

**REVIEW**  
**of the dissertation on the topic**  
**„Locus of control, coping mechanisms and quality of life in patients with**  
**bladder cancer”**

**Doctoral candidate: Anita Milusheva**

**Reviewer: Prof. Psy.D. Lyudmil Georgiev**

Firstly, I would like to categorically state that Anita Milusheva's dissertation on the topic: „Locus of control, coping mechanisms and quality of life in patients with bladder cancer” will greatly contribute to the contemporary Bulgarian psychology and psychotherapeutic practice, and will certainly stir up the spirits and research quests as well as will support the professional realization of those young psychologists who will take this difficult path, of course after its publication as a monograph. Further, in my opinion, this dissertation is also a daring challenge to the arguments, still considered unmistakable, of the traditional Western psychology, especially of American psychology, to whose methodological requirements Bulgarian psychology has stuck uncritically in the last 30 or so years, in the same way as it was done with respect to the German psychology, after 1878, and to the Soviet psychology, after 1944. It seems that Bulgarian psychologists, like the Bulgarian political elites, are predestined to bring in one or another conjuncture external models the perfection, be it scientific or political, which means, as far as the psychological knowledge is concerned, that the Bulgarian concretization of the idea of science psychology has not yet happened and is not likely to happen soon, as far as the servile obedience to outside concretizations of this idea has been reproduced historically in an

uncompromising manner. I allow myself to think, which makes me happy, that this dissertation is a successful attempt to break into the empowered, hierarchized and considered as the only *scientific* Western traditional university psychology, especially if we try to understand that the text in essence falls unambiguously into the theoretical and practical perspectives of the existential psychology and existential psychotherapy. What is it really about?

It is well known that the traditional Western university psychology continues to look rather suspiciously on the existential psychology and existential psychotherapy, pretending that they either do not exist or lie too far from the accepted „scientific” norms, thus it helpfully omits them in the curriculum of psychology students. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, and here in Bulgaria - the scientific leader of this brilliant dissertation, the undisputed leader of clinical psychology and psychotherapy in the country, Professor Vanya Matanova, long ago included in the clinical psychology master's program at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” a lecture course in existential psychology, which I have been honored to lead for nearly 20 years.

One of the profound reasons for this attitude of the traditional Western psychology is the explosive consequences in both the „scientific” and the everyday thinking that brought with it the thunderous posing and addressing of the existential problems, which the European existential philosophy of the XX<sup>th</sup> century realized in a brilliant manner through its basic question, „Is life worth living when we know we are going to die?” - a shaking refrain, also reproduced by Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger, by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, and by all other existentialist philosophers. Along with the horror of the unpardonable but also too human revelation of the existential philosophy, however, as far as the Western university psychology is concerned, it also is fraught with additional resistance to the existential psychological knowledge and therapeutic practice, since in this case we have completely different approaches to psychological knowledge, and especially to the ways through which it become

feasible. Mathematized and statistically subordinate university psychology is not able to understand, of course, the university psychologists stating that other ways of accumulating psychological knowledge are available, especially when it comes to the existential experiences, fear of death, the last moments of life and agony, the meaning of life, suicide, freedom and non-freedom, love, etc. It is very difficult, even almost impossible for the theoretical existential models, and at the same time, the existential psychotherapy of terminally ill patients, to be verified by the orthodox mathematical and statistical requirements of the empirical methodology of university psychology.

But whether it provides it ground to stigmatize the existential psychology and the existential psychotherapy as „unscientific”? In my opinion, definitely not, because such an attitude is an expression of the theoretical poverty of the traditional Western university psychology rather than a manifestation of scientificity.

However, the fundamental challenge and along with this a plus of this dissertation is that Anita Milusheva puts her finger namely in this methodological wound of the traditional Western university psychology in order to illustrate that the existential experiences of oncologically ill people can also be mathematically and statistically verified, though they appear on the other hand to be absolutely real. Anyway, the doctoral candidate, as well as any other existential psychologist or existential psychotherapist, are compelled to comply with the canons of the bastion that the Western university psychology has created, in order that a scientific career to be pursued according to its rules, nevertheless they seem absurd in one area or another aspect, which is especially valid for the existential psychological knowledge and practice. At the risk of repeating myself, I will say again that Anita Milusheva has coped brilliantly with this challenge.

Structurally, her dissertation consists of a preface, four chapters, conclusion, reference literature and annexes spread over 196 standard pages. Especially impressive is the number of sources cited - 309, all of them adequate to

the studied issues, of which 116 in Cyrillic and 193 in Latin. In other words, the dissertation fulfills the requirements for this type of work.

In the preface, Anita Milusheva introduces us to the history and relevance of the problems she has explored, and at the same time, she shares the reasons for her choice - personal and professional. The fundamental idea of the doctoral candidate is to outline the prospects for presenting and understanding the existential experiences of patients with bladder cancer by examining the regulatory functions of such basic psychological constructs as locus of control, coping mechanisms and quality of life.

In chapter one, quite logically the doctoral candidate provides a very meticulous overview of the historical and contemporary theories and approaches to the psychological constructs she has selected, to which she seems to naturally add an overview of psychosomatic theories and models. What is striking here is the ease with which Anita Milusheva presents this vast psychological matter, and this is definitely an indicator of her undeniable psychological culture. Of course, this review is not a goal in itself, but the doctoral candidate is elegantly suggesting to the readers that they should bear in mind that the information presented implicitly targets the problematic area as chosen by her. At the end of this chapter, the author also focuses on a still controversial matter, such as the idea of psycho-oncology, which is why I will discuss this point at the end of the review.

