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### **Title of Entry**

Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents

### **Synonym**

LACA

### **Definition**

The term “loneliness” refers to the negative feelings that emerge when people experience their social relationships as deficient (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). The Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LACA; Marcoen, Goossens, & Caes, 1987) measures loneliness in two kinds of relationships, that is, relationships with parents and peers. In addition, the measure assesses two attitudes to being alone, that is, aversion to aloneness (or negative attitude to being alone) and affinity for aloneness (or positive attitude to being alone).

### **Theoretical Background**

The LACA has been referred to as the Louvain Loneliness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LLCA) in earlier work (e.g., Marcoen et al., 1987). The instrument was developed specifically for the age range of 10 to 19 years. The available measures for adults were deemed too difficult in wording or seemed developmentally inappropriate. Late childhood and adolescence are crucial periods in life during which important changes take place in the relationships with parents and peers. If young people cannot cope effectively with these challenges, they tend to feel lonely (MacEvoy, Weeks, & Asher, 2011). During these

same developmental periods, young people also show greater appreciation for time spent on their own (Larson, 1997). As a result, their attitude to being alone becomes more positive (Goossens, 2014).

Both loneliness and attitude to being alone have been related to key developmental tasks in adolescence and to attachment and identity formation in particular. Adolescents who do not feel securely attached to their parents can be expected to feel lonely in their relationships with these central attachment figures. Because these relationships tend to serve as a blueprint for other relationships, these adolescents will also feel lonely in their relationships with their peers. Adolescents who explore their identity options can be expected to show a more positive attitude to being alone. An important part of identity exploration is conducted when adolescents are by themselves. A negative attitude to being alone will be associated with less identity exploration and a sense of identity that is less firmly established (Goossens, 2006; Marcoen & Goossens, 1993).

### **Description**

The LACA is intended to measure all aspects of loneliness and attitude to being alone that are considered relevant in adolescence. The instrument comprises 48 items that are divided into 4 subscales of 12 items each. These subscales measure (a) loneliness in relationships with parents (L-PART; sample item “I feel left out by my parent”), (b) loneliness in relationships with peers (L-PEERS; sample item “I think I have fewer friends than others”), (c) negative attitude toward being alone (A-NEG; sample item “I feel unhappy when I have to do things on my own”), and (d) positive attitude toward being alone (A-POS; sample item “I want to be alone”). Items are responded to on a 4-point scale: often, frequently, rarely, and never.

### **Psychometric Properties**

Internal consistency of the four subscales is good (i.e., Cronbach's alpha .80 or higher; Goossens, 2016). A reliability generalization (RG) study across 92 samples of children and adolescents from 11 countries revealed that similar estimates were obtained across age groups and countries (Maes, Van den Noortgate, & Goossens, 2015). Test-retest reliability across a brief interval (i.e., 2 to 4 weeks) is good (with *rs* ranging between .78 and .88; Goossens, 2016).

Subscale correlations are low to moderate (Maes, Van den Noortgate et al., 2015). The near-zero correlation between aversion to and affinity for aloneness indicates that these two attitudes do not represent opposite ends of a common continuum but rather reflect independent aspects of young people's orientation to time spent on their own. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported the expected four-factor structure, which proved superior to simpler, alternative models (Maes, Klimstra, Van den Noortgate, & Goossens, 2015).

Comparative analyses revealed that both boys and girls and young people from different age groups (i.e., elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school) interpreted the items of the four subscales in a similar way. So measurement invariance was established across gender and age (Maes, Klimstra et al., 2015).

Construct validity has been firmly established. The LACA subscales showed substantial correlations with alternative measures of loneliness and attitude to aloneness in both adolescents (Goossens et al., 2009) and children (Goossens & Beyers, 2002). These measures included the Children's Loneliness Scale (CLS; Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984), the Differential Loneliness Scale (DLS; Schmidt & Sermat, 1983), the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults – Short (SELSA-S; DiTommaso, Brannen, & Best, 2004), and the Preference for Solitude Scale (PSS; Burger, 1995). Convergent validity was demonstrated for the subscale loneliness in the relationships with peers with measures of depressive symptoms, anxiety, social anxiety, neuroticism, introversion, and low self-esteem (Goossens, 2016). The

subscale loneliness in the relationships with parents showed a negative correlation with parental support and a positive one with parental psychological control (Maes, Vanhalst, Spithoven, Van den Noortgate, & Goossens, 2016). The subscales aversion to and affinity for aloneness showed a substantial correlation with excessive need for close interpersonal relationships (i.e., sociotropy) and excessive concerns about independence and autonomous achievement (i.e., autonomy), respectively (Teppers, Luyckx, Klimstra, Vanhalst, & Goossens, 2013).

