

## ADOLESCENTIN EXISTENTIAL SATISFACTION AS PROCESS CONECTING SELF-IMAGE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONABILITY

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**Abstract:** 206 adolescents, aged between 16 and 18, from four high schools in Brasov, distributed in a balanced way after the gender criterion, were investigated with a battery of instruments destined to determine the factors implied in the global level of life satisfaction. Besides the questionnaire of demographic data, there were used the questionnaire of Existential Satisfaction, indicative for global level of life satisfaction, Burns questionnaires for anxiety and depression, Dean questionnaire of Social Support and three questionnaires of self-esteem, on its dimensions: physical (Clinciu Body Self-perception), psychical (Clinciu Self-perception) and social (Social Self-Esteem Inventory of Lawson, Marshall, and McGrath). The study hypothesis anticipates a significant direct link between the level of self-esteem and the level of life satisfaction and an indirect one between life satisfaction and negative emotionality (anxiety and depression). In addition, we anticipate that negative emotionality and self-esteem represent the poles of a unitary factor which is the one of adaptation. Exploratory factorial analyses applied to these sets of variables confirm the presence of the unitary bipolar factor of adaptation. It significantly correlates with life satisfaction and with school performances as well. It presents important associations with the variables gender, type of school and level of parents' schooling. Thus, negative emotionality plays a more important role for the feminine gender, its weight being less for the higher categories of age. The feeling of self, especially through its psychical and social dimensions, is more strongly represented at the good schools of tradition in the city, and within these schools at the sciences departments.

**Keywords:** existential satisfaction, well-being, negative emotionality, self-image, self-esteem.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A more and more important construct related to well-being literature is life-satisfaction. Proctor, Linley, & Malby (2009) suggest that life satisfaction in children and adolescents has received less attention compared to adult life satisfaction, which has been studied extensively for the last decades. “Measures of life satisfaction are sensitive to entire spectrum of functioning, and thus, provide indications of both well-being and psychopathology” (Proctor *et al.*, 2009:584). The well-being state has become a structural component of personality models, being investigated as a relevant dimension for the efficient functioning of self. It is found included in the great inventories of personality, either as a distinct factor or as one

of the facets of a super-factor. Thus, McCrae (2002) considers the well-being state is an expression of adult psychological development. More specifically, one of the facets of Extraversion super-factor from Costa and McCrae's NEO PI-R, E6, is called Positive Emotions, being considered by the two authors to be the best predictor of psychological well-being. On the other side, among the twenty basal scales of CPI, Gough & Bradley (2002) include one which is called Well-being (Wb). The persons with high scores to Wb are self-confident, good at coping with pressure, alert and energetic, able to get a long well-being with others. The low scores at the Wb are described as ill at ease socially, tense and nervous, prone to willful or headstrong behaviour.

In the evaluative model of self elaborated by Clinciu (2010) this is conceived as the integrative instance for four major structural sub-dimensions. Out of these, two of them - physical dimension and emotional dimension - have a preponderantly biological substantiation, being basal dimensions. The other two - cognitive dimension and social dimension of self - are preponderantly gained, being superior dimensions that were elaborated later in ontogenesis. The expression of superior integrative capacity of self is represented by its good functioning which is made evident through a superior level of adaptability, a good physical and psychical state of the person, the feeling of personal self-efficacy and high self-esteem. Its dysfunctional expression is represented by the negative emotionality that is managed by self, outlined by the high level of anxiety, depression and self-dissatisfaction, by a low independence on the account of a high need of social assistance and support. Thus, self functioning can be thought as a continuum which implies negative emotionality at one pole and at the other one adaptive efficiency doubled by a high feeling of self-esteem. In a magazine of literature concerning life satisfaction, Proctor, Linley, & Malby (2009) put its levels into connection with demographic factors and personality factors. The authors refer to the link between life satisfaction and physical or psychical health, or between life satisfaction and general level of the person's productivity. In this category they include employment, goal and motivation, hope, achieving personal standards and self-efficacy. They also emphasize the role and involvement in life satisfaction a parental marital status, siblings, social support, parenting style and family functioning. For the mentioned authors life satisfaction has environmental and cultural determinants, such as environmental quality, life events, and acculturation and culture values. The concept involves risk-taking behaviour, as violence, victimization, and bad sexual behaviour. Low life satisfaction is also correlated with physical disabilities, and mental disorders. Frequent invoked psychopathological problems of life satisfaction are eating disorders (anorexia and

bulimia), and obesity, depression, loneliness, suicide, insomnia, and emotional disturbances.

