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Cyber addiction as a factor of the destructive religiosity formation

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Abstract: The article examines the problem of the modern technologies' influence on young people. The essence, symptoms and negative consequences of cyber addiction are given. Psycho-physiological personality disorders as a result of cyber addiction are presented. The position of cyber addiction experts on the negative impact of destructive Internet content on young people in the socialization stage is demonstrated. The prerequisites for the involvement of young people in destructive religious organizations associated with cyber addiction are considered.

Keywords: cyber addiction, netolism, gambling addiction, Internet, cyberspace, social connections, emotional status, non-specific behavioral manifestations, aggression, self-control, behavioral model, destructive cult, information technology, computer games, patterns, self-regulation.

Information-communication technologies play a significant role in the life of a modern person. Their rapid development is an integral part of progress. A modern socialized individual cannot imagine his life without a computer, mobile phone and other gadgets that accompany him in almost all areas of life. Modern technologies are an integral part of young people's life, for whom the cyber environment is, first of all, a means of communication and positioning themselves and their lives in virtual space. The cyber environment provides young people with the right to individual communication in an interactive mode, both to obtain information of interest and to implement their creative ideas.

The main element of the technogenic development of mankind is the Internet. It is the global network that today solves an infinite number of problems set by human. The Internet has expanded the ability to work with a large amount of information and feel comfortable in the information environment. However, numerous studies suggest that hyper-involvement in cyberspace has a negative impact on young people.

One of the harmful consequences of unlimited and uncontrolled stay in the cyber environment is cyber addiction. Its main types include: netolism (Internet addiction) and gambling addiction.

Netolism manifests itself in a person's almost endless stay online. Sometimes netolics spend 14-16 or more hours a day in the virtual world, making virtual acquaintances, downloading music, and communicating on social networks.

The signs of netolism are:

- obsessive desire to constantly check email and mobile messengers for letters and messages presence;
- anticipation of the next online contact;
- increase in the time spent online;
- increase in the amount of money spent online.

Gambling addiction is divided into two groups depending on the nature of a particular game: role-playing (computer games with maximum escape from reality) and non-role-playing (computer games with the desire to achieve - to complete the game, reach the goal, score points).

Signs of gambling addiction include:

- significant improvement in mood even at the mention of a computer game;
- acute reluctance to tear away from a computer game with manifestations of irritation, and in the later stages of addiction - aggression towards anyone who is trying to distract from the game or interrupt it;
 - inability to plan work and educational activities or leisure time not related to the cyber environment;
 - neglect of household chores;
 - neglect of personal hygiene;
 - neglect of food and sleep;
 - reducing any conversation when communicating with others to computer topics;
 - refusal of social connections if they are not related to the cyber environment.

Virtual reality has not yet become widespread, but the problem of “escaping” from the real world into the world of computer games, programs, mobile content and personality changes under the influence of information technology has already been clearly identified.

Babaeva Yu.D. and Voiskunsky A.E. consider that young users who are interested in computer technology experience a “narrowing of interests” due to their attention being focused only on the latest information technology and following fashion in this area [1]. Absorption in the cyber environment affects other types of activity and even the entire personality as a whole.

Among the psychological mechanisms underlying addiction, the “flow experience” is distinguished – a special state of absorption in an activity, in which the expected result of this activity recedes into the background in a person’s consciousness, and the action itself takes up all attention. This state is accompanied by intense positive emotions; at the same time there is a “fixation” on the process of interaction with the computer, leaving from reality, an “escape” from it into the virtual world [2].

The Internet, computer games, and mobile applications can captivate young people so much that they develop a desire to spend more and more time in the online or mobile space, while their physical activity decreases, the real world is replaced by the virtual one, and behavioral patterns change completely.

One of the reasons for the emergence of cyber addiction in young people is the reduction or suppression of self-control skills. This leads to the fact that in the future, becoming adults and going deeper into virtual reality, they will also be unable to self-regulate behavior, will not be able to control themselves, limit, “slow down”, will make decisions and act without thinking, will not be able to outline the prospects, determine the result of their actions, analyze the situation.

Another effect of cyber addiction is the problem of reduced ability to recognize the emotional status of others. A psychological experiment was conducted at the University of California (Los Angeles, USA). Scientists have found that young people who abuse the use of their gadgets demonstrate a deterioration in the ability to recognize emotions both in the dynamics of conversation and in the photographs shown [3]. An interesting fact revealed as a result of this study was that subjects who were deprived of access to their devices for five days demonstrated a better ability to recognize the emotions of others than those who did not stop using their gadgets.

