

**RESEARCH**

## An Investigation of Developmental Goals and Well-Being in Emerging Adulthood

*Gelişimsel Hedefler ve İyi Halinin Beliren Yetişkinlerde İncelenmesi*

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### Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to investigate emerging adulthood from a goal-setting perspective in the frame of a developmental regulation model. The sample consisted of 396 participants aged between 18 and 30 years. The participants were administered a battery that consisted of Self-Esteem Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Loneliness Scale, Brief Symptom Inventory and questions to determine their life goals and appraisals of these goals. Both future and past goals were assessed. Qualitative data analysis indicated that emerging adults' future goals were mostly related to occupation, education and family and their previous goals were frequently related to education and occupation. Furthermore, older or engaged/married participants stated goals related to family, while single participants most frequently stated goals related with occupation. The study revealed that life satisfaction of the goal engagement participants was significantly higher than those of the goal striving participants. The results showed that young adults set goals appropriate to properties of their developmental period. Furthermore, the results were emphasized the importance of goal appraisals and goal engagement for emerging adults' well-being.

**Keywords:** Developmental regulation model, developmental goals, well-being, emerging adulthood.

### Öz

Araştırmanın temel amacı gelişimsel düzenleme modeli çerçevesinde beliren yetişkinlik dönemini hedef belirleme perspektifinden incelemektir. Çalışmanın örneklemini, yaşları 18 ile 30 arasında değişen 396 katılımcıdan oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılara Benlik Saygısı, Yaşam Doyumu, Yalnızlık Ölçeği ve Kısa Semptom Envanteri ile yaşam hedefleri ve bu hedeflere ilişkin değerlendirmelerini içeren bir form uygulanmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında bireylerin hem gelecekteki hem de geçmişteki hedefleri değerlendirilmiştir. Yürütülen niteliksel veri analizi sonucunda, beliren yetişkinlerin geleceğe yönelik en çok meslek, eğitim ve aileyle; geçmişte ise en çok eğitim ve meslek yaşamlarıyla ilgili hedeflere sahip oldukları ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışma kapsamında geçmişte belirlediği hedefe ulaşan grubun yaşam doyumunun hedefi elde etmek için çaba harcamaya devam eden grubunkinden anlamlı olarak daha yüksek olduğu ortaya konulmuştur. Gelişimsel hedefler açısından elde edilen sonuçlar, genç bireylerin içinde buldukları gelişimsel dönemin özelliklerine uygun hedefler belirlediklerine işaret etmektedir. Sonuçlar ayrıca, hedefe ilişkin değerlendirmeler ve hedefe ulaşmanın beliren yetişkinlerin iyilik hali açısından önemine işaret etmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Gelişimsel düzenleme modeli, gelişimsel hedefler, iyilik hali, beliren yetişkinlik.

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**RESEARCHERS** commonly argue that individuals play active roles in organizing their own development throughout their lives, and a significant amount of research draws attention to the importance of developmental goals as a regulative mechanism of this process (Lerner and Busch-Rossnagel 1981, Heckhausen 1999). Accordingly, individuals set goals for themselves with regard to the demands and expectations of the society they live in, in order to manage their lives effectively (Nurmi 2004, Salmela-Aro 2009). However, individuals are not only influenced by society; they also make their own choices with regard to their own demands and values (Baltes and Baltes 1990). In some situations, their choices could lead them to fail and they may need to compensate for their failure (Brandtstädter 1989, Heckhausen et al. 2010) by revising the goals they set and changing them accordingly (Heckhausen et al. 2001). The above-mentioned processes help individuals to manage their lives more effectively (Haase et al. 2013).

It is important for individuals to manage their lives by setting goals for themselves throughout their life. However, the period known as emerging adulthood is usually considered to be the most important period in setting goals (Salmela-Aro 2010). The period in question is a time when individuals make many important decisions about their lives, have many different choices in life, and can freely direct their lives (Arnett 2000, 2004). Although emerging adults have many opportunities and options there have only been a few, albeit a growing number of studies about how people manage their lives and how it is related to well-being during this period (Shulman and Nurmi 2010, Skaletz and Seiffge-Krenke 2010). In this context, the main purpose of the current study was to examine emerging adulthood from a goal-setting perspective in the framework of the developmental regulation model.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000, 2004) called the period between 18 to 25 years of age as emerging adulthood. The results of the studies from different countries indicated that more than half of the individuals in this age-range feel themselves in a period between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett 1997, 2001, Sirsch et al. 2009). However, cross-cultural studies revealed remarkable similarities and differences in the lives of emerging adults from different countries (Arnett and Eisenberg 2007). For instance, in China, only a few people demonstrated emerging adulthood characteristics (Nelson et al. 2004). In addition, it is emphasized that some characteristics of emerging adulthood may be seen clearly (e.g., high expectations for the future) while others (e.g., identity exploration and instability) are less evident. However, the characteristics of the period can become more evident by the effect of urbanization (Nelson and Chen 2007).

