

## REVIEW

From Prof. RUMYANA BOZHINOVA, PhD

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Regarding a competition for the academic position of "professor" in the field of higher education division 3. Social, Economic and Legal sciences, professional field 3.2 Psychology (General and age psychology), announced in SG No. 22 of 16.03.2021 for the needs of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Faculty of education studies and the arts (FESA)

### **1. General information about the candidate and the submitted materials under the competition**

One candidate participates in the above competition - Doctor of Psychology MARGARITA ANGELOVA STEFANOVA-BAKRACHEVA, Associate Professor at FESA at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". The submitted documents meet the basic requirements of the Law for development of the academic staff of the Republic of Bulgaria for holding the academic position "professor ", the Regulations for its application and the Regulations of Sofia University for development of the academic staff.

Assoc. Prof. Margarita Bakracheva received the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in 2004 with a dissertation on the topic: "Psychosocial identity and subjective well-being in adolescence". She holds the academic position of "Associate Professor" at FESA at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" from 2018. Since the same year she has been the Deputy Dean of this faculty for design, international activities, public relations. It is also worth noting that M. Bakracheva has been an associate professor since 2011 at BAS - IINCH in the previous period of her professional career.

The candidate has the necessary experience as a lecturer in the field of higher education - a full lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski "from 2018, part-time lecturer from 2019 at the National Academy of Arts, part-time lecturer from 2017 at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, part-time lecturer from 2014 at the Military Academy " G. S. Rakovski ". Emphasized serious teaching commitment of the candidate

is accompanied by successful management of graduates and doctoral students. From the attached reference it can be seen that she has supervised 3 doctoral students independently.

Assoc. Prof. Margarita Bakracheva is distinguished by significant experience from her work as an expert, coordinator and participant in national and international scientific and educational projects (seven in total), scientific editing, review of scientific publications, etc.

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarita Bakracheva has submitted for review 58 scientific publications, of which: 1) 2 independent scientific monographs, one of which is listed as a habilitation thesis, 2) 1 collective monograph, 3) 4 articles and reports, abstracted and indexed in world databases (WoS, Scopus), 4) 43 articles and 2 studies published in unrefereed journals or edited collective volumes, 5) 3 chapters from collective monographs. 15 of the attached publications are in English and 31 of the publications are co-authored.

The scientific papers submitted for participation in the competition are outside the papers for the acquisition of PhD degree and the academic position "Associate Professor" and are accepted for evaluation.

Attached is a list of a total of 54 citations of the candidate's works, of which 5 citations in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in a world-famous database, 49 in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review.

According to the attached reference, the specified quantitative indicators cover the requirements for holding the academic position of "professor".

## **2. General characteristics and evaluation of the scientific production and the candidate's contributions**

In terms of content, the publications of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva are entirely on the topic of the announced competition - general and age psychology.

The presented scientific publications definitely characterize the candidate as an original researcher and a competent scientist, with a wide range of interests. The thematic orientation of the publications of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva shows a clear consistency and purposefulness in the realized researches. There is also a connection between the scientific and the applied nature of the developed topics, the ambition to respond to current issues in science and social practice.

Despite the variety of research conducted by Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva, the works can be divided into several main areas, which the candidate herself has done and which I accept, as I accept her vision for the contributions of the research she applied.

*Psychosocial identity*, reflected in 11 publications and *stress management strategies*, including 12 publications are sub-areas that have a central place in the research orientations of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva and they are dedicated to her habilitation work "Identity and stress management" (*Bakracheva M., (2017) Identity and stress management, Kolbis Publishing House, Sofia, p.316, ISBN: 978-619-7284-17-1,*), to a very large extent demonstrating the qualities of the candidate.

This monograph presents an empirical study aimed at clarifying specific regulatory mechanisms regarding the adaptation of the individual to the immediate social environment, to its stressful nature and indirectly regarding the psychological well-being. The work focuses on the psychosocial identity and the coping strategies applied by the individual, emphasizing the relationship between them. The topic is emphatically relevant and significant in the field of personality psychology and age psychology, for which the problem of personal self-determination, adaptation processes and effective functioning are of key importance.

The structure and exposition to which the work is subordinated is in accordance with the empirical nature of the development. In the first part the candidate, in the plan of the existing researches and approved concepts, traces the development of the notion of identity as a psychological construct with emphasized importance for the development and adaptation of the personality to the social environment. She emphasizes the components of identity and the process of building them. Particular importance is attached to the dynamic nature of the phenomenon, its susceptibility to "movement" back and forth within different age periods. This emphasizes his connection with external circumstances, which can provoke a new view of himself, suggesting appropriate adaptation.

