

Future Perceptions of Israeli and Hong Kong Young Adults

Abstract

This study examined the future perceptions of Israeli and Hong Kong young adults while focusing on three aspects: (a) time horizon, i.e., the longest time into the future participants could envision themselves, (b) the future life roles on which they were focused, and (c) their emotions towards their perceived future. Participants were 20 undergraduate students: 10 from Israel and 10 from Hong Kong. They took part in semi-structured interviews. In general, a wide range of time horizon was expressed, although the Israeli participants reported a narrower range. Both samples mentioned four life domains when envisioning themselves in the future: work, family and relationships, education, and leisure, although some variations emerged within each domain. In addition, both Israeli and Hong Kong participants were similar in their emotions towards their perceived future, although the Israeli participants were, as a group, more positive. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Future perceptions; Time horizon; Young adults; Israel; Hong Kong.

Future Perceptions of Israeli and Hong Kong Young Adults

Future perceptions generally denote an individual's aspirations, view of future events, and plans in different life domains (Seginer, 1988). This future-oriented perception plays a crucial role in how people construct their identity and develop their career (Bandura, 2001; Nurmi, 1991). Studying young adults' future perceptions is particularly important as young adulthood is a stage during which people commonly reflect on their narrative life story, expand their conceptions regarding their future selves, explore vocational choices, and make decisions in various life domains such as family and relationships (Dolli, 2012; Erikson, 1968; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Nurmi, 1991; Super, 1990).

Different factors may impact the formation of future perceptions. For example, certain studies have reported socioeconomic status as a determining factor in youth's career development and aspirations (e.g., Jackson et al., 2006; Turner & Lapan, 2003). Other studies reported gender differences in relation to occupational aspirations (e.g., Perry et al., 2009; Gutman et al., 2012). The current study aimed at examining the role of nationality in young adults' future perceptions. Specifically, we investigated the future perceptions of young adults from two distinct regions with different cultures—Hong Kong and Israel.

Future Perceptions

According to Cinamon and colleagues (e.g., Cinamon & Rich, 2014; Michael et al., 2011), the term “future perceptions” includes the process of preparing and building the future in relation to different life roles (e.g., family, work, and the connection between them). It is also proposed that future perceptions involve aspects such as the degree of clarity when conceiving the future, future beliefs and expectations, and the emotions emerging from contemplating the future (such as excitement and feelings of stress). This conceptualization suggests that certain aspects should be examined when exploring individuals' future perceptions such as the different life roles they envision and their feelings involved when thinking about the future.

People who are future-oriented often make long-term plans and focus on future goals as opposed to present or past ones (Rolison et al., 2017). Therefore, an important aspect of future perceptions is future time horizon or time span (Hagger & Malmberg, 2011; Sundberg et al., 1983), i.e., the period of time into the future for which individuals are able to foresee their lives. Although some life events are more or less determined by the social timetable that coincides with one's life cycle, e.g., schooling and retirement (Poole, 1983), individuals may still differ in their time horizons.

According to Carstensen and collaborators (Carstensen et al., 1999; Charles & Carstensen, 2009), young adults who have a long time horizon (e.g., until retirement) tend to perceive time as open-ended. This tendency is often associated with placing a higher priority on preparatory goals which underscore knowledge acquisition for future possibilities. In general, when examining individuals' future time horizons, it was found that events that were in the near future were perceived in more detail and in a more concrete context. For instance, Liberman and Trope (1998) reported that when participants were asked to imagine reading a book either the next day or in a year, those who imagined the longer horizon described the activity in terms of higher-order goals, such as broadening their horizons, while those who imagined the shorter horizon tended to focus on action details, such as flipping pages.

Examining young adults' future perceptions seems particularly important as people tend to explore and establish their occupational choices during this life stage (Super, 1983, 1990), along with other important decisions in life (e.g., marriage and parenthood), leading some researchers to call this a unique developmental period known as emerging adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000). Although traditionally, this period is between ages 18 and 25, the transition time between adolescence and adulthood has lengthened in modern industrial societies causing emerging adulthood to last up to the early 30s (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). This may partially be attributed to the growing expectation for higher levels of education in securing well-paid jobs (Arnett, 2000). Consequently, the common indicators of adult role achievement, such as marriage and parenthood, are typically postponed (Arnett, 2001).

Among the various existing career development theories, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994) offers a useful framework in relation to future perceptions. The SCCT is based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and focuses on career development. It outlines the developmental processes of educational and career interests, the ways in which interests and other socio-cognitive mechanisms promote career-relevant choices, and the attainment of varying levels of career performance and persistence. Although the SCCT is focused on the career domain, its suggested mechanisms seem relevant to other life roles as reflected in the individual's future perceptions.

According to the SCCT, beliefs in self-efficacy, expectations of outcomes, and goal representations are the cognitive mechanisms involved in the development, modification, and pursuit of career interests over time. Through recurrent involvement in an activity and obtaining feedback from

important figures, individuals acquire relevant skills, set their own performance goals, develop confidence to varying degrees in certain tasks, and build expectations regarding the future outcomes of their performance (Lent et al., 1994). Thus, future perceptions are embedded in the SCCT in the form of outcome expectations.

