

*The Role of Empathy in Experiencing of Loneliness of Others and Existential-
Behavioral Training in the Empathy Development.*

Emma Meshcheryakova*¹, Elena Litke*²

*¹Tomsk State University, Russia, *²Retirement Fund of Tomsk Region, Russia

0202

The Asian Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013



iafor

iafor
The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

On the one hand, modern post-industrial information society gives people the opportunity to access the global information space, and on the other hand enlarge the gap between species homo sapiens represents. As famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche says: «I do not run from people proximity: just the distance, the age-old distance which runs between men, drives me to the loneliness». Loneliness is one of the key existential problems in modern man being, to which psychology just getting close. It is an especially important issue in the age of globalization. Everywhere in the world the value experience of loneliness, which is not of less importance for the spiritual formation of man than authentic communication and social contacts, is leveled. You could even say that loneliness is a kind of psychological contribution to preserve the integrity of personality – after all in the presence of loneliness the opportunity of intimacy is almost absent. «Mad» society (Michel Foucault) generates «mad» people, so modern man in order to save himself, his integrity, his mental and psychological health, has to go into loneliness, plunging into his nobody dissolvable (Soren Kierkegaard) fundamentally inner life. It can be concluded that loneliness is a way to protect oneself in this spontaneous and chaotic changing world, the possibility to obtain value-notional guiding lines, some starting «sense-creation» matrix, which is not possible in «mad» society.

Loneliness as a typical *anthropic* characteristic of human being, is always seen as multileveled and many-sided phenomenon. Different typologies subdivide loneliness into components according to the characteristics of the subject (age, level of maturity, features of experience, perception, etc.). The typology of William Sadler and Thomas Johnson, presented in their joint paper «From Loneliness to *Anomia*» [3] is interesting. The researchers separate four measuring of loneliness out:

1. From interpersonal point of view the object is concrete people who are significant to individual, some referential group, rejection or avoidance that leads to the loneliness experience in this measuring.

2. The social measuring of loneliness arises, primarily, in condition of social isolation or public ostracism. The reasons are alienation, aversion, imprisonment, hospice, pension, resignation, fragmentation of society, a high degree of mobility, uncertainty or disintegration of traditional groups and the short life of groups. A sense of social isolation is often mixed with doubt, the striving to belong to certain integrity, anxiety about social identity and meaning of everyday confrontations with other people.

3. Cultural: a typical feature of this measuring - feeling of tearing their own culture off, its heritage, nostalgia, disunity with traditional meanings, values and guidelines. The cause of this measuring origin can be immigration, deportation, rapid social changes, revolutions, exile, failed youth's attempting of identifying with their own culture.

4. Space: for this type the feeling of disunity of me and isolation from being, nature, the cosmos and God is typical. It can be peculiar to individuals and to the whole nations and epochs as well. Its reflections are religious existentialism, in which man understands as a lonely restless soul, and Eastern philosophy.

We suppose that all typologies of the phenomenon of loneliness, including this one, can be generalized into two types - the loneliness as a conscious choice (anthropotypical characteristic of a human), and loneliness as a detachment, the impossibility of being-in-the-world (Martin Heidegger). In other words, people may be able in loneliness voluntarily or forcibly. The methodological basis of this

generalizing is the paradigm of subjectivity (S. Rubinstein, K. A. Abulhanova-Slavskaja, A. V. Brushlinskii, V. V. Znakov), which has just mastered and formed in psychology. According to this position, in both cases, *thrust* was on the man, his subjective experiences, his deliberate choice, his will and personal freedom made. This interpretation was *excellently* illustrated by the expression of Nietzsche, who writes that there are two kinds of loneliness. For one, loneliness - it is an escape of sick person, for another - an escape from the sick. The great philosopher probably experienced both kinds of loneliness - primarily the second, and then, unfortunately, the first.

We can assume that in the present there are no higher measuring of loneliness - social, cultural, space, and there is only an interpersonal level. It does not carry deep existential feelings and is temporary and situational. In general, the examination of interpersonal loneliness (loneliness «by roles») is a tribute to the classic paradigm by itself, as there is an identification of a human with the personality (not only the recognition of the personality just as «social role» of a human). In post non-classical paradigm interpersonal loneliness it is enough formal phenomenon.

