

## **Peculiarities of Internet Self-Presentations of People with Eating Disorders**

### **Особливості Інтернет-самопрезентації осіб із розладами харчової поведінки**

#### **Shebanova Vitaliia**

Dr. in Psychology, Professor,  
Professor of the Department of Psychology,  
Kherson State University,  
Kherson (Ukraine)  
ORCID ID: [orcid.org/0000-0002-1658-4691](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1658-4691)  
Researcher ID: D-2740-2019  
Scopus AuthorID: 57221382679  
E-mail: [vitaliashebanova@gmail.com](mailto:vitaliashebanova@gmail.com)

#### **Шебанова Віталія**

Доктор психологічних наук,  
професор, професор кафедри психології,  
Херсонський державний університет,  
м. Херсон (Україна)

#### **Yablonska Tetiana**

Dr. in Psychology, Professor,  
Assistant Professor of the Department of Developmental Psychology,  
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv,  
Kyiv (Ukraine)  
ORCID ID: [orcid.org/0000-0001-7272-9691](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7272-9691)  
Researcher ID: S-2060-2019  
Scopus AuthorID: 57221618222  
E-mail: [t\\_yablonska@ukr.net](mailto:t_yablonska@ukr.net)

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Address for correspondence, e-mail: [kpnu\\_lab\\_ps@ukr.net](mailto:kpnu_lab_ps@ukr.net)  
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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2022-55.150-172>

## Яблонська Тетяна

доктор психологічних наук, професор,  
доцент кафедри психології розвитку,  
Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка,  
м. Київ (Україна)

Авторський внесок: Шебанова Віталія – 60%, Яблонська Тетяна – 40%.

*The contribution of the author: Shebanova Vitaliia – 60%, Yablonska Tetiana – 40%*

### ABSTRACT

*The article presents the research results concerning self-presentations of people with eating disorders on specialized Internet forums.*

**The purpose of the article** is to reveal the peculiarities of self-presentation of anorexic and overweight persons on the basis of psychological analysis of their avatars.

**Research method** is discourse analysis as a tool revealing specificity of symbolic information (avatars, nicknames) to identify the peculiarities of self-presentation of people with eating disorders.

**The results of the research.** Avatars of users visiting sites for anorexic and overweight people are analysed from the psychological point of view, the analysed results assert that images used as avatars reflect specific nutritional problems and self-attitude in connection with them. Such sites are visited mostly by the female audience, and hence the problem of standards of a woman body is really important. The main categories of images used as avatars are differentiated to: personal photos; anime characters; food related images; images of well-known people as examples of success; emotionally-coloured images, etc. The differences in self-representations of anorexic and overweight people have been determined on the basis of content, colours of used images, in particular, a more positive self-presentation and self-attitude of people with excess weight compared with anorexics have been revealed.

**Conclusion.** The article argues that the analysis of avatars' characteristics as a means of self-presentation is useful both for psychological diagnosis of people with eating disorders, as well as for provision of professional psychological assistance for them. Such analysis is appropriate at contact establishing, primary psychological diagnosis and psychotherapy for people with eating disorders combined with chronic dissatisfaction with their own weight.

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2022-55.150-172>

**Key words:** *eating disorders, anorexia, obesity, online communication, self-presentation.*

## Introduction

The Internet as a special kind of informational environment is a rather new object of psychological research. This segment lacks established, tested and approved research methodology; specific methods for collecting, analysing and interpreting information only have to be developed. At the same time, modern researchers are increasingly turning to research using the Internet, as well as to determine Internet network influence on formation of various forms of human behaviour. After all, various forms of human activity are carried out in cyberspace; one of the leading activities is communicative. Taking into account that communication is a complex information-sign system where different language and extra-language symbols or codes are used, it is clear that during communications, actors are guided by individual discourses in accordance with their communicative intentions and a situational context.

Modern researchers (Lyons, Mehl & Pennebaker, 2006; Borzekowski, Schenk, Wilson & Peebles, 2010; Teufel, Hofer, Junne, Sauer, Zipfel & Giel, 2013; Шебанова & Яблонська, 2019; Шебанова & Онуфрієва, 2019; Шебанова, 2020 etc.) examine the Internet network from a psychological point of view, in particular as a virtual space widely used for communication allowing people to expand their circle of acquaintances and establish new contacts. Accordingly, communications through the Internet, and corresponding virtual self-images, virtual identity are a new, actual and insufficiently researched problem of psychology.

