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A Preventive Role of Empathy towards the Feeling of Loneliness*

Introduction

The arguments presented in this paper focus on two major questions. Firstly, is empathy able to perform a preventive function towards the feeling of loneliness? Secondly, what are the structures of personality variables which mediate the preventive influence of empathy on the feeling of loneliness?

Loneliness is a phenomenon well known since the dawn of mankind. Its valuation has always been negative. Rembowski (1992), in his monograph on the issue of loneliness, notes this fragment from the *Book of Genesis:* "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him." Prometheus chained to a rock and Odysseus' search for the ways home are two literary symbols of the suffering humans endured because of loneliness. In modern times, authors of Encyclopaedia (F. Voltaire, D. Diderot, P. Holbach, J.J. Rousseau), analysed the feeling of loneliness (ref. to Rembowski, 1992). For them, loneliness was the consequence of an independent, individual choice, a conscious withdrawal from society. Loneliness was also analysed carefully in the works of the existentialists. Such authors as S. Kierkegaard, M. Heidegger, J.P. Sartre and M. Marcel (ref. to Rembowski, 1992) discussed many aspects of loneliness. These included the absolute loneliness of man in this world within himself, and towards other people, a feeling of being small finite, a feeling of perplexity and, loss of genuine interpersonal bonds.

The feeling of loneliness interested also psychoanalysts. Freud (1987) regarded man's existence to be a lonesome fight with his own impulses/urges, and Fromm (1978) believed that the most powerful psychic need of man was the impulse to overcome his own loneliness.

In analysing the importance of loneliness in human life, we can point to some situations which seem to be positive, seem to stimulate the development and maturing of human personality, as well as enable us to accomplish diverse creative projects. However, more frequently, loneliness encourages destructive behaviours

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and has negative consequences for both the individual and social groups. Since the 1960s, psychologists have conducted studies on the feeling of loneliness, investigating both its conditions, and its consequences. The results of these studies indicate a relationship between loneliness, and the feelings of alienation and fear (anxiety), unfriendliness and inhibition, neuroticism, psychoticism suicide attempts, a higher incidence of certain somatic diseases, misuse of alcohol, and antisocial behaviours (Wenz, 1977; Bragg, 1979; Mijuskovic, 1985; Hojat, 1982). Duration of experiencing loneliness is a very important factor. Chronic loneliness influences at a higher level than transitory one such measures as global loneliness, anxiety, depression, neuroticism and external locus of control (Hojat 1983).

It is generally thought that the modern feeling of loneliness and the accompanying negative consequences are becoming an increasingly common phenomenon affecting more and more people. Respective empirical studies have confirmed this widespread opinion (Yalome, 1980; Dołęga, 1997, 1998).

The analysis of theoretical concepts on the basic nature of loneliness reveals several types (ref. to Rembowski, 1992), and indicates the complexity of this phenomenon. In the context of the psychodynamic interpretation (Sullivan 1958, Fromm-Reichmann, 1959), the feeling of loneliness is regarded as the effect of fundamental but unmet and/or poorly shaped psychic needs during infancy and early childhood: a lack of love and close (intimate) relations with others. The same concept deems the exclusive experience of loneliness as a dynamic force showing a pathologic character. From the phenomenological point of view (Rogers, 1973, Moore, 1976), the reasons for loneliness can be attributed to one's immediate sensations, and not to one's childhood memories. As for the existentialists, they perceived loneliness as an essential human experience. Despite the point of loneliness (in existential terms – the painful feeling of alienation), they believed it could facilitate and create our lives. In the context of interactive interpretation of loneliness, there is an approved differentiation, introduced by Weiss (1976), between emotional and social loneliness. *Emotional loneliness* results from either temporarily broken or non-existent intimate interpersonal relations. This leads to a very tormenting form of isolation, and is often experienced by abandoned or widowed persons. *Social loneliness* springs from a lack of social bonds or affiliation with a group with which a person could share interests and joint activities. Those who interpret loneliness as a sociological phenomenon consider it to be an effect of cultural and societal factors, as well as of social structure. I believe that the outcome of the development of civilisation is a human being formed as an externally controllable person needing permanent social approval with regard to its actions and behaviour. The authors of the cognitive interpretation of loneliness (Perlman and Peplau, 1981) highlight the importance of a subjective approach to the state of loneliness, since they regard it as an inter-mediating element between a lack of

real interpersonal relations and the feeling of loneliness. It is possible, under such subjective approach, to separate models of how people in similar social relationships sense their loneliness. According to the theory of social learning, three facts seem essential for the feeling of loneliness to occur: 1) a person's expectations on the locus of control over events, 2) rising social intensification, 3) and a subjective evaluation of the person's psychological situation. Russel, Peplau, Curtone (1980), supporters of the cognitive interpretation of loneliness, find that it has three components: a) lack of intimate relations with others, b) the tendency to break off relations with others, and c) a feeling of lack of belonging to a group and lack of affiliation. They constructed a UCLA scale, called the Loneliness Feeling Scale to measure these three components as indicated above.

