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Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents: How it Relates to Giftedness

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
IN ADOLESCENTS:
HOW IT RELATES TO GIFTEDNESS

A Specialist Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Educational Specialist in School Psychology

by
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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ADOLESCENTS:
HOW IT RELATES TO GIFTEDNESS

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The current study addresses the concept of emotional intelligence and how it relates to gifted adolescents. Until recently, it was not possible to test the theory of emotional intelligence. With the advent of the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory and BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version, it became possible for the first time, to measure emotional intelligence in adults and adolescents. However, up to this point, there has been very little if any empirical research conducted with gifted adolescents and emotional intelligence. In addition, there has been a long-standing debate within the scientific literature concerning the social emotional adjustment of academically gifted adolescents. On one side of the debate are researchers who argue gifted individuals are poor in social emotional adjustment. On the other side of the debate are researchers who claim that gifted individuals are actually higher in social emotional adjustment than their nongifted peers. Therefore, the current research was conducted to provide a sample (n=100) for gifted adolescents on the Bar-On EQ-i, Youth Version, and to add additional empirical research to the debate on gifted adolescents. Results from the current study confirmed three of six hypotheses. Specifically, gifted adolescents scored significantly higher than their nongifted same age peers on the Adaptability dimension, Stress...
Management dimension and on the Total EQ composite of the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version. Over all the current findings support the view that gifted adolescents are socially and emotionally well adjusted.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

What is an emotionally intelligent person? Could one spot them walking down the street? What is it that gives one person the edge over another? Within the past five years the concept of emotional intelligence has received considerable attention. Since the publishing of Daniel Goleman’s book “Emotional Intelligence” (1995), this concept has gained general acceptance among the public. This acceptance is not surprising since intuitively the concept of emotional intelligence makes sense. Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to “know one’s own emotions, manage one’s own emotions, motivate oneself, recognize emotions in others, and handle relationships” (p. 43). It is evident that some people are more skilled in these five areas than are others. For example, think of the business executive who is able to talk his way into very lucrative business deals versus the unemployed man who has had six different jobs in the last three months. There could be many reasons why these two men differ; level of emotional intelligence could be one.

The business world is one area where emotional intelligence has gained widespread acceptance. With the birth of a new millennium, it has become evident that the face of business is drastically changing. Where cognitive intelligence was once the standard, it alone is no longer enough. Corporations now want to hire people they feel have good interpersonal skills as well as good cognitive skills (Goleman, 1998). Not
only are businesses hiring more emotionally intelligent people but also more emotionally intelligent people are now starting their own businesses. For example, in recent years we have seen the emergence of new Internet based businesses, such as “Amazon.com” and “Yahoo.com.” These businesses were born out of interpersonal ingenuity and creativity, not procedural formulaic ideas. For this reason, one could argue that the CEO’s of these businesses are not only high in cognitive intelligence but possibly high in emotional intelligence as well. These CEO’s were able to convince others to help them make their dream businesses a reality.

Emotional intelligence is not confined only to the business world. One could argue that certain elected officials, rock stars, movie stars, authors, etc., are high in emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, at least initially, there was no way of testing to determine whether people were truly emotionally intelligent. For this reason, the idea of emotional intelligence was heavily criticized among scholars, and it was debated whether or not emotional intelligence actually existed. To help settle this debate, tests have now been developed to measure the construct of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Bar-On & Parker, 2000). In 1997, Reuven Bar-On constructed a measure called the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory, which measured emotional intelligence in adult populations. The test was quite effective in measuring emotional intelligence in adults, but it completely neglected child and adolescent populations.

For this reason Bar-On and Parker (2000) constructed the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version, which aimed to specifically measure child and
adolescent populations. As a result of this new test, several normal populations of children and adolescents have now been measured. However, up to this point, child and adolescent populations outside the normal population have yet to be measured. Specifically, child/adolescent gifted populations have not yet been measured. Therefore, the purpose of the current research is to measure a sample of the gifted adolescent population on the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version in order to provide a description of these youth in comparison to a norm group.

