

Statement

For

Dissertation work on the topic:

"Features of the cognitive model in social anxiety"

By

Sofia Dimitrova - Clinical Psychologist,

For obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Psychology"

Scientific specialty: "Clinical Psychology"

Scientific advisers: Assoc. Prof. Pavlina Petkova, PhD,

Scientific consultants Prof. Sonya Karabeliova, PhD, DSc,

Kaloyan Kukov, PhD, DSc,

**Dr. William Chaplin, PhD, Director of the General
Master's Program, Department of Psychology, Director of Research at the
Psychological Services Center, St. John's University**

Reviewer: Assoc. prof. Miglena Krusteva, M.D., Ph.D

Contemporaneity of the dissertation work:

The presented dissertation work is dedicated to the relationship between the manifestations of social anxiety and its influence on the development of the ability for mentalization. A sign for high metacognitive functioning is the attitude towards humor defined as one of the main evolutionary mechanisms for adaptation. Another aspect of the dissertation work is the thorough investigation of the genesis of social anxiety, its multifaceted clinical picture, the specification for its assessment in the clinical practice as well as the definition of the most adequate and effective psychotherapeutic models for treatment.

From an evolutionary point of view, human survival has always depended on the group. The expulsion from the tribe or a conflict with tribal members has been practically an experience of a death threat. Therefore, behavior directed at seeking the approval of the group (not to be expelled) and submissive behavior (which allows to avoid conflict with the stronger members) has been established as an evolutionary adaptive behavior. And, thus, from the tribal community to modern society one of the main theories about the origin of social anxiety as a psychological phenomenon is formed. On the other hand, the development of social anxiety in a single individual depends on the early experiences, the type of attachment and the interaction between the genetic predisposition and the influences from the environment.

Theoretical framework of the dissertation work

The dissertation work consists of four logically interconnected parts /chapters/. The first chapter is theoretical and presents the main constructs related to social anxiety, mentalization, the main theories explaining its origin and formation, sense of humor and its connection to social anxiety as well as a summary of the therapeutic approaches appropriate for patients with social anxiety disorder, primarily focusing

on the cognitive-behavioral paradigm. Each concept is diligently examined and the theoretical framework for further analysis is established. The thorough description of the different phenomena reflects the most contemporary achievements in psychological research. The analysis is characterized by consistency and criticism which bring clarity to the scientific endeavors.

The second chapter is dedicated to the empirical psychological research and encompasses the aims, hypotheses, and instruments of the study. They are well-formulated and fully correspond to the topic of the research.

The results from two pilot studies are described and the analysis allows for the precision of the methodology of the current study. They are adequate to the main topic of the study and the investigative aims and prove the uniformity with the descriptive content of the constructs. The tests have good psychometric characteristics.

The third chapter is dedicated to the empirical design of the study. There is quantitative as well as qualitative analyses of the obtained results conducted correctly and with competence. The description of individual cases is one more proof for the professional experience of the author in the area of clinical and psychotherapeutic practice and work with patients with social anxiety disorder. I would like to point out one of the advantages of the conducted research - the participants in the clinical group were chosen after an assessment by a clinical psychologist and a psychiatrist, diagnosis and assigned therapy. This allows for solid scientific support and exquisite professionalism of the conducted study.

Another advantage is the detailed observation not only of the anamnestic factors but also of the clinical picture for each participant from the clinical group - with social anxiety. The analyses are specific and the conclusions are made based on the quantitative and qualitative changes. For the author each patient constitutes a universe to be known and discovered, the recommendations are strictly individual

which is the point of psychological therapy. In spite of that she also presents a summary of her findings that can be helpful to professionals when working with patients with similar psychopathology.

The fourth chapter offers discussion about the limitations of the current study and recommendations about future research, theoretical achievements of the dissertation work as well as practical applications for the treatment of social anxiety disorder.

The theoretical work uses 142 sources, 6 in Bulgarian and 136 in English.

Conclusions for confirming the working hypotheses of the conducted study:

In conclusion it is important to note that the study confirms the initial intention that high levels of anxiety affect the ability for mentalization and in this specific case the understanding and use of humor. There is a close connection between high levels of social anxiety and the use of dysfunctional coping strategies and immature defense mechanisms. The high levels of anxiety are also accompanied by the presence of dysfunctional thoughts.

Another conclusion is that personal maturity plays a moderating role between high levels of social anxiety and the use of dysfunctional coping strategies and suggests 'sense of humor' as a mediating factor of this relationship.

The contributions of the author can be summarized as follows:

The presented analysis outlines the problematic areas in assessment and therapy in cases of social anxiety and presents the rationale for the study itself, which is a sign of its relevance and contemporaneity in its attempt to improve resilience, self-esteem and social adaptation as signs of success and welfare for such patients.

A practical contribution is the conducted factor analysis on the questionnaires presented. This gives a new perspective for future research in this specific area since

there is already evidence supporting or refuting the division of separate subscales for each questionnaire.

The autoreview of the author correctly reflects the essence of the dissertation work. The language is professional, to the point, and shows personal engagement of the author with the problem at hand.

The candidate has the required scientific publications from NACID (National Center for Information and Documentation).

In conclusion I could state that I value highly the work by Sofiya Dimitrova, derived from the rich theoretical summary, the conducted empirical study and the analysis of the conclusions, and by her personal experience in the realm of psychotherapy. I, therefore, recommend to the members of the honorable jury to award the science degree “doctor” in Clinical Psychology to the candidate.

16.12.2021 Varna

Reviewer:

Assoc. prof. Miglena Krusteva, M.D., Ph.D