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“What a View!”: Associations Between Young People’s Views of the Late Teens and Twenties and Indices of Adjustment and Maladjustment

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to examine differences in how young people view the period of life from the late teens to the mid-to-late twenties and how different perspectives of the time period may be differentially associated with indices of adjustment and maladjustment. Participants included 772 college students in the United States with an average age of 19.51 years ($SD = 1.69$). The majority of participants were female (69 %), White (69 %), and not living at home (90 %). Five factors were identified reflecting different views of what the time period should be about including *risk-taking* (e.g., a time to drink and get drunk), *uncertainty* (e.g., a time of confusion), *role preparation* (e.g., a time to prepare to marry and be a parent), *possibilities* (e.g., a time of optimism and fun), and *stress* (e.g., a time of high pressure). Each view of emerging adulthood was differentially linked with indices of adjustment (e.g., prosocial behaviors, school engagement) and maladjustment (e.g., binge drinking, depression).

Keywords Emerging adulthood · Views of life · Well-being · Maladjustment · College students

Introduction

There have been numerous studies conducted examining the criteria that emerging adults think they need to achieve before

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they will consider themselves to be adults (e.g., Arnett 1998, 2003; Nelson and Barry 2005). The majority of these studies show that young people in the United States believe that accepting the consequences of one’s actions, financial independence, and independent decision making are important criteria for adulthood, and research shows that the achievement of these markers do indeed distinguish emerging adults from those who claim to be adults (Nelson and Barry 2005). However, understanding what is needed in order to enter the next phase of life (i.e., adulthood) does not necessarily suggest that young people are working towards achieving those criteria in emerging adulthood. Indeed, some young people may be purposefully putting off taking on adult responsibilities. Therefore, though useful in helping us understand what young people are thinking about adulthood, examining the criteria young people consider necessary and important for adulthood does not help us understand what young people think emerging adulthood should be about, and how those views might help explain their beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relations between different views that young people have regarding emerging adulthood (i.e., the late teens to the mid-to-late twenties) and indices of adjustment and maladjustment.

Perspectives During Emerging Adulthood

In an attempt to explain how various views of life might explain the current well-being and adjustment of emerging adults, there have been a number of different conceptual approaches that underscore how expectations *for the future* can account for current behavior. For example, Marital Horizon Theory (Carroll et al. 2007) argues that trajectories through emerging adulthood are influenced by young people’s beliefs, attitudes and expectations toward long-term committed relationships, typically marriage. One’s

marital horizon consists of at least three separate and overlapping dimensions—desired marital timing, the importance of marriage in one's life, and the criteria one holds regarding marriage readiness (Carroll et al. 2007, 2009). The important thing to underscore is that these attitudes are not only indicative of particular relationship trajectories that are associated with eventual union formation patterns (Willoughby 2012a), but that they play a significant role in framing emerging-adults' behaviors in many aspects of their lives such as risk-taking, sexual patterns, educational pursuits, and employment plans (e.g., Carroll et al. 2007; Clarkberg et al. 1995; Willoughby and Dworkin 2009; Willoughby 2012b). In sum, Marital Horizon Theory provides evidence that some young people's current behavior may be driven by their outlook on the future. This approach, however, does not help us understand how emerging adults' views about the purpose of the present time period might be related to current ways of thinking and behaving.

Although not focused solely on emerging adulthood, there has been both theoretical and empirical work suggesting that how and whether people focus on the past, present, or future determines beliefs and behaviors. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) created the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory in which they identified five subscales related to the perspective of time including the Past-Negative Scale (reflecting a generally negative, pessimistic view of the past), Past-Positive Scale (reflecting a warm, sentimental, nostalgic attitude toward the past), the Present-Hedonistic Scale (reflecting a hedonistic, risk-taking attitude toward time), the Present-Fatalistic Scale (reflecting a helpless and hopeless attitude towards life), and the Future Scale (capturing a general future orientation). In a synthesis of findings associated with each of these time perspectives, Boyd and Zimbardo (2005) describe those individuals with a future-time perspective as working harder in the present, planning and practicing for the future, and engaging in fewer risk behaviors, whereas those with a present-time orientation tend to take greater risks, have more negative interactions with others, and experience greater depression and anxiety.

This line of work has implications for the study of emerging adults specifically because some young people may view the third decade of life as a time during which they should be focused on living in the "here and now" while others may see it as a time to prepare for the future. It should be noted that Boyd and Zimbardo (2005) argue that present and future orientations are not necessarily polar opposites but are orthogonal, in that some people can think about both the present *and* the future. Thus, emerging adults' views of this stage of their lives may be wide and varied. However, although both Marital Horizon theory and Time Perspective provide evidence that a future-orientation and/or present-orientation may be influencing young

people's current trajectories through emerging adulthood, we know very little about how young people specifically view their present stage of development.

Specific Views of Emerging Adulthood

Although the work exploring emerging adults' own perspectives of this time period in their lives is growing, it is still rather limited. In an initial attempt to better understand the views that young people have about emerging adulthood as a period of their lives, Reifman et al. (2007) designed the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) which aims to measure various dimensions conceptually claimed by Arnett (2000, 2004) to be distinct features of emerging adulthood, including the constructs of identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities (e.g., this period of life is a time of experimentation), negativity/instability (e.g., this period of life is a time of confusion), self-focus (e.g., this period of life is a time of personal freedom), and feeling in-between (e.g., this period of life is a time of feeling adult in some ways but not others), as well as other-focus (e.g., this period of my life is a time of settling down).

