

On Emotional Intelligence

by Peter Salovey and
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Consider how people describe the emotionally traumatic events in their lives. Two friends of ours, Jim and Tim (not their real names, which are Robert and William), recently terminated long standing, romantic relationships that had seemed to us more likely to end in marriage. Mingling with us at an SPSP/Division 8 happy hour last summer, Jim said, "I felt empty, sad, confused like my life had no meaning. It was as though a part of me were missing. But, after a while, I tried to put it in perspective. I used it as an opportunity to learn something about myself. In the depths of my depression, I felt miserable, but gradually thoughts about both the positive things I had done and the mistakes I had made came to me clear as a bell. But I must be boring you with this tale of unrequited love. Tell me, what's going on with you the two of you?" (We never answer such questions, of course, while doing research.)

A little bit later that same evening, Tim stopped by to share a drink and a bit of conversation. Compare his thoughts to those of Jim. "So we broke up after 6 years. I don't know what got into her. The things she said! It was terrible, everything hurt — headaches, stomach aches, but who cares anyway? I don't even think about it anymore. That's life, I guess. Now I feel fine, really." Tim then continued by describing his latest experiment, including details of a four-way interaction that we sincerely

regret there is insufficient space to describe here. After about a half an hour of this, we decided that a second drink might not be such a bad idea after all and excused ourselves in search of the bartender.

Jim and Tim deal with their negative feelings in quite different ways. Jim could articulate what he was feeling clearly, he seemed to learn from his feelings — he used his sadness to gain insight about himself and moreover, expressed concern about the impact that sharing his feelings was having on us. Rather than carefully introspecting about his internal experience, Tim substituted for feelings words like "fine." He described his emotions in terms of external events and vague bodily pains. Tim seemed content to ignore the feelings and hoped they would dissipate over time, and apparently didn't care about his personal impact on us as he described the Methods section of his next JPSP article.

For the past several years, we have been trying to articulate a concept that captures the variability with which people experience, communicate about, and regulate their moods and emotions. We called this Emotional Intelligence and have defined it as a set of skills hypothesized to contribute to the accurate appraisal, expression, and the effective regulation of emotion in oneself and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). We chose the term emotional intelligence both because some would read it as an oxymoron and to those the concept would be provocative — "rule your feelings, lest your feelings rule you," exclaimed Publilius Syrus more than 2000 years ago — and to others it might evoke what has often been left out in discussions of both

emotion and intelligence. The emotional intelligence framework acknowledges that moods and emotions can be organizing responses that adaptively focus cognitive activities and actions. They arouse, sustain, and direct activity (Leeper, 1948), and are not best viewed as disorganized, chaotic, and immature reactions (Woodworth, 1940). Thus emotional intelligence is best thought of as a type of social intelligence involving the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide thought and action (Mayer & Salovey, in press).

Some of our empirical work is now addressing the processes that may underlie emotional intelligence and documenting expected individual variability in those processes. In one study, we explored the ability to recognize consensually agreed upon emotional qualities of objects in the environment. We asked 139 adults to view a series of faces, color samples, and abstract designs and to rate the emotions suggested by them. Some individuals were much more skilled at identifying the consensual responses than others. This skill was associated with the ability to respond empathically to other people (Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990).

In another set of studies, the experience of moods was found to consist of more than just a feeling state such as happiness or anger. It also seems to include mood management processes whereby individuals actively try to facilitate or inhibit the experience of their moods (Mayer, Salovey, Gombert-Kaufman, & Blainey, 1991). Individual differences in the tendency to self-regulate feeling states — captured by an instrument called the Trait Meta-

Mood Scale — appear to be associated with recovery from traumatic experiences and reductions in unproductive ruminative thinking following trauma (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1991). Individuals who attend to their feelings, experience them clearly, and know how to regulate them, seem to be better able to communicate such feelings to others using the language of emotional terms, while those individuals who lack such skills are more likely to report physical symptoms (Goldman, Salovey, Mayer, & Kraemer, 1991).

Although the value of the emotional intelligence construct to personality and social psychology is still unclear, we are encouraged by these preliminary findings. Moreover, we believe that the idea of emotional intelligence has heuristic value in drawing together previously unintegrated literatures in social, personality and clinical psychology. Further, we believe that emotional intelligence may help us to understand positive mental health. Emotional intelligence seems to make individuals who possess it a pleasure to be around. In contrast, deficits in emotional intelligence may be associated with a variety of problems in adjustment. People who cannot learn to regulate their feelings may indeed become slaves to them. Individuals who cannot recognize emotions in others may behave cloddishly and become socially ostracized. Others may over-regulate their feelings and thus experience an impoverished emotional life and even act in sociopathic ways. Some individuals may become obsessed with manipulating the feelings of others for their own gain — the charismatic style of some television evangelists comes to mind.

We hope that emotional intelligence could serve as an

organizing framework for understanding emotions in self and others and the regulation and adaptive use of feelings. Certainly, our work has had personal relevance. Confronting emotionally tumultuous situations used to give us heartburn and headaches. But since we've learned to employ a sophisticated affective lexicon, we now can communicate exactly how these situations make us feel. . . fine.

References

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SPSP Paid Membership Increases

Jim Blascovich announced good news regarding SPSP membership at the February Executive Meeting. Paid-up membership was up 6.2% on February 1, 1991, with the biggest increase among student affiliates (99.2%) and non-APA members (32.7%) compared with February 1, 1990. Hopefully, this trend will continue throughout the year and into 1992. All members who still owe 1991 dues are asked to remit them as soon as possible to Jim Blascovich.

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