ability, talents and potentials, objectives that requires a stable investment in social life contexts. A present-oriented time perspective does not contribute to improving social well-being and divergent thinking. A present-oriented time perspective is the only factor that significantly undermines social functioning. As argued by Beck (1992), moreover, life-course in western society is increasingly left to individuals that have to make decisions about families and social roles on their own. As a result, emerging adults are required to “individualize” their life-course by taking initiative to plan for the future in several areas of life, such as work, personal and social relationships, social participation etc. Addressing these issues in a proactive and agentic

manner may represent the best way to enhance well-being through an active and productive participation in social life in our society, especially when future time become less “predictable” (Leccardi 2005).

The crucial role played by an open family communication in improving social well-being is confirmed. Authors find in fact a positive causal relationship between open family communication and social-well being and a positive correlations between the perception of an open communication and future time perspective. This result allows us to hypothesize that shared communication in the family during this stage of life encourages discussions about life-projects and social roles of the youth (Scabini et al. 2006; Lanz and Rosnati 2002).

Perceived efficacy on affect regulation positively predict social well-being. These two skills help individuals in creating satisfactory and long-lasting relationships: several dimensions of social well-being, as social integration, social contribution and social acceptance request the ability to directly interact with other individuals.

The strong relationship between proactive coping, divergent thinking and future time perspective that emerged in our study could be explained by mental time travel theory (Lieberman and Trope 1998; Suddendorf and Corballis 1997), which maintains that having a distal temporal perspective increases divergent thinking. According to this theory, individual variation in future thinking manifests itself as speculative thinking, creative problem solving, the perception of new environmental opportunities, dimensions of functioning that our study confirms; those emerging-adults who have a future-oriented time perspective, tend to utilize more proactive coping strategies, to perceive a higher level of social well-being and to utilize a more creative approach to problem solving.

Proactive coping and affect regulation are unexpectedly strongly interwoven, indicating that they participate in an overall ability to regulate and direct intentionally the behaviour towards constructive social and relationship goals. Proactive coping strategy, emotional competence, a solid, shared communication with parents represent, along with a future-oriented time perspective, a complex set of abilities and strategies that can help the younger generations to improve their level of overall functioning, both at individual and social levels. Masten et al. (2004) maintains that the stage of emerging adulthood in modern societies may afford special risks and opportunities, depending of the amount of skills and resources they possess. They also highlight the crucial role of agency, defined as a complex sets of abilities: achievement motivation, future orientation, planfulness and coping abilities for a positive transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

Many studies have analyzed the existing relationships between several facets of social well-being in complex western society (Cicognani et al. 2001; Albanesi et al. 2007). However, a hypothesis that our study confirms is that the individual factors contribute to enhancing well-being and social participation in the youngest generations. Individual emotional competencies, proactive and agentic strategies, time perspective and divergent thinking style are in fact of crucial relevance for a perceived high level of social well-being, along with an open family communication. The positive relationships that emerged in our research between divergent thinking, proactive coping and future time perspective deserves more attention in future research, because these areas may be increasing in importance for positive outcomes during this new stage of life. On the other hand, a present-oriented time perspective might undermine not only social well-being but also the use of planning strategies and proactive strategies, due to the excessive attention given to the “here and now” and less ability to hypothesize future scenarios, confirming that during this stage of life there is the necessity to “unbalance” time perspective in favor of a broader future-oriented cognitive frame.

The study has several limits. It is unbalanced for gender, so we cannot verify the influence of gender on the tested model. Moreover, it is a correlational study, and we cannot make inferences about causal influence of these variables on social well-being, inferences that will be verified only through longitudinal designs.

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