

Artículo de investigación

Individual psychological determinants of eating behavior of students of higher education institutions

Индивидуально-психологические детерминанты пищевого поведения студентов высших учебных заведений

Determinantes individuales y psicológicos del comportamiento alimentario de los estudiantes de las escuelas superiores

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of eating disorders of young people. The study focuses on the identification of psychological factors that determine the styles of eating behavior. The empirical results of the survey are presented, in which 937 students aged 18 to 25 took part. The aim of the study was to identify the relationship between the characteristics of the self-structure of students' personality, reflecting the state of their identity, and the characteristics of their eating behavior. As a result, it was revealed that constructive, destructive, and deficit self-functions (as unconscious personality constructs) find their expression not only in behavior and interpersonal social relations, but also in the style

Аннотация

Статья посвящена проблеме нарушения пищевого поведения людей молодого возраста. В исследовании акцентируется внимание на выявлении психологических факторов, детерминирующих стили пищевого поведения. Представлены эмпирические результаты опроса, в котором приняли участие 937 студентов в возрасте от 18 до 25 лет. Целью исследования стало выявление взаимосвязи между особенностями Я-структуры личности студентов, отражающими состояние их идентичности, и особенностями их пищевого поведения. В результате было выявлено, что конструктивные, деструктивные и дефицитарные Я-функции, (как

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of eating behavior, tendencies to eating disorders and deviations.

Key Words: Personality structure, identity, self-functions, styles of eating behavior.

неосознаваемые конструкты личности), находят свое выражение не только в поведении и межличностных социальных отношениях, но и в стиле пищевого поведения, склонностях к пищевым расстройствам и нарушениям.

Ключевые слова: структура личности, идентичность, Я-функции, стили пищевого поведения.

Resumen

El artículo se centra en el problema del trastorno del comportamiento alimentario de las personas jóvenes. El estudio se centra en la detección de los factores psicológicos que determinan los estilos del comportamiento alimentario. Se presentaron los resultados empíricos de la encuesta, en la que participaron 937 estudiantes de 18 a 25 años. El observatorio del estudio fue identificación de la relación entre las características de la estructura del autoconcepto de la personalidad de los estudiantes, que reflejan el estado de su identidad, y las características de su comportamiento alimentario. Como resultado, se reveló que las funciones constructivas, destructivas y deficientes del autoconcepto, (como los diseños de personalidad inconscientes), encuentran su expresión no solo en el comportamiento y las relaciones sociales interpersonales, sino también en el estilo del comportamiento alimentario, las inclinaciones a los desórdenes alimentarios y los trastornos.

Palabras clave: Estructura de personalidad, identidad, funciones del autoconcepto, estilos de comportamiento alimentario.

Introduction

The problem of eating behavior of an individual is being currently actualized, which is associated both with an increase in the number of people suffering from eating disorders all over the world and with insufficient knowledge, and, as a result, with the controversy of issues of determining the characteristics and disorders of eating behavior. Most researchers focus on finding causes and catalysts for nutritional deviations with a view to correcting and treating them. However, the issue of how to prevent eating disorders is equally important. This issue is still open in modern science. In this regard, preventive measures are practically limited to the transmission of information, which, due to a large number of information sources available in information society, is either distorted, transformed into stereotyped judgments, or is not internalized at all.

The development of preventive programs involves taking into account evidence-based information about the naturally existing stable relationships between the harmonious eating behavior of a person and those psychological factors that ensure its resistance to the occurrence and development of food deviations.

In this regard, the present study is aimed at identifying factors determining the harmonious and deviant eating behavior of modern youth. The study was focused on identifying how unconscious personality structures find expression in the peculiarities of their attitude to food, eating behavior options and how they can influence the development of food deviations. This goal was achieved in the process of solving the following tasks: (a) analyzing modern scientific ideas about the determination of the eating behavior of a person and identifying a problem area for the study of psychological factors that determine a person's tendency to food deviations based on the results of a theoretical analysis; (b) using selected diagnostic tools to investigate the eating habits of modern youth; (c) empirically identifying the nature of the relationship between the degree of inclination of young students to eating disorders and the characteristics of the development of their personal identity.

