



Forms of showing love in relationships with loved ones versus feelings of loneliness in young adults

Formy okazywania miłości w relacjach z najbliższymi osobami a poczucie samotności u młodych dorosłych¹

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Abstract: Since the experience of love and close relationships is one of the most important aspects of human life, man defines his existence by diverse relationships. The congruence of expected and received forms of love transmission is important. This study verifies whether there is a relationship between the forms of showing love and the sense of loneliness in a group of young adults. *Methods:* The study used the Forms of Expressions of Love Questionnaire (FOREM) designed by M. Rys and colleagues, and the R-UCLA Loneliness Scale, a Polish adaptation of Russell, Peplau and Cutrona's tool, developed by M. Kwiatkowska, R. Rogoza and K. Kwiatkowska. The survey with the participation of 73 women and 73 men was conducted online. The youngest person was 18 years old, and the oldest – 34 (Max = 34). The average age of the subjects was just under 24 (M = 23.99). *Results:* The results of correlation analysis with the application of Kendall's Tau-b coefficient proved to be statistically significant for the associations of all subscales of feelings of loneliness and the overall score of this variable, with the discrepancy between expected and received forms of love in terms of help and time. All statistically significant correlations were positive, meaning that the greater the discrepancy between the expected and received form of love, the higher the sense of loneliness. The strongest statistically significant correlation was that of the dimension of help with the dimensions of belonging and affiliation (Tau-b = 0.247; p < 0.01) while the weakest was the correlation of the dimension of time with the dimension of social others (Tau-b = 0.131; p < 0.05). *Conclusions:* The results of the study indicate that young adults do not experience love in the expected forms regarding affectionate touch, help from the other person and time devoted to them. The greater the discrepancy between the expected and received forms of love, the higher the feelings of loneliness among young adults.

Keywords: young adults; relationships; sense of loneliness; love

Abstrakt: Doświadczenie miłości oraz bliskie relacje to jeden z najważniejszych aspektów życia człowieka. W znacznym stopniu swoje istnienie człowiek definiuje w odniesieniu do innych osób, tworząc i podtrzymując zróżnicowane związki i relacje międzysobowe. W tworzeniu prawidłowych relacji interpersonalnych istotną rolę odgrywa poczucie bycia kochanym przez najbliższe osoby. W procesie tym ważną jest zgodność oczekiwanych i otrzymywanych form przekazu miłości. Celem badania była weryfikacja założenia o istnieniu zależności między formami okazywania miłości a poczuciem samotności w grupie młodych dorosłych. *Metody:* W badaniu zastosowano Kwestionariusz Formy Ekspresji Miłości (FOREM), autorstwa M. Rys i współpracowników oraz Skalę Samotności R-UCLA, polską adaptację narzędzia Russella, Peplau i Cutrony, opracowaną przez M. Kwiatkowską, R. Rogożę oraz K. Kwiatkowską. Badania młodych dorosłych zostały przeprowadzone internetowo. W badaniu wzięły udział 73 kobiety oraz 73 mężczyzn. Najmłodsza osoba badana była w wieku 18 lat, najstarsza w wieku 34 lat (Maks. = 34). Średni wiek osób badanych wyniósł niecałe 24 lata (M = 23,99). *Wyniki:* Wyniki analizy korelacji z użyciem współczynnika Tau-b Kendalla okazały się istotne statystycznie w przypadku związków wszystkich podskal poczucia samotności oraz wyniku ogólnego tej zmiennej, z rozbieżnością pomiędzy oczekiwaną a otrzymywaną formą miłości w zakresie pomocy oraz czasu. Wszystkie istotne statystycznie korelacje były dodatnie, co oznacza, że im większa jest rozbieżność pomiędzy oczekiwaną a otrzymywaną formą miłości, tym wyższe jest poczucie samotności. Najsilniejszą istotną statystycznie zależnością okazała się korelacja wymiaru pomoc z wymiarem belonging and affiliation (Tau-b = 0,247; p < 0,01). Najslabszą zaś – korelacja wymiaru czas z wymiarem social others (Tau-b = 0,131; p < 0,05). *Wnioski:* Wyniki badań wskazują na to, że młodzi dorośli nie doświadczają miłości w oczekiwanych formach dotyczących czulego dotyku, pomocy ze strony drugiej osoby oraz poświęcanego im czasu. Im większa jest rozbieżność pomiędzy oczekiwaną a otrzymywaną formą miłości, tym wyższe jest poczucie samotności młodych dorosłych.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi dorośli; relacje; poczucie samotności; miłość

