found that spending time alone or feeling comfortable alone is correlated with worse, rather than better, adjustment in adulthood (Larson, 1990; Larson & Lee, 1996). In adulthood, as in childhood, aloneness appears to be more like a deficit state. Of course, these findings may be due to many other factors in adults lives – being unmarried, job factors, and misanthropy – that are confounded with aloneness and obscure underlying relationships. However, I believe that aloneness becomes less significant in adulthood because healthy adults achieve a synthesis of their private and public selves and thus have less need for a private sanctuary to sort out new and untried thoughts and feelings (Larson, 1990).

Time alone may also be less functional for adolescents outside the European American samples I have studied thus far. The opportunity to withdraw into solitude is a luxury not available to most adolescents in the world, whose homes are often smaller and families larger. Among adolescents living in inner cities, feelings of danger when alone (Bhana, 1995) may also prevent solitude from being used constructively. Also, irrespective of whether the opportunity to be alone is present or not, aloneness may have little value apart from the cultural tradition of individualism – it may be just lonely. My argument, then, is that it might only be within the Western individualistic tradition that the loneliness of being alone is tolerable, in limited doses, and can provide a context for adolescents' reflexive project of constructing the much-valued personal self. Under these conditions loneliness may be useful.

Acknowledgment

13 | Social Self-Discrepancy Theory and Loneliness During Childhood and Adolescence

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In this chapter, we are interested in loneliness in children and adolescents and its relevance to their adjustment. The subjective experience of loneliness as a negative affective state associated with deficits in the formation of social relationships has long been recognized as an important area of study in adults (see Marangoni & Ickes, 1989, for a review). However, until the past decade, loneliness was relatively neglected in the child and adolescent literature. In recent years, a growing body of literature has emerged to suggest that children and adolescents experience feelings of loneliness related to problems in social relationships. Indeed, approximately 10% of children between kindergarten through eighth grade report feeling very lonely (Asher et al., 1984; Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992). These and other studies highlight the fact that loneliness can occur with alarming frequency across child and adolescent development.

Loneliness is related to a range of emotional, social, and behavioral problems for children, adolescents, and adults. Emotional problems include low self-esteem (Hymel et al., 1990), depression (Goswick & Jones, 1981), and social anxiety (Moore & Schultz, 1983). Social problems include peer rejection and victimization, lack of friendships, and lack of high-quality friendships (Asher et al., 1990; Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Boivin & Hymel, 1996; Crick & Ladd, 1993; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Parker & Asher, 1993b). Behavioral problems include shyness, social withdrawal, spending more time alone (Horowitz, French, & Anderson, 1982; Jones et al., 1981; Russell et al., 1980), dating frequency (Brennan, 1982), and decreased participation in religious and extracurricular school activities (Brennan, 1982). Thus, feeling lonely, in and of itself, is a negative outcome for children and adolescents, but it is also associated with other adjustment problems. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of understanding the factors associated with loneliness.

Despite the fact that research on the implications of loneliness for the adjustment of youth has been an area of growing interest, theories about the etiology of loneliness in children and adolescents and about developmental differences in the factors related to the onset of loneliness are only recently being developed. Thus, the goal of the present chapter was to develop a theoretical model relating social cognitions about the self to loneliness in children and adolescents. The chapter is organized into four sections. In the next section, we discuss previous efforts to explain the phenomenon of loneliness in children and adolescents within theoretical and empirical contexts. In the second section, we examine the association between peer relationship problems and loneliness in the context of self-discrepancy theory and propose the relevance of examining self-discrepancies in the social domain. We provide a review of the peer relations literature and its relation to loneliness that provides initial support for this theory. In the third section, we describe a study we conducted to test the applicability of social self-discrepancy theory to the understanding of self-reports of loneliness in adolescents. Finally, we discuss the implications of social self-discrepancy theory and our study for future research efforts that attempt to understand the etiology of feelings of loneliness.

Theoretical and Empirical Explanations of Loneliness

Two theoretical models have emerged regarding the etiology and implications of loneliness for the adjustment of youth: the social needs model and the cognitive discrepancy model. According to the social needs model (Bowlby, 1973; Fromm-Reichman, 1959; Sullivan, 1953; Weiss, 1973), human individuals have a universal, basic need for social contact (e.g., affiliation, companionship, intimacy, and attachment). When this need is not met, individuals experience loneliness. Thus, loneliness is the result of an actual deficit in the extent or closeness of social contact.

