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**APPRAISALS OF SELF AND OTHERS IN ADOLESCENTS WITH  
AFFECTIVE AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS**

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***Abstract***

In adolescence forming of personal and public selves is crucial for development and could be important factor of depressions and behavioral disorders. The aim of this study was to compare positive, negative and ambivalent appraisals of Self and Others in adolescents with affective disorders (depressive syndrome), behavioral disorder (psychopathic syndrome) and controls before and after self-focused attention. 51 adolescents 13-17 years old without mental illnesses, 40 adolescents with affective disorders and 41 adolescents with behavioral disorder of the same age filled (counterbalanced) two equivalent forms of Ambivalence in Appraisals of Self and Others scale before and after intervention provoking self-focused attention (concentration on how they perceive themselves and how their friends and enemies perceive them). In line with positive psychology perspective, positive and negative appraisals of Self and Others are not contrary to each other: depressive adolescents indeed perceive themselves less positively and more negatively, others more negatively (not less positively) than controls. Adolescents with psychopathic syndrome consider themselves and others more negatively (but not less positively) than controls. There were no differences in ambivalence of these appraisals between groups. Contrary to the hypothesis about the role self-focus in perpetuation of psychopathological symptoms, self-focused attention was related to less ambivalent appraisals of Self, more positive and less negative appraisals of Others. We suggest that self-focus could spontaneously function as psychotherapeutic technic close to Pennebaker's writing not only for controls but also for adolescents with mental illnesses.

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**Keywords:** Self-focused attention, ambivalence, adolescents, depressive syndrome, psychopathic syndrome, appraisals of Self and Others.



## 1. Introduction

There is a long tradition both in psychoanalysis and in cognitive approach to consider negative self-descriptions as a key factor of depression (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1987) while inconsistency in descriptions of self and others – as a correlate of personality disorders (Sokolova, 2015). However, despite the emphasis of cognitive therapy on the importance of comparing beliefs about Self, world and other people, less is known about their difference in people with mental illnesses comparing to controls. Based on cognitive approach to personality disorders (Beck & Freeman, 1990) it could be suggested that adolescents with psychopathic syndrome would be characterized by higher ambivalence in appraisals of Self and Others. Another interesting perspective that comes from positive psychology (Seligman, 2008) demands to take into account difference between positive and negative appraisals that are not simply opposites and could regulate different psychological processes ending up at different consequences.

## 2. Problem Statement

In adolescence forming of personal and public selves is crucial for development (Erikson, 1968). Accurate differentiation of the role of appraisals of Self and Others (positive, negative, ambivalent) in adolescents with depressions, adolescents with behavioral disorders and healthy controls could be important both for understanding of possible mechanisms for mental illnesses in adolescence and for formulation of treatment goals. Of especial importance are factors and processes that could explain and/or stimulate more or less positive, negative and ambivalent view of Self and Others.

## 3. Research Questions

Self-regulation theory suggests that one of these factors is self-focused attention increasing negative thoughts in depression and anxiety (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Burling, & Tibbs, 1992; Clark & Wells, 1995) and probably participating in the pathogenesis of these symptoms. However, some researchers insist that difference between focus on personal or public self may be crucial for understanding effects of self-focused attention (Scheier & Carver, 1977).

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The **aim** of this study was to compare positive, negative and ambivalent appraisals of Self and Others in adolescents with affective disorders (depressive syndrome), behavioral disorder (psychopathic syndrome) and controls before and after self-focused attention. We **hypothesized** that:

1. There would be different patterns in positive and negative appraisals of Self and Others in adolescents with affective and behavioral disorders comparing to controls that could not be reduced to opposition of positive/negative appraisals.
2. Ambivalence in appraisals would be more typical for adolescents with psychopathic syndrome.

Self-focused attention would lead to more positive and consistent appraisals in controls but could provoke negative appraisals of Self in adolescents with depressions and more ambivalent appraisals in adolescents with psychopathic syndrome.

