



## Positive and Negative Affect And Conflict Management Styles in Mexican Adolescent High-School Students

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### ABSTRACT

In order to contribute to the discussion on conflict management in adolescence in the school context, this paper analyses the relationships between two components of mood (positive and negative affect) and three conflict management message styles (self-oriented, other-oriented, and issue-oriented), in a sample ( $N = 197$ ) of Mexican high-school students, aged 15 to 18 years old. The participants answered the Spanish version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and the Conflict Management Message Style Instrument (CMMS). In the results, the self-oriented style correlated positively with negative affect, the issue-oriented style correlated positively with positive affect, and the other-oriented style did not correlate with any components of mood.

### KEYWORDS

Emotions, Conflict management, Conflict resolution.

According to Montes, Rodríguez and Serrano (2014), although in the last 30 years the number of studies on the role of emotions in the processes of conflict has significantly increased, it remains a relatively unexplored field. In this framework, the research on the relationship between emotions and conflict in adolescent samples in the school context has received only a few attention by researchers. Because of this, and in order to contribute to the discussion on this issue, the present study aimed to analyze the relationships between two components of mood (positive and negative affect) and the conflict management styles in a sample of Mexican high school students.

The conflict management style can be defined as "the specific behavioral patterns that individuals employ when dealing with conflict" (Ann & Yang, 2012, p. 1021). Ross and DeWine (1988) proposed to evaluate these styles through verbal messages used by individuals to manage conflict situations. In this way, these authors identified three conflict management message styles: a) the issue-oriented style maintains that the problem can be solved without jeopardizing the relationship and emphasizes that both parties must deal with the problem; b) the other-oriented style emphasizes overlooking the problem and keeping the other party happy; and, c) the self-oriented style reflects an emphasis on the speaker's personal interest.

Some recent studies in Mexico have contributed to conceptualize the conflict management styles of Mexican adolescents into Ross-DeWine theoretical framework (e.g., Luna, 2014, 2016; Luna y Laca, 2014). In this context, the present study aimed to further develop this line of research studying the relationships of the three conflict management message styles proposed by Ross and DeWine (1988) and the two-factor model of mood proposed by Watson and Tellegen (1985).

According to Watson and Tellegen (1985), the basic structure of affect is composed of two dominant and relatively independent dimensions: a) the positive affect, which reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert; and, b) the negative affect, which reflects subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement. The authors claim these dimensions are not opposed (*i. e.*, they aren't negatively correlated among them in a strongly way), but that these dimensions are relatively independent in the sense that each of them can be high or low regardless of the other.

In order to evaluate these two dimensions of mood, Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988) developed the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (PANAS). The PANAS is a self-report measure composed of two 10-item mood scales corresponding to neg-

ative and positive affect, respectively. According to authors, a low positive affect is characterized by sadness and lethargy, whereas high positive affect is a state of full concentration, high energy, and pleasurable engagement. In turn, negative affect is understood by the authors as "a general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness" (p. 1063). A low negative affect is characterized as a state of calmness and serenity, whereas high negative affect is a state of high presence of any variety of cited aversive moods.

Previous studies have found relations between emotions and conflict management and negotiation (e.g., Coles, 2011; Druckman & Olekalns, 2008; Linder, 2014); however, there are only a few studies which have analyzed this issue focusing on mood. In this framework, the main antecedent of the present research is the study of Montes *et al.* (2014), which analyses the relationship between five conflict management styles (integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating and avoiding) and two dimensions of mood (positive and negative affect) in a sample ( $N = 440$ ) of Spanish university students, aged 17 to 48 years. In their results, the integrative style of handling conflicts was related with positive affect, whereas dominating style was related with both positive and negative affect.

Because of the previous studies have been conducted on samples of adults and emerging adults, the present study was proposed to analyze the correlations between these variables in a sample of high school adolescents in order to contribute to the discussion on the relationship between mood and conflict management in adolescence in school context.