The following literature review will be separated into three sections. First, a brief overview of the social intelligence literature that preceded the theory of emotional intelligence will be discussed. Second, the theory of emotional intelligence from its inception in 1990 to its current state will be discussed. Finally, research pertaining to gifted adolescents and their levels of social adjustment will be addressed.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

History of Social Intelligence

In order to understand the theory of emotional intelligence it is necessary to first explain its roots in social intelligence. E. L. Thorndike (1920) first defined social intelligence as “the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls and to act wisely in human relations” (p. 228). Thorndike believed that social intelligence was a separate intelligence independent of abstract and mechanical intelligence. This belief was one that proved to be somewhat difficult for researchers to demonstrate (Cronbach, 1960). Early on, social intelligence gained wide spread acceptance within the scientific community. People began to design instruments to measure the construct of social intelligence (Hunt, 1928; Chapin, 1939; Feffer, 1959). The most popular of the scales developed was the George Washington Social Intelligence Test (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). The George Washington scale was comprised of five main subtests: judgment in social situations, memory for names and faces, observation of human behavior, recognition of mental states behind words, and sense of humor. The test was widely used and underwent several revisions through the years of 1927 to 1949 (Walker & Foley, 1973).

Despite the popularity of the George Washington Social Intelligence Test, it was found to be ineffective at actually measuring social intelligence (Cronbach, 1960). The
reliability of the test was not disputed, but the validity was often called into question (Walker & Foley, 1973). Many researchers believed that the test was not measuring the construct of social intelligence at all (Grosvenor, 1927). In the end, the test was found to be a better measure of abstract intelligence rather than social intelligence (Thorndike, 1936; Woodrow, 1939). Over the years several other tests were developed to measure social intelligence, but none of them were successful either (Cronbach, 1960). With no viable way to measure social intelligence researchers started to lose interest in the construct and its popularity waned. No doubt, Cronbach’s (1960) statement that “after fifty years of intermittent investigation, social intelligence remains undefined and unmeasured” (p. 319) added to the decreased popularity in social intelligence.

In recent times, social intelligence has once again gained popularity within the psychological scientific community. One theorist in particular, Sternberg (1996), has spent considerable time developing his theory of successful intelligence. Successful intelligence involved the combination of three intelligences working together: analytical, creative, and practical. Sternberg (1999) stated, “one's ability to achieve success in life depends on one's capitalizing on one's strengths and correcting or compensating for one’s weaknesses through a balance of analytical, creative, and practical abilities in order to adapt to, shape and select environments” (p. 290). He believed that current as well as past tests of general intelligence have failed to measure abilities (analytical, creative, and practical intelligence) outside the range of our traditional view of intelligence (abstract and mechanical intelligence). With this point in mind, Sternberg pushed for new tests
that not only measure abstract and mechanical intelligence but analytical, creative, and practical intelligence as well.

Analytical intelligence involves one's ability to analyze a problem and to make judgments concerning the best way to go about solving that problem. It involves being able to select an appropriate strategy and employing it when confronted with different types of problems. Sternberg (1999) argued that analytic abilities are not fixed and that they can be improved by providing people with theory based formal instruction. This instruction would involve directly teaching people the skills needed to solve certain types of problems. For instance, one could be directly taught how to utilize context clues in reading passages.

Creative intelligence involves one's ability to solve novel problems. It includes going beyond a traditional set of procedures for solving problems and, instead, creating solutions to problems based on the uniqueness of the current situation. A person who is skilled in creative intelligence should be able to find solutions to problematic situations that he/she has never before encountered. Creative intelligence is seen in multiple domains such as writing, science, art, music, etc. According to Sternberg (1999), creativity across domains is not equal. For instance, some people may be highly creative in art, but be very poor at creative story writing. Creative intelligence like analytic intelligence can be improved by providing proper instruction (Davidson & Sternberg, 1984).
Practical intelligence is the last of the three intelligences described by Sternberg, and it is also the one that is most closely connected to social intelligence. People skilled in practical intelligence should be able to effectively solve everyday real world problems. For example, someone high in practical intelligence should be able to successfully solve work related problems, interpersonal relationship types of problems, and any other problems that one might encounter in a normal day. People are able to solve real world problems by employing what Sternberg refers to as “tacit knowledge.” Sternberg (1999) defined tacit knowledge as “what one needs to know in order to work effectively in an environment that one is not explicitly taught and that often is not verbalized” (p. 300). In essence, it is the skills that people learn through their cumulative interactions with the environment that enable them to solve new real world problems when they encounter them. Sternberg believed that everyone possesses different levels of analytical, creative, and practical intelligence. It is expected that people exhibit strengths and weaknesses among the three intelligences. The utilization of the three intelligences together is requisite to being successful, hence the name successful intelligence. Next, the issue of emotional intelligence and what it means to be emotionally intelligent will be discussed.

