

Opinion Statement

by Assoc. Prof. Valery Denev Todorov, PhD,

Academy of the Ministry of Interior, professional field „3.2 Psychology“

regarding procedure for obtaining doctoral degree in professional field „3.2. Psychology“ by PhD

candidate Gergana Ilieva Kuzmova-Paneva,

dissertation topic: "Decision making in negative emotional states and the threat of being left out from a group"

This opinion statement was assigned in accordance with Protocol No. 1 on the meeting of the Scientific Jury, appointed with Order No. 3 PK-230/7.07.2019 by the Rector of New Bulgarian University. It is based on the documents required by the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), and the Regulations for the Application of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RAADSRB), including a copy of the dissertation and an abstract in English. The documents that were provided show that the PhD student Gergana Ilieva Kuzmova-Paneva has successfully passed through the previous stages of the procedure for acquiring a doctoral degree and is eligible for defense of the degree.

1. Theoretical and practical significance of the research problem

The dissertation is devoted to the study of relationship between social ostracism and subjective experience of social exclusion upon decision-making, the main idea for the experiments originates from the hypothesis that social exclusion would encourage people to cooperate. The topic is relevant and interesting from a scientific as well as theoretical and applied point of views. A better understanding of the phenomenon of social exclusion and its consequences is relevant to solving real-life issues such as building harmonious and productive communities and teams. Understanding the emotions, decision-making, and behavior of individuals who have been socially excluded may provide ideas and guidance on how to propose adequate support and how to prevent potentially negative consequences. In this respect, this work can be seen as part of a research direction in psychology that has not lost its relevance for more than fifty years.

The author's approach to the problem is original and goes out of the traditional framework of social psychology expressing strongly emphasized cognitivist perspective.

2. Rationale of the goals and objectives of the thesis

The text of the dissertation is clearly and consistently structured, with its research goals, objectives, and hypotheses being clearly formulated, meaningfully and logically related to the ideas and literary overview formulated in the introductory part. The literature review seems to be

exhaustive and sufficiently detailed in terms of the formulated goals and hypotheses and the overall theoretical and methodological focus of the work.

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology, research methodology, and the goals and the objectives of the thesis

The formulated main hypothesis and the additional hypotheses were tested through four experiments, the goals of the subsequent experiments and the formulated supplementary hypotheses logically follow the results of the previous ones and reflect the evolution of the candidate's ideas and knowledge. In my view, the interpretations of the results and how the additional hypotheses are formulated illustrate long, authentic, consistent and intensive research efforts. A wide range of well-chosen and properly used mathematical and statistical methods were used in the data analysis, the results are presented in accordance with contemporary requirements.

4. Scientific and applied scientific contributions of the dissertation

The main scientific contributions of the dissertation are the results obtained in the attempts to operationalize social exclusion through game simulation of a social interaction; examining the impact of negative affect on decision-making in social dilemmas; studying the effects of the personality variable Action Orientation on the decision-making process in relation to negative affect. In the process of developing the thesis, original experiments were constructed using innovative computer simulations like the Cyberball game and the Prisoner Dilemma Game integrated and conducted in an online environment. For the purposes of the research, the candidate translated several questionnaires in Bulgarian language and developed instruments that can be used in other studies.

5. Assessment of dissertation publications: number, nature of the editions in which they have been published.

The PhD candidate presents five publications that meet the requirements for volume, quality and thematic focus.

6. Opinions, recommendations and notes.

Overall, the dissertation impresses with the depth of the approach towards the problem, the attention to the details and the ability to make significant efforts over a long period of time. In interpreting the results, the author herself raises the question of whether a suitable approach has been chosen to manipulate the independent variable in the case of "Ostracism" and offers possible answers.

In my opinion, using a specially modified version of the Cyberball game for that purpose in that particular context is an interesting and an original idea. The results are methodologically useful. I would accept such "over-cognitivation" of the experiment more as an advantage and

contribution of the dissertation, rather than a downside. The classical approaches to the experimental manipulation of social exclusion variable are considered to be already well documented, and the implementation of many of them rise serious ethical concerns.

As a whole, in terms of the overall design of the research strategy, methodology applied, data analysis and interpretation strategy, the dissertation exceeds the average level of works of this type we have seen in recent years.

7. Conclusion

The presented dissertation has led me to the conviction that Gergana Ilieva Kuzmova-Paneva has demonstrated the required for the acquisition of PhD degree knowledge; research skills; ability for independent, creative exploration of a significant scientific and applied problem. I believe that the work meets the requirements of the ADASRB, RAADASRB, and the Regulation for the development of the academic staff of NBU for awarding PhD degree.

Hereby, I express my positive appraisal of the provided for evaluation dissertation "Decision-making under negative emotional states and the threat of being left out from a group", and I recommend to the honorable members of the scientific jury, Gergana Ilieva Kuzmova-Paneva to be approved for accomplishment of doctoral degree in professional field "3.2. Psychology", field of higher education "3. Social, Business and Legal Sciences".

06.10.2019 г.

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