REVIEW

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Concerning**:** Public defence of a PhD thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree „Doctor“; Scientific area In the scientific area: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professionalfield: 3.2. Psychology

Author: **Lubomir Rumenov Draganov**

PhD dissertation title: **Belief in a Just World and Life Stories**

Scientific supervisor: Professor Ergyul Tair, DSc

Relevance of the topic

Lubomir Draganov's study of belief in a just world through autobiographical narratives is a highly relevant topic in both scientific and practical terms that can be viewed from several perspectives. The concept of justice is universal and fundamental to the organization of human life. It serves both as a moral principle, a social regulator, and as an internal psychological necessity, and a self-regulator. Given the current social disturbances and growing demands for justice in various domains, studying the individual concept of deservingness is becoming increasingly important. This timely PhD thesis addresses the question of how people restore their sense of meaning, trust, and belonging in an uncertain and unpredictable world, highlighting its socio-psychological significance in the contemporary context. Although the theory of belief in a just world has been widely studied, Draganov successfully fills a significant scientific gap by focusing research interest on how beliefs are experienced and reconstructed in particular life experiences. His study employs an implicit narrative and is an innovative contribution that broadens the conceptual framework of the problem under investigation. The work's relevance is reinforced by using autobiographical narratives to access deep motivational tendencies. Including the pandemic period in the study of perceptions of the social situation adds value by allowing an examination of how enduring beliefs interact with current crisis events. The work offers an analytical model applicable to the development of interventions for emotional regulation and coping with traumatic experiences. This makes the work important not only for the academic community, but also for clinical and counselling practices.

General description of the PhD thesis

The dissertation is 188 pages long and includes an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, references, and four appendices. The first chapter is an in-depth theoretical review that traces the evolvement of the concept of belief in a just world, the "personal contract" model, and the integration of these constructs into the narrative approach to life stories. The second chapter focuses on the methodological design. It defines the objectives, tasks, and hypotheses and presents the author's original model of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of autobiographical narratives. The third chapter interprets the empirical results, emphasizing the roles of personal and general belief in a just world in relation to life story structure and the psychological consequences for individuals. Twenty-nine tables and three figures support the text by presenting the results of the statistical processing and the conceptual models of the study in detail. A total of 98 references are used, 12 of which are in Bulgarian and 86 of which are in English. Four appendices are included containing the research instruments, a list of adjectives for assessing the social situation, and the original map for categorizing the narratives.

Knowledge of the topic and theoretical preparation of the doctoral candidate

Lubomir Draganov provides a comprehensive theoretical overview that situates the concept of a just world within the context of contemporary personality psychology and narrative theory. He distinguishes between the personal belief in a just world, which is related to individual destiny, and the general belief in a just world, which refers to how the world functions as a whole. He integrates these beliefs into the paradigm of life stories and justifies the role of autobiographical narrative as a tool for meaningfully integrating experience. Draganov presents the underlying concepts of the study in a structured, analytical manner. He presents trust as a basic need and a mechanism of social and personal regulation. His description of the models and directions of research demonstrates his high level of research competence. The theoretical section is clearly structured and smoothly introduces the studied concepts and their relations. The two approaches to studying belief in a just world — as universal and as stable personality dispositions — are competently and substantively described. It is also important to note the attention paid to research on this topic in the Bulgarian context. The narrative approach and cognitive-emotional representations of the social context are structured analytically and in detail. Rather than a chronological or formal listing, the doctoral

candidate presents a logically connected framework as a solid basis for the planned study. Lyubomir Draganov demonstrates mastery of theoretical knowledge and scientific erudition, covering a wide range of fundamental and contemporary psychological concepts. His references attest his awareness and critical analysis skills. One particularly strong aspect is the synthesis of the motive for justice and the narrative paradigm in psychology. This enables Draganov to identify a specific scientific gap: the lack of systematic research on how persistent beliefs organize personal stories of injustice. Thus, the author establishes a robust conceptual framework, demonstrating his ability to think independently and define research constructs precisely.