The analysed psychological researches on eating disorders reveals that the basis of these disorders is a distorted perception of oneself (a false interpretation of their own corporeality). The most widespread psychological features of people with eating disorders are feelings of isolation and their own "abnormality" because of overweight (imaginary and real), contradictory feel-

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2022-55.150-172>

ings and torn self-concept, actuated primitive mechanisms of psychological protection, somatisation of internal conflicts, as well as violations of social adaptation (Shebanova, 2016).

The works of D. L. Borzekowski, S. Schenk, J. L. Wilson and R. Peebles (Borzekowski, Schenk, Wilson & Peebles, 2010), M. Dickins, S.L. Thomas, B. King, S. Lewis and K. Holland (Dickins, Thomas, King, Lewis & Holland, 2011), Branley D.B. and Covey (Branley & Covey, 2017) analyse information in the Internet regarding the issue of eating disorders. Researchers emphasize the need for continuous research monitoring to better understand an impact of specialized sites on users.

The research of M. Dickins, S.L. Thomas, B. King, S. Lewis and K. Holland (Dickins, Thomas, King, Lewis & Holland, 2011) has found out that information posted on specialized blogs for people who are obese and constantly faced with stigmatization allows them to switch from reactive strategies in response to stigma to proactive responses that allow them to withstand stigma. This fact is consistent with the studies of D.B. Branley and J. Covey (Branley & Covey, 2017), who emphasize that developers of information and curative method should take into account a social network impact on users and potential negative consequences and, accordingly, focus on positive online support.

The modern studies (Шевченко, 2003; Lyons, Mehl & Pennebaker, 2006; Mulveen, & Hepworth, 2006 and others) understand "avatar" as an embodiment of a person's certain mental model. A person's psychological *mood*, expressed in self-presentation, is an important aspect of Internet communications. A person having a sense of inner well-being reveals information about him/herself that corresponds to reality, in this case the person is not inclined to fundamental changes of his/her own image. The *general feeling of internal ill-being* is a significant cause of self-image distortion at self-presentation, and therefore a person, oppressed by such feeling, often enjoys an opportunity to change his/her own image for Internet communications (Шевченко, 2003). We proceed from the fact that images used

for certain avatars reflect psychological well-being of Internet forum users having the specific problem – eating disorder. That is why research on such avatars is an attempt to expand understanding of individual peculiarities of people with distorted patterns of eating behaviour.

So, in the context of widely spread Internet communications, it is important to study peculiarities of self-presentation of people with eating disorders that will clarify the causes of such disorders, and to develop the content and means of psychotherapeutic work with them.

**The goal of the article** is to reveal the peculiarities of self-presentation of anorexic and overweight persons on the basis of psychological analysis of their avatars.

### **Materials and Methods**

To achieve the research purpose, discourse analysis was used as a tool revealing specificity of symbolic / sign information (avatars, nicknames) to identify the peculiarities of self-presentation of people with eating disorders. The conditional general sample of forum users consisted of 237 people, including 126 people – visitors of the anorexic site and 111 overweight people – visitors of the site of health-improving weight loss clinic.

The research on the discourse presented at the Internet sites with eating disorders included a series of steps: 1) determination of the categories of avatars as symbolic self-presentations; 2) comparison of self-presentation of persons with eating disorders on thematic internet forums.

Archive materials from the sites for the period of 2013-2018 were studied in the research; in total, about 157 thematic areas and 4000 post-messages were analyzed. By comparing self-presentations of anorexic and overweight people, we have identified specific markers indicating existence of users' certain personality traits and forms of problematic eating behaviour that can be the basis for primary online psychological diagnosis and development of psychological correction tools.

Our research was conducted in accordance with the articles of the Declaration of Helsinki and Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists, which declare protection respondents in scientific researches. According to these documents, all respondents agreed to participate in the study. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Ethical commission of the Kherson State University psychological service.