Introduction

The problem of experiencing loneliness today affects an increasing number of not only the elderly and the sick, but also young people. Some of the main reasons are: loosening of family ties, quarrels and conflicts within the family, lack of social ties, lack of satisfaction of basic needs (such as the need for love, acceptance, contact, belonging), lowered self-esteem, which makes it difficult to relate to others, withdrawal of contacts as a form of defense against possible rejection (cf. e.g. Bangee, Harris, Bridges, Rotenberg, Qualter, 2014; Gardiner, Geldenhuys, Gott, 2016; Harris, Qualter, Robinson, 2013; Krupa, 2013; Junntila, Vauras, 2009; Madsen, Holstein, Damsgaard, Rayce, Jespersen, Due, 2019; Norona, Tregubenko, Boiangiu, Levy, Scharf, Welsh, Shulman, 2017; Nowland, Talbot, Qualter, 2018; ONS, 2018; Rys, 2020a,b, Rys, Tataj-Puzyna, 2022).

It is stressed that loneliness can also be caused by excessive involvement in technological advances, escape into the virtual world, a lifestyle and cultural model that favors individual success and consumption, or the negative impact of working overtime. An important cause of increasing loneliness has become the marginalization of religious life, migration, emigration, or various types of social conflicts, international conflicts, or wars, etc. (cf. e.g. Dubas, 2006, Krupa, 2013).

Analyzing the problem of counteracting the feeling of loneliness, attention is increasingly paid to interpersonal relationships, especially those through which one feels to be loved (cf. e.g. Karbowa, 2012; Rys, Tataj-Puzyna, 2021).

Proper ties with loved ones can determine important aspects of self-image, the perception of other people, or interpersonal relationships in general (cf. e.g. Oleś, 2006; Ołdakowska-Jedynak, Rys, Sztajerwald, 2021; Rembowski, 1992; Rys, Greszta, Śledź, 2020).

1. Theoretical introduction to the study

1.1. Love and forms of its expression

1.1.1. Concepts of the definitional account of love

Over the years, many researchers have subjected this topic of love and close relationships as one of the most important aspects of human life to numerous studies (quoted by: Wojciszke, 2018). The very concept of love is complex, multiple and diverse. In literature or in art, it is the romantic view of love that usually emphasizes its emotional aspect. Important though it is, it is not the only one. Love in a relationship with another person is not just a feeling, but something much richer, deeper and more complex. It is frequently emphasized that love is not merely a relationship, but also an attitude. As such, it contains three elements: cognitive (knowledge of someone), emotional (emotional attitude), and behavioural (action – the disposition to a certain action) (cf. e.g. Rys, 2016; Rys, Greszta, Grabarczyk, 2019). Love is an active, positive attitude towards the other person. It is a desire to affirm the existence of the loved person and his or her development (Rys, 2016).

Rather than viewing love as an attitude, E. Fromm (2007) proposes to regard it as a trait of character that defines a person's overall approach to the world. Love understood in this way manifests itself not only in relationships with the loved ones, but in various areas of social life. The scholar emphasizes the active nature of love. Its peculiarity also consists in cognition, a sense of responsibility and concern for the other person.

J. Rostowski (1987) defines love as “a peculiar, highly complex emotional state intensely experienced by an individual” (ibid, p. 37). In this view, love is characterized by the interest in and action for the benefit of the other along with concern, goodness, responsibility, knowledge, and respect (ibid).