Research methodology

In addition to demonstrating extensive knowledge of the problem and skills in comparative and contrastive analysis, revealing competence in working with scientific texts, the value of the chosen empirical approach, which incorporates quantitative and qualitative elements, should also be noted. This approach allows for in-depth conclusions and a detailed, holistic picture, despite its exceptional labor intensity. The research design is well-argued. The research methods are well-matched to the goal. The psychometric qualities of the selected instruments are described, confirming Lyubomir Draganov's research precision. Data processing is correct. The research variables are clearly described, and a well-founded model is presented. The objective is clearly defined and operationalized into research tasks. The results are based on these tasks, which enhances the consistency and clarity of the research. The research procedure demonstrates careful consideration and correctness in obtaining reliable data. The work skilfully combines the nomothetic and idiographic approaches. A notable strength of the methodology is the author's innovative approach to categorizing stories based on narrative tradition.

Significance and robustness of the results, interpretations, and conclusions

The presentation of the results and the interpretation provided by Lubomir Draganov are both impressive. References are made to confirm the results of previous studies. Thus, the analysis is integrated into the initial presentation of the results, improving the text's coherence. The direct and indirect links outline a holistic picture that is interpreted and analysed from the perspective of subjective perceptions. The levels of relations and their significance are clearly described. The analysis is situated within an

overarching framework that outlines the specifics of interaction and the relationships between constructs within a given context. It integrates nomothetic and idiographic approaches to the study of personality; the role of experiences in adaptation and personality functioning; the role of attributions in self-realization and subjective experiences; and the role of personality dispositions and context. The conclusions are robustly substantiated. Lubomir Draganov's precision is evident in his description of the study's limitations, which reflects real potential for future research rather than a formal approach. The analysis offers a new, deeper understanding of individual adaptability. These conclusions build on classical models by defining adaptability as both affective well-being and identity resilience.

Critical notes to the PhD thesis

Lubomir Draganov's PhD thesis is of high quality and practical relevance, therefore my recommendations concern the further development of the PhD thesis's potential and contributions, as well as the continuation of the research.

Assessment of the quality of the doctoral candidate's scientific publications in relation to the minimum national requirements for the Doctoral degree

Lubomir Draganov's scientific work, presented in connection with his dissertation defense, consists of three independent publications that fully reflect the dissertation's main points and empirical results in national scientific journals. The number and nature of the publications meet the minimum national requirements.

PhD thesis abstract

The abstract is 45 pages long and accurately reflects the entire content of the dissertation research.

Scientific contributions

The topic chosen by Lubomir Rumenov Draganov addresses the fundamental motive for human existence, namely justice. Justice is a basic mechanism for personal self-regulation and maintaining stability in conditions of social insecurity and unpredictability. Belief in a just world is not merely an attitude; it is an implicit organizing principle of autobiographical memory that structures the subjective experience of life. I completely accept the contributions, proposed by the doctoral candidate in

theoretical, methodological, empirical, and practical domains. Main merits for me are the substantiated integrative model of the interaction between general and personal beliefs in a just world, as well as its implications at the individual and social level. This expands the interpretive scope of the research framework. A key contribution is the precise differentiation between general belief in a just world as a social regulatory framework and personal belief in a just world as an emotional regulatory framework. While these two concepts are interrelated, they remain distinct. This distinction is supported by differentiated perception patterns observed during crises, when personal and general beliefs follow separate trajectories. The analysis also underscores the dynamics of perceptions in stable versus unstable contexts, a distinction that is particularly relevant for understanding responses in crisis and uncertain environments. From a practical standpoint, the findings can be incorporated into academic curricula to introduce students to the foundational role and contextual specificity of perceptions and self-regulation. The conclusions are significant given their potential application across multiple levels. The proposed model can be implemented within broader social dimensions and more focused organizational and educational settings. The general mechanism outlined can inform environmental management strategies aimed at enhancing effectiveness at the collective and individual developmental levels. The proposed assessment framework and qualitative analysis model offer valuable tools for future research. A notable practical contribution is the identification of bidirectional links and effects, providing a basis for formulating guidelines and developing applied programmes.

Conclusion

The materials reviewed provide compelling evidence of Lubomir Draganov's ability to plan and carry out complex independent research. The PhD thesis represents a relevant, original, and valuable scientific contribution and fully satisfies the requirements for the educational and scientific degree 'Doctor'. Due to the abovementioned advantages, I give my positive assessment and propose the scientific jury to award Lubomir Draganov the educational and scientific degree 'Doctor' in the scientific area: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional field: 3.2. Psychology.

30 January 2026 Prof. Margarita Bakracheva, DSc