**Emotional Intelligence - Theory & Definitions**

The theory of emotional intelligence first came out of research conducted by Mayer and Salovey. In their landmark article, “Emotional Intelligence” (1990), the researchers defined emotional intelligence as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to
guide one’s thinking and actions." According to Mayer and Salovey (1990), emotional intelligence is a “subset of social intelligence” (p. 189). As stated earlier, one of the main problems with social intelligence was that it was very broadly defined. The definition provided by Thorndike did not explain any of the inner processes that one must use in order to act wisely in human relations. Emotional intelligence differs from social intelligence in two ways. First, emotional intelligence explicitly lists a specific set of mental abilities that one must use in order to be considered emotionally intelligent. Second, emotional intelligence focuses primarily on how one processes emotional content, whereas social intelligence does not even address the role of emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993a).

Mayer and Salovey (1990) stated that emotional intelligence was closely related to one of the personal intelligences described by Gardner. Gardner (1983) divides the personal intelligence into two components: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal intelligence involves one's ability to be able to identify the way people differ in terms of their moods, temperaments, and intentions. A person truly skilled in interpersonal intelligence would have the ability to be able to identify the true intentions of individuals even when those individuals go to great lengths to hide their true feelings. Upon learning the true intentions, the interpersonally intelligent person would next use the information obtained to persuade those people in a direction of his/her choosing.

The intrapersonal intelligence is the second component of Gardner’s personal intelligence. It is the intrapersonal intelligence that most closely resembles Mayer and
Salovey's emotional intelligence. Specifically, intrapersonal intelligence as described by Gardner (1983) involves

Access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior. (p. 239)

The initial framework Mayer and Salovey (1990) provided for their theory of emotional intelligence consisted of three parts: appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion, and utilization of emotion. The appraisal and expression of emotions was broken down into two categories: appraisal of emotions in self and in others. According to the theory, people appraise and express emotion themselves both verbally and nonverbally. The verbal appraisal and expression of emotion takes place when people use verbal language (words) to accurately describe what they are feeling. This ability would include being able to verbally tell someone else (or themselves) that they are feeling happy, sad, anxious, angry, shameful, etc. when asked. Appraisal and expression of emotion can take place on a nonverbal level as well. For instance, people could express the emotion of happiness and warmth towards others by shaking their hand or hugging them. Anger could be expressed towards someone by punching that person in the face or by giving "the silent treatment." People who are better able to perceive, interpret, and express their emotions accurately are considered to be more emotionally intelligent.
Emotionally intelligent people should also be able to accurately identify the appraisal and expression of emotions in others. Persons skilled in this ability can read the emotions of others by interpreting their expressions of nonverbal language, such as smiles, frowns, hugs, kisses, handshakes, slaps, etc. Effectively perceiving others’ nonverbal language has practical applications in the real world. Mayer and Salovey (1990) stated, “those who can accurately interpret others emotions by reading nonverbal language should have an easier time engaging in interpersonal relationships” (p. 192). In essence, correctly identifying another person’s emotions allows one to respond accordingly, which should result in less misunderstandings and possibly less interpersonal conflict. A person who is truly high in emotional intelligence will have the added ability of being able to identify false displays of emotions in others as well (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Empathy, “the ability to comprehend another’s feelings and to re-experience them oneself” (Mayer & Salovey, 1990, p. 194), is another ability that should develop in individuals who are adept at reading other’s nonverbal language. According to these researchers, accurately reading another’s nonverbal language helps one to understand how that person feels and to respond to that person appropriately. Responding appropriately to others emotions, in turn, allows a person to be more interpersonally successful.

Regulation of emotion in one’s self and in others is the second component of Mayer and Salovey’s (1990) framework of emotional intelligence. The regulation of
one's own emotions involves trying to maintain happy, pleasant moods and avoid negative moods. There is evidence to suggest that a person’s level of “openness” to experiencing emotions plays a key role in effectively regulating emotions (Mayer & Geher, 1996; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Openness gives people experience with their emotions, which in turn, helps them better to cope with disturbing emotions in the future. People may go about regulating their emotions in a variety of ways. For instance, people who are in a good mood could, as one option, choose to interact with a person who will likely help them maintain their good mood. The person typically chosen will have fewer successes in areas important to them, so that they can maintain a positive view of themselves. By carefully selecting the person with whom to associate, people can minimize the chances of negative interactions and therefore maintain a positive mood.

Another way that persons could maintain a positive mood would be for them to continue to engage in the activity that put them into the positive mood in the first place. For example, if they were listening to rock music and it put them into a good mood, they could choose to continue to listen to that particular style of music for the rest of the day. Also, once they have associated rock music with a positive mood, they could listen to rock music as a strategy for promoting a positive mood in the future. People also regulate their own emotions by engaging in certain prosocial behaviors, such as helping others, to bring them out of their negative moods (Mayer & Salovey, 1990; Salovey, Hsee, & Mayer, 1993). According to these researchers’ theory, the act of helping another makes
people feel better about themselves and therefore regulates mood in a positive way (i.e., putting them into a positive mood).

