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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LONELINESS AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS*

ABSTRACT: The study investigated Sullivan's view that loneliness is related to the type of childhood friends and activities and Zilboorg's view that lonely adults are more hostile in interpersonal situations. A sample of 88 female college students filled in a loneliness questionnaire, Leary's Interpersonal Check List, and answered questions about childhood friends. The hostility hypothesis was confirmed and the friendship hypothesis partially confirmed. The more lonely Ss were significantly more hostile-submissive. The findings suggest that a person's own behavior is an enduring mode of interaction responsible for bringing about, perpetuating, aggravating, and/or solving loneliness feelings.

The experience of loneliness is not a new phenomenon specific to our contemporary society but it may be increasing. Sullivan (1953) perhaps has formulated the most integrated theory about the development of loneliness. He postulated various needs which occur in the developmental stages of personality and become components of the loneliness experience in the adult person. Thus, needs for contact and tenderness (0 to 2 years), adult participation in the child's activities (2 to 6 years), peers (6 to 9 years), acceptance (9 to 14 years), and intimate exchange with a friend (14 to 16 years) become the components of the eventual loneliness experience of the adult. Sullivan believed that after loneliness has fully developed in the pre-adolescent era, it remains relatively unchanged throughout life. Loneliness, for Sullivan, was the main driving force to form interpersonal situations despite the really severe anxiety which may develop.

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Zilboorg (1938) in attempting to explain how loneliness, narcissism, and hostility are interrelated in lonely persons stated that they are self-centred and have difficulty hiding their hostility. Their hostility readily became observable in interpersonal situations.

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether persons who report to be more lonely than others also say they have fewer friends and activities and are more hostile in interpersonal situations as Sullivan and Zilboorg respectively suggested.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 88 female first-year students from St. Bride's College, St. John's, Newfoundland. This is a two-year, all-female, Roman Catholic residential college which is affiliated with, and offers the first two years of the teacher-training programme of, the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Ss' ages ranged from 16 to 22 years, with a mean age of 17.5.

Instruments

Sisenwein (1964) developed a 75-item loneliness questionnaire that correlated, for a male-cadet sample, .72 with self-ratings on a 6-point continuum of loneliness. Similar correlations were obtained with the female Ss in this study. He reported test-retest reliabilities of .83 and .85.

The Interpersonal Check List of Leary (1957) has 128 adjectives or adjective phrases describing different aspects of interpersonal behavior. It was so designed that its eight variables relate to each other as shown in Figure 1. In addition to the variables on the circumflex continuum, the circle can also be viewed as a two-dimensional grid, with the perpendicular axis representing the Dominance-Submissive (DOM) continuum and the horizontal axis, the Love-Hostility (LOV) continuum.

By checking the 128 adjective phrases Ss indicated qualities they saw in themselves. The scoring unit is S's selection or rejection of a phrase. A person's score on each octant is the number of items checked as true for self. As there are 16 items in each octant, the range of possible scores for each octant is 0 to 16. No use is made of standard scores or other forms of scaling assumptions (La Forge & Sucek, 1966). The Love and Dominance vectors are obtained from the scores on the eight categories with the following formulae:

