

## IFTE 2018

### 4th International Forum on Teacher Education

#### THE CHALLENGES OF THE POSTMODERN ENVIRONMENT: VIRTUALITY, THE INTERNET, AND WIKIPEDIA

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#### *Abstract*

This article provides an analysis of the postmodern psychology and pedagogy of personality and outlines its main contours formed by means of textual, nomadological, schizoanalytical, narratologic, simulative and synergistic approaches. The postmodern approach allows to view the investigated addicted personalities as some kind of artificial alive psychic ‘prostheses’: *simulacra* cut off from reality and formed both from the outside (for example, by the society) and from the inside (for example, by a drug). The addicted personality gets stuck with these past semantic processes which never cause a feeling of boredom and extend to present processes seeking to transcend this past.

In order to achieve a more effective psycho-correction of an addicted person, it is necessary to take into account the fundamental unpredictability and paradoxical character of this person’s future semantic processes. Besides, it is important to exclude the substitution of real meaning-making values with artificial ones, and also to reduce the likelihood of critical personality conditions. Finally, it is necessary to detect deficiencies of critical and nonequilibrium-stable conditions of the semantic structures, thereby reducing the likelihood of unpredictable psychical bifurcations leading to immersion in a virtual reality world. All these conditions are feasible if one manages to solve the language problem in the dialogue of two semantic realities (virtual and real), taking into account that virtual reality is subject to laws that cannot be described within the framework of the psychology of the initial reality.

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**Keywords:** Postmodern psychology, pedagogy, virtuality, postmodernism.



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## 1. Introduction

The psychology of dependent adolescents and young people (drug, alcohol, toxic, game, fanatical, gambling, internet-dependent, etc.) immersed in a postmodern environment (virtuality, the Internet, Wikipedia, etc.) becomes one of the most significant problems in terms of those negative social and psychological consequences that such behavior can cause. One of the reasons for the aforesaid is the lack of a clear and exact psychological and pedagogical concept of an addicted personality, and as a consequence, the insufficiency of knowledge on the psychology of addiction. It is evident that this theoretical problem is one of a general character in psychology and pedagogy. However, despite this and against the background of a small number of empirical studies, there are practically no attempts being carried out to produce theoretical generalizations. And even if such attempts are done, we can say that the results of those studies are interpreted within the framework of traditional classical approaches. Therefore, below we will try to analyze the nonclassical approach to the psychology of personality with the purpose of developing new nonclassical approaches to the problem of the addictive personality.

## 2. Problem Statement

The problem of development of nonclassical psychology has already been formulated by various authors. D. A. Leontev's involvement with the existential-mediation aspect of semantic reality helped Russian psychologists to escape the trap of the 'zombifying' predictable existential world, to which the individuum always adapted only by means of the principle of congruity (Leontyev, 2007). It is known that some psychologists added new guidelines to the postmodern psychology of personality, moving from vital activity to vital creativity, from semantic regulation to regulation of meanings, from psychology of a 'changing personality' to psychology of a self-creating and self-changing personality that is also able to create and change its own vital world. Nevertheless, one should ask whether it is possible to strive, on the one hand, for a unified systemic conception, thereby manifesting attitudes of postmodern psychology and philosophy, while, on the other hand, aiming to build postmodern psychology, which must be characterized for being rhizomorphic, which implies the absence of binarities and the opposition of subject to object, inner to outer, center to periphery, and so on (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). The explanation of psychic reality exclusively on the basis of semantic mechanisms in combination with simpler explanatory logics, despite its sophistication, never goes beyond the 'postulate of congruity', since there is a regulatory principle that determines the hierarchical system of criteria which the subject's entire activity is congruent with. At the same time, practical psychology demonstrates that there are forms of human behavior that are not subject to a semantic explanation. As an example, we can mention non-adaptive activity phenomena described by Petrovsky (1993), as well as the value choice situation constructed by Vasiliuk (1997) (when it is impossible to compare alternatives in a single semantic coordinate system, as it is done in simpler cases).

Thus, a question arises as to what degree such a global and ubiquitous implementation of the concept of "meaning" for the description of the psyche has a heuristic potential. All the more so since V. F. Petrenko's works on the semantics of the consciousness have detected phenomena related to the semantic disruptiveness of the human consciousness, i.e. there is not a complete 'filling' of the psyche with meaning (Petrenko, 1997). Moreover, the concept of "meaning", in the traditional sense, always takes us back to the past, back to something that has gone away and requires reflection, ignoring what is happening

“here and now”. Perhaps the time has come to understand something else as “meaning”? Are semantic processes the real root cause of mental and semantic dynamics?