Since its publication, the IDEA has been successfully used in more than a dozen studies, the majority of which have focused on demographic correlates of emerging adults' views. Cross-national work using the IDEA has shown that considerable similarities exist among emerging adults' perceptions of this time period, with individuals from the United States, Mexico, Spain, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Romania generally viewing this time period as one of identity exploration, possibilities, self-focus, and feeling in-between (Arias and Hernández 2007; Macek et al. 2007; Negru 2012; Reifman et al. 2007; Sirsch et al. 2009). This work also shows that in most of these countries, emerging adults score higher on these views than high school students (Arias and Hernández 2007; Negru 2012; Reifman et al. 2007). Together, these findings corroborate the assumption that emerging adulthood represents a distinct developmental period, and that in Western, industrialized countries, emerging adults generally view this period of life as being one of exploration, possibilities, and feeling in-between.

Findings emerging from these studies also suggest that views of this time period are linked to important psychosocial indices of adjustment and maladjustment. For example, viewing this period as a time of exploration and possibilities is positively linked to quality of life (Huisman et al. 2012) and life satisfaction (Negru 2012), while viewing this period as a time of instability is negatively associated with life satisfaction (Huisman et al. 2012; Reifman et al. 2007) and greater depressive symptomatology (Luyckx et al. 2011). Furthermore, the view that this period

of life is a time of exploration and possibility is linked to greater drug and alcohol use (Lisha et al. 2012) while the view that emerging adulthood is a time to be focused on other people is negatively associated with marijuana use and binge drinking (Allem et al. 2013).

In sum, this work is consistent with Carroll's et al.' (2007) work on marital horizons and Boyd and Zimbardo's (2005) work on time perspective in that it suggests that emerging adults may engage in certain behaviors in part because of the views that they hold about time. Specifically, this work suggests that emerging adults' views of the *present* time period may impact their current behaviors. However, this work is still underdeveloped in that only a handful of studies have examined how views of the present time period (i.e., emerging adulthood) are connected with behavioral outcomes (Lisha et al. 2012; Allem et al. 2013). Furthermore, the views of emerging adulthood as measured by the IDEA tap only a small range of possible ways in which young people may see this period of their lives.

Indeed, there is evidence supporting the need to focus not only on young people's broader views of the time period (i.e., IDEA) but also on views of what specific behaviors they should engage in during the third decade of life. For example, Ravert (2009) conducted an investigation of what he termed "now or never behaviors" (p. 379). Specifically, his aim was to explore the question, "To what extent do college students report engaging in behaviors now because they fear losing the opportunity as adults, and what is the nature of those behaviors?" (p. 380)". In the qualitative component of his study, he coded open-ended responses to the question, "How often do you do or try something because you think you won't be able to do it later on when you settle down as an adult?" (p. 382)". The most common theme that emerged was travel/adventure, followed by social events, alcohol/tobacco/drug use, relationships (focused on dating, multiple sexual experiences, etc.), carefree lifestyle (e.g., being lazy, enjoying not having a real job), sports/action, academic/career (being able to change schools or change jobs), and independence/personal expression.

The context for Ravert's (2009) study was to better understand the areas of exploration that occur in emerging adulthood. His study is certainly a useful starting point in understanding young people's views regarding the behaviors they should be engaged in during the time period. Specifically, some of the responses from the qualitative component of his study captured a sentiment by some young people that emerging adulthood is indeed a time to have as much fun as possible before having to settle down. Unfortunately, Ravert's study captures only one possible view of the time period, specifically a present-orientation of time (i.e., needing to do things now that they will not get

to do later). Some might argue that this present-only approach to studying the time period is rather pessimistic and not shared by all emerging adults (i.e., others may have a future-orientation). Indeed, it may be that some young people certainly engage in travel and adventure during the time period because they see it as a convenient time to do it before settling into adult roles (present perspective), but they may also do it because they see utility in these behaviors in preparing them for adult roles (future perspective). Therefore, a focus on young people's views regarding "now-or-never" behaviors captures one important view for the time period that emerging adults might focus on but it does not capture other possibly important views young people may have for this period of their lives.

In sum, extant research has examined (a) emerging adults' views regarding emerging adulthood broadly as it differs from adolescence and adulthood (Reifman et al. 2007), (b) ways in which views about the future are related to *current* behavior (e.g., Marital Horizon Theory; Carroll et al. 2007), and (c) specific now-or-never behaviors in which emerging adults engage (Ravert 2009). However, there is a need to conduct a more expansive examination of the views that young people have regarding this period of their lives including both broad views (as was examined by Reifman and colleagues; e.g., a period of uncertainty) and views of more specific behaviors (e.g., getting drunk, preparing to marry, try new things). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the relations between different views that young people have regarding emerging adulthood and indices of adjustment and maladjustment.