A brief review of the interpretations of loneliness makes it clear that loneliness is a complex and multifaceted human experience and that many differing conditions can bring it into the conscience of a contemporary person. The authors of the individual interpretations of loneliness emphasised a wide range of aspects and conditions related to it. A Polish psychologist J. Rembowski (1992) formulated a rather inexact, general interpretation of loneliness. He asserts that loneliness is a complex and multi-dimensional psychosocial human experience, manifesting itself in various forms and with varying strength. Loneliness originates from the dissonance between one's expectations of social relationships, and his/her real potential and abilities. It is an emotional state in which a person is aware of his/her seclusion/isolation from the others, as well as of her/his inability to affect change (Rembowski, 1992).

It should be stressed, however, that the experience of loneliness includes emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components. In Rembowski's (1992) opinion, factors such as the intensity of loneliness, its development over time, and the individual's way of reacting to it affect the experience of loneliness. Usually, persons feeling short-term loneliness attribute their state to external conditions, to causes that are unstable and situational. On the other hand, persons experiencing chronic loneliness see internal and enduring, or even permanent causes for their loneliness. The way a person senses loneliness has controlling features. People who rarely experience loneliness usually attempt to remedy their situation quickly, while chronically lonely people are characterised by decreased pro-social motivation, and they show several non-constructive traits including passiveness, apathy, and depression.

In researching the origins of contemporary loneliness, several variables were taken into consideration, including age, gender, family status, work conditions, housing conditions, and other demographic and cultural variables. The results of this research were often inconsistent and not analogues. Individual authors have had widely different approaches and, consequently, varied methodological

difficulties in dealing with the phenomenon of loneliness. Developing a procedural rationalisation for the feeling of loneliness was a difficult task since loneliness is hard to measure, and many people do not want to speak about their solitude.

Contrary to the majority of researches aimed at finding demographic conditions of the feeling of loneliness (Page, Cole, 1991), our investigations were meant to detect personality determinants of loneliness. From the outcomes of similar researches completed thus far, we know that the several personality variables obstruct the process of establishing satisfactory interpersonal relations and stimulate the development of the feeling of loneliness. These include: low self-esteem (Solano, at al, 1997; Goswick & Jones, 1981); social anxiety, shyness/timidity (Hojat, 1982); neuroticism, (Maroldo, 1981); feeling of external locus of control (Nerviano & Gross, 1976). Some researches also found a significant association between loneliness and interpersonal sensitivity (low self-esteem) and depression and supported the notion that self-blame and self-devaluation are strong correlates of loneliness (Jackson & Cochran, 1991). Loneliness has been linked to such maladies as depression, suicide, hostility, alcoholism, poor self-concept and psychosomatic illnesses (McWhirter, 1990) and although most research has been conducted in North America, it is clear that the negative implications of loneliness are felt regardless of the culture in which it occurs.

Largely, loneliness research has tended to focus on individual factors either on personality factors or lack of social contacts (Jylha & Jokela, 1990). In practice, the majority of researches on the psychological conditions of loneliness focus on the analysis of isolated mechanisms of personality that exercise control over loneliness. Yet, the development of loneliness and its correlation with other personality variables seem to result from a complex internal process and interactions among individual personality variables and environmental factors. According to many studies loneliness is correlated with neuroticisim and is inversely correlated with social support (Hawkley, el. al. 2003).

Relations between individual difference variables and loneliness could be explained by two different models. One model suggests that individual difference variables are related to loneliness through the mediation of social network variables. It is that individual difference variables may reduce people's motivation and/or ability to build and maintain social relationships, which in turn leads to loneliness. The second model, the cognitive bias model, states that both the individual difference variables and loneliness are influenced by the same intrapersonal, cognitive processes. Some people are prone to negative affect and tend to evaluate themselves and their relationships negatively. Levin and Stokes (1986) found that the relations of self-esteem, neuroticism, and depression to loneliness could reflect the cognitive bias model, while extroversion and attitudes toward others were related to loneliness through the mediation of social network

variables. The results indicated partial support for both models for each of the individual difference variables. The two models did a good job of explaining the correlations of the individual difference variables and loneliness.

In our researches, we took into consideration previous studies on personality determinants of the feeling of loneliness, and we based our study on the assumptions of the following theories and concepts: Personality Theory by Eysenck (1970); Temperament Concept by Strelau (1985); Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977); Concept of Measure of Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966).

