

# Personality features and values orientations of university students with manipulative behaviour

## Las características personales y orientaciones de valor de estudiantes universitarios propensos a conducta manipuladora

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### Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
  - [2. Materials and Methods](#)
  - [3. Results](#)
  - [4. Discussion](#)
  - [5. Conclusion](#)
- [Bibliographic references](#)

#### ABSTRACT:

The relevance of the study is conditioned by the fact that in recent decade the problem of preventing psychological violence among university students has arisen, which often manifests itself in the form of manipulative behavior. It is important to study the personality traits and value orientations of university students prone to manipulative behavior to develop effective programs for the prevention of this socio-psychological phenomenon. In the paper results of empirical research on prevalence and interrelation of personal features and valuable orientations among university students, inclined to manipulations in interaction with other people, in the educational environment are presented. It is established that students who are prone to manipulative behavior have such personal characteristics as high rigidity, low extraversion and sensitivity. Their value orientations are characterized by low importance of conformity, kindness, universalism and safety both at the level of normative ideals and at the level of individual priorities.

**Keywords:** Manipulation, manipulative behavior, value orientations, motivational orientation, personality characteristics, university students, educational environment

#### RESUMEN:

La relevancia del estudio se debe a que en las últimas décadas se ha agravado el problema de la prevención de la violencia psicológica entre estudiantes universitarios, lo que suele manifestarse en forma de conductas manipulativas. Es de gran importancia estudiar los rasgos de personalidad y las orientaciones de valor de los estudiantes universitarios propensos a la conducta manipulativa, con el fin de desarrollar programas efectivos para la prevención del dicho fenómeno sociopsicológico. El artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación empírica de la prevalencia y la interrelación de las características personales y las orientaciones de valor entre los estudiantes universitarios, propensos a la conducta manipulativa en el marco de la interacción con otras personas en el entorno educativo.

**Palabras clave:** manipulación, conducta manipulativa, orientaciones de valor, orientación motivacional, características personales, estudiantes universitarios, entorno educativo

# 1. Introduction

There have been social, economic and political changes that have significantly changed the way of life and psychology of people in the country over the past decade. There is also a shift in the values of Russian citizens from collectivism to the value of individualism - orientation to others and society is replaced by an orientation toward oneself and one's own interests, to achieve personally significant goals (Akhmetzyanova et al., 2017; Artishcheva, 2017; Masalimova et al., 2018). This is accompanied by the spread of asymmetrical interpersonal relationships - the relationship of rivalry, competition and manipulation, which are the cause of psychological violence. Interpersonal interaction, which is based on manipulative methods, is characterized by the attitude to another person as a means to achieve one's own goals and interlocutor's qualities are belittled as the subject's qualities in decision-making. Consequently, in the relationships that are built on manipulation, the positions between the participants in interpersonal interaction are often distributed on the basis of the principles "winner-defeated", "winner-loser", creating discontent and distrust among people who are involved in manipulative communication. With this strong desire to manipulate other people, whose support is untrue, lies and deception, although it brings short-term benefits to the manipulator himself, can turn into numerous personal and social problems for him in a long time perspective (Karakulova, 2008; Akhmetzyanova, Nikishina & Petrash, 2017; Neverkovich et al., 2018).

This, in turn, is accompanied by the spread of asymmetrical interpersonal relations - the relations of rivalry, competition and manipulation. Therefore, it is highly relevant to conduct a comprehensive study to identify the impact of differences in personality and psychological characteristics, value attitudes toward the tendency to manipulative behavior (Machiavellianism) in interpersonal relationships (Sergeev, 2012).

The peculiarity of manipulation, from the point of view of E.L. Dotsenko (1997), is that the manipulator seeks to hide, not to show their intentions. Therefore, for all except the manipulator itself, manipulation is more likely as a result of the interpretation and speculation of the meaning and purpose of its actions, rather than a direct comprehending of them. The author notes that in the psychological literature the term "manipulation" has three meanings. The first is completely borrowed from engineering and is used mainly in engineering psychology and labor psychology in the aspect of using any objects or devices. In the second meaning, borrowed from the ethology, under the manipulation is understood the active movement by the animals of the components of the environment in space (as opposed to locomotion - movement in the space of the animals themselves). Gradually, the word "manipulation" became used in the context of interpersonal relations. Under the objects of manipulative actions are no longer objects, but people, and the actions themselves are no longer performed with the help of hands, but with the help of other means of interpersonal communication. As a result, manipulation in this sense is the desire to "tie in hands", "tame" the other, "hook", that is, it is an attempt to turn another person into an obedient tool, as if to a puppet.

