REVIEW

by Prof. DSc Teodora Stoeva

of Diana Dobreva-Hristova's dissertation
on the topic: "Existential fulfillment and full human functioning in actors (Guidelines for Psychological Counseling)", or the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" by professional direction 3.2. "Psychology", scientific specialty: "Counseling psychology"

Relevance and importance of the problem

Just a glance of the first pages of the presented work is enough to get the impression that we are facing an impressive scientific work not only in terms of volume, but also in terms of complexity and multidimensionality. We are faced with an extremely complicated problem concerning the dynamics of interaction between each of the dimensions - physical, mental, spiritual, treated in the context of the deep aspiration of man towards a higher meaning of existence. I greatly admire the engagement with this undoubtedly fundamental problem of rehabilitating the role of "spirituality and meaning". This commitment is definitely a manifestation of scientific courage, insofar as for social knowledge, determined by the ideas of the reductionist in nature positivist science, the higher aspect of human spirituality is a distant phenomenon, treated as abstractly philosophical, even anti-scientific. Such research builds a bridge to other spaces outside of conventional science, satisfying the growing need to make sense of the spiritual dimension as a constructive force for authentically building one's life.

In the focus of attention are the needs of counseling psychology to develop its theoretical and methodological base, insofar as interest in the technical and practical side of counseling prevails in it, and to expand its perimeter by including new thematic areas and new social groups in need of psychological support, which in particular is the target group of actors. All this outlines the high not only cognitive, but also applied value of the scientific work.

Knowing the problem

In the scientific work, many theoretical concepts of the analyzed constructs are presented, which shows that the doctoral student knows in detail the existing concepts on the developed problem. An overview of the literature was made, and the research topics related to the difficulties for the full functioning of the actors from the point of view of psychological

counseling were brought out. Irrespective of the available research in the area, there are few studies devoted specifically to the problem of psychological help oriented to the needs of people with creative realization who have specific needs due to the nature of their profession. This shows an ability to detect the unresolved and insufficiently developed problems in the relevant scientific field. The PhD student directs her attention to under-researched aspects related to the topic of mental health and well-being of people in the acting profession, correctly pointing out that a thorough study of the psychological constructs related to the meta-theoretical model of full human functioning among the representatives of this profession is needed.

The previous, albeit scanty, experience in the study of this aspect of the problem in the studies of Hamilton, Bates, etc. is well presented and integrated, with which the author convinces us that she has skills both for systematic exposition and for creative rethinking of the scientific achievements of her predecessors.

A good orientation in the theoretical foundations of the dissertation work has been achieved, as numerous conceptual models related to the main constructs of the dissertation - namely, full human functioning, existential fulfillment, personal existential abilities, and psychological well-being - have been presented and meaningfully analyzed. The theoretical and methodological achievements of Bulgarian and foreign scientists are reported. In this regard, it should be noted that the doctoral student referred to 282 sources, in Bulgarian, Russian, English and German. All this is proof of the scientific representativeness of the theoretical analysis, which convincingly testifies that Dobreva knows the problem both in classical and in modern scientific literature. The analysis has a heuristic value, "providing" the necessary argumentation for the need for new research, as the doctoral student herself points out, related to answering the question: Will the same prominence of the interrelationships between personal existential abilities and mastering the environment be observed in people from the general population as found in actors?

Scientific and methodological representativeness of the study

The structure of the dissertation reflects in the best way the leading ideas, the empirical setting, the design, and the methods of data analysis, obtained through reliable and valid instruments. Dobreva turns the idea of investigating the relationship between personal abilities to the existential realization and full functioning of the actors, in the context of the specific challenges they encounter. Thus, the doctoral student clearly outlines the trajectory of the subject area of the research, summarizing that this research field provides an opportunity not

only for an in-depth study of the resources for the full functioning of the actors, but also reveals the potential for deploying the theory and methodology of existential-humanistic psychology, by specifically of existential analysis.

The conceptual basis of the research is the constructs of existential and positive psychology, the common cross-sections of the various discourses related to them are examined, which enabled the author to integrate into a comprehensive approach the optimistic and full functioning of the person in the context of the existentially fulfilled life. The theoretical analysis unfolds in the direction of the conceptual and terminological refinement of these constructs, and the exposition itself is realized in accordance with the classic scheme of transition from general to particular, with the research focus gradually narrowing, moving from conceptualizing existential fulfillment and full-fledged human functioning in a general plan, to their subcategories - of personal existential abilities and psychological well-being, treated in the context of the acting profession. The structure of the described constructs enables them to be operationalized and measured with different psychological questionnaires. Thus, when examining "existential fulfillment" and "full functioning", Dobreva reveals their specific aspects related to the constructs of "self-transcendence", "freedom", "mental endurance" and "self-acceptance" - which are parameters embedded in the measurement tools she uses. This is an indicator of compliance with the universal principle of correspondence between a theoretical model and its operationalization.

