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Short Commentary

Utilisation of Cognitive Adaptation Strategies to Counteract Discrimination on Well-being

OWUSU BOATENG Raymond*

Department of Psychology, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, SAR, China

Corresponding author: OWUSU BOATENG Raymond, Department of Psychology, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, SAR, China; Email: raymondowusuboateng@ln.hk

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Introduction

Taylor's theory of cognitive adaptation proposes that when the individual experiences threatened events, adjustment depends on the ability to search for meaning in the experiences, the ability to gain mastery over the event, and an effort to enhanced one's self-esteem to feel good about oneself again despite the personal setback [1]. Cognitive adaptation views the individual as adaptable, self-protective, and functional in the face of adversities. Thus, cognitive adaptation deals with the utilization of various cognitive strategies to counteract negative distress on well-being. Cognitive adaptation theory has been broadly applied to threats to health, particularly with cancer patients [2,3] however, it has not been adequately used to understand the adaptation to social life challenges, such as the discrimination or exclusion. Crisp and Turner [4] propose that when people cognitively adapt to the experience of social and cultural diversity, there are cross-domain benefits these processes bring. Hence, cognitive adaptation theory may be particularly useful in predicting successful adjustment to the adaptation processes of individuals facing social exclusions and discrimination.

Cognitive Adaptation to the Experiences of Discrimination and Well-being

Several studies have shown that experiencing discrimination leads to a problem in psychological well-being (Blodorn et al., 2016; Jang et al., 2008; Suh et al., 2019). Despite this significant proportion of research on the negative implications of discrimination on health, there is a paucity of empirical research effectively distinguishes between individuals who adapt to discrimination versus those who are hugely affected. Similarly, there is a lack of clarity on how the individual adapts to a different environment. Early research in the discipline of health psychology focused on the causes and effects of poor psychological and ill-health. Over the last couple of decades, the field has moved from a diseased model to a personal strength model that delineates the psychological resources people adapt in dealing with threatening situations and adversity in their environment [5,6] opined that the theory of cognitive adaptation posits positivity biases in personally relevant information processing and memory which are significantly related to well-being. It has been well established that a positive outlook in the face of adversity is associated with psychological wellbeing. The phenomenon of cognitive adaptation is about selective information processing that yields positive outcomes. For example, within a social context, depressed individuals who are judged negatively worry more about critical appraisals whereas those free of depression erroneously conceived the critical appraisal positively [7].

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The adapted theory of cognitive adaptation incorporates the phenomenological tenets of the social strain model by assuming that perceived discrimination is a significant predictor of well-being, however, the association between perceived discrimination and well-being is dependent on the cognitive processes. Thus, an interesting question is if the individual develops cognitive adaptation strategies what happens when these cognitions are threatened by social strains such as discrimination? Cognitive adaptation is significantly associated with well-being among conjugal bereaved older women, aids in coping with adversity more effectively resolve any inaccurate and negative stereotypes of the local ethnic/cultural group that immigrants may hold and appears to be associated with improved physical health outcomes [8]. Other studies revealed that individuals on higher levels of cognitive responses (i.e. optimism, control, self-esteem) experience positive effects in response to a threatening event such as cancer, diabetes. Cognitive adaptation contends exhibiting unbridled optimism, a sense of meaning, and exaggerated perception of control to protect oneself from negative or threatening events [9]. Evidence from the above sources suggests that a positive view of the self, one's control, and optimism may be apparent and adaptive in the face of adversity. One may speculate that similar phenomena may be instrumental in adjustment to perceived discrimination. Given this observation, the theory of cognitive adaptation may be germane to our understanding of adjustment to perceived discrimination. Cognitive adaptation theory, then, is proposed as an alternative model to the experiences of discrimination and well-being in adjusting to threatening events. To the best of my knowledge, there is as yet no detailed model of how the types of cognitive adaptation observed by victims of discrimination can occur or the conditions under which the utilization of the various cognitive strategies can help buffer the effect of discrimination on well-being. Granted, the challenge remains to ascertain whether the association between discrimination and well-being is realized over and above the contribution of idiosyncratic

cognitive factors. Cognitive adaptation will offer a different view for our understanding of how people deal with discrimination. Essentially, I ask whether these components of cognitive adaptation theory can promote successful psychological well-being in the face of discrimination among a marginalised population.

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