It has been revealed within the scope of the numerous studies carried out in Turkey that individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 years, especially undergraduate and graduate students, exhibited characteristics of emerging adulthood (Vural-Yüzbaşı 2012, Morsümbül 2013, Atak 2015, Çok and Atak 2015). However, it was also emphasized that certain cultural and economic conditions in Turkey may affect how emerging adulthood is experienced. Accordingly, because the conditions in Turkey are not suitable for changing preferences –especially in the fields of education and profession– individuals are not likely to experience the instability of emerging adulthood (Doğan and Cebioğlu 2011). The current education system limits adolescents' alternative future professions by forcing them to select an area of interest in the first years of high school, and that choice then determines their future career. Therefore, young people find only a few opportunities to try alternatives. This example indicates that appearance of emer-

ging adulthood in Turkey could be different from that described in the West (e.g., USA and Europe). In addition, statistics from the Turkey Higher Education Information Management System indicated that the number of students who apply for entrance to university has increased by five times over the past 40 years. Furthermore, in a study conducted in our country, it was revealed that 60% of the university students aimed graduate studies (Şahin et al. 2011). In this context, providing the necessary educational and occupational guidance to young adults who want to apply to university, directing them to choices that are compatible with their interest and skills, and examining the processes that could play a role in the successful development and well-being of these people seem very important.

One could consider developmental regulation in this scope. According to the lifespan model of motivation (Salmela-Aro 2009), one of the developmental regulation models, individuals grow up in an environment that channels their development. Many sociocultural factors create “opportunity spaces” that influence individuals’ thoughts and behaviors. Besides the influence of sociocultural factors, individuals also make their own choices and manage their own lives. Personal goals that help individuals design and manage their lives are crucial in this process. Individuals also seek to achieve their goals through co-regulation within a social context. Furthermore, individuals regulate their behaviors as a result of their choices, and they receive feedback on their successes and failures. They compensate their failures with regard to feedback and they regulate their goals accordingly (Nurmi and Salmela-Aro 2006, Salmela-Aro 2009, 2010).

According to the model mentioned above, goals that individuals determine to channel their lives seem important in the developmental regulation. Goals are defined as “internal representations of desired states” (Austin and Vancouver 1996), or as “desired states that individuals seek to obtain, maintain or avoid” (Emmons 1996). Researchers addressed this concept in various ways. Developmental goals (Heckhausen et al. 2010), personal projects (Little 1983, Salmela-Aro 1992, Little et al. 2007), personal goals (Salmela-Aro 2009, 2010) and life goals (Nurmi 1992, Nurmi et al. 1992) are some of the usages of the concept in the literature.

The goals of emerging adults, namely goal contents, were examined in various studies (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1997a, Nurmi and Salmela-Aro 2002, Salmela-Aro et al. 2012, Ranta et al. 2014). These studies demonstrated that young individuals often set goals for education, occupation/achievement and family. They also set goals concerning friends, hobby-leisure time activities, health and the self (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1997a, Nurmi and Salmela-Aro 2002, Salmela-Aro et al. 2012). A recent study found that the goals of emerging adults were mostly about education and occupation; it also showed that the third most important goal for them was romantic relationships (Ranta et al. 2014). These results about goal content indicated that young individuals set goals which were congruent with the characteristics of the period of their lives they were currently going through.

A large number of studies indicated that both goal contents and the goal appraisals were related to well-being (Vasalampi et al. 2009, 2010, Dietrich et al. 2012, Marttinen and Salmela-Aro 2012, Salmela-Aro et al. 2012, 2014, Ghassemi et al. 2017). For example, a study examined the associations between goal orientations which depends on goal content and well-being and concluded that self-focused adolescents reported more depressive symptoms than others (Marttinen and Salmela-Aro 2012). In another

study (Vasalampi et al. 2009), participants were asked to report an achievement-related goal and then they were asked to make some appraisals about the same goal (e.g., goal progress). These researchers found that progress in attaining the goal positively predicted the school engagement, and negatively predicted girls' school burnout levels.

In addition to the goal appraisals, goal attainment was also related to individuals' well-being (Messersmith and Schulenberg 2010). A study which examined the relationship between goal attainment and well-being also tested whether this relationship was altered as a function of the goal content in individuals in transition to adulthood. Messersmith and Schulenberg (2010) found that the self-efficacy of individuals in their late twenties who attained their goal of "graduating from a four-year college degree" was higher than individuals who had not attained the same goal. Similarly, they also showed that life-satisfaction and self-efficacy of individuals in their late twenties who attained their goal of "marriage" was higher than individuals who had not attained the same goal. However, they could not find similar results for the goals about "being a parent". These findings indicated that the relationship between goal attainment and well-being may change as a function of the goal content; and addressed the importance of attaining "more valuable goals" (e.g., graduation and marriage –which could be seen as more important for individuals in transition to adulthood) in well-being (Messersmith and Schulenberg 2010).