### **Translations**

Originally developed in Dutch, the scale has been translated in different languages. An English translation has been used in the United Kingdom (Qualter, Brown, Munn, & Rotenberg, 2010), Ireland (De Roiste, 2000), and Canada (McNamara, Vervaeke, & Willoughby, 2008; McNamara, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2005; Terrell-Deutsch, 1999). Additional translations are available in Arabic (Scharf, Wiseman, & Farah, 2011), Chinese (Maes, Wang, Van den Noortgate, & Goossens, 2016), French (Danneel et al., 2016), Hebrew (Seginer, 1998), Italian (Brighi et al., 2012; Corsano, Majorano, & Champetravy, 2006; Majorano, Musetti, Brondino, & Corsano, 2015), Portuguese (Bastos & Costa, 2002), and Spanish (de Minzi, 2006).

The psychometric properties of the Italian adaptation have been examined in some detail (Melotti, Corsano, Majorana, & Scarpuzzi, 2006). Comparative analyses revealed that adolescents from other cultures interpreted the LACA items in a similar way as Dutch-speaking adolescents did. This type of cross-cultural equivalence has been established for adolescents who speak French (Danneel et al., 2016), Italian (Cicognani, Klimstra, & Goossens, 2014), and Chinese (Maes, Wang, et al., 2016).

### **Links With Developmental Tasks and Adjustment**

Clear links have been established between the LACA subscales and adolescents' dealing with the developmental tasks of attachment and identity formation. Adolescents who were securely attached had low scores on both parent- and peer-related loneliness, and their agemates who were dependently attached had the highest scores for aversion to aloneness (Goossens, Marcoen, Van Hees, & Vandewoestyne, 1998). Adolescents with a diffused identity had the highest scores for peer-related loneliness and their agemates who were more engaged in exploring their options regarding politics and religion had a higher score for affinity for aloneness (Goossens & Marcoen, 1999). These findings suggest, as expected, that adolescents' feelings of loneliness and their attitudes to being alone are related to their internal representations of attachment figures and their ongoing quest to define their own identity.

To examine the utility of loneliness-related configurations in research on adjustment, person-centered analyses using cluster analysis have been conducted. Such an analysis on the two subscales that measure attitude to being alone revealed that adolescents who felt indifferent regarding time spent on their own showed greater self-esteem, reported fewer depressive symptoms, and felt less lonely than their counterparts who showed either a positive or a negative attitude toward being alone (Teppers, Luyckx, Vanhalst, Klimstra, & Goossens, 2014). A similar analysis using all four LACA subscales revealed that adolescents who scored low on all subscales showed the most positive profile of adjustment. Adolescents who scored high on parent-related loneliness, peer-related loneliness, or affinity for aloneness all had a negative profile of adjustment (Maes, Vanhalst, et al., 2016). Collectively, these findings suggest that particular combinations of high and low scores on the different subscales each carry specific risks and benefits for adolescents' problem behavior and well-being.

## **Conclusion**

An extensive review of available measures of loneliness for use with children and adolescents praised the instrument for its very good psychometric properties and good internal consistency in particular (Weeks & Asher, 2012). Initial reviews stated that the meaning of the two subscales that measure attitudes to being alone – and their associations with the two loneliness subscales – had to be clarified further (Terrell-Deutsch, 1999). Meanwhile, additional reports on the correlates of these subscales and person-centered analyses in particular have filled that gap in the literature. The LACA, therefore, can be regarded as a reliable and valid measure of loneliness and the related construct of attitudes to aloneness in childhood and adolescence.

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