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PERSONAL TRAITS AS DETERMINANTS OF FEELING LONELINESS AMONG STUDENTS

Despite the informational and technological opportunities available in the modern world, the experience and perception of loneliness has a significant impact on personal development of young people. Understanding the factors that cause this phenomenon is crucial to creating effective counseling and coaching strategies to help people overcome the problems they face in experiencing loneliness. The aim of the article is to present the results of the study of the relationship between the experience of loneliness and personal qualities and life values. Loneliness is a multidimensional phenomenon that has both a subjective (experience) and an objective (social situation) aspects, both a negative and a positive potential. The existential approach was used as a basis of the study, according to which loneliness contains special personal resources, and the way it feels depends on the attitude to this experience. The research sample involved 89 respondents - students majoring in humanities and mathematics. Correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze the results of the study, while the Mann-Whitney statistical test and variance analysis helped to determine significant differences in the results between students of different specialties. The research outcomes have shown that single students tend to be more pessimistic about their future and have more negative expectations than those who do not feel alone. As for egoism, there are no significant differences, and this feature does not affect the experience of loneliness. However, the experience of loneliness is closely related to spirituality, individuality, and independence. According to the results of the study, the positive role of loneliness in the formation of a mature personality is emphasized, namely, as a resource for personal self-improvement.

Keywords: *personal traits, values, loneliness, youth, students.*

Introduction

The research of the loneliness phenomenon, which appears to be quite hard and controversial, has preserved its theoretical and practical significance throughout the decades. On the one hand, loneliness is a global, essential, socially determined phenomenon with lacking clear criteria and, on the other hand, it is a fact of a complicated psychological feeling that touches on deep layers of human conscience.

The necessity to analyze the nature and external characteristics of the feeling of loneliness becomes more and more obvious in the modern world with its rapid development of technologies and information, which lead to the substitution of the live communication with the virtual one. Besides, such an analysis is a fundamental term for the search of effective psychotherapeutic, psychocorrective and counseling methods of helping people who suffer from loneliness.

The risk of experiencing loneliness is paradoxically high in the age of late adolescence and early adulthood. This afterschool complicated transitive period is accompanied by the change of the person's social environment, the structure of social and interpersonal relationship. Thus, many adolescents are facing the task of creating new social relationships. Uncertainty in the future, stress and despair, which occur in case of unfortunate tries on building the relationships, cause the feeling of loneliness and have a negative impact on further socialization.

Personality and individual traits influence significantly the way a person perceives his or her life and determine his/her expectations towards the future and communication with others.

Therefore, the **aim** of this study is to determine the correlations and effect of these psychological constructs on the feeling of loneliness.

More specifically, our intention was to find the answers to such questions: Do such dispositional traits as optimism, pessimism and egoism influence the factual feeling of loneliness and its perception? How are personal values connected with the feeling of loneliness and what are the key values of people who suffer from loneliness? What are the differences in feeling loneliness by students of different age and specializations?

Theoretical background

There are several approaches of the research of factors that are connected with loneliness and its causes.

The followers of the psychodynamic approach (Sullivan, 1953, Winnicott, 1958) identify loneliness as an individual reaction to inadequate satisfaction of the need of close human relationships. They associate loneliness with narcissistic traits, which are the basis for the feeling of alienation, aloofness and aggression. [6]

Perlman and Pepló (1981) determine loneliness from the cognitive point of view as a feeling that occurs in the situation of conflict between the desired and achieved level of persons' social encounters. The authors also men-

tion that the person's attribution of himself/herself as a lonely one reinforces the feeling of loneliness and leads to the alienation from the Self and to problems with forming interpersonal relations.

From the point of view of the interactionist approach, Weiss (1973) identifies loneliness as a product of interactional effect of two factors – personality and situation. As a result, he defines two types of loneliness: 1) emotional isolation (the lack of belongingness to a specific person); 2) social isolation (the lack of available social network).