Based on the life-span model of motivation (Salmela-Aro 2009, 2010) and the literature presented above, the current study examined the association between goals, goal appraisals and well-being in emerging adults. In addition to that, we also examined individuals' future and past goals by seeking answers to the questions below:

1. What kinds of goals that emerging adults plan to achieve are most prominent in the future and in the past (previous developmental stage)?
2. To what extent are demographic variables related to future goal contents and past goal groups (goal engagement group, goal disengagement group and goal striving group)?
3. To what extent are goal appraisals related to individual's well-being? And are there any significant differences between past goal groups in terms of well-being?

## Method

### *Participants*

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit a total of 419 participants. High school graduates and graduates preparing for university entrance exam, undergraduate and graduate students, individuals working in various workplaces (e.g., academic and administrative units of universities) participated in the study. In our study, there were no exclusion criteria except for age and education level. All of the participants were at least high school graduates. After excluding missing and incorrectly filled scale forms, 396 responses (214 women and 182 men) were used in the analysis. The mean age of the participants was 23.92 years ( $SD = 3.80$ ), and ages ranged from 18 to 30 years. 46% of the participants were undergraduates, two-year college students or graduates; 48% were bachelors, post graduates, PhD students or PhDs, and 6% were high school graduates. The majority of the participants were unmarried (82%) and 51% of them were

unemployed. With regard to the education levels of their parents, the majority of the mothers had elementary school (34%), high school (19%) and university (16%) degrees, whereas the majority of the fathers had university (27%), high school (24%) and elementary school (18%) degrees.

## **Measures**

### **Future and Past-Oriented Goals and Goal Appraisals**

The future goals of the participants were measured by asking them the question: "What is the most important goal that you plan to achieve in the future (next five years on average)?" Participants were also asked to make appraisals for this future-oriented goal (e.g., Little 1983). These appraisals were about (1) goal importance, (2) goal attainability, and (3) positive and negative feelings. Participants were asked to rate their goals (e.g., How important is this goal to you?) on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (very important). Participants were also asked to think about their high school or university years and to remember and report their past goals, which they had at those times. Furthermore, participants were asked (1) whether they achieved their past goals, (2) and if not, whether they still wanted to attain that goal.

### **Satisfaction with Life Scale-SWLS**

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985) is a 5 item self-report scale for measuring global life satisfaction. Each item (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life") is rated on a seven-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores of SWLS indicate higher levels of life satisfaction. Diener et al. (1985) found the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to be .87. In the Turkish adaptation of the scale, Durak et al. (2010) found the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to be .81 in a sample of 17-28-year-old individuals. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .83.

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale-RSES**

Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965) is a 10 item self-report scale. It assesses an individual's global positive or negative attitude toward oneself. Each item (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself") is rated on a four-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). According to the scale, higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. It is found to be a reliable scale for a Turkish sample (Çuhadaroğlu 1986). In this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .87.

### **UCLA Loneliness Scale**

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al. 1980) is a 20 item self-report scale for measuring the degree of a person's satisfaction with social relationships. Each item (e.g., "I feel left out") is rated on a four-point scale from 1 (never) to 4 (often). According to the scale, higher scores indicate higher levels of loneliness. Russell et al. (1980) found the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to be .94. In the Turkish adaptation of the scale, Demir (1989) found the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to be .96. In this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .92.

### **Brief Symptom Inventory-BSI**

Brief Symptom Inventory is a 53 item self-report instrument designed by Derogatis (1992) to assess the psychological symptom status of individuals. Each item of the BSI (e.g., "Feeling that most people cannot be trusted") is rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). According to the scale, higher scores reflect

higher symptom severity. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the subscales ranged from .71 to .85 (Derogatis 1992). Şahin and Durak (1994) adapted the BSI to the Turkish sample and found Cronbach's Alphas of .95 and .96 for total scores in three different samples. In this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .96 for the total score.

