

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Daniel Lyudmilov Petrov, PhD

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of doctoral thesis

*"Role of early maladaptive schemas and
attachment styles for conflict resolution in
intimate relationships"*

Submitted for the award of PhD in professional field 3.2.

Psychology

PhD candidate: Vladimir Vladimirov Marinov

Thesis supervisor: Prof. I. Zinovieva, DSc

The dissertation is published in English and focuses on the interrelationships and specificities in adult attachment styles, early maladaptive schemas, conflict resolution styles, emotional expressivity, and romantic relationship satisfaction. The role of early experiences and actual close relationships are integrated into a theoretical model that reflects the developmental and relational frameworks of intimate relationship satisfaction and couple conflict resolution. The study acknowledges the interrelationships between different human behavioral systems and adopts attachment theory as an explanatory frame and general theory of human development, close relationships, and mental health. The researched topic is actual because of our atomized living, the epidemic of loneliness, conflicted couples and increasing domestic violence with dire consequences for human well-being. The theoretical framework reflects a return to a trauma-informed approach in psychology, which does not reduce humans to biological and ahistorical beings but seeks answers in environment, early

experiences and developmental logics in the formation of personality traits and psychological difficulties. The dissertation provides valuable empirical information from our sociocultural environment about interpersonal relationships in times of pandemic and social isolation. The results are a valuable source of applied solutions for counseling and therapeutic practice.

The aim of the dissertation research is to examine associations between adult attachment styles, early maladaptive schemas, conflict resolution styles, emotional expressivity, and romantic relationship satisfaction. The specific aims of this work are related to: examining attachment styles in Bulgarian sociocultural settings and their role in conflict resolution, early maladaptive schemas, emotional expressivity and romantic relationship satisfaction; examining the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas and emotional expressivity as mediators of the relationship between attachment styles and conflict resolution styles.

The thesis has 234 pages (258 standard pages) and consists of three parts: introduction, seven chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendix. The literature comprises 426 sources in English, Bulgarian and Spanish. A total of 55 tables and 6 figures are included. The appendix contains the questionnaires of the study.

The introductory part of the dissertation introduces the relevance of the research topics, the place of intimacy in human development and the quality of past experience, the function of attachment styles and emotional expressivity in resolving conflict and achieving satisfaction in close relationships. Some current questions related to this area of research are also mentioned.

Chapter one of the dissertation is devoted to attachment theory through authors such as J. Bowlby, M. Ainsworth and others. Characteristics of attachment styles in childhood are described. They illustrate the genesis of individual differences in close relationships. The regulatory role of the attachment system and its development to a system of regulation of romantic relationships is explained. Different aspects of close relationships in relation to infidelity and attachment are presented in a separate paragraph.

Chapter two examines the theoretical underpinnings and contemporary framework of the construct of early maladaptive schemas, the links with cognitive-

behavioural and schema therapies through the ideas of J. Young, V. Guidan, J. Cid and others. Related coping styles (overcompensation, avoidance, etc.) and parenting styles are discussed in relation to the other variables of the dissertation study. Results from empirical studies are presented with detailed attention to the role of early maladaptive schemas in increased vulnerability to psychopathology (depression and anxiety). The dissertation succeeds in presenting J. Young's theory in a consistent and synthesized form within 21 pages without forgetting current critical perspectives.

The third chapter presents conflict resolution styles in everyday life and reviews a range of empirical findings on topics on which couples typically experience conflict, the place of dependency in relationships, and sexism in relation to satisfaction in intimate relationships.

Chapter four synthesizes results from previous research on the topic of emotional expressivity in close relationships. A number of historical definitions of emotions, current theoretical positions and aspects of emotion regulation empirically related to other research constructs are conveyed.

Chapter five is devoted to relationship satisfaction, the construct-related dimensions in the modern times - mental health, sexuality, connectedness, complete well-being. This section could have been better organized towards the main aim of the dissertation research.