Rogers (1961), who represents humanistic psychology, considers loneliness as a demonstration of weak personal adaptation, isolation from person's true inner feelings. He reckons that a conflict between inner genuine Self of the person and the demonstration of Self in the relationships with others leads to loneliness [2].

Whereas, existentialists, particularly Yalom, Mustakas, Frankl and Leontyev, have opposite view and point out that loneliness is the fundamental basis for personal growth, one of the essential characteristics of the human being. According to Leontyev (2013), the feeling of aloofness from social communication can take place both in case of physical (objective) isolation and in the presence of others but without a psychological contact with them. If the loneliness is free-will, then this feeling is called solitude. In the other case, when loneliness is forced, it can cause serious psychological problems and malfunction [1].

Basing on existing theoretical approaches, in our study we understand loneliness as a feeling that causes complex and severe emotions, expresses particular form of self-consciousness and points at the disharmony between the real social network and the inner world of the person.

Considering that the phenomenon of loneliness can be explained both in positive and negative (destructive) aspects, we took the existential approach as the basis for our research. It seems to us the most appropriate and complete due to its thesis that loneliness is the crucial entity of living. In other words, loneliness contains particular personal resources and the way of how it is felt depends substantially on the attitude towards it.

Regarding personal traits, we based on such theoretical theories:

1. The concept of optimism and pessimism as dispositional traits (Scheier and Carver, 1992). According to this theory, when results are seen as desirable and achievable, individuals strive to attain them, even though the process may be slow and difficult. Nevertheless, if the results seem unattainable, individuals tend to give up and do not commit themselves to the behaviour that enables them to achieve their goals. On the basis of this theory, optimists are defined as those whose general expectations involve achieving a positive result, whereas pessimists are those who generally expect a negative outcome. As personality traits, optimism and pessimism are presumed to be stable with little scope for change.

2. Egoism as a dispositional trait (Muzdybaev, 2000). Egoism is a motivational state that characterizes the person's concern about his or her own benefit. It can interfere the building of personal relationships by disturbing the mutual understanding and decreasing the chances on effective social integration [3].

3. The concept of value sphere. Rokeach defined values as 'enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence' (Rokeach, 1973). He divided the value sphere into two systems – instrumental (preferable modes of behaviour) and terminal values (desirable end-states of existence). Senin (1998) developed the theory by stating that these two sets of values are likely to manifest themselves in such life spheres as professional life, education, family, social life and hobbies [5].

Research Methods

According to the theoretical basis of the study, our empirical research aimed to analyze the factors of the feeling of loneliness by students and to identify the role of personal traits and values in it. Data were gathered with the use of four questionnaires.

The first one, Differential questionnaire of the feeling of loneliness (DOPO-3) by Leontyev and Osin (2013) is based on the existential view towards loneliness. It contains 40 statements, which are divided into 3 scales and 8 subscales. The main three are 'General loneliness', 'Communication dependence' and 'Positive loneliness (solitude)'. The first scale reflects the fact of actual feeling of loneliness, lack of close relationships. The second one measures the level of rejection of loneliness, inability to remain alone. And the last one identifies the person's ability to find a resource in loneliness and to use it creatively for self-understanding and self-development.

The level of students' optimism and pessimism was measured with the help of Extended Life Orientation Test (ELOT) (Chang, 1997). According to the author's approach, optimism and pessimism are bidimensional in structure. This questionnaire helps to find out general positive and negative personal expectations of the future. It includes 20 statements with 6 items that assess for optimism and 9 items that assess for pessimism. Each of the statements is assessed across the 7-point scale (from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (7) 'strongly agree'). [4]

We used the 'Egoism Scale' by Muzdybayev (2000) for diagnostics of the egoism dispositional trait. The questionnaire contains 10 items, each assessed across the 7-point scale. High scores on the scale display the person's inclination to characterize others by negative moral categories, demonstrate arrogance and difficulties in social interaction.