We also worked from the assumption that the feeling of loneliness might depend on personality variables that build certain hierarchic structures. Further, we included the possibility that the feeling of loneliness could develop under the influence of particular systems of personality variables, i.e.:

Basic temperament traits according to the Strelau's Theory (1985); their physiological mechanism constitutes of: excitation strength of nervous processes, inhibition strength of nervous processes and mobility of behaviour.

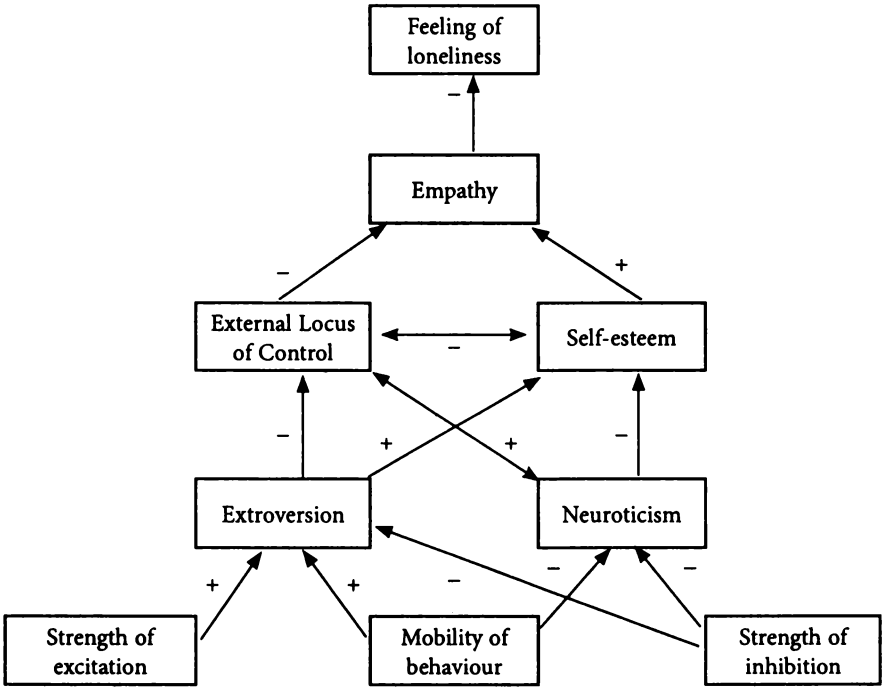
Personality traits conditioned by functional features of the nervous central and autonomic systems, such as: extraversion, neuroticism.

Personality traits developing under the contextual influence of social interactions and reactions, such as: self-esteem level, locus of control (Bandura, 1977, Rotter, 1966).

We assumed that empathy (both emotional and cognitive) could have a mediating influence on, and even prevent development of loneliness. This assumption was made based on extensive data (Grzywak-Kaczyńska, 1971; Morgan, 1979, 1983; Kalliopuska, 1986, Kalliopuska, Laitinen, 1991) which evidenced the importance of empathy in interpersonal relations, as well as in the performance of such professions as therapist, nurse, teacher, i.e. so-called support-oriented professions.

Our research was conducted in a professional group of teachers. Teachers are known to have practically the same percentage of lonely persons as other groups of adults. However, the intensity of the feeling of loneliness experienced by teachers is more differentiated, which makes this particular group worth studying (Dołęga, 1998). From the researches by Dołęga (1998), it can be concluded that teachers show deficits in deeper interpersonal bonds. Moreover, teachers also admit that they expect more support than they are given, as well as more understanding of themselves and their professional situation.

The assumptions which we made were illustrated in the form of a diagram of hypothetical causal dependencies between variables studied by us (ref. to graph 1).



Graph 1. Hypothetical variables conditioning the feeling of loneliness

Method

Subjects

195 teachers were tested, 126 (N) from primary schools and 69 (N) from secondary schools. Of 195 people 159 persons were women, and 36 were men, aged between the ages 25 and 55.

Measures

We used UCLA Loneliness Feeling Scale, which was developed by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978) to assess subjective feelings of loneliness or social isolation. Items for the original version of the scale were based on statements used by lonely individuals. The Scale was used to describe feelings of loneliness, applied to assess three different aspects of loneliness:

a) lack of intimate relations with others (Lon1),

b) tendency to break off relations with others (Lon2), and

c) feeling of lack of belonging to a group and lack of affiliation (Lon3).

To measure personality variables introduced into the research model, the following methods were used: Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) – to measure introversion, extraversion, and neuroticism; Questionnaire to Assess Temperament (Strelau, 1985) – to measure temperament variables, a Self-Esteem Scale for Adults (Battle, 1981) – to assess the self-esteem level (general, social, and personal), 'I-E' Locus of Control Scale – to evaluate the locus of control (Rotter, 1966), Questionnaire of Empathetic Understanding of Other People (Węgliński, 1983) – to measure the cognitive empathy, and, finally – an Emotional Empathy Scale (Mehrabian&Epstein, 1972) – to assess emotional empathy.