Present Study

The first purpose of the study was to examine the associations between views of emerging adulthood and indices of adjustment and maladjustment. In building upon past work, we employed not only broad views of emerging adulthood (e.g., time of exploration, time of possibilities) but also specific views of what this time of life should be used for (e.g., pleasure, preparation for future roles, and experimentation). As noted previously, there is evidence that a future-time perspective is related to greater indices of adjustment (e.g., as working harder in the present, planning and practicing for the future, engaging in fewer risk behaviors), whereas a present-time orientation appears to be linked to indices of maladjustment (e.g., greater risk behaviors, more negative interactions with others, greater depression and anxiety; e.g., Boyd and Zimbardo 2005; Carroll et al. 2007). Based on this work, it was expected that, in general, views of emerging adulthood reflecting more of a focus on hedonistic pleasure would be related to indices of maladjustment whereas a view of this period of

time indicative of more of a focus on the future, especially family-orientation, would be linked to greater school engagement and a focus on others (e.g., prosocial behaviors). Furthermore, it was expected that views of the period that might reflect stress and uncertainty would be linked to greater levels of depression and lower self-worth.

Second, we intended to explore the role of gender in the links between views of emerging adulthood and indices of adjustment and maladjustment. There is mounting evidence that men are floundering to a much greater extent than women in emerging adulthood (e.g., Kimmel 2008; Nelson and Padilla-Walker 2013). Therefore, we thought it important to examine how the links between views of emerging adulthood and well-being might differ for men and women respectively.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants for this study were drawn from a study of emerging adults and their parents entitled Project READY (Researching Emerging Adults' Developmental Years), which is an ongoing, collaborative, multi-site study that is being conducted by a consortium of developmental and family scholars. Data used in the current study were collected during 2009–2010. Data for the study included 772 emerging adults sampled from four university sites in the United States. These sites included three large, public universities in the Midwest, on the West Coast and in the Southern areas of the United States, and a large, private, religious university on the East Coast. Individuals completed a survey online after being introduced to the project in classroom settings at each university. Response rate varied by site (ranging from 50 to 71 %), with an overall response rate of approximately 60 %.

The sample was predominately female (69 %) and White (69 %). Other racial groups were African (Black) (3 %), Asian (18 %), Hispanic (5 %) and Other (5 %). The average age of the sample was 19.51 ($SD = 1.69$). 95 % of the sample reported being heterosexual while 1 % reported being gay or lesbian and 4 % reported being bisexual. Ten percent reported still living with their parents. 41 % of the sample was currently employed, indicating at least 1 hour of paid employment per week while 5 % were cohabiting with a romantic partner.

Participants completed the questionnaire via the Internet. The use of an online data collection protocol facilitated unified data collection across multiple university sites and allowed for the survey to be administered to emerging adults who were living in separate locations throughout the country. Participants were recruited through faculty's

announcement of the study in undergraduate courses. Undergraduate courses were primarily Introduction to Psychology courses or large general education courses of the like in an attempt to access a broad range of students. Professors at the various universities were provided with a handout to give to their students that had a brief explanation of the study and directions for accessing the online survey. Interested students then accessed the study website with a class-specific recruitment code. Informed consent was obtained online, and only after consent was given could the participants begin the questionnaires. Each participant was given a survey that took approximately 45 min to complete. Most participants were given a \$20 Amazon gift code for their participation (a small percentage were given extra/research credit).

Measures

Views of Emerging Adulthood

Participants were asked how much they agreed with nineteen statements regarding "how you feel about the period of life you are currently in." Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Six of the items tapping broader views of the time period were drawn from the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA; Reifman et al. 2007) while 13 additional items were generated by the research team designed to capture more specific views not found in the IDEA. A full list of statements is found in Table 1, along with means and standard deviations, split by gender (items drawn from the IDEA are indicated in this table). To examine the optimal factor structure for these nineteen items, we initially conducted an exploratory factor analysis using principal-axis factoring to extract factors. Oblique rotation (paramax) was utilized due to the likely correlated nature of the factors (see Reifman et al. 2007) and the number of factors was left open-ended. Eigenvalues, scree plots, and item loadings were examined to determine the optional number of factors. Factor analysis results indicated the presence of five factors with eigenvalues above 1. These five factors explained 60.2 % of the variance in the items. Examination of individual items showed that one item, "time of unpredictability" did not load above a .40 on any of the five factors and had low communality values suggesting the item was not loading well within the factor structure. This item was removed and the factor analysis rerun. Table 2 summarizes initial rotated factor loadings for each item. None of the items cross loaded on two factors higher than .30. With the one item removed, the five factors explained 62.4 % of the variance in the items. Scales were created by averaging items together. Final scores on each scale ranged from 1 to 4.