### METHOD

#### Participants

The sample ( $N = 197$ ) was composed of high school students from the city of Guadalajara, Mexico, with age-range 15 to 18 years ( $M = 16.51$ ,  $DS = 0.88$ ). 93 (47.2%) of the participants were males and 104 (52.8%) females.

#### Instruments

**Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS).** The original instrument by Watson and Tellegen (1985) is composed of two 10-item mood scales corresponding to negative and positive affect, respectively. Sandín, Chorot, Lostao, Joiner, Santed and Valiente (1999) realized the translation of the PANAS into Spanish in a study on a sample of 712 university students of Madrid (Spain). In this study, the authors subjected the 20 items to an exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and

their findings showed a factorial structure in accordance with the original instrument. The coefficient of reliability Cronbach's alpha reported by Sandin *et al.* (1999) were, in the sample of males of .89 and .91, and in the sample of females of .87 and .89, for positive and negative affect, respectively.

**Conflict Management Message Style instrument (CMMS).** This questionnaire consists of 18 items distributed in three subscales according to the model of Ross and DeWine (1988): a) self-oriented, b) issue-oriented, and c) other-oriented. The CMMS was originally created for Ross and DeWine (1988). Mejía and Laca (2006) and Laca, Mejía and Mayoral (2011) made the translation into Spanish on samples of Mexican and Spanish university students. Later, Luna and Laca (2014) realized a validation study on a sample ( $N = 1074$ ) of Mexican students, age-range 11 to 25. The coefficient of reliability Cronbach's alpha reported by Luna and Laca (2014) were of .68, .72 and .83 for the self-oriented, other-oriented, and issue-oriented styles, respectively.

**Procedure**

Collaboration of school authorities was obtained. Students were invited to participate in the classroom in a completely voluntary and anonymous way. They were guaranteed confidential handling of information and its exclusive use for scientific purposes. Participants answered a battery consisting of various psychometric scales in one session lasting approximately an hour; as a part of a larger study on *Correlates and predictors of conflict management styles in teenagers*. In this paper the correspondent results of the relationships between mood and conflict management are reported.

**RESULTS**

According the aim of this study, a Pearson's correlational analysis was realized. As it can be seen in Table 1, the following correlations were statistically significant. First, self-oriented style correlated positively with negative affect. Second, the issue-oriented style correlated positively with positive affect. Finally, the other-oriented style did not correlate with any components of mood.

**Table 1.** Pearson correlations between positive and negative affect and conflict management message styles

	Positive affect	Negative affect
Self-oriented	.025	.257**
Other-oriented	.101	.123
Issue-oriented	.229**	.030

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

**DISCUSSION**

In general, the findings of this study provide evidence about a positive relationship between a collaborative conflict management style (issue-oriented) and positive affect, and between a competitive style (self-oriented) and negative affect, in adolescent high-school students. According this, on the one hand, it is possible that the adolescents who feel more enthusiastic, active, and alert tend to be more willing to manage conflicts with their classmates through messages which they emphasize that both parties must deal with the problem without jeopardizing their relationship (issue-oriented style). On the other hand, it is possible that those adolescents who tend to feel more angry, disgusted, guilty, fearful and nervous tend to be more willing to manage conflicts with their classmates through messages which they reflect an emphasis on their own personal interest (self-oriented style).

According to Montes *et al.* (2014), the individuals who experience high positive affect are more focused on promoting positive outcomes, while subjects experiencing high negative affect are more focused on preventing negative results. In this way, it is possible that the adolescents who experience high positive affect interpret the conflict as an opportunity to promote these positive results, while that adolescents who experience high negative affect tend to interpret the conflict as a situation that threatens their interests. However, in order to deepen the explanation on this possible phenomenon, further

studies that could explore the dynamic mechanisms through which the mood and conflict management styles are related in adolescents are recommended.



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