

Meaning in Life and Psychological Well-Being in Spanish Emerging Adults

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Abstract

Experiencing meaning in life (MiL) and psychological well-being (PWB) is an important developmental task in emerging adulthood, perhaps more than in any other period in life due to its transitional character and to the nature of its features, in Western societies. This study analyzes the relationship between MiL and PWB, as well as the differences in PWB according to the level of MiL (lack of meaning, indefinite meaning, and presence of meaning), in a sample of 333 Spanish emerging adults (224 women, 109 men), age ranged from 17 to 26 years, $M = 21.06$, $SD = 2.23$. Both Spanish versions of the *Purpose-In-Life Test* and the Ryff's *Scales of Psychological Well-Being* were used. The Spearman's coefficient of correlation showed a positive, significant relationship between MiL and PWB (global and dimensions). The Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant differences in PWB between lack of meaning, indefinite meaning, and presence of meaning groups, except in Autonomy, in which only the difference between the presence of meaning group and the indefinite meaning group was significant. MiL is associated to the cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspects that directly point to PWB: positive self-worth and self-acceptance, perception and experience of freedom, responsibility and self-determination, positive view of both life as a whole and future, purpose and commitment of significant existential goals, self-trascendence and opening up to the others, integrative but not resigned coping of the adversity, life satisfaction, and self-realization.

Key words: Meaning in life, lack of meaning, purpose-in-life, psychological well-being, emerging adulthood.

Sentido de vida y bienestar psicológico en adultos emergentes españoles

Resumen

Sentir que la vida tiene sentido y experimentar bienestar psicológico son una importante tarea evolutiva en la adultez emergente, quizás más que en cualquier otra etapa evolutiva, debido a su carácter transicional y a sus características en las sociedades occidentales. En este estudio se analizan las relaciones entre sentido de la vida y bienestar psicológico, así como las diferencias en bienestar psicológico en función del nivel de sentido de vida (vacío existencial, indefinición de sentido y experiencia de sentido) en una muestra de 333 adultos emergentes españoles (224 mujeres y 109 hombres) con edades entre 17 y 26 años, $M = 21.06$, $DT = 2.23$. Como instrumentos, se utilizaron versiones españolas del test *Purpose-In-Life* y de las *Escalas de Bienestar Psicológico* de Ryff. Como resultado, el coeficiente de correlación de Spearman mostró una relación positiva y significativa entre sentido de vida y bienestar psicológico (global y dimensiones), mientras que el test de Kruskal-Wallis mostró diferencias significativas en bienestar psicológico entre los grupos de vacío existencial, indefinición de sentido y experiencia de sentido, excepto en la dimensión de Autonomía, en la cual solo fue significativa la diferencia entre experiencia de sentido e indefinición de sentido. El sentido de vida se relacionó con los aspectos cognitivos, emocionales y motivacionales que apuntan directamente al bienestar subjetivo, es decir: autovaloración positiva y autoaceptación, percepción y experiencia de libertad, responsabilidad y autodeterminación, visión positiva de la vida como un todo y del futuro, propósito y compromiso con metas existenciales importantes, autotracendencia y apertura a los demás, afrontamiento integrativo pero no resignado de la adversidad, y satisfacción vital y autorrealización.

Palabras clave: Sentido de vida, vacío existencial, propósito vital, bienestar psicológico, adultez emergente.

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Sentido de vida e bem-estar psicológico em adultos emergentes espanhóis

