

A prototype scale for the validation of the Neo-Functionalism theoretical model in psychology: The Basic Experience of the Self's Assessment Form

Filippo Dipasquale¹, Paola Magnano², Marta Blandini³,
Raffaele Gueli³ & Paola Fecarotta³

Abstract

The Neo-Functionalism theory in psychology asserts the complex and integrated psycho-bodily functioning of human being. During child development, a congruent embodiment of the human functioning will be achieved living the “Basic Experiences of Self” (BEsS). The BEsS are organized in a typical “Configuration of Functions”, and the Functions are measurable variables across a gamma of values between their polarities. An evaluation form, the Basic Experience of Self Evaluation Form (BAF), was constructed to assess three BEsS (Vitality, Contact, Letting Go). The BAF reports thirty Functions to be quoted across the gamma polarity with points from 7 to 1, according to the Osgood's Semantic Differential Scale. Data were collected examining twenty-four videos of newborns and infants up to 3 years of age, recorded in their spontaneous activity. A number of 840 evaluation forms were admitted to the study. Significant differences were found in ANOVA among almost all the Functions of the three BEsS, according to the Neo-Functionalism's Theory on the specific BEsS's configuration of Functions. A good scale's internal consistency and reliability was confirmed by the Cronbach's Alpha Index. This study is the first step to construct a specific

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¹ University Hospital “Policlinico-Vittorio Emanuele”, Catania, Italy.

² “Kore” University – Enna, Italy.

³ Functional Psychotherapy Centre of Catania, Italy.

Correspondence to: Filippo Dipasquale, University Hospital “Policlinico-Vittorio Emanuele”, Catania, Italy. Fax. 095/7435252; E-mail: f.dipas@gmail.com.

psychometric assessment scale to be used in research and in clinics settings.

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1. Introduction

To date, the dichotomies among mind and body, rational thinking and emotions, body and spirit, seem to be totally disproved by several evidences that span multiple disciplines and move toward the confirmation of a complex interconnection between body and mind (Damasio, 1994; Borghi & Caruana, 2015). The theories on the development of the self support the epistemology of complexity and the importance of the *Whole Self* (Morin, 2002) and provide renewed points of view on neurodevelopment, so that child development can no longer be considered as a sequence of milestones to be exclusively seen in motor, or in cognitive, or in relationship and emotional areas, but an *ontogenetic adaptation* to life experiences from his/her neonatal, probably also prenatal, age (Bjorklund, 2018). Moreover, Evolutionary Psychology (Bjorklund & Ellis, 2014) has been proposed as a mainstream framework for the clinical diagnosis of developmental disability. The discovery of the Mirror Neurons' System has just switched on the research about the possibility that empathy, emotions and other psychological actions are embodied and originate from the same system (Gallese, 2003). Other evidences derive from the research on the Connectome (Scheinost, Sinha, Cross, Kwon, Sze, Constable *et al.*, 2017); computational theoretical models on neural networks' functioning makes actually possible to formulate hypothesis regarding the abnormal development: at the basis of neurodevelopmental disorders a mechanism of *developmental miswiring* could be involved in neural interaction (Di Martino, Fair, Kelly, Satterthwaite, Castellanos, Thomason *et al.*, 2014). And more, looking at early stages of fetal and newborns' life, other studies are going to classify neurodevelopmental disabilities on the progress of modern models deriving from computer-based research (Friedman, Soloveichick, Barak, Bar-Yosef, Raunak, & Smolkin, 2018). The ancient *Nature versus Nurture* debate is going realistically to be resolved; as more specific studies report evidences of the interaction between genes and the environment, the phenotype has actually to be considered the result of this interaction (Sameroff, 2010; Bjorklund, 2018). In this study, our research interest concerns the developmental theory formulated by Rispoli (2016) in Neo-Functionalism's psychotherapy: it argues a modern diagnostic and therapeutic approach to child development that seems to be consistent with recent research evidences.