In accordance with the model proposed by Marques, Pais-Ribero and Lopez (2007), subjective well-being is comprised of three distinct components, namely positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction seems to be a "global evaluation by the person of his or her life" (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991:150). No matter if subjective evaluation about own life satisfaction is a global one or interferes to specific domain of life, evaluation seems to be a multidimensional one, involving physical or psychological aspects, intrapersonal or interpersonal outcomes, perennial or contextual-specific traits or domains. Bipolar nature of life satisfaction is reflected in its strong association with extraversion, proactive behaviour, pro-social activities, stress-resilience and active coping, internal locus of control, high self-esteem, self-efficacy and positive self-concept. On the other hand low levels of life satisfaction may correlate with anxiety, depression, social stress (Huebner et al., 2000), high level of stress, chemical abuse, aggressive behaviour and neuroticism (Fogle et al., 2004). Some studies explore the relationship among life satisfaction, body image and eating disorders (Zullig, Pun, & Huebner, 2007; Korkeila et al., 1998).

## **2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES**

The goal of the present survey is to study a Romanian instrument intended for investigating existential satisfaction of pubescents and adolescents, students in low and high secondary school levels. The instrument we have elaborated consists in 20 items and has been conceived through an empirical method taking into consideration the already existing instruments of life satisfaction.

Secondly, we intend to render evident the relationships between existential satisfaction and the other two components of well-being (Huebner et al., 1996), what the positive affects and the negative ones are. In our survey the negative affects include anxiety, depression and dependence (the high need of

social support). The positive affects refer to self-image through self-efficacy and self-esteem, the latter including physical, psychical and social components. The model that arises for operationalizing well-being (Figure 1) is similar to the one proposed by Huebner (1996), the latter consisting in three components: existential satisfaction, negative

emotionality and self-image. The difference comes from the fact that the last two components define a unitary bipolar factor which we named adaptation of self. In this context life satisfaction is the direct resultant of integrative efforts of adaptation of self and not only a component of its well-being.

