

## Perceived Emotional Intelligence and Ways of Coping among Students

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The present study was aimed at studying coping in relation to emotional intelligence. The sample comprised of 197 students, between the age of 18 and 25 years. Participants completed self-reported measures of emotional intelligence and ways of coping. It was found that appraisal of emotions in the self was positively correlated with plan-full problem solving and positive reappraisal coping styles. Appraisal of emotions in others was positively correlated with plan-full problem solving and positive reappraisal. Emotional regulation of the self was positively correlated with planfull problem solving, confronting coping, self-controlling, positive reappraisal and with distancing, but negatively correlated with escape avoidance. No gender differences were found in perceived emotional intelligence and ways of coping except for self-control, where males reported higher than females.

**Keywords:** Perceived Emotional Intelligence; Coping; Students.

Late adolescence is a critical transitional period in which individuals face a number of social changes, and relationship and achievement related stressors (e.g., Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995). The dynamic relationship between the person and environment in stress perception and reaction is especially magnified in college students, so the problems and situations encountered by students may differ from those faced by their nonstudent peers (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996). The environment in which students live is quite different. While jobs outside of the university setting involve their own sources of stress, such as evaluation by superiors and striving for goals, the continuous evaluation that students are subjected to, such as weekly tests and papers, is one which is not often seen by non-students (Wright, 1964).

The pressure to earn good grades and to earn a degree is very high (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996). Earning high grades is not the only source of stress for students. Other potential

sources of stress include excessive homework, unclear assignments, and uncomfortable classrooms (Kohn & Frazer, 1986). In addition to academic requirements, relations with faculty members and time pressures may also be sources of stress (Sgan-Cohen & Lowental, 1988). Relationships with family and friends, eating and sleeping habits, and loneliness may affect some students adversely (Wright, 1967). We believe that that many of these sources of stress are also applicable in the urban Indian context.

### ***Coping and Emotional Intelligence***

Lazarus's coping model defined coping as "constantly changing cognitive, behavioral, (and emotional) efforts to manage particular external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person" (cf., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately,

appraise and express emotions, the ability to access and or generate feelings when they facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and the regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Matthew and Zeidner (2001) suggest that successful coping with stressful encounters is central to emotional intelligence. Successful coping forms the very bedrock of good mental and physical health. It is through the coping process that we are able to survive the many challenges that life brings and to flourish as people (Snyder & Dinoff, 1999). Gohm, Corse and Dalsky (2005) examined the association between emotional intelligence as assessed by an ability measure, Mayer, Salovey & Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2002) and stress (feelings of inability to control life events) among American students. They found that overall emotional intelligence was potentially useful in reducing stress for some people, but irrelevant or unnecessary for others. Specifically, higher emotional intelligence was correlated with lower stress for only those individuals who are high in attention to emotion, clarity to emotion and emotional intensity. Besides, overall emotional intelligence was negatively correlated with certain coping styles, such as, behavioral disengagement and alcohol-drug engagement. Further analysis showed that managing emotion was positively correlated with certain other coping styles, such as, seeking social support- emotional, seeking social support- instrumental and religious coping styles.

Carriochi, Deane, and Anderson (2002) and Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, and Epel (2002) found evidence that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between stress and mental health. Furnham, Petrides, and Spencer-Bowdage (2002) showed that emotional intelligence is related to healthy social coping styles. Pelliteri (2002)

found that college students who are emotionally intelligent tend to use an adaptive defense style.

### ***Gender and Coping***

Gender differences in the use of coping strategies have been reported in a number of studies. In general, findings suggest that females tend to favor social support, emotion focused and avoidant coping strategies relative to males (e.g., Ptacek, Smith, & Zanas, 1992; Stein & Nyamathi, 1999). A study on life stress and coping styles among teachers indicated that males are higher in their use of acceptance and females are higher in the use of self-blame as coping styles (Sahu & Misra, 1995). Gurnakova (2000) found that males tend to use problem focused coping more than females. A study done by Gupta and Murthy (1984) studied role conflict and coping strategies among Indian women, showed that the most commonly used coping strategy was personal role re-definition. The qualitative results also indicated that 'Adjustment' and 'Compromise' were most commonly used and successful methods of coping.

### ***Gender and Emotional Intelligence***

There is considerable body of research on emotional intelligence and gender differences. Women have scored higher than men in emotional intelligence across the studies (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Mayer et al., 2002; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998; Thingujam & Ram, 2000).

