



ETHNIC GROUP DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE WITHIN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

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2006, 12(2-3), 317-327

Resumen: This study investigated ethnic differences in the United States and Mexico on Perceived Emotional Intelligence (PEI). The investigation explored the hypothesis of ethnic variability in PEI by having African Americans, Latino Americans, Whites and Mexicans complete the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) on three factors: *Attention*, *Clarity*, and *Repair* of emotions. A total of 519 participants volunteered to complete the TMMS. The results showed that for Attention and Clarity there were significant differences among ethnic groups with Mexicans scoring lower than African Americans, Latino Americans and Whites. However, on Repair, there were no significant differences among ethnic groups. Additionally, results indicated gender differences between women and men on Attention and Clarity. Women scored higher than men on Attention and lower than men on Clarity. These findings suggest that particular ethnic groups can have notable differences in certain domains of PEI. However, researchers should be guarded in assuming that particular ethnic groups can have greater PEI, without first controlling essential socio-demographic variables.

Palabras Clave Ethnic differences; Gender differences; Emotional Intelligence; Trait Meta-Mood Scale.

Abstract: The cognitive correlates of affect intensity, together with the relationships between this variable and socio-demographic and outcome variables such as, respectively, age and anxiety remain understudied. This work analyzes age differences in affect intensity and in two types of cognitive coping strategies in threatening situations: vigilance and distraction. Also, the relationship between this two variables and their association with the level of anxiety is explored. Fifty five younger and 51 older subjects (aged 60 and more) participated in the study. The results revealed significant age differences in the assessed variables, as well as differential interrelationships between them in the 2 age groups. Also, affect intensity and cognitive coping appear to be more related to anxiety in the older subjects group. The relevance of age in the analysis of the relationships between psychological construct is highlighted

Key words: Affect intensity, Cognitive coping, Vigilance, Distraction, Anxiety, Older adults, Age differences

Título: *Diferencias étnicas en inteligencia emocional percibida en los Estados Unidos y México*

Introduction

Numerous scholars and professional practitioners, including organizations have come to believe that the construct of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which has been defined as the ability to perceive,

understand and manage emotions, is important for success in life (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Mayer and Salovey (1997) define the construct of EI as: "Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion: the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional

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and intellectual growth” (p. 10). In comparison to the empirically studied cognitive/intellectual intelligence, EI holds its’ place as an emerging construct that is gradually investigating the emotional domains of EI that are necessary for emotional competence in daily living, professional success, and healthy interpersonal relationships.

The theoretical basis for EI is based on a proposed mental set of skills and/or abilities that underlies the accurate assessment, evaluation, expression, and self-regulation of emotions (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Goleman, 1995). In the past two decades, researchers have developed theoretical models of EI. Ability models and mixed models are presently two distinct modes for comparing EI’s attributes (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). The ability model’s premise is the individual knowledge of incoming emotion-focused information processing (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In contrast, the mixed models of EI include personality characteristics/traits in addition to socialization skills along with adequate emotional functioning (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995).

From the ability model of EI, various instruments have been developed that attempt to measure this construct. Although recently, ability-based EI measures have been created in order to avoid problems associated with self-report (e.g., the *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test*, MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002), the use of self-report measures of EI have maintained their interest. For example, Petrides and Furnham (2001) defend their application with respect to ability measures (see also Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & McKenney, 2004) arguing that the intrapersonal component of EI, as

measured by self-report measures of EI, seems to be resistant to maximum-performance measurement (Petrides & Furnham, 2003).

One of the most widely used of these self-report measures of EI is the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey & Palfai, 1995), which is a measure of what Salovey’s research group has termed Perceived Emotional Intelligence (PEI), or the knowledge individuals have about their own emotional abilities (Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002). Specifically, the TMMS is a measure of beliefs concerning one’s own emotional *Attention* (amount of attention paid to one’s own emotional states), *Clarity* (understanding of one’s emotional states), and *Emotional Repair* (the ability to regulate one’s emotional states). Studies across the world have used the TMMS as a indicator of PEI, and have documented the relationship between the TMMS and behavior in laboratory settings as well as in ‘real world’ settings under which individuals engage in coping strategies (Fernández-Berrocal, Alcaide, Extremera, & Pizarro, 2006; Goldman, Kraemer, & Salovey, 1996; Salovey, Bedell, & Detweiler, 1999; Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 2000; Salovey et al., 1995; Salovey et al., 2002).