1.1.2. Forms of showing love conceptualized by G. Chapman

In recent years, the concept of so-called love languages developed by G. Chapman gained in popularity (2018). Love languages or forms of showing love constitute a very important scientific and practical issue (cf. e.g. Dudziak, 2013; Gorbacewicz, 2015, Jaworska, Lubiejewski, Wójtowicz, 2019). As a therapist, Family Counselor Chapman distinguished five love languages. These are affirmative expressions, affectionate touch, good time, small favours, and gifts directed to the other with all of them being accompanied by the expectation of reciprocity.

Affirmative expressions are a verbal form of showing love that can manifest itself in simple, direct phrases that testify to love or kindness, or in words that appreciate, support or even embolden the other person to bring out his or her potential in life. Verbal expression of love calls for authenticity and sincerity along with the form of spoken words, tone of voice, etc. Such messages, if sincere and authentic, build a sense of being loved (Chapman, 2018; cf. also: Gorbacewicz, 2015).

A particularly important form of showing not only parental but also romantic love or friendship is affectionate touch². For individuals who highly value tender touch, its absence can be equated with not being unloved and can deprive them of a sense of security (Chapman, 2018; cf. also: Dudziak, 2013; Gorbacewicz, 2015; Jaworska et al., 2019).

Another form of showing love highlighted by Chapman (2018) is “having[?] good time,” which is characterized by focusing one’s attention on the other person. In order to be a form of showing love, the time spent together should contain a message about the joy of the other person’s presence. The most common variation of the language of good time is a friendly dialogue, during which people share their thoughts, experiences, or desires (ibid, cf. also: Gorbacewicz, 2015).

Among the important forms of showing love, Chapman (2018) also singles out assistance, that is, the willingness to do what the loved one needs at a given moment. This form of love is expressed in

both serious and trivial matters. For those for whom this form of experiencing love is most important, the lack of help even in small things can result in feelings of rejection, lack of either love or kindness. As Chapman emphasizes, this form of showing love requires mutual expressions of requests rather than demands. Such behaviour helps deepen the relationship, and prevents misunderstandings or quarrels (ibid).

Chapman believes that also gifts are a form of showing love. A gift is a materialization of someone’s care for the other person. It is remembering the loved one that counts rather than the material value of the gift. In this language of love, one can distinguish the gift of oneself or the intangible gift of presence, the significance of which can highly exceed material gifts, which is especially precious when the other person badly needs it (ibid, cf. also: Gorbacewicz, 2015).

1.2. Problems of loneliness

Loneliness ought to be carefully distinguished from aloneness (cf. e.g. Śliwak, Brzeziński, Zarosinska, 2019; Śliwak, Reizer, Partyka, 2015; Śliwak, Zarzycka, Dzduch, 2001). Loneliness means an unavoidable, necessary situation, and even a result of human nature. Its other characteristics, however, are ambiguity, indefinability and inexpressibility. It is universal and timeless. It is extremely individualized, as it is experienced subjectively and very specifically, differently by each person (cf. e.g. Dubas, 2000, 2006; Maes, Qualter, Vanhalst, Van den Noortgate, Goossens, 2019; Wasilewska-Ostrowska, 2018). Loneliness refers to the state registered with consciousness and felt at the affective level, when an individual is left alone with himself. Loneliness itself appears to be neutral: it is neither unequivocally good nor unequivocally bad. Evaluation of loneliness is subjective and polar. If loneliness evokes difficult emotions in an individual, experienced as negative or negative associations, then it is called “bad loneliness”. This type of loneliness more or less has a destructive effect on the individual. On the other hand, if loneliness evokes emotions felt as positive, it is considered good (Domeracki, 2009).

2 Child development studies confirm that this way of communicating love, expressed through hugs and kisses, leads to a later healthier emotional life compared to children who were deprived of such physical contact (cf. e.g. Ryś, 2016).

The feeling of loneliness is a complex psychological phenomenon that is often accompanied by a decrease in psychological well-being. Loneliness in the global sense is associated with feeling a lack or deficiency of epistemic trust and connection with other people, contact with whom is highly desirable in difficult or crisis situations (Dołęga, 2020ab).