In contrast, the cognitive discrepancy model (Paloutzian & Janigan, 1987; Peplau & Perlman, 1979; Peplau et al., 1982) distinguishes between actual and desired level of social contact. Individuals will experience loneliness only to the extent to which their actual degree of interpersonal contact falls short of their desired degree of contact. The larger this discrepancy, the stronger the feelings of loneliness will be.

In addition to these two theoretical perspectives, a host of other approaches have attempted to identify predictors of loneliness. One approach has distinguished between different aspects of loneliness. Marcoen and Goossens (1993) pointed out the importance of distinguishing

between parent-related and peer-related loneliness when studying children and adolescents. In addition, Weiss (1973) distinguished between emotional and social loneliness. Weiss defined emotional loneliness in terms of the feelings that emanate from the lack of a close, intimate attachment dyadic relationship; he defined social loneliness in terms of the feelings that emanate from the lack of strong association with a meaningful group. This approach views negative social experiences as critical antecedent conditions for loneliness. The assumption underlying this approach is that certain aspects of peer relationships are normative, and that any deviation from these norms is associated with loneliness. In support of this approach, aspects of peer relationships have been shown to be associated with loneliness. Specifically, absence of positive relationships (i.e., lack of friendship and lack of high-quality friendship) and presence of negative relationships (i.e., peer rejection and peer victimization) predict loneliness (Asher et al., 1990; Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Crick & Ladd, 1993; G. A. Williams, Ladd, & Asher, 1996). Four peer contexts were examined simultaneously in structural equation models in relation to self-reports of loneliness (G. A. Williams et al., 1996). Feelings of loneliness were predicted by both the absence of positive relationship qualities with peers and the presence of peer victimization. Thus, both the way a child was treated by his or her peers and the quality of his or her relationships were associated with loneliness. Although unexamined in the loneliness literature, other aspects of peer relationships have been shown to increase in importance in adolescence, such as romantic relationships (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992) and social networks (Cairns, Leung, & Cairns, 1995). As such, these relationships may have important implications for the study of loneliness.

A second approach points to personality characteristics such as shyness, anxiety, social withdrawal, and submissiveness (Hymel et al., 1993; Boivin et al., 1989; Parker & Asher, 1993b) as predictors of loneliness. Passive socially withdrawn children report feeling lonelier than more sociable children (Hymel, Woody, & Bowker, 1993; K. H. Rubin et al., 1993; K. H. Rubin & Mills, 1988). In addition, social withdrawal in early childhood is predictive of loneliness in middle childhood (Hymel et al., 1990). Rejected children who are submissive in their behavior have also been found in several studies to report more loneliness and social dissatisfaction than average-status children (Boivin et al., 1989; Boivin et al., 1994; Parker & Asher, 1993b; Williams & Asher, 1987).

A third approach is concerned with attributions for success and failure. The tendency to attribute success to external and unstable factors and to attribute failure to internal and stable factors is associated with loneliness

across age groups (Anderson, Horowitz, & French, 1983; Bukowski & Ferber, 1987; Renshaw & Brown, 1993). Consistent with this perspective, Bukowski and Ferber found that children who attribute peer relationship problems to internal and stable causes are more lonely. Likewise, Crick, Grotpeter, and Rockhill (1996) have adopted the social-information-processing model to explain self-reports of loneliness (also Crick et al., this volume). According to this model, children incorporate feedback gained through their social experiences into their "social database." This database stores information about individuals, their peers, and their peer relationships, and it influences their processing of information in specific situations. In a study of elementary-school-age children, Crick et al. (1996) reported a relation between social information processing and peer experiences, supporting the notion that peer experiences affect social information processing. With regard to loneliness, they found that, for girls, social information processing predicted loneliness and added to the prediction obtained by peer experiences. For boys, however, social information processing was unrelated to loneliness. Thus, awareness of one's peer status, expectations for social interactions with peers, and attributions for social successes and failures may interact with social experiences to produce loneliness.