The relationship between the TMMS and psychological adjustment variables such as depression, anxiety, and overall physical and mental health has been well documented in adult samples. For instance, individuals who pay greater attention to their own emotions, individuals who score lower on emotional clarity, and individuals who report an inability to regulate their own emotional states show poor emotional adjustment on a number of measures (see Salovey, 2006 for a review; Fernández-Berrocal, Salovey, Vera, Extremera, &

Ramos, 2005). Conversely, individuals reporting greater emotional clarity and a greater ability to repair their own emotional states report higher levels of self-esteem, another important indicator of mental health (Salovey et al., 2002). Emotional repair is also associated with the ability to control intrusive and ruminative thoughts that often accompany stressful situations (Salovey et al., 1995).

Findings from research on EI have received recognition in several domains of psychology. Not surprisingly, EI has received considerable attention in the counseling profession and at the organizational level. Constantine and Gainor (2001) advocate the construct of EI in relation to counselor professional functioning and to a salient counselor skills, empathy. The authors associate counselor multicultural knowledge and awareness as important skills when servicing culturally diverse patients and view EI as a pivotal role in determining effective counseling skills for practitioners. Additionally, Ashkanasy, Hartel, and Daus (2002) view EI and diversity as new frontiers in organizational behavior research. They predict EI can have crucial implications on the selection and performance management of employees in organizations (Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000). At the organizational level, possessing high EI is important for leadership positions, working with teams, and in interviewing. Currently, organizational researchers are advocating for research in the domain of *emotions in the workplace*.

Another area that has espoused the applicability of EI has been in educational settings. In many elementary schools in the United States the current trend has been to include EI techniques into the school curriculum in order to increase students' EI competency (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso,

2000; Pfeiffer, 2001; Salovey & Pizarro, 2003).

When reviewing EI's empirical contributions, several recommendations made in experimental, educational, clinical, counseling and school psychology for conducting appropriate research have identified cultural and ethnic group inclusion in sample selection as well as cultural sensitivity in applicability of interventions in professional practice (Panigua, 2005; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991). This "push" toward culturally and ethnically sensitive research and practice has led scholars involved in the concept of EI to factor in culture and ethnicity as important variables to examine in the study of EI (Fernández-Berrocal, Martines, & Extremera, under review; Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2005; Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & Mack, 2002; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthew, 2001; Van Rooy, Alonso, & Viswesvaran, 2005).

Consequently, the adoption of a culturally sensitive framework for EI research should include consideration of cultural norms, values, and traditions of various cultural and ethnic groups when investigating cultural diversity variables in EI. As an important point of reference, cultures and ethnic groups that embrace autonomy versus dependence as part of their worldview is a variable that may cause interpretation of skewed results if such differences are not noticed. Scholars studying cultural differences have identified cultural individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 1984; 1991; 1998; Schwartz, 1990). Individualism is defined as one's emotional and autonomous independence from groups or organizations. In contrast, collectivism is defined as a collaborative dependence on groups when working on projects or other

areas of interests without the need individual recognition.

Since EI is a fairly new construct, in the sense that it has created attention within the last two decades (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) research in cultural and ethnic differences of EI is sparse. To date, studies that have explicitly focused on ethnic differences in EI within a multicultural country, even in the United States are few (Roberts et al., 2001; Sitarenios, 1998). However, pioneering efforts have led researchers to further extend their investigations to include diverse ethnic groups.

Roberts et al. (2001) investigated ethnic group differences in EI by comparing Whites, African Americans, Latino-Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Roberts et al. utilized the EI ability measure, Multi-Factor Emotional Intelligence Test (MEIS; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999) and found conflicting results. Recently, Van Rooy et al. (2005) explored ethnic differences in self-reported EI (Schutte Self-Report Inventory; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998) on three ethnic groups: Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. The authors found that Female-Hispanics scored the highest in EI and Female-Whites scored the lowest. These studies (Roberts et al., 2001; Van Rooy et al., 2005) have helped launch research on ethnic differences in EI.

The goal of this present study was to examine ethnic group differences in PEI within the United States and Mexico. We hypothesized that the diversity of our sample's ethnicities would reveal ethnic differences on PEI. For example, some ethnic groups could score high on Attention and Clarity, but low in Repair of emotions.

Method

Participants

The study comprised three major ethnic groups from the United States (African Americans, Whites, and Latino Americans) and a group from Mexico. Sample size was suitable and totaled 519 participants (Cohen, 1988). Sample consisted of 404 adult participants from the metropolitan areas of New York and New Jersey in the United States and 115 adult participants from Mexico who volunteered to participate in the study. The participant's ages ranged from 17 to 82 with a mean age of 27.75 (SD=11.35). African Americans included 144 (85 female), Latino-Americans included 154 (99 females), Whites comprised 106 (66 females), and Mexicans included 115 (58 females).