1.1. Theoretical background

The Neo-Functionalism provides a new concept in psychology and psychotherapy, combining mental and bodily aspects in a unified theoretical framework, and asserts a consistent developmental theory: the complex and congruent psycho-bodily functioning in adult derives from a multidimensional integration of experiences, deeply and completely lived by the child during the development. In this assertion, the Neo-Functionalism model offers an innovative theory to approach child development and human functioning, coherently to the new advances in neuroscience (Rispoli, 2016). According to the Neo-Functionalist developmental theory, the child approaches his/her life living the Basic Experiences of Self (BEsS) so that more congruent and complete is the approach, more appropriate and congruent to life span situations will be his/her adult life (Rispoli, 2008). The Basic Experiences of Self can be considered the way through which the child participates to daily activity, developing his/her functioning from the beginning of life. Any Basic Experience of Self (BES) along the life, could be considered as the *building brick* of human functioning. Life experience constantly sustains the complex multidimensional integration in cognitive, emotional, physiological and motor-postural areas, so that the integrated and multidimensional organization of these four functioning levels represent the *whole self* (Rispoli, 2016). Every BES consists in a configuration of Functions, already present from the neonatal age, even though not as complex as in adult. The Function represents a variable that, concurrently to life situation, fluently takes a definite position in the spectrum of values between its dyadic polarity, that is considered as a *falsely antithetic* polarity because of its fluently mobility across the values' gamma between the polarities (i.e., *trust-distrust*, *happiness-unhappiness*, *mobility-immobility*, etc.) and take a pattern freely flowing, alternating from one pole to another in a fluently sinusoidal mode depending on the circumstances of life experience (Rispoli, 2016). Functions' organization is regulated by four laws and the developmental theory in Neo-Functionalism is mainly centred on the first of the four laws; it says: "All the Functions are interconnected and integrated with each other, and they are present from the very beginning of an individual's life" (Rispoli, 2008, p. 57). Though in a primordial level, all the Functions already exist when the child is in the womb and are integrated and ready to function. So, when the newborn lives his/her own basic experience (i.e., being held, being nourished, contact, etc.), the Functions change concurrently to the way and the quality of the experience, acquiring

more and more *nuances*. No other Functions will be created during the experience, but only the existing same Functions get organized themselves in a different configuration, modulating a different position on the spectrum between the opposite polarities. Consequently, more times and more congruently to life situations the BEsS are lived, more their Functions' configurations will be adequately variant, variable and complex to permit a congruent functioning (Rispoli, 2008; 2016; Blandini, Fecarotta, Buscemi, Ramaci, & Buscemi, 2015). The configuration of the Functions will be typical for the BES just lived (Rispoli, 2008; 2016; Ottoboni & Iacono, 2013; Ottoboni, Iacono, & Chattat, 2016) and will be more and more complex according the variability of nuances that the Functions will be able to get in every BES. The Neo-Functionalism's model proposes its own methodological assessment for diagnosis and its own treatment strategies, in children and adults, according to theoretical background. While empirical studies on treatment results have been published (Ottoboni & Iacono, 2013; Blandini *et al.*, 2015; Perciavalle, Blandini, Fecarotta, Buscemi, Di Corrado, Bertolo *et al.*, 2017; Maniaci, La Cascia, Ferraro, Picone, Sideli, Seminerio *et al.*, 2018), no current studies exist on the validation of its instruments. In this study we will focus on the different functioning configuration of the BEsS.

2. Aim of the study

In Neo-Functionalist assessment, psychotherapists need to objectively detect the characteristic signs of the person's functioning. Congruently to the developmental theory, the BEsS represent the complex and integrated multi-level functioning of the Self. In order to provide evidences that can document empirical studies on the functionalist psychotherapeutic model, two questions moved our interest. How do the experts in functionalist method identify the BEsS through person's behavior observation? Is it possible to characterize the single BES for its own configuration of Functions, in order to successively identify its alterations? If the BEsS are the constructs of the Neo-Functionalism theory, the Functions represent the items that can be used as evaluable indicators. Functions can be analytically observed, measured, quoted in the degree that they express in a given situation, as the possible result in the spectrum of values between two polarities of opposite sense. This study is the first attempt to validate the theoretical construct of Neo-Functionalism, building a psychometric scale.

The construction of a prototype scale is intended to be the first step for the implementation of an assessment scale to be used in clinics.