The theoretical formulation related to these constructs are examined in the necessary completeness and content. Integrating the main merits of these formulations, Dobreva reaches the construction of her own author's position on the problem, seeing her mission in the development of the understanding of the full life of man, through the search for the positive and his strengths. Thus, the author sets as a leitmotif, permeating the entire scientific work, the idea of the potential and stimulation of people's resources, as a counterpoint to the approaches aimed at mental problems and negative states, dominating the field of clinical psychology and practice. Dobreva reaches broader, fundamental generalizations that if clinical psychology focuses mainly on psychopathology, counseling has the theoretical and methodological commitment to prevention and creating conditions for personal growth. In this regard, quite rightly, she turns positive psychology as the foundation of her research, as the basis of Rogers' metatheoretical model, containing the greatest explanatory potential in relation to full-fledged human functioning. At the same time becoming an exponent of the idea of the person as a spiritual

entity, she uses the capacity of the existential theory, including in her research the methodological approach of Leangle's existential analysis.

In order to clarify her author's position on the issue of meaning and well-being, the doctoral student conducts a polemic that is directly or contextually present in the text. Delineating a skeptical field about the possibility that the constructs she examines can be explained by a single approach, she continues her search in a broader perspective, building a general interpretive framework that includes Ryff's model of psychological well-being and that of existential fulfilment, contributing to the confirmation of the general platform of existential-humanistic psychology, which is an indisputable priority of the scientific work in the theoretical-methodological plan.

The problem of existential fulfillment and psychological well-being is conceptualized by Dobreva, based on the classical theory of Rogers and Allport, passing through the ideas of Frankl and the philosophical insights of Heidegger and Sartre, reaching the modern understanding of the problem of Grishina and Hoffmann. The scientific work abounds with data revealing the contribution of existential constructs to mental health, which increases the evidentiary value of the proposed abstract theories by verifying their credibility, thereby ensuring the scientific significance of the study.

Research methodology

Methodologically, the empirical study reflects the main research question about the relationship between existential fulfillment and the full functioning of people from the acting profession. The research design, including a complex mediator model, is excellently conceived and implemented, respecting the basic standard requirements regarding the components - object, subject, validity and reliability of the study, method of data processing. The choice of the specific object - the professional group of the actors - is thoroughly argued. The empirical part impresses with the high research culture of the doctoral student, with the way of presenting the research idea in terms of the thesis, the hypotheses and tasks formulated with a subtle research sense, the adequately selected rich arsenal of methodology, the reliability and validity of which are proven in the research. I believe that these methods allowed Dobreva to obtain sufficient empirical data for the studied parameters, the interrelationship between them and the mediator effects. The applied research technology consists of 5 instruments, two of which are empirically verified at the preliminary stage of the research, and the rest are applied in practice, with high psychometric indicators of reliability and validity. In addition to methods established

in practice, the research toolkit includes new a questionnaire constructed by the author about stress related to the acting profession.

The empirical study was conducted on the basis of a gender-balanced sample with a wide age range.

The PhD student demonstrates competence in statistical data processing related to the so-called "technology of science". Adequate processing methods for the empirical setting and the obtained data were chosen. The logic and rationale in the presentation and processing of this data is convincing. Various algorithms were used for their transformation into empirical results through mutually complementary statistical methods (correlation, descriptive, regression, Student's T-test), proving relationships and dependencies in accordance with the tasks and formulated hypotheses. The resulting interdependencies are discussed in depth and richly visualized with the help of tables and figures, which gives the study even stronger evidence.

Dobreva thoroughly interprets the obtained results in the context of theoretical assumptions and previous studies, which he successfully summarizes in his conclusions. Much of the results are new to the field and represent a contribution to psychology. The PhD student analyzes them at a professional level with understanding and meaning. Conclusions are drawn at a high level of generality regarding the studied parameters. Important from an applied point of view is the conclusion about the contribution of freedom and self-transcendence to the psychological well-being and successful adaptation of actors to life challenges. The conclusions are in the direction of the author's position about the influence of existential well-being on the psychological well-being of the actors in conditions of increased stress.

Based on a professionally conducted and structured research with clear evidence, the doctoral student outlines the areas with the greatest potential for counseling interventions related to: supporting the psycho-emotional maturation of the actors in training; development of their existential capacities and resilience necessary to recover from adverse events.

Contributions

The reference for the scientific-applied and theoretical-analytical contributions objectively reflects the achievements in the dissertation. Contributing moments can be reduced to:

1. The accumulated knowledge related to various psychological phenomena among the actors has been systematized.

2. An original multidimensional model expanding the theoretical and methodological base of counseling psychology is presented

3. The existential-humanistic paradigm has been confirmed as leading in the support and prevention of psychological well-being.

4. For the first time in Bulgaria, an empirical study is being conducted in the field of counseling psychology among actors.

5. A questionnaire for the study of stress related to acting was adapted and constructed, enriching the psychological toolkit in the field

The empirical contributions are the result of the study and are obvious.

Abstract

The abstract fully and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation, giving information about the 4 publications on the topic. These publications are sufficient to reach the scientific community with the results of the research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to summarize that the research in the dissertation work is at a very high professional level. Dobreva masters the methodology of scientific knowledge, knows well and successfully applies modern methodical approaches to data collection and analysis, reaches reliable and valid results, which she interprets in depth in the context of further developed theoretical models. I confidently give my positive assessment and suggest to the respected scientific jury to vote positively for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Diyana Dobreva-Hristova.

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Reviewer:

Prof. DSc Teodora Stoeva