On the basis of an analysis of many works, we have shown that the majority of the studied psychic mechanisms are secondary reconstructions induced by the main vector of psychic dynamics (Garifullin, 2005a, 2005b). In our opinion, this vector has barely been studied in psychology (the dynamics of the unpredictable intrapsychic and extrapsychic being in which human psyche is abandoned; non-adaptive processes, etc.). In addition, when analyzing the dynamics of the semantic reality, one cannot ignore the studies claiming that the individual has the ability not only to search for meaning but also to seek illusions, delusions, that is, occasional meaningless formations (Garifullin, 1997). Having got into a non-adaptive process condition, the individual begins to form nonsense with such speed and frequency that it (nonsense) is no longer perceived as such and becomes a semantic formation.

The analysis shows that only the concept of meaning, being an ubiquitous operator or scriptor (a concept from postmodern philosophy) between various psychic worlds and structures, can become one of the central categories of psychology (postmodern psychology), integrating and seemingly penetrating different levels of the psyche: emotions and thinking, conscious and unconscious, depth and “top” psychic phenomena. We are not talking here about the meaning as a conscious mental process, but about certain information operators of relationship. Therefore, we have to talk of the semantic reality as a kind of continuum, a ‘fabric’ formed on the basis of life relations, the ‘life world’ of the subject within the process of existential mediation of semantic formations. On the other hand, the semantic reality is an aggregate of various components of the personality semantic structure that do not have a hierarchy, and depending on their stability and dynamics, these components, while flowing into each other, turn into motives, semantic guidelines, dispositions, constructs, and finally, personal meanings. So, for example, E. T. Sokolova’s studies have shown that the cohesion and fusion of individual meanings are reflected in the fact that even negligible changes in one single meaning or one single view lead to destabilization of many other meanings (Sokolova, 1980). These provisions are well described within the nomadological approach to the analysis of dynamic semantic structures of the addicted personality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Further, we attempted to extend the category of rhizome to semantic processes and structures. It is shown that, unlike the metaphor of ‘root’, which assumes a rigidly fixed configuration and a genetic (axial) structure, the semantic rhizome is either something that can sprout in any direction or a network of ‘root hairs’ whose potential interlacement cannot be foreseen. The semantic rhizome is fundamentally procedural: it ‘does not begin and never ends. It is always in the middle’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Such nomadic semantic reality appears as successively changing virtual structures.

The simulative approach (Garifullin, 1997; Boudrillard, 1981) unlike the nomadological one, made it possible to detect the existence of non-dynamic, stable semantic structures (destructive values, semantic dispositions, and constructs) in the semantic structures of the investigated addicted personalities as some kind of artificially alive psychic ‘prostheses’, simulacra cut off from reality and formed both externally (e.g., by the society) and internally (e.g., by a drug). Owing to memory, the addicted personality gets stuck with these past semantic processes (for example, images of drug abuse) which never cause a feeling of boredom and extend to present processes seeking to transcend this past. As a result, the real meanings come into conflict with the ‘preserved’ past meanings, this being the reason for the devastating neuroticism of the addicted personality. Thanks to these simulacra, which form a virtual semantic reality, the personality

is so carried away and detached from the sober-minded semantic reality that she/he does not want to ‘listen’ (pay attention) to it. This artificial semantic reality becomes more real, relevant and significant for the addicted person. This virtualizing society immerses itself not only in the inner ‘hell of the Same’ (*L'enfer du Même*)—a world of artificial meanings (*simulacra*), but also in a world of living external meanings formed by electronic media and the Internet, in particular, Wikipedia, which become more real and relevant than the objects of the original reality (Baudrillard, 1981). When these ‘two psychic prostheses’ (external and internal *simulacra*) become identical, the sources of the natural liveliness of the psyche would apparently disappear. A personality subconscious creates delusions and illusions as projections of the world in the form of ‘psychic prostheses’: internal and external *simulacra*. According to their nature, these *simulacra* are different from the signs that arise during activity and interiorization process, since they are empty signs, inadequate to reality. This, apparently, should affect the socio-cultural component of the psyche development of future generations.