Manipulation is a kind of psychological influence, the skillful implementation of which leads to an implicit, hidden excitation of the other person's intentions, which do not coincide with his real desires and goals (Ilyin, 2014). This is the hidden control of the addressee on the part of the initiator, in which the latter achieves his goals, damaging the addressee (Sheinov, 2010).

E. Shostrom (2003) notes that hiding his true emotions is one of the main signs of the manipulator. The manipulator sees his task in producing certain due, beneficial impression for him. Another peculiarity of the modern man-manipulator is that, although his manipulative activity offers him the widest opportunities for self-development and enjoyment of life, he tries to avoid the risk of any emotional experiences or involvement. Not having his own face, the manipulator is forced to acquire a mask, which, as he believes, should appeal to the audience and will be able to produce the desired effect. The manipulator is someone who, in interpersonal interaction, exaggerates his responsibility or, on the contrary, refuses it.

This understanding of manipulation and peculiarities of manipulators actualizes the theme of our research, since the problem arises of studying their personal characteristics and the peculiarities of their value orientations that they hide during interpersonal communication and the perception and understanding of such people eventually become inadequate and far from the true.

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## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Theoretical Methods**

The theoretical method of research is the content analysis of scientific papers related to the problem of manipulative behavior and manipulation in interpersonal communication, which allows to consider the degree of its development comprehensively and to reveal the basic approaches to its understanding and the factors determining the scale of this phenomenon in the educational environment in general and in the student environment in particular.

### **2.2. Empirical Methods**

An empirical study was conducted aimed at studying the expressiveness of personality traits and values and motivations among students prone to manipulation, using a set of valid and validated methods aimed at their study:

1. Scale "Machiavellianism", or Mac-scale, which is a psych diagnostic technique aimed at identifying and quantifying the specific form of psychological protection (or complex of defenses), behavior, social position and the corresponding personality orientation, called "Machiavellianism" (Bratchenko, 1997).
2. Diagnosis of manipulative attitude (by the scale of Bant) (Fetiskin, Kozlov & Manuylov, 2002).
3. Schwarz's technique for studying personality values (in the adaptation of V.N. Karandashev (2004)), consisting of three units (30, 27 and 40 questions respectively) and aimed at identifying the value-motivational structure of the individual at the level of normative ideals and at the level of individual priorities, each of which allocate 10 value-based motivational types: Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Independence, Universalism, Kindness, Tradition, Conformity and Safety (Karandashev, 2004).
4. Individual-typological questionnaire of L.N. Sobchik (2010), which allows diagnosing the expressiveness of such personal characteristics as aggravation, extraversion, spontaneity, aggression, rigidity, introversion, sensitivity, anxiety and emotiveness.

### **2.3. Base of Research**

the study involved 128 students of 19-22 years old, students of higher educational organizations of Kazan.

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## **3. Results**

In the course of the empirical study, a high tendency to manipulation was noted among 21.1% of the students.

### **3.1. Studying of Students' Personal Characteristics that are Prone to Manipulation**

The students with a high level of propensity to manipulate in interpersonal communication possess significantly lower the scores on scales characterizing spontaneity, sensitivity and anxiety than students with a low level.

Consequently, students with a high level are less prone to relaxed self-affirmation, bellicosity, striving for open leadership. They have less formed such personal traits as

sensitivity, orientation to the authority of a stronger personality, conformity, traits of dependence). At the same time, they are less cautious in making decisions, are responsible towards others, experience social harmony with the environment, less often feel excessive anxiety, suspiciousness, and fearfulness, they are less prone to obsessive fears and panic reactions.

The results of the correlation analysis of the scales of the Individual-typological questionnaire with the Machiavellian and manipulative attitude scales are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Correlation analysis of scales of the Individual-typological questionnaire with the scales of Machiavellianism and the manipulative attitude of students

