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Relationships Between Psychological Well-Being And Resilience In Middle And Late Adolescents

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Abstract

The aim of this investigation was to examine the relationships between the dimensions of psychological well-being (according to the Ryff's perspective) and resilience (in relation to the Wagnild and Young's model) in a sample of 224 middle and late adolescents. We used the Psychological Well-Being Scales with 18 items grouped in six dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations with others, personal growth, and self-acceptance) and the 10 item-version of Resilience Scale. Results showed positive relationships between PWB (environmental mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance) and resilience: the more the adolescents were able to choose contexts suitable to personal needs, to see themselves as growing and expanding, and to perceive themselves as self-satisfied, the more they were resilient. Boys expressed a greater well-being (environmental mastery and self-acceptance) than girls and late adolescents showed a greater well-being (personal growth and purpose in life) than middle ones. Future researches could deepen the relationships between self-efficacy and psychological well-being.

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1. Introduction

Psychological well-being (PWB) has been considered by Ryff (1989) as a set of psychological features involved in positive human functioning (Ryff, Keyes & Schmotkin, 2002) that included several resilience-related aspects such as maturity (Allport, 1961), purpose in life (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969), self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Warner,

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2013). According to the “eudaimonic perspective” (Ryan & Deci, 2001), the most frequent criterion of PWB is linked to the individual’s sense of “self-acceptance”, defined as a central feature of mental health as well as the characteristics of self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Another important criterion of PWB is defined as “positive relations with other individuals”, linked to the ability to express strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings and to be capable of greater love, deeper friendship, and more complete identification with others (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The criterion of “autonomy” is assumed as self-determination, independence, and regulation of behavior through internal locus of control, all of them useful to guarantee a condition of well-being for all individuals. The criterion of “environmental mastery” is considered as the individual’s ability to create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The “purpose in life” is another recurrent criterion of PWB considered as a sense of directedness and intentionality in changing purposes or goals in life, such as being productive and creative or achieving emotional integration in later life (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The last aspect of PWB is given by the “personal growth”: an optimal psychological functioning requires not only to actualize oneself and realize one’s potentialities, but also to continue to develop and expand oneself as a person, underlining the importance of new challenges or tasks at different periods of life (see Table I: Ryff & Singer, 1996).

Table I
Definitions of Theory-Guided Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being

Self-acceptance
<i>High scorer:</i> Possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life.
<i>Low scorer:</i> Feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred with past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he or she is.
Positive relations with others
<i>High scorer:</i> Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships.
<i>Low scorer:</i> Has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.
Autonomy
<i>High scorer:</i> Is self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards.
<i>Low scorer:</i> Is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments of others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.
Environmental mastery
<i>High scorer:</i> Has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.
<i>Low scorer:</i> Has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks sense of control over external world.
Purpose in life
<i>High scorer:</i> Has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living.
<i>Low scorer:</i> Lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims, lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose of past life; has no outlook or beliefs that give life meaning.
Personal growth

High scorer: Has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness.

Low scorer: Has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors.

The paradigm of psychological well-being has been analyzed in relation to other constructs such as resilience and hardiness (Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn, 1982; Masten et al., 1999), life satisfaction (Ozpolat, Isgor, & Sezer, 2012), internal locus of control (Ryff, 1989; Ruini et al., 2003), adaptive coping strategies (Gloria et al., 2009), personality traits (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997; Garcia, 2011), positive and negative affect (Watson et al., 1988; Garcia & Moradi, 2013), and so on. For example, Schmutte and Ryff (1997) discovered significant relations between personality traits and PWB: that is, neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness were predictors of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life; openness to experience was predictor of personal growth; agreeableness predicted positive relations with others; finally, autonomy was strongly predicted by neuroticism. Also, more recently in a sample of high school Swedish adolescents, Garcia (2011) found that neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, persistence, and self-directedness were strongly related to well-being. In relation to affective personality, Garcia (2006) found that adolescents classified as self-actualizers (with high positive affect and low negative affect) reported a greater PWB than adolescents classified as self-destructive ones (with low positive affect and high negative affect); in addition, self-actualizers expressed greater self-acceptance and environmental mastery than self-destructive, lowly affective (with low positive affect and low negative affect), and highly affective adolescents (with high positive affect and high negative affect); finally, Garcia and Siddiqui (2009) found that adolescents with high levels of well-being remembered more positive and fewer negative life events than those with low levels of well-being.