Materials and Procedure

In order to evaluate PEI, participants completed an abridged version of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS-24; Salovey et al., 1995; Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera y Ramos, 2004). The TMMS-24 is a twenty-four item Likert-type scale. The scale employs three key facets of emotional intelligence: *Attention* which conveys the degree to which individuals tend to observe and think about their feelings and moods (8 items, e.g. "I don't think it's worth paying attention to your emotions or moods"); *Clarity* which evaluates the tendency to discriminate between emotions and moods (8 items, e.g. "I am usually very clear about my feelings"); and *Repair* which refers to the subject's tendency to regulate their feelings (8 items, e.g. "Although I am sometimes sad, I have a mostly optimistic outlook"). Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with each item on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Earlier studies utilizing this scale have proven the TMMS-24 to be reliable and satisfactory (Salovey et al., 1995; Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2004).

Results

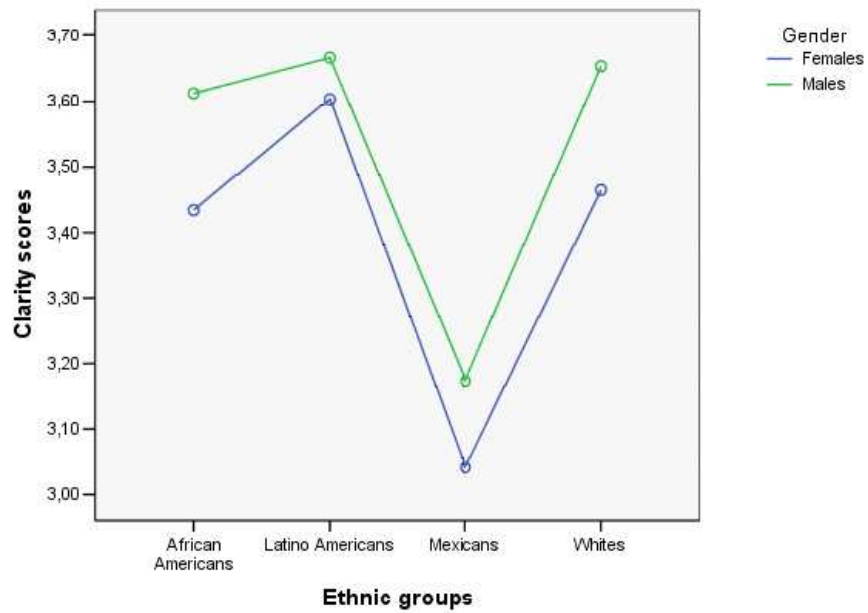
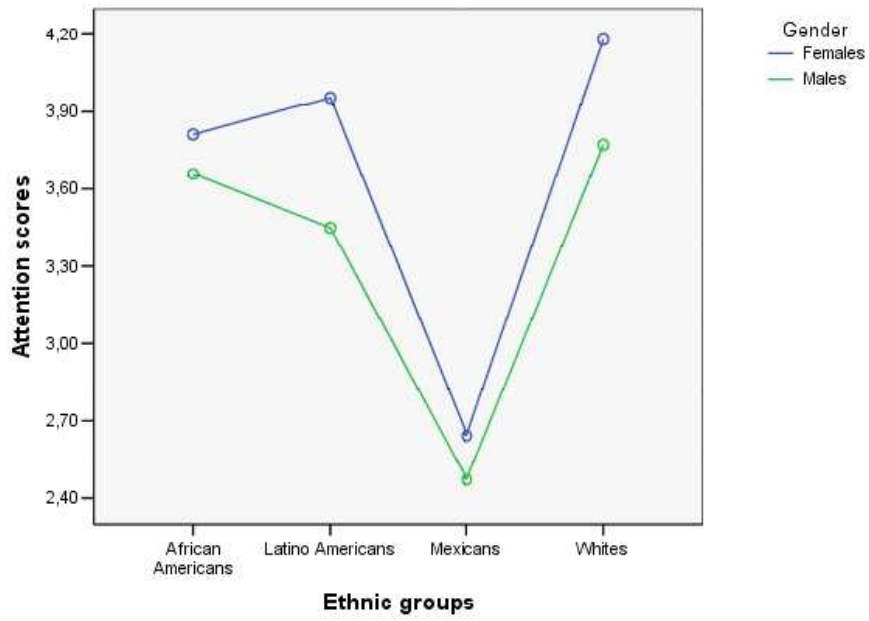
Descriptive Analyses

Means and standard deviations for demographic groups in TMMS-24 subscales are presented in Table 1. We examined the hypothesis of possible ethnic group differences of PEI by analyzing differences between ethnic groups on the three factors obtained from the TMMS-24 (Attention, Clarity, and Repair subscales). The data was analyzed with 2 (females/males) x 4 (African Americans/Latino Americans/Whites/Mexicans) ANOVAs.