It is worth paying attention to one more significant point. During periods of crisis exacerbations in the development of society, an increase in emotional tension is observed not only among adults, but also among young people. The consequence of this is a variety of neuroses and emotional deviations. It should be noted that some features of the emotional reactions of adolescence are due to hormonal and physiological processes. The emotional sphere of representatives of the “youth” social group is characterized by mental imbalance, sudden mood swings, transitions from exaltation to depression and vice versa, an increase in general excitement and a weakening of all types of conditioned inhibition. Due to the specificity of their emotional status, they can react to weak stimuli and not respond to strong ones.

At the same time, young people who spend virtually unlimited time in the cyber environment (in particular, playing aggressive computer games) exhibit serious non-specific behavioral manifestations such as increased aggression, anxiety, and fears [4]. Unlike adults, who perceive these games as harmless entertainment that allows them to forget about life’s problems, young users are more likely to look for a source of increased risk and self-testing in them. Virtual reality gives them the opportunity to feel like participants in exciting stories, battles, and missions to save humanity. Many become obsessed with the desire to defeat the computer.

However, psychologists warn about the “narcotic”, addictive influence of such games, about the possibility of aggressive and ruthless behavior under their influence. In addition to the emergence of aggressive behavioral models, passive forms of manifestation of the consequences of cyber addiction have recently been noted. In Japan and England doctors have identified a new type of disease - video game epilepsy syndrome - at several teenagers who were overly fond of computer games from early childhood. This syndrome although does not lead to the extinction of mental abilities, nevertheless contributes to the formation of such negative character traits typical of epilepsy as suspiciousness, suspiciousness, hostility towards loved ones, impulsiveness, irascibility.

In connection with cyber addiction and the changing (or changed) behavior model under it, it is very difficult to interest young people in educational institutions, sports sections, creative sections. This is due to the fact that the content of modern technologies is quick access, easy-to-understand information, ready-made behavioral models. In other words, in order to get what you want, there is no need to spend intellectual and physical resources. In contrast, for example, sports club activity is long and hard work, the need to maintain discipline and a regime. If in the cyber

environment the result can be achieved by simply pressing a button, then in sports achieving the result will require effort and time.

Separately it should be mentioned that the Internet is capable of potentially influencing the formation of moral standards that differ from those accepted in society. The global network carries both virtually unlimited development opportunities and a huge destructive component. The Internet can provide not only positive, educational information, but also harsh content that destroys the personality of young people (cruelty, aggression, child pornography, propaganda of physical and psychological violence, bullying, perverted and ritual murders, cannibalism, real rapes, calls for racial and ethnic hatred, etc.).

Presenting in the cyber environment, young users are left to their own devices. Parents most often do not have the necessary skills to limit their children's access to negative information on the Internet. The younger generation is quicker than their parents to navigate the range of computer games on the market and often chooses for themselves those that lead to gradual latent degradation of the personality.

Cyber addiction specialist Stepanova A.K. refers that for many teenagers escape into virtual environment is one of the ways to adapt to the cruel world around them. They find difficulties to express their emotions, and feel uncomfortable communicating with their peers in real life. But since the need for communication in adolescence is extremely high, many take the "easy way" and choose virtual communication. There, they don't need to look into the eyes of interlocutor, dress nicely, take care of appearance, they can embellish themselves, invent many different advantages, and hide flaws. Also, such communication is much easier than real one, because user don't need to hide true emotions, bad mood, irritation, which teenagers often suffer from. The author is of the opinion that many teenagers try to raise their self-esteem with the help of such communication. However, children suffering from cyber addiction, despite long-term communication in the virtual world, suffer from a lack of attention, warmth, support, and mutual understanding. They still continue to suffer from misunderstanding and loneliness. In this regard, even after prolonged gaming or communication on the Internet, they experience nervousness, anxiety and emotional tension [5]. All of the above aspects provokes the decomposition of social status, the loss of own "I", deterioration of psychological health, excitation of internal irritants, the emergence of isolation, anxiety and aggression.

The virtual world created by electronic games and information networks includes the entire range of moral standards, but if in real life good and evil exist in some dissolved form, and are not so obvious, then in the cyber environment they are most often found in their pure form. This causes the inadequacy of the use of skills transferred by the personality of a teenager from the virtual world to the real world.

Cyber addiction, like any other addiction, is a form of escape from reality, which is traumatic and difficult to predict, where we have to build relationships with different people, including those who are perceived negatively. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that reality for representatives of the "youth" social group is intrapersonal and group conflicts, disappointments, painful failures and losses, to which young people react with youthful maximalism and uncompromisingness

inherent in this age category. Therefore, a young person who has not yet learned to exist in the adult world seems to think that virtual life is an ideal escape to the comfort zone.