The fact that the SCCT emphasizes the importance of environmental factors suggests that this theory may be especially relevant when examining future perceptions of individuals from different nations. Indeed, the SCCT theorizes that distal (e.g., cultural identity) and proximal (e.g., family expectations) contextual factors can both influence future development either directly or indirectly (Lent et al., 2000). In addition, the SCCT proposes that contextual factors should be explored fully in order to reach a better understanding of development in the academic and occupational domains.

Future Perceptions and Nationality

Nationality includes the system of meaning common to people in a culture which differentiates one culture from another (Erez, 2011). Various scholars have suggested that cultural factors may influence many psychological processes, such as attitudes, beliefs, norms, opinions, values, behaviors, and perceptions of the future (e.g., Husman & Shell, 2008; Matsumoto & Yoo, 2005). Others point to the impact of societal factors on shaping individual choices (Johnson & Reynolds 2013; Schoon, 2007, 2012). Therefore, it seems that nationality may be an important consideration for understanding individuals' future perceptions.

Specifically, scholars have addressed the relationship between individuals' future perceptions and national identities characterized as 'Eastern' or 'Western'. Accordingly, they claim that Western cultures place more emphasis on individual success than the success of the group or society and therefore are considered more competitive and future-oriented (e.g., Zimbardo & Boyd, 2009) than Eastern cultures, which are oriented more towards the past and present, and emphasize commitment to family and community (e.g., Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). Indeed, the self is often considered independent from others in Western nations, and individuals are encouraged in these cultures to express their own unique attributes (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, Eastern cultures tend to emphasize an interdependent self that is characterized by relationships with others in the social setting (Uchida et al., 2001). As such, the value of independence upheld by Western cultures likely leads people from a Western background to place a stronger emphasis on preparing for the future.

In light of the above, it is reasonable to assume that people from different cultures will likely differ in their perceptions of the future. Indeed, previous studies which examined adolescents' and young adults' future perceptions from different countries have reported some differences. For example, Michael et al. (2017) who examined the future perceptions of young Israeli and U.S. women found certain differences between the two study groups, such as a greater tendency to aspire for future job promotion and to keep contact with their family of origin among Israeli participants. These, as well as others (e.g., Bellare et al., 2018), point to the importance of exploring the differences that may exist between individuals from different cultures and environments. Understanding such differences may help counselors or other professionals who work with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to tailor the most suitable intervention for each of their clients.

As noted above, the current study focused on young adults from Israel and Hong Kong. A few existing studies examined the future perceptions of either Israeli or Hong Kong young adults, however these studies focused only on men or women. For example, Bellare et al. (2018) and Kim et al. (2020) studied future perceptions in Israeli males and Hong Kong females respectively. Among both Israeli and Hong Kong samples, future family was described with relatively more details than other domains, suggesting the importance of family in their perceptions. However, the extended family was mentioned mainly by the Hong Kong participants. Israeli (Michael et al., 2017) and Hong Kong (Kim et al., 2020) participants also reported other similar future life roles such as work and education, although they sometimes had different conceptualizations regarding them. In any case, since such studies did not examine both Israeli and Hong Kong participants simultaneously, it is difficult to make direct comparisons and reach firm conclusions on the matter.

Israel and Hong Kong are both perceived as Western societies with Eastern influences. Israel, for example, is located in the Middle East surrounded by Arab countries. In addition, a large proportion of its population originated from Eastern societies, mostly North Africa and the Middle East (Khazzoom, 2003). Similarly, Hong Kong citizens have a very Westernized outlook since they had been colonized by the British for an extended period of time (Cheung & Arnold, 2010). Nevertheless, according to their government's population census (Census & Statistics Department, 2016), 92% of Hong Kong citizens are ethnic Chinese. These citizens maintain the Chinese traditions and customs, and have a strong identification with Chinese culture (Cheung & Arnold, 2010) which is highly collectivistic and hierarchical (Cheung & Arnold, 2014).

Despite the above, when examining Israel and Hong Kong, several differences come to mind that may impact the future perceptions of young adults from these countries. For example, Israel is frequently characterized as a family-oriented society in which the majority of the youths aim to form their own family, raise children, and hold a career (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002; Portugese, 1998; Seginer, 2009). By contrast, Hong Kong is characterized by low fertility rates and an aging population (Thein et al., 2010). This difference may influence the ways in which individuals from Israel and Hong Kong perceive their future families.

Another difference derives from the fact that in Israel there is mandatory military service for Jewish citizens. Consequently, Jewish Israeli college students, on average, are a few years older than their Hong Kong counterparts. In addition, it is assumed that two years of service for women and almost three years of service for men has a pivotal role in determining Israelis' hierarchal order of civic rights and their involvement in the society (Sasson-Levy, 2002). This may impact their future perceptions in aspects such as future social involvement. Military service also leads to a postponement of future plans for young Israelis (e.g., Dar & Kimhi, 2001), causing a delay in entering adult roles as compared to young adults in other countries without mandatory military conscription, such as in Hong Kong.

Following the conceptualization of Cinamon and her colleagues (e.g., Cinamon & Rich, 2014) as well as the suggested importance of time horizon when examining future perceptions (e.g., Rolison et al., 2017), the current study aimed at exploring the future perceptions of young adults living in Israel and in Hong Kong. Specifically, we focused on three aspects: (a) time horizon, (b) the domains in which their future perceptions were focused, and (c) their emotions towards their perceived future.

