

Perceived Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction in Adolescents*

Inteligencia Emocional Percibida, Autoestima y Satisfacción con la Vida en Adolescentes

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Abstract. The present study examined the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence, self-esteem and life satisfaction in a sample of 316 Spanish adolescents (179 females and 137 males), ranging in age from 14 to 18. Demographic information was collected, along with data through the use of three self-report measures: the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. As expected, perceived emotional dimensions, particularly mood clarity and repair, showed positive associations with life satisfaction. Self-esteem also correlated significantly and positively with levels of adolescents' satisfaction with life. More interestingly, results of structural equation modeling indicated that mood clarity and emotional repair had a significant direct and indirect link (via self-esteem) with life satisfaction in adolescents. The present study contributes to an emerging understanding of the underlying process between perceived emotional intelligence and life satisfaction. Our findings encourage moving beyond the examination of direct association between perceived emotional intelligence and life satisfaction and focusing on the role of potential mechanisms such as self-esteem involved in the link between perceived emotional intelligence and life satisfaction in adolescents. Implications of the present findings for future research are discussed, as well as potential interventions for increasing subjective well-being in adolescents.

Keywords: adolescents, life satisfaction, perceived emotional intelligence, self-esteem.

Resumen. El presente estudio examinó la relación entre inteligencia emocional percibida, autoestima y satisfacción vital en una muestra de 316 adolescentes españoles (179 mujeres y 137 hombres), de edades comprendidas entre los 14 y 18 años. Junto con los datos demográficos se recogió información mediante tres medidas auto-informadas: la escala de meta-cocimiento de los estados emocionales, la escala de autoestima de Rosenberg y la escala de satisfacción vital. Como esperamos, las dimensiones emocionales, especialmente claridad y reparación emocional, mostraron una asociación positiva con la satisfacción vital. Autoestima también correlacionó significativa y positivamente con los niveles de satisfacción vital de los adolescentes. Más interesante fueron los resultados del modelo de ecuaciones estructurales que indicaron que claridad y reparación emocional tenían un efecto directo pero también un vínculo indirecto (vía autoestima) con la satisfacción vital de los adolescentes. El presente trabajo contribuye a la mejor comprensión de los procesos subyacentes entre la inteligencia emocional percibida y la satisfacción vital. Nuestros hallazgos ponen de manifiesto la necesidad de ir más allá del examen de las asociaciones directas entre inteligencia emocional percibida y satisfacción vital centrándonos en el posible papel de otros mecanismos potenciales tales como la autoestima implicados en el vínculo entre inteligencia emocional percibida y satisfacción vital en adolescentes. Se discuten diversas implicaciones de estos hallazgos para futuras investigaciones así como posibles intervenciones dirigidas a incrementar el bienestar de los adolescentes.

Palabras clave: adolescentes, autoestima, inteligencia emocional percibida, satisfacción vital.

Individual differences in emotional intelligence (EI) have been the subject of a great deal of research throughout the last two decades (Mayer, Roberts, &

Barsade, 2008). Much of this research has been interested in studying emotional abilities as predictors of psychological well-being, health and interpersonal functioning (Heck & Oudsten, 2008). Accordingly, numerous studies have focused mainly on the role that EI plays in an individual's subjective emotional reactions when facing stressful encounters and how these emotional abilities might influence subjective well-being (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Yoo, 2009).

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EI is defined as: the ability to accurately perceive, appraise and express emotions; the ability to access or generate feelings, or both, when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The authors propose that individuals vary in their ability to process information of an emotional nature and in their ability to relate emotional processing to a wider cognition. According to this idea, those individuals who are able to understand and regulate their emotions should be able to generally maintain a better outlook on life and experience better psychological well-being (Heck & Oudsten, 2008; Salovey, 2001).

The concept of EI has been theorized as being critical for effective functioning and providing enhanced personal well-being and growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Although attempts to measure emotional intelligence have been numerous and there have been some important advances in the use of ability measures, Salovey and Colbs. developed an earlier self-report approach to assess relevant aspects of individuals' perception of their emotional competencies (Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). One of the most widely used self-report measures with regard to EI is the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS). This measure taps into what researchers have termed Perceived Emotional Intelligence, or the knowledge individuals have about their own emotional abilities as opposed to actual capacity or capacity of mental abilities (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 1999; Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002). In particular, the TMMS is a measure of beliefs concerning one's own emotional Attention (perceived attention paid to one's own emotional states), Clarity (perceived understanding of one's emotional states), and emotional Repair (perceived ability to regulate one's emotional states). These meta-mood dimensions have been suggested to reflect a three-phase functional sequence (Martínez-Pons, 1997; Salguero, Extremera, & Fernández-Berrocal, submitted). Specifically, it is assumed that (1) some degree of attention to feelings is needed (2) for a clear understanding of emotions and, consequently, (3) that the capacity to repair negative moods and emotions would not be possible without some level of emotional clarity. Evidences for this proposed functional sequence have been found using path analytic methodology (Martínez-Pons, 1997; Palmer, Gignac, Bates, & Stough, 2003).

With respect to predictive validity, growing empirical evidences have showed that TMMS is associated with higher life satisfaction (Martinez-Pons, 1997), better subjective happiness (Extremera, Salguero, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2011), greater optimism (Extremera, Durán, & Rey, 2007), increased self-esteem (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, Hollander, & McKenley,

2002), use of more adaptive coping strategies and higher social problem-solving ability (Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007; Pena, Extremera, & Rey, 2011) and better outcomes with regard to one's health and meaningful life (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2006; Shulman & Hemenover, 2006).

There is also extensive literature demonstrating that perceived emotional intelligence measured by the TMMS is related to a number of aspects of positive well-being (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2008). For example, Palmer, Donaldson, and Stough (2002) examined the predictive validity of components of TMMS concerning prediction of life satisfaction over and above both positive and negative affect. The authors found that the Clarity subscale accounted for further variance in life satisfaction not accounted for by positive and negative affect. Other studies have found that emotional repair is the most important predictor of emotional well-being (Thompson, Waltz, Croyle, & Pepper, 2007). Similar findings suggest significant associations between perceived emotional intelligence measured by the TMMS and psychological well-being independent from well-known mood state constructs and personality traits in college students (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2005; Shulman & Hemenover, 2006).

Despite the above findings about emotional abilities and well-being in adults, the empirical research in EI pertaining to adolescence is still in an early stage. Few studies have examined the role of EI in the wide spectrum of positive and negative functioning outcomes in adolescence. However, some preliminary evidences suggest that EI is also critical for effective emotional functioning in youth and adolescence. Using adolescents as a sample, some research has reported that those adolescents with high perceptions of emotional abilities assessed by TMMS (in particular, high mood clarity and emotional repair) generally show higher life satisfaction and lower perceived stress after the effect of dispositional optimism/pessimism were statistically controlled for (Extremera et al., 2007). Similar results have been obtained between TMMS dimensions and reduced levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents (Fernández-Berrocal, Alcaide, Extremera, & Pizarro, 2006; Salguero, Palomera, & Fernández-Berrocal, in press; Williams, Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera, Ramos-Díaz, & Joiner, 2004).

Beyond this direct link between EI and well-being, many potential mechanisms have been theorized through which EI might work to enhance well-being and adaptive coping (Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002; Rey & Extremera, in press). One characteristic considered as a relevant mediator might be self-esteem. Self-esteem is described as a global feeling of self-worth or adequacy as a person (Baumeister, 1993), or generalized feelings of self-acceptance, goodness and self-respect (Rosenberg, 1965). Numerous evidences exist that self-esteem is positively related to emotional

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