### ***Procedure***

Research ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Commission of Hacettepe University (Approval date: 24.12.2013). The questionnaires were self-administered. Participants were asked to return the questionnaires to the researcher in a sealed envelope within approximately one week. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Participation in the research was voluntary.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

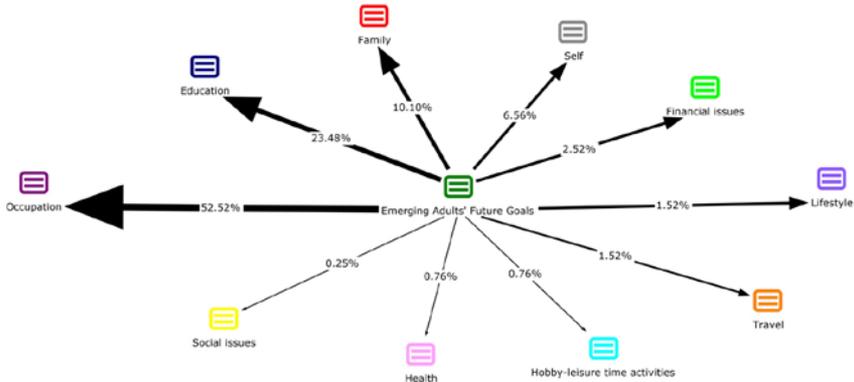
Qualitative data analysis was conducted in order to determine participants' goal contents in detail. Within the context of quantitative analysis, initially the Chi-square test was performed to find if there were differences between groups (age, gender and marital status) with regard to goal contents (occupation, education, family and self). Demographical characteristics of three goal groups (goal engagement group, goal striving group and goal disengagement group) were also examined with two different logarithmic linear analyses. Additionally, a canonical correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship pattern between goal appraisals and well-being. Finally, a univariate ANOVA was performed to indicate differences in well-being between goal groups. The results of the power analysis for the one-way ANOVA using the G-Power 3.1 program (Faul et al. 2007) indicated that the statistical power was .91. Additionally, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods led to examine the research questions from a holistic perspective.

## **Results**

### ***Analysis of Qualitative Data about the Goal Contents***

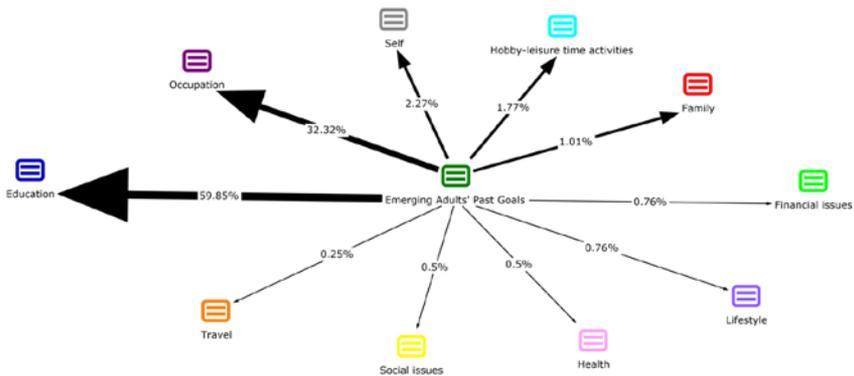
Participants' responses to the two open-ended questions that were designed to reveal the future and past goals were first imported into an Excel-file and were then transferred to the MAXQDA 11 program without any modification. In order to reveal potential basic categories crucial for the goal contents, a literature review was conducted before coding process. Participant responses to the open-ended questions were coded according to the relevant categories (for example, occupation, education, and leisure time activities) that were derived from previous studies (Salmela-Aro et al. 2007, Marttinen and Salmela-Aro 2012). A number of demographics (e.g., age, gender, education level, and employment status) and responses to other questions were also taken into consideration when coding. Thus, basic categories about the goal contents were identified with regard to the deductive approach. After coding into basic categories was completed, the coding contents were controlled. In the next step, similar responses to open-ended questions were put together and subcategories were created in accordance with the inductive approach. While the basic categories were determined by using the information gathered from the relevant literature, the codes were created by using participants' responses. Thus, the analysis of the qualitative data was based on both

inductive and deductive approaches (Varjas et al. 2005). Finally, the responses to two open-ended questions were coded separately.



**Figure 1 Percentages of the categories derived from future-oriented goals**

The analysis revealed that emerging adults frequently used statements about their occupational lives (52.52%) when they were asked to indicate their future goals. This was followed by statements about their educational (23.48%) and family lives (10.10%). Examining the responses to the relevant question revealed that participants set goals for ten different categories (occupation, education, family, self, financial issues, lifestyle, travel, hobby-leisure time activities, health and social issues) (Figure 1). “Being an academician”, “career/having a good career” and “successful professional life/being successful in profession” were the most stated codes concerning occupational lives. “Completing a PhD”, “graduating from university” and “to study for master’s degree” were frequently stated codes concerning educational lives. Finally, “marriage” was one of the most frequently stated codes concerning family lives.