The empirical part of the dissertation begins in chapter six. The aims of the study, the hypotheses, the objectives, the characteristics of the sample of 308 subjects aged 14 to 74 and the selection criteria are described in detail. A theoretical-empirical model of the expected influences of the variables included in the study is presented in graphical form (Fig. 1). In separate subchapters, in tables are presented the psychometric properties of the questionnaires: Attachment Style Questionnaire (Chui & Leung, 2016), Young Schema Questionnaire - Short Form (Young & Brown, 2005), Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire (Kurdek, 1994); the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (Gross & John, 1995) and Relationship Assessment Scale, (Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1988).

The procedure of the empirical study and the psychometric characteristics of the questionnaires are presented - the descriptive characteristics of the scales, their internal

consistency (including alpha of the original scales). Chapter seven (Results and Discussion) is structurally divided into seven parts. The results of descriptive statistics, t-test, analysis of variance, correlation, regression and mediator analysis are presented and illustrated by means of tables and figures. Vladimir Marinov demonstrates a high level of competence in the choice of statistical procedures and the presentation of the results. The last part of the dissertation discusses the main results in a synthesized and generalized form with relevant psychological analyses without overinterpretations and generalizations. The thesis ends with a concise conclusion.

An advantage for the paper would be the presentation of the results relevant to the scope of the study in the direction of recommendations for the counselling and therapeutic practice (in a separate paragraph). Vladimir Marinov sets this as one of the tasks at the beginning of the empirical part. A broader commentary is needed about the start of the pandemic and how it affected close relationships beyond the organizational difficulties of the study. The results in the tables are not presented in APA format. The decimal point is arbitrary and in several variations. The Pearson correlation coefficient is represented by a capital letter (R) in part of the text and the regression coefficient by a Latin B... A number of tables could be merged around related variables, and the transfer of tabular information to the next page could be accompanied by appropriate headings to facilitate the perception of the information. There is no review of relevant literature in Bulgarian language, which is at odds with the author's claim to examine the Bulgarian sociocultural environment without parallels to previous empirical studies. Unfortunately, the above remarks have not been taken into account by the author after chair discussion.

Vladimir Marinov's work is well written and has many strengths. Among them, I would highlight the actual research topic, the well-structured theoretical and empirical parts, the relevant psychological interpretation and the review of contemporary world scientific literature. Four instruments well known in the research practice are adapted for Bulgarian conditions. An integrative model of different paradigms is constructed and proves the role of insecure attachment in the formation of early maladaptive schemas, conflict resolution styles and relationship satisfaction. The author highlights the limitations of the current study and provides directions for future research, which speaks to scientific integrity, sets a realistic framework and a

future perspective. Specialized statistical procedures were used. Empirical material has been collected from Bulgarian socio-cultural settings to provide information on the specificities of particular age groups and relational patterns during the pandemic. The results have applied value in a counseling and therapeutic context and successfully complement the data in the scientific field.

The abstract in English consists of 31 pages and reflects the main highlights of the thesis: the theoretical analyses, the stages in the empirical research and the summaries of the research work carried out. The scientific and practical contributions are correctly formulated. The publication activity of Vladimir Marinov on the topic of the dissertation consists of three publications in scientific journals and one presentation at a scientific conference,. In the submitted abstract in Bulgarian (33 pages) there are a number of terminological and technical inaccuracies that have not been taken into account despite their discussion at the chair defense. For example, the styles of attachment used in Bulgarian do not reflect the framework of the methodology (secure, fearful-avoidant, preoccupied and dismissing - Chui & Leung, 2016) and do not correspond to the names established in research and publication practice. The requirements for reporting numerical data in Bulgarian are not met. The author has underestimated the preparation of this part of the documentation.

In conclusion the dissertation represents an integrative actual study and contains significant scientific and applied results that represent an original contribution and meet the requirements for the third educational degree. Vladimir Marinov demonstrates competence in the subject and the ability to plan, conduct, analyse and publish empirical research. The dissertation has the necessary contribution and scientific and applied value.

I give my positive review and strongly recommend the Honourable members of the scientific jury to award Vladimir Vladimirov Marinov the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.2. Psychology.

10 August 2023

Sofia

Reviewer:.....

/ Assoc. Prof. Daniel Petrov, Phd/