3. Methods

3.1. Construction of a psychometric prototypic scale: the BES Assessment Form (BAF)

The first step of this research is specifically centered on the construction of a prototypic scale that objectively confirms empirical studies on the configuration of Functions that characterizes a BES. Rispoli (2016) distinguished up to 22 BEsS. In this study, we have chosen only three BEsS, *Vitality*, *Contact* and *Letting go*, not because as being the best or most appropriate, but with a view to their eventual simpler recognizability in a video observation. The chosen BEsS were representative of a typical functioning of infant children. The Basic Experience of Self *Vitality* (BES_V) is evident when child shows a “wriggle”, an interior or exterior “movement” or “energy” that color the Self of “joy” or “gaiety” and other related nuances. The Basic Experience of Self *Contact* (BES_C) is characterized by “nearness”, “fusion”, “empathy”, as a flux of sensations that continuously flow from one to another. The Basic Experience of the Self *Letting Go* (BES_L) can appropriately be seen when a child gets enchanted, as he/she is going toward resting after a period of activity, loosing his/her state of activation. The Functions, as indicators of the construct, in wellness conditions, are theoretically described as characterized by their own fluent variability between opposite polarity (i.e. not just anger but a grade of anger variably moving through polarity anger-calm) and are typically organized in a configuration that is specific for each BES. Thus, we constructed an evaluation form, the BES Assessment Form (BAF), the same to be used for each BES, containing the Functions drawn up in their dyadic polarity, each reported on one line as a couple of nouns with opposite meaning. The BAF consists of 30 Functions: *Certainty-Uncertainty*; *Happiness-Unhappiness*; *Tranquility-Agitation*; *Hope-Hopeless*; *Trust-Distrust*; *Calm-Anger*; *Love-Hate*; *Mobility-Immobility*; *Fast movements-Slow movements*; *Active-Passive*; *Nimble-Clumsy*; *Light-Heavy*; *Big movements-Small movements*; *Soft movements-Jerky movements*; *Softness-Stiffness*; *Harmonious body-Disharmonious body*; *Open voice-Closed voice*; *Excitement-Tranquility*; *Noisy-Silent*; *Sympathicotonia-Vagotonia*; *Sensibility-Insensibility*; *Muscle hypertone-Muscle hypotone*; *Thoracic breath-Diaphragmatic breath*;

Attention-Loosening; Rational-Irrational; Fantasy-Concreteness; Remember-Forget; Positive values-Negative values; Creative thinking-Logical thinking; Globality-Details. This prototypic scale was constructed adopting the same Functions and in the same combination they are described by Rispoli (Rispoli, 2016). It is also important to consider every Function related to its functional plane (i.e. the Function *Tranquility-Agitation* in Emotional plane has a different semantic connotation compared to the Function *Excitement-Tranquility* in Physiologic plane, see BAF in Appendix 1). With the aim to assign to each Function a value along a spectrum between the opposite polarities, we adopted the Osgood's Semantic Differential Scale. Points from 7 to 5 were assigned to quote the intensity values for polarity in the left side of the Functions (where 7 is "very much"; 6 "enough"; 5 "a little") and points from 3 to 1 to quote the intensity values for polarity in the right side (where 3 is "a little"; 2 "enough"; 1 "very much"). A medium value (4) was indicated as neutral one (see BAF, Appendix 1). This aspect involves an important methodological concern of this research: the accuracy of the Function's semantic significance and its grading in the polarity spectrum.

3.2. Detection method and data collection.

With the aim to assess functional characteristics of each BES, we decided to use video observation of children's spontaneous activity. Videography and video-analysis are assessment instruments actually used in Social sciences (Knoblauch, 2012) and clinical medical research (Einspieler, Prechtel, Bos, Ferrari, & Cioni, 2004). We selected twenty-four videos of newborns and infants up to 3 years of age, chosen from familial video-collection, where a clear evidence of each BES's characteristics in child's spontaneous activity could be detected. The selected videos had previously been recorded in "natural setting" (Knoblauch, 2012), and resulted appropriate to observe children's daily living spontaneous activity. Informed consent on the strictly research use of the videos was acquired from children's parents. In the first phase, only the authors of this study skilled in Neo-Functionalism model individually assessed the videos and used the BAF to quote Functions' values according to the specific BES. Then, the same authors jointly reassessed the videos and the related values they individually had attributed before to each Function for each BES, in order to check eventual bias or other issues in interpreting semantic meaning about the items. Successively, all the twenty-four videos were submitted to a group

of 33 students of the European School in Functional Psychotherapy. They were invited to individually assess all the videos and fill the form, using the adopted criteria.