Literature review

In the works of many researchers, eating behavior is considered to be a relation to food and

to the regimen of its intake in everyday conditions and in emotogenic, stressful situations, as a semi-deterministic behavior, interconnected with the formation and creation of the image of the body self, and the personality control of its bodily states and processes (Tsirkin *et al.*, 2000; Bobrov, 2015; Voznesenskaya *et al.*, 2000; Nikolaeva, 2012; Romatsky, & Semin, 2006; Skugarevsky, & Sivukha, 2003; Shabanova, 2017 and others). The organization of the learning process and its impact on personal development are considered in studies Tan, Ho, & Pang (2016); Sofoklis & Megalokonomou (2016); Alcalde & Nagel (2016); Obrizan (2017); Litau (2018); Sam (2018).

By virtue of its polydetermination, eating behavior is characterized by the absence or, on the contrary, the presence of various deviations and disorders. In the former case, it is a balanced, harmonious, adequate eating behavior; in the latter case, it is a question of food deviations, disturbances, disorders, having a wide spectrum of manifestations (from minor overeating or self-limitation to anorexia nervosa and bulimia) and reflecting the influence of physiological, genetic, social and psychological factors.

The largest scope of research on eating behavior is devoted to identifying the causes of eating disorders. Based on the results of theoretical analysis, it can be said that in modern science eating disorders are considered as a manifestation of endogenous pathology (Gerish, & Iovchuk, 1999; Sorokman, 2015), psychiatric disorders (Voznesenskaya *et al.*, 2000; Marilov *et al.*, 2006), psychosomatic reactions (Demeshkina, & Serdyuchenko, 2015), both as one of the types of addictive behavior (Semenova *et al.*, 2015; Akhmetova, Fuschi, & Vasiliunaite, 2017; Navrátilová, Abrahám, Beranová, & Brož, 2019) and as a result of non-harmonious style of family education (Shevchenko, & Chalov, 2015), sexual pathology (Villagomez *et al.*, 2003), excessive nervous and mental stress (Connan *et al.*, 2004).

At the same time, modern psychiatric practice considers eating disorders as a component of the overall clinical picture in many mental disorders. The issues of the pathogenesis of anorexia nervosa are the most developed and at the same time debatable. The term itself began to be used only at the beginning of the 20th century, when psychiatric practice started paying attention to the issues of differential diagnostics, its criteria, etiology and treatment of anorexia nervosa. Currently, foreign and domestic researchers are witnessing a sharp increase in diseases of

anorexia nervosa and bulimia among adolescents and young adults.

In psychiatry, researchers in the field of anorexia nervosa and bulimia have repeatedly pointed to a correlation between eating disorders and mental disorders of the individual.

Thus, in the work of Tsirkin *et al.* (2000), it is stated that 90% of patients with bulimia nervosa are diagnosed with comorbid psychiatric pathology. A sufficiently high rate of combined cases of bulimia and anorexia nervosa with comorbidity of mental disorders has been recorded by other domestic and foreign researchers (Voznesenskaya *et al.*, 2000; Cruz-Bermudez, & Rossello, 2003; Villagomez *et al.*, 2003).

Recently, it has become common to attribute food disorders to such causes as psychological characteristics of the individual, manifested in his or her self-esteem (Tolochkova, & Vishnevaya, 2014), attitude to current trends in the development of society (Nikolaeva, 2012) and in healthy eating stereotypes (Semenova *et al.*, 2015; Akhmetova & Suleimenova, 2018), the degree of satisfaction of essential needs (Cruz-Bermudez, & Rossello, 2003) and in other aspects of mental functioning.

The state of personality identity is important in psychological and psychotherapeutic practice. Researchers recognize the fact that personality behavior is determined primarily by its identity. The category of "personal identity" is studied in the framework of various psychological schools and directions (psychoanalytic, behaviorist and cognitive approaches, as well as identity concepts developed in the framework of the theory of symbolic interactionism).