Finally, another line of research has pursued a cumulative approach to the identification of predictors of loneliness. This research has examined the relative influence of the above-mentioned predictors simultaneously and within a single sample. For example, personality characteristics (e.g., social withdrawal), problematic peer relationships (e.g., peer rejection), and self-deprecatory attributional patterns (e.g., attributing personal failure to internal and stable factors) each predict the presence of loneliness. Empirical support has begun to emerge to support this more complex model. For example, Bukowski and Ferber (1987) reported that unpopular children who attributed peer rejection experiences to internal and stable causes were the loneliest. Also, Renshaw and Brown (1993) combined the factors listed earlier in a single study, and they reported that withdrawn behavior, low peer acceptance, lack of friendships, and internal and stable attributions were related to later loneliness. Thus, these different factors uniquely contributed to the prediction of loneliness within a single sample. Finally, Boivin and Hymel (1997) considered the personality characteristics of aggression and withdrawal as well as the peer group factors of victimization and affiliation in a single sample. They reported that the impact of social withdrawal on loneliness was mediated in part, by peer rejection and by peer behaviors directed toward the target child (victimization).

Although these more complex approaches have recently received empirical support, the theoretical basis underlying the social–cognitive component of these models has been less well developed (Renshaw & Brown, 1993). This focus, then, formed the primary goal of the present chapter, namely, to develop a theoretical model relating social cognitions about the self to loneliness in children and adolescents.

We have noted in the past that although problematic peer relations can have negative consequences for concurrent and subsequent adjustment such as feelings of loneliness, negative outcomes do not necessarily generalize to all children with peer problems (Kupersmidt, Buchele, Voegler, & Sedikides, 1996). For example, as Renshaw and Brown (1993) pointed out, studies assessing peer factors account for a low-to-moderate amount of variance in loneliness scores. Several explanations for these observed individual differences have been proposed, such as the attributional bias approach, whereby some children may blame themselves for their social failures. Asher et al. (1990) provided several additional possible explanations for the relation between peer factors and loneliness, including the ideas that some children may receive social support from individuals other than their peers, some children may have experienced social problems for relatively short periods of time and therefore may not experience associated loneliness, and some children classified as having peer problems may in fact have one high-quality friendship. In addition, children may place differing levels of importance on aspects of social relationships. For example, some children may have a relatively low level of interest in affiliation with peers or high peer status. Such children may describe themselves as not caring what others think about them or not wanting or needing friends. Also, these children may have other means of satisfying their social needs, such as through a positive affiliation with a pet, parent, or sibling. For these children, peer problems may be unrelated to their emotional adjustment. Thus, knowledge of normative cognitions about desirable or ideal social conditions, experiences, and resources would provide researchers with a benchmark for evaluating social functioning and may improve researchers' ability to predict children's reactions to different kinds of interpersonal successes and failures with peers.

The aim of this chapter is to propose and develop a theoretical model relating children's and adolescents social self-cognitions to feelings of loneliness. Social–cognitive factors represent individual-difference variables that may help to account for the differential impact of peer relations problems on loneliness. In this chapter, we develop a framework that explains individual differences in the impact of the type, quality, and quantity of children's peer relations problems on loneliness. The theoretical model

that we describe in this chapter conceptualizes social cognitions about the self as a moderator of the associations between peer relationship problems and loneliness. We also present the results of an empirical study that we conducted with children and adolescents to begin to examine this theory.

Self-Discrepancy Theory Applied to Social Relationships and Feelings of Loneliness

Description of the Theory

Social cognitions about the self have been examined extensively in the social psychological literature. In particular, Higgins and his colleagues have developed a framework for understanding different cognitions about the self, known as *self-discrepancy theory* (Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986; Strauman & Higgins, 1987). This model evolved separately from the cognitive discrepancy model of loneliness described previously. Nonetheless, the two models are similar to one another in that they both consider cognitive discrepancies as predictors of emotional states. This self-discrepancy model adds to the literature on loneliness in that it provides a context within models of the self by which the social–cognitive underpinnings of loneliness can be better understood. Self-discrepancy theory distinguishes among several domains of the self. For the purposes of understanding loneliness, two of these domains are relevant, namely, the *actual self* (representations of attributes actually possessed) and the *ideal self* (representations of attributes that might ideally be possessed).

We have described an important difference between Higgins's (1987) theory and our adaptation of the theory to understanding individual differences in peer relations problems on children and adolescents (Kupersmidt et al., 1996). Briefly, in Higgins's conceptualization, all aspects of the self are examined, whereas we have focused our interests on examining only the social realm of the self. Thus, we have termed our adaptation of this theory, *social self-discrepancy theory*. We define the *actual social self* as children's perceptions of their actual social resources (e.g., the actual type, quality, and quantity of peer relations), and we define the *ideal social self* as children's reported desired social resources, or social needs (e.g., the desired type, quality, and quantity of peer relations).