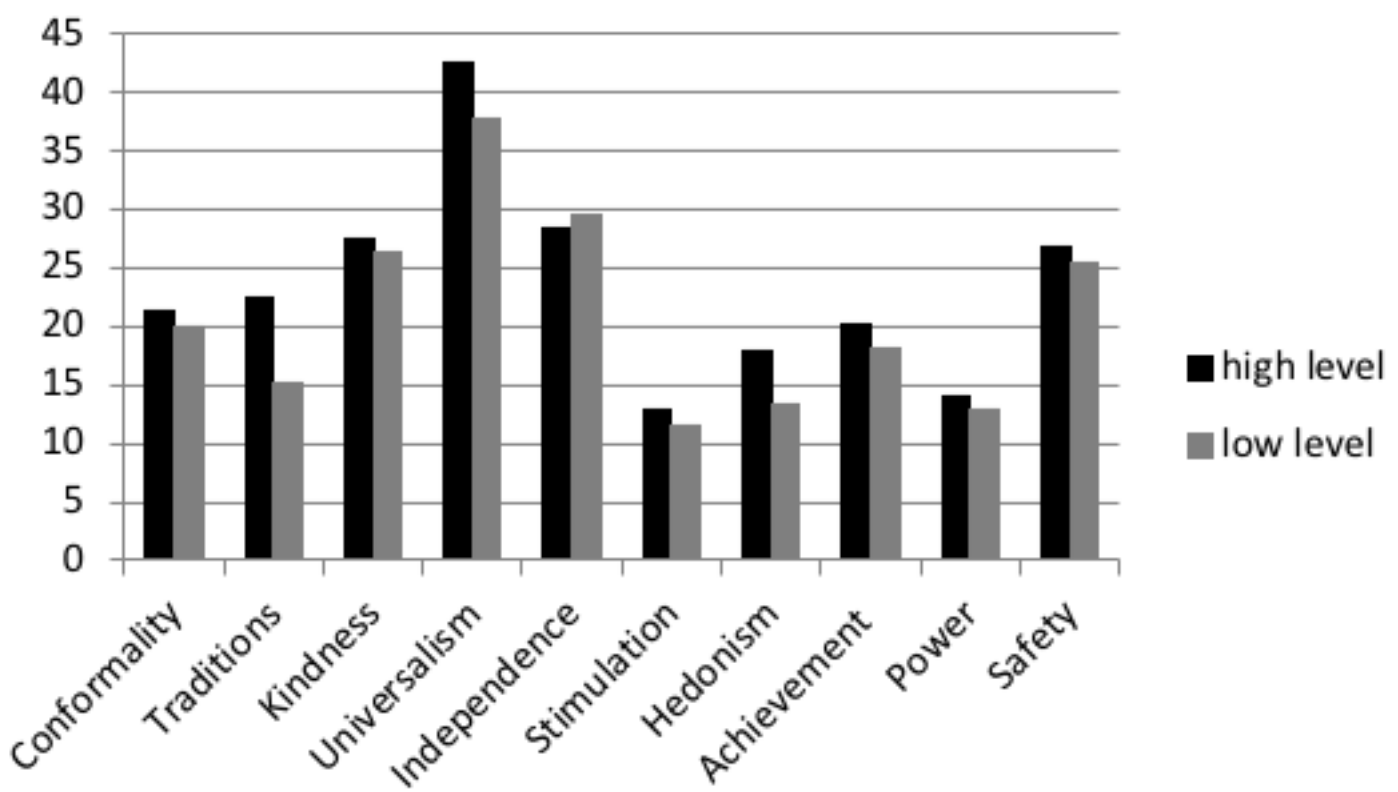
	Machiavellian scale	manipulative attitude scale
Extroversion	-0,354*	-0,352*
Spontaneity	0,002	-0,043
Aggressiveness	0,237	0,261
Rigidity	0,468**	0,365*
Introversion	-0,245	-0,271
Sensitivity	-0,359*	-0,291
Anxiety	-0,237	-0,218
Emotionality	0,203	0,218
**. Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (bilateral). *. Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (bilateral).		

As it can be seen from the table, the students' propensity to manipulative attitude has a feedback with extraversion and direct one - with rigidity. On the scale of Machiavellianism, one more feedback is established with sensitivity. Consequently, with the strengthening of such traits as the propensity for active social contacts, increased sociability, orientation to the external social environment, and not to one's own inner world, sensitivity, orientation to the authority of a stronger personality, conformity, traits of dependence, the tendency to manipulation is lowered. But the propensity to manipulation is enhanced by a combination of introverted subjectivity with sluggishness of attitudes and persistence of the person, prone to pedantry and suspicion.