With respect to Attention, there were significant differences among ethnic group means, $F(3,511) = 92.54$, $p < .001$. A post hoc analysis (Least Squares Difference, LSD) revealed that Mexicans ($M=2.56$) reported lower scores on the subscale Attention than African Americans, Latino Americans, and Whites ($M=3.73$, $M = 3.70$, and $M=3.98$ respectively; $ps < .01$). In addition, Whites obtained higher scores in Attention than African Americans and Latino Americans ($ps < .01$). There was a significant main effect of gender, $F(1,511) = 23.29$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 1). Overall, women ($M=3.72$) obtained higher scores in Attention than men ($M=3.30$). There were no statistically significant interactions between ethnic group and gender.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the demographic groups in TMMS-24 subscales

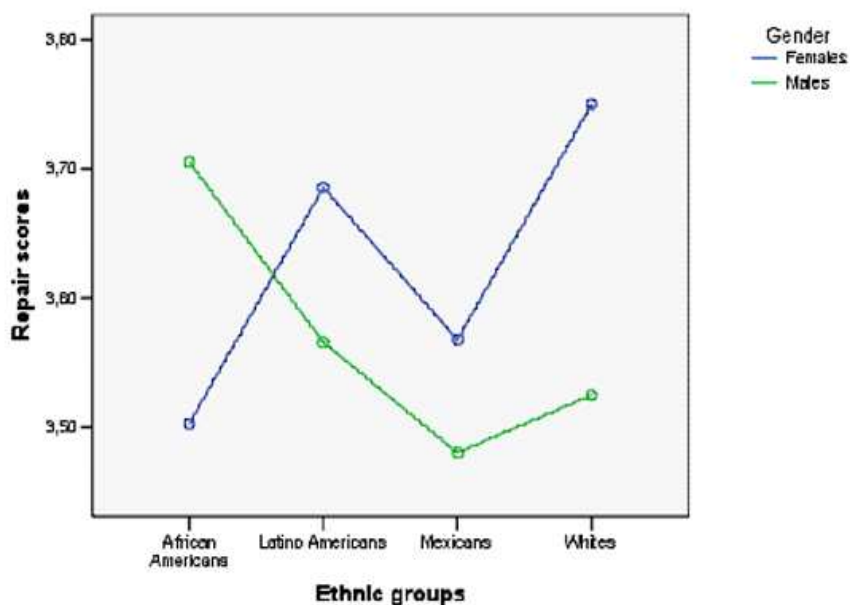
Group	N	Attention M (SD)	Clarity M (SD)	Repair M (SD)	
African Americans	144	3.73 (.72)	3.52 (.67)	3.60 (.62)	
Females	85	3.81 (.67)	3.43 (.69)	3.50 (.62)	
Males	59	3.66 (.79)	3.61 (.62)	3.71 (.60)	
Latino Americans	154	3.70 (.78)	3.63 (.68)	3.63 (.67)	
Females	99	3.96 (.71)	3.60 (.71)	3.69 (.71)	
Males	55	3.45 (.82)	3.67 (.63)	3.57 (.58)	
Whites	106	3.98 (.64)	3.56 (.71)	3.64 (.71)	
Females	66	4.18 (.52)	3.46 (.73)	3.75 (.64)	
Males	40	3.77 (.73)	3.65 (.67)	3.52 (.80)	
Mexicans	115	2.56 (.71)	3.11 (.79)	3.52 (.68)	
Females	58	2.64 (.70)	3.04 (.77)	3.57 (.59)	
Males	57	2.47 (.72)	3.17 (.80)	3.48 (.76)	
Gender	Females	308	3.72 (.85)	3.42 (.74)	3.63 (.66)
	Males	211	3.30 (.92)	3.52 (.71)	3.56 (.68)



For Clarity, there were significant differences among ethnic group means ($F(3,511) = 13.40, p < .001$). A post hoc analysis (LSD) revealed that Mexicans ($M=3.11$) obtained lower scores on the subscale Clarity than African Americans, Latino Americans, and Whites ($M=3.51, M=3.63, M=3.53$, respectively; $ps < .01$). Significant main effects were found for gender ($F(1,511)=4.8, p < .05$; see Figure 2). Overall, women obtained lower scores

($M=3.42$) than males ($M=3.52$). There were no statistically significant interactions between ethnic group and gender.

