

Protective Reflection of a Person Experiencing Loneliness

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The article presents the results of a study of the connection of protective reflection with the peculiarities of loneliness experience by students of humanitarian and economic education profiles. Mathematical processing of data and their qualitative analysis showed a general picture of reflexive strategies and tactics that largely determine the quality of life, behavioral characteristics, and the strength of experiences of people suffering from loneliness.

Keywords: reflection, pathogenic reflection, sanogenic reflection, reflexive strategies and tactics, loneliness

The World Health Organization defines loneliness as an “urgent health threat” on a global scale. This means that there is an increasing need for society to find ways to create favorable conditions for the maximum development and preservation of mental health of the individual.

Although the problem of loneliness has never lost its relevance, many scientists have dealt with its issues at one time (V. K. Vilyunas, E. E. Malashenko, L. S. Vygotsky, F. E. Vasilyuk, Yu. B. Gippenreiter, S. L. Rubinstein, E. S. Azarova, M. D. Levitov, I. M. Slobodchikov, A. D. Nekrylova, S. N. Shevchenko, and many others); currently, in a rapidly changing digital world, when familiar, warm ties and relationships are collapsing, being replaced by quasi-forms of communication, the problem of loneliness is especially acute (Nekrylova, 2023).

Loneliness is a multifaceted phenomenon that is considered both from the standpoint of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and other sciences, which gives rise to differences in theoretical approaches to its understanding and research methods.

Currently, there are three types of loneliness:

- emotional loneliness (associated with a perceived lack of full-fledged relationships, including intimate relationships);
- social loneliness (a subjective feeling that a person does not have enough social connections, a gap between the desired and real number of friends and acquaintances);
- existential loneliness (focuses on alienation from society as a whole).

Experiencing is the most accurate term for a person’s holistic response to a situation, including a situation of loneliness.

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Many researchers studying loneliness emphasize the difference between loneliness and isolation (Arakantseva, 2023; Gnevasheva, 2023; Osin & Leontiev, 2013; Slobodchikov, 2007).

Isolation is the separation of a person, his isolation from the social environment, which is more determined by external circumstances rather than internal experiences.

Unlike isolation, loneliness reflects disharmony with the world and with oneself, accompanied by suffering and crises.

Isolation and loneliness are not synonymous for the reason that you can feel lonely and isolated from society, or you can be isolated and not feel lonely.

It is not always the one who feels lonely who is truly isolated from society. You can be surrounded by people, but at the same time suffer from loneliness, because there is no emotional and spiritual intimacy with them. According to E. N. Osin and D. A. Leontiev, loneliness can be defined as the experience of one's own non-involvement in connection with other people. This experience can take place both in a state of physical isolation and in the presence of other people, but without psychological contact with them. The combination of these two factors sets the state, which is traditionally designated by the word "loneliness" (Slobodchikov, 2007).

It can be said that the experience of loneliness depends not so much on real relationships with others, but on how much they correspond to the expectations of the individual, his orientation, attitudes, interests and desires, ideas about what a relationship should ideally be.

On the time line, a lonely person feels disconnected from the past, does not find his place in the present, and does not see prospects in the future. She is, as it were, out of time; there is a loss of personality status as a subject of social life, which cannot but cause anxiety and fear.

People who feel lonely often look for the cause of this condition either in themselves, explaining it by the peculiarities of their character, lack of abilities or their unattractiveness, or in the imperfection of the world, cruel and cold, from which they want to isolate themselves. One of the most expressive characteristics of loneliness is a special feeling of complete immersion in oneself.

In the light of the above, the experience of loneliness is considered as a negative factor in personality development, which can lead to the loss of a person's identity, the erosion of his value motivation, depression, and even mental illness, which prevents the construction of strategies for personal and cultural development.

At the same time, according to I. M. Slobodchikov, the experience of loneliness plays an important role in personality formation. "This is a key feeling that accompanies the process of self-development and is closely related to such important aspects of personality as self-perception, internal reflection and the formation of one's own identity" (2007, p. 213).

What is the author talking about but reflection? It can be said that it is the experience of loneliness that triggers constructive reflective processes aimed at finding answers to the questions: "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", "Why is this happening to me?", "What should I do to fix the situation?". Only in conjunction with reflection does it directly affect the nature of personality development and the degree of its maturity. Reflection, spurred on by the experience of loneliness, helps a person in the painful search for new meanings, finding moral and spiritual supports for his existence. This is where the developmental function of loneliness as an experience is realized.