A certain place in the latest views of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva in the specific field is occupied by the virtual identity, which is undoubtedly in sync with the new realities of life and the attitudes of the individual. It is worth emphasizing that Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva very clearly states her positions in this part (the theoretical prerequisites for the planned research), based on the existing empirical evidence, including her previous research.

In the first chapter of the paper, coping is presented as a phenomenon. It is known that stress and dealing with it are one of the most studied problems in the field of psychology. Regardless of their popularity, Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva manages to present them in a sufficiently attractive version, as well as to draw attention to the issue of the hierarchy of coping strategies, involving the inclusion of a variety of emotional and behavioral responses to environmental stressors - extensive, maximum detailed study of coping and its dynamics.

From this stable theoretical basis, the author of the monograph focuses on studying the relationship between identity and coping, which she considers to be functionally close and related to the characteristics of the environment, individual adaptability of behavioral choice and ultimately psychological well-being.

The formulation and design of the research, the applied research methods (seven questionnaires, interviews and focus groups) highly ensure the quality of the research and the reliability of the results.

Significant regularities are revealed, with contributing significance, regarding the functioning of the individual in the conditions of daily stress. It has been shown that the choice of coping largely depends on the definition of identity, but at the same time it in one way or another reflects on identity, mainly on interpersonal identity - active coping strategies stimulate identity building, and emotionally focused and avoidance support the postponement of choice and self-determination.

The results give a special place to the environmental factors in terms of these relationships and influences, including the studied impact of individual characteristics: age, presence of a partner, presence of children, club activities, time spent on social networks. These trends, according to the study, are reflected in the so-called result variables, namely found and sought meaning in life, psychological well-being, a sense of loneliness.

At the end of the research, Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva illustrates the revealed regularities by describing the individual who is under the influence of factors leading to a more positive feeling about himself or vice versa related to factors leading to a more negative feeling. In reality, the author of the monograph realizes the more general goal of setting successful behavioral patterns that help a person to be more satisfied with life and happier.

The results of the research presented in the monograph, in general, in addition to their scientific value, also have a certain applied significance. They involve the

development of intervention techniques to stimulate and achieve positive impacts in the process of development and change of personal self-determination in the course of the life cycle by supporting those coping strategies that affect the identity.

It is worth noting that the research approach applied by Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva is essentially functional. It involves tracking the functioning of two variables of different order, how they meet and interact with each other in the conditions of daily stress that accompanies the man today. I think this is an interesting, non-traditional research position that makes it possible to establish functional links that are in some way involved in the more global processes of behavioral regulation.

In more general terms, it should be emphasized that Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva with her works (reflected in 11 publications) significantly enriches the notion of *psychosocial identity* as a phenomenon characterized by significant dynamics in its construction and functioning, seriously related to environmental factors and specific individual characteristics (presence of a partner, presence of children, club activity, interest in social networks) and having a significant impact on the adaptability of the individual. The most adaptive strategy for the current conditions has been established, related to postponing the stable elections, extending the search period, i.e. self-determination.

The plan of several studies has expanded the idea of *coping strategies* as a phenomenon, its interaction with other dynamic variables, such as identity and the resultant effect that its specificity leads to. The most effective model of reaction in a modern context, defined by Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva as accommodative coping, implies self-reflection with a focus on rethinking the possibilities and reformulating the goals in situations where active acts are not possible and passivity is a luxury. Specific coping strategies are derived - escape from reality in the virtual world, sharing conspiracy theories and motivation for tattooing.

***Psychological well-being*** is a sub-area present in nine of the publications attached by the candidate (3.1., 4.1., 4.2., 7.1., 7.2., 7.12., 7.38., 7.39., 7.40.). It is the focus of the monograph "Proactive Mindfulness - Pathways to psychological well-being and flourishing" presented by Assoc. Prof. M. Bakracheva, published in 2020, with a volume of 232 pages. Systematization of research in positive psychology has been achieved and integration of the hedonistic and eudemonic approach from the perspective of the theory of prosperity. There are tendencies that place a certain emphasis on the

difference between the predictors of happiness, life satisfaction and well-being, regardless of their interconnectedness. The research suggests that psychological well-being is a learning process and Assoc. Prof. M. Bakracheva derives models for interventions and programs for building mindfulness.

