

REVIEW

on the dissertation thesis

SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL STATUS – ENVY, ANGER AND WELL-BEING

for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the professional field

3.2. Psychology (Health Psychology)

Author: Svetoslav Kaloyanov Hristov

The subject of analysis in the dissertation research are the relationships between subjective social status and well-being, as mediated both by attitudes towards social hierarchy and social status, and by the tendency to negative emotions – envy and anger. The starting point is the assumption that the indicated relationship between subjective status and well-being will manifest itself, regardless of the effects of objective social status (related to income, education, profession). From this perspective, the subjective experience of the individual, beyond external, objective indicators of his social status, increases the prognostic capabilities of empirically tested models. Therefore, the assessment of subjective status has an advantage, since it combines objective indicators with the cognitive assessment of the individual who experiences them.” (p. 29 of the dissertation).

The dissertation work includes an introduction, a theoretical chapter, an empirical chapter, a summary of the results, a conclusion, a list of references and an appendix, with a total volume of 265 pages, of which 209 pages are the main text, tables and graphs, 56 pages are the references and an appendix. 20 of the scientific sources used are in Bulgarian, 321 in English and one in Russian.

The first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, divided into three parts, which sequentially trace the origin and historical development of social inequalities, the relationship of social status with health and well-being, the subjective perception of social status; contemporary understandings of envy are presented, justifying a distinction between benign and malicious envy and their relationships with social status, health and well-being; data on cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions related to anger are presented, including socio-demographic and cultural aspects and the relationships of anger with social status, health and well-being. In conclusion, views on subjective and psychological well-being are compared, as well as approaches to their integration. The theoretical analysis systematizes a significant number of theories and views on the topic of the study and is the basis for formulating research hypotheses and planning the empirical study.

The second chapter describes the organization and results of the empirical research. The first part presents the conceptual model, the aims and hypotheses of the study, the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, as well as the instruments used. Based on the theoretical analysis, seven research hypotheses are formulated, tested in a sample of 490 respondents: 34.7% men and 65.3% women, with mean age of 33 years.

The research instruments include scales for subjective social status, status anxiety, status consciousness (with 8 subscales), envy, anger, and well-being, measured by several

instruments: the Satisfaction with Life Scale, Positive and Negative Experiences Scale, The short version of the Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire and the Subscale "Remembered well-being" from the Pemberton Happiness Index questionnaire.

The scales for subjective social status, status anxiety, status consciousness, benign and malicious envy, and remembered well-being were translated into Bulgarian by 7 independent versions. The summarised Bulgarian translation was subjected to back-translation to English. The structure of the scales was tested using exploratory factor analysis. The results reproduce the original structure, with one exception regarding the subscale the high-perceived status of the Status Consciousness Scale from which, due to low factor loadings, two items are removed. Regarding the tables of the factor analyses, it can be recommended to present the full factor matrix, and not only the weights of the items according to the factor they assess. This would allow the reader to orient themselves in their discriminatory capabilities. The data indicate good levels of internal consistency of the adapted instruments, comparable to those obtained in the original studies. However, the work does not present data on the internal consistency of the other instruments used in the study. The fact that they have adapted Bulgarian versions does not remove the question of their reliability in the sample of the dissertation study.

The next part of the second chapter discusses the testing of research hypotheses. At the first stage, the correlation analysis generally indicates weak relationships between subjective social status and the other variables (the strongest correlation is with life satisfaction ($r=0.413$) and perceived well-being ($r=0.412$)). The data from the regression analysis show that after taking into account socio-demographic characteristics, as well as objective indicators of social status (income, education, profession), subjective social status has an independent effect and explains between 2% and 12% of the variance of the various indicators of well-being (with an average value: 7%).

The last part of Chapter 2 discusses the two tested mediator models. The first of them examines the mediating role of status anxiety and status consciousness as cognitive aspects of subjective social status, and the second examines the mediating role of benign envy, malicious envy, and anger in relation to well-being.

The evaluation of the first model shows that subjective social status, based on direct and indirect effects, explains between 8% and 17% variance of the well-being indicators, with the most essential and significant role for status anxiety and perception of low status. In comparison, the indirect effects of some of the other mediator variables remain statistically insignificant. In the second model, the explanatory possibilities are in the same range (from 8% to 17% variance explained), and within the tested models, the role of malicious envy and anger turns out to be significant, while the mediator effects of benign envy are borderline or statistically insignificant.

The final third chapter summarizes the results obtained and the verification of the research hypotheses, discusses the main conclusions and their significance, presents the contributions of the work, outlines the limitations of the research conducted, as well as the directions for future work.

In conclusion:

- The dissertation contains a carefully planned and successfully implemented empirical study, the results of which are of interest, both in research and applied perspectives.

- Data analysis is based on modern statistical methods and corresponds to the standards for similar types of research.

- The self-description scales adapted for the purposes of the study have the potential to be used for both research and applied purposes.

- The results present new facts about the relationship between subjective social status and well-being, mediated by the role of status anxiety, status consciousness, envy and anger, which in turn further develops the theoretical model and methodological framework of the study.

The essential qualities of the work should also include the well-structured text and the professional language of the presentation, which make it as easy as possible for the reader to follow the logic of the research.

Some recommendations related to expanding the researched topics can also be made to the work.

- 1) Subjective social status plays a fundamentally important role in the design of the study and is related to the main hypotheses. However, it is assessed using only one (picture) stimulus. The author cites data on test-retest reliability obtained in other studies, but an assessment based on only one empirical indicator generally raises questions about reliability of the assessment. From this point of view, a more detailed assessment of subjective social status can be recommended from several perspectives: (a) the baseline comparison group "people from our society" could be combined with specification in terms of age and profession (e.g. "When you compare yourself to people of your age/with people in your profession ... "); (b) additional potentially useful information can be obtained through retrospective and prospective assessment of status, for example five years ago and an expected assessment after five years; (c) the overall assessment of status is based on three criteria: income, education, occupation. Since these indicators are not always consistent, they could be assessed separately, and then the overall assessment formed on their basis.
- 2) The author points out the key role of negative emotions as mediators of the relationship between subjective social status and well-being. Along with the variables analyzed in the study, the model could be expanded to include, for example, anxiety, depression, hostility. Indeed, the subject of assessment in the work is status anxiety, but it reflects a specific type of anxiety, and there is reason to assume that low subjective status will be associated with a wider range of anxious experiences, related, for example, to worries about everyday problems, etc. The inclusion of additional mediators would potentially increase the predictive capabilities of the model.

The recommendations mentioned do not question the quality of the reviewed work, but point to possible directions for expanding the research.

I accept the reference of the scientific contributions of the research noted by the candidate.

The candidate meets the national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

The presented research undoubtedly meets the requirements for a dissertation thesis . Therefore, I strongly recommend to the esteemed jury to award Svetoslav Hristov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

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Plamen Kalchev, Prof. DSc.