Each type of loneliness is emotionally colored, depending not only on the temperament and psychological characteristics of the individual, but also on the psychological and social context in which interaction with people significant to the personality occurs or does not occur. And this is primarily a communication experience that is actualized by reflection.

Each person is characterized by the experience of loneliness. However, whether this experience will be traumatic for the personality or contribute to its development depends on the quality of reflection accompanying this experience.

If in a person who is not prone to chronic loneliness, the trigger that triggers reflection is individual situations of forced loneliness, then in a person who is prone to chronic loneliness, it is reflection, pathogenic in nature, that triggers the process of experiencing loneliness for no apparent reason.

We believe that there is a dependence of a person's experience of loneliness on the quality of his reflection.

In order to verify this assumption, a study was conducted in March-May 2024.

The empirical base of the research is the autonomous non-profit organization "Moscow University of Humanities and Economics", Moscow. 193 people aged 18-23 years participated as respondents—boys (83 people) and girls (110 people). The respondents have incomplete higher education, studying 1-4 bachelor's degree courses in the fields of "Psychology", "Economics", "Customs".

The following techniques were used to obtain empirical data:

1. The projective test "Cognitive-emotive test" (CET) (Y. M. Orlov, S. N. Morozhuk) (Osin & Leontiev, 2013).

2. Differential questionnaire of loneliness experience by E. N. Osin and D. A. Leontiev.

The main concept of this technique is that loneliness is not only the absence of social contacts, but also the experience of a lack of high-quality or satisfying relationships with other people (Osin & Leontiev, 2013, p. 55).

The choice of this particular technique through a one-dimensional approach to the study of loneliness is most justified and applicable to our work.

This is due to the fact that the experience of loneliness is measured in interpersonal relationships and depends on the degree of their harmony—disharmony. With the "one-dimensional" approach, loneliness is a single phenomenon that differs in the intensity of the experience. It is assumed here that the experience of loneliness has something in common for all people.

With a "multidimensional" approach, loneliness is considered as a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be summed up under a single measure of global loneliness. This approach attempts to identify hypothetical types or manifestations of loneliness and is an attempt to operationalize various forms of loneliness.

The results of the study were processed using the STATISTIKA 7.0 program using a parametric statistical data processing method for independent samples of the r-Spearman criterion.

According to the results of the differential questionnaire of loneliness experiences by E. N. Osin and D. A. Leontiev, out of the total number of subjects (193 people), a sample with a high degree of loneliness experience was represented by 87 respondents—boys (37 people) and girls (50 people).

Table 1 presents the results of a study of the relationship between protective reflection and the indicators of the differential questionnaire of loneliness.

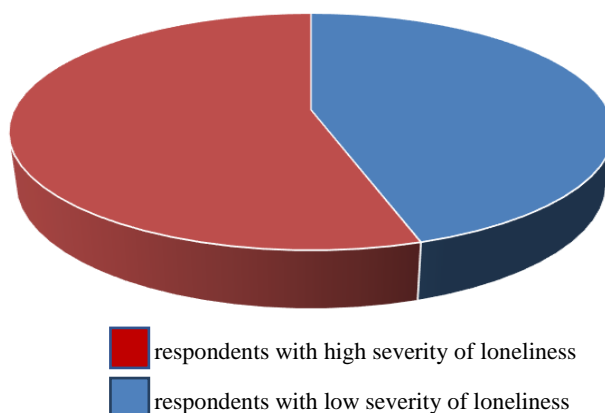


Figure 1. The number of respondents with high and low severity of loneliness (%).

Table 1

The Relationship of Protective Reflection (Y. M. Orlov, S. N. Morozyuk) With the Indicators of the Differential Questionnaire of Loneliness Experience (E. N. Osin, D. A. Leontiev) (According to R-Spearman)

CET indicators (Y. M. Orlov, S. N. Morozyuk)	Indicators of differential test loneliness (E. N. Osin, D. A. Leontiev)		
	Common loneliness	Influence from communicate	Positive loneliness
The volume of defensive reflection in reproducing the fear of failure	0.11	0.08	-0.14
The volume of protective reflection in the reproduction of guilt	0.17	0.05	0.06
The volume of protective reflection in the reproduction of feelings of shame	0.26**	0.12	0.03
The volume of defensive reflection in the reproduction of feelings of resentment	0.19*	0.16*	0.09
Aggression against others	0.07	0.12	0.11
Aggression against yourself	-0.08	-0.02	0.08
Rationalization by depreciation of the object	-0.07	0.06	0.08
Rationalization by circumstances	-0.08	0.02	0.10
Projection on others	-0.01	0.15	0.13
Protection from guilt	-0.01	-0.11	0.07
Protection from feelings of shame	0.03	0.06	0.19*
Protection from the fear of failure	-0.08	0.02	0.17*
Protection from envy	-0.11	-0.23**	0.07
Protection from resentment	-0.09	0.05	0.05
Avoiding the situation	0.08	0.19*	0.09
Self-deprecation I	0.21**	0.02	0.03
Arousing guilt in others	0.10	0.06	0.06
Sanogenic thinking	0.20*	0.14	0.18*
Inconsistency of behavior with other expectations	0.10	-0.04	0.22**
Appealing thinking	-0.04	0.13	0.02