The second chapter is devoted to a detailed medical description of bladder cancer. The essence of the diagnosis, symptoms, histological appearance, stages of the disease and diagnostics are presented consistently and precisely. Both the opportunities and the perspectives of surgical treatment, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy for bladder cancer are described in detail. Certainly, the skills of her scientific consultant, Prof. Krasimir Neykov, are evident here, and the result of their joint efforts gives a very representative picture of the disease. It seems quite natural that here again the doctoral candidate elegantly refers the medical description to the patients' own psychic experiences, as if to prepare the readers

for the core of the work, according to the requirements of the university psychology.

The third chapter presents the empirical study itself - the purpose, object and subject. The characteristics of the persons surveyed, such as the sample volume, age and gender distribution, are shared, as well as the arguments and selection criteria. The five hypotheses and the tasks of the study are defined, and the methodology and organization are described, as well as the procedure of the research process.

I consider that the three methodological tools are adequate to verify the hypotheses and the tasks accomplishment.

Chapter four presents an analysis of the results of the empirical study itself. The results obtained from the study of the locus of control, coping mechanisms and life satisfaction in patients with bladder cancer in the sample are interpreted individually and correlatively. I consider that the analysis, interpretations and conclusions of the study here demonstrate the undisputed research culture of the doctoral candidate, and the essentials, at least in my opinion, boils down to the fact that through the empirical requirement of the traditional university psychology Anita Milusheva proves her professional and scientific belief - the need for rendering psychological assistance to the patients with bladder cancer with a view to improving their quality of life, and not only to them but to terminally ill patients, as a whole.

In conclusion, the doctoral candidate actually shares exactly her own suffering mission, which I think should be treated with respect.

It is well known that one of the important requirements of reviewing is that the reviewer should assess the contributions made and formulated by the candidate for the scientific degree or title. I would like to state definitely that the contributions made by Anita Milusheva are real and I fully agree with them. Moreover, at the beginning I dared to say that the whole dissertation is a contribution to Bulgarian psychology and psychotherapy. Moreover, the abstract

adequately reflects the dissertation contents, which is also an important prerequisite for reviewing the text.

Finally, going back to the logic of the whole review, for which it is not so important to describe the realized obviousness of the dissertation's achievements, but to look beyond them and on the challenges they bring, I would like to share some more words.

It would not be surprising to say that this is, first of all, the idea of *psycho-oncology*, traditionally seen as emerging at the border of psychology and oncology, though as a Kantian I would say that when something emerges at the border of two other sciences, usually nothing happens. I understand not only Anita Milusheva, but anyone else who tries to work in this field by avoiding the some insane demands of the traditional university psychology, but I do not see any serious theoretical grounds for them to escape from what they are actually doing, namely, the *existential psychotherapy*. Moreover, if any therapy is essentially an intervention in a person's life with a view to improving its quality, then it seems rather logical that any therapy is also existential psychotherapy, and I do not see any valid theoretical and methodological reasons to escape this indisputable fact.

Thus, I would like to emphasize one of the leading threads not only in the dissertation but also in the practical work of Anita Milusheva - her psychological assistance to patients in their search of meaning even in such a difficult situation. Here I think of one of the very important sources of knowledge in the existential psychology, the so-called. „Near-death states,” and as a specific example, shared by Frida Naylor, a doctor who has bravely kept a diary while dying of cancer: „I went through things I have never experienced before, things for which I have to thank my cancer. Humility, awareness of my own perishability, learning about my inner strength, which constantly amazes me, which I found because I had to stop, strike a balance and then move forward”.

And last but not least, the other guiding thread in the text and therapeutic work of Anita Milusheva - the vocation and mission of the existential psychologist to help the dying patient more peacefully go out of this world. I think of the deeply thought-out sentence of the Tibetan psychologist Sogial Rinpoche, who said that „for Buddhist psychology there is no more humane value than helping a person die better. „And also the exclamation of his colleague Yongi Rinpoche, who was surprised to learn that „the science of psychology originated in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe while I was studying the psychological systems created 5,000 years ago by our wise ancestors”?!

I will say again, as a Kantian, that if the idea of the psychology science is merely a pure idea *a priori* of reason, then many concrete manifestations *a posteriori* of that idea are possible, that is, no single „scientific” psychology exists. However, for all possible concretizations of this idea, psychotherapy also as existential psychotherapy remains the only meaningful *practical method*.

Certainly, the last sentences are primarily intended to inspire the courage of Anita Milusheva, because she has achieved results that are beyond the limits of the obvious things, of the text and of the empirical research. And they can serve as a reliable support in her future theoretical and practical pursuits.

In conclusion, having in mind the profound theoretical and practical psychological culture and the undisputable research qualities of Anita Milusheva, I strongly recommend the honorable jury to confer on her the doctorate degree for her dissertation on the topic: „Locus of control, copying mechanisms and quality of life in patients with bladder cancer“.

I consider that this will be an adequate assessment of both her current work and an important impetus for her future achievements.

March 06, 2020

Sofia

Reviewer:

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