Our study was based on the projective approach, understanding a person as a relatively stable system of interconnected dynamic processes, organized on the basis of needs, emotions and individual experiences acting throughout the personal life, and forming, directing, reflecting each situation in the personal inner world. In accordance with this approach, each new personal action, each emotional manifestation, personal perception, feelings, statements, and motor acts bear the imprint of the person (Бурлачук, 2008). Thus, a personal avatar can be regarded as a source of graphic symbolic information about its author, because it is a projective material, reflecting a person's own way of seeing life, thoughts and feelings, inner world.

In order to determine statistical significance of the determined differences, the statistical  $\phi^*$ -criterion of Fisher's variance ratio was used.

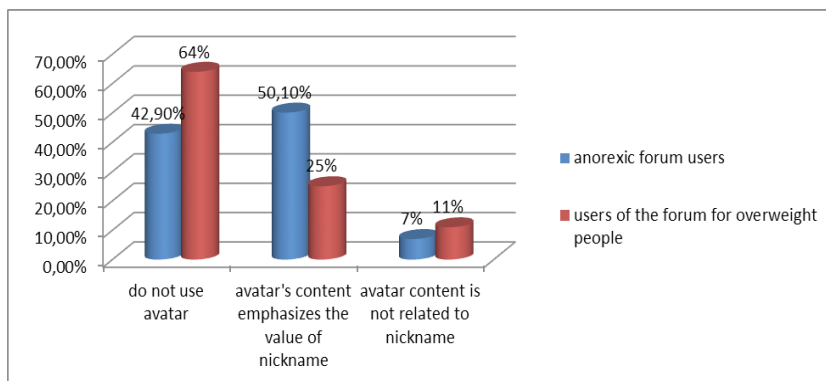
## Results and discussions

The analysed avatars of the anorexic and overweight forum users have allowed us to identify peculiarities specific to each sample.

Analysis shows that not all users accept avatars as an element of self-presentation (Fig. 1).

In particular, only 36% of the *people with overweight – Internet forum users* accept avatars as graphic display of their own self. Perhaps this is due to the low self-esteem and fear of presenting themselves, even incognito under an avatar. At the same time, the proportion of those who accept avatars is 57.1% among the *anorexic forum users*, which far exceeds the simi-

lar part of overweight people ( $\varphi_{ex}^* = 3.273$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Moreover, in most cases, avatars for both samples serve as an addition to users' nicknames (names presented on the Internet for the purpose of self-presentation).



**Fig. 1. Use of avatars as a graphic self-presentation on forums of anorexic and overweight people.**

Only 6.95% of *anorexic forum users* displayed their own real photos as avatars (the same number of nicknames were marked as their own names). Consequently, most users strive to change fundamentally their images of self-presentation, which can testify to a general feeling of internal distress (Shevchenko, 2003). At the same time, 22.5% of *the users of the forum for overweight people* presented their own photos as avatars, which is much higher than the number of anorexics. Does this indicate a higher level of internal well-being in this sample? In order to answer this question, we have analyzed the texts accompanying the forum accounts.

The analysed texts has shown that this tendency does not indicate satisfaction with own bodily image or a high sense of inner well-being. Moreover, none of the photographs shows existence of the overweight problem of their owners. Some photographs depict only persons' faces, with some photos accompa-

nied by commentaries, which reveal easily a hidden discontent with their own body: "*but this is just a face!*" Other photographs (full-length image, allows a viewer to estimate the figure) acts as a confirmation of "overweight problem" absence, but in the past. Such avatars are usually accompanied by a commentary: "*such I was until...*" (a birth delivery, accident, operation, etc.).

Thus, real photos as avatars used by overweight people, in our opinion, also indicate psychological ill-being, accompanied by negative feelings. The basis of this ill-being is the combination of dissatisfaction with the "present" physical appearance and loss of a positive bodily image of the past period of life (when there were no overweight problems). At the same time, the tendency to post their own photos by overweight users can be associated with greater self-acceptance and/or recognition of problem and the desire to find help among people with similar problems.

The further analysis of avatars was aimed at defining certain categories of self-presentation images of specialized forum users.

