

Review

Of dissertation work on the topic:

“Specifics of the cognitive model in social anxiety”

Candidate: **Sofiya Dimitrova**

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Krasimir Ivanov, M.D, PhD.

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The submitted dissertation for review explores from an interesting point of view the problem of social anxiety hidden behind common behavioral models. It shows a good research skill to be able to go beyond the popular understanding and to catch those relationships invisible to the unprofessional eye that define the complex mechanisms of human existence.

Sofiya Dimitrova and her mentor have succeeded in showing and scientifically discovering and supporting part of the phenomenon - the specifics of the cognitive model in social anxiety.

A main focus of the dissertation research are the areas related to impaired social adaptation among people with social anxiety disorder as well as its impact on the main areas of mental functioning according to the cognitive model - thoughts, emotions and behavior. The current research work investigates the manifestations of social anxiety in the framework of the cognitive model as well as the influence of anxiety on the development of the ability for mentalization. As a sign for high metacognitive functioning it has been chosen an investigation of the attitude toward humor - one of the evolutionary-based mechanisms for coping and adaptation.

In the theoretical part of the dissertation the different anxiety disorders are explained in detail according to the most up-to-date criteria. The depth of the research is shown through the neurophysiological aspects, genetic correlates and early behavioral models, all playing a possible role in the formation of this type of disorder. The personality, cognitive and social factors part of the etiology of the pathological picture are also very well defined.

For the scope of the research, it is indicative that Dimitrova has analyzed transcultural aspects of manifestation and suppression of socially anxious experience in cultures like the Japanese and the effects of this process on the individual and society. The dissertation research is enriched and supported by the analysis of the process of mentalization according to Fonagy and Allison. Its main function is to assume and understand the actions of others by correctly and adequately guessing the intentions, desires and needs that logically stem from. The theory of mentalization is skillfully combined with the concept of humor through the theories of Superiority, Incongruity and Relief.

A special place in the dissertation by Sofiya Dimitrova takes the analysis of the cognitive model by Aaron Beck and the cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). It is supported by the fact that in the modern therapeutical paradigms CBT is the main approach with proven efficacy in those type of disorders. Research not only in the area of neurobiology but also in completing and affirming the cognitive model using clinical and control groups contribute to the importance and scientific foundation of this model and the therapeutic approaches stemming from it. This is one of the reasons why the current research focuses on the three pillars of the cognitive model - thoughts, emotions and behavior, whether and how they change and reflect one of the most common psychopathologies - social anxiety.

In the spirit of the modern integrative approach the researcher investigates the importance of defense mechanisms, coping strategies, social and clinical models of behavior which brings interdisciplinary background to the dissertation.

The presented review of the psychotherapeutic algorithms and the detailed explanation of the mechanisms of therapeutic effect speaks to the affinity of the researcher for practical application of knowledge in the area of psychotherapy and clinical practice.

The analysis of the weak aspects of certain therapeutic paradigms and the knowledge on new integrative treatment aspects aiming at better effectiveness among patients with social anxiety disorder is impressive.

In regards to the empirical psychological research the initial pilot study has been enriched with new methodologies and increase in the sample size. This stands as a proof for the conscientious attitude of the candidate and her mentor towards the problem.

The battery of psychological tests is well-selected, the questionnaires complete one another, they are modern, with high-assessment value regarding the presented problem.

The hypotheses are clearly formulated and directly related to the research aim and tasks of the dissertation.

The groups of the sample are selected using a diagnostic filter open enough to guarantee precise results.

The analyses are supported professionally and are relevant to the investigative aims. The results are well-presented and understandable even to non-professionals who show interest in the subject.

The specific examples from the clinical practice with their versatility and depth suggest a high level of professional preparation and a real clinical approach.

My critical notes are directed towards the structural side of the dissertation but in no way do they impair the scientific value of the research and dissertation work.

In conclusion, I deem that the proposed dissertation is fully responsible for the educational scientific degree "Doctor" and I propose to the esteemed jury to award Sofia Plamenova Dimitrova educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in 3.2. Psychology. Clinical Psychology

Varna

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