Table 1 Means and standard deviations for views of emerging adulthood items, by gender

Item	Males		Females		<i>t</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	
...of confusion? ^a	2.67	.91	2.73	.81	-.984
...to prepare to be a parent?	1.79	.88	1.58	.85	3.16**
...of trying new things out? ^a	3.13	.75	3.39	.68	-4.78**
...to start a family?	1.57	.80	1.40	.69	3.01**
...to experiment with drugs?	1.79	.90	1.35	.69	7.51**
...you wish would never end?	2.66	.85	2.63	.89	.483
...of feeling stressed out? ^a	2.93	.85	3.22	.71	-5.04**
...to focus on others?	2.58	.76	2.58	.74	.002
...to volunteer and help on campus or in the community?	2.67	.75	2.98	.70	-5.73**
...to be sexually active?	2.68	.95	2.29	1.00	5.14**
...to have fun?	3.39	.78	3.58	.58	-3.83**
...to drink to get drunk?	2.34	1.02	2.10	1.03	3.01**
...of high pressure? ^a	2.95	.89	3.06	.85	-1.54
...to break the law a little bit?	2.24	.92	1.80	.87	6.38**
...to prepare to marry?	2.05	.97	2.01	1.04	.513
...of not being sure who you are?	2.60	.93	2.66	.90	-.860
...of not knowing where you fit in society?	2.63	.86	2.62	.87	.135
...of optimism? ^a	3.12	.78	3.27	.68	-2.80**
...of unpredictability? ^a	3.20	.78	3.20	.75	.124

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ ^a Items drawn from the inventory of dimensions of emerging adulthood (Reifman et al. 2007)**Table 2** Rotated pattern matrix for views of emerging adulthood items

Item	Pattern matrix				
	1	2	3	4	5
...to drink to get drunk?	.790	-.089	-.034	.130	.012
...to break the law a little bit?	.722	.106	-.023	-.053	-.015
...to experiment with drugs?	.689	.136	.019	-.165	-.081
...to be sexually active?	.581	-.146	.065	.009	.135
...of not being sure who you are?	-.005	.908	-.045	.030	-.062
...of not knowing where you fit in society?	.002	.795	.001	.033	.019
...of confusion?	.000	.525	.060	-.018	.214
...to prepare to be a parent?	.018	.074	.837	.035	-.037
...to start a family?	.070	.020	.783	-.075	-.048
...to prepare to marry?	-.059	-.102	.706	.089	.104
...to have fun?	.070	-.035	-.071	.663	.044
...of optimism?	-.051	-.062	.051	.601	-.098
...of trying new things out?	-.025	.122	-.069	.481	.122
...you wish would never end?	.239	.014	.038	.457	-.056
...to volunteer and help on campus or in the community?	-.197	.121	.102	.442	-.040
...of feeling stressed out?	-.027	.038	-.007	-.086	.857
...of high pressure?	.088	.059	.028	.036	.561

Bolded numbers indicated which factor item was assigned too

The first factor included items related to risk-taking behavior and thus was labeled “*Risk Behavior*” to capture the view that emerging adulthood was a time to engage in risk-taking such as drinking, drug use, and criminal behavior. The four items included in this scale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .77$).

The second factor included three items which tapped the view that emerging adulthood was a time of uncertainty and confusion. This factor was labeled “*Uncertainty*” to capture the notion that emerging adults may view emerging adulthood as a time of being in-between adolescence and true adulthood, thus creating uncertainty as to their place

and role. These three items had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .81$).

The third factor was comprised of three items linking emerging adulthood to a time of preparation for future family and relational roles. We labeled this factor “*Role Preparation*” to capture that some emerging adults may view emerging adulthood as a time to prepare for future adult family and relational roles such as marriage and parenthood. These three items also had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .80$).

Five items loaded on the fourth factor. Although more eclectic than the previous factors, all the items which loaded on this factor related to the view that emerging adulthood was a time of low responsibility and provided emerging adults with time and opportunity to explore new opportunities and experiences. This factor was labeled a time of “*Possibilities*” to capture Arnett’s (2004) notion that some emerging adults view this time in their lives as an opportunity to try new things and have fun. These five items had moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .65$). Further investigation of this scale revealed the internal consistency did not improve with the removal of any of the items included.

The final factor included two items, both of which related to the view that emerging adulthood was a time of stress and anxiety. This factor was labeled “*Stressful*”. The two items were significantly correlated ($r = .50, p < .001$).

Positive Adjustment Four assessments of positive adjustment were measured. Participation in school clubs and activities was assessed with one item, asking participants how often they had engaged in school clubs or activities in the past year. Responses ranged from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*every day or almost every day*). School engagement was also assessed by averaging responses to three items taken from a previous measure of school commitment and engagement (Fredericks et al. 2005). Items asked participants how “like them” behaviors were on a five point scale (1 = *Not like me at all*; 5 = *Very much like me*). Items included: “I complete my homework/assignments on time,” “I pay attention in my classes,” and “I regularly attend my classes.” Reliability was in the acceptable range ($\alpha = .83$). *Prosocial behavior* was assessed by averaging five items asking about behaviors with peers. Sample items included: “I help my friends, even if it is not easy for me” and “I enjoy being kind to my friends.” Responses to these items ranged from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). Reliability was in the acceptable range ($\alpha = .93$). In order to measure *self-worth*, participants answered questions from the Self Perceptions Profile for College Students: Self-Worth Subscale (Neeman and Harter 1986). Questions were answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true for me*) to 4 (*very true for me*). Sample questions

include, “I am often disappointed with myself (reverse coded),” and “I am happy being the way I am.” Reliability was in the acceptable range ($\alpha = .83$).