Method

Participants

Participants were 20 undergraduate students: 10 from Israel and 10 from Hong Kong. The Israeli students were between the ages 23 and 30 ($M=26.10$, $SD=2.56$) and the Hong Kong students were between the ages 19 and 22 ($M=21.20$, $SD=1.03$). All the Israeli participants were Jewish and one Hong Kong participant was Christian while the rest did not state their religion. Among the Israeli sample, 4 were men and 6 were women. Among the Hong Kong participants, 2 were men and 8 were women. Participants reported a variety of major disciplines of study, including education ($n=5$), social

sciences ($n=4$), business and economics ($n=3$), sciences ($n=3$), engineering ($n=2$), health-related fields ($n=2$), and social work ($n=1$).

Instruments

Students were invited to attend a semi-structured interview based on a questionnaire adapted from Michael et al. (2017). The questionnaire contained four open-ended questions: 1) “When you think about your future, how far into the future can you picture yourself (e.g., 3, 5, 10 years)?” 2) “Try to describe a typical day during the time in the future you just mentioned.” 3) “In your description, you mentioned different life domains (e.g., work and relationships). Try to elaborate on each of them. For instance, what are the things that are important to you in this domain, what are the possible factors that may help fulfill your expectations in this domain, and what are the possible hindrances?” 4) “What feelings or emotions emerge when you talk about your future?”. Instead of following a strict protocol, the interview was intended to let participants describe their own experience and thoughts in a rather free-flow manner. In addition, participants also responded to several questions relating to demographic information including age, gender, academic institution, field of study, and current status of employment.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through social media. Written consent was obtained before the interview. All interviews were conducted individually. The interviews in Israel were in Hebrew and were conducted by an education major who received training in conducting qualitative research interviews. The interviews in Hong Kong were conducted in Cantonese by a trained psychology major. All interviews were performed at the respective universities of the participants, and each lasted for about 30 minutes.

The responses to the interview questions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Thematic analysis of participants’ responses to the questions about future perceptions was conducted following the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included: 1) transcribing the data into written form and identifying overt patterns, 2) generating initial codes, 3) identifying potential themes from the codes, 4) reviewing the themes, and finally 5) labelling the themes. These procedures were conducted for both the Israeli and Hong Kong data. The Israeli research team included a researcher with a PhD in educational counseling and three undergraduate students who majored in education. The Hong Kong research team included a researcher with a PhD in educational psychology

and two undergraduate students who majored in psychology. The undergraduate students received training in interviewing and coding qualitative data. They conducted the interviews according to the interview protocol and carried out independent coding of the transcripts. After completion of coding, the coders and the primary researcher on each team discussed and reviewed any discrepancies in coding, and then generated the themes. Finally, similarities and differences in the results were discussed between the two researchers.

Results

Based on the interview questions and the thematic analysis, seven themes emerged in relation to the participants' future perceptions: time horizon, future life domains, important aspects of future life roles, future assistive factors, future hindrances, self-efficacy in the future, and emotions towards the future. Each theme included categories and *future life domains* also included sub-categories, as presented in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Theme 1: Time Horizon

This theme comprised two categories: *range* and *degree of ease*. The *range* category included any remarks that were specifically related to the length of time into the future that participants could visualize themselves. Students' time horizon ranged from a few months to 40 years into the future among the Hong Kong participants. However, the Israeli participants reported a narrower range of time horizon, ranging between two and ten years. In both samples the majority ($n=7$ in each group) indicated a time horizon of 3-10 years. Three participants (two Israeli and one from Hong Kong) envisioned themselves with no specific time range.

The *degree of ease* category included participants' remarks regarding the extent to which it was easy for them to envision themselves in the future. Most of the Israeli participants ($n=8$) could easily envision themselves in the future during the time they mentioned. However, two participants stated that this was a difficult task for them. For example, M., age 29 said "I can't imagine myself right now in the future. The future is unknown and it may bring about a lot of surprises". Similarly, most of the Hong Kong participants were able to envision themselves in the future with relative ease, except for one participant (W., age 21) who reported that what she could think of was only a general direction for her life.

Theme 2: Future Life Domains

Four common categories emerged for the Israeli and Hong Kong participants in terms of future life domains: (1) work, (2) relationships, (3) education, and (4) leisure.

Category 1: Work

Work was the most common category that emerged when participants were portraying their future and asked to describe their future life roles. This category included two sub-categories: *type of work* and *clarity*. All participants mentioned a possible future job (e.g., “being an accountant”, “occupational therapist”). However, whereas the Hong Kong students were more decisive regarding the type of job they wanted to pursue, only six of the Israeli participants expressed such decisiveness. The other four described a vaguer picture suggesting more than one occupational direction or presenting a more general description of their future job. For example, Y., age 26, said: “I see myself in a key position... a CEO or a researcher in brain science. Maybe I'll lecture in a university”. Another example was N., age 24, who indicated she'll work in the marketing domain but did not specify exactly in what capacity when asked about her future job and just said: “My future job will be a self-fulfilling one”. It should be noted that all of the participants who expressed certainty regarding their future work mentioned rather specific career goals and a time frame (e.g., “I am planning to become a certified accountant within 3 years, and hopefully I can become a manager in 10 years”, “I hope that I will be a lawyer in the future, maybe a partner when I reach 40”).