Results

Thanks to the confirmation method of path analysis applied to our results, it was possible to determine the participation of personality variables, introduced in the researches on the development of the feeling of loneliness. This method enabled us to analyse the direct and indirect relations among the variables we studied, as well as to expose the structure of interrelations present between the feeling of loneliness and personality variables that constitute its predictors.

The formulas describe relations occurring among personality variables and three different aspects of the feeling of loneliness:

a) lack of intimate relations with others (Lon1),

b) tendency to break off relations with others (Lon2),

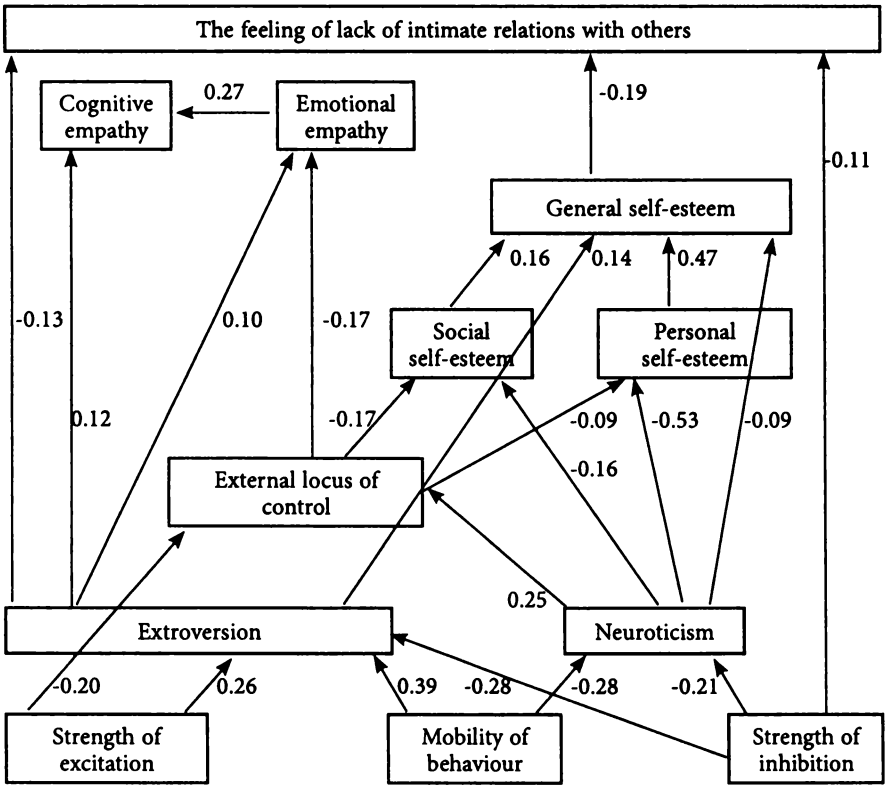
c) feeling of lack of belonging to a group and lack of affiliation (Lon3).

From the results obtained, and owing to the application of the confirmation method of path analysis, we can conclude that the empirical data we gathered confirms the general theoretical model of relations we designed. While analysing the course of individual paths, we received a very detailed and thorough representation of relations between the three aspects of the feeling of loneliness and the personality variables studied. It became clear that the three conditions upon which aspects of loneliness depend vary slightly, but that the trends of relations evidenced and confirmed are similar among the variables we studied. This fact proves that feelings of loneliness are correlated with those personality variables

described, i.e. those whose development is conditioned by physiological features of the nervous system and those which depend on the social context of events.

The relationship between the three aspects of loneliness and the variables we studied are illustrated in three graphs. Graph No. 2 shows the relationship emerged between **the lack of intimate relations with others** (Lon1) and the personality variables. We can see that this aspect of the feeling of loneliness directly depends on several variables as, namely, a weak inhibition of nervous processes, introversion and a low level of general self-esteem. Indirectly, loneliness depends on the strength of excitation of nervous processes (according to Strelau [1985], this strength is a physiological mechanism of reactiveness, a temperament trait); strength of inhibition of nervous processes, mobility of behaviour, neuroticism, a low level of social and personal self-esteem and an external locus of control (Rotter, 1966).