Resumo

Sentir que a vida tem sentido e experimentar bem-estar psicológico são uma importante tarefa evolutiva na idade adulta emergente, talvez mais que em qualquer outra etapa evolutiva, devido a seu caráter transicional e a suas características nas sociedades ocidentais. Neste estudo, analisam-se as relações entre sentido de vida e bem-estar psicológico, bem como as diferenças em bem-estar psicológico em função do nível de sentido de vida (vazio existencial, indefinição de sentido e experiência de sentido) numa amostra de 333 adultos emergentes espanhóis (224 mulheres e 109 homens) com idade entre 17 e 26 anos ($M=21.06$, $DT=2.23$). Como instrumentos, foram utilizadas versões espanholas do teste Purpose-In-Life e das Escalas de Bem-estar Psicológico de Ryff. Como resultado, o coeficiente de correlação de Spearman mostrou uma relação positiva e significativa entre sentido de vida e bem-estar psicológico (global e dimensões), enquanto o teste de Kruskal-Wallis mostrou diferenças significativas em bem-estar psicológico entre os grupos de vazio existencial, indefinição de sentido e experiência de sentido, exceto na dimensão de Autonomia, na qual somente foi significativa a diferença entre experiência de sentido e indefinição de sentido. O sentido de vida se relacionou com os aspectos cognitivos, emocionais e motivacionais que apontam diretamente ao bem-estar subjetivo, isto é: autovvalorização positiva e autoaceitação, percepção e experiência de liberdade, responsabilidade e autodeterminação, visão positiva da vida como um todo e do futuro, propósito e compromisso com metas existenciais importantes, autotranscendência e abertura aos demais, enfrentamento integrador, mas não resignado, da adversidade, satisfação vital e autorrealização.

Palavras-chave: Bem-estar psicológico, maturidade emergente, propósito vital, sentido de vida, vazio existencial.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a developmental period of the life span between adolescence and young adulthood, which ranges roughly from 18 to 25 years, in the industrialized societies characterized by increasing individualization (Arnett, 2014). The main features of the emerging adulthood are to be the age of the identity explorations (especially in love and work), the age of instability, the most self-focused age of life, the age of feeling in-between (neither adolescent nor adult), and the age of possibilities (high optimism and opportunity to change the one's life). In addition, in the course of emerging adulthood, the three most important criteria for reaching adult status are gradually attained: accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007).

The emerging adult period has been increasingly studied over the last years in a wide range of disciplines, such as sociology, education, and psychology, among others. Several studies have found that well-being improves during emerging adulthood, and that the greater involvement in one's self-definition and self-understanding predicts positive psychological functioning in emerging adults (Schwartz et al., 2011). This might be because, as Arnett (2007, p. 70) said, "emerging adults enjoy their self-focused freedom from role obligations and restraints, and they take satisfaction in their progress toward self-sufficiency. [...] they also benefit from growing social cognitive maturity, which enables them

to understand themselves and others better than they did as adolescents". The features of emerging adulthood noted above can be experienced as socio-personal challenges or even identity crisis that can be a source of distress, emotional and interpersonal dysfunctioning, and anxiety, but "the evidence of rising well-being during the course of emerging adulthood indicates that most people adapt successfully to its developmental challenges" (Arnett, 2007, p. 71).

Meaning in Life and Psychological Well-Being in emerging adults

Experiencing satisfaction with life and psychological well-being, as well as finding a meaningful life, are important developmental tasks in emerging adulthood, perhaps more than in any other period in life due to its transitional character and to the nature of its features, in Western societies (Kins, Beyers, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009; Mayseless & Keren, 2014). According to Frankl (2014), meaning in life (MiL) is the human being's main motivational principle. MiL is related to the perception and the experience of freedom and responsibility as well as to self-determination, positive perception of life, future and oneself, accomplishment of existential goals, integrative acceptance of the adversity, life satisfaction, and self-realization. In turn, Carol Ryff (1989) suggested that the greatest goodness for the individual is his or her self-determination, achievement of goals, MiL, actualization of the personal potentials, commitment with the existential challenges, and self-realization. On the other hand, Ryff proposed a model of Psychological Well-Being