### **Peculiarities of anorexic forum users' self-presentation**

As for these respondents, the most common category of avatars was *emotionally negative images* (Table 1), which reflect anxiety, disturbance, internal distress (18%). They include images of a *crippled body* (images of disturbed, distorted people) and *symbolic images of problematic eating behaviour* (a cow's mouth, too large and sewn mouth, obscene inscription on a mirror). In our opinion, such self-representations testify to personal psychological ill-being, a pessimistic assessment of their own existence and problems in self-perception. The basis for negative emotional state demonstrating and deliberate distortion of own bodily images can be the desire to cause violent negative reactions from others that allow a person to attract attention to him/her and express own protest (dissatisfaction) against an uncomfortable external situation.



Table 1

**Psychological content of anorexic forum users' avatars  
(N = 72)**

<b>Category character: description and examples of avatar images</b>	<b>Popularity, %</b>
Emotionally negative images (disturbing images): images of worried, distorted people, as well as symbolic image of problematic eating behaviour	18
Stressed concealment of a face	8.33
Attractive sexual image: images of beautiful, seductive women with a frank look (possibly partially nude)	6.95
Subcategory: Famous and well-known actresses and models as success stories	9.72
Mysterious mystical image. An aggregate category including characters that combine an overall impression of romance, mystery, dreaminess, unearthliness	6.95
Heroes of anime serials and dolls	9.72
Food related images, associated with a eating process or food products	8.33
Realistic image – genuine user photos	6.95
Kittens	8.33
Emotionally positive images – vivid colour images, fun and smiley characters	5.56
Symbolic characteristic images	11.11

Some avatars of anorexic forum users emphasize users' attempts to *conceal a face* (8.33%). On the one hand, it may be a hint of mystery, unidentified depth of the inner world and on the other hand, an attempt to protect oneself from others' attention. In our opinion, this is evidence of an attempt to establish an additional barrier and to increase protection of one's own personality.

The category of *mysterious mystical images* (6.95%) has the close meaning, it includes images combining an overall im-

pression of romance, mystery, dreaminess. The avatars of this category include images of heroines that have wings or light in their souls. We believe that such avatars are chosen due to the idealization of *lightness, volatility, or immateriality*.

A significant proportion of avatars (16.67%) create the category including *images of attractive sexy female bodies* (6.95%) and *photographs of famous actresses and models* that are considered as sex symbols and represent ideas of success, prosperity and popularity in the world of show business (9.72%). In our opinion, this is due to the identification mechanism and indicates the main values and orientation of the users from this group to success, perfection, and popularity.

A separate category of images (9.72%) includes characters of *anime series and dolls*. It can be assumed that the idealization of puppet body size and proportions reflects not only the negative attitude to own body, but also its distorted perception (up to a complete rejection at women suffering from anorexia). In our opinion, self-presentation in the form of *dolls or anime characters* may indicate, on the one hand, an unwillingness to grow up (which means taking responsibility for their lives), and on the other, the *desire to plunge into a fantastic world that allows escaping from reality and preserving of childishness, defencelessness, fragility*.

Taking into account the specific communicative topics on the researched Internet forums and users' fixation on dissatisfaction with their own body images and willingness to lose weight, we have assumed existence of avatars related to food and eating, but the part of such avatars was significantly lower than expected (8.33%). *Food related avatars* include pictures with symbols of food minimization (vegetables, lettuce leaves) or, vice versa, symbols of overeating consequences.

Other categories of avatars characteristic for anorexic forum users ("Kittens" – 8.33%, "Emotionally positive images" – 5.56%, "Symbolic characteristic images" – 11.11%) confirm, in a sense, the general tendencies of this group: their eagerness for

something unusual, brightness, extravagance, elegance, gracefulness; idealization of fragility, lightness, and defensiveness.

Thus, these avatars, although indirectly, but reveal the characteristic psychological features of anorexics – a sense of physical dissatisfaction, torn self-concept, actuated mechanisms of psychological protection, violations of social adaptability.

We shall note that anorexic forum users, despite the expressed sense of dissatisfaction with themselves (weight, figure, body volumes), are sure that they have no problems with eating behaviour, and therefore do not need psychological help. That is why it is very difficult to help such people, because any suggestion regarding medical treatment and psychological correction meets desperate resistance, and existence of distorted eating behaviour is denied. We associate this with the fact that at a certain stage of anorexia as a disease, a person loses criticism concerning his/her state, and therefore becomes incapable to accept existence of own disease and assess adequately distorted stereotyped manifestations of own anorexic eating behaviour. At the initial stage of correction work a psychologist can offer clients to begin with knowing their own psychological peculiarities by analysis of their nicknames and avatars. In the future, it will help the clients to formulate an adequate request for their own eating behaviour.