The state of cosmic loneliness, which includes a layer of everyday experiences and has a permanent (timeless) and super situational nature, possesses the great potential for psychotherapy. At this level, a man is able to rise above himself and the whole world in the sense of that he has the opportunity to see the reality on the other side, abstract from it.

Despite the fact that for many people the notion of loneliness carries negative cultural connotations, its experiencing is an essential component of a modern man being. Voluntary loneliness assumes going away from society to itself, forced loneliness also takes one away from people, but not to itself, as commonly thought, but from itself. Therefore, there is a burning issue about lack of auto communication. A man cannot be alone with himself because of the overall social influence and ubiquity penetration of civilization in our lives. The scale and availability of different communication channels make the communicating superficial. O. V. Lukyanov names modern culture «the culture of loneliness» and he writes that when quantity of means of communication grows, the deficit of communication's meaning grows too. [4] Man is as if in zero-gravity: on the one hand there is the lack of meaningful social contacts, and on the other hand - the lack of autocommunication. Viktor Frankl called this state existential vacuum. [5]

In this connection, no less important issue is empathy. After all, the ability to arbitrarily «penetrate» to the emotional world of another person is the foundation of balanced relationships, and balanced relationships with the outside world permit to organize contacts with oneself, open up new horizons, to make the oneself phenomenological world deeper, richer and full.

The term «empathy» came to scientific psychology in the early twentieth century, but in the Russian psychology was injected only in the early 70's by T. P. Gavrilova. She affirms that the empathy recognized by Wilhelm Dilthey and his followers as the main method of the spirits sciences as «understanding» sciences opposed to rational explanation in the natural sciences which are «explanatory» sciences. [6]

There are many different definitions. Anna Freud gives the following: «Empathy - is the understanding of emotional state, entering into feelings of another man, the ability to feel himself in his place; implies that a person, feeling themselves the object, continues to recognize their own identity». [7] Empathy is a complex process, the essence of which is a comprehension of the inner world of another man. Carl Rogers (1975) wrote: «The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the «as if» condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is *as if* I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this «as if» quality is lost then the state is one of identification». [8]

Empathic comprehension, when the therapist transmits the perceived content to the client, considered by Rogers is the third most important condition of a person-centered therapy, closely interconnected with the others two – authenticity and congruence. Empathy does not imply appraisal, blaming for attempts to open unconscious feelings, since they can be traumatic. Empathetic person, pointing to the possible meanings of the Other's feelings, helps him experience them more fully and structurally. Being with Other means to lay for some time your own viewpoints and values aside, to enter into his world without any bias. This means that empathetic person remains with himself.

We postulate that empathy is not a natural gift, which is either given by birth or not. It can be developed, at that understanding the responsibility that we take. Lack of control over the ability of emotional feeling Other's world can be fatal to both sides.

If we turn to the sources, we can say that the feeling of loneliness originate from the ability of the human mind to divide the world into its constituents, to differentiate it and make a choice (like or dislike). But child is born without a personal identity. He does not even have the ability to feel his own body apart from the world, mother, and separate the I and not the I. Later, under the pressure of social norms and contracts he learns the need of selfish opposition to all the rest, and dips into the disintegration area. That is the person divides communication partners on their's own and others, near and far, necessary and unnecessary people. This separation in the end generates loneliness. Empathy allows to take the Other's loneliness as an existential given preserving the immunity of borders of his personality. According to Karl Rogers [9], empathy may include not only understanding of Other's feelings, but also an emotional response to them, a kind of feedback, which implies the involvement and supportiveness.

Empathic «penetration» into emotions and feelings of Other helps to draw a conclusion about its semantic fullness, values and content. It relates to the content of the experience of loneliness as well. Loneliness and empathy can be considered as two opposite phenomenon. Loneliness in fact, is the lack of a sense of connectedness with the world and people. Through empathy, in contrast, deep, personal-colored connection with Other is built.