From a cognitive point of view, loneliness is related to the subjective perception of interpersonal ties and the evaluation of them. Loneliness has a subjective form and can appear as the result of a discrepancy between what is expected and what is real in the sphere of social relations. The individual evaluates interpersonal relationships in terms of their quantity and quality, and compares them with his or her standards towards relationships. Loneliness can result from an evaluation of the quality of relationships as unsatisfactory (De Jong Gierveld *et al.*, 2009; after: Kosowski i Mróz, 2020).

Loneliness can become the ability to focus on one's inner world that can result in building the right distance from/to the world (Śliwak, Reizer, 2015).

Loneliness can be discussed in social, psychological and moral terms. In the social aspect, it is understood as the cessation of contacts, or lack of relationships with other people. Social loneliness occurs if a person isolates himself or is isolated, has no family of his own, or his marital relationship has broken down. Loneliness in psychological terms is shown as a lack of ability to establish relationships and bonds with other people. It can result from an unmet emotional need, or from abnormal social relationships, a changing environment or situation (Wasilewska-Ostrowska, 2013). Moral loneliness, on the other hand, can stem from a person's differ-

ent, usually incorrect hierarchy of values or from selfishness. The result of it can be a loss of purpose and meaning in life (Szafrńska, 2017).

Those experiencing long-term loneliness can often feel unloved by loved ones, and may feel rejected or misunderstood. Emotional loneliness experienced in this way is a risk factor for the onset of behavioural addictions (Wasilewska-Ostrowska, 2013).

Research has found that attachment-related³ insecurity contributes to a sense of loneliness (Sahin-Bayraktar, Seven, 2022; Shorter, Turner, Mueller-Coyle, 2022), and a sense of social dissatisfaction (Sahin-Bayraktar, Seven, 2020).

Aloneness is a different phenomenon. A person may feel a sense of aloneness in the face of adversity, i.e. those events or life circumstances that are highly stressful, related to family or social situations (e.g. poverty, divorce of parents) or direct threat to life (wars, disasters, terrorist attacks)⁴. When defining adversity, it is very important to distinguish between negative events that are a consequence of decisions made by the individual (e.g., using psychoactive substances, running away from home) and those negative events that are independent of a person's will, and which are not subject to control (e.g., illness), (cf. e.g. Borucka, Ostaszewski, 2012; Borucka, Pisarska, 2012; Luthar, Brown, 2007).

Factors that cause or exacerbate feelings of aloneness can be of different nature. They mainly occur in a particular environment (a family with an alcohol problem or mental disorder, a family at risk of unemployment, violence, crime, breakdown) and they include traumatic experiences, such as sexual abuse, abandonment, and the resultant maturing in institutions (cf. e.g. Sikorska, 2016).

3 Attachment theory describes how interactions, social and emotional bonds are developed and the impact of such development on individuals (Bowlby 1980; Ainsworth 1978). Bowlby (1969) describes attachment as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings. He further explains that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a great effect that continues through life. The effects of such attachment to particular others include the development of strong affectionate bonds between those who are attached to each other (Bowlby 1969, 1980). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, Walls (1978) identified three major different attachment styles or patterns that a child may have with attachment figures: secure attachment, anxious/avoidant attachment, and anxious/resistant attachment. Individuals who are securely attached enjoy socialisation and feel less lonely than the others (Sahin-Bayraktar, Seven, 2022; Shorter, Turner, Mueller-Coyle, 2022; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, Walls, 1978). More recently, M. Ryś and colleagues distinguished yet another attachment style—rejectionist. Research has confirmed the occurrence of this style (Ryś, Krasowska, Witerek, 2021).

4 Research on the sense of loneliness is presented by, among others: S. Cudak (2014); M. Dąbkowska (2019); Z. Dołęga (2003, 2006, 2020a and b); M. Kornaszewska-Polak (2015); M. Ryś (2020b); A. Wojnarska, K. Korona (2017).