Maladjustment Two general assessments of maladjustment of an internalizing nature were assessed. *Depression* was assessed using an abbreviated version of the CES-D scale (Radloff 1977). This utilized eight items asking participants how often during the past week each behavior or thought was true. Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 3 (*most of the time*). Sample items included: “I was happy” (reverse coded), “I felt sad,” “I could not get ‘going’”. Reliability was in the acceptable range ($\alpha = .83$). In order to measure *emotional dysregulation* participants answered questions on the Emotional Self-Regulation Subscale (Novak and Clayton 2001). Participants answered questions on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*). Sample questions include, “I get upset easily,” and “I slam doors when I am mad.” Reliability was in the acceptable range ($\alpha = .83$).

In addition, four risk behavior outcomes were assessed to examine maladjustment of an externalizing nature. Binge drinking (defined for participants as drinking 4-5 drinks in one occasion), pornography use (defined for participants as “pornography online or offline, such as movies, websites, magazines, and/or strip clubs”), marijuana use, and sexual intercourse were all assessed by asking participants to indicate how often they participate in these five behaviors during the last year. Responses ranged from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*every day or almost every day*). Again, these behaviors were included as indices of maladjustment based on literature suggesting that when these behaviors are done in the extreme (e.g., drinking, number of sexual partners) that they are associated with risk.

Controls

Several demographic variables were utilized as controls including age, gender and race. Race was coded as either white (0) or other (1).

Results

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for each scale item, by gender. The items most endorsed by emerging adults were “...of trying new things out”, “...to have fun,” “...of feeling stressed out,” “...of optimism,” and “...of unpredictability”. This perhaps captures the dualistic nature of emerging adulthood, with emerging adults largely viewing this time of their lives as both full of freedom but full of uncertainty. Several gender differences were also found among single item responses. Males were

Table 3 Correlations between views of emerging adulthood scales

View of EA	Men					Women				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Risk-taking	–					–				
Uncertainty	.282**	–				.205**	–			
Role preparation	–.048	–.014	–			–.076	–.101*	–		
Possibilities	.269**	.365**	–.104	–		.208**	.175**	–.139**	–	
Stressful	.220**	.543**	–.102	.326**	–	.129**	.365**	–.084*	.152**	–

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

more likely than females to indicated that they felt emerging adulthood was a time to prepare to be a parent, to start a family, to experiment with drugs, to be sexually active, to drink to get drunk, and to break the law a little bit. Females were more likely than males to indicate that emerging adulthood was a time of trying new things out, of feeling stressed out, to volunteer or help on campus or in the community, to have fun, and of optimism.

Examination of sample means showed that Possibilities ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .48$) was the most commonly endorsed view of emerging adulthood followed closely behind by Stress ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .71$). The least endorsed view of emerging adulthood was Role Preparation ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .74$). Risk-taking ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .72$) and Confusion ($M = 2.66$, $SD = .74$) were in-between. Correlations between scales are presented in Table 3.

Relationship with Outcome Measures

In order to understand how the five views of emerging adulthood were associated with a range of indicators of adjustment and maladjustment, partial correlations were computed between these indicators and the five factors, controlling for age and race. These correlations are found in Table 4 and 5 for adjustment and maladjustment, respectively. Given the potential for gender differences in the results, the sample was split by gender and correlations are reported separately for men and women. Below we discuss correlation results for each of the five views of emerging adulthood.

Risk-Taking

In regard to indicators of adjustment, partial correlations revealed that higher views that emerging adulthood was a time of risk-taking were significantly related to lower school engagement ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$), lower self-worth ($r = -.15$, $p = .12$) and lower prosocial behavior ($r = -.20$, $p = .002$) for men, and lower school engagement

($r = -.18$, $p < .01$) for women. In regard to indicators of maladjustment for both genders, stronger views that emerging adulthood was a time of risk-taking were related to more binge drinking (men, $r = .50$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .51$, $p < .001$), marijuana use (men, $r = .43$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .36$, $p < .001$), pornography use (men, $r = .33$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .17$, $p < .001$), sexual behavior (men, $r = .37$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .41$, $p < .001$), and emotional dysregulation (men, $r = .22$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .09$, $p = .35$), as well as higher depression levels for women ($r = .14$, $p < .001$).

Uncertainty

In regard to indicators of adjustment, partial correlations revealed that viewing emerging adulthood as a time of uncertainty was related to lower self-worth for both men ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$) and women ($r = -.38$, $p < .001$). In regard to indicators of maladjustment, stronger views that emerging adulthood was a time of uncertainty were significantly related to higher levels of depression for both men and women ($r = .25$, $p < .001$; $r = .31$, $p < .001$, respectively), as well as, greater pornography use for men ($r = .20$, $p = .003$), and higher levels of binge drinking ($r = .11$, $p < .001$), marijuana use ($r = .11$, $p = .015$), and emotional dysregulation ($r = .14$, $p < .001$) for women.

Role Preparation

In regard to indicators of adjustment, results revealed that viewing emerging adulthood as a time period of preparation for future adult roles was linked to lower school engagement among women ($r = -.13$, $p = .002$). For maladjustment, role preparation was significantly associated with more sexual intercourse for men and women ($r = .20$, $p < .001$; $r = .12$, $p < .001$, respectively), and higher emotional dysregulation among men ($r = .17$, $p = .011$).