(PWB) encompassing six dimensions: Self-acceptance (positive self-evaluation and positive evaluation of one's life), Positive Relations (satisfactory interpersonal relationships of high quality), Autonomy (sense of self-determination), Environmental Mastery (capacity to manage one's life and environment efficiently), Purpose in Life (belief that one's life is useful and meaningful), and Personal Growth (sense of one's growth and development as a person) (Cfr. Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). PWB, therefore, includes personal characteristics associated to the positive mental functioning (Ryan & Huta, 2009).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) suggested that a critical component of both mental health and personal development is the belief and feeling that life is valuable and meaningful. If the person experiences lack of MiL, then he or she develops a negative cognitive-emotional-motivational state, which is associated to hopelessness and perception of lack of control of one's life and vital goals, as well as a negative and pessimistic attitude toward life as a whole. On the contrary, the experience of MiL is related to coping successfully with adversity, due to the strong sense of autonomy, self-determination, purpose in life, personal commitment to a cause, values, and defined clear goals. In fact, a great number of studies show the relationship between MiL and several measures of mental health and positive cognitive-emotional functioning (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010). Also, a low level of MiL is related to hopelessness, depression, substance dependence, self-injury behaviors, and suicide, among others (García-Alandete, Marco, & Pérez, 2014; Kleiman & Beaver, 2013). In the same way, several studies show a negative relationship between MiL and psychological disorders, and positive relationship between MiL and mental health, psychosocial functioning, optimism, life satisfaction, disease acceptance, and PWB in pre-adolescents and adolescents (Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2011; Mulders, 2011; Rathi & Rastogi, 2007), adult and older people (Burrow, Sumner, & Ong, 2014; Grouden & Jose, 2015; Krause & Hayward, 2014), teachers (Damásio, de Melo, & da Silva, 2013), cancer patients (Scignaro et al., 2015), chronic pain patients (Dezutter, Luyckx, & Wachholtz, 2015), nursing-home patients (Gorill, 2013; Haugan, 2014).

Regarding to studies that included mostly or exclusively emerging adults, King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006) found, in a sample of 568 American participants, whose age ranged from 19 to 43 years ($M = 20.91$, $SD = 2.00$): (a) that MiL was strongly positively related to the experience of positive mood, as well as negatively related to the experience of negative mood, (b) that the strongest predictor of a day being experienced as meaningful was the amount of positive affect experienced that day. In addition, retrospective reports of MiL were best predicted not by daily meaning reports or goal-related activity or thoughts, but by the average of positive

affect experienced in the preceding weeks, (c) that current mood may play a large role in reports of the experience of MiL, (d) that MiL increased when individuals were primed with positive-mood concepts or when positive mood was induced (and no attributional cue was provided), and (e) that rather than find any situation meaningful, positive affect was associated with discriminative responding such that those in a good mood found a meaningful task quite meaningful but a meaningless task less meaningful.

Steger and Kashdan (2007), with a sample of 82 undergraduates ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.3$, $SD = 1.4$), found a significant relationship between MiL and life satisfaction, and a good short-term (1 year) stability of their relationship.

Kleftaras and Psarra (2012), with a sample of 401 newly recruited men during their basic training in Army Navy (ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.5$ years), of which 182 were emerging adults (18-24 years) and 216 were young adults (25-29+ years) found a negative relation between MiL and general psychological health, somatic symptoms, anxiety and sleep disturbances, social dysfunction and severe depression. In addition, the individuals with higher MiL differed significantly in all the above factors from those with lower MiL, showing much better scores in their general psychological health.

In a sample of Spanish emerging adults (ranged from 17 to 25 years, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.08$, $SD = 2.18$), García-Alandete, Soucase, Sellés, and Rosa (2013) obtained a high positive relationship between MiL and Global PWB, Self-acceptance, and Purpose in Life, as well as a moderate association between MiL and Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, and Autonomy.

Dezutter et al. (2014), in a sample of 8492 American emerging adults, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.98$, $SD = 2.08$, who completed measures on MiL, as well as positive and negative psychosocial functioning measures, found that participants with profiles high on MiL showed the most adaptive psychosocial functioning, whereas participants with profiles where MiL was largely absent showed maladaptive psychosocial functioning.