Both loneliness and aloneness can be associated with unpleasant personal experiences, can be adverse in nature, and lead to many problems and risks (alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide attempts). They can also weaken a person's physical and mental condition, or negatively affect the formation of interpersonal relationships (cf. e.g. Wyczesany, 2001). Experiencing feelings of loneliness or aloneness as emotional states is part and parcel of human life. Sadly, if this condition is of high intensity and becomes a chronic experience, it can cause difficulties in adjusting to life in society and emotional disorders (Oleś, 2006).

Aloneness is never an expected or chosen state. It hinders development, can give rise to anxiety or be experienced as a kind of life tragedy (Dubas, 2000). Research on aloneness has shown that its high levels are associated with poorer social adjustment (Śliwak et al., 2015). Aloneness is often associated with low self-esteem, an external sense of control, and emotional immaturity. It also manifests itself in excessive self-centeredness and high levels of generalized and social anxiety (Szafrńska, 2017).

2. Research methodology

2.1. Problem and hypotheses

With the above theoretical considerations and empirical data on forms of showing love and experiencing loneliness in mind, the researchers have asked the following questions:

1. Do young adults experience love in the form expected by them?
2. Is there a relationship between forms of showing love and feelings of loneliness in young adults?

Prior to the study, the following hypotheses were made:

1. There is a discrepancy between the received and expected form of love in young adults.
2. The discrepancy between the received and expected form of love from loved ones is positively correlated to feelings of loneliness, i.e. the greater the discrepancy, the greater the feelings of loneliness.

2.2. Methods

2.2.1. Forms of Love Expression (FOREM)

The Forms of Love Expression Questionnaire is a tool designed by M. Rys and colleagues on the basis of Gary Chapman's concept of five love languages. The questionnaire and the set of test items distinguishing ways of showing love drew on the literature on forms of love expression. The items were evaluated by competent judges. Those test items that achieved high ratings from the judges were subjected to further analysis (after: Jaworska et al., 2019). The questionnaire consists of two parts, each made up of 25 test items, assigned 5 to each scale corresponding to one of the forms of love expression distinguished by Chapman. Survey participants responded on a 5-point scale: 1 – definitely no, 2 – rather no, 3 – can't say, 4 – rather yes, 5 – definitely yes. On each scale, respondents could score a minimum of 5 points and a maximum of 25 points (ibid.). The results of the first part of the tool indicate which forms of love make the respondent feel loved. The purpose of the second part of the questionnaire is to indicate the forms of love the respondent experiences from his or her loved ones (ibid.).

The reliability of the tool was calculated with the Cronbach's Alpha test. On individual scales, the reliability index reached the following results:

- Words of affirmation – 0.75;
- Quality time – 0.84;
- Physical touch – 0.87;
- Acts of service – 0.85;
- Receiving gifts – 0.84 (Jaworska et al., 2019, p. 103).

For the purpose of verifying the hypotheses, discrepancy scales were created between the expected and received forms of love. The discrepancy scales correspond to the individual scales of love expression. Discrepancy is understood here as the absolute value of the difference between the score of the expected form of love expression and the score of the received form of love expression.

2.2.2. R-UCLA Loneliness Scale

The R-UCLA Loneliness Scale is a Polish adaptation of Russell, Peplau and Cutrona's tool, developed by M. Kwiatkowska, R. Rogoza and K. Kwiatkowska (2018). The scale measures feelings of loneliness.

The tool consists of 20 test items. Responses are given on a 4-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often. Subjects could score a minimum of 20 points and a maximum of 80 points (*ibid.*).

A subject's higher score on the questionnaire indicates a higher level of loneliness, while a lower score indicates its lower level (*ibid.*).

The reliability coefficient for the entire Scale was 0.92. The reliability coefficient for individual subscales had the following values:

- Intimate Others – 0,90;
- Social Others – 0,83;
- Belonging and Affiliation – 0,80 (Kwiatkowska, Rogoza, Kwiatkowska, 2018, p. 167).

Intimate Others – includes loneliness, rejection, withdrawal, a sense of exclusion, as well as the severance of social relations, associated with unpleasant feelings of loneliness/aloneness? and isolation (Austin, 1983, after: Kwiatkowska *et al.*, 2018, p. 165).