Category 2: Relationships

Besides work, relationships were apparently the second most common category that arose among the study's participants. This category included two sub-categories: *family* and *social relationships*. The *family* sub-category involved relationships with family of origin or with participants' future families. The *social relationships* sub-category encompassed all future relationships outside participants' families. Among the Israeli participants, all of them mentioned future marriage and starting a family, with seven mentioning marriage and five mentioning future parenthood. For example, when asked about a typical day in her future life, C., age 23, said: “Making breakfast for my kids and husband... During the evening I'll dedicate time for my husband and kids”. Also, there were two Israeli participants who included having a pet when talking about their future relationships (e.g., “I'll dedicate quality time with my spouse, with my dogs, I'll take them for a walk”).

The majority of the Hong Kong participants ($n=7$) mentioned family in general when asked to perceive their future life roles. For instance, F., age 21 said: “I hope I have time every year for a family

trip”; A., age 22, said: “I will put family as my first priority, and if there is anything that will affect my family life, I will try my best to overcome it”. Among them, only three explicitly touched upon future marriage or having their own family, e.g., N., age 21, said: “I am thinking of getting married after age 30...By chance and by luck, I will have my own children”. With respect to future relationships outside one’s family, in contrast to the Israelis who mentioned having a pet, three Hong Kong participants talked about friendship and peer relationship.

Category 3: Education

This category related to further education participants mentioned when talking about their future. It included two sub-categories: *type and domain of education* and *reasons for further studies*. Four Israeli participants and five Hong Kong participants mentioned pursuing further studies when describing their future and specified the study domain and the type of education (i.e., further higher education or participation in professional development). For example, H., age 23, an Israeli student, said: "I'll proceed to graduate school in therapy". As for the reasons for pursuing further education, two main reasons were mentioned by both samples: self-enhancement (e.g., "constant development and learning") and improving career prospects (e.g., "I am thinking of the opportunity to pursue further studies for my career prospect").

Category 4: Leisure

This category captured desired activities that the participants would like to undertake in the future in their spare time and that were not related to work. In general, more participants mentioned this category among the Israelis than among the Hong Kong sample. As presented in Figure 1, the leisure category included two sub-categories: *personal leisure* and *social leisure*. Seven Israeli students and two Hong Kong students reported that they would spend time in pursuing personal hobbies or interests (e.g., “I will keep the habit of exercising to maintain a healthy lifestyle”; “I like playing music”). Also, there was one Hong Kong student who mentioned traveling (“Travelling is important for you to relax and gain more experience, a chance for you to grow if you travel alone”). As for social leisure, five Israeli participants and one Hong Kong participant mentioned social activities such as meeting friends (e.g., "Once in a while I'd like to go out with friends in the evening, go out with my wife to a movie, take her to a restaurant or something"), and another Hong Kong participant mentioned involvement in religious activities (e.g., “Supporting each other in the church, hoping that I can offer help for people in need”).

Theme 3: Important Aspects of Future Life Roles

In general, participants described the importance of their future life roles in relation to two domains: work and relationships. When asked about the aspects which were important to them regarding their future, participants' answers could be grouped under two main categories: *extrinsic aspects* and *intrinsic aspects*.

Regarding their future work, most of the Israeli participants mentioned extrinsic aspects such as pleasant working environment and relationships with co-workers ($n=7$). Other extrinsic aspects mentioned by the Israelis were income ($n=5$) and working hours ($n=3$). Five Israeli participants talked about intrinsic aspects, mainly job satisfaction ($n=4$). Another Israeli participant brought up the importance of liking the professional nature of the job and having a passion for it. By contrast, most of the Hong Kong participants referred to intrinsic aspects as important factors for consideration in the future work domain: four stated passion as an important aspect (e.g., "I am an outgoing and energetic person, I will be able to work outside the office"), and three mentioned job satisfaction (e.g., "I feel satisfied after helping people", "It's rewarding as I can help the needy in the society"). As for extrinsic aspects, five Hong Kong participants indicated job prospects and stability (e.g., "a rather stable job" and "a promising future") as important factors for consideration, while three mentioned the importance of social recognition (e.g., "Becoming a professional is crucial for climbing up the social ladder").

In relation to their future relationships, while only two Hong Kong participants stated the important considerations for them in this domain, all of the Israeli participants talked about this topic and suggested a variety of internal and external aspects deemed important to them. These aspects included support ($n=6$), communication ($n=5$), shared values ($n=4$), friendship ($n=4$), love and admiration ($n=3$), boundaries ($n=2$), and attraction ($n=1$). The two Hong Kong participants mentioned support as an important aspect in future relationships.

Theme 4: Future Assistive Factors

When asked about the possible factors that may help them achieve their future goals, again they referred mainly to their future job and relationships. Two categories emerged: *internal factors* (determinants from within an individual) and *external factors* (factors that exert their influence from the environment).

In relation to the possible factors that may help them achieve their future job, most of the Israeli participants mentioned intrinsic factors. Specifically, half of the Israeli participants mentioned

personal development in terms of gaining occupational-related experience (e.g., "Working hard... learning the profession which means working in the beginning in less prestigious roles"). Four Israeli participants also mentioned actively searching for a job (e.g., "I will search for a job through want-ads, contact relevant workplaces, through the internet...") and fostering good connections (e.g., "I'll find out. I'll talk to the right people").

