



# Disabilities and Psychological Poetry



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**Submission:** March 2, 2021; **Published:** March 15, 2021

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## Abstract

Two aims are pursued in this article. The first is to make the reader of the Global Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, familiar with a psychological tool that consists of a versified therapeutic writing, called Psychological Poetry. The second is to dedicate to the concept of disability, a therapeutic poem which can prove helpful to the patient suffering from a disability and to his/her family. Finally, in the section of the discussion, a proposal for teamwork is presented, so that the recommendations that are suggested in the poem can become easier to apply.

**Keywords:** Disabilities; Positive Psychology; Psychological Poetry; Therapeutic tool; Treatment children; Treatment adolescents; Treatment adults

## Introduction

Human disabilities consist of dysfunctions of the mind and impairments of the body that impede or make it hard or impossible for the person to do certain activities or to communicate with others. They are known, as activity restrictions or participation restrictions. They belong to the general notion of imperfection that we find in nature, in humans, in the animal world and in the vegetal world. We have to accept them and live with them. However, human disabilities can be serious and strenuous for the person who suffers from them and for his/her family. Scientific journals dealing with the subject and centers that are involved in the care of these persons (children or adults) show a commendable and laudable initiative. It is in a spirit of compassion and of willingness to contribute to this field of psychology, that the present text is written.

The author tries to fulfill two purposes. The first is theoretical and the second is practical. In the theoretical one, a psychological tool is introduced and elaborated. In the practical one, a therapeutic poem written especially for the persons who suffer from a disability is presented and explained via a commentary.

## A look at Psychological Poetry

Psychological Poetry is a special type of versified writing that has been developed by the author, who is also a poet and who writes poetry under the name of Felicity Mat [1]. Psychological Poetry consists of short essays that examine a psychological subject and propose constructive solutions for complicated

situations through direct or indirect messages. The non-directive hypnotic approach of Milton Erickson is endorsed [2].

The poems belonging to Psychological Poetry, called also, "Poetic reflections of psychological content" are conceived through a conscious and preconscious desire to influence positively and constructively the listener in psychotherapy and the reader of the general public, by transmitting positive messages to them. They strive to be therapeutic, informative and mental health or physical health preventive.

Psychological Poetry has not been researched up to now. There is only some anecdotal evidence that was obtained by the author who is a clinical psychologist and applied it to some of her patients [3]. This type of writing was discovered by her only, at the end of her career. Consequently, she did not have the time to use it long enough. However, the encouraging comments of her colleagues and the invitation of a good number of editors of several scientific and literal journals to contribute to their journal with an article of hers, made her believe that there is a promising future for this kind of therapeutic writing.

What follows now is a description of the application of this tool. The therapist tells the patient that there will be a recitation of a poem during which the eyes will be closed, and the concentration will be devoted only to the poem. After the end of the recitation, a short period of silence is suggested, so that the content of the poem can be reviewed in the mind of the listener. Then, the reaction to the poetic reflection is requested and a discussion of it

can take place. The repetition of the recitation in the next session or later on will depend on the remarks made by the patient. Is he/she ready to consider one or more recommendations? It may take some time or even a long time, before one or more of the positive suggestions is accepted or rejected. It may also, take a long time before some change is obtained.

Let us look now at the poetic reflection dedicated to the disabilities.

### Poem Dedicated to the Disabilities

Repairing

By Felicity Mat

I have a disability and I often ask myself questions like these:

“Am I going to be treated the same way as a normal person?”

“Can I be happy?”

“Can I enjoy myself?”

“What do people think of me?”

“Should I care about what they say?”

“Who is responsible for my disability?”

“Who is responsible for my luck?”

There are only a few answers to my questions.

I would also like to know where I stand.

I ask myself who is going to help me.

I know nobody who can do that.

But suddenly, a fine idea strikes my mind.

I think of a sage. He is a good choice.

Yes, this is a good idea.