Social Others – refers to the lack of a social network and the lack of a sense of closeness in relationships with other people; it takes into account of the lack of contact with close relatives or trusted people who provide a sense of security and support (*ibid.*).

Belonging and Affiliation – refers to a lack of a sense of group identity and connection to the community, along with having weaker ties to a social group while feeling more like an individual than part of a group (Austin, 1983; after: Kwiatkowska *et al.*, 2018, p. 165-166).

2.2.3. Surveyed persons

The survey in which seventy-three women and 73 men participated was conducted online. . The youngest person surveyed was 18 (Min = 18), while the oldest – 34 years old (Max = 34). The average age of the subjects was just under 24 (M = 23.99).

43.8% (32) of the female respondents and 42.5% (31) of the male respondents had tertiary education, 38.4% (28) of the women and 39.7% (29) of the men had partial higher education while – 15.1% (11) of women and 16.4% (12) of men – secondary education with only 1.4% (1) of women have elementary education. 1.4% (1) of men completed vocational education. Among women, 1.4% (1) did not provide information on education.

The survey included 31.5% (23) of working women, and 30.1% (22) of working men; 28.8% (21) of women and 16.4% (12) of men were studying. The group of working and weekend/evening students comprised 17.8% (13) of women and 20.5% (15) of men. The group of those studying and working casually consisted of 19.2% (14) women, and 32.9% (24) men. Information regarding their professional status was not provided by 2.7% (2) of women.

2.3. Research results

2.3.1. Forms of showing love

Table 1 shows the results on expected and received forms of showing love.

The results of the study indicate that young adults do not experience love in the expected forms regarding affectionate touch, help from the other person and time spent with them.

The results of correlation analysis based on Kendall's Tau-b coefficient proved statistically significant for the associations of all subscales of the sense of loneliness and the overall score of this variable, with the discrepancy between the expected and received form of love in terms of help and time.

All statistically significant correlations were positive, meaning that the greater the discrepancy between the expected and received form of love, the higher the sense of loneliness. The correlations are characterized by weak intensity.

The strongest statistically significant relationship appeared to be the correlation between help received and a sense of belonging and affiliation (Tau-b = 0,247; $p < 0,01$), while the weakest for the correlation between time quality social others (Tau-b = 0,131; $p < 0,05$).

Table 1. Forms of love – expected and received

Variable	Expected:			Received:			Divergence		
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	M	W	p
Words of affirmation	4.15	4.20	0.61	3.85	3.90	0.80	0.30	0.98	0.010
Physical touch	4.30	4.40	0.68	3.76	4.00	1.09	0.55	0.95	<0.001
Receiving gifts	3.57	3.60	0.95	3.49	3.50	0.91	0.08	0.97	0.001
Acts of service	4.48	4.60	0.58	4.13	4.20	0.69	0.35	0.95	<0.001
Quality time	4.62	4.80	0.44	4.20	4.40	0.67	0.43	0.95	<0.001

M – mean; Me – median; SD – standard deviation; W – Shapiro-Wilk test statistic, p – significance.