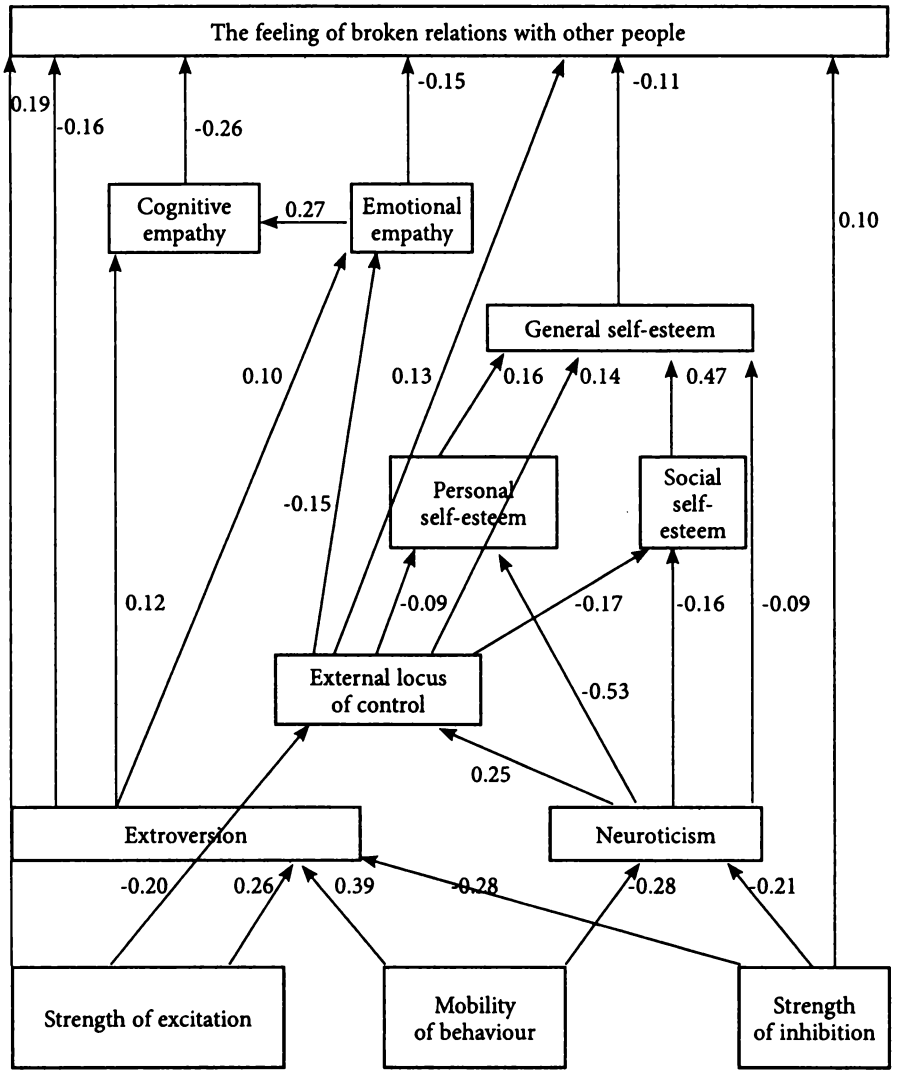
Only as little as 16% of the variables deviation can be explained by the personality variables assumed in the model. Thus, we can expect that some variables, other than those assumed in our theoretical research model, 'participate' in the feeling that we lack close/intimate relations with other people. However, no relation was found between the empathy of the subjects and their lack of close/intimate relations with other people. So we believe that empathy does not play any essential role in preventing feelings of deprivation resulting from a lack of intimate contacts with people. Based on numerous studies revealing empathy's role in establishing close/intimate relations with other people (Hoffman, 1977; Morgan, 1979; Richardson et al, 1994), we might conclude that empathy would moderate the feelings of emotional deprivation due to a lack of close/intimate relations with other people. For example, in situations when empathy would increase the mutual attractiveness of partners in certain interactions, or when empathy would stimulate the effectiveness of processes leading to the creation of interpersonal relations, it takes an important role in preventing the feeling of lack intimate relations. In the latter case, empathy would also indirectly moderate the same feeling of no close/intimate relations with other people, in the measured aspect. But it is necessary, for the purpose of verifying this suggestion, to add variables beyond our research to the scope of our studies, and to statistically verify the study of the extended research model.



Graph 2. Conditions of the feeling of lack of intimate relations with others (Lon1)

The second aspect of the feeling of loneliness measured by us, namely **the tendency to break off relations with others** (Lon2), produced a higher degree of variance (23%); we can anticipate that there are some variables, other than those we measured, which influenced this particular aspect of the feeling of loneliness. The following personality variables (from among all variables under our consideration) directly affect the feeling caused by broken relations with other people: high strength of nervous process excitation, introversion, external locus of control over behaviour and low level of general self-esteem. The feeling caused by broken relations with other people is indirectly influenced by many things, including the strength of nervous process excitation, the strength of nervous process inhibition, mobility of behaviour, introversion, neuroticism, external locus of control and low level of social and individual self-esteem. In the case of this specific feeling, empathy fulfils an important function because it limits its development. According to our

