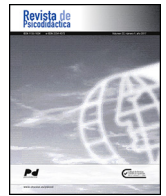




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Original

Understanding the Connections between Self-perceptions and Future Expectations: A Study with Spanish and Portuguese Early Adolescents[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the relationships between Spanish and Portuguese adolescents' positive self-perceptions (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy) and future expectations. The sample includes 534 adolescents, aged 12–16 ($M = 12.54$, $SD = .77$). Despite the economic instability in southern European countries, adolescents from this study showed positive self-perceptions and high future expectations, with some significant differences related to sex and nationality. Regression analyses show the predictive capacity of self-perceptions for future expectations. Besides, the structural equations models confirm that there is a positive causal effect of self-perceptions on the future expectations of the Spanish and Portuguese adolescents. The main implication of this research is to strengthen the self-confidence of the younger generation during adolescence. This will have a great impact on the development of career goals and the perceived likelihood of realizing one's goals in the future. This issue is essential to keep qualified adolescents in their own countries.

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Las relaciones entre autopercepciones y expectativas futuras: un estudio con preadolescentes españoles y portugueses

RESUMEN

Este trabajo estudia la relación entre las autopercepciones (autoestima, satisfacción vital y autoeficacia) y las expectativas de futuro de adolescentes españoles y portugueses. La muestra incluye 534 adolescentes, con edades comprendidas entre los 12 y 16 años ($M = 12.54$, $DT = .77$). A pesar de la inestabilidad económica de los países del sur de Europa, los adolescentes de este estudio manifiestan autopercepciones positivas y altas expectativas de futuro, con algunas diferencias significativas con respecto al sexo y la nacionalidad. El análisis de regresión muestra la capacidad predictiva de las autopercepciones sobre las expectativas de futuro. Además, los modelos de ecuaciones estructurales confirman el efecto causal positivo de las autopercepciones sobre las expectativas futuras de los adolescentes españoles y portugueses. La implicación principal de esta investigación es fortalecer la autoconfianza de las nuevas generaciones durante la adolescencia. Esto tendrá un gran impacto sobre el desarrollo de objetivos profesionales y la probabilidad percibida para cumplir los objetivos en el futuro. Esta cuestión es esencial para mantener a los adolescentes cualificados en sus propios países.

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Palabras clave:

Expectativas de futuro

Autoestima

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Introduction

Southern European countries have been heavily affected by economically adverse circumstances. National unemployment rates rose in 2015 to 12–13% in Italy and Portugal and to 23–25% in Spain and Greece (Eurostat, 2015). These rates were higher among

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youths under the age of 25 (31.2% in Portugal, 40.9% in Italy, and nearly 50% in Spain and Greece). Regarding sex differences among youths from Spain and Portugal, data show higher unemployment rates among girls (47.1% in Spain and 33.6% in Portugal) than among boys (46.5% in Spain and 30.7% in Portugal), although it is not known that these differences are significant. As a consequence of a lack of employment, more highly qualified young people are migrating to central and northern European countries. The starting point of this study is the interest to know the future expectations of adolescents from these countries in this historic moment, particularly in times when the economic circumstances do not work in young people's favor. Bengtson, Elder, and Putney (2012) point out the importance of historical conditions and change for understanding individual development.

Future expectations have been defined as beliefs about the probability that a specific event will occur in the future (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002). Previous research has revealed the association between future expectations and higher engagement (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007), increased persistence to complete tasks (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004) and better academic performance (De Volder & Lens, 1982).

There are individual differences in the construction of these expectations. Future expectations are built in the context of other self-perceptions: the existence of self-confidence at the present makes the person able to imagine a more positive future and hope for better future results (Sánchez-Sandoval & Verdugo, 2016). In this paper, we analyze the relationship between the future expectations of early adolescents in two southern European countries (affected by the financial crisis), Spain and Portugal, and other self-perceptions (self-esteem, life satisfaction and self-efficacy). It is important to analyze now the early adolescents in order to understand future generations.

Self and future expectations

Self-perception plays an important role in identity construction, one of the main tasks of adolescence. Recent studies have emphasized self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy as concepts to consider when it comes to self-evaluations (Reina, Oliva, & Parra, 2010). They all have an emotional impact because they refer to the way one perceives and evaluates different personal aspects.