Interpersonal social skills, which is closely linked to EI has consistently, demonstrated a gender effect with females being more perceptive, empathic, and adaptable than males (Argyle, 1990). Further, Schutte et al. (1998) predicted and found gender differences in their measure of trait EI with females scoring higher than males.

In contrast to Schutte et al. (1998), Petrides and Furnham (2000) did not find a

significant gender difference in overall trait EI. The results of their study showed that in spite of the evidence that females seem to be more socially skilled than males (Argyle, 1990; Hargie, Saunders, & Dickson, 1995) and score higher on existing EI tests (Schutte et al., 1998), their self-estimated EI scores tend to be lower than those of males. They hypothesize possible explanations for this in terms of the nature (self enhancement versus self-derogation) and source (male versus female) of the bias. It could be, for example, that males self-enhance and females self-derogate; that both genders self-enhance with males more so than females; or that males are accurate and females self-derogate. It may be argued that the bias is more likely to be self-derogatory and on the side of females since, on the whole, the correlations between measured and self-estimated EI were lower for females than for males (Petrides & Furnham, 2000).

Emotional intelligence in the present study would be considered as perceived emotional intelligence. This is because Schutte et al. Emotional Intelligence Scale measures participants' perception of emotional intelligence as against emotional intelligence as a type of intelligence or ability. Such perceived emotional intelligence could also be considered as emotional maturity (Thingujam 2002, 2004) or emotional competence (Saarni, 1999).

Thus it was hypothesized that perceived emotional intelligence (appraisal of emotion in self, appraisal of emotions in others, emotional regulation of the self, and utilization of emotions in problem solving) would be significantly associated with different ways of coping (such as confrontative coping, self controlling, planful problem solving, positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility, etc.). This relationship would be examined across

the gender if gender differences were found in perceived emotional intelligence subscales.

## **Method**

### **Sample:**

The sample comprised of 197 participants (80 males, 117 females), between ages 18 and 25 years (mean age = 20.34 years). All participants were college and university students from Pune city. Participants were approached individually and their co-operation was solicited for some samples and requested to respond to the test package after establishing rapport. All the participants were told that they were a part of a study and their consent to participate in the study was taken prior to the tests. They were also informed that all information given would be confidential and be used for research purpose only. They were then given the standard instructions for the tests required and were requested to indicate their responses on the response sheet. For the remaining samples the tests were administered in the classroom after taking permission from the concerned class teacher. The entire process lasted for 45 minutes.

### **Measures:**

Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998): Based on the original Mayer-Salovey model of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), Schutte and colleagues developed a 33-item self-report Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS). Three of the 33 items (5, 28, and 33) are reverse-scored. Participants responded to the items on a 5-point Likert scale. Despite an alpha of .90 and Schutte et al.'s (1998) claim about uni-dimensionality, Gignac, Palmer, Manocha and Stough (2005) found evidence of six interpretable factors similar to those mentioned in the original literature. They derived six components via confirmatory analysis, but only those subscales (factors) with sufficient alpha coefficient reliabilities were included in this study. Namely, appraisal

of emotions in self ( $\alpha=.80$ ), appraisal of emotions in others ( $\alpha=.81$ ), emotional regulation of self ( $\alpha=.71$ ), and utilization of emotions in problem solving ( $\alpha = .69$ ). Higher score indicated higher perceived EI in all the subscales.

**Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WOCQ;** Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984): WOCQ assesses the thoughts and actions individuals use to cope with stressful encounters of everyday living. It is derived from cognitive-phenomenological theory. It measures coping processes, not coping dispositions or styles. It consists of 8 sub-scales, which include:

- i) Confrontative-coping ( $\alpha=0.70$ ), ii) Self-controlling ( $\alpha = .70$ ), iii) Distancing ( $\alpha= 0.61$ ), iv) Seeking social support ( $\alpha=0.76$ ), v) Accepting responsibility ( $\alpha=.66$ ), vi) Escape avoidance ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ), vii) Planful problem solving ( $\alpha=. 68$ ), viii) Positive reappraisal ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ).

**Results**

After computing descriptive statistics the data were subjected to ANOVA and Person's Product Moment correlations to examine gender differences and correlations, respectively (see Tables 1, 2, & 3).