In our model, an ideal social self cognition is a broad conceptualization of the desire for and importance of social relationships. For example, a child who reports that being popular is very important would be said to have a high ideal for popularity. Ideal social self-cognitions are distinguished from the construct of social goals by their relatively broad nature.

We conceptualize a *social goal* in the context of the social-information-processing model as a type of social cognition that may determine the choice of strategies used to solve a specific social problem. Social goals have been operationalized in terms of the proximal and immediate goals for specific social situations (e.g., Renshaw & Asher, 1983). Ideal peer relationships reflect cognitive structures representative of the social self. These cognitive structures are thought to be accessible in memory and can influence social goals and behavior in specific situations (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1990, 1991; see also Higgins, 1990).

We have organized our understanding of the actual and ideal social selves into three broad peer contexts of the type, quality, and quantity of peer relationships. First, social self-cognitions may vary with regard to the type of relationship, such as dyadic same-sex or dyadic opposite-sex friendships. For example, a child may have a high level of desire for a best friend, but may have a low level of desire for a romantic partner. Second, social self-cognitions may vary with regard to the qualities or provisions of the relationship. For example, a child may want to have a best friend for companionship but may place less importance on sharing secrets or intimacy. Another example is that a child or adolescent may really want a low-conflict best friendship and may not care about having high levels of support. Third, social self-cognitions may vary with regard to the perceived quantity of relationships. For example, a person may want many close friends but may believe that he or she has only one close friend.

Researchers examining similar constructs in adults have conceptualized the desire for social relationships or the ideal social self as global personality variables such as sociotropy or need for relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Beck, 1983). Thus, the ideal social self of adults is viewed as a stable personality trait that, in the extreme, may be representative of psychopathology. In contrast, we propose that in children and adolescents, social self-cognitions are context specific and vary both within and across individuals. We expect that social self-cognitions in one context are relatively independent of social self-cognitions in other contexts. High levels of importance in one social domain may be unrelated to high levels of importance in another social domain. In addition, adult models are typically presented as relatively static models, whereas we conceptualize social self-cognitions in children and adolescents as operating within a dynamic developmental framework. Thus, we would expect to find individual differences as well as developmental differences in social cognitions about features of children's peer relationships. For example, the ideal social cognition of wanting a best friend (as opposed to playmates)

may increase across elementary school and may stabilize throughout ado-
lescence. Likewise, wanting a boyfriend or girlfriend may be relatively
less common in childhood and may become increasingly more important
across adolescence as well.

As the name suggests, self-discrepancy theory is primarily concerned
with differences or discrepancies among the different domains of the
self. The theory suggests that discrepancies between different domains
of the self will be related to adjustment. For example, if an individ-
ual's actual self does not match his or her ideal self (he or she does
not have what he or she would like), the individual should experience
some adjustment-related outcome as a result of this discrepancy. Specifi-
cally, self-discrepancy theory proposes that discrepancies between actual
and ideal selves result in dejection-related affect. This affective reaction
to an ideal–actual discrepancy signifies the absence of positive outcomes,
or the nonattainment of goals, desires, and hopes. In support of this idea,
research with adults has found that ideal–actual self-discrepancies are
associated with sadness, disappointment, and discouragement (Higgins
et al., 1986; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985; Strauman & Higgins, 1987).
In addition, discrepancies between actual and desired relationships in
adults have been suggested as predictors of loneliness in adults (Peplau &
Perlman, 1982; Rook, 1988). Although this model has been less well ex-
amined with children and adolescents, we would expect to find a similar
pattern of findings to those reported with adults. In the case of the present
chapter, the dejection-related affect examined with children and adoles-
cents was loneliness.

Empirical Findings Relating Social Self-Discrepancy Theory to Loneliness

The relation between social self-discrepancy theory and loneliness has
received some prior theoretical attention in the adult literature. Loneliness
has been thought to be dependent on the degree of discrepancy between
individuals' desired and actual social relationships (Peplau & Perlman,
1982; Rook, 1988). The discrepancy between perceptions of ideal and ac-
tual social relationships is thought to be a cognitive mediator between
social relationships and psychological adjustment. Self-discrepancy the-
ory has empirically been examined in children and adolescents in only
a few studies and has rarely been examined with respect to loneliness.
Nevertheless, these studies provide some support for the notion that
ideal–actual discrepancies in children may be related to their experiences
in social relationships (Archibald, Bartholomew, & Marx, 1995; Higgins,
Loeb, & Moretti, 1995; E. C. Rubin, Cohen, Houston, & Cockrel, 1996). The

ideal social self has been examined, to some extent, in studies of children's
subjective experiences with peers or in their reports of different types of
desirable or ideal peer relations.