The fourth, 'Terminal Values Questionnaire' (Senin, 1998) was used to assess the hierarchy of students' personal values (prestige, financial status, creativity, social encounters, self-development, achievements, spirituality and individuality) and their representation in different life spheres. The questionnaire comprised 80 statements, each

assessed across 5-point scale. The results were summarized in a form of individual profiles.

In order to explore the influence of personal traits and values on the feeling of loneliness, correlation and regression analyses were used. In addition, Mann-Whitney statistic criteria and dispersion analyses helped to define the significant differences in results between students of different specializations.

The study was conducted in Kiev, Ukraine, the sample included 89 individuals (65 women and 24 men) with average age of 22 years (ranging from 18 to 25). The participants were students of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, divided into two groups according to their specialization (39 students from the Faculty of Philology and 50 students from Mechanics and Mathematics Faculty).

Research Results and Discussion

As a result of a comparative data analysis, we have discovered differences ($p=0.045$) in the attitude toward loneliness between the groups of students of different specializations. According to the ‘Positive loneliness’ scores, students from the Faculty of Philology (31.5, high level) perceive the fact of loneliness more positively than students from the

Mechanics Faculty (28.8, medium level). This means that the philologists tend to find more inner resources in the feeling of loneliness and consciously experience the states of solitude. We assumed that such differences might be connected with the characteristics of their specialization, such as creative thinking, which often requires isolation in order to achieve the best result. These outcomes were proved by the differences ($p=0.006$) in the characteristics of the value sphere between the mentioned two groups of students. Philologists put such values as individuality and nonconformity higher than the mechanics do.

In order to investigate the influence of dispositional traits on the feeling of loneliness, the analyzed students were divided into two groups on the basis of the scores in ‘Differential Questionnaire of the Feeling of Loneliness’. These groups are ‘Lonely’ and ‘Not lonely’. The results of the comparative analysis of these groups have shown that lonely people tend to be more pessimistic about their future and have more negative expectations than those who do not experience this feeling. Regarding egoism, there were no significant differences found (Table 1).

Table 1.

Means of Optimism, Pessimism and Egoism for ‘Lonely’ and ‘Not Lonely’ Students

Dispositional trait	Groups		t	p
	Lonely	Not lonely		
Optimism	28	33.6	-3.1	0.003
Pessimism	34.5	22.9	4.8	0.000
Egoism	42.9	42.5	0.15	0.9

The same analysis as above was conducted to investigate the group differences in the value sphere (Table 2).

Table 2.

Characteristics of the Value Sphere for ‘Lonely’ and ‘Not Lonely’ Students

Category	Groups		t	p	
	Lonely	Not lonely			
Terminal values	Prestige	30	31.9	-0.8	0.4
	Financial status	36.3	35.5	0.4	0.7
	Creativity	30.5	33	-1.09	0.2
	Social encounters	30.8	35.4	-2.4	0.02
	Self-development	33.4	37.4	-2.4	0.02
	Achievements	35.4	39	-2.1	0.04
	Spirituality	35.5	39.5	-2.3	0.03
	Individuality	34.2	34.4	-0.12	0.9
Sphere of life	Professional life	56	60.5	-1.8	0.09
	Education	58.3	59.5	-0.4	0.6
	Family	51.4	55.6	-1.3	0.2
	Social life	47.8	55.3	-2.2	0.03
	Hobbies	52.6	55.2	-0.8	0.4

Thus, the results have shown that lonely students are more inclined to avoid social interaction; they appreciate self-development, spirituality and achievements less than those students who do not feel lonely. At the same time, such values as prestige, financial status and creativity remain similar for both groups.