**Table1. Mean, SD, F values of the subscales of emotional intelligence, and Alpha Coefficient Reliabilities (males = 77 to 80, females = 108 to 117)**

Scale (alpha)	Male		Female		F
	M	SD	M	SD	
AES (.65)	7.2	1.6	7.2	1.4	0.13
AEO (.67)	25.6	4.6	25.6	3.7	0
ERS (.67)	31.6	4.5	31.5	3.7	0
UEPS (.54)	15.7	2.3	16.2	4.4	1.03

Key: AES = Appraisal of emotions in self, AEO = Appraisal of emotion in others, ERS = Emotional regulation of self, UEPS = Utilization of emotions in problem solving

**Table 2. Mean, SD, F values of the subscales of Ways of Coping, and Alpha Coefficient Reliabilities (males = 79 to 80, females = 115 to 117)**

Scales (alpha)	Male		Female		F
	M	SD	M	SD	
PPS (.32)	9.9	3.3	9.2	4	2.09
CO (.44)	7.4	3.5	7	3.3	0.45
SSS (.36)	8.1	4.3	8.1	3.9	0
AR (.23)	7.9	3.8	6.9	3.9	3.5(p=.06)
SC (.18)	11.5	3.2	10.6	3	4*
D (.19)	8.3	3.3	7.9	3.5	1.05
EA (.43)	7.5	4.7	8.5	4.9	1.8
PR (.56)	12.84	3.9	12.2	4.5	1.1

\*  $p < 0.05$

Key: CO = Confronting coping, SSS = Seeking social support, PPS = Planful problem solving, AR = Accepting responsibility, SC = Self controlling, D = Distancing, PR = Positive reappraisal, EA = Escape avoidance

**Table-3: Results of Pearson's product moment correlation between subscales of emotional intelligence and ways of coping (N =197)**

Ways of coping	Subscales of emotional intelligence			
	AES	AEO	ERS	UEPS
CO	.13 (p =.07)	0.06	0.27**	0.09
SSS	0.08	0.02	0.04	0.12
PPS	0.20**	0.18*	0.38**	0.07
AR	0.02	-0.9	0.07	-0.01
SC	0.09	0.09	0.15*	-0.01
D	-0.02	-0.8	0.14*	0.01
PR	0.24**	0.18*	.30**	0.11
EA	-0.07	-0.1	-0.16*	-0.00

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*  $p < 0.05$

Key: AES = Appraisal of emotions in self, AEO = Appraisal of emotion in others, ERS = Emotional regulation of self, UEPS = Utilization of emotions in problem solving, CO = Confronting coping, SSS = Seeking social support, PPS = Planful-problem solving, AR = Accepting responsibility, SC = Self controlling, D = Distancing, PR = Positive reappraisal, EA = Escape avoidance

### Discussion

The main focus of the present study was to examine the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence and ways of coping across the gender if gender difference was observed across the variables used in the present study. However, there was no gender difference in any of the subscales of perceived emotional intelligence, hence correlation between perceived emotional intelligence and ways of coping were not computed across the gender. On the basis of the present and other earlier studies it may be concluded that gender differences in perceived emotional intelligence cannot be generalized although, theoretical literature tends to favor women to be more emotionally intelligent. The same is the condition in the context of gender and coping too since only one subscale, self-control showed difference across the gender.

*Perceived emotional intelligence and ways of coping:* A number of researchers have argued that emotions create different mental sets that are more or less adaptive for solving certain kinds of problems (Palfai & Salovey,

1993). Different emotions create different information processing styles. Happy moods facilitate a mental set that is useful for creative tasks in which one must think intuitively or expansively in order to make novel associations. Sad moods generate a mental set in which problems are solved more slowly with particular attention to detail using more focused and deliberate strategies. Palfai and Salovey argue that these two information-processing styles i.e. intuitive and expansive versus focused and deliberate should be effective for two different kinds of problem solving tasks- inductive problems like analogical problems like analogical reasoning and deductive logical tasks. Thus, students scoring high on emotional intelligence components may tend to use planful problem solving to cope with their stressors.