The importance of distinguishing between those children who are alone
by choice and those who prefer to be with others and are alone because of
peer rejection has previously been discussed (K. H. Rubin & Asendorpf,
1993; Rubin et al., 1990). For example, K. H. Rubin (1993) reported that
5-year-olds who exhibited socially withdrawn behavior tended to report
that interactions and relationships with others were not important to them.
One might interpret these findings as suggesting that for these socially
withdrawn children, their ideal social self would include cognitions that
being alone was important and that affiliating with peers is less important
or not important to them.

In a recent study, adolescents rated a variety of social goals that factor
analyzed into six scales, including dominance, intimacy, nurturance, lead-
ership, popularity, and peer victimization (Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996). An
examination of this new measure indicated that, in fact, the items could
also be described as assessing aspects of the ideal social self. For exam-
ple, items were constructed with the root phrase "When I am with people
my own age, I like it when" or "I don't like it when." An example stem
for the popularity scale is "I'm the most popular" and for the avoidance
scale is "they pick on me." These six social goals or aspects of the ideal
social self were examined in relation to self-reports of loneliness and so-
cial dissatisfaction on Asher et al.'s (1984) scale. Loneliness items were
reverse scored so that high scores indicated less loneliness and greater
social satisfaction. Jarvinen and Nicholls reported that the goals or ideals
of popularity and intimacy and nurturance from friends were positively
correlated and that dominance was negatively correlated with social satis-
faction. Hence, the more adolescents endorsed dyadic quality and group
acceptance ideal self-cognitions or goals, the less lonely they reported that
they were. Also, the more they desired to be dominant with peers, the
more lonely they were.

The cognitive discrepancy model was compared with the social needs
model in a study of loneliness in 10th-grade students (Archibald et al.,
1995). Students' reports of loneliness were predicted by actual levels of
social contact and by discrepancies from a personally defined ideal stan-
dard and a socially defined normative standard of social activity. The
domains of social activity that were examined included social friends,
close friends, and special activities such as attending parties or going to
movies. This measure focused on levels of social contact or activities
with peers but did not examine other features of peer relations such as

size of social network, quality of peer relations, status in peer group, or social experiences such as peer victimization. Actual social activity was determined on the basis of summed scores across the three domains. Likewise, ideal social relations were examined through a composite measure of social satisfaction summed across the domains. The relation between the actual levels of social activity and loneliness were hypothesized to reflect the social needs model and hence, this was controlled for in each model. Although actual–ideal and actual–normative discrepancies were associated with loneliness, they only added minimally to the prediction of loneliness after controlling for level of social activity. Archibald et al. concluded that their findings provided more support for the social needs rather than for the cognitive discrepancy model, but they cautioned about limitations in the study because of the restricted range of social relations that were examined. Taken together, these studies provided initial evidence of the importance of examining broader social goals or ideal social self-cognitions in terms of their measurability and their relation to loneliness.

Examination of the Self-Discrepancy Model for Loneliness

Goals of the Study

We conducted a study to examine Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy model as a means of explaining loneliness in adolescents. The existing literature on the relationship between problematic peer relations and loneliness led us to focus on the social domain in the present study. Given that problems in friendship have already been found to be associated with loneliness in children (see Parker et al., this volume), we expected to replicate and extend these findings in the context of the self-discrepancy model for adolescents. In addition, other types of peer relationship problems may be associated with negative outcomes in adolescents and constitute additional domains of inquiry within the rubric of social functioning. For example, considering the normative nature of social network involvement across childhood and adolescence, one hypothesis is that lack of involvement in a desired social network might additionally be associated with loneliness in children. Similarly, romantic relationships become increasingly more common across adolescence so that lack of desired involvement in a romantic relationship might also be associated with adolescent loneliness. By using a recently developed measure of the social self, we were able to examine the relative strengths of association between each discrepancy and loneliness. On the basis of the prior findings of the additive relationship between different types of peer problems and loneliness,

we also hypothesized that social self-discrepancies were additively associated with loneliness in a cumulative risk model.