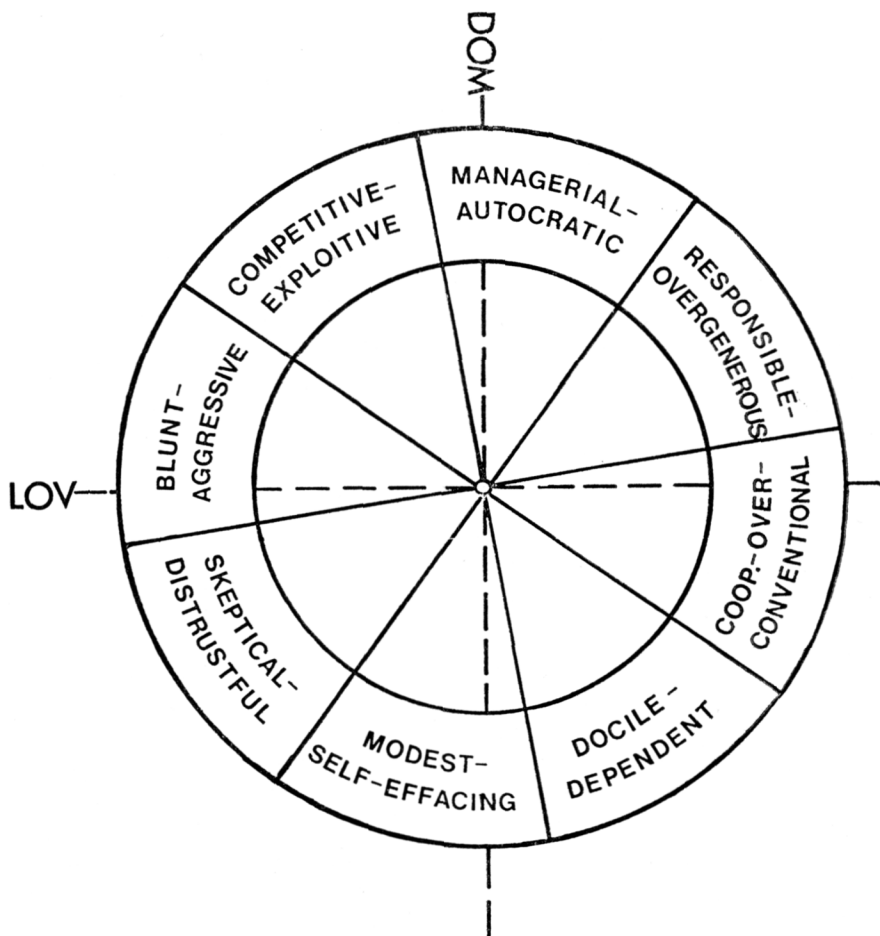
$$\text{DOM} = \text{MA} - \text{MS} + 0.7 (\text{CE} + \text{RO} - \text{DD} - \text{SD})$$

$$\text{LOV} = \text{CO} - \text{BA} + 0.7 (\text{RO} + \text{DD} - \text{SD} - \text{CE})$$

Test-retest reliability coefficients have been reported for octant scores of .78 (La Forge & Sucek, 1966) and for Dominance and Love scores, .90 (Leary, 1957).

In addition to filling in these forms, Ss also completed a 28-item questionnaire which asked for information about place of birth, order

of birth, income of father, educational level of the parents, social standing of the family, feelings toward parents, siblings, childhood, and adolescence experiences, number of family residence movements, and number of contacts with relatives. As part of this questionnaire Ss answered three questions about their growing-up years: the number of close friends, fondness for solitary activities, and fondness for being with other persons.



The Eight Variable Categories of the Interpersonal Check List with the LOV and DOM vectors

Figure 1

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Scores for the Loneliness Questionnaire were rank-ordered. Groups of low and high scorers were formed from Ss with the 30 lowest (1 to 33) and the 30 highest (95 to 215) scores.

A *t*-test for the mean scores on the Love-Hostility dimension showed that the more lonely Ss had significantly lower scores, indicating greater hostility than did the less lonely group (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Comparisons of High and Low Loneliness Groups on
Leary's Interpersonal Check List

	Low Loneliness (N = 30)		High Loneliness (N = 30)		<i>t</i>
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Dominance-Submissive	-2.6	5.13	-5.8	5.73	2.19*
Love-Hostility	8.2	5.28	3.8	8.34	2.38**
Managerial-Autocratic	3.4	2.1	4.0	2.7	0.83
Competitive — Exploitive	3.4	1.9	3.9	2.6	0.77
Blunt-Aggressive	4.1	2.3	5.7	3.1	2.23*
Skeptical-Distrustful	4.2	2.3	7.2	2.9	4.50**
Modest-Self-effacing	5.9	2.7	7.9	2.4	2.99**
Docile-Dependent	6.4	2.7	7.3	3.1	1.28
Cooperative — Over Conventional	8.4	2.5	7.2	2.8	1.75
Responsible-Overgenerous	6.7	2.8	7.1	3.8	0.48

**p* < .05 (two-tail)

***p* < .01 (two-tail)

The answers to the three items on number and type of childhood friends were in the hypothesized direction (Table 2). However, only the item on fondness for solitary activities reached the .05 level of significance.