By contrast, external factors were mentioned by fewer Israeli than Hong Kong participants. Notably, three Israeli participants stated the importance of educational qualifications (e.g., "I'll graduate. Also get a Masters"). For the Hong Kong participants, apart from educational qualifications ($n=3$; e.g., "I think your educational qualifications are important for getting a job"), other extrinsic determinants brought up by the Hong Kong students included work/internship experience ($n=4$; e.g., "Internship experience is very important for you...building up a CV is more important than your GPA") and job interview performance ($n=2$; e.g., "I guess the main point is that you have to perform well in the interview").

When addressing their future relationships, the Israeli participants suggested a variety of assistive factors, however all of them were internal factors. Specifically, half of the Israeli participants mentioned self-care (e.g., "I'll try to maintain an attractive appearance"). Other factors included hard work ($n=3$), choosing the right partner ($n=2$), and agreeing to take part in matchmaking ($n=2$). By contrast, only one participant from the Hong Kong sample raised this issue as an assistive factor for future relationships and mentioned flexible working hours as an important external factor that may possibly facilitate future relationships.

Theme 5: Future Hindrances

As mentioned above, participants also talked about possible barriers to attaining their future goals. Similar to the theme on *future assistive factors*, this theme also revolved around participants' perceptions of future jobs and future relationships and included the categories of *internal factors* and *external factors*.

In relation to their future jobs, both samples mentioned the external factors of low passing rates on exams ($n=2$ in each group) and limited job availability ($n=1$ in each group) as possible hindrances. For instance, A., age 22, a Hong Kong participant said: "The passing rate of the certification exam for accountants is very low, so I may have to take the exam several times". The Hong Kong participants also talked about limited connections ($n=2$; e.g., "I don't have a rich father")

and lack of human capital ($n=2$; e.g., "If you didn't acquire the basic knowledge at the university...") as perceived external hindrances to their future jobs. In addition, the Israeli participants mentioned the external factor of incompatible conditions ($n=3$; e.g., "If I won't have the conditions I want in terms of working hours..."). Conversely, internal factors were less commonly described by both groups of participants: two Israeli students mentioned getting rejected ($n=1$; "If I won't be accepted...") and going through a possible negative shift in life ($n=1$; "A radical change in my personal life. A negative change") respectively, while only one Hong Kong student depicted a lack of specific goals as a possible internal barrier to attaining her future job ("What would hinder my career path would be a lack of specific career goals, that I don't have a clear goal in my mind").

When describing possible hindrances to reaching their aspirations in future relationships, three Israeli participants mentioned the internal factor of making personal mistakes such as not giving a chance to potential partners and two blamed their own characteristics (e.g., "low self-confidence"). Among the Hong Kong participants, half of them foresaw that long working hours in the future, an external factor, would be the largest hindrance to maintaining healthy relationships with family and friends ($n=5$; e.g., "I am a bit worried as I work too much and meet friends and family less", "I guess I will sacrifice time in family as I have to work").

Theme 6: Self-Efficacy in the Future

Eight Israeli participants and all Hong Kong participants talked about their self-efficacy in managing different future life roles. This theme included two categories: *degree of confidence* and *coping strategies*. The first category referred to the degree to which the participants were sure they would be able to handle their future roles. The second category included descriptions of ways in which the participants envisioned they could handle their future roles.

With regards to the *degree of confidence* category, most of the participants who mentioned this issue expressed low levels of confidence in their ability to manage multiple life roles in their future (one Israeli participant and eight Hong Kong participants). For example, O., an Israeli aged 29, said: "I believe that I will want to invest more time in my kids and in my relationship with my spouse and it will come at the expense of my work". Similar remarks were given by the eight Hong Kong participants who expressed concerns about balancing their time in the domains of work and relationships in the future. This was the major reason offered by the participants who claimed that they lacked self-confidence in their own ability to manage different future life roles.

In terms of coping strategies, participants mentioned strategies such as obtaining environmental support (such as receiving assistance from their extended family in raising their future children) and having time management. For example, L. an Israeli participant aged 30 said, "I will create a harmonic living environment, one [role] connected to the other. I will create it together with a day schedule". Another participant, A., aged 22, from Hong Kong, mentioned other means to tackle the problem, "If my job has really long working hours, I will try to change my occupation, or talk to my boss to see if any other arrangements can be made".

Theme 7: Emotions Towards Perceived Future

When participants were asked about their feelings while they talked about their future, three categories emerged from their responses: *positive emotions*, *negative emotions*, and *mixed feelings*. Four Israeli participants expressed positive emotions of excitement and expectation for a good future (e.g., "I'm excited to talk about the future because I know that good things will come, I know where I'm aiming at and I know it will happen, I have the patience"). Another three participants expressed mixed feelings (e.g., "I felt pressure and tension. There was a pleasant feeling when I imagined my future, but it was also stressful - especially if it won't happen. These are pressing questions because that's what I want... these are my aspirations").