The ability to regulate one’s own emotions is central to the theory of emotional intelligence. Individuals who gain a sense of control over their moods can engage in what Mayer and Salovey refer to as “mood repair” (Mayer & Salovey, 1990, 1995; Salovey, et al., 1993). People who engage in mood repair are able to recognize that their current negative mood is only temporary, and as a result they actively seek out ways to combat their negative mood. Combating negative moods enables people to persist in times of hardship and to actively repair their moods. Finally, individuals may try to seek out a variety of emotional experiences within a safe context. For instance, human beings may choose to attend plays, operas, and other experiences that result in feelings of sorrow. Mayer and Salovey suggest that individuals engage in this behavior to simply practice experiencing negative emotions when there is nothing at stake, thereby allowing these individuals to be better prepared for dealing with negative emotions when they truly arise.

Emotionally intelligent individuals not only regulates their own emotions but the emotions of others as well. A person engaging in this type of behavior knows how to say the right things at the right time in order to get people to respond in certain ways. For instance, politicians are often able to get people to vote for them based on promises made. The same is true for charismatic religious leaders who can convince people to donate large amounts of money to their church. Think of the people who are able to
easily gain acceptance into particular groups by carefully adjusting what they say to the group, so that they fit in. Effective regulators of emotions in others are able to withhold their true feelings to better promote their interpersonal relationships. This ability can be used for good as well as bad. Good-natured persons can use this ability to influence others to do positive things (such as giving money to charity). Unfortunately, untrustworthy individuals may use this ability to manipulate and take advantage of others. People who are able to regulate their own emotions and those of others as well (in a prosocial manner) are considered to be engaging in emotionally intelligent behavior.

The final component of Mayer and Salovey’s (1990) theory of emotional intelligence includes how utilizing emotional intelligence can assist one in solving problems. The authors have listed a few ways that emotions can assist in solving problems: flexible planning, creative thinking, and motivating emotions. Flexible planning has to do with what occurs when individuals engage in mood swings. Switching from one mood to another should assist one in thinking about things in a different way. For instance, persons in a bad mood may fail to see any future possibilities for themselves. However, if they shift into a good mood, they may start to see some real options for their future that they were unable to see while in a bad mood. In this way, switching from one mood to another may actually help people see more options than they would see otherwise, thereby enabling them to plan accordingly.
Emotions may also assist people in being more creative when approaching problems (Mayer & Salovey, 1990). People who are in good moods may be better able to see the relations between items that would otherwise appear unrelated and as a result be able to solve problems accordingly. The theory seems to suggest that one’s ability to “think outside of the box” may be directly related to one’s emotional mood state.

Finally, emotions may serve as a source of motivation to persist in times of challenge. The act of being in a positive mood may allow individuals to try harder and overcome challenges that they may otherwise view as insurmountable. Thus, according to Mayer and Salovey’s (1990) initial theory of emotional intelligence, the level at which people are able to accomplish each of the above components would determine how emotionally intelligent they are. Despite the appeal of the initial theory of emotional intelligence, Mayer and Salovey felt that their theory was too vague and that it needed to be further clarified and revised (Mayer & Salovey 1993, 1997).

In 1993, as a response to criticism, Mayer and Salovey slightly refined their theory to better demonstrate how emotional intelligence qualified as an intelligence. It was suggested by some (anonymous researchers) that emotional intelligence was nothing more than a set of personality traits and that it should not be considered an intelligence for this reason. Mayer and Salovey (1993) responded to this criticism by stating that “personality traits (such as extroversion) are behavioral preferences rather than mental abilities. Knowing what another person feels, in contrast, is a mental ability” (p. 435).
From that point, the authors went on to qualify emotional intelligence as an intelligence by explicitly stating that it is a set of mental abilities.

A few years later, Mayer and Salovey (1997) once again revised their theory of emotional intelligence. The revision of the theory included two new changes: addition of a new component to the theory and placing the theory in a developmental framework. First, the definition of emotional intelligence was changed to include a new component: the ability of thinking about feelings. The revised definition was stated as follows:

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 provoke emotional and intellectual growth.

(Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10)

The thinking about feelings component of theory focused on how one analyzes, understands and applies emotional knowledge. One of the first things that a person learns is the similarities and differences between emotions. For example, a person learns how to distinguish between closely related emotions such as “like” and “love” and the opposing emotions of love and hate. Next, the person learns how certain emotions are typically tied to specific situations for instance, how sorrow usually accompanies the loss of a friend or loved one. The emotionally intelligent individual also learns how complex emotions can be experienced together (such as loving and hating someone at the same time). Finally, the highest level of thinking about emotions involves understanding the
sequences in which emotions cycle (such as anger turning to rage, which may ultimately result in shame).