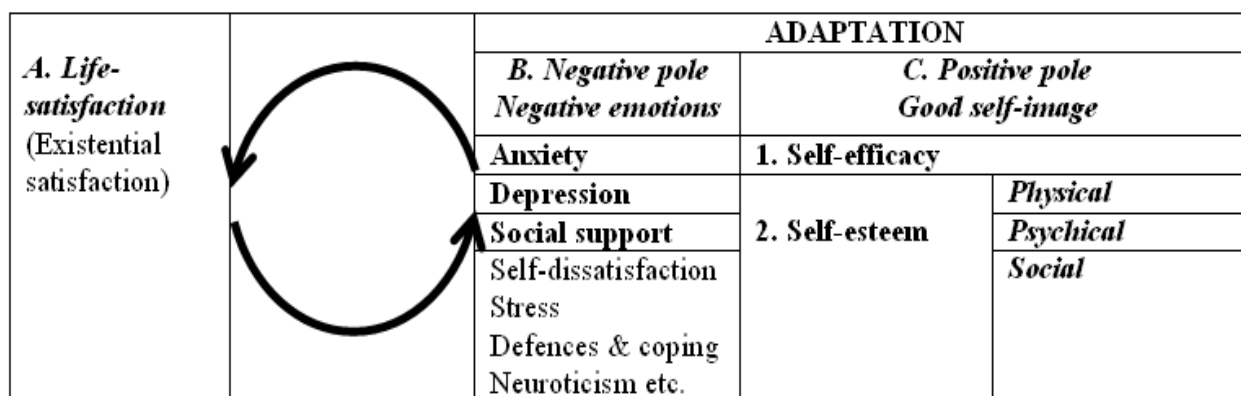


Fig.1 Model of operationalizing well-being

Third, the constructs involved in survey were put into connection with demographic variables in order to find gender differences, differences associated with the level of parents' schooling and of types of attended high schools and departments. Our survey anticipates the existence of some significant gender differences in connection with the place and role of negative emotionality in the process of adaptation of self which could have a more important weight for feminine gender. On the other hand, all the three components of self-esteem (physical, psychical and social), together with a stronger feeling of personal efficacy, could have a bigger weight for masculine gender. Secondly, existential satisfaction will be associated, at close but significant levels, with the two components of the factor of adaptation of self due to its symmetric bipolar nature. It is also expected that existential satisfaction should associate directly with the level of parents' schooling and with the indicators of the level of family's socio-economical and cultural status. Students' school performances, expressed by grade point average and main participants' averages (Romanian and mathematics) will be associated directly with existential satisfaction

and with self-image (self-efficacy and self-esteem) and inversely with negative emotionality.

### 3. METHOD

**3.1 Participants.** Participants included 206 pupils, from two high schools from Brasov, aged between 15 and 20 years (M=17.13, SD=1.51), equally distributed numerically in two age groups, 16 respectively 18 years. Partition after gender criterion and type of high school (good and less good) is also a balanced one (102 males and 104 females; 101 from "good" high schools and 105 for the less good ones).

**3.2 Measures.** All participants completed measures of Clinciu's Existential Satisfaction Inventory (ESI), negative affect (anxiety, depression and social support), and self-efficacy plus self-image questionnaires (physical, psychical and social self-esteem).

**Existential satisfaction:** *Existential Satisfaction Inventory* (Clinciu, 2006) consists in 20 items which measure a homogeneous construct, namely the one of existential satisfaction, which results from summing several distinct facets: physical and psychical

well-being, psychical endowment, life context, relational, family and physic dimension. The items score on a bipolar scale from -3 to +3. The questionnaire has a high internal consistency, alpha Cronbach for the entire test being of 0.86, for the first and second part of 0.76, respectively 0.78, and between halves (correct Spearman-Brown method) of 0.79.

**Negative affect:** *Burns Inventory of Anxiety* (BIA) has the advantage that, although it is single phase, it operationalizes anxiety in three distinct categories, namely anxious feelings (6 items), anxious thoughts (11 items) and physical symptoms as a result of anxiety (16 items), giving a consistent expression to the physiological reactions to stress. *Burns Depression Inventory* (BDI) consists in a list of 15 depressive symptoms that are scored from 0 (not at all) to 3 (a lot); out of their summation there results a synthetic indicator of the level of depression. The instrument has a good concurrent validity with Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). *Questionnaire of Social Support* (QSS, Dwight Dean) comprises a number of 24 items that are scored on a scale with 5 steps, from strong agreement to strong disagreement, these items measuring not only the need for external support and help – a major way of stress decreasing – but also the social seclusion.

**Efficacy and Self-Esteem:** *Self-efficiency Scale* (SES of Sherer, Maddux, Mercandate, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, Rogers, 1982) consists of 23 items rated from 1 (very little) to 5 (heavily). The author of the theory of social learning, Bandura, demonstrates the existence of a very close connection between self-esteem and the feeling of self-efficacy. *Questionnaire of Self-perception* (QSP, Clinciu, 2010) consists of 30 items which are rated on a bipolar scale from -3 to +3 which express self evaluation, easiness in decision-making and attitude towards risk. This tool provides on one hand a self-depreciative component (negative) of self-esteem which is very pronounced in depressed persons and, on the other hand, a self-appreciative component (positive). The algebraic sum of the two components reveals the synthetic image of self-esteem, with important particularities on temperament and gender. *Corporal Self-perception* (CSP,

Clinciu, 2010) consists of 48 items which are rated on a bipolar scale from -3 to +3 which express physical self-evaluation. The questionnaire offers a synthetic measure of a homogeneous construct which is indicative of physical dimension of the satisfaction connected to own body and therefore to the corporal component of self-image. *Social Self-esteem Inventory* (SSEI) was created by Lawson, Marshall and McGrath (1979) and also evaluates self-esteem, but in social context. The subjects with a deficit of assertiveness or with a personality disorder usually have a social self-esteem which is inferior to the other categories of subjects.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to see if the manner in which we have operationalized the concept of well-being is in accord with the real situation, we have made an exploratory factorial analysis. Conditions for such an analysis are achieved because the determinant is positive, the value of KMO index is 0.80, Bartlet test of sphericity shows a  $p < .001$ , and MSA is an excellent one. The principal components with Varimax rotation were used, with the number of factors initially unspecified. There were extracted two factors with eigenvalues higher than 1 (3.28 and 1.11), which cover 62.69% out of the entire variance.