4. Data analysis

All the evaluation forms were previously analyzed and those containing errors or absence of more than three values were excluded from the study. Data missing in up to three Functions were corrected, assigning a neutral value (4) on the form sheets. We admitted a total of $N = 840$ forms, distributed as follows: $BES_V = 315$; $BES_C = 261$; $BES_L = 264$.

SPSS 20.0 software was used for data analysis. To test the internal consistency of the scales, Cronbach's alpha has been calculated for each scale on the sample of the study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients are: $BES_V = .87$; $BES_C = .80$; $BES_L = .79$. For each BES, means and standard deviations (*SD*) were calculated for each Function. ANOVA was calculated to verify the existing differences between BESs.

5. Results

Obtained data, means, standard deviations, test ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc test, are presented in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the differences among BESs.

Table 1 - *Functions in BESs Vitality (BES_V), Contact (BES_C) and Letting Go (BES_L). Means, Standard Deviations and ANOVA (Bonferroni post-hoc; $p < .05$). Different letters (in apex format) indicate statistically significant differences*

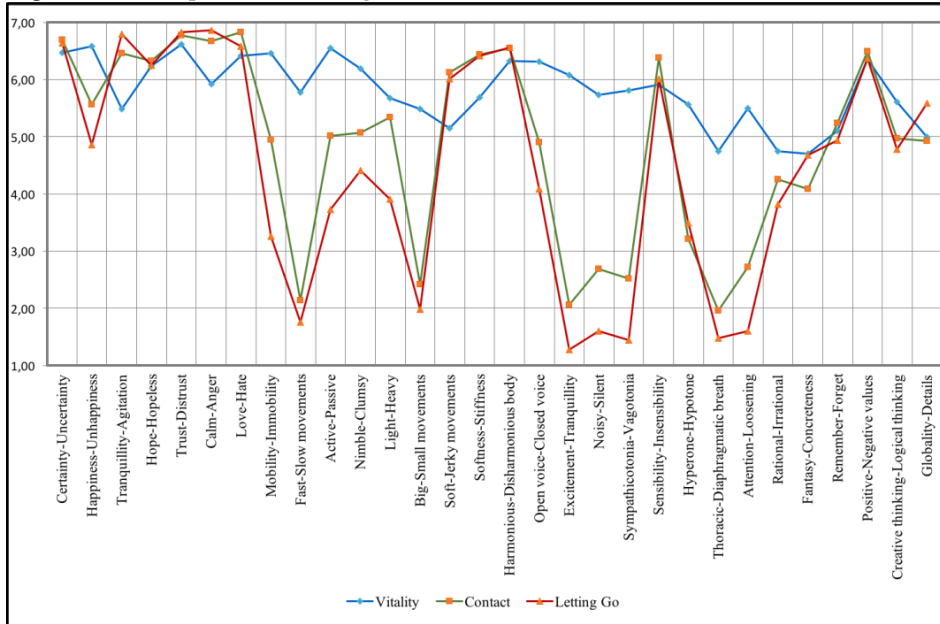
Functions	BES_V		BES_C		BES_L		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Certainty-Uncertainty	6.47 ^a	.82	6.69 ^b	.62	6.64 ^b	.70	7.54	.001
Happiness-Unhappiness	6.58 ^a	.66	5.57 ^b	1.06	4.86 ^c	.91	281.12	< .001
Tranquility-Agitation	5.48 ^a	1.48	6.46 ^b	1.01	6.79 ^c	.57	109.62	< .001
Hope-Hopeless	6.23	.91	6.32	.95	6.25	.97	.67	.510
Trust-Distrust	6.62 ^a	.57	6.77 ^b	.53	6.83 ^b	.44	12.93	< .001
Calm-Anger	5.92 ^a	.93	6.67 ^b	.63	6.86 ^c	.39	149.24	< .001
Love-Hate	6.41 ^a	.81	6.83 ^b	.51	6.58 ^c	.79	24.02	< .001
Mobility-Immobility	6.46 ^a	.63	4.95 ^b	1.68	3.26 ^c	2.01	320.84	< .001