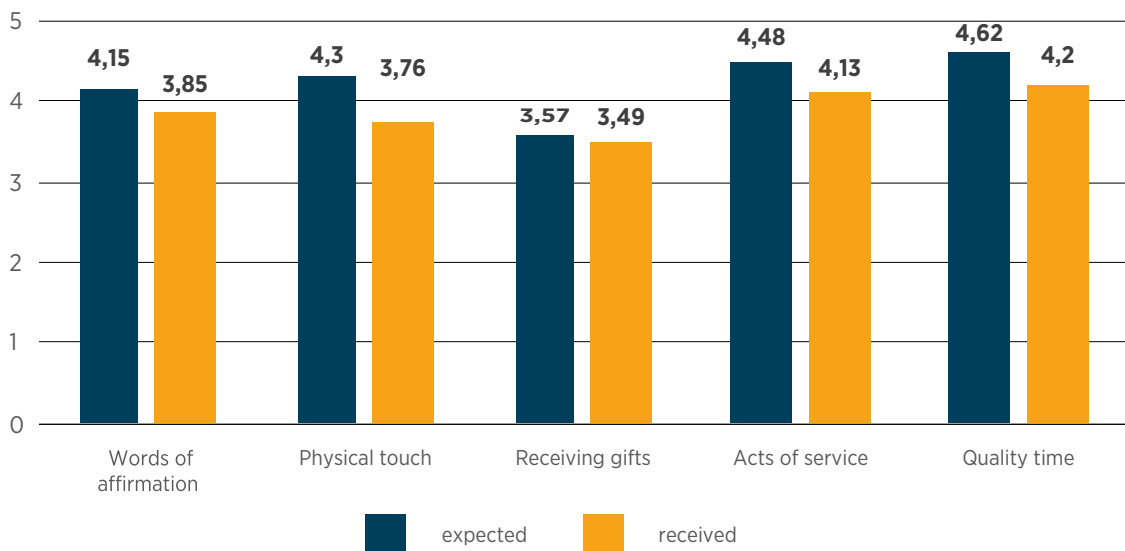


Chart 1. Forms of love – expected and received

Table 2. Correlation of discrepancy between expected and received form of love and feelings of loneliness (Kendall's Tau-b)

	Words of affirmation	Physical touch	Receiving gifts	Acts of service	Quality time
A sense of loneliness	0.108	0.104	0.004	0.215**	0.171**
Intimate Others	0.108	0.098	-0.009	0.181**	0.189**
Social Others	0.070	0.120	0.043	0.196**	0.131*
Belonging and Affiliation	0.077	0.072	-0.006	0.247**	0.153*

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

2.4. Discussion of the research results

The purpose of the research, the results presented in this article, was to verify the assumption that there is a relationship between the forms of showing love and feelings of loneliness in a group of young adults. Hypothesis 1 assumed that there is a discrepancy between the expected and received forms of love from loved ones in young adults. The hypothesis was confirmed in terms of expectation of affectionate touch, help from loved ones, and time spent.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that the discrepancy between the expected and experienced form of love is related to feelings of loneliness. Statistically significant results were obtained for assistance and time. These forms of showing love are related to all dimensions of feeling lonely. The resultant relationship means that the greater the discrepancy between expected and received forms of love in terms of experienced help and time, the greater the feeling of loneliness.

Research shows that young adults (16-24) are a particularly lonely demographic group in Western countries. In their study, Fardghassemi and Joffe conducted a systematic, in-depth analysis of the subjective causes of loneliness in this group. The study found that young adults from London's poorest communities experience a sense of disconnectedness because they feel misunderstood, irrelevant to others and unable to express themselves (Fardghassemi and Joffe, 2021).

S. Bakiera and M. Obrebska (2021, p. 9), in their introduction to an article on the psychological aspects of interpersonal relationships, cite Monica Tomalik's statement from "Strange times": we stroke smartphone screens more often than the hands of the people we love. Meanwhile, humans define their existence to a large extent in relation to other people, creating and sustaining diverse relationships and interpersonal relations (Pinker, 2015).

Previous research shows that people cannot function properly without close relationships with others. According to B. Wojciszke (2013), thanks to close relationships and social support, people perceive difficult situations as less threatening, resulting in less intense experience of stress and better well-being (*ibid.*). Loneliness has been linked to mental health

challenges such as anxiety and depression. Achterberh *et al.*, (2020), in their study, emphasize that these two conditions, loneliness and depression, can reinforce each other. If people with depression withdraw from relationships for various reasons and do not confide in others, they may experience loneliness, which worsens their mood, thereby perpetuating their depression.

In the formation of proper interpersonal relationships, the feeling of being loved by those closest to you plays an important role. In this process, the compatibility of expected and received forms of love transmission is important.

Life in the 21st century is characterized by a constant rush and lack of time. Time has become all the more precious. This might explain why showing love through devoting time to another person is so important. Among the respondents, most people prioritized time spent together as the most important forms of showing love ($M = 4.62$; $SD = 0.44$) and help ($M = 4.48$; $SD = 0.58$) (Table 1). The discrepancy between expectations and the experience of love within such important spheres for human beings may intensify feelings of loneliness.