TABLE 2
Chi-squares between Childhood Experiences and Loneliness

Item	Chi-square*	<i>p</i> <
1. Number of friends while growing up	3.26	.10
2. Fond of being with other children or adults as a child	2.13	.15
3. Fond of solitary activities while growing up	4.63	.05

*Yates correction was used.

Leary's scale also yielded personality measures on the Dominance-Submissive dimension and on the eight octant variables. The significant difference (Table 1) between the means on the Dominance vector indicates that the more lonely individuals were more submissive than the less lonely Ss. The differences on the Love and Dominance variables shows Ss reporting higher loneliness have higher scores on both hostility and submissive dimensions. The three Leary categories which were the significant contributors to these differences on the Love and Dominance variables were: Blunt-Aggressive, Skeptical-Distrustful, and Meek-Self-effacing. Thus, phrases on the Blunt-Aggressive category indicated that the more lonely Ss were more impatient with others' mistakes, more self-seeking and sarcastic, more often unfriendly, and more frequently angry and outspoken, than were the less lonely Ss. On Skeptical-Distrustful, items such as "skeptical, often gloomy, resents being bossed, hard to impress, touchy and easily hurt, frequently disappointed," were more often endorsed by the more lonely Ss as being self-descriptive. On the Meek-Self-effacing category some of the self-descriptive items chosen more frequently by the lonely Ss were: lack of self-confidence, easily embarrassed, shy, usually give in, meek and modest.

There is no direct evidence that the more lonely Ss acted in a more hostile manner towards others or were perceived as being more hostile by them. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that the loneliness of a substantial portion of the Ss may have had a relatively long history. More lonely individuals reported having been more fond of solitary activities during their younger years than the low scorers. There was also a non-significant trend for the more lonely Ss to report having fewer friends during their childhood and being less fond of being with children and adults in their childhood than the less lonely Ss.

These personality descriptions of the more lonely Ss also suggest that, in many instances, their own behaviour is responsible for bringing about, perpetuating, aggravating, and/or solving their loneliness experience. If one assumes that people generally act in a manner similar to the interactional patterns they describe themselves as having when responding to Leary's scale, then it is plausible that the behaviours which characterize lonely individuals on the Blunt-Aggressive, Skeptical-Distrustful and Meek-Self-effacing variables would likely tend to hinder the formation of positively valued, mutually rewarding interpersonal relationships.

When the finding that the more lonely Ss reported having fewer close friends and engaging in more solitary activities when growing up is considered in conjunction with the personality descriptions obtained on Leary's check list, there seems to be support for the view that people who identify themselves as being more lonely are characterized by relatively enduring modes of interpersonal interaction. Here, of course, the inference is that childhood conditions of the Ss who said they had fewer close friends and also engaged in more solitary activities when growing up, actually were as described.

The possibility must be considered that people with different degrees of loneliness might respond differently to questionnaires. This cannot be ruled out since no direct check was made on the veridicality of Ss' responses.

RESUME: On a étudié l'hypothèse de Sullivan selon laquelle la solitude serait reliée au genre d'activités et d'amitiés durant l'enfance et celle de Zilboorg selon laquelle les adultes solitaires seraient plus hostiles dans les situations interpersonnelles. On a demandé à un échantillon de 88 collégiennes de remplir un questionnaire sur la solitude, de répondre au "Leary's Interpersonal Check List" ainsi qu'à des questions sur leur amitiés d'enfance. Les deux hypothèses ont été partiellement confirmées. Les résultats suggèrent que le comportement propre à une personne est relié au fait de susciter, d'entretenir, d'aggraver et/ou de résoudre ses sentiments de solitude.

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