As for the Hong Kong participants, they expressed mainly negative or mixed feelings. More than half expressed a sense of uncertainty towards their future ($n=6$; e.g., "The future is a vague and broad thing for me", "You cannot foresee even if you plan beforehand", "The future involves too many changes"). Some reported a positive attitude in face of such uncertainty ($n=3$; e.g., "I am not worried about the future", "I am willing to take a risk"), whereas others expressed apprehension towards this ($n=3$; e.g., "I feel lost and don't know what I can do for my future", "I am a bit worried about my future to be frank", "I think I am escaping from the reality a bit").

Discussion

The current study explored the future perceptions of young adults living in Israel and in Hong Kong. Based on the interview questions and the thematic analysis, seven themes emerged: time horizon, future life domains, important aspects of future life roles, future assistive factors, future hindrances, self-efficacy in the future, and emotions towards the future.

As for their time horizon, although in both samples the majority indicated a span of 3-10 years, some participants stated decades ahead whereas others saw themselves only a few months into

the future. In addition, most of the participants were able to envision themselves in the future with relative ease. Moreover, the Israeli participants reported a narrower range of time horizon, suggesting that time horizon is impacted by both personal as well as cultural or national factors. This finding is in line with those from other studies claiming that differences exist between countries in terms of an individual's time horizon span (Bellare et al., 2018; House et al., 2004).

As for the life domains in which participants envisioned themselves, four domains were reported by both samples: (a) work, (b) relationships, (c) education, and (d) leisure. Similar domains have been reported in previous studies which examined future perceptions of young adults from different countries. It should be noted that leisure was previously reported as a future life domain mainly among Israeli young adults (Michael et al., 2017; Bellare et al., 2018) and not among young adults from Hong Kong (Kim et al., 2020). In this study only two Hong Kong participants (as compared to seven Israeli participants) related to this domain. This finding strengthens the conclusion that leisure time may be of more dominant concern in Israel than in Hong Kong among young adults.

As in previous studies (e.g., Bellare et al., 2018; Michael et al., 2017), the work domain was the most common domain in participants' responses followed by the relationships domain. This finding emphasizes the centrality of work and family in adult lives (e.g., Culbertson et al., 2012). Nonetheless, some variations in the content of these domains were apparent among the two study groups. For example, the Hong Kong participants were more decisive regarding their future jobs than the Israeli participants. The tendency to report detailed information regarding the future among Hong Kong participants has been previously reported (Kim et al., 2020) and may suggest that, at least in certain aspects, Hong Kong young adults are more future-oriented than their Israeli counterparts. Another explanation may be that since the Israeli participants were older and probably had more life experience, they were more realistic and concluded that "you can't always get what you want". Consequently, they were more careful in their statements regarding their future jobs.

Life experience may also explain why the Israeli participants were more diverse when describing the possible career barriers to their future job, as well as their tendency to be more occupied with environmental aspects when asked about factors important to them in their future job and factors that may help them achieve it. Since the Israeli participants were older in age than the Hong Kong participants, they may have had more occupational experience. Therefore, they were more aware of the variety of possible barriers they could be confronted with when trying to achieve their dream job. Their

experience may have also led to a better understanding of the significance of environmental aspects in their future career as opposed to the Hong Kong participants who were more focused on themselves and less aware of other factors.

In contrast to the work domain, in the relationships domain, specifically in relation to their future family, it seems that the Israeli and Hong Kong participants portrayed an opposite picture. Whereas the Hong Kong participants provided more general descriptions, such as spending time with their family, the Israeli participants were more specific, and most of them talked about both having a partner and establishing a family of their own. Interestingly, only a few participants in each group mentioned relationships outside the family. This result is in accordance with previous studies which suggest that relationships during adulthood become more focused on family formation such as marital relationships (e.g., Umberson et al., 2010).

In relation to the education domain, participants from both samples were relatively similar in their responses. The fact that all participants who indicated this domain specified the study domain and the type of education they would like to pursue implies that this domain was relatively vivid in participants' future perceptions. This is not surprising since the study's sample was comprised of college students who were acquainted with the higher education system and with at least some of the possibilities of further education.

The reasons for pursuing future education were also similar among both study groups. The two samples mentioned self-enhancement and improving career prospects. Such reasons were reported in previous studies, especially in relation to relatively privileged populations which are more occupied with reputation and less with financial issues (e.g., Sojkin et al., 2011). This may imply that socio-economic status is an important factor to consider when examining the future perceptions of individuals.

The fact that almost half of the Israeli participants mentioned further education in their future perceptions is not surprising, since tertiary education in Israel is no longer targeted at a highly selective and elite group of students as it was a few decades ago, but instead is perceived nowadays as a right more than a privilege by many (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010). As for the Hong Kong participants, although they might not see higher education as a right, they certainly perceive further studies as an important step for the enhancement of their career. The rapid expansion of tertiary education and the establishment of a number of self-funded post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong over the past

twenty years have raised the level of educational credentials (Kember, 2010). While only 10.4% of young people had earned a college degree in 1998, the number had nearly doubled (21.1%) by 2013 (Census & Statistics Department, 2014). As such, pursuing further education is commonly regarded as a means to increasing one's competitive edge in the job market.

