

# LONELINESS: SELF-DISCREPANCY AND SOCIOLOGICAL VARIABLES<sup>1</sup>

J. A. MOORE

*Special Services  
Roman Catholic School Board  
Central Newfoundland*

## Abstract

This study attempted to verify various viewpoints about loneliness. In a sample of first-year college women, loneliness was related to a discrepancy between perceived and reflected self, and father's level of income. There was no support for loneliness being related to discrepancies between perceived and ideal self, ideal and reflected self, number of changes in residence and mother's level of education.

## Résumé

Cette étude a tenté de vérifier divers points de vue au sujet de la solitude. Parmi un groupe d'étudiantes inscrites en première année au niveau collégial, la solitude était en rapport avec la divergence entre le soi perçu et reflété, et le niveau de revenu du père. On n'a pas trouvé que la solitude était liée à des divergences entre le soi perçu et le soi idéal, entre le soi idéal et le soi reflété, le nombre de changements de résidence et le niveau d'éducation de la mère.

Rogers (1961, 1970) has expressed a view that loneliness is an estrangement between the individual and his own inner feelings. The lonely person is responding mainly to the roles and expectations society assigns him. In his search for acceptance and love, he develops a facade which alienates him from himself and prevents him from communicating his real experiences to another person. Rogers suggests that loneliness is related to the discrepancy between one's actual and idealised self-view.

Whitehorn's (1961) views on loneliness are similar to Rogers. Whitehorn, too, sees the cause of loneliness in the lack of meaningful personal relationships. Attempts to form friendships which are based on changing the image one presents to others are likely to increase feelings of loneliness. Presenting a different image to others in turn causes the responses of others to vary. The resulting change in feedback from others often confuses the individual's sense of who and what he is. Thus, Whitehorn proposes that loneliness is closely related to the discrepancies between the individual's self-view and the way others view him (the reflected self).

Bowman (1955) attempts to give some reasons for the development of loneliness. However, unlike Rogers and Whitehorn, he looks at today's society rather than phenomenological feelings of the individual. He points out three major changes in our industrial-urban society as probably conducive to feelings of loneliness. The first is the decline in primary group contact. This has resulted from a decrease in family size, increase in mother's participation in activities outside the home, a decreased likelihood that children could see their fathers at work and know the type of work their fathers performed, and an increase in grouping children by age, particularly at school. In a similar manner, family mobility separates relatives and restricts communications within the larger kinship group. This increase in mobility is the second societal change which would be conducive to loneliness, according to Bowman. An increase in upward social mobility is the third factor leading to increasing the likelihood of experiencing loneliness. Increases in birth rates and educational opportunities in our industrial-urban society for the lower classes have resulted in greater upward social mobility. Bowman stated that an increase in educational level, compared to one's parents, is indicative of upward social mobility. The upwardly mobile individual would feel isolated and lonely among the mem-

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bers of the aspired for class, due to different standards and practices, before he accepts or is accepted into the new class.

The above three views on loneliness are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Bowman's views are concerned with the development of, and the present state of, our society which contribute to feelings of loneliness. It is the present state of the person experiencing loneliness which Rogers and Whitehorn are generally concerned with. Thus, for a lonely person changes in society could correlate with changes within the phenomenological self and both the phenomenological and sociological viewpoints may complement each other, and any research which supports one need not necessarily cast doubt on the other.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the following hypotheses:

(1) There is a positive relationship between loneliness and the discrepancy between the self-view and reflected self-view.

(2) There is a positive relationship between loneliness and the discrepancy between the self and ideal self-views.

(3) There is a positive relationship between loneliness and the number of times an individual has changed his place of residence up to the end of his high-school years.

(4) Loneliness is positively related to the subject's father's level of income and mother's educational level. The inference for this sample of college students being that upward social mobility would be indicated by a relatively lower parental socio-economic level.

METHOD

Ss were 88 female first-year students from St. Bride's College, St. John's, Newfoundland. This

is a 2-year, all female, Roman Catholic, residential college which is affiliated with, and offers the first two years of the teacher-training program of the Memorial University of Newfoundland. S's ages ranged from 16 to 22 years (mean 17.5).