The current study is based on the theory of identity proposed by Ammon in the framework of his concept of dynamic psychiatry (Ammon, 1983). In the concept of Ammon, a person is considered as a whole, integrating his or her biological, mental, spiritual, social and cultural principles. In this regard, Burbiel (2014) calls the theory of Ammon multidisciplinary.

In Ammon's theory, the structural-dynamic identity model has been significantly supplemented and reconsidered. Ammon argues that certain functions of the self are greatly influenced by the social energy, which determines the development of the individual due to the impact on the unconscious. Such social energy, according to Ammon, can be

constructive, destructive and defective. Entering a specific socio-energetic field, the self-functions, as secondary, socially conditioned components of the individual, are subject to the impact of this energy, determining the strengthening or destruction of the integrity of the individual. The personality structure, according to Ammon, is made up of the self-functions integrated into the identity. Identity, as an integrative central force of the self, can be integrated when a constructive effect of social energy is observed, or disintegrated, reflecting the result of a destructive or deficit effect on the unconscious socio-energetic field.

The current study was aimed at identifying and defining the kind of effect the person's integrated identity has on their eating behavior and on the risk of developing food deviations. According to the definition used in this study, the integrated identity is the identity of the person possessing constructive components of its structure, while the harmonious eating behavior, in accordance with the results of the theoretical analysis, is defined in this research as the absence of food disturbances and the risk of their occurrence, expressed in a low degree of propensity to food deviations.

Materials and Methods

The study is based on the psychodynamic approach and central provisions of the concept of dynamic psychiatry, according to which the personality structure, considered in conjunction with the mixture of its relationships, is a certain combination of the central and unconscious self-functions of varying degrees of severity that make up its identity.

Nine hundred and thirty-seven respondents aged 18 to 25 from various university programs participated in the research: 628 of them were female and 309 – male. The purpose of the empirical study was to identify the relationship between the eating habits of respondents and the individual psychological characteristics of their personality, in particular, the characteristics of their self-structure.

Diagnostic tools used in the research:

- 1) Methods used to identify the features and style of eating behavior:
 - Screening-test EAT-26, a food intake test (developed and tested in 1979 by Clark Institute of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto), which allows

determining the level of development of the respondent's propensity to eating disorders (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and disorders of restrictive and impulsive types of eating behavior) (Skugarevsky, & Sivukha, 2003);

- The Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire DEBQ (developed in 1986 by Dutch psychologists at the Faculty of Nutrition and Social Psychology of the Agricultural University), aimed at identifying the degree of severity of the respondent's restrictive, emotogenic and external types of dietary behavior (Skugarevsky, & Sivukha, 2003);
- 2) Ammon's self-structural test (developed in 1997 to measure the personality structure of a person) chosen to identify the identity of the person, which is manifested in the mixture of relations. The questionnaire includes 220 questions-assertions grouped into 18 scales. Each scale reflects three types (constructive, destructive, and deficit) of one of the self-functions: aggression, anxiety, external restriction of the self, internal restriction of the self, narcissism, and sexuality (Ammon, 1983)).

Statistical methods used in the study: calculation of the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, percentage distribution, comparative analysis with calculation of Student's t-criterion and Pearson correlation analysis.

Results

The research performed by means of a screening test showed that the majority of students had an average degree of propensity to eating disorders: 45.70% of young women and 42.07% of young men displayed average values that coincided with the standard values found in a large population of females and males. At the same time, 21.37% of female students and 50.16% of male students demonstrated the absence of any risk of problems related to nutritional disorders. A high risk of food deviations was recorded in 8.12% of young women and in 3.24% of young men; 16.24% of girls and 4.53% of boys displayed an above-average tendency to food deviations.

The percentage distribution of female and male students by the degree of severity of restrictive, emotogenic and external types of eating

behavior allows stating that young females are prone to restrictive and emotiogenic types of eating behavior, while males have a propensity for the external type (Fig. 1).