In line with the main purpose of the current investigation, the analysis of literature underlined that the relationship between PWB and resilience is one of the most interesting topic in educational positive psychology in different domains of human development and according to the life-span perspective (Ryff, Singer, Love, & Essex, 1998). Ryff and Singer (2003) argued that resilient individuals were generally capable to maintain their physical and psychological health and had the ability to recover more quickly from stressful events. Specifically, we deepened the construct of resilience defined as “a personality characteristic that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation” (Wagnild & Young, 1993) and as “the ability to restore or maintain internal or external equilibrium under significant threat by means of human activities including thought and action” (Smith & Carlson, 1997). As recently found by Sagone and De Caroli (2013), the more the middle adolescents experienced high levels of resilience, the more they felt able to cope with novelty in various domains of human functioning and, especially in scholastic context, reducing the possible risk of maladaptive outcomes. Moreover, Picardi and his colleagues (2012) found that PWB appeared positively correlated with dispositional resilience (measured using the three factors of commitment, control, and challenge), except for the dimension of autonomy. Finally, in a sample of medicine university Iranian students, Souri and Hasanirad (2011) discovered that resilience was predictor of PWB and optimism played a mediating role in the relationship between resilience and PWB. As reported by Fredrickson (2001), the main assumption is that resilience was effective in improving individuals’ psychological well-being.

Very few investigators have devoted their studies to this important relationship in adolescence, a period characterized by multiple and complex developmental tasks useful to growth in a positive or negative trajectory, and carried out their researches with participants mainly living in stressed or traumatic conditions.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to verify the relationships between psychological well-being and resilience in healthy middle and late adolescents. In relation to the previous findings, we hypothesized that:

- the more the adolescents will score highly in the six dimensions of psychological well-being, the more they will be likely to resist under stressed situations (H_1);
- late adolescents will express higher psychological well-being than middle ones (H_2), in line with Ryff et al.’s

general findings (2002), according to which the psychological well-being tends to increase with age;

- girls will report higher psychological well-being than boys (H_3): according to Ryff and Singer's findings (1996), women of all ages consistently rate themselves higher on positive relations with others and personal growth than men.

2.1. Participants

The sample was composed by 224 Italian adolescents (109 boys, 115 girls), divided in two age-groups (middle adolescents: 14-15 yrs., late adolescents: 17-18 yrs.) and randomly chosen from two Public Secondary Schools in Catania (East Sicily, Italy). Parental consent was obtained for the participation of adolescents to this study.

2.2. Measures and procedure

The PWB is a self-report inventory (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) consisting of a set of items for each of which individuals had to evaluate themselves on a 6-point Likert scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=.60$), with 1 indicating *strong disagreement* and 6 indicating *strong agreement*. We used the short form Italian version of the PWB (Zani & Cicognani, 1999) with 18 items grouped in six subscales:

- Autonomy: e.g. "I have confidence in my opinions, even if contrary to the general consensus";
- Environmental mastery: e.g. "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live";
- Purpose in life: e.g. "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them";
- Positive relations with others: e.g. "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others";
- Personal growth: e.g. "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world";
- Self-acceptance: e.g. "I like most aspects of my personality".

Responses were totaled for each of the six subscales (about half of the responses were reverse scored) and, for each subscale, high scores indicated that the respondent has a mastery of that area in his or her life, whereas low scores showed that the respondent struggles to feel comfortable with that particular area. A total PWB score was calculated by adding all items of six dimensions.

The Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993) was formed by 10 items each valuable on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 intervals (*strongly agree*). This scale assessed the ability to cope with adversity and unfamiliar events. Score ranged from 10 to 70 points. Cronbach's α was equal to .74.

2.3. Data analysis

Statistical analyses were realized using the SPSS 15, with the application of linear regressions with stepwise method and t-tests. Sex and age of participants were considered as independent variables, while mean scores obtained in resilience and dimensions of psychological well-being were counted as dependent variables. Comparing the six dimensions of PWB, descriptive analyses showed that adolescents scored more highly in personal growth ($M=14,29$, $sd=2.27$), positive relations with others ($M=13,22$, $sd=2.75$), and environmental mastery ($M=12,18$, $sd=2.42$), whereas less highly in autonomy ($M=11,48$, $sd=1.84$), self-acceptance ($M=11,48$, $sd=3.01$), and purpose in life ($M=11,38$, $sd=2.74$) ($F=61,46$, $p<.001$). In relation to resilience, results showed that the 51,3% of adolescents ($n=115$) scored lowly (range 20-53) and the 48,7% of adolescents ($n=109$) scored highly (range 54-66) on this dimension.

3. Results

3.1. Linear regressions between PWB and resilience

Deepening the influence of psychological well-being on resilience, statistical analysis carried out by means of linear regression with stepwise method showed that self-acceptance, personal growth, and environmental mastery

were the best predictors of resilience (Table 1). The more the adolescents were able to see themselves as growing and expanding, to feel satisfied with themselves, and to choose contexts suitable to personal needs, the more they were resilient.

Table 1. Stepwise linear regressions with PWB and resilience - Total sample (n=224)

Models for total sample	R	Adjusted R ²	Beta	t	Sig.	F	Sig.
Self-acceptance	,420	,173	,420	6,901	.000	47,643	.000
Self-acceptance ^a , personal growth ^b	,495	,238	,303 ^a ,286 ^b	4,722 4,457	.000 .000	35,781	.000
Self-acceptance ^a , personal growth ^b , environmental mastery ^c	,539	,281	,217 ^a ,251 ^b ,239 ^c	3,274 3,979 3,783	.001 .000 .000	30,061	.000

In relation to sex differences, for boys (Table 2), environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and relations with others were the best predictors of resilience.