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

A 44-item adjective Q-sort developed by Cohen (1960) was used for measuring the perceived-self, ideal-self and reflected-self. An 11-point rectangular sort required the subject to place 4 adjectives at a point on the continuum from most applicable to least applicable. The discrepancy score between any two Q-sorts is obtained by first measuring the number of units each adjective changes its position. Since there are no established criteria for the perfect sort, the sign or direction of the difference is not considered. The total discrepancy (D) score between the two sorts is the sum of these 44 units.

As part of a larger questionnaire Ss answered three questions: the level of income earned by their father, the highest level of education reached by their mother and the number of times they have moved residence up to the end of high school.

Scores for the loneliness questionnaire were rank-ordered. Groups of low and high scorers were formed from Ss with the 30 lowest (1-22) and the 30 highest (95-215) scores. The discrepancy scores between the Low and High loneliness groups were compared by t-tests. The questions on father's income, mother's educational level and family movements were collapsed so that a 2 x 2

TABLE 1  
Comparison of High and Low Loneliness Groups

|                          | High (N=30)                |      | Low (N=30) |      |              |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|------|------------|------|--------------|
|                          | $\bar{X}$                  | S.D. | $\bar{X}$  | S.D. |              |
| Dps-is .....             | 117.9                      | 38.8 | 107.3      | 37.0 | t=1.05       |
| Dps-rs .....             | 105.8                      | 30.4 | 94.0       | 23.1 | t=1.68*      |
| Dis-rs .....             | 123.3                      | 35.9 | 110.4      | 30.8 | t=1.45       |
| Father's Income .....    | \$15,000+ vs. \$15,000—    |      |            |      | $X^2=4.57^*$ |
| Mother's Education ..... | Post H.S. vs. H.S. or less |      |            |      | $X^2=1.42$   |
| Family Movements .....   | None vs. at Least once     |      |            |      | $X^2=0.77$   |

\*P < .05

Chi-square test using Yates correction was performed.

### RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The mean discrepancy score between the perceived self and the reflected self (Dps-rs) was significantly higher for the High loneliness group than for the Low loneliness group (Table 1). Thus hypothesis 1 was supported.

The mean discrepancy score between the perceived self and the idealised self (Dps-is) was higher but not significantly so (Table 1). The Chi-square on family movements before high-school were not significant (Table 1). Thus hypotheses 2 and 3 were not confirmed.

There was a greater number of fathers of lower incomes and mothers of lower educational level in the High loneliness group (Table 1). However, only the former was significant at the .05 level. Thus hypothesis 4 was only partially supported.

Although only one of the three discrepancies between these aspects of the self (perceived, ideal and reflected) reached a level of significance, the results suggest that these discrepancies tend to go with more marked loneliness experiences. The greater discrepancy between the perceived and reflected self found in this study contrasts with the failure of Eddy (1961) and Sisenwein (1964) to find discrepancies in the subjects' actual social environment. One possible explanation is that an individual's feelings of loneliness are not necessarily the result of the real characteristics of his social environment but rather of what he experiences or perceives his relationship with social environment to be.

There is partial support for the idea that upward movement away from the socio-economic level of the parent as indicated by father's annual income and mother's level of education is related to loneliness. However, there was no support for Bowman's other contentions. It could be that the societal changes might not apply to this Newfoundland sample where the largest city has a population of 100,000. This might not be what Bowman means by an urbanized society. It could be on the other hand that Bowman's points are not valid. Cox (1965) contends that urban living offers greater opportunities for individual choices

and basing one's friendships on interests, abilities, and understanding rather than on kinship ties or the proximity of living arrangements.

Bowman contends that upward social mobility is related to a sense of loneliness, which he attributes to the attenuation of earlier social ties. However, there is no direct evidence in the present study for this claim. Bowman suggests that the psychological difficulties of the upwardly mobile are short lived due to (1) eventual acceptance of, and by, the aspired-for class and (2) a vertical movement that is not far from one's previous social class.

The possibility must be considered that people with different degrees of loneliness might respond differently to the questions asked. This is a possibility since no direct check was made on veridicality of subjects' responses.

In conclusion loneliness as a subjective experience appears influenced by a disparity between one's self-view and one's perceptions of others views of oneself and also by upward social mobility.

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