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### Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

# SUBJECTIVE REASONS FOR LONELINESS IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

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### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the analysis of subjective causes of loneliness in the different social behavior patterns of a person. It was assumed that among adolescents with deviant behavior, the subjective causes of their loneliness primarily included violation of contacts with their family and immediate relatives. To determine the level of subjective loneliness, the researchers applied the questionnaire developed by D. Russell and M. Ferguson, and in order to analyze the content of subjective causes - the modified methodology of unfinished sentences by L. Sachs and V. Levi. It was established that teenagers with different social orientations were inclined to experience loneliness. The explicitness and level of loneliness are found to be similar in the group of teenagers with deviant and prosocial behavior. Teenagers with different behaviour patterns clearly differentiate the causes of loneliness into social and personal ones. Among the causes of loneliness they include problems with communication in the family, with friends, peers, loved ones and their immediate environment. Teenagers with deviant behaviour are more likely than those with prosocial behaviour to see the source of loneliness in communicating with others and less likely to recognize personal qualities as a subjective cause of alienation. They see separation from the family, misunderstanding and neglect of current needs on the part of parents and family members as the main source of loneliness. Loneliness of teenagers with prosocial behaviour is associated with a reluctance to solve their own problems using the advice and life experience of their parents.

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**Keywords:** Loneliness, deviant behaviour, adolescents, subjective reasons.



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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Loneliness as a subjective problem of an individual in social interaction**

Among various psychological experiences of human existence, loneliness holds a unique position. The uniqueness of loneliness is associated with the paradoxical nature of its essence, origin, role in human life, in the uniformity of its ambivalent manifestations. Loneliness reflects the emergence of subjectively insurmountable boundaries in relationships with others, the impossibility of satisfying the need for communication, group affiliation, and at the same time arises in the broad space of social interaction of an individual. Loneliness is experienced as a distressing condition; in some cases, it is accompanied by pathological changes in mental processes. However, it also possesses a psychotherapeutic potential and can be used in curing diseases (Kuznetsov & Lebedev, 1972). Loneliness is intertwined in different spheres of social activity of a person, including professional life and family relations, and can be overcome through work, career advancement, transformation of family roles and parental status. Perhaps the greatest paradox of loneliness is the contradiction between the subjective and the objective aspects. The experience of loneliness is a purely subjective individual phenomenon, which does not always correspond with the objective social interaction of an individual, even though it is conditioned by it. Loneliness implies a deep immersion into oneself, into the identity of one's Self in situations when it is necessary to show social identity, to comply with the ethical laws of the social system. It is no coincidence that loneliness has always attracted the attention of philosophers and sociologists (Hkeydegger, 2002; Sartre, 2000).

Psychologists try to identify the causes of loneliness which are embedded in the surrounding reality as well as in the structure of the personality and biological nature of man himself (Averill & Sundararajan, 2014; Schermer & Martin, 2019). Through an integrative approach, loneliness is revealed not only as a negative experience of social deprivation, but also as a condition for personal development. Different forms of loneliness experience are associated with mechanisms of personal self-development (Leontiev, 2011).

### **1.2. Individual aspects of the experience of loneliness**

The specific features of the experience of loneliness arise from the uniqueness of the life course, social and age-specific development of a person. Loneliness takes a big place in the life of adolescents. There are various social, personal and biological preconditions for this. They include high emotional vulnerability of teenagers, which is associated with physiological changes, the desire to be treated as adults without being socially and psychologically prepared for it, protests against the demands of the community, including families and school. Retreat into oneself provokes a permanent need for self-knowledge and self-understanding, for the recognition of one's individuality by one's immediate environment and people important for the individual, for trusting relationships with classmates, peers and friends which might be hard to fill. Moreover, the foundations of the meaningful personal organisation are also established in adolescence. That is why the conflict of basic needs becomes more and more acute: the need for autonomy, independence, self-management and social acceptance, belonging to a group. Adolescents try to satisfy these conflicting needs by searching for a socially comfortable environment. Not infrequently they find emotional and communicative comfort, moral and economic support from asocial groups, informal communities, and cults. In such organizations, responsibility-free behaviour is often valued. Therefore, teenagers are given ample opportunities for self-assertion, self-realization and compensation for the failures

and resentments that accompanied them in school and family relationships. The ways of realizing these opportunities are not always constructive and socially accepted.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Loneliness is one of the most important systemic phenomena affecting the entire mental organization and various activities of an individual. It has been found that teenagers regard loneliness as an essential problem of their age and perceive it as a crisis situation in which they are deprived of any communication. They see the reasons for loneliness in family relations, in their own personality traits and in experiencing emotional discomfort. Strained and insecure relationships with parents suppress the need for intimacy, understanding from others, and social interaction (Izotova, 2014).