It was found that 9.24% of young women had a restrictive type of eating behavior; 66.24% displayed an average degree of restrictive behavior whereas in 24.20% it was low. In the male sample, low indicators on the scale of "Restrictive Behavior" were recorded in 54.69% of respondents; average – in 44.34% and high – in 0.97% of the total number of male students. High rates of emotiogenic behavior, which implies a tendency to transform meals in stressful

and emotional situations, were recorded in 9.87% of female students and 2.26% of male students; an average rate – in 73.73% of women and in 62.14% of men; low – in 16.40% of female students and 35.60% – in male students.

A strong tendency towards external behavior was found in 4.53% of young men and in 5.25% of women. The majority of respondents showed average (59.87% of women and 70.55% of men) and low (34.87% of female students and 24.92% of male students) levels of the propensity for external eating behavior.

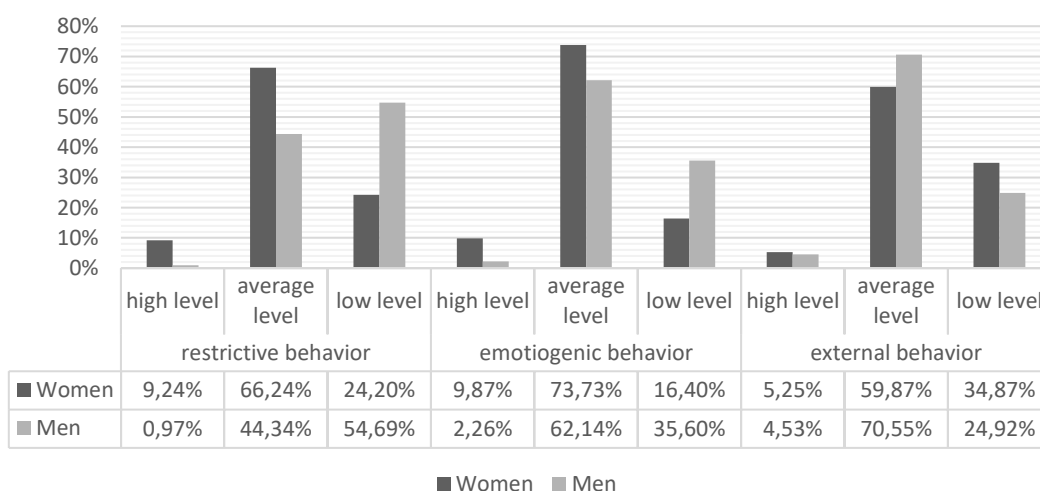


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of respondents by predominant type of food behavior (screening survey results)

The results of the screening survey allowed forming two contrasting groups: the main group consisted of 177 students with a high and above-average risk of developing food disorders; the control group was equal to the main one in terms of the number and age of respondents – it comprised 177 students, characterized by the absence of any signs of eating disorders.

In order to determine the effect of the type of personality structure organization on its propensity to food deviations, a comparative analysis of the characteristics of the development of the basic self-activities of the personality was carried out in two research groups. The results of such analysis indicate that the profiles of the students personality structures in the control group are antipodal to the averaged profiles revealed in the main group (Fig. 2).