**Figure 2 Percentages of the categories derived from past goals**

The analysis of the responses to the second open-ended question revealed that emerging adults frequently used statements about their educational (59.85%) and occupational (32.32%) lives when they were asked to indicate their past goals. Examining

the responses to the relevant question revealed that participants set goals in ten different categories (education, occupation, self, hobby-leisure time activities, family, financial issues, lifestyle, health, social issues and travel) (Figure 2). "Getting into university" and "getting into a specific department/faculty (e.g., law, psychology, medicine, dentistry and conservatoire)" were among the most stated codes. "Having a profession" and "being an academician" were frequently stated codes concerning occupational lives. The goals of the participants were identified via qualitative data analysis and sample statements for each category were indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1 Sample statements about future and past goals**

Goal type	Sample statements about future goal	Sample statements about past goal
Occupation	"Being an academician"	"Having a job"
Education	"To finish PhD"	"To get into a university"
Family	"To marry"	"To marry"
Self	"Being happy"	"Standing on your own feet"
Financial issues	"Increase in annual income"	"To be rich"
Travel	"Going abroad"	"To visit many places of the world freely"
Lifestyle	"To increase the quality of life"	"Leaving home"
Leisure time	"Shooting short films"	"Improving yourself in painting"
Health	"To overcome health problems"	"To be in good health"
Social issues	"To organize social responsibility projects for children with the money earned"	"To enter politics"

### ***Goal Content and Group Differences Based on Demographic Variables***

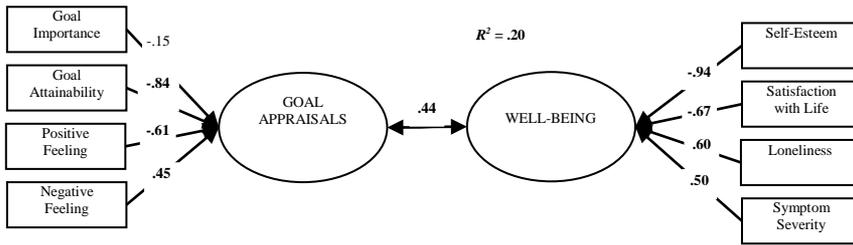
The Chi-square test was performed to determine if there were differences between groups (age, gender and marital status) on contents of their future goals. Categories that may be less than the expected value of 5 were excluded from the analysis due to the assumptions of the Chi-square test (Field 2013). Thus, analyses related to future-oriented goals were conducted with four categories (occupation, education, family and self). Analysis revealed that future-oriented goals varied with age,  $X^2(3, N = 367) = 12.90, p < .01$ . 28% of the participants with a family-related goal were between the ages of 18 and 24 (adjusted standardized residual = -3.6) and 72% of them were between the ages of 25 and 30 (adjusted standardized residual = 3.6). Accordingly, family-related goals were stated more often by individuals between the ages of 25 and 30. However, future-oriented goals did not vary between genders,  $p > .05$ . Thirdly, and finally, we examined whether future-oriented goals varied with marital status. The results showed that future-oriented goals varied with marital status,  $X^2(6, N = 367) = 34.13, p < .001$ . Education-related goals of participants with a romantic relationship (adjusted standardized residual = -2.0), occupation-related goals of engaged/married participants (adjusted standardized residual = -2.8) and family-related goals of participants with no romantic relationship (adjusted standardized residual = -4.5) were lower than the expected value. In addition, occupation-related goals of participants with no relationship (adjusted standardized residual = 2.0) and family-related goals of engaged/married participants (adjusted standardized residual = 4.6) were higher than the expected value.

The examination of the past goals showed that more than two-thirds of the participants (71%) achieved their goals. Participants who reported that they achieved their goals were classified as the goal engagement group. In addition to this, approximately, one-third of the participants (29%) reported that they could not achieve their past goals

or that they could not achieved their past goals yet. Among these, 67% of them still wanted to achieve their goals, while 33% did not have a similar intention. Participants in these two groups were classified as the goal striving group and the goal disengagement group respectively (Messersmith and Schulenberg 2010).

Two distinct logarithmic linear analyses were performed to examine demographical characteristics of three separate goal groups (goal engagement group, goal striving group and goal disengagement group). The first analysis was for the interaction between gender (1-female and 2-male), educational level (1-high school graduates, two-year college students/graduates; 2-undergraduates; 3-bachelors, graduate students, post graduates, PhD students or PhDs) and the goal groups (1-goal engagement group; 2-goal striving group and 3-goal disengagement group); and the second one was for the interaction between gender, income (1-low; 2-middle and 3-high) and the goal groups. It is aimed at assessing covariance and interactions for variable levels that form a 2 x 3 x 3 design. Thus, hierarchic logarithmic linear analysis was performed that allows two-way and three-way interaction analysis and covariance analysis.

