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# Perceived emotional intelligence and dispositional optimism–pessimism: Analyzing their role in predicting psychological adjustment among adolescents

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## Abstract

The current study examined the relationships between perceived emotional intelligence (PEI) (measured by Trait-Meta Mood Scale, TMMS), dispositional optimism/pessimism and psychological adjustment (perceived stress and life satisfaction) in a sample of 498 adolescents (202 males and 296 females). In addition, the present research investigated the extent to which dimensions of PEI predicted variance in life satisfaction and perceived stress beyond the variance explained for by individual differences in optimism and pessimism. TMMS dimensions and dispositional optimism/pessimism showed significant correlations in the expected direction with perceived stress and life satisfaction. Likewise, PEI and dispositional optimism/pessimism were not strongly redundant albeit related. Further hierarchical regression analyses confirmed that emotional clarity and mood repair still remained significant in predicting perceived stress and life satisfaction after the influence of optimism/pessimism were controlled. These results are consistent with previous findings on construct validity of PEI assessed by TMMS. In this sense, data suggest that adolescents with high perceptions of emotional abilities (in particular, high clarity and repair) generally show higher life satisfaction and lower perceived stress. Moreover, to some degree, this effect might be considered as independent from their own optimistic or pessimistic dispositions.

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## 1. Introduction

The body of research on individual differences has drastically grown in recent years. Some of the constructs that have classically attracted such a great deal of research attention as individual predictors are dispositional optimism/pessimism. To a certain extent, the interest is due to dispositional optimism/pessimism which have been found to be related to positive and negative adjustment, respectively. Dispositional optimism–pessimism is defined in terms of generalized expectancies concerning important future positive (optimism) and negative outcomes (pessimism) (Scheier & Carver, 1985). In addition, a number of investigators have found that optimism and pessimism represent two partially independent dimensions (Chang, Maydeu-Olivares, & D’Zurilla, 1997; Mroczek, Spiro, Aldwin, Ozer, & Bosse, 1993) and are considered important predictors of psychological well-being (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001). A series of studies have also shown that these constructs have implications for the manner in which people cope with stressful experiences, and the success with which they cope in their lives. For example, higher scores on optimism have been associated with less psychological maladjustment, including higher perceived stress (Chang, 2002), and greater life satisfaction (Chang et al., 1997). In contrast, there is a good deal of evidence that links pessimism to lower life satisfaction (Chang et al., 1997), greater perceived stress (Chang, 2002) and higher depressive symptoms (Chang, Sanna, & Yang, 2003). For the last decade, increasing attention has been paid in examining the discriminant validity of dispositional optimism–pessimism with respect to other well-known personality variables. In this line, some researchers have confirmed that the influences of these constructs on adjustment can be distinguished from the effect of neuroticism, trait anxiety, self-mastery, self-esteem, information processing styles, and problem orientation, among others (Chang & D’Zurilla, 1996; Chang & Farrehi, 2001; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). However, more research would be necessary to distinguish the role of optimism and pessimism on adjustment over the influence of other personal predictors.

In this sense, emotional intelligence (EI) has lately been suggested to be an important factor to predict psychological adjustment to life (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Following Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) theoretical approach, EI is conceptualized as the capacity to perceive, assimilate, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others. While several ways of measuring EI have been devised (Geher, 2004), generally speaking they might be divided into two main categories: self-report and performance-based measures. Despite its limitations related to response biases, self-report measures are most typically used and they seem to be viable alternatives to performance-based measures for investigating particular research questions (Pérez, Petrides, & Furnham, 2005). In particular, they are generally chosen instead of performance-based measures because they are easy to use, imply relatively low costs in terms of time and economic resources and rely on introspection, which provides unique access to emotional-affective processes. One of the most widely used self-report measures is the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995), based on Salovey and Mayer’s EI model (1990). This self-report measure evaluates three facets of the reflective processes that accompany mood states termed the meta mood

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