Fast-Slow movements	5.78 ^a	.95	2.13 ^b	1.23	1.76 ^c	1.10	1228.34	< .001
Active-Passive	6.55 ^a	.63	5.02 ^b	1.69	3.73 ^c	2.02	247.95	< .001
Nimble-Clumsy	6.19 ^a	1.00	5.07 ^b	1.24	4.41 ^c	1.27	174.57	< .001
Light-Heavy	5.68 ^a	1.17	5.33 ^b	1.53	3.91 ^c	2.06	94.95	< .001
Big-Small movements	5.49 ^a	1.30	2.42 ^b	1.43	1.98 ^c	1.22	617.10	< .001
Soft-Jerky movements	5.15 ^a	1.49	6.13 ^b	1.20	6.02 ^b	1.30	46.55	< .001
Softness-Stiffness	5.69 ^a	1.20	6.44 ^b	.96	6.41 ^b	1.13	43.91	< .001
Harmonious-Disharmonious body	6.33 ^a	.93	6.55 ^b	.84	6.56 ^b	.83	6.74	.001
Open voice-Closed voice	6.31 ^a	.97	4.90 ^b	1.62	4.09 ^c	1.40	205.57	< .001
Excitement-Tranquility	6.08 ^a	.98	2.06 ^b	1.48	1.27 ^c	.64	1677.76	< .001
Noisy-Silent	5.73 ^a	.86	2.69 ^b	1.77	1.59 ^c	.97	871.38	< .001
Sympathicotonia-Vagotonia	5.80 ^a	.79	2.51 ^b	1.52	1.44 ^c	.71	1375.51	< .001
Sensibility-Insensibility	5.91 ^a	.94	6.38 ^b	.80	6.02 ^a	1.17	17.03	< .001
Muscle hypertone-Muscle hypotone	5.57 ^a	.81	3.21 ^b	1.68	3.49 ^b	2.40	166.03	< .001
Thoracic breath-Diaphragmatic breath	4.75 ^a	1.28	1.96 ^b	1.08	1.47 ^c	.74	797.66	< .001
Attention-Loosening	5.49 ^a	1.16	2.72 ^b	1.80	1.60 ^c	1.00	645.56	< .001
Rational-Irrational	4.74 ^a	1.27	4.25 ^b	1.29	3.81 ^c	1.47	34.94	< .001
Fantasy-Concreteness	4.70 ^a	1.49	4.08 ^b	1.49	4.68 ^a	1.28	16.61	< .001
Remember-Forget	5.10 ^a	1.17	5.24 ^b	1.27	4.94 ^a	1.31	3.95	.020
Positive values-Negative values	6.36	.79	6.49	.79	6.37	.86	2.38	.093
Creative thinking-Logical thinking	5.61 ^a	1.22	4.97 ^b	1.05	4.78 ^b	1.02	45.72	< .001
Globality-Details	4.99 ^a	1.72	4.92 ^a	1.83	5.58 ^b	1.49	12.40	< .001

Means and standard deviations for the thirty Functions of each BES show values ranging from 7 to 1, and represent a specific polarity mark in the spectrum of the Function, according to the position from the maximum intensity on its left polarity (points 7, 6, 5) to the maximum intensity on its right one (points 3, 2, 1) (see BAF, Appendix 1). Differences among the three BESs, detected by ANOVA, are signed in the last two columns of Table 1. Among the three BESs, significant differences exist ($p < .05$) for all but two of the Functions (*Hope-Hopeless*; *Positive Value-Negative Value*). Post hoc Bonferroni test shows the Functions whose mean values are significantly different among the three BESs. In the BES_V, the Function *Certainty-Uncertainty* obtains a significantly lower mean value (M_V) than in BES_C (M_C) and BES_L (M_L), while in the BES_C it shows a higher value versus BES_V; no significant differences in its value exist between in the BES_C and BES_L ($M_V = 6.47$; $M_C = 6.69$; $M_L = 6.64$; $F = 7.54$). The Function *Happiness-Unhappiness* presented significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C

and in BES_L , while showed significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 6.58$; $M_C = 5.57$; $M_L = 4.86$; $F = 281.12$).

