

EHPS Grant Report

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'Charting New Territories in Health Psychology' was this year's EHPS conference theme. When I first read about it, I noticed that it reflects the experiences I make on my current research path. As a PhD student who is a studied psychologist, I apply a health psychology approach in the area of rehabilitation sciences and health services research. I was thus very pleased that I was given the opportunity to attend the EHPS conference 2022 and to discuss my thoughts about combining two theoretical approaches from two differing scientific territories.

In my PhD project, I analyze the participation experiences of people with Multiple Sclerosis with gait impairment by combining the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (World Health Organization, 2001) with facets of the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being (Haslam et al., 2018) using qualitative research methods. The ICF defines participation as the "involvement in a life situation" (World Health Organization, 2001, p.14) and offers a system to categorize participation. However, a characterization of subjective facets of participation, i.e. participation quality or perceived participation, is lacking. In order to characterize subjective participation, facets of the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being (Haslam et al., 2018) were combined with the ICF. Due to the novelty of this approach, I was keen to discuss this approach with fellow psychologists and to discuss possible theoretical and practical implications of transferring a health psychology model into the field of rehabilitation research.

I can say that the EHPS conference increased my confidence (a) in the relevance of this research approach and (b) to follow this research path. This became specifically clear during two sessions. Firstly, in the session 'Implementation in Mental Health and Social Exclusion', Dr. Emily Oliver reported about their study in which they analyzed how characteristics of a specific form of care, in this case co-located mental health services, interact with the sense of autonomy of an individual (Oliver, 2022). I follow a similar approach by analyzing how context factors such as the built environment or health services shape the subjective experience of a sense of efficacy, sense of meaning and sense of connection (Haslam et al., 2018). Secondly during my poster presentation, I had the chance to discuss the results of my research with various fellow researchers and found interesting points of connectivity between the different projects.

Apart from my insights that were specifically relevant for my PhD, I also had the chance to gain insight into current discussions in the field of health psychology. I was able to attend the Symposium 'Health Inequalities - why do they matter and how can we tackle them?' which was chaired by Prof. Wendy Stainton Rogers. An interesting discussion about the role of positive psychology in the context of living under stressful socioeconomic circumstances evolved during this Symposium. The different streams and perspectives within (critical) psychology became clear. It was encouraging to perceive the awareness of the relevance of the socioeconomic situation of an individual for health psychologists and to discuss the possibilities and limits of different theoretical

approaches.

An international conference such as the EHPS also offers time for discussing different methodological approaches which I was able to do during various conversations. Specifically, I was able to get in touch with colleagues from my alma mater, the Constructor University Bremen (previously called Jacobs University Bremen) about qualitative methods and their changing role in psychology in comparison to quantitative methodological approaches. The contact that was re-established because of the EHPS conference later yielded in an online qualitative research exchange group. A first meeting has taken place and it helped me to continue shaping my research network beyond the EHPS, but also to further elaborate on qualitative methods in the field of rehabilitation and psychology.

Overall, the EHPS conference 2022 was an important experience for me as an early-career researcher with regard to enlarging my scientific network and knowledge and I am very thankful that the EHPS Grants Committee made it possible for me to attend the EHPS conference in Bratislava. It was very valuable for me as a participant that the conference was very well organized which facilitated the exchange with other researchers. The glance at the cultural heritage of Slovakia through music and a speech given by the president of Slovakia that was broadcast during the welcome ceremony made the attendance of the EHPS conference 2022 especially memorable. I am already very much looking forward to the EHPS conference 2023 which will take place very close to my home University (the University of Oldenburg) in Bremen!

References

- Oliver, E. (2022, August, 24th). *Autonomy in co-located mental health services: impacts on staff and service users [Conference presentation]*. EHPS 2022, Bratislava, Slovakia.
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