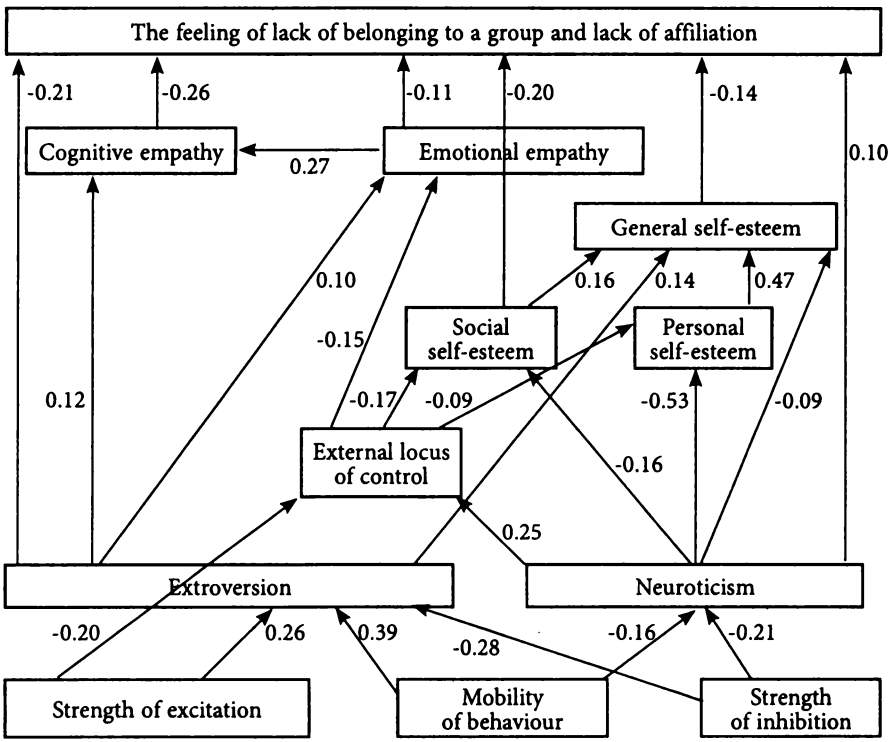
research, emotional empathy had both a direct and, through cognitive empathy, an indirect influence on the limitation of the feeling of broken relations with other people. (Presented in Graph 3).



Graph 3. Conditions of the feeling of broken relations with other people

The statistical analysis showed that we had correctly anticipated the third aspect of the feeling of loneliness, namely **the feeling of lack of belonging to a group and lack of affiliation** (Lon3). With the variables assumed by in our research model, we can explain the 56% variance of this aspect of loneliness. The basic conditions present for those with a feeling of no belonging to and affiliation with a group are: a low level of general and social self-esteem, then, the variables of introversion, and neuroticism. The indirect conditions are: strength of nervous process excitation, strength of nervous process inhibition, a mobility of behaviour, introversion, and an external locus of control.

As for this third aspect of the feeling of loneliness, both cognitive and emotional empathy limits the feeling of no belonging to and affiliation with a group. Analogous to the feeling of breaking off relations with other people, through cognitive empathy, emotional empathy directly and indirectly influences the studied aspect of the feeling of loneliness through cognitive empathy. These relations are illustrated in Graph 4.



Graph 4. Conditions of the feeling of lack of belonging to a group and lack of affiliation

Discussion

Interpreting our results we want to emphasise that they affirmed, to a consequential degree, the assumptions we made on the hierarchic dependencies and relations among psychological variables influencing the feeling of loneliness. The analysis of the influence various aspects of loneliness had on individual personality variables allows us to conclude that temperament variables exert both a direct and indirect impact on the measured aspects of loneliness. The indirect influence of temperamental variables (rooted in physiological mechanisms of the excitation and inhibition strength of nervous processes) on loneliness can be seen in the level of such personality traits as neuroticism, extraversion, and locus of control. According to Rotter (1966), the feeling of locus of control can be positioned either within the personality structures of a person, or in other factors remaining independent of his/her personality.

While interpreting interactions and relations found among temperament variables and the feeling of loneliness, it is important to remember that high excitation strength of nervous processes (which means a low level of reactiveness) activates an inhibiting mechanism of nervous stimulation. This inhibition may force a person to act more desperately (the intensification of behavioural actions) in order to inhibit his/her nervous stimulation. In some situations, such intensified activity of an individual may promote the damage of interpersonal relations, or at least allow them to become much weaker. For persons showing high excitation strength of nervous processes it is characteristic to search out new impressions. Thus, such persons are stimulated to seek as many impulses as possible to help them achieve the optimum activation level of nervous processes. This is why in the behaviour of such persons (with high excitation strength of nervous processes) focusing on interpersonal relations is not a dominant motive, and they can either easily break them off, or can allow their intensity to wane, which leads to the intensification of their feeling of loneliness.