In a study that included mostly emerging adults (participants' age was ranged from 18 to 55, $M = 22.91$, $SD = 6.71$), García-Alandete (2014) found a high, positive relationship between MiL and Global PWB, Purpose in Life, Self-acceptance, Environmental Mastery, and a moderate association between MiL and Positive Relations, Personal Growth, and Autonomy.

Hill, Edmonds, Peterson, Luyckx, and Andrews (2016) carried out two studies with emerging adults, in which they found: (study 1) in a sample of 179 Canadian participants with an age of 25 or less ($M = 19.4$, $SD = 1.62$), that MiL positively correlated with positive affect, positive self-image, an adaptative profile of personality (assessed with the model

of the Big Five) and well-being (even controlling the effect of personality, age, and gender), and negatively correlated with negative affect, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms, and (study 2) in a sample of 490 American participants with an age-range between 18.4 and 20.7 years ($M = 19.4$, $SD = .43$), that MiL negatively correlated with stress, depression, and delinquency as measures of psychosocial dysfunction, and positively correlated with positive self-image, an adaptative profile of personality, and perceived adulthood.

As far as we know, no other studies apart from both Kleftaras and Psarra (2012) and Damásio et al. (2013) analyzed the differences in PWB associated to the level of MiL. In the Damásio et al. (2013) study, inferential analyses showed MiL as a predictor of PWB (as well as of quality of life, QOL), and a moderation analysis demonstrated that PWB showed distinct correlation coefficients for participants with high and low levels of MiL; specifically, participants with low MiL scores considered PWB as a fundamental source of general QOL, whereas participants with high MiL scores considered that PWB does not act as a determinant variable in general QOL levels. However, the sample used by Damásio et al. (2013) was composed by adult teachers ($M_{age} = 36.5$ $SD = 10.34$), as noted above, not by emerging adults.

The aim of this study is to contribute evidence on the relationship between MiL and PWB, and on the differences in PWB according to level of MiL, in a sample of Spanish emerging adults.

METHOD

Design

The design of the study was non-experimental, descriptive, and comparative (ex post facto), focused on analyzing the level of MiL and PWB, as well as the relationship between these variables, in a sample of Spanish emerging adults.

Participants

Participants were 333 Spanish emerging adults (224 females, 67.3%; 109 males, 32.7%), aged 17 to 26, $M = 21.06$, $SD = 2.23$. All of them were Caucasian, undergraduate students of Psychology, and not married. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants did not receive any incentive.

Instruments

Purpose-In-Life Test (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholic, 1969). This scale assess MiL. The Spanish version used in the present study (Noblejas, 1994) is a 20-item Likert type (1 to 7, with specific anchors for each item) whose total score is the sum of the selected values in each item, ranging from 20 to

140. This version distinguishes three levels of MiL: (1) a score lower than 90 means lack of MiL, (2) a score from 90 to 105 is a feature of indefinite MiL, and (3) a score higher than 105 is typical of presence of MiL. The Crumbaugh and Maholic's (1969) version of the PIL has shown good internal consistency in several studies. For example, Jonsén et al. (2010) in a sample of Swedish people and Gottfried (2016) in a sample of Argentinian people obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .83 and .89 respectively. In the present study, the PIL test obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB; Ryff, 1989). The short version of a Spanish adaptation (Díaz et al., 2006), a 29-items Likert type (1 = Absolutely disagree; 6 = Absolutely agree) was used. The total score is the sum of the selected values in each item, ranging from 29 to 174. The scale is composed by six dimensions: Self-acceptance, Positive Relations, Environmental Mastery, Autonomy, Personal Growth, and Purpose in Life. Some recent factor analysis studies have supported the six factor structure of the SPWB, and have shown a higher order PWB factor above the subscales (Keyes et al., 2002). Díaz et al. (2006) obtained an internal consistency between acceptable and good for the SPWB version used in this study: Self-acceptance, $\alpha = .84$, Positive Relations, $\alpha = .78$, Environmental Mastery, $\alpha = .82$, Autonomy, $\alpha = .70$, Purpose in Life, $\alpha = .70$, and Personal Growth, $\alpha = .71$. In the present study the SPWB obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .89, and the dimensions obtained the following scores: Self-acceptance, $\alpha = .78$, Positive Relations, $\alpha = .76$, Environmental Mastery, $\alpha = .57$, Autonomy, $\alpha = .70$, Purpose in Life, $\alpha = .88$, and Personal Growth, $\alpha = .64$.