So, I decide to go and visit one.

What a nice surprise!

He is an old man with white hair.

A bright man, a nice one and compassionate.

Here is the advice he gives me:

“Ignore what people say about your disability.

Instead, concentrate on your hobbies,

Your talents, your strengths and your virtues.

Appreciate them, apply them well and take pleasure out of them.

Forgive your mistakes.

Forgive the mistakes of others that hurt you.

Be positive about your future!”

God bless him. He helped me.

### Commentary

Here, an analysis of the poetic reflection is presented. Two parts are distinguished in the content of the above poem. The first has to do with the feelings and some probable preoccupations of the person who suffers from a disability. The use of the pronoun “I” from the beginning - which makes the author a patient herself - was chosen for the purpose of allowing the patient to sense the author’s identification with his/her problems. On the other hand, the presence of a sage who is a benevolent authority figure may also permit the installation of some confidence regarding the suggestions made by him. It is good for patients to feel that people around them are ready to help.

The second part consists of therapeutic considerations that are scientifically supported. They are based on the research of a branch of psychology called Positive Psychology (PP). PP was introduced by Seligman 20 years ago [4]. Voluminous research on the subject is available and many aspects of it have been investigated. PP’s research is internationally recognised and highly valuable [5-8]. PP examines happiness and satisfaction with life. The scientific term for happiness is “subjective wellbeing”. Happiness consists of positive emotions like joy, flow, glee, pleasure, contentment, serenity, hope and ecstasy. It is influenced by many factors that can either promote it or impede it [9]. Internal factors like heredity, a pessimistic outlook at life, including anger and chronic stress, as well as the pursuit of ephemeral hedonic pleasures or the accumulation of material goods and personal success are factors that impede happiness. On the contrary, external factors called by Seligman “circumstances” may promote it. These are work, sociability, marriage, health, negative emotions, education, race, climate, gender and religion. No details on these factors will be given here, because of lack of space. Finally, a factor that possesses a robust capacity to secure happiness is a voluntary willingness of the person to change his/her attitude towards life by forgiving the past, living positively in the present and being optimistic about the future. The last three principles are used in the recommendations that are included in the second part of the poem.

### Discussion

A number of questions may arise in the mind of the reader who has read this article. These may be related to the validity of the recommendations made, the type of disability that can be treated with Psychological Poetry, the age of the subject who suffers from a disability and other factors.

Let us say from the beginning, that the author includes also in the notion of developmental disability, restrictions that are due to physical problems, like serious hearing and vision problems, loss of an upper or lower limb and other physical dysfunctions. This approach does not agree with the usual definition of

developmental disabilities adopted by medicine today. Having this idea in mind three types of patients suffering from a disability should be taken into consideration: (a) patients with intellectual disabilities; (b) patients with physical disabilities; (c) patients with both intellectual and physical disabilities.

The therapeutic poem introduced in this study can be used with adolescents and adults that have a physical disability but possess a good intelligence. It can also be applied in cases of an attention deficit disorder. Psychotherapy among other treatments is a choice as well as, team work especially in the case of adolescents. The family, the educators and other health professionals involved can be informed of the aims pursued and they can contribute in their own way in the change proposed by the author. Children can also profit indirectly from the recommendations of the above poem. It is their parents, their educators and other people that take care of them that should be exposed to the principles of PP, so that they can promote them during their interaction with the suffering child. On the other hand, any health professional that treats mental or physical types of disabilities can profit from reading this article. Finally, the recommendations of positive and constructive content included in the poem entitled "Repairing", can hopefully inspire any psychotherapist who works with children, with adolescents and with adults.

The author wishes to encourage psychotherapists in general, to try to apply therapeutic poetry, if they feel comfortable with it

and if they consider that their patient is capable to profit from it.

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DOI: [10.19080/GJIDD.2021.07.555723](https://doi.org/10.19080/GJIDD.2021.07.555723)

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