As for the leisure domain, as noted above and following previous research regarding the dominance of leisure among Israeli individuals (Michael et al., 2017; Bellare et al., 2018), this domain was more evident in the Israeli students' future perceptions than in those of the Hong Kong sample. A possible explanation may be that the importance given to leisure in Israel society has risen, as proposed by Snir and Harpaz (2002). Less reference to leisure among the Hong Kong students may partially be explained by their concern about long working hours when envisioning their future. Long working hours are common in Hong Kong and about one-quarter of the employees have reported working for over 50 hours per week in a large-scale survey (Chou & Cheung, 2013; Chung et al., 2010; Vyas et al., 2017). Young adults in the Hong Kong study group foresaw that they might need to sacrifice family time for their busy work schedule, and this hindrance might well apply to future leisure activities as well.

Interestingly, the themes of important aspects of future life roles, future assistive factors, and future hindrances were addressed only in relation to participants' future work and relationships. This may imply that work and relationships are the most dominant life domains when young adults perceive their future, as suggested by other scholars (e.g., Haratsis et al., 2016). Nonetheless, some variations were apparent between the study groups regarding these themes. For example, whereas most of the Israeli participants mentioned extrinsic aspects as important factors for consideration in their future work, such as pleasant working environment and co-worker relationships, most of the Hong Kong participants referred to intrinsic aspects, mainly passion and job satisfaction. In relation to the possible factors that may help them achieve their future job, extrinsic factors were mentioned by fewer Israeli than Hong Kong participants. This finding may be explained by cultural differences. The Israeli culture is known for its low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, and moderate collectivism (Erez & Nouri, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that the Israeli students tend to seek a pleasant environment where they can feel confident to act for themselves when needed. By contrast, Chinese culture, which is the dominant culture in Hong Kong (Census & Statistics Department, 2016), appears to be different from Israeli culture by being high on uncertainty avoidance, high on collectivism, and moderate on

power distance (House et al., 2004). Such a cultural profile emphasizes centralization and control (He & Tian, 2008), hence causing people to feel a lower sense of control over their environment and more controlled by it. Therefore, they may prefer to focus on themselves and their own passion and satisfaction while they may rely on their environment when they need help and assistance.

In addition, whereas almost none of the Hong Kong participants related to aspects that were important to them in their future relationships and factors that may help them achieve these relationships, all of the Israeli participants talked about these topics while suggesting a variety of aspects. A possible explanation for these findings may be that, as stated above, Israel is considered a traditional family-oriented society (e.g. Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2002) with a relatively large average family size as compared to other Western countries (OECD, 2018). By contrast, Hong Kong is characterized by low fertility rates (Thein et al., 2010). Thus, it seems that Israeli young adults are more family-oriented than Hong Kong young adults.

Interestingly, there were somewhat more Hong Kong participants who expressed concerns regarding possible barriers to their future relationships than the Israeli participants. However, the barriers that they perceived were external, such as long working hours, whereas the barriers that were perceived by the Israeli participants were more internal, such as making personal mistakes and having certain personal characteristics that may sabotage their plans. A similar finding was reported by Kim and colleagues (Kim et al., 2020) who observed that young women in Hong Kong foresaw that they would often need to sacrifice their quality of life in the future due to long working hours and busy work schedules. This, again, may also suggest that the Israeli participants were more family-oriented than the Hong Kong participants. As noted by Lombardo (2009), future planning is associated with internal locus of control and a proactive attitude towards life. Since the Israeli participants expressed a more internal locus of control in the relationships domain, it may be a reflection of their greater tendency to think about this domain and plan it.

Despite the certain variations which were found in their future perceptions, both Israeli and Hong Kong participants were similar in their self-efficacy to manage future life roles and in their emotions towards their perceived future. Most of the participants expressed low levels of confidence in their ability to manage multiple life roles in their future. This may be related to the fact that they were currently unexperienced in managing all the life roles they envisioned in their future. For example, since they were not parents, they did not have the experience of managing both a career and being a

parent. Nonetheless, this is an issue that needs further examination since self-efficacy to manage future multiple roles and future conflict between work and family was found to contribute to young adults' career decisions and career plans (Lent et al., 2003; Weitzman, 1994).

As for their emotions towards their future, both positive as well as negative feelings were expressed. However, it seems that the Israeli participants were, as a group, more positive, since all of them included in their descriptions some positive emotions, whereas some of the Hong Kong participants expressed only negative ones. This finding may be related to more positive expectations towards the future among the Israelis as compared to people from Hong Kong, a finding which was previously reported (e.g., Gallagher et al., 2013).

The findings in this study suggest that despite the emergence of similar life roles when young adults in Israel and Hong Kong were asked to describe their future perceptions, differences were observed with respect to their time horizon, the description of future life roles, and the emotions they evoked. As discussed earlier, the two groups of undergraduate students were primarily different in the number of factors, including nationality, religion, and age. In the current study, it is not possible for us to delineate the effects of the abovementioned factors, and we postulate that all these variables might have contributed to the development of future perceptions among the respondents. This is in accordance with the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) which emphasized different personal factors as influencing the development of career interests and choices.