Loneliness can change the social orientation of behavior, even resulting in serious deviations (Kuznetsov & Lebedev, 1972). It is also suggested that adolescents with deviant behavior are more likely to experience loneliness (Izotova, 2014). The problem of loneliness among deviant teenagers requires special attention and research. The deviant behaviour of teenagers is a characteristic model of the emergence and experiencing of loneliness in situations when social interaction is distorted.

## **3. Research Questions**

The causes of loneliness and their relationship to the objective reality are among the key issues in the relationship between the subjective and the objective aspects in the new social interaction of an individual (Izvekov, 2014). The study raises the question

1. of the subjective causes of loneliness,
2. their connection to the violation of social interaction in adolescence

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

The purpose of the study is to reveal the subjective causes of loneliness experienced by adolescents with different social orientations: deviant and prosocial (normative) behavior. It was assumed that among the subjective causes of loneliness experienced by adolescents with deviant behavior, the prevailing ones included disruption of contacts with their family and immediate environment. Teenagers with prosocial behavior tend to experience loneliness mainly when emotional relations are disturbed.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Subjects (cases)**

The study involved male adolescents aged 15-17. The group of socially deviant adolescents included 86 people whose behaviour violated social norms. The teenagers neglected school discipline, left school without permission, used abusive language, smoked, engaged in extortion, participated in gambling for money, behaved aggressively towards their peers and teachers, had conflicts with their parents, loitered, and identified themselves with asocial groups. Almost 52% of teenagers lived in single-parent families, 27% were brought up by their stepfather. A comparison group included 90 teenagers with prosocial

behaviour. All respondents volunteered to participate in the study, the confidentiality of the results was guaranteed.

## **5.2. Research methods**

1. "Incomplete sentences" by L. Sachs, V. Levi (as cited in Karelin, 2007), modified version (Izotova, 2014)
2. "Loneliness scale" by D. Russel and M. Ferguson (as cited in Raygorodskiy, 2006)

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Expression of the subjective feeling of loneliness by teenagers with different social orientation of behavior**

According to the research, adolescents with different social orientations are prone to experiencing loneliness. Besides, the expression and the level of their emotional experience are similar in the group of teenagers with deviant and prosocial behavior. For example, the intensity of loneliness in the group of teenagers with deviant behavior measured  $26.1 \pm 12.4$  points, and in the group of teenagers with prosocial behavior -  $24.7 \pm 11.8$  points. A high level of loneliness is observed in 20% of adolescents with deviant behavior and in 28% - with prosocial behavior. These are the teenagers who acutely suffer from a break-up with the group and miss affiliation with it, often feel abandoned, unnecessary, dissatisfied with themselves and their relations with relatives and friends. A moderate level of loneliness was recorded in 36% of teenagers with deviant and prosocial behavior. The feeling of alienation among these teenagers depends on the availability of means to overcome communication barriers. A low level of loneliness is observed in 44% of deviant and 36% of prosocial teenagers. This category includes adolescents who occasionally experience loneliness, who have internal resources to cope with communication problems, and who are able to use available resources to maintain the quality of communication.

### **6.2. Subjective reasons for loneliness of adolescents with different social behaviour patterns**

The reasons for loneliness in teenagers with different social orientations are revealed by the analysis of the content of written messages. Adolescents with deviant and pro-social behaviour clearly differentiate the causes of loneliness into social and personal ones. The former are related to the specifics of communication, while the latter are connected with the personal characteristics of the teenagers. Teenagers with deviant behaviour more often than teenagers with standard behaviour see the cause of loneliness in communication with others: 61% and 47% of respondents respectively (the difference is statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ). At the same time, they are less likely to recognize personal qualities as a cause of alienation: 39% and 60% of adolescents respectively (the difference is statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Both groups of teenagers view problems in communication with family, friends, peers, loved ones and the nearest environment as the main cause of loneliness. For teenagers with deviant behavior, the main reasons for loneliness include breaking up relationships with the family, misunderstanding and disregard of their essential needs by parents and family members. Loneliness provokes family scandals and turmoil, alcohol abuse by parents, and especially mothers, their prolonged absence from home, and a ruined household. This fact was mentioned by 70% of the adolescents involved in the study. Only 35% of the

teenagers with prosocial behaviour (the difference is statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) view difficult family relationships as a reason for feeling lonely. Detachment of teenagers in this group is connected with their unwillingness to solve their problems by resorting to the advice and life experience of their parents. On the whole, this group of teenagers notes warm relations with their parents, understanding and recognition from the family.

In adolescence, the immediate environment is of particular importance. As a rule, it is people who are respected and who can make up for communication deficiencies in families. It is not always easy for teenagers to cope with the complexities of the world around them, they need a person who can understand all their reflections without judgement and help them understand themselves. Their immediate environment is not homogeneous and includes mentors, teachers, and members of subcultural groups. Teenagers with deviant behaviour are acutely affected by breaking up with their immediate environment and by misunderstandings among their family members. In this case 57% of teenagers are experiencing loneliness. Only 32% of teenagers with prosocial behaviour regard the breakdown in relationships with their immediate environment as a significant reason for loneliness (the difference is statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Adolescents consider closeness to their social environment an important factor in the integrity of their personal life. They need to feel related to another person. In situations when there is no emotional intimacy with friends and peers, they feel loneliness. For deviant teenagers, severing relationships with friends and peers is less important than leaving the family and immediate environment. About 30 % of adolescents in this group experience loneliness when a trust relationship with friends is broken or not established or when friends act dishonestly. Adolescents with prosocial behaviors feel the same way in these situations. Loneliness is experienced by 38.5% of teenagers in conflicts with friends, and by 35% in conflicts with their peers.