Table 1 Factorial loading for seven study variables

	One-Factor Model	Two-Factor Model	
		Factor 1 Negative affect	Factor 2 Esteem_Efficacy
Anxiety	-.73	.87	-
Depression	-.85	.77	-
Social support	-.61	.75	-
Corporal self-esteem	.57	-.48	.33
Psychical self-esteem	.70	-	.66
Social self-esteem	.61	-	.86
Self-efficacy	.69	-	.78

Results that are summarized in the above Table 1 confirm unitary but bipolar nature of the extracted factor, giving saturations of over 0.50 for all factorized variables. The identified factor is that of adaptation, followed by

studying its relationships with the other factors and variables, especially with existential satisfaction. Through rotation, anxiety, depression and social support obviously form the pole of negative affection while self-efficacy, psychic and social self-esteem form the negative pole which is called efficacy and self-esteem. Corporal self-esteem has saturations at levels that are close between the two poles, but we prefer to add it to the latter pole because it has positive values of saturations as that one. Relationships between the factor of adaptation and other variables of the survey are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation between adaptation and other study variables

	Existential satisfaction	Gender	Mark grade	High school type
Adaptation	.56**	-.31*	-.18*	.15*
Effect size	1.12	.33	.18	.15

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level \*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Although all the four correlations in Table 2 are statistically significant, the effect size is extremely strong only between adaptation and existential satisfaction, being just average for gender.

Table 3 Statistical significance for Existential Satisfaction sub-dimensions

	Gender M/F	Number N	Mean x	Sigma D. σ	Difference Δ	Signific. t	Probabil. p																																																																				
TE Existential Satisfaction	M	102	33.47	12.53	2.43	1.39	0.166																																																																				
	F	104	31.04	12.58				TE1 Endowments	M	102	1.65	0.80	0.23	2.21	0.028*	F	104	1.88	0.69	TE2 Support	M	102	1.88	0.80	0.17	1.45	0.149	F	104	1.71	0.86	TE3 Context	M	102	0.33	1.24	0.13	0.80	0.423	F	104	0.46	1.11	TE4 Well-being	M	102	2.10	0.69	0.55	4.57	0.001***	F	104	1.55	1.00	TE5 Family	M	102	1.91	1.05	0.06	0.47	0.640	F	104	1.85	0.85	TE 6 Physic	M	102	2.00	0.88	0.23	1.84	0.067
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The general score of existential topics questionnaire does not show significant differences after gender. Significant differences are still on two of the questionnaire facets, one in favor of girls, the other one in favor of boys. Thus, girls score at a superior level compared to boys at the dimension of endowments ( $t(102, 104) = 2,21, p = 0.028$ ), which refers to a combination of elements that include learning, intelligence, personal efficacy and affectivity. On the other side, boys score significantly high at well-being ( $t(102, 104) = 4.57, p < .001$ ), consisting in physical endowment, health, soul wealth and happiness.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, the goal of the present survey was to study a Romanian instrument intended for investigating existential satisfaction of early adolescents and adolescents. The newly

created instrument has good psychometric qualities and gives a unitary image for life satisfaction at the considered ages. Secondly, in our research the model that arises for operationalising well-being is similar to the one proposed by Huebner (1996), consisting in three components: existential satisfaction, negative emotionality and self-image. The difference comes from the fact that the last two components define a unitary bipolar factor which we named adaptation of self. Existential satisfaction is in a good relationship with adaptation factor. Both of them have some gender and family's socio-economic and cultural determinants. Thirdly, students' school performances, expressed by grade point average and main subjects averages (Romanian and mathematics) are weakly associated with existential satisfaction and with the adaptation factor. The feeling of self, especially through its psychical and social dimensions, is more strongly represented at the

good schools of tradition in the city, and within these schools at the sciences departments. Further researches need to prove the validity of the proposed model of well-being in other areas, such as stress, work, sports or human psychiatric pathology.

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