Description of Study Methods and Results

A study was conducted with 212 African American and Caucasian 7th- and 11th-grade students enrolled in a rural southern public high school. Participating students completed several paper-and-pencil questionnaires during the regular school day including the Social Selves Questionnaire (SSQ; Kupersmidt et al., 1996), the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (LSDQ; Asher & Wheeler, 1985), and other measures not relevant to the current study.

The LSDQ is a 16-item measure that assesses children's self-reports of loneliness and social dissatisfaction on a 5-point rating scale, with higher summed scores indicating greater feelings of loneliness. Scores for this sample ranged from a low of 16 to a high of 59. Previous studies have demonstrated adequate internal reliability and validity of this questionnaire (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Asher et al., 1990; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992; Terrell-Deutsch, this volume). Because this measure has been used more often with children, we examined its psychometric properties with the current sample of adolescents. Internal consistencies of the LSDQ for 7th graders was .90 and for 11th graders was .87, findings that are consistent with prior research. The LSDQ had convergent validity with the Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (Angold et al., 1987) designed to measure depression in children and adolescents (.53, $p < .0001$, for 7th graders and .42, $p < .0001$, for 11th graders) and the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978; .52, $p < .0001$, for 7th graders and .57, $p < .0001$, for 11th graders). Because of the significant positive correlations found across studies between depression and anxiety, we expected loneliness to be correlated with both types of negative affect (V. V. Wolfe et al., 1987). Discriminant validity was also examined by using the Trait Scale of the State–Trait Anger Scale (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983). Loneliness was not correlated with trait anger (.05 for 7th graders and .10 for 11th graders). Although some researchers suggest that adolescents, on average, report higher levels of loneliness than children (Parkhurst & Asher, 1992; Peplau & Perlman, 1982), mean levels of loneliness in this sample did not appear to be unusually high (7th grade: $M = 26.59$, $SD = 9.90$; 11th grade: $M = 27.75$, $SD = 8.69$).

The SSQ is a new self-report measure designed to assess the type, quality, and quantity of ideal, actual, and ought social self-cognitions in children and adolescents. For the purpose of the present study, six subscales on the actual and ideal sections were utilized and are described later. Each

actual social self item began with the stem "I have." A parallel form of the actual section was developed to assess the ideal social self. Each ideal social self item was identical to each of the actual social self items, except that each began with the stem "It is important to me or I want." Each item was rated on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (*not true for me*) to 5 (*the most true for me*).

Six subscale scores were created for the following social contexts including having a best friend, having a good quality best friendship, having a romantic relationship, experiencing peer acceptance, being in a social network, and not being victimized by peers. Except as noted later, each scale item was presented with both the actual stem and the ideal stem described previously. All scale items are described later, using the actual stems as examples. Three scales contain one item per scale because they indicate solely the presence or absence of a particular type of peer relationship. The Presence of a Best Friend Scale included one item, "I have a best friend." Similarly, the Romantic Relationship Scale included one item, "I have a boy/girlfriend." The Social Network Membership Scale included one item, "I have a group of friends." The Best Friendship Quality Scale consisted of seven items, "I have a best friend who will be my friend for a long time," "I have a best friend who I can trust," "I have a best friend who I can talk to about my problems," "I have a best friend who I can share my thoughts and feelings with," "I have a best friend who keeps my secrets," "I have a best friend who sticks up for me," and "My best friend and I do not have arguments with each other." The Peer-Group Acceptance Scale consisted of five items, "I am popular," "I am liked by a lot of kids," "I hang out with more than one group of kids," "I spend a lot of time around other kids," and "I am the kind of person other kids want as their leader." Finally, the Not Being Victimized by Peers Scale consisted of four items, "I am not picked on or bullied by other kids," "I am not talked about behind my back by other kids," "I am not rejected or disliked by other kids," and "I am not left out by other kids."

Internal consistencies of scales were acceptable and ranged from a low of .67 to a high of .94. The seventh-grade sample was retested 2 weeks after the original testing. Test–retest correlations were low to moderate, ranging from .34 to .77 for actual self and from .45 to .78 for ideal self, suggesting that children's conceptualizations of their actual and ideal social selves are moderately stable across time. These findings are consistent with arguments that self-perceptions are reflective of children's social experiences that vary over time (Crick & Ladd, 1993) and with reports on the stability of self-concepts across childhood and adolescence (Damon & Hart, 1986).