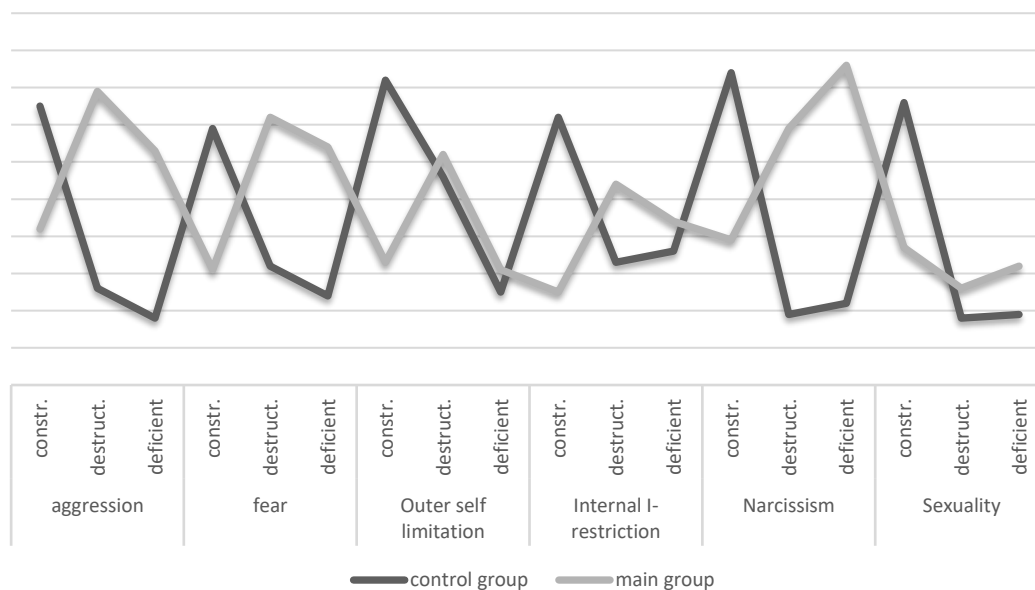


Figure 2. Types of organization of personality structures of two research groups

The personality profiles of the main and control group students are close to antipodal. Structural components of organizational structures prevail in the control group, whereas in the main group the average group indices of either destructive or deficit characteristics of each component of the identification structures of a personality are significantly higher.

The results of the comparative analysis showed significant differences between the two research groups reflected in the indicators of all three types of development of Aggression as one of the main self-functions: constructive ($t = 2.897$, $p < 0.01$), destructive ($t = 2.645$, $p < 0.01$) and deficit ($t = 3.948$, $p < 0.001$): constructive ($t = 3.161$, p

< 0.01), destructive ($t = 2.335$, $p < 0.05$), deficit ($t = 3.258$, $p < 0.01$) Anxiety (fear).

There are statistically significant differences in the mean group indices of constructive ($t = 3.662$, $p < 0.001$) and deficit ($t = 4.445$, $p < 0.001$) external self-limitation; constructive ($t = 3.604$, $p < 0.01$), destructive ($t = 3.061$, $p < 0.01$) and deficit ($t = 4.412$, $p < 0.001$) internal self-limitation; constructive ($t = 3.892$, $p < 0.001$), destructive ($t = 2.809$, $p < 0.01$) and deficit ($t = 3.164$, $p < 0.01$) narcissism and constructive ($t = 3.022$, $p < 0.01$), destructive ($t = 2.988$, $p < 0.01$) and deficit ($t = 2.323$, $p < 0.05$) sexuality (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the comparative analysis of the characteristics of the self-structure of the subjects of two research groups (T-points)

Self-functions	Main group	Control group	t	p
<i>Aggression</i>				
Constructive	27.8378 ± 2.903	42.7027 ± 4.302	2.897	< 0.01
Destructive	55.1666 ± 5.623	37.5000 ± 3.814	2.645	< 0.01
Deficit	66.2136 ± 6.717	36.6019 ± 3.721	3.948	< 0.001
<i>Anxiety/fear</i>				
Constructive	28.8235 ± 2.899	46.0181 ± 4.743	3.161	< 0.01
Destructive	69.0909 ± 6.929	49.0045 ± 5.017	2.335	< 0.05
Deficit	58.5000 ± 5.912	40.3182 ± 3.999	3.258	< 0.01
<i>External self-limitation</i>				
Constructive	29.9103 ± 3.002	51.8834 ± 5.223	3.662	< 0.001
Destructive	66.9696 ± 6.832	63.3333 ± 6.446	0.396	> 0.05