If a person feels an unwillingness to share time on the part of the loved ones, this can give rise to feelings of isolation. Some researchers frame isolation as a particular dimension of feelings of loneliness/aloneness (Hawkley, 1999, after: Bednar, 2000).

Showing help towards another person can be a particularly important form of showing love, as it allows the person experiencing this expression of love to see that he or she can count on the loved ones in a difficult situation. The fact that the form of showing love through help has become particularly important may also have been influenced by the recently experienced pandemic situation in the country and the world. The time of the pandemic has dramatically intensified virtual interactions and deepened the paradox of moving away from traditional, close social relationships while seeking them far more intensely in the virtual web. Digital connections, the Internet and social media have become an integral part of individual and social life (Groarke, Berry, Graham-Wisener, McKenna-Plumley, McGlinchey, Armour, 2020; Digital: Poland, 2022).

Research confirms that communication through social media increases feelings of disconnectedness and loneliness because young adults compare themselves to others by viewing their profiles (Fardghasemi and Joffe, 2021). Research shows that while young adults seek to increase their virtual contacts to alleviate social loneliness, they may neglect their emotional needs, and therefore be at risk of experiencing emotional loneliness. In a study by Von Soet et al. on developmental trends in loneliness, the authors found that while emotional loneliness increased during adolescence in young adults, social loneliness decreased (2020). One can feel emotionally lonely even if one has significant social ties. Similarly, one can experience social loneliness despite having intimate relationships.

The long-term consequences of forced isolation during a pandemic are varied and involve the entire spectrum of reactions: post-traumatic stress, anger, frustration, boredom, financial losses, and an acute sense of loneliness (Kosowski and Frost, 2020). The sense of threat that accompanies a pandemic can also result in lowered tolerance of other people's attitudes, social divisions, or radicalization of one's own attitudes (Kossowska, Letki, Zaleskiewicz and Wichary, 2020).

Research also shows that young adults also feel deficits regarding tenderness in their relationships with loved ones. Meanwhile, tenderness is important in building deep interpersonal relationships. Researchers unanimously conclude that matching or "tuning" parental love to the emotional and physical needs of one's children early in the child's life is critical to whether children develop the ability to build attachment and interpersonal relationships (Sabey et al., 2018; Schore and Schore 2008).

Though attention was drawn to the ever-commoner occurrence of loneliness among young people already a dozen years ago (see, for example, Jakuta, 2012), the phenomenon was often underestimated or disregarded as one that does not cause direct negative consequences in the functioning of society (cf. e.g. Beutel, Klein, Brahler, Reiner, Junger, Michal, Tibubos, 2017).

Conclusions

Serious measures are required to prevent loneliness in young. The task of both parents and educators should be to develop in young people various skills that help them cope with difficult situations, including the feeling of loneliness.

Valuable solutions were presented already in 2007 by J. Mastalski that help in the integral development of a young person's personality and counteract their sense of loneliness. The author/scientist stresses the need to support young people in the development of various types of skills. These include:

- interpersonal skills, such as empathy, active listening, assertiveness, negotiation, conflict resolution, teamwork, interaction with the community;
- the ability to build self-awareness, which consists in self-assessment, identifying one's own strengths and weaknesses, building a positive self-image, including one's own body;
- the ability to build a system of values, to understand different social norms, beliefs, cultures, to counter discrimination and negative stereotypes, to work for the law, responsibility and social justice;
- decision-making skills, which include critical and creative thinking, problem solving, seeking alternatives and evaluating their value, anticipating the consequences of one's own actions, behaviour, setting goals; and
- the ability to cope with and manage stress, which consists in self-control, dealing with pressure, managing work time and resting properly, dealing with anxiety and difficult situations, and seeking adequate help (Mastalski, 2007).

The research, the results of which are presented in this article, shows that there is a correlation between the lack of experiencing love in the expected form and the feeling of loneliness. Attention ought to be devoted not only to experiencing feelings towards loved ones, but also showing them in the way most expected by the other person.

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