Figure 1 - Comparison among BES s



The results of the Function *Tranquility-Agitation* showed significantly lower value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , while it showed significantly higher means in the BES_L than in BES_C ($M_V = 5.48$; $M_C = 6.46$; $M_L = 6.79$; $F = 109.62$). The Function *Trust-Distrust* obtained significantly lower value in the BES_V compared to BES_C and to BES_L ; no significant differences were found in this polarity between the BES_C and BES_L ($M_V = 6.62$; $M_C = 6.77$; $M_L = 6.83$; $F = 12.93$). The Function *Calm-Anger* showed significantly lower value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , while obtained higher value in the BES_L compared to BES_C ($M_V = 5.92$; $M_C = 6.67$; $M_L = 6.86$; $F = 149.24$). The Function *Love-Hate* obtained significantly lower mean values in the BES_V respect to BES_C and to BES_L , while obtained higher value in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 6.41$; $M_C = 6.83$; $M_L = 6.58$; $F = 24.02$). The Function *Mobility-Immobility* showed significantly higher value in the BES_V compared to BES_C and to BES_L , while obtained significantly higher value in the BES_C than in BES_L ($M_V = 6.46$; $M_C = 4.95$; $M_L = 3.26$; $F = 320.84$). The Function *Fast Movements-Slow Movements* obtained significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L ,

and significantly higher value in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 5.78$; $M_C = 2.13$; $M_L = 1.76$; $F = 1228.34$). The Function *Active-Passive* showed significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and significantly higher values in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 6.55$; $M_C = 5.02$; $M_L = 3.73$; $F = 247.95$). The Function *Nimble-Clumsy* showed significantly higher value in the BES_C compared to BES_C and to BES_L , while means in the BES_V were significantly higher than in BES_L ($M_V = 6.19$; $M_C = 5.07$; $M_L = 4.41$; $F = 174.57$). The Function *Light-Heavy* obtained significantly higher means in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed significantly higher value in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 5.68$; $M_C = 5.33$; $M_L = 3.91$; $F = 94.95$). The Function *Big Movements-Small Movements* showed significantly higher means in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and significantly lower means in the BES_L than in BES_C ($M_V = 5.49$; $M_C = 2.42$; $M_L = 1.98$; $F = 617.10$). The Function *Soft Movements-Jerky Movements* obtained significantly lower value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 5.15$; $M_C = 6.13$; $M_L = 6.02$; $F = 46.55$). The Function *Softness-Stiffness* obtained significantly lower value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 5.69$; $M_C = 6.44$; $M_L = 6.41$; $F = 43.91$). The Function *Harmonious Body-Disharmonious Body* showed significantly lower means in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_C respect to BES_L ($M_V = 6.33$; $M_C = 6.55$; $M_L = 6.56$; $F = 6.74$). The Function *Open Voice-Closed Voice* obtained significantly higher means in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 6.31$; $M_C = 4.90$; $M_L = 4.09$; $F = 205.57$). The Function *Excitement-Tranquility* showed significantly higher means in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 6.08$; $M_C = 2.06$; $M_L = 1.27$; $F = 1677.76$). The Function *Noisy-Silent* obtained significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 5.73$; $M_C = 2.69$; $M_L = 1.59$; $F = 871.38$). The Function *Sympathicotonia-Vagotonia* showed significantly higher means in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 5.80$; $M_C = 2.51$; $M_L = 1.44$; $F = 1375.51$). The Function *Sensibility-Insensibility* obtained significantly higher value in the BES_C than in BES_V and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_L respect to BES_V ($M_V = 5.91$; $M_C = 6.38$; $M_L = 6.02$; $F = 17.03$). The Function *Muscle*

Hypertone-Muscle Hypotone showed significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 5.57$; $M_C = 3.21$; $M_L = 3.49$; $F = 166.03$). The Function *Thoracic Breath-Dyaphragmatic Breath* obtained significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 4.75$; $M_C = 1.96$; $M_L = 1.47$; $F = 797.66$). The Function *Attention-Loosening* showed significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 5.49$; $M_C = 2.72$; $M_L = 1.60$; $F = 645.56$). The Function *Rational-Irrational* obtained significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed significantly lower value in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 4.74$; $M_C = 4.25$; $M_L = 3.81$; $F = 34.94$). The Function *Fantasy-Concreteness* showed significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and significantly lower value in BES_C than in BES_L , no significant differences were found between the BES_V and BES_L ($M_V = 4.70$; $M_C = 4.08$; $M_L = 4.68$; $F = 16.61$). The Function *Remember-Forget* obtained significantly higher value in the BES_C than in BES_V and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_V respect to BES_L ($M_V = 5.10$; $M_C = 5.24$; $M_L = 4.94$; $F = 3.95$). The Function *Creative Thinking-Logical Thinking* showed significantly higher value in the BES_V than in BES_C and in BES_L , and showed no significant differences in the BES_L respect to BES_C ($M_V = 5.61$; $M_C = 4.97$; $M_L = 4.78$; $F = 45.72$). The Function *Globality-Details* showed significantly higher value in the BES_L than in BES_C and in BES_V , and showed no significant differences in the BES_V respect to BES_C ($M_V = 4.99$; $M_C = 4.92$; $M_L = 5.58$; $F = 12.40$).