The second major change that Mayer and Salovey (1997) made was to place their theory into a developmental framework. They made this decision in order to illustrate that emotional intelligence abilities should develop with age over time. The new framework suggests that fundamental skills (such as identifying emotion in one’s self) should develop first with more complex abilities (managing emotions of others) developing later in life. “People who are high in emotional intelligence are expected to progress more quickly through the abilities designated and to master more of them” (p. 10). Within the developmental framework, the role of parental teaching of emotions (both verbally and nonverbally), situational factors (such as poverty or abuse), and other experiences are all considered to affect a person’s given level of emotional intelligence.

Since its inception in 1990, the theory of emotional intelligence has been continually evolving. Initially, Mayer and Salovey (1990) defined emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one’s own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions" (p. 189).

In 1993, as a response to criticism, Mayer and Salovey qualified emotional intelligence as a true intelligence by explicitly stating that emotional intelligence involves a specific set of mental abilities. The most recent and substantial revision of the theory took place in 1997, when Mayer and Salovey added a ‘thinking about feelings’ component to the definition and placed the theory into a developmental framework.
Since 1997, the theory has yet to undergo any further revisions. Next, the issue of gifted adolescents and their level of social adjustment will be discussed.

**Gifted adolescents and social adjustment**

A number of studies conducted have shown gifted adolescents to be socially and emotionally adjusted, while two studies have suggested otherwise. Before describing these studies, it is first important to define giftedness. One of the most popular and most agreed upon definitions of giftedness comes from what is known as the Marland (1972) definition:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high-performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. (p.10)

Children capable of high-performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas:

1. General intellectual aptitude
2. Specific academic aptitude
3. Creative or productive thinking

With this definition in mind, the next logical question to ask is how does one identify a gifted individual? For the most part, identification procedures vary depending on the program for which the applicant is applying. For instance, gifted programs that are
interested mostly in cognitive ability or academic aptitude tend to rely primarily on standardized test scores (SAT, ACT, IQ, etc.) to determine eligibility. Some of the most common ways to identify gifted individuals include teacher reports, standardized testing, direct observations of behavior, and analyzing samples of individual creative work (Jackson, 1980). For the purposes of this thesis, the following literature reviewed will focus solely on the social emotional adjustment of academically gifted individuals. The majority of the studies reviewed use either the SAT, ACT, or an intelligence test to determine giftedness. It is important to note that many gifted and talent programs use the SAT/ACT total scores to determine eligibility. The use of the SAT/ACT to determine eligibility is acceptable because research has shown that IQ and SAT/ACT total scores are significantly related (Longstreth, Walsh, Alcorn, & Szeszulski, 1986).

There has been a long-standing debate within the scientific literature concerning the social emotional adjustment of academically gifted individuals. Using Neihart’s (1999) definition

Adjustment refers to an individual’s pattern of responding to environmental demands. Persons with positive adjustment are able to cope effectively with the demands of life. Persons with negative adjustment have maladaptive coping strategies or lack enough coping skills to deal effectively with stress. (p.10)

On one side of the debate are researchers who claim that highly gifted individuals are poor in social-emotional adjustment (Hollingworth, 1942). On the other side of the debate are researchers who claim that gifted individuals are actually higher in social
emotional adjustment than their nongifted peers (Terman, 1925, 1959; Baker, 1995; Holliday, Koller, & Kunce, 1996).

Although there are numerous studies that support positive social emotional adjustment within the gifted, there are at least two studies that would suggest otherwise. For instance, Cornell (1990) investigated the self-concept and peer status of unpopular gifted youth attending a summer enrichment program exclusively for the gifted. The study revealed that the gifted students who were rated as unpopular were lower in social self-concept, academic self-esteem, and had less prestigious paternal occupations.

Coleman and Cross (1988) conducted a study involving 15 academically gifted high school students. The purpose of the research was to determine whether the 15 students experienced their giftedness as a social handicap. The investigators conducted two interviews with the gifted students in order to answer that question. The results of the study indicated that most of the students did indeed experience their giftedness as a social handicap. Specifically, the students indicated that the act of being gifted stigmatized them.