Contrarily to the simulative approach, where there is still a certain awareness of destructive meanings, in the schizoanalytic approach this awareness is missing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Based on a synthesis of the synergistic and the semantic approaches, we have shown that the positive life-affirming state of the addicted personality’s psyche is the result of a stable nonequilibrium state of the semantic structures induced by an active-critical state, namely creativity, gambling, risk, overcoming, borderline states, etc. (In this paper, we understand as equilibrium the process of psychic adaptation consisting in the coincidence of the goal, as an anticipated image, and the result of an activity). On the contrary, depression is a consequence of the absence of a stable nonequilibrium state in the semantic processes and structures, i.e. the existence of a ‘dead’ stable equilibrium (adaptation). This state is characterized by the presence of stable semantic structures formed from outside (for example, by ideology) and from within (for example, by a drug). Owing to these destructive semantic structures, the psyche of the addicted personality comes into a state of boring predictability (congruity, semantic dependence) in which non-adaptive and unpredictable creative processes cease. As a result, an individual that has never before been submerged in a virtual reality world enters a passive-critical state (negative, stable and nonequilibrium state): depression. In this critical state, even small disturbances in personal-semantic structures carried out by manipulators can lead the individual to the spontaneous decision to immerse in a virtual reality world. In addition, there are passive-critical states caused by a constant comparison of the real and virtual worlds by an addicted individuum. Therefore, the addicted personality tries to artificially (i.e. virtually) escape from this boring and subject-destroying predictability, which is governed by the principle of congruency, into another one that is not boring: a world of virtual illusions which is able to artificially create a feeling of transcendence and makes it possible to transcend one’s own self. After all, a living psyche is constantly in a state of stable disequilibrium and is open to the transcendental, that is, it transcends and creates something that is not established, something that is beyond the boundaries of the principle of congruency. Consequently, the immersion in a world of virtual reality that is dangerous for the psyche is provoked by the desire to escape from a boring predictability (stable equilibrium in the semantic processes and structures), as well as from a frustrating nonequilibrium (noncoincidence of goal and result). As a result, the individuum receives in return a pleasing imaginary equilibrium (for example, intoxication), which also ‘kills’ the subject but causes euphoria. That is, the person is disappointed by both the nonequilibrium semantic component and the equilibrium (adaptive) component, and therefore chooses an artificially organized equilibrium:

intoxication, in which the result and the goal always coincide. In other words, as a result of alcohol and drug consumption, natural equilibrium and nonequilibrium in the semantic processes give way to the artificial, temporary and imaginary equilibrium of the semantic processes.

This process of substitution of a living psyche with a psychic model ‘saturated’ with a stable semantic reality (a striving for congruity which leads to a discrepancy between goal and results) is precisely what leads many people to mental disorders and, as a consequence, to alcohol and drug addiction.

The textual approach, based on the contextual disclosure of meanings, on the play of meanings, allowed to identify on a new basis the problem of collision of two semantic spaces (real and virtual) within which two different semantic realities coexist in the psyche of one addicted person (Aylesworth, 2005; Best & Kellner, 1991, 1997). In addition, the textual approach to the psyche led us to one of the most important questions of our study: what makes a person believe that meaning exists? An answer to this question was already obtained in our previous studies (Garifullin, 1997). According to these investigations, the individual has not only the ability to search for meaning but also to seek illusions, delusions, that is, occasional meaningless formations. Having got into a non-adaptive process condition, an individual, driven by their needs, starts forming nonsense with such speed and frequency that it (nonsense) is no longer perceived as such and becomes a semantic formation.

### **3. Research Questions**

1. To apply postmodern approaches to the psychology of an addicted person in a postmodern environment.
2. To reveal new psychological mechanisms of the dependent person and its semantic processes with the help of postmodern approaches.
3. To develop recommendations for the successful psychocorrection and education of adolescents and young people based on the identified mechanisms.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Development of the foundations of postmodern psychology and pedagogy.

### **5. Research Methods**

We study postmodern approaches to the psychology of the addicted personality by reviewing and analysing our previous works as well as other authors' studies on this topic.

### **6. Findings**

To conduct effective psycho-correctional and educational activities with addictive adolescents and young people who become victims of the postmodern environment, it is necessary:

1. To take into account the fundamental unpredictability and paradoxical character of a personality's future semantic processes.
2. To exclude the substitution of real meaning-making values with artificial ones.

3. To reduce the likelihood of critical personality conditions able to lead to a spontaneous decision (namely, to immerse in a world of destructive virtual reality) even after small or insignificant disturbances in personal-semantic structures carried out by manipulators.
4. To take into account that the rehabilitation of an addicted person should be understood as a training of tolerance to an unacceptable psychological old age caused by destructive virtuality, and as the transition of the semantic processes determined by the psychopathological old age of the addicted personality into semantic processes of a normal old age leading to youth.
5. To identify deficiencies of critical and nonequilibrium-stable conditions of the semantic structures, thereby reducing the likelihood of unpredictable psychical bifurcations leading to immersion in a world of virtual realities.
6. To solve the language problem in the dialogue of two semantic realities (virtual and real), taking into account that virtual reality obeys laws that cannot be described within the framework of the psychology of the initial reality.
7. To reduce the intensity of social schizophrenia processes.

## 7. Conclusion

The application of our postmodern approach to psychology and pedagogy has proved to be more effective in psychological correction and education of adolescents and young people.

## Acknowledgments

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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