### ***Peculiarities of Internet self-presentations of overweight people***

The features of graphical Internet self-presentations of overweight people are presented in table 2 in the form of the main categories of images, among which, as has already noted, the most common category is their *own photos* (22.5%).

Avatars of this group are often represented by *food-related images* (20%); they are images of food products or fatty characters eating a large amount of food. Moreover, most of the characters depicted are representatives of the wildlife or fairy-tale heroes (a rat, a hamster, a bear, etc.). In our view, such a self-presentation shows actuated mechanisms of psychological protection, in particular, dissociation and denial, which helps

respondents to *distance themselves from their overeating problem*.

Table 2

**Psychological content of avatars at forums for overweight people (N = 40)**

Category character: description and examples of avatar images	Popularity, %
Real user photos	22.5
Food-related images (food eaters, effects of overeating and food products)	20
Symbolic characteristic images	15
Kittens	12.5
Attractive sexy images: images of beautiful women with a slender body	12.5
Emotionally positive images– vivid colour images, fun and smiley characters	7.5
Mysterious mystical image, including characters that combine an overall impression of romance, mystery, dreaminess, mystery	5
Children's images	5

The self-presentation category with *symbolic characteristic images* (15%) is close to the previous one and includes a variety of images. There are images of animated fat characters (a bee, a hamster, Winnie-the-Pooh), known as good-natured, glorious characters, but who are always hungry. Also there is an interesting image of an air ball with a tiny girl on the flower inside. It can be many options interpreting this image, but first of all, the duality of the image attracts attention: a balloon that can be associated with a plump body creating certain limitation, and the girl-elf as the true nature of the person. Symbolic images showing ways to overcome the overweight problem are also interesting (in particular, “a mouth under lock”; “witchcraft, switching to healthy eating”).

The separate avatar category with *kitten* images (12.5%) also metaphorically reflects the *problem of overweight and passive lifestyle*. This is especially noticeable at comparison with anorexic "kittens" (8.33%), which are unusual – glamorous, mysterious, graceful, decorated with accessories.

A separate avatar category of overweight forum users form *children's images*, in particular, small girls (5%). Note that anorexic forum visitors do not use such images. Such a presentation of oneself, in our opinion, indicates a feeling of being a child (defenceless, vulnerable, unable to deny pleasures, even if they are harmful to their own health), show infantilism (inability to solve independently their own problems and take responsibility for the events of their own lives).

Some avatars (12.5%) of the overweight forum users include images of *attractive women with a slender body*, which, obviously, are *their* ideal of a bodily image.

Statistical differences between certain avatar categories presented by the anorexic and overweight people samples have been detected with Fisher's ratio (Table 3).

The comparative analysis results show that avatars, as a means of self-presentation of anorexic and overweight forum users, have specific differences. In our opinion, these differences are due to their individual features, as well as their fixation on a specific problem that unites people in the Internet community. Let us focus on the main points of the comparative statistical analysis:

– users of the forum for overweight persons accompany their accounts with graphic self-presentation significantly less often ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). This may be due to a variety of causes, such as those associated with distorted patterns of eating behaviour (in particular, fear of self-presentation, even anonymously under the mask of an avatar), and not related to it;

– visitors of anorexics forum use their own photos as avatars much less often ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). Most avatars of this group reflect vivid, mysterious, refined, elegant, sexy images. This may

be due to a pronounced tendency to change their bodily image as a result of its persistent rejection, manifested in excessive pursuit of perfection (a constant "marathon" for an unattainable ideal);

– anorexic forum users have categories of avatars not found on the forum for overweight people, in particular, "emotionally negative images", images emphasizing an attempt to conceal the face, "famous and well-known women as models of success". At the same time, avatars with food-related images ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) are more common in the forum for overweight people.