As a result of a correlation analysis, we have proved our assumption regarding the connection between the feeling of loneliness and optimism and pessimism. Those students, who had been pessimistic about their future perspectives, more often lacked close communication with other people and considered themselves lonely and isolated. It is also interesting to mention that the feeling of loneliness is closely related to the values of spirituality and individuality. Those young people who valued their independence and dedicated a lot of time for self-development and hobbies, tended to be more positive about loneliness and considered this state as a valuable personal resource. High positions of such values as prestige and social life in the personal profile were accompanied by the fear of loneliness and avoidance of this feeling.

In order to identify how optimism, pessimism and personal values influence the feeling and perception of loneliness, we have built three regression models for each of the three main indicators of loneliness ('General loneliness', 'Communication dependence' and 'Positive loneliness'). The results allowed us to make the following conclusions:

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- pessimism and optimism have significant (0,5 and 0,4 respectively) impact on whether the young person feels lonely or not. This means that if one has negative expectations about the future, he/she is more likely to feel the same about the results of social interaction with other people, and this can increase the chances of loneliness, and the opposite with optimism.

- positive attitude towards the feeling of loneliness is formed under the influence of such values as individuality and active social contacts. In other words, the more a person cares about his/her self-development and the less need in a wide social network he/she has, the more positively loneliness is perceived by him/her.

Conclusions

The empirical research we have conducted among the Ukrainian students, has given an opportunity to determine the correlations between such personal traits as optimism, pessimism and different aspects of the feeling of loneliness. The findings suggest that these determinants are among the critical factors having influence both whether a young person considers himself/herself lonely and his/her perception of this feeling. The results also illustrate the crucial role of such values as individuality and spirituality in the positive attitude towards loneliness. There have been also found significant differences in the ways loneliness is felt by students of different specializations. Future studies might focus on in-depth research of different personality factors that influence the feeling of loneliness and finding effective methods of coping with destructive consequences of loneliness in early adulthood.

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ОСОБИСТІСНІ РИСИ ЯК ПОКАЗНИКИ ПЕРЕЖИВАННЯ САМОТНОСТІ СЕРЕД СТУДЕНТІВ

Незважаючи на інформаційні та технологічні можливості, наявні в сучасному світі, переживання і сприйняття самотності значно впливає на особистісний розвиток молоді. Розуміння факторів, які викликають появу цього явища, має вирішальне значення для створення ефективних стратегій консультування і коучингу, з метою допомогти людям подолати проблеми, з якими вони зустрічаються при переживанні самотності. Метою статті є презентація результатів дослідження взаємозв'язку між переживанням самотності з особистісними якостями і життєвими цінностями. У статті представлена ідея про те, що самотність – це багатомірне явище, яке має як суб'єктивну (переживання), так і об'єктивну (соціальна ситуація) сторони, і як негативний, так і позитивний потенціал. Ми використовували екзистенціальний підхід в якості основи для нашого дослідження, згідно з яким самотність містить у собі особливі особистісні ресурси, і спосіб її переживання істотно залежить від ставлення до цього переживання. Для вирішення поставлених завдань в нашому дослідженні взяли участь 89 досліджуваних – студенти гуманітарного та математичного профілю. Для аналізу результатів дослідження були використані кореляційний і регресійний аналіз, а статистичний критерій Манна-Уїтні і дисперсійний аналіз допомогли визначити значущу різницю в результатах між студентами різних спеціальностей. Результати порівняльного аналізу двох груп показали, що самотні студенти, як правило, більш песимістично ставляться до свого майбутнього і мають більш негативні очікування, ніж ті, хто не відчувають себе самотніми. Що стосується егоїзму, то суттєвих відмінностей виявлено не було, і ця риса не впливає на переживання самотності. Однак, переживання самотності тісно пов'язане з цінностями духовності та індивідуальності, незалежності. За результатами дослідження підкреслюється позитивна роль самотності у формуванні зрілої особистості, а саме, в якості ресурсу для особистісного самовдосконалення.

Ключові слова: особистісні риси, ціннісні орієнтації, самотність, юність, студенти.

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