Several studies have been conducted that have demonstrated positive social emotional adjustment in the academically gifted. Grossberg and Cornell (1988) looked at the level of personality adjustment in eighty-three 7-11 year old children with IQ’s in the 120 –168 range. Results obtained from the Revised Personality Inventory for Children and The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory School Form indicated that levels of personality adjustment increased with intelligence. Specifically, the authors found
that the children with higher IQ's (168) were reported to have less behavior problems and less anxiety. Self esteem and social skills were also rated as positive across the entire group.

Garland and Zigler (1999) assessed the emotional and behavioral adjustment of 191 intellectually talented youth (13-15 years old) using the Child Behavioral Checklist. The Child Behavior Check List assesses internalizing and externalizing problems such as anxiety, depression, aggression, and delinquency. The results of the study demonstrated two things. First, on the average, the gifted individuals in the study fell within the normal range for emotional behavior adjustment. Second, the more highly gifted individuals (when compared to their moderately gifted peers) in the study were actually found to have less problems.

Another study conducted by Sayler and Brookshire (1993) looked at the social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment of three different groups of eighth grade students: an accelerated group (students who had skipped a grade), a gifted group, and a group of regular eighth grade students. The results of the study revealed that both the accelerated group and the gifted group both rated higher on social relationships and emotional development than the regular group comparison. The gifted group and accelerated also tended to have less behavior problems in school.

A study conducted by Norman, Ramsay, Martray, and Roberts (1999) investigated possible differences between moderately gifted and highly gifted students’ level of social adjustment. The authors of the study hypothesized that highly gifted students would have
lower levels of social adjustment compared to moderately gifted students. However, the results of the study indicated no significant differences between the two groups. Further, both moderately gifted and highly gifted students were found to possess average levels of social adjustment.

Finally, Neihart (1999) conducted a review of the literature pertaining to the impact of giftedness on psychological well being. After reviewing all the pertinent literature, Neihart reached the conclusion that “gifted students are at least as well adjusted and are perhaps better adjusted than their nongifted peers” (p.16).

The giftedness literature reviewed demonstrates that the debate, as to whether or not gifted individuals are socially and emotionally adjusted, has yet to be settled. However, the majority of the giftedness research appears to support the theory that gifted adolescents are socially and emotionally well adjusted.

Purpose

The purpose of the current research is to provide a sample for gifted adolescents on the Bar-On EQ-i, Youth Version. As stated in the preceding literature review, there have been inconsistent findings on the level of social emotional adjustment within the gifted. However, the majority of the research seems to suggest that on average gifted adolescents do in fact have a higher level of social emotional adjustment when compared to their same age peers. It is the current researcher’s belief that if gifted students do truly score higher on social emotional adjustment scales then they should also possess the ability to score higher than average on measures of emotional intelligence. With this
thought in mind, it is hypothesized that gifted adolescents will score higher on the Total EQ composite of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version measure of emotional intelligence than their same age peers as defined in the standardization sample. In addition, it is further hypothesized that gifted adolescents with score higher on all five individual dimensions (Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Adaptability, General Mood, and Stress Management) of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version than their same age peers.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

Subjects

100 adolescents between the ages of 12-16 (with a mean age of 14.42) participated in the study. The students were selected to participate based on their acceptance to a Verbally and Mathematically Precocious Youth (V.A.M.P.Y) program held over the summer at Western Kentucky University. To gain entry into the summer program the adolescents had to be completing their 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th grade year in school and meet the qualifications for other talent searches such as the Duke Talent Identification Program within the past four years. In keeping with the Marland definition, the adolescents who meet the qualifications for the Duke Talent Identification Program also meet the definition of giftedness. In addition, all participants had to obtain qualifying scores by the end of the seventh grade year on the SAT (500 or above on verbal or math) or ACT (18 or higher on math, 21 or higher on verbal) in order to be eligible for the program. Written parental consent and adolescent assent was obtained for every participant in the study.

Instruments

The BarOn EQ-i Youth Version was designed by Reuven Bar-On and James Parker (Bar-On & Parker, 2000). It’s construction was based around Reuven Bar-On’s 1997 definition of emotional intelligence: “Emotional Intelligence is an array of
emotional, personal, and interpersonal abilities that influence one’s overall ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 14).

Bar-On went on to explain,

Emotionally intelligent people are people who are able to recognize and express their emotions, who possess positive self-regard, and are able to actualize their potential capacities and lead fairly happy lives. They are able to understand the way others feel and are capable of making and maintaining mutually satisfying and responsible interpersonal relationships, without becoming dependent on others. These people are generally optimistic, flexible, realistic, and successful in solving problems and coping with stress, without losing control. (Bar-On & Parker, 2000, p. 33)

The BarOn EQ-i Youth Version taps several components put forth in the Mayer and Salovey (1997) definition of emotional intelligence. In addition, at the time of the current research the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version is the only instrument that may measure emotional intelligence as defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997, p. 10). Therefore, it was selected to be used in the current research.