## 5. Research Methods

132 adolescents 13-17 years old participated in the study (mean age  $15.23 \pm 1.05$  years old). Control group included 51 adolescents from various Moscow schools (20 boys, 31 girls). There were two clinical groups including inpatients of Scientific and Practical Center for Mental Health of Children and Adolescents named after G.E. Sukhareva with affective disorders (depressive syndrome) and behavioral disorders (psychopathic syndrome).

The first clinical group included 40 adolescents with depressive syndrome due to affective disorders (19 boys and 21 girls). The second clinical group consisted of 41 adolescents (22 boys and 19 girls) with psychopathic syndrome due to behavioral disorders.

Control and clinical groups did not differ by gender ( $p > .20$ ).

Participants filled two alternative forms (the sequence was counterbalanced) of Ambivalence in Appraisals of Self and Others scale (Rasskazova, Tkhostov, & Abramova, 2015) before and after intervention provoking self-focused attention. During intervention researcher asked adolescents to concentrate on their feeling of themselves and appraise by a number of visual scales (Dembo-Rubinstein scales) (Sokolova, 2015) as themselves, their friends and their enemies perceive them (Cronbach's alpha for 5 scales were .59-.74).

Ambivalence in Appraisals of Self and Others scale (Rasskazova, Tkhostov, & Abramova, 2015) includes opposites positive and negative adjectives describing persona and other people. Participates are asked to appraise themselves and others by each adjective (for instance, "I'm... good, bad, dangerous etc"). Previous research establish that positive and negative valence of Self and Others are reliable scales (Cronbach's alphas .52-.79) and are related to well-being and coping. Ambivalence of appraisals (for instance, using both or none of opposite adjectives in each pair) was related to poorer well-being. There are two different forms of the scale with 6 pairs of opposite adjectives each that were demonstrated to be equivalent to each other.

Data were processed in SPSS Statistics 23.0.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Appraisals of Self and Others in control and clinical groups

2 (Males versus Females)  $\times$  3 (Controls, Affective and Behavioral disorders) ANOVA was used to establish clinical and gender differences in appraisals of Self and Others.

Adolescents with depressive syndrome appraised themselves less positively comparing to both controls and adolescents with psychopathic syndrome (Table 01). Adolescents from both clinical groups appraised themselves and others more negatively comparing to controls.

Neither valence nor ambivalence in the appraisals of Self and Others differed in males and females. No interaction effect between diagnosis and gender were found.

**Table 01.** Appraisals of Self and Others in control and clinical groups before experiment

	Control group		Affective disorders		Behavioral disorders		F	p	$\eta^2$
	Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.			
Positive appraisal (valence) of Self before experiment	3.89	.49	3.52	.73	3.84	.81	3.39	.04	.05
Negative appraisal of Self	1.84	.55	2.45	.79	2.2	.79	8.15	.01	.12
Negative appraisal of Others	1.96	.57	2.29	.77	2.18	.64	3.11	.05	.05

### 6.2. Change in valence and ambivalence of appraisals after self-focused attention

While we counterbalanced two different forms of the measure of valence and ambivalence, the variable of Sequence was used in the ANOVA as a covariate (Tables 02, 03). Gender did not moderate any the effects described below.

**Table 02.** Effect of self-focused attention on the valence and ambivalence in appraisals of Self and Others: results of ANOVA

	Major effect of self-focused attention (before – after)			Major effect of diagnosis			Interaction effect between diagnosis and self-focused attention		
	F	p	$\eta^2$	F	p	$\eta^2$	F	p	$\eta^2$
Positive appraisal (valence) of Self	.04	.85	.01	<b>3.43</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.05</b>	.46	.63	.01
Negative appraisal of Self	.00	.99	.00	<b>8.25</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>.11</b>	.80	.45	.01
Ambivalence in appraisals of Self	<b>4.31</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.03</b>	1.56	.21	.02	<b>2.94</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.04</b>
Positive appraisal (valence) of Others	<b>4.85</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>.04</b>	.09	.91	.00	.23	.80	.00
Negative appraisal of Others	<b>14.36</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>2.85</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.04</b>	2.08	.13	.03
Ambivalence in appraisals of Others	.06	.81	.00	1.40	.25	.02	.12	.88	.00

3 (Controls, Affective disorders, Behavioral disorders)  $\times$  2 (Before versus After Self-Focused Attention) ANOVA with repeated measures and test forms' sequence as a covariate was used to study the role of self-focused attention in self- and others- appraisals. Major effects of diagnosis are similarly to those described earlier: adolescents with depressive syndrome perceive themselves less positive, more negative and perceive people more negative than controls. Adolescents with psychopathic syndrome perceive themselves and others a bit more negative (but not less positive) than controls (Tables 02, 03).