A saturated model that included parameters - including average main effects, all possible two-way interactions and a three-way interaction- was obtained with regard to the variables (gender, educational level and goal groups) which were examined in the first analysis. The likelihood ratio of this model showed the best fit to the data,  $\chi^2(0) = 0$ ,  $p = 1$ . However, the model revealed that the three-way interaction was not statistically significant (Pearson  $\chi^2(4) = 4.424$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and that at least one of the two-way interactions (Pearson  $\chi^2(8) = 47.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) or main effects (Pearson  $\chi^2(5) = 462.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were statistically significant. Partial relationships were examined to decide which main or two-way effects should stay in the model, and it was found that two two-way effects [goal groups and education level (Partial  $\chi^2(4) = 26.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ); gender and education level (Partial  $\chi^2(2) = 7.01$ ,  $p < .05$ )] and two main effects [goal groups (Partial  $\chi^2(2) = 253.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and education level (Partial  $\chi^2(2) = 123.35$ ,  $p < .001$ )] were statistically significant. The logarithmic linear analysis interaction parameter estimates were used to obtain information about the direction and the degree of the relations between variables. The three-way interaction coefficient was not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). Two-way interaction parameter estimates showed that high school graduates or two-year college students/graduates were less likely to achieve their past goals than four-year college graduates, (Predictive Value-PV = -0.658,  $z = -3.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, high school graduates or two-year college students/graduates reported more effort in attaining their goal than four-year college graduates (PV = 0.496,  $z = 2.94$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while undergraduates reported less effort to attain the goal than four-year college graduates (PV = -0.345,  $z = -2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, the number of undergraduate girls was higher than the number of girls in the graduated group, (PV = 0.270,  $z = 2.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The results from this backward-stepping approach indicated that drawing out the three-way interaction and the two-way interaction of the goal group and gender would not change the model fit. For this reason, we decided to exclude these two effects and to go with two main effects and two separate two-way interactions in the model. The goodness-of-fit statistics of the appropriate model were calculated as follows: Pearson  $\chi^2(6) = 9.54$ ,  $p > .05$  and Likelihood Ratio  $\chi^2(6) = 9.88$ ,  $p > .05$ .



**Figure 3** Canonical loadings, the canonical correlation and the overlapping variance for the first canonical root

The model in the second analysis with the gender, income and goal groups showed that the three-way interaction was not statistically significant (Pearson  $\chi^2(4) = 3.30$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and that at least one of the two-way interactions (Pearson  $\chi^2(8) = 21.52$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or main effects (Pearson  $\chi^2(5) = 468.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were statistically significant. Partial relationships were examined to decide which main or two-way effects should stay in the model, and it was found that only two two-way effects [goal groups and gender (Partial  $\chi^2(2) = 6.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ); goal group and income (Partial  $\chi^2(4) = 12.75$ ,  $p < .05$ )] and two main effects [goal groups (Partial  $\chi^2(2) = 252.420$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and income (Partial  $\chi^2(2) = 103.61$ ,  $p < .001$ )] were statistically significant. The logarithmic linear analysis interaction parameter estimates were used to obtain information about the direction and the degree of the relationships between variables. The three-way interaction coefficient was not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). Two-way interaction parameter estimates showed that low-income individuals were less likely to achieve their past goals than high-income individuals ( $PV = -.443$ ,  $z = -3.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). According to the backward-stepping approach, drawing out the three-way interaction and the two-way interaction of the gender and income would not change the model fit. For this reason, we decided to exclude these two effects. The goodness-of-fit statistics of the appropriate model were calculated as follows: Pearson  $\chi^2(6) = 3.72$ ,  $p > .05$  and Likelihood Ratio  $\chi^2(6) = 3.57$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### *Analyses of Goal Appraisals, Goal Groups and Well-Being*

Prior to analysis, the examination of skewness and kurtosis parameters showed that the well-being variables met the assumptions of normality. Seven participants with univariate outliers ( $z$  scores higher than  $\pm 3.29$ ) were excluded from the analysis. First, a Canonical Correlation Analysis was conducted to explore the relationship pattern between four variables concerned with future-oriented goal appraisals, and four variables reflecting well-being. The variable called the goal appraisals consisted of goal importance, goal attainability, and positive and negative feelings; and the variable called well-being consisted of self-esteem, life satisfaction, loneliness and symptom severity (Figure 3). The results revealed that the relationship between two variable sets was statistically significant for the first canonical root; Wilks'  $\lambda = .78$ ,  $\chi^2(16) = 96.97$ ,  $p < .001$ . The canonical correlation coefficient of the first statistically significant canonical root was .44, and it explains 20% of the variance in the relationship between two variable sets. The other three canonical correlation coefficients were below .30 and were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). The criterion value for interpreting canonical loadings was designated as .40, and only the correlations above this value were included in the study.