Deficit	50.8969 ± 5.104	25.7848 ± 2.604	4.445	< 0.001
<i>Internal self-limitation</i>				
Constructive	17.7670 ± 1.958	40.5825 ± 4.222	3.604	< 0.01
Destructive	58.6666 ± 6.088	45.9394 ± 4.696	3.061	< 0.01
Deficit	52.4849 ± 5.442	17.2289 ± 3.878	4.412	< 0.001
<i>Narcissism</i>				
Constructive	21.6423 ± 2.206	48.4476 ± 5.034	3.892	< 0.001
Destructive	39.3945 ± 4.028	25.2434 ± 2.613	2.809	< 0.01
Deficit	51.0453 ± 5.229	26.9374 ± 3.191	3.164	< 0.01
<i>Sexuality</i>				
Constructive	19.9038 ± 2.074	34.3772 ± 3.515	3.022	< 0.01
Destructive	32.3349 ± 3.332	19.6343 ± 2.123	2.988	< 0.01
Deficit	49.0932 ± 5.103	38.6342 ± 3.202	2.323	< 0.05

The results of the correlation analysis presented in Table 2 indicate reliable interrelationship between constructive self-functions, integrated into the general identity of the person, and the harmonious eating behavior reflected in the absence of risk of food deviations. It is worth

noticing that all the subscales of Ammon's questionnaire, reflecting the constructive type of development of self-functions, have a negative correlation with the indicators of the screening test for susceptibility to disorders of eating behavior.

Table 2. Results of the correlation analysis of the characteristics of the subjects' self-structure and their propensity to food deviations

Self-functions	Screening test	Restrictive behavior	Emotionally induced behavior	External behavior
<i>Aggression</i>				
Constructive	-0.46707**	-0.20054*	-0.10947	-0.04823
Destructive	0.19113*	0.11342	0.11034	0.33041**
Deficit	0.14265	0.10985	0.11663	0.10472
<i>Anxiety/fear</i>				
Constructive	-0.53492**	-0.11325	-0.10194	-0.10091
Destructive	0.19342*	0.10562	0.29533*	0.10046
Deficit	0.15638	0.43444**	-0.18432*	0.11421
<i>External self-limitation</i>				
Constructive	-0.49735**	-0.11194	-0.30284**	-0.10582
Destructive	0.09943	0.13726	0.10485	0.11943
Deficit	0.11733	0.40270**	0.11592	0.15342
<i>Internal self-limitation</i>				
Constructive	-0.60371**	-0.12994	-0.32471**	-0.11901
Destructive	0.20021*	0.11553	0.10584	0.19460*
Deficit	0.16449*	0.51692**	0.11499	0.10487
<i>Narcissism</i>				
Constructive	-0.57632**	-0.10948	-0.11843	-0.20291
Destructive	0.21284*	0.10463	0.27344*	0.00421
Deficit	0.11834	0.50431**	0.11844	0.09486
<i>Sexuality</i>				
Constructive	-0.33254**	-0.10038	-0.10037	-0.08827
Destructive	0.17727*	0.13265	0.10328	0.03842
Deficit	0.09264	0.10832	0.10052	0.10551

Note: *p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

Discussion

The results of the correlation analysis presented in Table 2 indicate reliable interrelationship between constructive self-functions, integrated into the general identity of the person, and the harmonious eating behavior reflected in the absence of risk of food deviations. It is worth noticing that all the subscales of Ammon's questionnaire, reflecting the constructive type of development of self-functions, have a negative correlation with the indicators of the screening test for susceptibility to disorders of eating behavior.

The results of the study suggest that one of the dominant factors determining the risk of eating disorders is disharmony and destruction of the integrity of the individual's identity, which is expressed in the disintegration of the self-structure.