6. Discussion

As already described in theoretical background, the BEsS *Vitality*, *Contact* and *Letting Go* are characterized by different expressions of functioning (Rispoli, 2008). The present study aimed to verify whether the configuration of the Functions specifically characterizes the three Basic Experiences of the Self. The prototypic scale reported a good internal consistency showing high Cronbach's alpha coefficients: $BES_V = .87$; $BES_C = .80$; $BES_L = .79$. Data analysis confirmed our research hypothesis: in this study, a typical configuration of the Functions does exist for each analyzed BES. These findings are consistent with theoretical assertion on BEsS' Functions Configuration (Rispoli, 2016). In particular, the results show a

statistically significant difference among the three BESs in all but two Functions (*Hope-Hopeless*; *Positive values-Negative values*), confirming the hypothesis. More specifically, comparing each BES to the others, significant differences were found in all Functions but five between BES_V and BES_L and between BES_V and BES_C , while in nine Functions no significant differences resulted between BES_C and BES_L . We argue that, probably, the significance of these differences could depend on the meaning given by the observer to the way the child shows his/her functioning characteristics during BES_V , BES_C and BES_L activity. In support to this consideration, the results reported high values in the left polarity of the Functions characterizing “movement” or an “activation” state of the child’s functioning observed in the video during his/her BES_V activity, while high intensity values signed the polarity on the right side of the same Functions during child’s activity characterizing the BES_L or BES_C : *Fast movements-Slow movements* ($BES_V = 5.78$ versus $BES_L = 1.76$ and $BES_C = 2.13$); *Big movements-Small movements* ($BES_V = 5.49$ versus $BES_L = 1.98$ and $BES_C = 2.42$); *Excitement-Tranquility* ($BES_V = 6.08$ versus $BES_L = 1.27$ and $BES_C = 2.06$); *Noisy-Silent* ($BES_V = 5.73$ versus $BES_L = 1.59$ and $BES_C = 2.69$); *Sympathicotonia-Vagotonia* ($BES_V = 5.80$ versus $BES_L = 1.44$ and $BES_C = 2.51$); *Attention-Loosening* ($BES_V = 5.49$ versus $BES_L = 1.60$ and $BES_C = 2.72$). According to the Neo-Functionalism’s theory, the significance of the high values in the left polarity of the Functions observed when child shows his/her BES_V activity could be associated to psychotherapist’s perception of an exterior “wriggle” or “movement” activity of the child in the videos; on the contrary, high values in the right polarity of the Functions could denote a clear state that the child shows in the video during the BES_L and, with less intensity in the BES_C , when leaving or loosing his/her activation (Fig. 1).

7. Conclusions and future research

Diagnosis and related psychotherapeutic treatment in Neo-Functionalism are guided by functioning’s signs that the patient reports in his/her daily living and that the psychotherapist observes through body signs as a complex, but integrated, physiological, cognitive, motor-postural and emotional expression (Rispoli, 2016). The developmental theory in Neo-Functionalism derives from the concept of “Functions” (Rispoli, 2008) and on the importance of the Functions’ fluently variable configuration, specifically characterizing every BES in life situation. If BESs are the basic guide of the development of the Self, seen in its global cognitive,

physiological, emotive and bodily aspects (Rispoli, 2008), the fluently specific configurations of the Functions represent the fine-tuning of functioning influencing the developmental processes in the life. In over thirty years of psychotherapeutic experience conducted by Functionalist Model approach, some empirical studies have been conducted on the therapeutic method (Rispoli, 2008; 2016; Ottoboni & Iacono, 2013; Blandini *et al.*, 2015; Perciavalle *et al.*, 2017; Perrella, 2017; Maniaci *et al.*, 2018). But no other studies on the validation of the specific assessment method exist in literature. This study represents the first step for the construction of a psychometrically adequate instrument to be used (1) in research context, to obtain comparable results with other psychometric scales; (2) in clinical settings, jointly with other clinical methods. Future studies will aim to apply the BES Assessment Form to the remaining BEsS, verifying its psychometric properties, as the factorial structure and internal and external validity.

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