The change in the behavioral model of modern young people as a result of cyber addiction is not only a psychophysiological and psychological danger, but also a social one, since this complex transformation process caused by age-related characteristics is used as a basis for involvement in destructive religious organizations. A harmoniously developed personality, engaged in education at an educational institution, involved in sports, having leisure time and social connections corresponding to their age and social standards, rarely falls under the influence of sectarians or ideologists of religious extremist organizations. But a young person with an unbalanced psyche, who has isolated himself from social contacts, immersed in the cyber environment and actually cut off from the real world, becomes an ideal candidate for involvement.

Researchers of totalitarian sects and informal religious movements note that the prerequisites that can make a young person a victim include:

- strong interest and craving for everything unusual, mysterious;
- weak, unstable psyche, increased suggestibility;
- difficult situation (family problems, health and mental disorders, unfavorable social background, etc.);
- presence of relatives, friends and idols who are passionate about religion, mysticism;
- experience of drug addiction.

If we analyze this list, it becomes clear that at least three of the five points ideally coincide with the socio-psychological status of a young person subject to cyber addiction:

- he has an interest in the unusual, since almost all computer games presented on the media market contain elements of fantasy, mysticism, surrealism;
- destabilization of the psyche occurs as a result of information overload, and increased suggestibility develops as a result of a gradually lost ability to draw a line between the virtual world and the real one;
- family problems arise in all cyber-addicted young people due to neglect of household chores, poor academic performance, health problems due to an unhealthy lifestyle associated with constant presence in cyberspace.

The first factor - a strong interest and attraction to everything unusual and mysterious - is quite often exploited as a pattern in the process of involvement in destructive religious organizations. Modern young people who grew up on comics and computer games have literally “absorbed” mystical stories in which the hero confronts an unjust society and, through his confrontation, seeks to make the world a better place. Particular emphasis, in our opinion, should be placed on the fact that the objects of confrontation are often representatives of another religious denomination, and among the ways to achieve victory - murder (sometimes in an extremely cruel form) is justified, and in some cases is the only option. It is quite obvious that, relying

on the already formed readiness of a young person to fight with people of different convictions, worldview, race, faith, the recruiter only needs to stimulate his craving for the mystical battle of good with evil and hint that he can become that very “hero”, “the chosen one” who will cleanse the world (society) from filth (injustice, vice, evil, etc.). He can feel everything that the virtual space gives him in reality, for this he just need to become a member of the organization.

In non-militant sects, the main consequences of involvement are complete deformation of the personality (and sometimes its deliberate “erasure”), psychopathization and mental illness. In religious extremist organizations, everything is much more tragic - playing the “chosen ones” can end in death, because in real life it is impossible to “save” like in a computer game, “re-enter” under another “nickname” or, in the end, simply exit the virtual space.

Despite the scale of the tragedy caused by the increase in the number of cyber-dependent young people involved in destructive religious organizations, it is impossible to completely exclude modern technologies from the lives of young people. In this regard, the main problem, in our opinion, is the following:

1. The mass introduction of computer technologies is ahead of the acquisition of knowledge about their negative impact. As noted by Dr. Ruth Milanaik of the Medical Center in New York, computer technologies are developing rapidly, and our understanding of their impact is clearly lagging. This is due to the fact that in order to adequately understand this impact, it is necessary to conduct research, experiments, observations, etc. And they, as we know, take a lot of time. A number of them have a prolonged nature, sometimes measured in years, such as the study of the impact of mobile communications on the human body [6].

2. There is practically no relevant accessible interactive information on the regulations for the use of information and communication tools.

3. Parental control over teenagers in terms of the time spent in the cyber environment and the content they visit or use has been weakened. It should be emphasized that the main responsibility for how a teenager develops lies with parents. They are the ones who must see the alarming signals indicating a change in behavioral patterns. But, unfortunately, parents of teenagers are also often carried away by social networks, virtual communities, computer games and other Internet content, and communication between children and parents fades into the background. This is an additional factor that increases the influence of modern technologies on the process of forming the worldview of the younger generation.

Obviously, with such a large-scale problem it is necessary to take measures aimed at protecting young people from cyber addiction and information that destroys their psyche. And first of all, this task should become a priority for parents, teachers and other specialists who deal with the younger generation, nurturing spiritual and moral values in them and developing their abilities.

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