Most subjects who find themselves at low risk of food deviations are characterized by a proactive attitude, the ability to establish psychological contact with other people, to set realistic goals, to make plans and scenarios for life and implement them even in a challenging environment. They are more empathetic, imaginative and creative, with a wider range of interests than subjects with high levels of eating disorders. These personality traits, as a reflection of the integrity of their identity, contribute to the blocking of other factors (social, socio-cultural, genetic) and the development of deviations in eating behavior due to the individual's ability to self-determine, to transform oneself in healthy ways. By contrast, in the group of persons prone to food deviations, the indicators of constructive aggression are significantly lower than in the group of students with stable eating behavior. In the main group, many students are characterized by an unconscious internal ban on their own autonomy and identity. A narrow range of interests, inability to openly express emotional experience, "chronic" dissatisfaction with everything, including oneself, can become sources of eating behavior disorders.

The integrity of identity, expressed in constructive forms of self-functions, including constructive anxiety, controls the so-called "limits of experimentation". Individuals characterized by the integrity of identity and harmony of the formation of unconscious self-functions are able to adequately and soberly assess the danger of real life situations, to maintain their integrity even in emotional situations, while, according to the results of the

study, many students, predisposed to food deviations, have either "overwhelming anxiety" or a tendency to subjectively deny the presence of any anxiety at all.

Indicators of constructive external self-limitation are significantly higher in the control group than in the main one. They point to the fact that the majority of the control group respondents have an adequate sense of reality, the ability to allocate their resources and efforts in a rational way and to determine the strategy of their behavior in situations of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. Thus, a violation of the external boundaries of self can lead to various deviations, including, as shown by the results of the study, to eating disorders. It should be noticed that the greatest differences between the groups were recorded in terms of internal self-limitation.

It is worth mentioning that blocking of such processes as the emergence and development of eating disorders largely depends on the acquired ability of a person to adequately assess themselves, to accept their thoughts, feelings and experiences, so that their identity is characterized by harmony and integrity. The sense of self-esteem, realistic perception of oneself, one's own bodily states, the ability to resist negative perception from others, without destroying one's integrity, enable the individual to change his or her life and behavior in healthy ways. Low group indicators of constructive narcissism, recorded in the group of students prone to disorders of eating behavior, point to the fact that most of them, due to the disharmony of self-functions, easily fall under the influence of external opinions. Excessive dependence on the external opinions combined with the inability to accept oneself, including one's own body, can become a source of deviant eating behavior.

The inability of a person to differentiate between the imaginary and the real, the inability to regulate their own bodily processes, as a reflection of the functional insufficiency of the inner boundary, determine the risk of food disorders.

Correlation analysis allowed identifying statistically significant positive interrelations between the disintegrated type of personality structure and its propensity for disorders of eating behavior. It should be noted that food deviations related to restrictive behavior, i.e. tendency to anorexia nervosa, develop in a person characterized by the functional insufficiency of narcissism ($r = 0.5043$, $p < 0.001$), anxiety ($r = 0.4344$, $p < 0.001$), external

($r = 0.4027$, $p < 0.001$) and internal ($r = 0.5169$, $p < 0.001$) boundaries of their own self. The tendency to eat excessively without restriction in stressful situations may be due to destructive tendencies in the development of such self-functions as anxiety ($r = 0.2953$, $p < 0.01$) and narcissism ($r = 0.2734$, $p < 0.001$). Destructive aggression, reflecting the inability to regulate it ($r = 0.3304$, $p < 0.001$), the lack of correlation between the conscious and unconscious ($r = 0.1946$, $p < 0.05$) often become the reasons for the individual's uncontrolled desire to eat food whenever he or she sees it, or just to join company, satisfying other needs than hunger.

Conclusions

The research has established that the state of the identity of a person is an important psychological determinant of his or her nutritional behavior. An integrated identity implies that the individual is able to differentiate objects of the outside world and subjective ideas about them, to differentiate their own bodily states, to correlate them with the actual situation in their life activity. An integrated identity ensures the individual's control over reality, his or her control over his bodily states. In this regard, integrated identity blocks the processes of emergence and development of food deviations. The disintegration of the individual's identity and the disharmonious character of its formation, expressed in functional insufficiency or distorted development of basic self-functions, determines the appearance of problems in the mental activity of a person, including eating behavior. An integrated identity determines a stable and harmonious eating behavior of a person.

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