It is commonly accepted that adequate inhibition strength of nervous processes favours more appropriate control over behaviour, and such control facilitates a "correct" observance of social standards of behaviour (Strelau, 1985). So, proper inhibition strength of nervous processes is rooted in tactful and correct relations with other people, and in patience with and control over one's own emotions. This temperament trait advances the observance of standards and patterns that rule interpersonal coexistence. As a result, appropriate inhibition strength of nervous processes may directly cause the feeling of no close/intimate relations with other people to be tempered.

On the contrary, mobility of behaviour, regarded as a temperament trait, seems to have essential importance in those social situations where the ability to adapt

to quickly changing circumstances and events is needed (Strelau, 1985). In our research, we found that the mobility of behaviour change was not directly related with the feeling of loneliness. However, we discovered that it was indirectly related to loneliness through its interactions aimed at reducing neuroticism and increasing the extraversion strength.

According to Eysenck (1970), the level of neuroticism is conditioned by physiological parameters of the autonomous and central nervous systems (i.e. by the ease of reacting and liability of processes occurring in the autonomous nervous system, which also constitutes a neuro-physiological base of emotional reactions). In our research, we discovered that the neuroticism variable indirectly influenced the feeling of loneliness in two ways: first, this neuroticism effected the lower level of social self-esteem of the persons tested, i.e. of general self-esteem and of this aspect of the self-esteem that is formed under social relationships, as well as the self-esteem of a person's own 'ego'. Second, neuroticism favours the development of external locus of control (a person feels that external factors beyond their control greatly influence his/her behaviour). While interpreting those two effects of neuroticism, we must not forget that neurotic persons are, as a rule, highly emotionally labile. They are also very shy and reserved, emotionally unstable, and have difficulty in establishing social relations. They tend to worry and overreact more than normally, do not trust their own abilities and potential, and display strong feelings of inferiority and irritability. These character traits typical of a neurotic person mutually correlate with each other to establish a relatively fixed system of behaviours that indirectly advance the development of the feeling of loneliness in all its aspects.

The extraversion trait also directly and indirectly conditions the three aspects of the feeling of loneliness. However, indirect relations are rather complex. The variable of extraversion comprises two components: sociability and impulsiveness of behaviour, both of which indirectly influence an increase in general self-esteem. Extroversion also stimulates the development of cognitive and emotional empathy, and suppresses the development of the feeling of loneliness.

For our research, we have adopted the self-esteem concept outlined by Battle (1990), consisting of three aspects. One of them is a general concept definition of self-esteem pertaining to all attitudes of a given person. In particular, it pertains to those individual parameters which give a person his/her individualism, i.e. they constitute his/her unique 'sum and substance', and distinguish him/her from other people. This attitude allows a person to sense his/her identity and unsurpassed value, and helps him/her to construct satisfying interpersonal relations. From this point of view, it seems clear that an adequate level of general self-esteem not only eliminates the development of loneliness directly, but also does so indirectly – as a sum of partial aspects of self-esteem. J. Battle believes that self-esteem concerns

two areas of an individual's functioning: his/her social relations (social self-esteem), as well as references to himself/herself, to his/her 'ego' (personal self-esteem). An adequate social self-esteem stimulates the feeling of belonging to and affiliation with a reference group and it eliminates the feeling of non-existence of relations with a group. Self-esteem also predicts psychological health; it is inversely linked to anxiety, depression and loneliness though positively linked to subjective well-being (Sedikides, al. al. 2004). At the same time, social self-esteem upholds the feeling of being supported by a group when necessary. Both men and women appear to be protected against loneliness by spending more time with women but not with men (Hawkley, et. al. 2003). This may be because women tend to be more empathetic to interlocutor and more willing to help. Interactions with women are also seen as based on meaningfulness and closeness. Boley and his colleagues conducted researches (1995) which revealed that the feeling of a lack of support existing between members of a group was one of the more significant, and chronic professional stresses for teachers (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, Baglioni, 1995). Teachers' family, professional colleagues and friends provide them with the support necessary to handle stress and solve problems. Persons who can professionally support teachers in their work, such as methodologists or psychologists were not shown to be a real supportive or encouraging element for them (Sęk, 1996). So, the feeling that there are no relations with a group is one of the aspects of the feeling of loneliness, which directly affects the proficient performance of teachers and can put their health in danger. In this way, it is evident that the potentiality to show empathy can play a large part in the process of performing the teacher's profession. Indirectly, it helps to reduce the professional stress of teachers, and protects them against professional burnout symptoms (Kliś, Kossewska, 1997).