Procedure

Convenience sampling was used. The participants fulfilled the PIL test and the SPWB in the classroom in which they carried out their academic tasks under the supervision of the authors of the present study. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and sincerity in the responses was requested. Participants were informed that they could choose to discontinue their participation at any time. The questionnaire was filled in about 30 minutes. The procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2013.

Statistical analyses

Data were analyzed with the SPSS 23.0 software. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the measures of MiL and PWB were assessed. Since the data distribution was not normal, non-parametric statistics were used: Spearman's coefficient for the correlations

between MiL and PWB, and Kruskal-Wallis test for the differences in PWB according to the level of MiL (lack of MiL, indefinite MiL, and presence of MiL). To check the differences between the average positions of MiL groups in PWB, the Mann-Whitney test with Bonferroni correction significance was applied for the differences between pairs.

RESULTS

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was significant, $p < .01$, for Self-acceptance, $Z = 2.15$, Positive Relations, $Z = 2.09$, Environmental Mastery, $Z = 1.55$, Purpose in Life, $Z = 2.17$, and Personal Growth, $Z = 1.96$, and the Levene test was

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of MiL and PWB, and correlations MiL-PWB

	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	rs(MiL-PWB)
Meaning in Life	44	137	107.98	14.30	
Global Psychological Well-Being	68	177	134.69	17.87	.64*
Self-acceptance	4	24	18.39	3.55	.69*
Positive Relations	7	30	24.26	4.77	.38*
Environmental Mastery	9	30	22.16	3.72	.57*
Autonomy	6	36	25.55	5.27	.22*
Purpose in Life	7	30	23.66	4.07	.65*
Personal Growth	6	24	19.95	3.12	.43*

Note. N = 333.

* $p < .01$

Table 2
Mean ranks of the levels of MiL in PWB, and Kruskal-Wallis test (a)

PWB	Level of MiL	N	Mean rank	$\chi^2(df)$
Global Psychological Well-Being	Lack of MiL	39	60.86	104.52(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	113.32	
	Presence of MiL	218	204.70	
Self-acceptance	Lack of MiL	39	65.14	131.14(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	95.22	
	Presence of MiL	218	210.25	
Positive Relations	Lack of MiL	39	96.10	35.20(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	144.84	
	Presence of MiL	218	187.41	
Environmental Mastery	Lack of MiL	39	64.18	89.96(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	121.25	
	Presence of MiL	218	201.34	
Autonomy	Lack of MiL	39	153.12	11.52(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	137.93	
	Presence of MiL	218	179.62	
Purpose in Life	Lack of MiL	39	55.97	109.18(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	114.70	
	Presence of MiL	218	205.09	
Personal Growth	Lack of MiL	39	84.27	59.35(2)*
	Indefinite MiL	76	129.46	
	Presence of MiL	218	194.89	

Note. N = 333. (a) Grouping variable: Level of Meaning in Life.

* $p < .01$

Table 3
Effect-sizes (Cohen's d) for the differences between MiL groups in PWB

Variable	Lack of MiL- Indefinite MiL	Lack of MiL- Presence of MiL	Indefinite MiL- Presence of MiL
Global Psychological Well-Being	.64 (I)	1.23 (L)	.94 (L)
Self-acceptance	.51 (I)	1.21 (L)	1.29 (L)
Positive Relations	.54 (I)	.71 (I)	.40 (S)
Environmental Mastery	.80 (L)	1.12 (L)	.82 (L)
Autonomy	ns	ns	.38 (S)
Purpose in Life	.85 (L)	1.25 (L)	.95 (L)
Personal Growth	.53 (I)	.89 (L)	.64 (I)

Note. N = 333. In parentheses, the Cohen's *d* interpretation: (S) = Small effect-size; (I) = Intermediate effect-size; (L) = Large effect-size; ns = Difference was non-significant.

significant, $p < .05$, for both Autonomy, 3.33, and Personal Growth, 3.89. These data suggested to use non-parametric statistics for the multivariate analysis.