### 3.2. The Features of Value-Based Attitudes of Students Prone to Manipulation

The average values by the technique of determining value orientations at the level of normative ideals among students with a low and high level of propensity to manipulative behavior in interpersonal communication are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
The average values by the technique of determining value orientations at the level of normative ideals among students with a low and high level of propensity to manipulative behavior in interpersonal communication

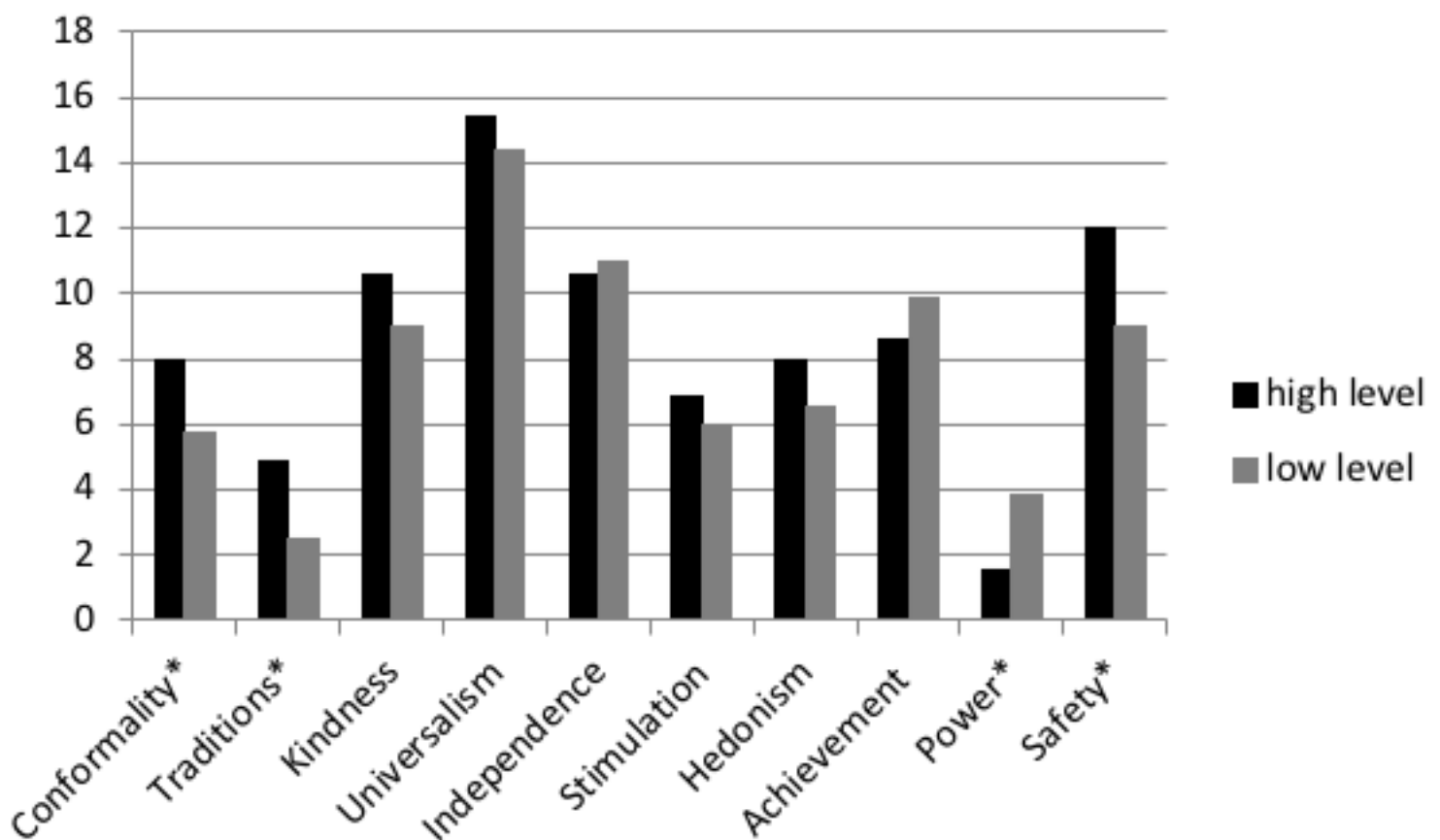


According to this technique, there were no reliable differences in the average indicators, but one can speak of a tendency towards a stronger orientation toward values such as traditions, universalism, hedonism and achievements. Consequently, they are more prone to respect and accept the customs and ideas that exist in their environment and culture. They are more intrinsic to the survival needs for themselves and their social group, which are clearly necessary when people come into contact with someone outside their environment or when expanding of the primary group. On the one hand, they seek enjoyment or sensual pleasures, and on the other hand - to personal success through the manifestation of competence in accordance with social standards.