Our research also confirmed the influence of an external locus of control over behaviour on the development of loneliness, i.e. of its aspect of sensing the severed relations with others. There is also an indirect relation between the locus of control and the feeling of loneliness that decreases the level of self-esteem (general, personal, and social) and hinders the development of emotional empathy. The reason for this lies in the fact that the external locus of control promotes a lack of trust in a person's own abilities and potential, along with passiveness (Rotter et al., 1972, in: Drwal, 1995). This leads to social isolation, increased alienation and, ultimately, loneliness. In addition, the locus of control affects the way a person interprets the sources of his/her successes and failures. A person who senses that control over his behaviour lies outside him/her believes that all his/her setbacks are caused by own shortcomings, and all successes achieved happened only owing to favourable external circumstances (Drwal, 1995).

Our research showed that the ability to be empathetic helped to reduce the feeling of loneliness in its two aspects: the feeling of broken relations with others,

and the feeling of lack of belonging to and affiliation with a reference group. Psychology regards empathy as a composed phenomenon: an emotional-cognitive or cognitive-emotional one, depending on the sequence of components engaged in the process of empathising. The predomination of one of these empathy components over the other dictates both the quality of the process of empathising and its controlling role over our behaviour (Szmukier, 1989). Our research also revealed that emotional empathy directly influenced the feeling of loneliness, but also did so indirectly – through cognitive empathy. This outcome supports the idea, already referred to, that empathy is a complex event, a phenomenon actualised during the process of constructing interpersonal relations. In the process of empathising, emotion-generating stimuli also animate the cognitive processes that are actualised in the form of cognitive presentation of events or in the form of presentation of other people's feelings and experiences (Bonino, 1996). In this way, attempts to understand the emotional states and situations of others reinforce the successful construction of satisfying interpersonal relations. When one person expresses empathy for another person's feelings or when he/she comprehends feelings of the other person, both people are gratified. One of them feels he/she is understood and the other, who feels compassion, feels that he/she receives a gift because the first one is thankful to him/her. By producing the emotional support, the empathetic person increases the chance that his/her intimate relations with the second person will be formed or at least maintained, and in this way, he/she also receives emotional gratification.

We can conclude that the relations, as detected in our research and existing among the feeling of loneliness and self-esteem, the feeling of having control, introversion, and empathy, can be two-sided relationships. This means that low levels of self-esteem and empathy, an external locus of control, and a high level of introversion constitute a specific 'constellation' of personality traits. This constellation can produce an ineffective approach to difficulties of an interpersonal nature, as well as a sort of predisposition to expect setbacks in social situations. In consequence, this can lead a person to avoid such contacts. A feeling of loneliness may arise if a person secludes himself/herself from other people, or if he/she is secluded from them due to his/her weak aptitude for empathy or high level of introversion. On the other hand, the feeling of loneliness releases the feeling of alienation; this is a feedback-process. And the produced feeling of alienation secondarily depresses the level of self-esteem and capacity to empathise with others, which had already been reduced by the feeling of not having satisfactory social relations.

The outcomes obtained in our research show that our assumed model of unilateral relationships occurring between the feeling of loneliness and the personality variables we had stated has been empirically and statistically

verified and a high degree of verisimilitude has been lent to it. We also believe that bilateral, causative relationships between the variables we investigated may also exist. However, further research is necessary to verify this hypothesis.

Conclusions

Summing up our researches, we can state that their results confirmed our assumptions i.e. the theoretical model of relationships between the feeling of loneliness in its three aspects and the selected personality variables.

1. The preventive role of empathy was confirmed. We showed that empathy does limit the development of the feeling of loneliness in its two aspects: the feeling of broken relations with other persons, and the feeling of lack of belonging to and affiliation with a reference group.

2. Emotional empathy directly influences loneliness by decreasing it; this influence is enhanced by other indirect factors mediated through the activation of a cognitive aspect of empathy.

3. The preventive influence of empathy on the feeling of loneliness seems to have a great practical importance. It encourages us to develop new ways of combating loneliness by helping teachers develop an ability to empathise. This ability will help teachers to establish satisfying interpersonal contacts at school, among students and colleagues that are meaningful for their personal and professional situations.

4. The ability to empathise with others prevents the development of loneliness. This is why empathy can indirectly check and neutralise symptoms of chronic professional stress, since its intensity depends on the level of social support one receives and it can have various negative health consequences.

5. The empirical verification of the theoretical model of interdependencies, found between the development of the feeling of loneliness and personality conditions of this feeling, makes us willing to formulate ensuing research questions. More extensive studies are expected to bring answers to the following questions:

- What other personality traits, not investigated here, in combination with their interactive relations with environmental variables, would explain more explicitly the feeling of non-existing close/intimate relations with other people?
- What function could the ability to empathise perform in a new, extended system of variables that affect the feeling of loneliness?
- Does the structure of psychological variables that conditions loneliness change depending on the gender of tested persons, their age or place of work?

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