In all the participants self-focused attention leads to lower ambivalence in appraisals of Self but this effect is marginally more prominent in adolescents with psychopathic syndrome and almost disappear in controls. Moreover, in general positive appraisals of Others increases while negative appraisals of Others decrease after self-focus attention.

**Table 03.** Descriptive statistics for interaction effects between groups and change after self-focused attention

		Control group		Affective disorders		Behavioral disorders	
		Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.
Positive appraisal (valence) of Self	Before	3.89	.50	3.52	.73	3.84	.80
	After	3.90	.53	3.63	.64	3.86	.79
Negative appraisal of Self	Before	1.84	.55	2.45	.80	2.20	.80
	After	1.88	.57	2.40	.76	2.30	.90
Ambivalence in appraisals of Self	Before	.62	.33	.73	.42	.67	.38
	After	.69	.35	.72	.36	.53	.42
Positive appraisal (valence) of Others	Before	3.86	.54	3.82	.63	3.76	.61
	After	3.83	.58	3.83	.66	3.81	.63
Negative appraisal of Others	Before	1.96	.58	2.29	.77	2.18	.64
	After	1.92	.56	2.13	.77	2.25	.79

## 7. Conclusion

In line with cognitive perspective of depression (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1987), depressive adolescents indeed perceive themselves less positively and more negatively and the others more negatively than controls. Interestingly, adolescents in depressions do not perceive others less positive. Moreover, adolescents with psychopathic syndromes considers Self and Others more negatively than controls. As positive psychology suggests (Seligman, 2008), there is a difference between negative and positive conditions and appraisals. Thus, rather positive view of others in depressive adolescents could be used a psychological resource in psychotherapy despite their negative view of themselves and others. Similarly, negative appraisals of Self in adolescents with psychopathic syndrome could be basis for insight development and their motivation for change.

Unlike in previous studies we did not found higher ambivalence in self-appraisals (Sokolova, 2015) or others-appraisals in adolescents with psychopathic syndrome. One possible explanation is that explicit measures are just not sensitive enough to measure feeling of indefinite and ambivalent relationships with others. Another reason could be that ambivalent appraisals of the Self and others are normative developmental phenomena (Erikson, 1968) in adolescents looking for different forms of identifications and self-presentations.

Although self-focused attention is considered as a factor increasing depressive feelings in under-risk population (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Burling, & Tibbs, 1992), in our study self-focused attention was not related to appraisals of Self while appraisals of Others became even more positive and less negative. On the contrary, appraisals of Self become less ambivalent especially in adolescents with psychopathic syndrome. We suggest that self-focused attention could be problem-focusing and helpful both for controls and for adolescents with mental disorders. Indeed, there are data that efficacy of self-descriptions depends on emotional processes (Cameron, 2003) including whether these descriptions aimed to resolve problem or to ruminate or catastrophize about it. Results indicate that both adolescents with depressive and psychopathic syndrome could spontaneously benefit from self-focus coming to more positive perception of the world and more consistent perception of the Self.

Thus, in line with positive psychology perspective positive and negative appraisals of Self and Others are not contrary to each other: depressive adolescents indeed perceive themselves less positively and more negatively, others more negatively (not less positively) than controls. Adolescents with psychopathic syndrome consider themselves and others more negatively (but not less positively) than controls. There were no differences in ambivalence of these appraisals between groups. Contrary to the hypothesis about the role self-focus in perpetuation of psychopathological symptoms, self-focused attention was related to less ambivalent appraisals of Self, more positive and less negative appraisals of Others. We suggest that self-focus could spontaneously function as psychotherapeutic technic close to Pennebaker's writing not only for controls but also for adolescents with mental illnesses.

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