Notes. Statistically significant differences, **—at the level of $p \leq 0.01$; *—at the level of $p \leq 0.05$.

The data presented in the table indicate the presence of positive statistically significant associations of protective reflection indicators with indicators of loneliness. The more pronounced the indicators of protection from shame, resentment, the more a person self-deprecates himself, the more actual loneliness he experiences. A person experiences isolation more strongly, a lack of emotional intimacy or contact with people, and realizes himself lonely, isolated. This confirms the presence of positive reliable links between the indicators “Volume of

protective reflection from feelings of shame" (0.26**), "Volume of protective reflection from feelings of resentment" (0.19**) and the indicators "General loneliness" and "Dependence on communication".

At the same time, the more pronounced the ability to sanogenically reflect, the more resourceful a person is in the process of experiencing loneliness. This is evidenced by the presence of a positive statistically significant relationship between the indicator "Sanogenic thinking" and the indicator "Positive loneliness" (0.18*). A person, being in a state of loneliness, uses it for creative self-realization and self-knowledge. And this expresses the developing function of sanogenic thinking and sanogenic reflection.

On the one hand, a person suffers from a lack of communication, and on the other hand, avoids it in order not to experience shame, resentment and envy. The more pronounced the "Protection from envy" is in a person experiencing loneliness, the less she seeks to communicate, while resorting to her characteristic tactics of leaving a traumatic "I" situation. This is confirmed by the presence of inverse reliable links between the indicator "Protection from envy" and the indicator "Dependence on communication" (-0.23**), as well as positive links between the latter and the indicator "Withdrawal from the situation" (0.19*).

The starting point that triggers the experience of loneliness is the idea of the imperfection of the world and oneself in it. The pathogenic understanding of traumatic experience forms a pathogenic philosophy of everyday life, on the basis of which pathogenic worldviews are formed, such as readiness for pathogenic "self-examination" and isolation.

A reflexive strategy in experiencing loneliness is a reflexive process aimed at protecting against feelings of resentment, envy, and shame. A person experiencing loneliness, as a rule, chooses a reflexive tactic of leaving a communication situation, and goes into the world of fantasy, drawing an image of the desired result, which has nothing to do with reality.

Thus, our assumption about the existence of a connection between the experience of loneliness by a person and the peculiarities of her reflection was confirmed. The nature of this connection is peculiar; it depends on the quality of its reflection: The more pronounced the indicators of protective reflection from shame, resentment, and envy, the more relevant the experience of loneliness. The more the indicator "Sanogenic thinking" is presented, the more a person is resourceful in experiencing loneliness, as evidenced by the presence of a direct reliable connection with the indicator "Positive loneliness".

The more a person is prone to experiencing shame, resentment, and envy, the more pronounced her protection is in the form of withdrawal from communication situations into the fantasy world.

If in a person who is not prone to chronic loneliness, the trigger that triggers reflection is individual situations of forced loneliness, then in a person who is prone to chronic loneliness, it is reflection, pathogenic in nature, that triggers the process of experiencing loneliness for no apparent reason.

The identification of the connection between a person's experience of loneliness and the quality of her reflection opens up new perspectives in solving the problem of loneliness on a global scale.

The use of technology that improves the quality of reflection opens up a new path for the development and preservation of mental health of the individual. One of such technologies is the theory and practice of sanogenic thinking and sanogenic reflection (Y. M. Orlov, S. N. Morozyuk).

Sanogenic reflection, as a process and result of conscious activity, is able to bring personality behavior beyond the limits of dynamic formations that have become pathogenic, change thinking stereotypes as programs of pathogenic thinking, and rebuild mental behavior that contributes to the emergence and consolidation of

protective behaviors, including when experiencing loneliness. However, this aspect of the application of sanogenic thinking and sanogenic reflection technology requires its experimental verification.

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