Table 3

**Differences in avatars choice for specific forum users  
(anorexics and overweight people)**

Self-presentation category	anorexics, N=72, %	overweight people, N=40 %	Statistical significance of the difference
Attractive sexy images	6.95	12.5	-
Famous persons as samples of success	9.72	-	$p \leq 0.001$
Emotionally negative, anxious images	18	-	$p \leq 0.001$
Mysterious, mystical/romantic images	9.72	5	-
Stressed concealment of a face	8.33	-	$p \leq 0.001$
Pictures of dolls and anime characters	9.73	-	$p \leq 0.001$
Food-related images	8.34	20	$p \leq 0.05$
Real (personal) user photos	6.95	22.5	$p \leq 0.001$
Emotionally positive images	5.56	7.5	-
Symbolic characteristic images	11.11	15	-
Kittens	8.33	12.5	-
Children's images	-	5	$p \leq 0.001$

These differences, in our opinion, are due to the psychological peculiarities of each group, namely:

– anorexic forum users want to become successful and famous, they think that a perfect bodily image is necessary for it. Hence they are oriented on the images of attractive and famous women. But the excessive enthusiasm in slimming is gradually becoming the disease that they actively deny, despite various problems in physical and psychological health, which definitely affects their emotional background, causing anxiety, irritation, increasing various fears, etc. (such categories as “stressed concealment of a face” and “emotionally negative images”);

– users of the forum for overweight people, due to their prevailing strategy of “comfort eat”, are less likely to experience a negative emotional states, they are aware of their own problems (therefore, they do not feel the need to conceal something, in particular, their faces).

## **Discussion**

The results of our research on Internet self-presentations of people with eating disorders are in line with other research data. Most researchers, studying self-presentations and identities of people with eating disorders, analyse text-based material – use communications in forums, social networks, text messages about body problems and body experiences (Riley, Rodham & Gavin, 2009, Figueras Bates, 2015, Smith, Wickes & Underwood, 2015, Lyons et al., 2006; Tuefel et al., 2013, Шебанова & Яблонська, 2019). The results from qualitative, correlation and experimental studies overall support the relationship between Internet use and body image and eating concerns (Marks, Foe, & Collett, 2020).

In particular, analysed language representations of the identity of users of “pro-ana” and “recovery” sites (Riley, Rodham, & Gavin, 2009) have revealed various forms of ideal body description, certain membership requirements for these groups, which for the pro-ana group reproduce identity related to eating disorder. In another study, the discourse analysis of metaphors used

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2022-55.150-172>

by members of the pro-ana group to present themselves in the social network has identified four key metaphorical constructs in user self-determination: "I" as a space, "I" as weight, self-improvement, and social "I", representing the strategies of discourse both for creating a collective identity and for the adoption of individual identities (Figueras Bates, 2015).

Our study results are largely consistent with the research performed by S.-R. Marcus (Marcus, 2016), where body's standards for persons with anorexia and overweight were examined in terms of their social identity. The studied group members are stigmatized regarding their health, lifestyle and appearance, suffering from low self-esteem, considerable tension and low social support, and association and communication of these people contributes to their self-esteem increase (Marcus, 2016). Our research has revealed significant differences in avatar self-presentations of people with anorexia and overweight, in particular, more positive self-representations of overweight people, which is manifested in more frequent use by them of their own photos or bright and positive images. Other comparative studies of such Internet communities have shown that fatosphere members demonstrate positivity and self-esteem using images, comments and hash-tags that reveal a general sense of happiness and positive energy (Marcus, 2016).

Members of the Pro-Ana community use images showing importance of weight loss and food restriction motivation (image of individual body parts, exhausted figures, known models or skinny people), use black-and-white filter, shadings, and negative hash-tags, such as #depression, #depressed, and #sad, which generally indicates negative mood and dissatisfaction (Marcus, 2016). We have also discovered that anorexics use images of a crippled body, anime-characters, interpreted as a distortion of self-perception. Some users use child's or doll's images that can hide the unconscious rejection of mature sexuality.

Participation in the online communities has a significant impact on identity of the users of the pro-anorexia and fatosphere



sites (Smith, Wickes, & Underwood, 2015), because it gives them a sense of security, affiliation, the ability to be united and communicate that mutually reinforce each other and form identity. Comparison of our research results with others confirms dominance of women in Internet communities discussing weight problems. This indicates greater social pressure on women concerning appearance standards, which leads to a higher level of dissatisfaction with their weight and body image than that of men and makes them seek to achieve certain body standards (Marcus, 2016; Figueras Bates, 2015).