The correlations between MiL and PWB were significant, $p < .01$, with low values for Autonomy and Positive Relations, moderated for Personal Growth and Environmental Mastery, and high for Global PWB, Purpose in Life, and Self-acceptance (See Table 1).

For the differences in PWB according to the level of MiL (lack of MiL, indefinite meaning, and presence of MiL), the failure of the normality assumption suggested to use the Kruskal-Wallis test. For all the measures of PWB, the presence of MiL group obtained a mean rank higher than both the indefinite MiL group and lack of MiL group. In Autonomy, the lack of MiL group obtained a mean rank higher than the indefinite MiL group, unlike what happened with the other measures of PWB, in which the indefinite MiL group obtained a higher mean rank (See Table 2).

The Mann-Whitney test with the Bonferroni correction showed significant differences between all MiL groups in the measures of PWB, except in Autonomy. In that dimension of BP, (1) the indefinite MiL group obtained the lowest mean rank, (2) the difference between the indefinite MiL group and the presence of MiL group was significant, (3) the difference between the indefinite MiL group and the lack of MiL group was not significant, and (4) the difference between the presence of MiL group and the lack of MiL group was not significant. The effect-sizes for the differences between the MiL groups are shown in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

The objectives of the present study were to analyze the relationship between MiL and PWB, and the differences

in this latter variable between lack of MiL, indefinite MiL, and presence of MiL groups in a sample of Spanish emerging adults.

Relationship between MiL and PWB

The results showed a positive association between MiL and PWB, especially with Self-acceptance, Purpose in Life, Global Psychological Well-Being, Environmental Mastery, and Personal Growth. These results might be stressing a decisive aspect regarding the positive evaluation of both one's self and one's life. That is, self-esteem and life satisfaction, which means giving one's life a meaning: people with a higher meaning have a high self-worth. Self-acceptance and self-worth are aspects of both self-esteem and life satisfaction, significantly linked to the experience of MiL (Rey, Extremera, & Peña, 2011). Self-esteem, on the other hand, is positively associated to PWB, as it is assessed by Ryff's scales (Paradise & Kernis, 2002).

Likewise, the above mentioned positive and significant correlations are conceptually consistent with MiL, referring to the personal conviction that one's life is useful and has a meaning, the feeling of oneself living in a process of continued development, growing and expanding, and opening to new personal control over the environment (Díaz et al., 2006; Ryff, 1989a). All these aspects are close related to the main characteristics of MiL: life satisfaction, experience of having a useful life, purpose of existentially significant goals, personal responsibility with life, and self-realization (Frankl, 2014).

The lowest correlations were between MiL and both Positive Relations and Autonomy, although they were significant. It may be probably related to individualism in Western culture, which determines the personal construction of PWB, especially in emerging adults, who have a strong sense of self-focused freedom and self-determination from

role obligations and restraints, taking satisfaction in their progress toward self-sufficiency, as Arnett (2007) stated. MiL in Western societies is built up subjectively rather than intersubjectively. The interpersonal aspects of MiL, as well as the other aspects of the self as a whole, have a secondary value compared to those that an individual has.

Differences in PWB according to the level of MiL

In line with the above, the presence of MiL group obtained the highest score in all the measures of PWB. However, it is worth to emphasize an important aspect related to Autonomy: (1) the indefinite MiL group obtained, with a significant difference from the presence of MiL group but not with the lack of MiL group, the lowest mean rank, and (2) the difference was not significant between the presence of MiL group and the lack of MiL group. This is related to the low correlation between MiL and Autonomy.