Correlations among the scales described previously were examined separately for 7th and 11th graders. In general, students distinguished among the peer context scales within a domain of the self and among the domains of the self within a peer context. Within the Actual domain, correlations among the different peer contexts ranged from .03 to .27. Within the Ideal domain, correlations ranged from .14 to .67. The correlations for each peer context scale between Actual and Ideal Social Selves scales were .43 for Presence of Best Friend, .25 for Romantic Relationship, .31 for Social Network Membership, .64 for Best Friendship Quality, .47 for Peer-Group Acceptance, and .15 for Not Being Victimized by Peers. Taken together, these mild-to-moderate interscale correlations suggest that adolescents could distinguish among the different domains of the self and the six peer contexts.

To test the discrepancy hypothesis, we first examined ideal scores. Because these scores were not normally distributed, we were unable to analyze the data using continuous raw scores. Instead, we chose to classify ideal scores for each of the six social domains into one of two groups, namely, being a domain of high importance or being a domain of low importance to each individual. We decided that a median split on the six scale scores might underestimate the level of importance of the domain. Thus, we adopted an absolute cutoff point reflecting the descriptive anchors on the rating scales. High importance was indicated by a scale score of greater than or equal to three, which represented ratings of moderate importance or better. Low importance was classified by a mean scale score of less than three, which represented that the social context was not at all important or a little important to the student. The majority of students reported that the six social domains were important to them when using this definition, as can be seen in Table 13.1. In fact, low importance was endorsed by 20 or more students for only three of the peer context scales including the Peer Group Acceptance, Romantic Relationship, and Not Being Victimized by Peers. High importance was found to be normative in this adolescent sample for the scales of Having a Best Friend, Best Friendship Quality, and Social Network Membership.

In the cases in which all students classified a domain as being of high importance, the discrepancy hypotheses is implied by a significant negative correlation between scores in the actual social subscale and loneliness. Hence, low actual scores implicitly suggest a discrepancy with the normatively high ideal for that peer context. Because of a small number of students in the low-importance group for three of the domains, only correlations are reported for the high-importance group between the actual social self and loneliness (see Table 13.1). Consistent with self-discrepancy

Table 13.1. Correlations of Mean Actual Social Self and Loneliness Scores as a Function of Ideal Social Self Level for Each Social Domain

| | Level of Ideal Social Self | | | |
| | Low | | High | |
Social Domain	r	n	r	n
Have a best friend		11	−.38***	201
Quality of best friendship		10	−.48**	202
Have a romantic relationship	−.05	44	−.16*	162
Peer acceptance	−.40**	54	−.63***	158
Not victimized by peers	−.26	32	−.36***	180
Have a social network		14	−.46***	198

*$p < .05$.   **$p < .001$.   ***$p < .0001$.

theory, the less a student has a best friend, a high-quality best friendship, or a social network, the more lonely the student reports that he or she is.

The correlation between actual social self and loneliness for each domain for students who rated the domain as low versus high in importance can also be seen in Table 13.1. The difference in the magnitude of correlations for the two ideal groups (low vs. high) is readily obvious. For example, the actual social self is more strongly correlated with loneliness for the Peer Group Acceptance and Not Being a Victim Scales. Thus, for adolescents who report that peer group acceptance is important, the less well liked they are by the peers, the lonelier they say that they are. For students who report that peer-group acceptance is relatively less important to them, the correlation between the actual Peer Group Acceptance and Loneliness Scales is less strong. Likewise, for students who report that peer victimization is very undesirable, being a victim is associated with loneliness. This association was not found for students who reported that being a victim of peer aggression is not that important to them. The magnitudes of the correlations for the low-versus-high groups for having a romantic relationship did not differ. The results of these correlations provide support for the discrepancy hypothesis in the social domain for adolescents.

Given recent interest in the cumulative risk model and the findings reported by Renshaw and Brown (1993), we also tested the hypothesis that the number of social domains with an ideal–actual discrepancy would be significantly and positively related to loneliness. Children were
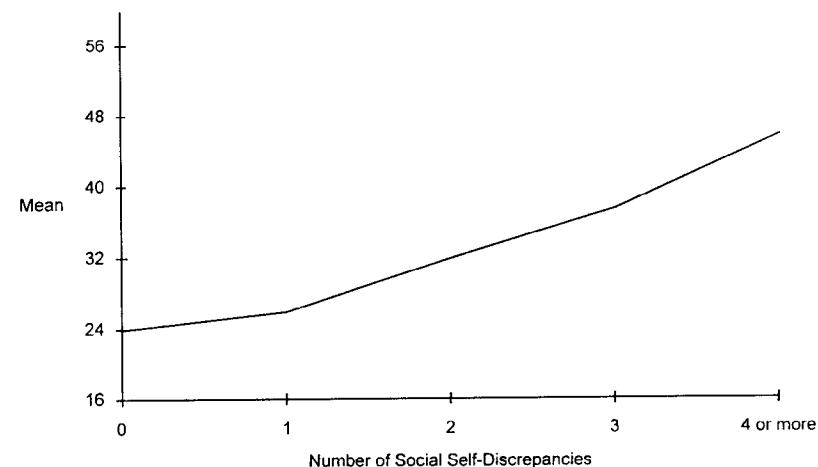
Figure 13.1. Mean loneliness scores as a functions of number of social self-discrepancies.