Like other researchers in this area, we consider it necessary to take into account data on self-presentation, identity and online support. Such assessment of peculiarities of self-presentations made by Internet community participants help clarify peculiarities of their identification, and, on the basis of this, develop strategies and means of professional assistance to such people. This is a promising area for development and implementation of a system of professional assistance to Internet community users with eating disorder, as highlighted by many researchers (Teufel et al., 2013, Branley, & Covey, 2017, Figueras Bates, 2015). The availability and anonymity of the Internet provide a wide range of support for people with eating disorders through online counselling with qualified personnel who can provide a primary contact, information to users and send them to specialized clinics or therapists (Grunwald, & Busse, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

The analysed avatars as a means of self-presentation of forum users with eating disorders (anorexics and overweight people) assert that such images reflect a specific nutritional problem and a person's self-attitude in connection with it. Psychological analysis of avatars should be based on the general interpretative principles of projective psychological methods, while taking into account interpretations of these symbols by the users.

The main categories of images that are used as avatars have been determined: personal photos, anime characters, food related images, images of well-known people as examples of success, emotionally coloured images, etc. The differences between self-presentations of anorexics and overweight people have been revealed based on meanings and colours of the used images, their correlation with nicknames and hash-tags. In particular, there is a more positive self-presentation of overweight people compared to anorexics, which is probably related to different coping mechanisms. Anorexics are fixed on idealized proportions of the human body, which lead to a negative attitude to own body, its distorted perception. They also show mechanisms for escaping *from reality into a fantastic world, infantilism*. Overweight persons have mostly such psychological protection mechanisms as dissociation and negation, which help them to *distance themselves from their own overeating problems*, and they show more pronounced awareness of the problem.

Analysis of avatars as a means of self-presentation is useful both for psychological diagnosis, and for professional assistance to such persons. We consider it expedient to use such an analysis during establishing of a contact, primary psychological diagnosis and psychotherapy of people with eating disorders, which are combined with chronic dissatisfaction with their own weight.

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**Шебанова Віталія, Яблонська Тетяна. Особливості Інтернет-самопрезентації осіб із розладами харчової поведінки.**

У статті наведено результати дослідження самопрезентації осіб із розладами харчової поведінки на спеціалізованих Інтернет-форумах.

**Метою статті** є розкриття особливостей самопрезентації осіб із анорексією та надмірною вагою на основі психологічного аналізу їх аватарів.

**Метод дослідження** – дискурс-аналіз як інструмент, що розкриває специфіку символічної інформації (аватар, псевдонім) для виявлення особливостей самопрезентації людей з розладами харчової поведінки.

**Результати дослідження.** Представлено психологічний аналіз аватарів користувачів сайтів для осіб з анорексією та зайвою вагою. Встановлено, що зображення, використовувані в якості аватарів, відображають специфічну харчову проблему та самоставлення людини у зв'язку з нею. Виявлено переважання жіночої аудиторії таких сайтів, а відтак і більшу актуальність проблеми стандартів тіла для жінок. Виокремлено основні категорії зображень, які використовуються в

*якості аватарів: особисті фото; аніме-персонажі; образи, пов'язані з харчовою тематикою; зображення відомих осіб як зразків успішності; емоційно-забарвлені образи та ін. Виявлено відмінності самопрезентації осіб з анорексією та осіб із зайвою вагою на основі змісту, кольору використаних ними зображень, зокрема, виявлено більш позитивну самопрезентацію і самоставлення осіб із зайвою вагою порівняно з користувачами, які мають анорексію.*

**Висновки.** *Стверджується, що аналіз особливостей аватарів як засобу самопрезентації є корисним як з метою психодіагностики осіб з розладами харчової поведінки, так і в процесі розробки і надання їм фахової психологічної допомоги. Використання такого аналізу є доцільним під час встановлення контакту, первинної психодіагностики та психотерапії осіб з розладами харчової поведінки, що поєднуються з хронічною незадоволеністю власною вагою.*

**Ключові слова:** *розлади харчової поведінки, анорексія, зайва вага, Інтернет-комунікація, самопрезентація.*

Original manuscript received 21.12.2021

Revised manuscript accepted 30.01.2022