

STATEMENT

on a dissertation theme:

"Specifics of the cognitive model in social anxiety"

Candidate: Sofiya Dimitrova

Author: Prof. Lyudmil Georgiev, PhD

The presented dissertation work by which its author Sofiya Dimitrova wishes to be awarded the science and education degree "Doctor" (in Clinical Psychology) is dedicated to a problematic area that has traditional as well as contemporary theoretical and practical value. Moreover, the problems of depression or anxiety assume a greater importance in the current situation - the traumatic experiences from which would probably not be overcome in the foreseeable future - a fact that does not require much evidence. This is the reason why I believe that the choice of the topic which is developed meticulously, represents on its own a cumulative contribution for which the candidate Sofiya Dimitrova deserves only admirations.

Regarding the structure of the work, it is presented in 4 chapters and there is an impressive volume of literature that takes up 232 pages. The fact that the introduction and the conclusion belong to the first and fourth chapters respectively and are not separated from the rest of the work may create a feeling of disbalance of the dissertation work but, at the end, writing is an individual creative process through which authors are allowed to express themselves including text formatting. From this point of view, I believe that formally the dissertation meets the requirements for similar works for which the author deserves the approval of the honorable members of the jury.

In the first chapter "Introduction and structural review" that takes up 124 standard pages the candidate has presented an impressive review of the main terms and concepts that later on will be used to interpret the theme of the dissertation. The types of anxiety disorders are presented in great detail in order to form the author's frame of the idea about social anxiety as well as the different

factors that cause it. She accents the modern concept of mentalization by Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman through which the attitude towards humor becomes one of the main indicators of metacognitive functioning according to the initial position of the candidate. I allow myself to fast-forward and give a recommendation on the basis of the discussion after the preliminary defense for future works of the author to use the term "wit" not only because in his studies "Wit and its relation to the unconscious" from 1905 Sigmund Freud himself uses this term but also because using it allows for the debate about the white and black humor to be easily avoided. Of course, this is only a wish that the author will decide whether to take into consideration.

Further in the first chapter we can find in detail presented the theories about Superiority, Incongruity and Relief, as well as a number of modern theories that are directly related to the investigated problem. The research on therapeutic approaches for the treatment of social anxiety is once again meticulous and the focus of the author is directed towards the cognitive-behavioral therapy which is not accidental since many researchers and practitioners believe it is one of the most effective approaches in the treatment of social anxiety disorder.

Chapter two called "Organization of the empirical research" is situated on 13 standard pages and presents the hypotheses, aims, and the sample of the research. The general purpose is to discover the characteristics of the cognitive process among individuals with social anxiety. There are 5 hypotheses about the relationship between social anxiety and automatic thoughts, negative experiences, mental defenses, coping strategies, humor, ability for mentalization. The test battery allows for the diagnosis of social anxiety and dysfunctional experience and gives an opportunity to measure the level of dissociation related to discovering defense mechanisms. The sample consists of 74 individuals, from which 30 males and 44 females, respectively between 16 and 62 years of age, the mean age is 37.5, among males it is 39, while in females - 36.

In the third and fourth chapter called "Empirical research" and "Discussion and future perspectives" situated on a volume of 53 and 9 pages respectively the

author presents analyses of the results of the empirical research and future intentions on the theme of the dissertation. It makes a very good impression the undoubtful research experience Sofiya Dimitrova has which allows her to interpret the data from her own study with ease. She proves the connection between dysfunctional thoughts and the negative affect caused by anxiety as well as the fact that maladaptive coping strategies are present in people with high levels of social anxiety. It is very interesting to note the gender differences in the experience of social anxiety - the more experience women get, the better adjusted they become and they are able to cope with anxiety more successfully compared to men who demonstrate the opposite tendency.

From the many other analyses of the results, in my opinion, it is interesting to note the established relationship between problem solving as an adaptive coping strategy and the positive attitude towards humor as a sign of personal and cognitive maturity. In other words, people who strive for actively solving their problems show a greater tendency to use humor in different situations perceiving it as a favorable coping mechanism when facing problems in different social situations.

An interesting fact noted by the candidate is that the cognitive component in social anxiety has no actual influence over the life and individual characteristics of the personality of the patient. Besides, it seems like overall discomfort and anxiety have the same importance as fear of negative evaluation although the latter still is perceived as predominant.

All these empirical data are interpreted as supporting the use of CBT for treating people with social anxiety disorder. The intentions of the candidate for future research and psychotherapeutic work also deserve attention and should be favorably supported.

One of the main requirements for doctoral defense statements is focused on the evaluation of the contributions the candidate presents in her scientific work. I must admit that in this case I agree with the formulation of the candidate for the contribution of her work to the science of psychology. Moreover, Sofiya Dimitrova has accurately evaluated her own dissertation which is another reason

for my positive assessment of her work.

Regarding my remarks and recommendations, I could share that I have already made my suggestions to the future endeavors of the candidate related to the use of the term "humor". I do not have any fundamental remarks to her work and I believe it meets all existing requirements for this type of scientific work.

It is left to add that regarding the topic of the dissertation the candidate has 3 publications and the total sum of 80 points that meet the minimal requirements of NACID (National Center for Information and Documentation) candidates for obtaining the education and science degree "Doctor".

In conclusion, considering the undisputable psychological, scientific and general competence of Sofiya Dimitrova and her in depth knowledge in the area of psychopathology and psychotherapy demonstrated in her dissertation work "Specifics of the cognitive model in social anxiety", I allow myself to eagerly recommend to the members of the honorable jury to award her the science and education degree "Doctor". I believe that this will reflect an adequate judgement for the achieved results of the dissertation and will represent an important stimulus for her future scientific investigations.

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