

REVIEW

for the defense of a dissertation on the topic:

"PERSONALITY AND PROFESSIONAL DETERMINANTS OF ALEXITHYMIA"

by Lyubomira Ivaylova Tsvetkova, regular PhD student at the Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "PhD" in the scientific specialty 3.2. "Psychology" under the supervision of Prof. Irina Zinovieva, PhD, PhD program of Cultural and Differential Psychology

1. Information about the doctoral candidate.

Lyubomira Tsvetkova demonstrates a consistent educational and professional trajectory. In 2015, she completed a bachelor's degree in Psychology at Sofia University, followed by a master's degree in "Health Psychology." From 2019 to 2022, she has been a regular doctoral student at the Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the PhD program of Cultural and Differential Psychology, conducting her research in Bulgarian. Initially, she worked as a marketing and advertising specialist at Anubis-Bulvest Ltd. in Pleven and Sofia, where she advanced to the position of regional manager. Since 2018, she has been a supervised psychotherapist in private practice. Additionally, since 2021, she works as a Clinical Psychologist at the University Multiprofile Hospital for Active Treatment "Alexandrovska" in the Psychiatry Clinic and as an assistant in Medical Psychology at the Medical University of Sofia.

Her autobiography highlights numerous specializations, including supervision in Schema Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, as well as various forms of training related to psychological assessment. She is fluent in English. In addition to

the mentioned publications related to her dissertation, she has two additional publications. During her doctoral studies, she has participated in six national and international scientific forums. She is a member of prestigious professional organizations.

2. Information about the dissertation.

The choice of the dissertation topic is interesting, innovative, and highly provocative. Its relevance stems from the necessity for every individual to understand, comprehend, and rely on their own emotional experiences, as well as the emotions of others, which forms the basis of emotional intelligence. On one hand, the lack of such understanding deteriorates the quality of an individual's life, while on the other hand, adequate communication, behavior management, and development of social skills depend on the ability of individuals to verbalize their feelings and emotions. The absence of this ability, known as alexithymia, leads to distorted assessments of social situations, worsens relationships, and to some extent, isolates the individual. Therefore, the need to study the personal and professional determinants of alexithymia is evident.

The procedure adheres to the normative framework of the Republic of Bulgaria and Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" without any violations or inconsistencies. The bibliometric indicators are fully covered (33 points). A document certifying the originality and authenticity of the research, as outlined in Article 27, paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the organization and functioning of the doctoral schools and the scientific degrees of the Republic of Bulgaria, is provided.

3. Analysis of the dissertation research and abstract.

In terms of structure, the dissertation project follows a classical format - introduction, six logically connected chapters, conclusion, and a list of references, spanning 210 pages, with 180 pages dedicated to the main text, tables, and graphs. It fully complies with the requirements for such a genre of scientific research. The conducted study is presented through 1 figure and 69 tables. The list of references includes 12 Bulgarian sources and 203 foreign authors relevant to the interpreted topic.

In the Introduction, with an additional subtitle "The Soul-Body Connection," the PhD student provides a brief but content-rich historical and contemporary interpretation of the examined relationship. They outline the orientation and focus of the dissertation research, highlighting its relevance and social significance, as well as the main objectives achieved through the work.

The first chapter, "Definition of the Construct of Alexithymia," offers a theoretical overview of the definitive characteristics of the phenomenon. It is reasonable to explore and establish the correlation between alexithymia, psychosomatics, and their normalization or pathological manifestations. The adept expression and the author's ability to work with theoretical concepts are impressive. Various types of alexithymia are identified, including primary, secondary, and organic types. The PhD student adopts a holistic approach in defining the concept, based on its neuropsychological characteristics. They critically analyze diagnostic instruments, both quantitative and qualitative, and emphasize the importance of reliable methods such as interviews and projective techniques. Each chapter concludes with a brief summary, serving as a bridge to the subsequent discussions and analyses.

The second chapter, "Study on the Prevalence of Alexithymia," logically builds upon the previous one. It represents an in-depth investigation of existing research on the relationship between alexithymia and demographic, personality, and pathological characteristics. Additionally, it explores the connection between the examined construct and attachment style, stress, burnout, professional well-being, and life satisfaction. It is worth emphasizing that the comprehensive and multifaceted presentation of alexithymia allows the doctoral candidate to successfully develop their own research model, presented in **the third chapter**, "Design of the Empirical Study on the Personality and Professional Determinants of Alexithymia."