The results showed that goal attainability ( $r = -.84$ ) was the most important variable for goal appraisals, and self-esteem ( $r = -.94$ ) was the most important variable for well-being. Interpretation of the canonical loadings revealed that the decrease in beliefs about goal attainability ( $r = -.84$ ) and positive feeling ( $r = -.61$ ) was related with the decrease in self-esteem ( $r = -.94$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r = -.67$ ), and with the increase in loneliness ( $r = .60$ ) and symptom severity ( $r = .50$ ). And, the increase in negative feeling ( $r = .45$ ) was related with the decrease in self-esteem ( $r = -.94$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r = -.67$ ), and with the increase in loneliness ( $r = .60$ ) and symptom severity ( $r = .50$ ). In summary, the results showed that individuals who have less goal attainability and positive feeling and have more negative feeling are likely to have more loneliness and more symptom severity and would also have lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. In the relationship between goal appraisals and well-being, goal appraisals explained 6% of the variance of the well-being variables, and well-being explained 9% of the variance of the goal appraisal variables.

Regarding the past goals, a univariate ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in well-being between goal groups (goal engagement group, goal striving group, and goal disengagement group). The Levene test showed that the life satisfaction variable violated the assumption of the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix. For this reason, a Box-Cox transformation was performed for the relevant variable (Box and Cox 1964). The lambda value that the Box-Cox transformation requires was calculated with an AID package which was developed in R-program by Dag et al. (2014). This lambda value was used in SPSS to complete the transformation. A Univariate ANOVA was conducted after the transformation process and it was found that there were significant life satisfaction differences between groups,  $F(2, 384) = 6.56, p < .01$ . The life satisfaction level of the goal engagement group ( $M = 7.31, SD = 2.41$ ) was significantly higher than the goal striving group's level ( $M = 6.24, SD = 2.73$ ) and there were no significant differences between groups for other variables (self-esteem, loneliness, and symptom severity) ( $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

The results of the qualitative analysis showed that the future-oriented goals of emerging adults were mostly about occupation, education and family. These goals were followed by goals about self, financial issues, life-style, travel, hobby-leisure time activities, health and social issues. These results were largely consistent with the previous studies (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1997a, Nurmi and Salmela-Aro 2002, Salmela-Aro et al. 2012). Because individuals intensely experience identity exploration in occupation and close relationship domains in this period (Arnett 2004), it was not surprising that future goals were mostly about occupation, education and family lives. In addition, this life period is commonly considered as the peak of both physical performance and health. Accordingly, a relatively low frequency of statements about health goals was also an expected result.

The results revealed that emerging adults' past goals were mostly about education and occupation. The goals about education and occupation were followed by goals about self, hobby-leisure time activities, family, financial issues, life-style, health, social issues and travel. This finding was especially evident when participants were talking about their high school years, and is consistent with previous studies (Kiuru et al. 2009,

Vasalampi et al. 2009, Salmela-Aro et al. 2010, Vasalampi et al. 2010, Dietrich and Salmela-Aro 2013, Tynkkynen et al. 2014). Considering one of the most important developmental tasks defined for adolescence, namely, the adolescents' preparation for future professional life, it was not surprising that young adults reported a great deal of effort on achieving their occupation-related and education-related goals when they were asked to report their past goals. Moreover, while the participants' most important goals in the past were education and occupation respectively, this order of importance reversed for their future goals. In addition to that, while the frequencies of participant statements about past family-related goals were limited, the frequency of family-related goals increased and placed the third rank when participants were asked to report their future goals. These results indicated that the interest in education-related goals decreased with age, and that individuals have begun to focus on goals related to their occupational and family lives in accordance with the demands of their developmental period. Although the current study has not established the changes in goals at an individual level, it can be said that the results addressed important cues about the changes in the goal contents.

The results about future goals revealed that 25-30-year-olds or engaged/married individuals were more likely to report family-related goals. Individuals with no romantic relationship were more likely to express occupation-related goals. These results are largely consistent with the literature (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1997a, Salmela-Aro et al. 2007). Moreover, the results showed no relationship between gender and future-oriented goals. A previous study with young adults (Salmela-Aro et al. 2012) found no relationship between gender and education/occupation or family-related goals; finding that women have more self-related goals than men. Another study (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1997a) did not find significant goal differences between male and female undergraduate students, either. Within this scope, it can be said that the current study findings in terms of gender differences were largely consistent with the literature. Female and male children are attributed different values by parents in Turkey, especially in rural areas (Sunar and Fisek 2005). In terms of education of female and male children, Sunar and Fisek (2005) emphasized that rural families frequently attempt to educate their sons, while having low expectations regarding the economic utility of female offspring are reflected in their reluctance to educate daughters. By contrast, urban families place very great emphasis on education for children with both sexes. However, it is known that socialization goals of Turkish families changed over the years as a function of the significant transformation of the society (Kagitcibasi and Ataca 2005). Considering the findings of the current study, it can be inferred that today's Turkish families are not directing female and male offspring to goals in different areas; on the contrary, they support their children goals equally regardless of the content.