Autonomy is related to sense of self-determination, independence of the environment, and internal locus of control, and it might be associated to the individualism and self-interest characteristics of contemporary Western culture (Christopher, 1999). The non-significant difference between the lack of MiL group and the presence of MiL group lay out a question on the nature of Autonomy, on its potential sociocultural determinants and role in PWB among emerging adults. If Autonomy is really related to contemporary individualism, it would contradict the characteristics associated to the experience of MiL, especially with self-trascendence (Frankl, 2014). In this regard, as noted above, MiL involves sociocultural issues, but the research on MiL has focused in the individual, whereas collective and cross-national aspects have not been systematically considered. It is important to include the sociocultural point of view in the study of both MiL and PWB (and in their relationships) in emerging adults, since the self is, to a significant degree, the result of social identification processes (Sharma & Sharma, 2010).

In short, with the mentioned aspects, the results show a positive and significant relationship between presence of MiL and PWB in emerging adults. On the other hand, from a conceptual overview, MiL is associated to the cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspects that directly point to PWB: positive self-worth and self-acceptance, perception and experience of freedom, responsibility and self-determination, positive view of both life as a whole and future, purpose and commitment of significant existential goals, self-trascendence and opening up to the others, integrative but not resigned coping of the adversity, life satisfaction, and self-realization. Regarding to this, Ryff (1989, p.1071) maintained that the definition of maturity “emphasizes a clear

comprehension of life's purpose, a sense of directedness, and intentionality. The lifespan developmental theories refer to a variety of changing purposes or goals in life [...]. Thus, one functions positively has goals, intentions, and a sense of direction, all of which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful”. We believe that these words apply to emerging adulthood.

Limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research

Despite the sample composition was according to the objective of the present study, to include younger or older people might allow comparisons according to age. In addition, the women group size was twice the men group. Although there are studies that analyze the differences associated to age and gender on both MiL and PWB in Spanish young people (García-Alandete, 2013; García-Alandete et al., 2013), it would be interesting to deepen the influence of these variables. Likewise, it would be especially interesting to analyze the role of sociocultural variables that could mediate these differences, as well as cross-cultural studies, in emerging adults. Although both MiL and PWB are personal experiences, there are involved social issues (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, & Gordon, 2003), for instance, collectivist versus individualist cultural values (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012). As it is known, individualism/collectivism cultural dynamism is the single most fruitful in the cross-cultural psychology (Heine 2010; Oyserman, Coon, & Klemelmeier, 2002). However, the research has focused on a small number of countries, has used a limited range of international samples (Gorlova, Romanyuk, Vanbrabant, & van de Schoot, 2012), and cross-national differences have not been systematically investigated (Oishi & Diener, 2013).

MiL is probably the most important human being motivation (Frankl, 2014) and, from a wider point of view, is a cornerstone of personal well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Therefore, MiL would be considered a significant variable in the psychosocial research and several fields of psychological practice (education, social and community work, counselling, psychotherapy) with emerging adults, because of its specific importance in the processes of personal growth and self-realization as well as its relationship with other psychological variables related to personal growth, mental health, and well-being (Mawson, Best, Beckwith, Dingle, & Lubman, 2015). For example, to promote MiL in emerging adulthood could strengthen the commitment with one's life and social challenges, as well as could protect against risk behaviors (such as substances abuse and risky sexual behavior among others, which are common in

emerging adults especially in the industrialized societies) (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006), and could improve positive mental functioning and PWB.

In addition, it would be interesting to conduct further studies on the relationship between MiL and PWB with other significant variables during emerging adulthood, such as identity (Hill & Burrow, 2012; Sumner, Burrow, & Hill, 2015; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013), positive emotional experiences, and personal values structure (Garcini, Short, & Norwood, 2013). It not only would increase knowledge on these variables and its interaction, but it would also improve the psychological practice and, therefore, would enhance personal growth, mental and physical health, coping abilities, well-being and life satisfaction, cognitive functioning, and people's happiness (Lane, 2015).

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