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Multi-faceted self-efficacy beliefs as predictors of life satisfaction in late adolescence

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Abstract

In a longitudinal design, 650 young adolescents' multi-faceted self-efficacy beliefs (academic, social and self-regulatory), academic achievement and peer preference in middle school were used to predict life satisfaction five years later.

Hierarchical regression analysis showed that for both genders, academic and social self-efficacy beliefs in early adolescence were better predictors of life satisfaction in late adolescence than early academic achievement and peer preference. Furthermore, change in academic and social self-efficacy beliefs significantly contributed to predict life satisfaction over the course of five years.

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Keywords: Self-efficacy beliefs; Academic achievement; Peer preference; Life satisfaction; Longitudinal study

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1. Introduction

Over the years, much research has been devoted to examining the personal and social determinants of successful development over the course of adolescence (Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995; Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Adolescence involves the management of major biological, educational, and social role transitions that tend to occur concurrently. The success with which the challenges of these transitions are managed depends, to a large degree, on adolescents' ability to behave appropriately in multiple domains.

Although most research has focused on the undesirable outcomes that may preclude healthy development (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Cicchetti & Toth, 1998; Jessor, 1998), no less important are the positive outcomes and personal factors that allow young people to navigate safely through the challenges of adolescence and set a successful life course. Thus, the scientific study of adolescence needs to explain why some youth cope effectively with taxing role demands and interpersonal strains whereas others withdraw in the face of challenges and, ultimately, may succumb to unhappiness and depression. An adequate psychological theory should also explain why some adolescents engage in persistent risky behaviors whereas the majority of youth avoid or desist (Moffit, 1993).

A new vision of adolescence points to the individual strengths that promote positive development (Damon & Gregory, 2003). It has become clear that individuals play a proactive role in their adaptation rather than simply undergo experiences that act on their personal liabilities (Bandura, 2006). In this regard, self-efficacy beliefs are among the knowledge structures that exert a pervasive influence on youths' successful development. Unless young people believe they can produce desired results by their actions, they have little incentive to undertake activities or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1997).

Over the years, cross-sectional and longitudinal findings have attested to the role that multi-faceted self-efficacy beliefs exert in sustaining positive behaviors and preventing maladaptive behaviors over the course of adolescence. In particular, academic, social and self-regulatory efficacy beliefs have proved to contribute to the promotion of prosocial behavior (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003), academic aspirations and career trajectories (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001), peer preference and academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Cervone, 2004), as well as to prevent depression (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999), shyness (Caprara, Steca, Cervone, & Artistico, 2003), internalizing and externalizing problems (Caprara et al., 2004) and engagement in transgressive behaviors (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001; Caprara, Regalia, & Bandura, 2002).

The present study aims to extend previous findings by examining the predictive power of self-efficacy beliefs related to relevant domains of functioning like: academic achievement, social relationships and resistance to transgressive peer pressures with respect to later adolescents' life satisfaction. Recent reviews (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Huebner, 2004) have highlighted the importance of life satisfaction on adolescents' positive adjustment. In particular, life satisfaction has been found to be positively related to key indicators of adaptive functioning including, self-esteem (Dew & Huebner, 1994), positive parent-child and interpersonal relations (Huebner, 2004), and academic ability and adjustment (Leung & Leung, 1992). In contrast, negative correlations have been found with depression and anxiety (Gullone & Cummins, 1999), externalizing and internalizing problems (McKnight, Huebner, & Suldo, 2002) and substance abuse (Zullig,

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