On the subscale Repair, there were no significant differences among ethnic group means ($F(3,511) = .68, p > .10$). There were no significant main effect for gender ($F(1,511)=.91, p > .10$; see Figure 3). There were no statistically significant interactions between ethnic group and gender.



Discusión

This research empirically tested the ethnic and gender differences of three factors of PEI. Specifically, we tested ethnic group differences with the TMMS-24 scale. The results showed that for the subscales Attention and Clarity there were significant differences among ethnic groups with Mexicans scoring lower. These findings are in direct agreement with our hypothesis

that there are ethnic group differences in PEI in these domains. However, for the subscale Repair there were no significant differences among ethnic groups. Future studies must explore why Mexicans scored lower, specifically on the Attention and Clarity subscales, which measure the propensity to detect and reason about feelings and moods, and the ability to distinguish between emotions and moods.

A conceivable explanation for this discrepancy appears to be that of cultural differences in value systems. According to Gouveia and Ros´ (2000) review of Hofstede and Schwartz’s model of the cultural dimensions of individualism versus collectivism, *individualism* is described as an individual’s emotional and autonomous independence toward groups or organizations. Conversely, *collectivism* is defined as dependence on groups of which the individual becomes a part. Its focus is mostly for the benefit of the collective whole rather than that of self-promotion. Unlike the United States (which is an individualistic-oriented culture) in a culture such as Mexico, which espouses collectivism, the dimensions of attention and clarification of individual emotions and moods would tend to be less stressed since the group is perceived as a single entity. Interestingly, our results indicated that Whites scored higher in Attention of emotions while Latino Americans demonstrated higher scores than Mexicans in Attention and Clarity of emotions. These findings seem to corroborate the cultural individualism practiced in the United States which, places more attention on individualistic outcomes, whether in EI or in other domains of personality entity.

In addition, it is important to control for the variables of age, education, and socio-economic background in future studies. Knowledge of socio-demographics variables would have brought additional information regarding Mexicans and thus aid in further deductions of why they scored lower on the Attention and Clarity subscales. It may be necessary to replicate this type of study with a homogeneous sample in order to have a secure and uniform composition.

Moreover, future research should utilize ability measures of EI such as the MSCEIT

(Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003) and other emotional and cognitive variables such as personality, rumination, depression, and well-being. Furthermore, future research should examine the generalizability of this study’s findings by including a larger range of ethnic groups (Asian Americans and Hispanic groups from countries such as Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, and Honduras).

Our study also observed score differences on PEI between women and men on the Attention and Clarity subscales. Women scored higher than men on Attention and lower than men on Clarity. However, prior investigations on gender differences of EI have reported that females scored higher on measures of EI than males (e.g., Day & Carroll, 2004; Mayer, et al., 1999; Schulte, Ree, & Carretta, 2004; Schutte, et al., 1998) however this gender effect is frequently minuscule (see Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). Nonetheless, participants in these investigations were mostly whites and females, which could indicate that some investigations cause ethical and cultural systematic bias. In addition, Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, and Grayson, (1999) call attention to investigations that include gender and depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, et al., 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). The authors stress that extreme caution is necessary before concluding that significant differences in gender are a causal explanation.

The vital deductions of the noted findings are obvious. First, we should be cautious in assuming that some ethnic groups can have a superior type of EI without first controlling for important socio-demographic variables as age, gender, educational background, or income. Finally, it is crucial to stress that scholars involved in investigations

regarding measurement of the construct of EI cannot ignore cultural factors in their concluding analysis. While socio-demographic data is essential for optimal statistical comparisons, the *cultural norms and values* of particular ethnic groups should be examined in order to compare how certain domains of EI (such as Attention, Clarity, Repair and others) are *perceived* and/or *learned* in particular cultures. In order to conduct empirical research on EI, researchers will need to develop cultural awareness and knowledge

of diverse cultures. Awareness and knowledge of cultural norms and values of diverse ethnic groups will ensure a better understanding of the various domains of EI measured in investigations, thus aiding in the analysis of the findings.

This research was funded by Project No. BSO2003-02573.

<p>Artículo recibido: 08-11-2006 aceptado: 15-11-2006</p>
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