Rosenberg (1986) defined self-esteem as an evaluative aspect of the self-concept based on the individual's overall perception of himself/herself. Life satisfaction, another self-perception, is conceptualized as a cognitive dimension of subjective or personal well-being, which, in turn, is considered a psychosocial component of quality of life (Galíndez & Casas, 2010). Self-efficacy refers to the perception of one's ability to organize and execute the necessary actions to attain certain achievements or outcomes (Bandura, 1997). It has to do with the perception about the ability to achieve a goal or a task. Although these concepts are different they tend to be interrelated. For example, feelings of self-efficacy will influence an individual's degree of engagement and persistence in performing tasks, which will affect task resolution, with the following impacting self-esteem (Schunk & Meece, 2006). Positive self-evaluations about these aspects will encourage adolescents to act, motivating them to pursue their life objectives.

The maturation of adolescents' cognitive abilities, including the understanding of time, contributes to the process of identity construction. This includes the integration of the *self* in the past, present, and future. This turns adolescence into a very important period for individuals to think about their future possibilities and expectations. The extent to which people expect that an event will actually happen influences planning and setting goals, guiding their behavior and development (Bandura, 2001; Nurmi, 1991; Seginer, 2008).

Certain constructs of the self -such as self-assessment and stability- are important in adolescents' tendency to orientate themselves toward the future (Seginer, 2009). In general, people with positive feedback about themselves will feel confident to carry out current projects and will also have a good future. A recent work on self-esteem in a sample of Israeli Jewish teenagers showed that self-esteem was positively associated with future orientation (Seginer & Shoyer, 2012). Castro and Sánchez-López (2000) have reported associations between satisfaction in different life areas and the achievement of life goals in the present and in the future. Besides, Jackman and MacPhee (2017) found positive correlations between future expectations and self-esteem and they even pointed out that these variables may serve as protective factors against engaging in risky behavior during adolescence.

Some researchers (Sanjuán Suárez, Pérez García, & Bermúdez Moreno, 2000) emphasize the limited future expectations of people with low self-esteem and negative feelings about their abilities. A study of the future aspirations of urban adolescents (Sirin, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves, & Howell, 2004) also supports the idea that such feelings of capability, along with personal skills (like self-reliance), were closely related to what young people might or might not do in the future. Galicia Moyeda, Sánchez Velasco, and Robles Ojeda (2013) also highlight that individuals' beliefs about their effectiveness to control events that affect their lives influence the choices they make, their aspirations, and their levels of effort and persistence. In this sense, expectations of success also depend on people's confidence in their intellectual abilities and on task difficulty (Kaplan Toren, 2013).

The arrival of pubertal changes at the beginning of adolescence has a significant psychological impact that influences adolescents' self-perceptions and personal identity. These self-perceptions tend to be more negative as a result of the continuous adaptations that young people have to do regarding the personal and social changes they are facing (Sánchez-Sandoval, 2015). Coelho and Romão (2017) also showed in their study that students retained at the end of 5th grade had greater declines in all self-perceptions.

Despite this slight decrease, their appraisals of themselves and of their future are generally very positive. Schmitt and Allik (2005) indicated that these positive self-evaluations are culturally universal. One of our interests is to know about these positive evaluations and future expectations among early adolescents from two different countries (Spain and Portugal).

Contextual factors and future expectations

The role of contextual factors in the construction of global future expectations in adolescence has received little attention, although other related concepts, like Future Time Perspective (FTP) and temporal attitudes, have been analyzed. Maybe, academic expectations is one of the dimensions that have been more studied, mainly researchers have examined contextual factors that affect academic expectations (Menéndez, Calvo, & Caro, 2016). The formation of the time perspective is related to many factors: some are learned in the process of socialization, cultural values, religion, education, socioeconomic status, family model etc. (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). FTP may be influenced by the development of the individual's lifetime, profession, and political or economic instability, in addition to personal experiences. There is clear evidence of the influence of cultural aspects on the FTP: people in disadvantaged educational and socioeconomic conditions have restricted FTP (Nuttin, 1985). Other aspects such as norms, values and living conditions have also shown a relationship with adolescents' future orientation (Seginer, 2009; Wade, 2008). Corica (2010) highlighted the geographical context as an important element configuring representations about the future. Furthermore, studies conducted by the Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE, 2012) indicated the trend of young Spaniards to have

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