

Body of Dialectics: Exploring a Dynamic-Adaptational Model of Physical Self-Integrity and the Pursuit of Happiness in a Hostile World

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Abstract : People with physical disabilities constitute a very large and simultaneously a diverse group of general population, as the term physical disabilities is extensive and covers a wide range of disabilities. Therefore, individuals with physical disabilities are often faced with a new, threatening and stressful reality leading possibly to a multi-crisis in their lives due to the great changes they experience in somatic, socio-economic, occupational and psychological level. The current study seeks to advance understanding of the complex adaptation to physical disabilities by expanding the dynamic-adaptational model of the pursuit of happiness in a hostile world with a new conception of physical self-integrity. Physical self-integrity incorporates an objective dimension, namely physical self-functioning (PSF), and a subjective dimension, namely physical self-concept (PSC). Both of these dimensions constitute an experience of wholeness in the individual's identification with her or his physical body. The model guiding this work is dialectical in nature and depicts two systems in the individual's sense of happiness: subjective well-being (SWB) and meaning in life (MIL). Both systems serve as self-adaptive agents that moderate the complementary system of the hostile-world scenario (HWS), which integrates one's perceived threats to one's integrity. Thus, in situations of increased HWS, the moderation may take a form of joint activity in which SWB and MIL are amplified or a form of compensation in which one system produces a stronger effect while the other system produces a weaker effect. The current study investigated PSC in relations to SWB and MIL through pleasantness and meanings that are physically or metaphorically grounded in one's body. In parallel, PSC also relates to HWS by activating representations of inappropriateness, deformation and vulnerability. In view of possibly dialectical positions of opposing and complementary forces within the current model, the current field study that aims to explore PSC as appearing in an independent, cross-sectional, design addressing the model's variables in a focal group of people with physical disabilities. This study delineated the participation of the PSC in the adaptational functions of SWB and MIL vis-à-vis HWS-related life adversities. The findings showed that PSC could fully complement the main variables of the pursuit of happiness in a hostile world model. The assumed dialectics in the form of a stronger relationship between SWB and MIL in the face of physical disabilities was not supported. However, it was found that when HWS increased, PSC and MIL were strongly linked, whereas PSC and SWB were weakly linked. This highlights the compensatory role of MIL. From a conceptual viewpoint, the current investigation may clarify the role of PSC as an adaptational agent of the individual's positive health in complementary senses of bodily wholeness. Methodologically, the advantage of the current investigation is the application of an integrative, model-based approach within a specially focused design with a particular relevance to PSC. Moreover, from an applicative viewpoint, the current investigation may suggest how an innovative model may be translated to therapeutic interventions used by clinicians, counselors and practitioners in improving wellness and psychological well-being, particularly among people with physical disabilities.

Keywords : older adults, physical disabilities, physical self-concept, pursuit of happiness in a hostile-world

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