Table 2. Stepwise linear regressions with PWB and resilience - Group of boys (n=109)

Models for boys	R	Adjusted R ²	Beta	t	Sig.	F	Sig.
Environmental mastery ^a , self-acceptance ^b , relations with others ^c	,553	,286	,383 ^a ,322 ^b -,199 ^c	4,032 3,171 -2,151	.000 .002 .034	15,398	.000

For girls (Table 3), personal growth, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance were the best predictors of resilience.

Table 3. Stepwise linear regressions with PWB and resilience - Group of girls (n=115)

Models for girls	R	Adjusted R ²	Beta	t	Sig.	F	Sig.
Personal growth ^a , environmental mastery ^b , self-acceptance ^c	,577	,314	,291 ^a ,225 ^b ,232 ^c	3,137 2,724 2,502	.002 .007 .014	18,429	.000

With regard to age groups differences, for middle adolescents (Table 4), personal growth, self-acceptance, and purpose in life were the best predictors of resilience.

Table 4. Stepwise linear regressions with PWB and resilience - Group of middle adolescents (n=110)

Models for middle adolescents	R	Adjusted R ²	Beta	t	Sig.	F	Sig.
Personal growth ^a , self-acceptance ^b , purpose in life ^c	,688	,458	,409 ^a ,322 ^b ,190 ^c	5,049 4,044 2,638	.000 .000 .010	31,733	.000

For late adolescents (Table 5), environmental mastery was the unique predictor of resilience.

Table 5. Stepwise linear regressions with PWB and resilience - Group of late adolescents (n=114)

Models for late adolescents	R	Adjusted R ²	Beta	t	Sig.	F	Sig.
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Environmental mastery ^a	,411	,161	,411 ^a	4,767	.000	22,721	.000
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3.2. Differences for sex and age groups in PWB and resilience

Differences for sex in PWB were noted: boys expressed a greater well-being than girls ($M_{\text{boys}}=75,42$, $sd=8.27$ vs. $M_{\text{girls}}=72,68$, $sd=9.17$; $t_{(222)}=2,35$, $p=.02$) and, specifically, in environmental mastery ($M_{\text{boys}}=12,76$, $sd=2.04$ vs. $M_{\text{girls}}=11,63$, $sd=2.62$; $t_{(222)}=3,63$, $p<.001$) and self-acceptance ($M_{\text{boys}}=12,16$, $sd=2.87$ vs. $M_{\text{girls}}=10,83$, $sd=3.00$; $t_{(222)}=3,37$, $p=.001$). Differences for age groups emerged in PWB: late adolescents showed a greater well-being than middle ones ($M_{\text{middle}}=72,67$, $sd=9.04$ vs. $M_{\text{late}}=75,31$, $sd=8.46$; $t_{(222)}=-2,25$, $p=.025$) and, specifically, in personal growth ($M_{\text{middle}}=13,95$, $sd=2.34$ vs. $M_{\text{late}}=14,61$, $sd=2.17$; $t_{(222)}=-2,16$, $p=.032$) and purpose in life ($M_{\text{middle}}=10,96$, $sd=2.65$ vs. $M_{\text{late}}=11,77$, $sd=2.78$; $t_{(222)}=-2,22$, $p=.027$). In relation to resilience, no significant differences were noted for sex and age groups.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between psychological well-being, according to Ryff's perspective (1989), and resilience during the period of adolescence. In general, results pointed out that these adolescents were highly likely to see themselves as growing and expanding, open to new experiences with a sense of realizing their own potential and of trusting in relationships with others and capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy with other persons, and able to manage their environment. We expected that the more the adolescents would be likely to resist under stressed situations, the more they would score highly in the six dimensions of psychological well-being (H_1); this hypothesis was fully confirmed, because the adolescents who were able to choose contexts suitable to personal needs, to see themselves as growing and expanding, and to feel satisfied with themselves, felt as resilient. This outcome demonstrated that psychological well-being is a good predictor of resilience.

In relation to age differences, we expected that late adolescents would express higher psychological well-being than middle ones (H_2); results showed a partial confirmation of this second hypothesis, because late adolescents were more likely than middle ones to consider themselves as open to new experiences with a sense of realizing their own potentialities and the objectives for living. With regard to sex differences, we expected that girls would report higher psychological well-being than boys (H_3): on the contrary, boys, compared to girls, were more likely to manage their environment and complex array of external activities, to make effective use of surrounding opportunities and to choose contexts suitable to personal needs and values; additionally, boys were more likely than girls to express positive attitudes toward self-image and to accept multiple aspects of themselves, including good and bad qualities.

This study constituted an important contribution to understand the relationship between psychological well-being and resilience in adolescence that Erikson's perspective considered as a fundamental period of changing and challenge with internal and external environment. Future research could deepen this relationship, including personality traits, lifestyles, and identity type.

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