Based on the rich theoretical framework of the study, well-formulated objectives and hypotheses, and appropriately selected research instruments, which include:

- Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20, Bagby, Parker, Taylor, 1994),
- Personality traits based on the "Big Five" model (Mini IPIP, Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006),

- "Dark Triad" - short version (Short Dark Triad, SD3, Jones & Paulhus, 2014),
- Adult Attachment Style Scale (AAS, Collins, Read, 1990),
- Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI, Kristensen et al., 2005),
- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983),
- Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985),
- Affective Well-being Questionnaire for measuring professional well-being (Warr, 1990),

Along with accurately described procedures and adaptations of some applied methodologies, the experimental study can be considered reliable, objectively constructed, and highly applicable.

The fourth chapter, "Sample and Psychometric Characteristics of the Empirical Study's Instrumentation," impresses with its accurately described sample and its representativeness - 458 individuals distributed by gender, age, educational level, professional engagement, and categorized into three professional fields - medicine, education, and other. The data analyses reveal another aspect of the candidate's developed abilities - skills and competencies in working with empirical data. The conducted analyses are well-executed and sufficiently informative, and presenting them in a tabular format aid in the comprehension of the text.

The fifth chapter, "Results of the Empirical Study on the Personality and Professional Determinants of Alexithymia," can be described as exceptionally productive and significant due to its in-depth exploration of the interplay between demographic characteristics (including health status, marital status, and chronic illness) and alexithymia, as well as analytical discussions on the relationship between alexithymia and the previously defined personality constructs. An additional contribution to the dissertation study is the identification of various personality characteristics as predictors of alexithymia levels, with thorough analyses conducted on overall alexithymia levels and some of its manifestations.

The sixth chapter, "Summary of the Results from the Empirical Study and Discussion," hints at its content - interpretation of the results, hypothesis testing, and an open channel for discussion that I perceive as an invitation for future research on the topic. The extent to which the hypotheses have been supported and

the factors that can be considered predictors of high levels of alexithymia are appropriately indicated.

The conclusion is concise and summarizing. I perceive it as a manifestation of scientific maturity and honesty in the last sentence - "To date - despite the extensive research on the construct, there is no effective way to work with such individuals, according to researchers' consensus." It does not sound discouraging; on the contrary, it provokes more researchers to engage with this highly significant issue for individuals.

The abstract fully corresponds to the dissertation and presents the key points in a condensed form.

Regarding the dissertation topic, four publications in scientific journals and three conference presentations have been made.

4. Scientific contributions

I accept the contributions formulated by the PhD candidate and comment on them as follows:

1. The detailed analysis of the personality and professional determinants of alexithymia includes the most significant psychological phenomena.
2. The conducted theoretical and experimental research on the professional and personality determinants of alexithymia is unique in both Bulgaria and an international context, distinguished by its comprehensiveness, breadth, depth, and representativeness.
3. It has been demonstrated that alexithymia can be regarded as a stable personality construct related to interpersonal interaction, which is minimally influenced or unaffected by professional determinants.
4. The analyses conducted are exceptionally thorough, providing a comprehensive examination of the relationship between levels of alexithymia and personality characteristics and constructs.
5. The empirical study is precisely designed and executed, and the obtained data are representative, analytically presented, and highly applicable for various specialists working with individuals.

6. The concise and substantive analyses following each chapter contribute to a deeper understanding of the author's exposition.

7. The work's contribution also lies in its unique "openness" to questions, observations, new research, and discussions, making it thought-provoking in a positive sense.

8. The dissertation work is applicable in psychotherapy for children and adults with high levels of alexithymia.

5. Notes and Recommendations:

I have no remarks or questions regarding the dissertation, except for the recommendation to publish it as a monograph to increase its visibility and usefulness to specialists and a wider audience.

6. Summary:

The overall impression of the dissertation is that it represents a well-thought-out and in-depth study supported by a solid theoretical foundation. It includes an original and well-structured empirical research, presented in a language that is both scientifically rigorous and accessible. The study incorporates a representative sample, and the conclusions and findings are measured and practically oriented.

7. Conclusion:

Based on the analysis presented above, I recommend that the esteemed members of the Academic Committee provide a positive evaluation of Lyubomira Tsvetkova's dissertation on the topic "Personality and Professional Determinants of Alexithymia" and award her the academic degree of PhD in the professional field of Psychology (Specialization: Cultural and Differential Psychology) at the Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." I will vote "FOR" the acceptance of the dissertation.

20.07.2023

V. Turnovo

prof. Kr. Petrova, PhD