Student participants were given the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version, which consists of 60 items across 5 dimensions. This test yields five composite scores (Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Adaptability, General Mood, and Stress Management) and a Total EQ score based on all five dimensions. The Intrapersonal dimension assesses a person’s level of emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, and
independence. The Interpersonal dimension evaluates a person’s level of empathy, ability to interact with others, and social responsibility. The Adaptability dimension assesses an individual’s ability to be realistic, flexible, and solve real world problems. The Stress Management dimension appraises a person’s stress tolerance and impulse control ability. The General Mood dimension evaluates an individual’s overall level of happiness and optimism. The internal consistency across all 5 dimensions (and the Total EQ composite) of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version is relatively good, with internal consistency coefficients ranging from .74 to .89. Pertaining to validity, the initial factorial and construct validity of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version has proven to be within the satisfactory range. All of the composite scores are standard scores, normalized with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15.

Parents were asked to rate their child on overall abilities in five areas of Emotional Intelligence as defined by Daniel Goleman (1995) and Peter Salovey (1990). The ratings were conducted on a 7 point Emotional Intelligence Likert scale of 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.” At the time of this paper, the validity and reliability of the Likert scale have yet to be established or published. It is believed that when the reliability and validity of the scale are published it will be at an acceptable level. Therefore, the researcher has decided to include the scale in the current study in order to provide more data.
Procedures

Consent forms were mailed to the parents of all the participants in the V.A.M.P.Y program. The parents who granted consent were mailed an Emotional Intelligence Likert scale form, a self addressed stamped envelope, and instructions explaining how to complete the Likert scale. The Likert scale instructed parents to rate their child’s overall emotional intelligence.

Participant’s SAT/ACT scores were provided by the Western Kentucky University Center for Gifted Studies for comparison with the survey results. In order to assure that the participants did not miss any of their VAMPY classes, testing was conducted during the evening hours in a nearby auditorium. Each participant was given an assent form to sign prior to receiving any of the testing instruments. A master list containing names and codes was checked off as each participant handed in their assent form. Two participants refused to sign the assent form and were excused from the study. The remaining participants were all given folders with individualized codes on them. Inside each folder was a copy of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version and instructions for completing it. All participants were orally instructed to complete the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version and to record their answers privately. No student was permitted to leave the auditorium until everyone was finished. Once every student had completed the BarOn EQ-i, Youth Version they were instructed to turn in their folder, thanked and permitted to leave. EQ-i Youth Version questionnaires were sent to the publisher MHS, Multi-Health Systems Inc., to be scored.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A one-sample t-test, comparing sample values against population values, was used to evaluate the following hypotheses. First, it was hypothesized that gifted adolescents would score higher, on the Total EQ composite of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version measure of emotional intelligence, than their same age peers as defined in the standardization sample. Second, it was further hypothesized that gifted adolescents would score higher, on all five individual dimensions (Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Adaptability, General Mood, and Stress Management) of BarOn EQ-i Youth Version, than their same age peers. A one tailed t-test was chosen, due to the directionality of the hypotheses stated above.

The gifted adolescents sample achieved a significantly higher score on the Total EQ composite of the BarOn EQi Youth Version than their same age peers as defined in the standardization sample, $t(99) = 3.85, p < .01$. In addition, the gifted adolescents also scored significantly higher on the Adaptability dimension when compared to the normed standardization sample, $t(99) = 7.96, p < .01$. Finally, a significantly higher score was noted on the Stress Management dimension for the gifted adolescents, $t(99) = 3.00, p < .01$. Gifted adolescents did not score significantly higher than their same age peers on the Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and General Mood dimensions. See Table 1 for means
and t values relating to the Total EQ composite and all five dimensions of the BarOn EQi Youth Version.

Table 1

Means and t values for the BarOn EQ-i: YV Dimensions and Total EQ Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total EQ</td>
<td>106.111</td>
<td>3.854*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>102.462</td>
<td>1.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>101.013</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>112.259</td>
<td>7.960*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>104.521</td>
<td>2.997*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Mood</td>
<td>101.570</td>
<td>1.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .01, one tail

Three of the six hypotheses were confirmed. Gifted adolescents did score significantly higher than their same age peers on the Total EQ composite, Adaptability dimension, and Stress Management dimension. Furthermore, mean results from the parent completed EQ Likert scale adds additional support to the confirmed hypotheses, M = 5.71, SD = 1.2, n = 68. In addition, a Pearson product-moment correlation revealed a significant positive correlation between the EQ Likert scale and the Total EQ composite of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version, r (67) = .268, p < .05. Also, a significant positive correlation was found between the EQ Likert scale and the Interpersonal Dimension of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version, r (67) = .261, p < .05. Finally, a
significant positive correlation was noted between the EQ Likert scale and the General Mood Dimension of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version, $r(67) = .246, p < .05$.