Table 4 Partial correlations between views of emerging adulthood scales and indices of adjustment

View of EA	Indices of adjustment (men)				Indices of adjustment (women)			
	School engagement	Self-worth	Volunteer/club participation	Prosocial behavior	School engagement	Self-worth	Volunteer/club participation	Prosocial behavior
Risk-taking	-.224**	-.154*	-.114	-.200**	-.179**	-.047	.014	-.041
Uncertainty	-.081	-.300*	-.028	-.013	-.078	-.379**	-.026	-.030
Role preparation	-.040	-.024	.060	-.120	-.133**	.021	-.072	-.020
Possibilities	.214**	.211**	.179**	.324**	.001	.210**	.211**	.203**
Stressful	.050	-.150*	.058	.033	.022	-.113**	.026	.118**

All correlations control for age and race

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Possibilities

Partial correlations between indicators of adjustment and viewing emerging adulthood as a time of possibilities revealed that for both genders, a view of possibilities was significantly associated with higher levels of self-worth (men, $r = .21$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .21$, $p < .001$), more participation in clubs and volunteering (men, $r = .18$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .21$, $p < .001$), and more prosocial behaviors (men, $r = .32$, $p < .001$; women, $r = .20$, $p < .001$). For men, these views were also related to more school engagement ($r = .21$, $p = .001$). In regard to indices of maladjustment, for both men and women, respectively, stronger views of possibilities were significantly related to less depression ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$; $r = -.11$, $p = .013$) and emotional dysregulation ($r = -.17$, $p < .001$; $r = -.12$, $p < .001$). For men, higher scores on this scale were also related to higher rates of pornography use ($r = .15$, $p = .023$) while for women, higher scores were related to higher rates of binge drinking ($r = .13$, $p = .004$).

Stress

Viewing emerging adulthood as a time of stress was significantly related to lower self-worth for both men ($r = -.15$, $p = .022$) and women ($r = -.11$, $p < .001$), and more prosocial behaviors for women ($r = .19$, $p < .001$). In regard to links between these views and maladjustment, viewing this time period as a time of stress was related to less marijuana use ($r = -.16$, $p = .018$) for men, and more sexual behavior ($r = .09$, $p = .037$), higher levels of depression ($r = .22$, $p < .001$), and more emotional dysregulation ($r = .16$, $p < .001$) for women.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relations between different views that young people have regarding

emerging adulthood (i.e., the late teens to the mid-to-late twenties) and indices of adjustment and maladjustment for males and females, respectively. Results of factor analyses revealed five factors including *risk-taking* (e.g., a time to drink and get drunk), *uncertainty* (e.g., a time of confusion), *role preparation* (e.g., a time to prepare to marry and be a parent), *possibilities* (e.g., a time of optimism and fun), and *stress* (e.g., a time of high pressure and feeling stressed out). These five different perceptions of emerging adulthood were associated with different indices of adjustment and maladjustment for emerging adults. Findings for each view of the time period are discussed below.

Risk Taking

The risk-taking view of life tends to reflect a perspective of life similar to the Present-Hedonistic view identified by Boyd and Zimbardo (2005) in which one's hedonistic, risk-taking attitude is focused primarily on the here-and-now. Results of the current study demonstrate that young people who see emerging adulthood as being about participating in risk behaviors are indeed living according to that belief as shown in results that found this way of thinking about emerging adulthood to be positively linked, regardless of gender, to binge drinking, marijuana use, viewing pornography, frequency of sexual intercourse (although not necessarily a risk behavior in itself, higher numbers of sexual partners has been identified as a risk-behavior in development; e.g., Guo et al. 2002; Santelli et al. 1998) and greater emotional dysregulation. The preference for and the time emerging adults spend engaged in these behaviors might explain why results also found a risk-taking view of emerging adulthood to be negatively linked to school engagement for both men and women, as well as lower participation in prosocial behaviors for men. A focus on fun in the form of hedonistic, risk behaviors seems to occur at the expense of positive aspects of development (e.g., school, prosocial behaviors), raising concern for the long-term well-being of young people who take this approach to their

Table 5 Partial correlations between views of emerging adulthood scales and indices of maladjustment

View of EA	Indices of maladjustment (Men)					Indices of maladjustment (Women)							
	Binge drinking	Marijuana use	Pornography use	Sexual intercourse	Emotional dys-regulation	Depression	Sexual intercourse	Pornography use	Marijuana use	Binge drinking	Emotional dys-regulation	Depression	Sexual intercourse
Risk-taking	.495**	.431**	.325**	.373**	.215**	.061	.373**	.167**	.361**	.514**	.092*	.143**	.408**
Uncertainty	.008	.022	.196**	.025	.105	.249**	.025	.001	.106*	.113**	.139**	.306**	-.074
Role Preparation	.042	-.021	-.115	.196**	.166*	-.030	.196**	-.002	-.042	-.072	.069	.005	.122**
Fun and Freedom	-.031	.006	.149*	-.053	-.170**	-.176**	-.053	-.067	-.015	.125**	-.120**	-.108*	.049
Stressful	-.089	-.155*	.082	-.082	.099	.115	-.082	.015	-.043	.059	.155**	.224**	.091*

All correlations control for age and race

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

emerging-adult years. This concern is underscored when we take into account the findings that this view of life was also found to be linked to lower self-worth for men and higher depression for women.