The average values by the technique of determining value orientations at the level of individual priorities among students with a low and high level of propensity to manipulative behavior in interpersonal communication are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

Average values on the technique for determining value orientations at the level of individual priorities among students with a low and high level of propensity to manipulative behavior in interpersonal communication



Note: \* - differences in average values are significant at the level of  $p \leq 0,05$ .

Students with a high level of propensity to manipulation, compared to students with a low level, are significantly higher at the level of individual priorities on such scales as conformance, tradition, safety and lower indicators on the power scale. Consequently, in their behavior they are more guided by values that are associated with the requirements to restrain tendencies that have negative social consequences and try to look obedient, demonstrate self-discipline, politeness, and win respect of parents and seniors. For them, the traditional way of behavior becomes a symbol of group solidarity, an expression of common values and a guarantee of survival. For them, values related to collective security, to a significant extent, express the goal of safety for themselves (social order, family security, national security, mutual respect, mutual assistance, honesty, sense of belonging, health). But at the same time they are less eager to achieve explicit power, leadership positions, prefer to act secretly and imperceptibly for the sake of achieving their personal goals.

The results of the correlation analysis for the scales of the technique of determining value-based orientations at the levels of normative ideals and individual priorities with the Machiavellian and manipulative attitude scales are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

The results of the correlation analysis of the techniques scales for determining value orientations at the levels of normative ideals and individual priorities with the Machiavellian and manipulative attitude scales.

	Level of normative ideals		Lever of individual priorities	
	Machiavellian scale	manipulative attitude scale	Machiavellian scale	manipulative attitude scale
conformality	-0,329*	-0,217	0,102	0,085
traditions	-0,248	-0,202	-0,250	-0,213
kindness	-0,346*	-0,237	-0,394*	-0,341*
Universalism	-0,406*	-0,341*	-0,475**	-0,414*
Independence	-0,179	-0,094	0,012	-0,008
stimulation	-0,025	0,010	-0,095	-0,120
Hedonism	-0,109	-0,040	0,128	0,094
achievements	-0,144	-0,144	-0,028	-0,159
power	-0,098	-0,192	0,220	0,120
safety	-0,401*	-0,322	-0,067	-0,073

\*\*, Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (bilateral),

\*, Correlation is significant at the level of 0,05 (bilateral)

At the level of normative ideals, connections of propensity to manipulation with conformity, kindness, universalism and safety were established. At the level of individual priorities - with kindness and universalism. And all the connections are inverse ones. Thus, the tendency to manipulation in interpersonal communication and interaction among students decreases with an increase in the focus on deterrence and prevention of actions, as well as propensity and

motivations for actions that can harm others or do not meet social expectations. Also, with the increasing need for positive interaction, the need for affiliation and the prosperity of the group, in preserving the well-being of people with whom the person is in personal contact are increased (usefulness, loyalty, indulgence, honesty, responsibility, friendship, mature love). To reduction of propensity to manipulate is influenced by the strengthening of understanding, tolerance, the desire to protect the well-being of all people and nature, the desire for harmony, stability of society and relationships.

## 4. Discussion

Currently, analytical studies are conducted with the aim to study the fixed forms of behavior underlying manipulative behavior, one of the main characteristics of which is rigidity. It is, in terms of G.V. Zalevsky (2003), is understood as a property of the individual and as a human condition. It can be said that the propensity to manipulate is a feature of the person, manifested in suspicion, alertness, distrust, high criticality and aggressiveness. The above characteristics, most likely, determine the non-acceptance of other people, which can lead to an isolated position in the social group. Young people prone to manipulation are more strongly affected by fear of new life situations and new people, which explains the difficulty of their adequate adaptation. They do not consider it necessary to change themselves and are not ready to observe social and moral norms. This specificity is especially dangerous for representatives of professions such as "Man-Man" (teachers, doctors, psychologists) (Karakulova, 2009).

V.P. Sheinov (2010), referring to manipulation in interpersonal communication, refers it to the form of hidden control, in which the initiator's gain and the loss of the addressee occur. He notes that the prevalence of manipulation in society is due to the fact that manipulation as a technology of hidden control gives power over people. And power is the strongest drug. The prevalence of manipulation is also facilitated by the existence of mechanisms of human management that are modernized in modern civilization. Another institution that promotes manipulative tendencies, from his point of view, is market relations (Sheinov, 2010).