However, the EQ Likert scale was not found to be significantly correlated to the Intrapersonal Dimension, $r(67) = .191, p < .05$, Stress Management Dimension, $r(67) = .131, p < .05$, and the Adaptability Dimension of the BarOn EQ-i Youth Version, $r(67) = .191, p < .05$. Overall, it does appear, at least on a global level, that gifted adolescents do possess higher emotional intelligence than their same age counterparts, as indicated by their scores on the Total EQ composite and parental ratings.

**Discussion**

The current researcher set out to answer the question “Do gifted students possess higher emotional intelligence than same age peers?” Results from the current study seem to suggest that at least in three specific areas (Adaptability, Stress Management) and on the Total EQ composite, the answer is yes. In terms of overall emotional intelligence (Total EQ), the gifted adolescents did score significantly higher than same age peers. In addition, the gifted adolescents scored significantly higher on the Adaptability and Stress Management Dimensions of the BarOn EQi Youth Version. This finding is consistent with Neihart’s (1999) review of the literature, which found that gifted adolescents were “at least as well adjusted and perhaps better adjusted than their nongifted peers” (p. 16). Specifically, “the ability to handle stress and to effectively deal with environmental demands is consistent with what it means to be a well adjusted individual” (p. 10). With
In this definition in mind, it does appear that gifted adolescents are better adjusted than normal same age peers.

However, results from the current study also indicated that the gifted adolescents did not score significantly higher than their same age peers on the Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and General Mood dimensions of the BarOn EQi Youth Version. Still, it should be noted that the gifted adolescents did not score any worse than their same age peers. In fact, the gifted adolescent sample actually scored as well as their same age peers on all three dimensions (Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and General Mood).

Over all the current findings support the view that gifted adolescents are socially and emotionally well adjusted (Grossberg & Cornell, 1988; Sayler & Brookshire, 1993; Garland & Zigler, 1999; Norman et al., 1999). In addition, the significant scores obtained on the Adaptability, Stress Management, and Total EQ dimensions partially supports the hypothesis that gifted adolescents possess higher levels of emotional intelligence than their same age peers. Finally, the current findings lend support to the belief that emotional intelligence and cognitive intelligence are not the same construct.
CHAPTER FIVE

Summary

With the advent of the Bar-On EQi and Bar-On EQi Youth Version it became possible for the first time to practically test the theory of emotional intelligence in children and adolescents. In addition, emotional intelligence in adolescents and how it relates to giftedness could also be tested. Results from the current study partially supported the hypothesis that gifted adolescents should be higher in all dimensions of emotional intelligence and Total EQ than their same age counterparts. When discussing the relationship between emotional intelligence and how it relates to giftedness a number of things can be noted. First, gifted adolescents in the current study scored significantly higher than did same age peers on the Total EQ composite of the BarOn EQi Youth Version. Second, gifted adolescents scored significantly higher compared to same age peers on the Adaptability and Stress Management dimensions of the BarOn EQi Youth Version. Finally, when looking at the other three dimensions (Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and General Mood) of the BarOn EQi Youth Version, gifted adolescents scored as well as their same age counterparts.

Future Research

The current research examined how emotional intelligence related to gifted adolescents. However, the current research did not examine how specific levels of general aptitude (as measure by the SAT/ACT) compared to emotional intelligence. This
measurement could be done by examining individual SAT/ACT scores and comparing them to individual scores on the BarOn EQi Youth Version. Future research may want to pursue this investigation. In addition, considering the developmental nature of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), it would be beneficial for future research to focus on how emotional intelligence relates to gifted children, gifted adults, and gifted elderly. Also, longitudinal research (concerning emotional intelligence) involving both gifted and normal populations could be very insightful. Both groups could be tested on their emotional intelligence as children, adolescents, and adults. The differences in emotional intelligence between the two groups could be noted and their levels of success throughout life could be recorded.

Moreover, it would be extremely useful for future research to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and the special education population. Emotional intelligence has not traditionally been studied in special education students; thus their potential in this area is unknown. Special education students may have significant strengths in emotional intelligence, which through proper enrichment may increase their chances at living successful lives. Finally, future researchers may want to consider using other up and coming measures of emotional intelligence to provide a point of comparison to the BarOn EQi: YV (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000).
References