classified on each scale as being discrepant for that scale if they had a high ideal mean score greater than or equal to three and an actual mean score less than three. For the purpose of this analysis, all other students were classified on each scale as nondiscrepant if they did not meet this criteria. The number of ideal–actual discrepancies was summed for each study participant and ranged from 0 to 6. Only six students had four or more discrepancies so that the range of scores was changed to range from 0 to 4. The sum ideal–actual discrepancy score was significantly correlated with the sum loneliness score ($r = .50$, $p < .0001$). As the number of social self-discrepancies increased, the mean level of loneliness also increased. These findings are graphically represented in Figure 13.1, which suggests that discrepancies are additively related to one another in the prediction of loneliness. In addition, the mean scores for the students who reported three or more discrepancies were among the highest sum scores reported in the literature and exceed the mean scores reported for children who were rejected by their peers using peer report measures (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Crick & Ladd, 1993; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1993b).

Conclusions

The self-discrepancy model that we have adopted in this chapter to explain loneliness in children and adolescents represents an attempt to integrate

previous research on self-cognitions with the peer relationships literature. We summarized different theoretical approaches to understanding the conditions under which loneliness has been reported in youth and focused on a possible mechanism that may underlie the observed relation between social problems and loneliness. We have proposed one broad framework within which these mechanisms may be understood and tested. We applied the self-discrepancy framework to examining cognitions about the social self and have argued that discrepancies between various aspects of the social self can be powerful elicitors of negative affect such as loneliness.

In the present framework, our goal has been to focus on peer problems and their relation to loneliness; however, self-discrepancy theory may also be applicable to explaining the relation between social experiences and other negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and anger. In addition, the theory may be applied to examining the relation between social successes and emotional well-being and life satisfaction. This approach is not incompatible with other research on the self, social behavior, social experiences, and emotional adjustment and may be one of several mechanisms that may operate to produce negative affect in the developing child or adolescent. The social self-discrepancy model undoubtedly operates within a network of other social and self-cognitions to produce an affective outcome. In addition, these processes may vary as a function of competing needs and resources, as well as developmental, ethnic, and gender differences.

In one sense, social self-discrepancy theory may be conceptualized as an example of a cognitive discrepancy theory with particular relevance for negative affect such as loneliness regarding social relations. In addition, the discrepancy approach may provide an explanatory framework for explaining prior support for the social needs theory. Consistent with the social needs theory, certain types of peer relationships were nearly universally desired by adolescents. Hence, the correlation of any measure of actual social contact in those specific, universal domains with loneliness would be hypothesized to be significant. The discrepancy score would not be needed in the sense that the actual would be subtracted from a "universal constant." On the surface, this type of analysis would appear to provide support for the social needs theory; however, at its root, a discrepancy with the universal ideal is implied. In the present study, for example, for each of the universal social needs or ideals, there were significant correlations between the actual social self and loneliness. In addition, we did find several domains of peer relationships that demonstrated variability in responding. This variability in the ideal social self

allowed for the direct examination of the discrepancy model that resulted in empirical support for that theory.

In conclusion, the ideas contained in this chapter suggest new directions for research on loneliness that more carefully examine the self as part of the prediction model. Relations between social behavior and social experiences have provided important advances in understanding loneliness in youth. However, cognitions about the self in social relationships across different developmental levels and their relationship to loneliness are less well-known. We have proposed that discrepancies between the ideal and actual social self for various types, qualities, and quantities of peer relations may play an important role in predicting loneliness and warrants additional investigation. The use of a theoretical framework such as social self-discrepancy theory will provide one avenue for moving beyond the description of social behavior and social relationships and their effect on youth to the development of explanatory models of the cognitive processes involved.

Acknowledgment