The results about previous goals revealed that most of the participants did achieve their past goals. While two-thirds of the participants who did not achieve their goal reported striving for the goal, one-third of them reported disengagement from their goals. Considering that education-related goals were the most prominent goals in the past, it can be said that the participants achieved one of the most important tasks of their developmental period. Further analysis to determine demographical characteristics of three goal groups (goal engagement group, goal striving group and goal disengagement group) indicated that individuals who did not take a four-year college degree

were less likely to achieve their past goals and strived more to achieve these goals than individuals who attend to four-year college or who obtained a profession. As known, in our country, compulsory education lasts for 12 years, and after that young people can attend university. The results, however, indicated that the majority of young people are planning to attend higher education. As stated earlier, it was revealed that young adults' most important goals to achieve in the past were education and occupation. In this context, it was quite understandable that high school and two-year college graduates who could not reach their past goals continued to strive to achieve these goals that they set to channel their life as they wished to get into their ideal jobs. Besides, the results revealed that low-income individuals were less likely to achieve goals that they set in the past than high-income individuals. A previous study (Uno et al. 2010) also found that young people from high-income families could easily give up their education-related goals. The results of previous and current studies both indicated that there is a relationship between family income, attaining a specific goal and giving up this goal.

The results about goal appraisals showed that individuals who have less goal attainability and positive feeling, and have more negative feeling, are likely to have more loneliness, symptom severity, but have lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. The results also revealed the importance of the goal appraisals, especially the goal attainability for individual well-being. Consequently, it can be said that positive appraisals about the goal positively contribute to well-being, and that negative appraisal about the goal would be a risk for individual's well-being. In accordance with these results, previous studies also emphasized the importance of the goal appraisals to individual well-being (Emmons 1986, Emmons and King 1988, Brunstein 1993, Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1996, 1997b, Vasalampi et al. 2009, 2010). For example, a study of undergraduates found that students who thought they had a difficult-to-achieve goal and students who reported more negative appraisals about their goal had less success in the first year of the university (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1997b). Another study with undergraduates showed that goal importance was a strong predictor of life-satisfaction (Emmons 1986). However, in the current study, we did not find a significant relationship between goal importance and well-being indicators. As mentioned above, the participants were asked to write a single goal in this study. Individuals stated the most important goal for themselves. Consequently, the appraisals about goal importance were very high. In this context, it can be said that the appraisals about goal importance would lead to more reliable results in cases of reporting more than one goal.

The study also revealed that the life-satisfaction of the goal engagement group was significantly higher than goal striving group. However, there were no significant differences in terms of self-esteem, loneliness or symptom severity. Achieving a goal has important implications for future well-being as well as the current well-being of individuals (Sheldon 2008). This finding was largely supported by the current study results about life-satisfaction. However, another study remarked that unsatisfied expectations about educational lives may not have long-term negative implications on individual well-being (Reynold and Baird 2010). Another study emphasized the importance of "timing" on the relationship between continuing goal striving, goal disengagement and well-being (Messersmith and Schulenberg 2010). As mentioned above, participants' past goals were mostly about education and occupation, and period of life of the participants is called the period of endless possibilities (Arnett 2004). Considering this

period as one of the most appropriate periods for individuals to structure their educational and occupational lives, it can be said that continuing to strive for a selected goal or giving up on a goal and engaging with a new goal could not have a detrimental effect on their functionality (e.g., loneliness and symptom severity).

These findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, individuals who are not in the higher-education system were not represented adequately in the sample of this study. Accordingly, it could be very informative if future studies include more individuals who could not get in the higher-education system. Another limitation of this study was its cross-sectional design for seeking answers to research questions. Future longitudinal studies can developmentally examine the changes in goals over time and can clearly reveal the relationship between goal appraisals and well-being. Additionally, in this study well-being was measured with four separate indicators. Therefore, future studies should consider the conceptualization of well-being and ill-being, and examine more in depth the associations among developmental goals and emerging adults' psychological well-being. On the other hand, the results presented here could not only contribute information to improving many intervention programs but also school guidance which can be organized to help young people to manage their lives successfully. Therefore, young people can receive more guidance and counseling on their educational and occupational lives. Similarly, in the literature, it is pointed out that improving goal-oriented intervention programs is important for individuals' development (Eryılmaz 2012a). Moreover, most of the previous studies were conducted in a Northern European country (Finland) and people living in different countries may not have the same opportunities; or they may encounter different obstacles when trying to achieve a goal. As we know, there is only one previous study that examined adult goals in the framework of the developmental regulation model in Turkey (Uçanok 2004). However, studies examining the life goals of university students has been increasing in recent years (İlhan and Özbay 2010, Eryılmaz 2012b). At this point, it seems very important to carry out related studies in different countries.

In conclusion, in terms of developmental goals, the results showed that young adults set goals appropriate to their developmental period. Furthermore, the results emphasized the importance of goal appraisals for emerging adults' well-being. Additionally, the study also revealed that achieving a goal has important implications on future well-being.

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