The current findings give rise to a number of practical implications that may be useful for professionals working in the field of career development. First, based on the variations found in time horizon, it may be useful for career counselors or educators to inquire about this concept to better understand the specific time frame that their clients intend to discuss when planning about their future. Second, as differences were found between the Israeli and Hong Kong students in terms of the content of their future perceptions and in the emotions they elicit, it seems vitally important for career counselors to be culturally sensitive when they are working with individuals that come from diverse ethnic origins. To this end, counselors may need to get acquainted with the cultural characteristics of the population they serve as well as specific societal characteristics that may affect their clients' future perceptions (e.g., orientation towards future work and future family, perceptions on leisure). Such characteristics should also be taken in consideration and appropriately addressed when designing and delivering career intervention programs for people of different cultural backgrounds. Finally,

counselors are advised not to focus only on the work domain when providing career counselling, since future perceptions entail a variety of life roles and the interplay and balancing between different life roles, as indicated in the current study. This suggestion is supported by various career counseling approaches which emphasize the interface between individuals' professional and personal lives (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Despite its contribution to research and practice, this study has some limitations. First, only a small sample size was included in this preliminary study and the groups were not balanced in terms of the gender ratio. Therefore, additional studies are necessary to provide further support for the generalizability of the results. Second, although both Hong Kong and Israeli participants were all college students, the two groups differed in terms of age due to delayed college entry after mandatory military service for the Israeli students. Differences in age and life experience, apart from nationality, might have affected the future perceptions of the young adults, and these should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Third, we suggest that future research should expand the scope and explore the future perceptions of other groups of young adults besides college students, and include those from more countries to better understand the contribution of cultural variables to future perceptions.

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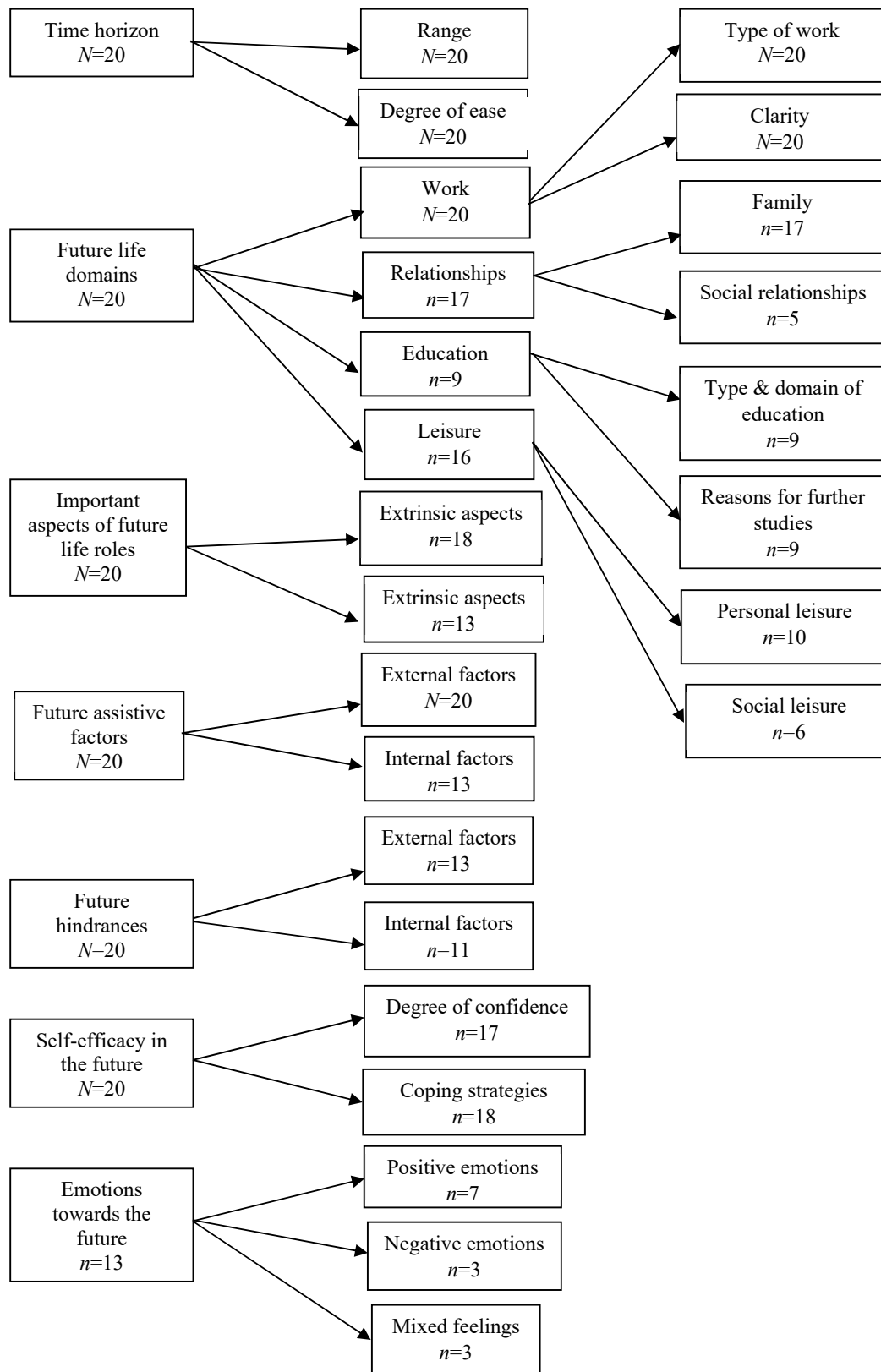


Fig. 1. Themes, Categories and Subcategories of Participants' Future Perceptions