Empathetic person can conclude has the experience of loneliness constructive or destructive function, is it lawfully to interfere in the internal world of the Other, or he

knowingly and with full realization of his/her decision move away from society? Understanding feelings of Other should be based on knowing of their own responsibility and developed sense of morality: empathy does not give the moral right to interfere in anyone's internal world, even with the positive intention, since feelings and their causes can be interpreted wrongly, mistakenly, and the invasion can bring harm.

However, if the state of loneliness is destructive and associated in the people minds with «throwing out», needlessness, isolation, negative experiences, a possible solution is trying of empathic sensation with him. And the experience of mutual (two-sided) empathy permits to reduce the destructive effects of forced loneliness, to realize the unity, synergism, continuity of immanent relations among people. In this case, empathy has great semantic, synergistic and psychotherapeutic potential.

V. I. Kabrin understands a man as a complex constellation of communicative worlds and postulates communicative essence of life. The meaning of their being a man gain in a process of discovery and creation of their own ways of communication with others, with the world and with himself. [10] In this case, the destructive loneliness can be compared with communicative stress, which containing the «experience of existential anxiety,» and the creative loneliness with the communicative trance, «experience of existential determination». Exactly here arise an area of autokommunication or metacommunication (by V. I. Kabrin). In other words, man's metaphorical level can be so high that he/she is able to get communicative trans from loneliness.

It is logical to assume, that going into transcommunication area, as «united eidetic semantic space of meeting» (V. I. Kabrin) is possible only through the experience of loneliness and empathy. Irvin Yalom note exactly the meeting with loneliness as a necessary condition of a deep and sensible involvement in the Other. Experiences of higher loneliness, cosmic measuring of it, its transcendence brings a man to a fundamentally new level of being - the level of universal cosmic unity experience. Speaking in mystics terms, to feel the unity with the cosmos, one must experience the feeling of despair and isolation (as a symbolic ritual of «inner fire» cleaning), that is only overcome all the stages of loneliness, one can exceed it, into a state of Other's empathic feeling.

«A man must carry his inner growth out by himself, but how?» - asks V. V. Nalimov, noting that «we live in the internal space less than in the external» [11, p. 77]. Anomalous communicative trans (when by Kabrin «loosing of interpersonal skill as a semantic attitude to the world and to itself» occurs [11]) in terms by V. V. Nalimov can be considered as *hyper personality* when as a result of avoiding feelings of loneliness at the interpersonal level may appear «correlative connectedness of semantic similarly oriented individuals», that is «thoughtless behavior of the excited crowd,» [11, p. 81]. This communicative anomaly or pseudo attitude with another person replacing autokommunication (or, according to V. I. Kabrin, metacommunication as a dialogue with yourself about the «how, why, why,» etc.), is only a rough pretentious imitation of an original transcommunication. If over a man prevailed extroverted desires and aspirations, he searches for the senses in the outside world, without appealing to the spiritual world, which located inside. Neurotic aspiration for searching and appropriation things of the material world, imposing to us

by the consumer society, only become stronger if it comply with. It will never be blase, since the objects of desire are limited and relative. While resorting inwards leads to absolute, limited senses.

However, the concept of *hyper personality* one can allotted with constructive potential if it was created by empathy. People with a common semantic field are doing as one organism (just the organism, but not the mechanism, since we are dealing with such its properties as synergy and emergence).

The idea of the research project was born in the state pension organization where there psychologist watched different nuances in officials attitude to older people, who are suffered from loneliness as a result of retirement.

As the hypotheses of the research several assumptions were adduced. First, people, who show great capacity for empathy, are less subjects to the destructive effects of loneliness. In other words, higher the development of human capacity for empathy is, lesser he/she feels the destructive loneliness. Second, people who experience a destructive feeling of loneliness, less disposed towards the empathy to others. That is, if loneliness is not perceived as a resource and space for self-reflectiveness, empathy cannot be highly developed, as a person who has no experience of «self-absorbing», are more likely incapable of «plunging» into the Other.

It is planed that the research will realized in two stages. In the first stage psychological diagnostics of state pension organization's staff using test tools will be conducted. In the second stage, based on the obtained information, will be made an attempt to create a model of teaching training oriented to the development of empathy and overcoming the destructive effects of loneliness.