It is well documented that heavy drinking, alcohol-related problems, drug use, and risky sexual behaviors (e.g., number of sexual partners, low or improper use of condoms) often reach some of their highest levels during emerging adulthood (e.g., see Bachman et al. 1996, Lefkowitz and Gillen 2006; Schulenberg and Maggs 2001, for reviews). Findings from the present study may help us better understand these phenomena by showing that many emerging adults specifically view the third decade of life as the time to engage in these behaviors. Indeed, these findings support those of Ravert (2009) who found that engaging in alcohol/tobacco/drug use were some of the most common activities that young people felt they should engage in before becoming an adult. This is potentially problematic given that Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2013) found these types of risk behaviors to characterize those young people who are floundering during the third decade of life. Thus, future work should examine the outcomes for individuals who see emerging adulthood as being about participation in risk behaviors more strongly than, or even to the exclusion of, other views of the time period.

Role Preparation

Risk behaviors are not the only view of life that young people hold. Indeed, a significant contribution of the present study is that it demonstrates that there are other perspectives, some more future-oriented, held by young people regarding what emerging adulthood is about. One of the views that appears to capture a more future-oriented perspective is *role preparation*. The view that emerging adulthood is about preparing for future roles such as marriage and parenthood was linked to greater emotional dysregulation for men, lower school engagement for women, and, for both men and women, higher levels of sexual intercourse. This view of life may be tapping into similar constructs identified by Carroll et al. (2007) in their study of marital horizons. Specifically, having an eye towards future family roles, may frame or shape current behaviors in emerging adulthood including risk-taking, sexual patterns, and educational pursuits, and employment plans (e.g., Carroll et al. 2007; Clarkberg et al. 1995; Willoughby and Dworkin 2009; Willoughby 2012b). Indeed, noticeably absent from the list of correlates of the role-preparation view in the current study are risk behaviors with the exception of frequency of sexual intercourse. It may be that participation in risk behaviors may be lower for individuals who endorse a future-oriented perspective because they may see these behaviors as potentially

interfering with them reaching their goals. Support for this might be found in the results that role preparation was the only scale not correlated with most of the risk taking behaviors. Or, it is possible that some young people may have a more future-oriented perspective, especially a family-oriented perspective, because they are already in a committed relationship which might serve as a buffer against participation in risk behaviors. Indeed, additional analyses revealed that those in a serious dating relationship and those who were engaged were significantly more likely to report that emerging adulthood was a time of role preparation compared to those who were not dating ($F(1, 780) = 44.15, p < .001$). This may also explain the link between role preparation and sexual intercourse in that those who endorse role preparation may be in a committed relationship and therefore engaging in sexual intercourse more frequently. For them, it might be incorrect to label sexual activity as a risk factor. Future work is needed to better understand why avoidance of risk behaviors appears to be part of this view, and what role current romantic relationships and sexuality may play in this view.

It should be noted, however, that not only was a view of emerging adulthood as a time of role preparation not linked to indices of risk but, contrary to hypotheses, it also was not associated with indices of adjustment. In fact, for women, it was linked to lower levels of school engagement. It is possible that the indicators of adjustment measured in our study did not tap into outcomes associated specifically with preparation for future family roles (e.g., joining a school club does not foster skills needed to care for a family) or it simply may be that, although young people may indeed know that emerging adulthood is a time to prepare for the future, this view simply is not taking a central role in guiding their behaviors especially for very young emerging adults (the average age for our participants was not even 20 years). Future work is needed to see if role preparation becomes more central in guiding beliefs and behaviors later in emerging adulthood. Additionally, future work is needed to better understand the reasons why some young people might choose to be more focused on a future family, and if, for them, role preparation may indeed be more strongly linked to indices of adjustment and maladjustment.

Possibilities

It should be noted that the results of the study did not just point to a dichotomy between present and future perspectives. The view of life labeled *possibilities* also appears to be focused on the present but without the focus on purely pleasure-seeking behaviors. Indeed, although the view is linked to higher levels of pornography use for men and binge drinking for women, this view of life appears to lack

the broader, solely-hedonistic nature captured by those who view emerging adulthood as a time for risk-taking. This broader view of emerging adulthood, including thinking of others, can be seen in the findings linking the view of possibilities to higher participation in prosocial behaviors and in clubs and volunteering, and less emotional dysregulation, as well as other indices of well-being including higher self-worth and less depression. In his theory of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2004) claims that a feature of the time period is optimism. This ideal seems to be captured by those in the current study who see emerging adulthood as a time to try new things, volunteer, and have fun. Young people with this view seem to certainly be enjoying this time of their lives as they are exploring and having fun, but their fun includes positive behaviors that consider and benefit others as well (e.g., prosocial behaviors).