Positive reappraisal way of coping was also found to be positively and significantly correlated with three subscales of perceived emotional intelligence, that is, appraisal of emotions in self, appraisal of emotions in others and emotional regulation of the self. It may be noted that positive reappraisal way of

coping used in the present study involves efforts to cope by creating positive meaning by focusing on personal growth. It also has a religious dimension. Items on this scale included, "I changed or grew as a person", "I found new faith", etc. This coping strategy may promote adaptive cognitive reappraisal of the stressor. Appraising emotions in one self and others as well as regulating ones emotions may produce an elaboration of the cognitive-affective structure regarding a stressful encounter. It may introduce elements incompatible with the original structure. For example, the individual may realize that, negative emotion eventually subsides and that the initially associated emotions are not as threatening as initially believed. Thus, some benefit can be probably derived from adversity.

It was also found that emotional regulation of the self was positively and significantly correlated with self-controlling, which describes efforts to regulate one's feelings and actions. Research indicates that from early age self-control is a necessary skill in all arenas of life (Strayhorn, 2002). When people lack self-control they have difficulty in regulating their emotions (Brooks & Goldstein, 2004). It is then conceivable that, regulating ones own emotion is a crucial ability while using self-control as a coping strategy.

Confrontative coping, which includes aggressive efforts to alter the situation and suggests some degree of hostility and risk taking was also found to be positively and significantly associated with emotional regulation of the self. Changing the problem situation requires a good degree of self-regulation, because it involves direct and active coping efforts. It also includes potential for conflict or unpleasantness, which requires the person trying to confront and alter the problem situation to stay alert to the subtle as well as obvious changes in his or her own emotions. Students with higher emotional regulation of self are probably more confident

of handling the possible reactions from others while entering into any confrontative situation.

Emotional regulation of the self was found to be negatively correlated with escape avoidance way of coping, which involves wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the problem; it differs from distancing which suggests detachment. Avoidance types of coping typically work against people rather than to their advantage (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996); however, cognitive avoidance may be an effective way to cope with short-term stressors (Suls & Fletcher, 1985).

According to Suls and Fletcher (1985), escape avoidance based strategies fail to resolve the underlying problems that are generating stress; they can be expected to lead to greater long-term distress than more active approaches. Avoidant coping strategies lead people into activities (such as alcohol use) or mental states (such as withdrawal) that keep them from directly addressing stressful events. Generally speaking, active coping strategies, whether behavioral or emotional, are thought to be better ways to deal with stressful events, and avoidant coping strategies appear to be a psychological risk factor or marker for adverse responses to stressful life events (Holahan & Moos, 1987). Seiffge-Krenke (1995) notes that a dysfunctional coping style may include efforts to withdraw from or deny the existence of the stressor, avoiding seeking solutions and attempting to regulate the emotions.

According to Mayer and Salovey (1995), high conscious levels of emotional regulation operate at a reflective or meta level. It involves extended self-observation, requires attention, involves thoughts of the self and can be often recalled. As a coping style, escape avoidance is the very opposite of this process. Hence, they are found to be negatively associated with each other.

Distancing way of coping was positively

associated with emotional regulation of the self. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found that distancing strategies were most successful for dealing with stressful impersonal situations, but committed and engaged strategies with relevant others were most successful in reducing emotional distress in more personal situations. Emotional regulation of the self includes “the ability to reflectively engage or detach from an emotion depending on its judged informativeness or utility” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This is consistent with the present findings. It seems that the coping process of distancing and confrontative require a good amount of emotional regulation. So, students with more capacity to regulate emotion of the self are arguably smarter in deciding whether they should confront or stay away from a stressful situation.

Thus, it seems that coping processes used by students depend in part, on one or more of emotional skills although emotion regulation of the self is the component of emotional intelligence which is related to most of the ways of coping with stress and utilization of emotions in problem solving is unrelated to any ways of coping included in the present study. An intervention becomes possible if we know when and at what level the emotional skills are weak or lacking. For instance those students, who cannot appraise or regulate their own emotions properly, may fail to recognize the origins of their problems. This can adversely affect the coping process, by either delaying it or rendering it inadequate. The use of student population as a basis of drawing the sample may have limited the study. However, the present results should be treated as preliminary because alpha coefficient reliabilities of the Ways of Coping are low in our data. It is important to improve the alphas and re-examine the coping-perceived emotional intelligence linkage. Besides, in future research the coping process-emotional intelligence relationship

could also be re-examined by using ability measure of emotional intelligence, such as Mayer-Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer et al., 2002). MSCEIT is to a great extent different from Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale since the correlation between the two measures is just,  $r=.18$  (Brackett & Mayer, 2003).

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