When examining the intercommunication of phenomenon of loneliness and empathy will use the following methods: 1) The inquirer «Diagnostics of the level of polycommunicative empathy» (I. M. Yusupov, 2002). 2) The methodology «Diagnostics of empathy level» (V. V. Boiko, 2001). 3) The inquirer for the diagnostics of ability for empathy (A. Mehrabien and N. Epstein, 1996). 4) Differential inquirer of loneliness experience (D. A. Leontiev, E. N. Osin, 2010).5) Diagnostic inquirer «Loneliness» (S. G. Korchagina, 2008). 6) The inquirer for determination of the kind of loneliness (S. G. Korchagina, 2008). 7) The methodology of diagnostics the level of subjective experience of loneliness (D. Russell and M. Ferguson, 1989). Also for receiving of the semantic field of feelings concerning empathic experience and states of loneliness planned to use texts of reflexive essays and interviews.

Research's result allowed realizing psychological help for the development of empathy of social service workers in the context of a combined behavioral and existential-humanistic knowledge. To achieve this goal creating of practical tools to *accompany those who* works with retirees, experiencing loneliness. One of the factors of modern culture is the intolerance to this feeling. This explains the growing popularity of communication trainings. D.A. Leontev said in an interview in «Psychologies» (№ 10, 2006): «In my opinion, loneliness trainings are much more important than communicative learning» [12]. Different trainings, as well as other forms of psychological and psychoeducational service, oriented at formation of a

balanced and deliberate understanding of the loneliness experience, as a personal resource, allows participants to take a fresh look at their life and to appreciate the value of the rich internal communication.

Post-industrial society, emphasizing the growing menace of anthropological crisis (V. S. Stepin), should pay close attention to the devaluation of the orthodox cultural values, which turns human being in an anomic world into continuous race for survival and for the preservation of the integrity of the one's own personality. Therefore, the theoretical and practical developmental work about loneliness and empathy phenomenon represent growing interest for the scientific psychological community. Considering the experience of loneliness and empathic experience as an inexhaustible personal resource for self-development and self-realization, we can talk about the heuristic and practical potential of this research. This research is able to contribute to forming an integral understanding of loneliness phenomena and its intercommunication with human's emphatic abilities and become the basis for further theoretical and empirical researches.

References:

1. Kierkegaard S. Fear and Trembling; trans. by Isaeva N.V., Isaeva S.A. Moscow: Respublika, 1993 (in Russian)
2. Foucault M. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason; Ed. Levit S. Ya. Histoire de la folie a l'age classiqui. St. Petersburg : Universitetskaja kniga, 1997, 573 p. (in Russian)
3. Sadler W., Johnson T. From loneliness to anomia. Labyrinths of loneliness; Ed. and trans. by Pokrovski N. E. Moscow: Progress, 1989 (in Russian)
4. Luk'anov O.V., Karpunjkina T.N. The Present – the culture of loneliness. The Messenger of Tomsk State University, 2005, № 286, pp. 97-104 (in Russian)
5. Frankl V. The Doctor and The Soul; trans. by Boreev A.A. St. Petersburg: Yuventa, 1997 (in Russian)
6. Gavrilova T. P. The notion of empathy in foreign psychology. Psychology Questions, 1975. № 2. pp. 147-158 (in Russian)
7. Freud A. Theory and Practice of child Psychoanalysis. V. 2. Moscow: 1999 (in Russian)
8. Rogers C . Empatic: an unappreciated way of being. The Counseling Psychologist, 1975, V. 5, N 2, pp. 2-10.
9. Rogers C. Client-Centered Therapy; Moscow: Refl-book; Kazan: Vakler, 1997, 320 p. (in Russian)
10. Kabrin V.I. Communicative World and transcommunicative potential of persons life: theory, methods, researches. Moscow: Smysl, 2005, 248 p. (in Russian)
11. Nalimov V.V. Searching of other meaning. Moscow: Progress, 1993, 280 p. (in Russian)
12. Leont'ev D.A. To love your Loneliness. Psychologies, №10, 2006 (in Russian)