*Virtual identity* is a field that is present in seven of the publications attached by Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva (4.2., 7.4., 7.6., 7.9., 7.16., 7.20., 7.31.). I share the opinion of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva that her contribution to this research area is the new approach she applies to the study of virtual identity as a component of general self-determination. It is proven that the time spent on social networks is coping behavior in conditions of highly perceived stress, insecurity, and requirements for maintaining identity and making choices. Identical patterns in the virtual world are revealed regarding the influence of social norms and the connection between coping strategies and active and passive behavioral identity.

*The applied contributions* of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva are related to almost all her research. They can be divided into two main groups:

- a) Adaptation and development of scales with good psychometric indicators, for measuring: "psychosocial identity", "experienced derealization" when using social networks, measuring "national identity" , "motivation to learn", "stereotypes and social attitudes and conspiracy theories", "methodology for analyzing visual restraint" and others;
- b) Derivation of models and guidelines for the development of programs and interventions to support personal self-determination, self-reflection and coping behaviors that ensure optimal personal effectiveness and functioning; Conceptual model focused on the possibilities for shortening the period of adaptation to changes in the physical environment and / or related experiences and fears, defined as a "state of weightlessness", etc.

Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva's publishing activity is also related to her scientific contributions with emphasized social significance in sub-areas such as: *Prevention of violence* (4.2., 6.1., 6.2., 7.29., 7.37.), *Parenting style* (7.8., 7.10., 7.14., 7.19.), *The educational process* (7.23., 7.42., 9.2.), *Intercultural dialogue* (7.13, 7.28., 7.34., 7.36.), *The needs of disadvantaged people* (6.3., 7.27., 7.43.).

The results of the research of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva have a serious contribution to the enrichment of modern knowledge in the field of general psychology (personality psychology) and age psychology, as well as for various practice-oriented areas of psychology - educational psychology, occupational psychology, sports psychology, social psychology, consultative psychology, etc.

My personal impression of the scientific production of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarita Bakracheva, as well as of our joint work over the years is that she is an in-depth, precise researcher, focused on empirical verification of original concepts and approaches, with high methodological culture and competencies for analysis of fundamental and applied problems in the field of psychology. It is characterized by a pronounced intellectual potential, enviable activity, ability to work and readiness for teamwork.

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**In summary**, the monographic works and other publications of Assoc. Prof. Bakracheva in the field in which she applied testify to **serious theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions**. I will allow myself to indicate some of them in a synthesized version:

- 1) Based on an in-depth analysis of existing concepts and research, formulated emphatically modern views on the interaction between psychosocial identity, coping strategies and psychology well-being in connection with the ongoing adaptation processes to current living conditions and development of individual (stressful nature of the environment, the existence of alternative virtual reality, etc.).
- 2) Empirically, important patterns of functioning of the individual in conditions of daily stress depending on personal determination have been revealed. The notion of the dynamic aspect of identity has been expanded.
- 3) The idea of the functional potential of coping strategies is enriched. The possibility that they influence the variation of personal determination has been established.
- 4) Psychological well-being is empirically outlined as effectively influenced by the individual's adaptation to the social environment based on the functional interaction between personal determination and applied coping strategies, complemented by the

influence of current individual characteristics such as age, presence of partner and children, club affiliation, time too much in social networks;

5) The serious interest of the individual in virtual reality is derived as an essential element of coping behavior in conditions of highly perceived stress, insecurity, requirements for maintaining identity and making choices;

6) In an attached plan, models and programs have been developed aimed at helping the individual to achieve higher satisfaction, happiness and flourishing.

7) Original approaches and research methods have been developed, referring to personal and individual characteristics and regulatory aspects of the functioning of the individual.

#### CONCLUSION:

The only candidate in the competition for a professor of "General and Age Psychology" for the needs of Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski Assoc. Prof. Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva is a researcher and university lecturer with a visible presence in this field. Through her publishing activity and the quality of her publications, she presents herself as a competent and in-depth professional, with a wide literary awareness and in-depth creative approach, with a serious attitude to psychological practice and with a sharp social sense of the relevance of the studied problems.

Assoc. Prof. Margarita Stefanova-Bakracheva meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of "professor".

All this gives me reason to vote with conviction for the award of Assoc. Prof. Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva the academic position of "professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2 Psychology (general and age psychology) and to I recommend that the members of the jury also support this choice.

July 17, 2021

**Reviewer:**

Prof. Dr. Romyana Bozhinova