For teenagers with deviant behavior, failures in love are the least significant in developing the sense of loneliness. Only 13.5% of participants in the study mention this reason. Presumably, the absence of unconditional love in the family, strained parent-child relationships undermine the proper perception of the beloved person, the meaning and culture of love. Therefore, adolescents themselves rarely have deep, persistent feelings. For teenagers with prosocial behaviour, breaking relationships and misunderstanding by loved ones is the most important factor in creating loneliness. Its role is more important even in comparison with the family. The importance of relationships with those they love is emphasized by 59.7% of adolescents (the difference is statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Reasons and awareness of loneliness are revealed in teenagers' ideas about a lonely person. As the content analysis demonstrated, according to teenagers with deviant and normative behavior, a lonely person is the one who is socially isolated. It is someone who is abandoned, not needed, who is shunned and avoided by people around, from whom everyone turns away and ignores. This is the view formed by 60% of deviant teenagers and 42% of teenagers with normative behavior.

Teenagers admit that a lonely person himself may avoid communication, since he does not know how to communicate, has difficulties in establishing contacts, or has a specific, not always approved style of communication. According to teenagers, a lonely person is annoyed, frustrated, disturbed and offended by many things. He is often dissatisfied and unhappy about his life. He does not know how to be happy or

live a fulfilled life. This is the opinion of 46% of teenagers with deviant behavior and 26% with prosocial. Some teenagers attribute suicidal behavior to a lonely person.

A certain number of adolescents in both groups have a different outlook. A single person is inherently ready to communicate. For him, communication is a kind of therapy that he needs. This feature is mentioned by 65% of deviant teenagers and 42% of teenagers with normative behavior. Such a perception reveals an important characteristic of how teenagers view loneliness. Teenagers who feel lonely have a need for communication that they cannot fully satisfy when social contacts are disrupted.

At the same time, a lonely person arouses sympathy among teenagers, they are inclined to accept him or her, or sympathize with such person. This attitude is observed in 40% of teenagers with deviant behavior and 58% with prosocial behavior. Their own need for emotional bonds with others and subjective lack of love seem to be projected on an abstract lonely person. The experience of loneliness among teenagers is connected with a sense of time perspective. In adolescents with deviant behavior, the feeling of loneliness is associated mainly with the past (Table 01). The past for them is the period of life when they lived with their family, when they encountered difficulties and problems, and experienced a feeling of hopelessness and insecurity. A distant future is less likely to be a source of loneliness, as it is filled with hopes, plans, prospects and success. Present times, filled with activities and attempts at self-assertion, are not as much a source of loneliness as the past and future. Prosocial teenagers have a different temporal perspective on loneliness. For them, loneliness is mostly relevant in the present and much less so in the past and future.

**Table 01.** The temporal perspective of loneliness by adolescents with different social behavior patterns

Temporal perspective	Adolescents with deviant behaviour, %	Adolescents with prosocial behaviour, %
Past	45.3	22.6
Future	30.9	25.0
Present	23.8	52.4

## 7. Conclusion

The social orientation of behavior initially determines the width and direction of the relationship between a person and his or her environment. Deviant behaviour either contains a complete rupture of the social interaction of an individual, or a noticeable negative deformation. Prosocial behaviour, essentially, is normative behaviour accepted and approved by society, and complies with its moral rules and norms. In adolescence, the emergence of loneliness does not arise from the social orientation of behaviour that severs or preserves social ties. Apparently, subjectively experienced loneliness is an essential sign of adolescence, and it serves as an internal criterion to measure how much a person conforms to the social world around him or her, to understand himself or herself and what is happening around them. In adolescence, the need for self-awareness, for determining one's place among other people, social institutions, and social processes is realized fully in solitude, in a subjectively comfortable place closed to others.

The social orientation of adolescent behaviour is reflected in the subjective causes of loneliness. It is possible to say that loneliness of teenagers with deviant behavior and destruction of social interaction is social. Loneliness of teenagers with prosocial behavior is rather an emotional experience. The main reason

for social loneliness lies in the destructive relationships with the family and the immediate environment and weak emotional ties. This type of loneliness is based on the need to communicate and the inability to fully satisfy it, on the willingness to communicate and the inability to socialise. Adolescents view social loneliness as distressing alienation. Emotional loneliness implies suffering a loss of contacts at the current moment in teenagers' lives.

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