Stress and Uncertainty

There were two factors that emerged in the study that appear to capture a feeling by many young people of stress, pressure, confusion, and uncertainty in regard to this time of their lives. Specifically, viewing emerging adulthood as a time of uncertainty was linked to lower self-worth and higher depression for both men and women. For men, it was linked to more pornography use, and for women, more binge drinking, marijuana use, and emotional dysregulation. Viewing this period as a time of stress was related to lower self-worth for both men and women, as well as more prosocial behaviors, more sexual behavior, higher levels of depression, and more emotional dysregulation for women, and less marijuana use for men.

By nature, emerging adulthood is a time of experimentation and exploration (Arnett 2000), which may give rise to feelings of instability and uncertainty. The lack of roles and responsibilities, coupled with the search for identity, may lead to a sense of ambivalence. As emerging adults attempt new things and try out possible identities, questions about one's own competence and failures are likely to occur, as seen in research which shows that feelings of incompetence are typical during periods of transition (e.g., Wigfield et al. 1991). Additionally, separation and loss may be a common theme for many emerging adults as they attempt to become more independent from parents and move in and out of romantic relationships. Taken together, identity exploration, separation, and loss could contribute to feelings of uncertainty, depression, and low self-esteem.

It is important to note though that stress and uncertainty emerged as distinct factors. They appeared to share some similar correlates but several important distinctions stand out as well. One of the similarities between the views of stress versus uncertainty is that they appear to take a toll on

the self-esteem of both men and women but beyond that the correlates are much more pronounced for women. The distinction between the two views, especially for women, is that for those who view emerging adulthood as a time of uncertainty, the correlates appear to be almost completely negative (e.g., binge drinking, marijuana use, emotional dysregulation) whereas those who view the time period as stressful reflect indices of both adjustment (e.g., prosocial behaviors) and maladjustment (e.g., depression). It may be that one can feel stress while still making positive strides in development (e.g., stress associated with doing well in school) but a feeling of uncertainty may reflect a broader state of maladjustment. Future work is needed to examine the impact of feeling stressed versus uncertain in various important areas of emerging adults' lives such as beliefs, behaviors, and relationships.

Summary

Taken together, the study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, building on the work of Reifman et al. (2007), it identified a variety of views of emerging adulthood. Although Reifman and colleagues tapped constructs that helped lend support for emerging adulthood being distinct from adolescence and adulthood, they tapped primarily those constructs theoretically proposed by Arnett (2004) including identity exploration, feeling in-between, focus on the self, instability, and possibilities. In doing so, they failed to focus on other possible views that young people may have for this period of their lives, especially those related to specific behaviors in which they should be engaged. The results of the present study contribute to our understanding of the views young people have about this period of their lives by examining both broad views of the period (e.g., a period of uncertainty) and views regarding the specific behaviors (e.g., binge drinking, prosocial behavior) one should engage in while in one's late teens and twenties.

Second, this study not only identified a variety of views of life in regard to emerging adulthood, but demonstrated that each was linked to a variety of indices of adjustment (e.g., prosocial behaviors, school engagement, self-worth) and maladjustment (e.g., depression, risk behaviors). Past work has pointed to the fact that a future-oriented perspective (e.g., Carroll et al. 2007; Boyd and Zimbardo 2005) might be linked to different behaviors than a present-oriented perspective (Boyd and Zimbardo 2005; Zimbardo and Boyd 1999) including "now-or-never" behaviors (Ravert 2009). However, this is one of the first studies to directly measure a variety of specific views of emerging adulthood and identify linkages between those views and a variety of age-important indices of well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations, however. First, the correlational nature of analyses precludes causal inferences. Although we often employed language suggesting causality in the direction of views of life leading to indices of adjustment and maladjustment, we recognize that the posited direction of effects is purely speculative. Certainly, it will be important to conduct longitudinal studies to determine causality in the associations identified in this study. Another limitation of the study is that participants include only college students. Future work should include participants who are not attending a 4-year college or university. The fact that participants were attending college might be a result of a certain view of what emerging adulthood should include. Thus, the relations between views of life in emerging adulthood and indices of maladjustment and adjustment may differ for non-college students. Indeed, there may be additional untapped views possessed by this population of emerging adults. For example, non-college samples of emerging adulthood may view this time of their life as a period to begin family formation or career development, transitions typically delayed by college-bound emerging adults. Variations in views of life and their correlates might likewise exist in various cultures around the world as well as subcultures (ethnic, religious) within the United States. Hence, there is need for future work to examine samples with greater cultural diversity. Additionally, future work is needed to examine how views of life during emerging adulthood may affect important relationships. For example, the views of life that young people have may conflict with what parents think this time period should be about which might lead to problems in the parent-child relationship.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the views young people have about the period of their lives now commonly referred to as emerging adulthood. It provides a starting point to begin to look more closely at the ways in which views about emerging adulthood (i.e., the third decade of life) might shape one's behaviors and sense of well-being during this time. Indeed, the findings are novel in demonstrating that views of life that reflect confusion, stress, and a pursuit of risk behaviors appear to be linked to numerous indices of maladjustment while viewing emerging adulthood as a time of possibilities and, to a lesser extent, role preparation tends to be linked to more indices of adjustment and well-being and fewer indices of maladjustment.

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