In the research of O.I. Yefremova (2014) the negative impact of psychological manipulation in pedagogical activity of the teacher on students, their parents, colleagues of such a pedagogue manipulator is considered. In particular, the causes of student neuroses associated with the impact of the teacher's psychological manipulation are analyzed. She considers it to be important to study not only the teachers' manipulation of students, but their parents or their colleagues in the interests of students or in their own interests.

A number of researchers believe that individuals with a pronounced penchant for manipulation are characterized by a certain fatalism and lack of confidence in their own ability to control and manage life. Persons with a high tendency to manipulate highly evaluate their own prestige and social contacts. The reason for their manipulative actions lies in the internal personal conflict: to trust oneself or the external environment. The manipulator never entirely trusts himself, other people, too, so he seeks to control them, so as not to fall under their influence and not lose his own individuality. But the problem is that because of successful or not very successful manipulations, a person begins to lose himself, forgetting his true face (Greiben, 2009; Znakov, 2000).

L.V. Orlova (2009) believes that many students have a manipulative orientation in communication that is dominant, and this may be due to the age features of this period (rivalry, competition of group relationships, the desire to get a certain status, the difficulties encountered in communication, the need to achieve, etc.). And also it is influenced by the impact of environmental factors exacerbating these features, in particular the impact of pragmatic attitudes in society "to be successful, financially prosperous, to have a high status, etc." In general, she notes, most of the students are characterized by positive ideas about themselves, persuasion of their own luck and the ability to control the events that happen to them. Students express their confidence in their ability to choose the most successful strategy of behavior in a difficult situation. Based on the results obtained, such, in their opinion, in most cases is manipulation. She revealed a link between the propensity to

manipulate and the person's ideas about the world around him. Prone to manipulating students are inherent beliefs that trusting others are dangerous, that in interaction with others one must be cautious and most people think and care only about themselves. Another feature of the value beliefs of students prone to manipulation is related to their notions of the justice of the world around them. They do not believe that the laws of justice work in life and that everyone gets what they deserve. Students with a low propensity for manipulation are characterized by the beliefs that there is much more in the world of good than bad. According to their opinions, most people are kind and seek to be useful to each other. They believe in the principle of justice that good deeds and actions will not remain without gratitude. She also notes that and students who are prone toward manipulation, and who are not prone, have similar beliefs about their self-image, faith in destiny and their own strengths (Orlova, 2009).

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## **5. Conclusion**

In recent decades, fundamental economic, social, political and ideological changes have taken place, in Russia there has been a shift in value orientations from collectivistic to individualistic ones, the problem of preventing psychological violence in society as a whole and among university students has become acute, in particular, which often manifests itself in the form of manipulative behavior. It is important to study the personality traits and value orientations of university students who are prone to manipulative behavior, as many scholars note that such personalities have deformed personality traits that actualize the development of effective programs for the prevention of this socio-psychological phenomenon. The leading theoretical method to investigate this problem is the content analysis of scientific papers relevant to the research problem, which allows us to consider the analysis of factors contributing to the propensity to manipulative behavior in a complex manner. Empirical methods were the conduct of a study using valid diagnostic techniques appropriate to the purpose of the study, statistical analysis and generalization of the results obtained. The paper presents the results of a theoretical and empirical study of the prevalence and interrelation of personal characteristics and value orientations among university students with their propensity to manipulate in interaction with other people in the educational environment.

In studying personality traits, it has been established that with the strengthening of traits such as a propensity for active social contacts, increased sociability, orientation to the external social environment, rather than to one's own inner world, sensitivity, orientation to the authority of a stronger personality, conformity, traits of dependence the propensity to manipulation is reduced. But the propensity to manipulation is enhanced by a combination of introverted subjectivity with inertia of attitudes and persistence of the person, prone to pedantry and suspicion.

In the study of value orientations, it was concluded that the propensity for manipulation in interpersonal communication and interaction among students decreases with an increase in the focus on deterrence and prevention of actions, as well as propensities and motivations for actions that may harm others or do not meet social expectations. Also with the increasing need for positive interaction, the need for affiliation and the prosperity of the group, in preserving the well-being of people with whom the person is in personal contact (usefulness, loyalty, indulgence, honesty, responsibility, friendship, mature love) are increased. Reducing the propensity to manipulation is also affected by increased understanding, tolerance, the desire to protect the well-being of all people and nature, the desire for harmony, stability of society and relationships.

The materials of the paper are of practical value for psychologists and educators who develop and implement psycho-pedagogical programs aimed at preventing addiction to manipulative behavior among university students in the educational environment.

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[Index]

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