

Postmodern Openings

ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387

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2021, Volume 12, Issue 2, pages: 01-17 | <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/12.2/294>

Research of the Relationship between Perfectionism and Feelings of Loneliness of Youths

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Abstract: The purpose of the study is a theoretical substantiation and empirical study of the psychological content parameters of the relationship between perfectionism and feelings of loneliness in youth. A new view of modern reality with its constant changes and increased requirements for the functioning of the individual in society has been substantiated. It is noted that such a view provokes the mass formation and spread of perfectionism and loneliness. It is noted that every day more and more people, especially young people, suffer from the imperfections of this world and the feeling of isolation from others. It has been established that socially conditioned perfectionism, concern for mistakes, doubts about one's own actions and self-criticism have a positive significant connection with the feeling of loneliness in youth ($p < .01$). However, rigid perfectionism and self-centered perfectionism are inversely related to feelings of loneliness. It was found that young men are largely prone to self-centered perfectionism ($p < .01$). A pronounced high level of loneliness was observed in $n=18$ subjects. Attention has been drawn to the fact that doubts about one's own actions and concern for mistakes inevitably provoke feelings of loneliness. Emphasis has been placed on important areas of actualization of empirical results in order to develop constructive perfectionism. It has been noted that the results obtained should be operationalized in educational and professional training of students-psychologists.

Keywords: *Constructive perfectionism, professional training, student, youth, psychologists.*

How to cite: Blynova, O., Kostenko, T., Nesin, Y., Fedorova, O., Chaban, O., Pyslar, A., & Popovych, I. (2021). Research of the Relationship between Perfectionism and Feelings of Loneliness of Youths. *Postmodern Openings*, 12(2), 01-17. <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/12.2/294>

1. Introduction

World globalization, social transformations, the complication of the spheres of relations, the constant increase in the requirements for the effective functioning of the personality in society inevitably provokes the mass formation and spread of such a psychological phenomenon as perfectionism.

Researchers of perfectionism consider it a disease of modernity, a disease of culture and a cult of success. "Cultural disease" is provoked by the high speed of social change, copying of Western European and other cultures, stereotyping of behavior.

Youths are most acutely aware of all social changes, challenges and demands, as they are faced with the need to choose a life strategy, the formation of personal and professional qualities.

2. Literature review

Modern psychology interprets perfectionism as a multicomponent personal construct, the essence of which is the individual's desire to achieve perfection in all spheres of life, to bring the results to the highest moral, intellectual, physical standards (Kononenko, 2017; Klenina, 2019).

In the 1990s, ideas about the internal structure of perfectionism were greatly expanded. Developments of British researchers under the guidance of R. Frost (1990) and P. Marten (1990), as well as Canadian scientists led by P. Hewitt (1991) and G. Flett (1991) have appeared.

We established that the current state of development of the problem of perfectionism is characterized by the presence of a significant number of models of this phenomenon. However, there are still many questions about understanding of perfectionism.

Perfectionism is a phenomenon that in many ways socially determined by nature. It is established that two main groups of factors are decisive in its occurrence: interpsychic and factors of family upbringing (Horney, 1993). This suggests that methods of upbringing and education, which are associated with the praise of the child, if he does well, and absence of praise, when the child does not show great success, are likely to lead to the development of perfectionism in old age.

Traditionally, perfectionism has been defined as a phenomenon that affects all spheres of human life, but the current view of the problem of perfectionism highlights it as differentiated into components that may affect certain characteristics of the personality and the sphere of her life. At present, a series of researches have convincingly demonstrated that

perfectionism is not always “global”; it partly affects only some of the most important areas of human life (McArdle, 2010). These are the results obtained in researches of perfectionism in sports and education. They show that members of university sports teams demonstrate a very high level of perfectionism in the field of sports achievements, but at the same time they do not have the desire for perfection in educational activities. But academically gifted young people had high rates of perfectionism aimed at learning; the desire for excellence in sports was at an average level (Dunn et al., 2006).

In the modern dimension, the question of the nature of the influence of perfectionism on the personality remains debatable. This is especially applies to people who are at a critical period of their development – youth. After all, this is a period of personal and professional development, the formation of professional orientation and identity, planning their future lives, as well as the development of their own worldview (Doktorová & Piteková, 2020b; Karpenko, 2016). The results of research on perfectionism indicate both negative and positive consequences of this phenomenon (Doktorová & Piteková, 2020b; Masoumeh, 2020; Prykhodko et al., 2020). The presence of contradictory data is primarily due to the fact that “healthy” and pathological perfectionism are distinguished. “Healthy” perfectionism is accompanied by an adequate desire for high standards, with the main focus on the process of performance, not on the result. At the same time, an unhealthy perfectionist constantly thinks only about the result, which never becomes perfect; he is upset by other people and his own mistakes, imperfection of work. This distinction is quite correct, because it allows the differentiation of perfectionists for further correctional work. The very term “pathological perfectionism” indicates the need for psychocorrection, which can prevent the development of depression and suicidal ideation. It is important to note that often perfectionism was seen as a negative characteristic of the personality, at the same time, perfectionism contains a whole system of traits that may well contribute to adaptability and positive development.

The phenomena of perfectionism and loneliness in youth acquire special psychological substantive formations and parameters (Shevchenko, 2019; Ma Feng et al., 2020). Youth is a period of searching for one’s identity and relationships with the environment (Blynova & Kruglov, 2019; Krupnyk & Tkalenko, 2019), so this age is marked by the first acute conscious experience of loneliness. Loneliness is sometimes interpreted as a necessary component of youth, as this feeling is associated with the beginning of adulthood and independent life (Grinyova, 2018).

The first to consider the problem of the psychological content of loneliness were representatives of the psychoanalytic approach, who interpreted it as a purely negative phenomenon arising from childhood experiences. They also believed that loneliness was the result of a great concentration of narcissism in the personality, mania for greatness and aggression. S. Freud (2005) and J. Breyer (2005) wrote that during neurosis people are isolated and removed from ordinary life, and loneliness is a prerequisite for neurosis (Freud & Breyer, 2005).

Subsequently, loneliness began to be seen as a result of the influence of society. Interesting is the point of view about emotional and social loneliness. Emotional loneliness is the result of absence of close intimacy (love or companionship), and a person may experience feelings similar to caring for an abandoned child. Social loneliness arises due to the lack of significant friendships or a sense of community, which can be traced in the experience of longing. Social loneliness arises due to the lack of significant friendships or a sense of community, which can be traced in the experience of anguish (Dovby, 2011).

Studying the feeling of loneliness, N. Huseynova (2013), noted that this phenomenon is quite complex and contradictory. It is sometimes associated with the deformation of various personal relationships, as well as the feeling of impossibility to take a stable position in this world. Loneliness hinders the process of successful entry of the personality into social relations, and the lack of a sense of loneliness leads to the underdevelopment of constructive relations with the world (Huseynova, 2013).

We understand the feeling of loneliness as a feeling of rupture with the environment, a difficult inner experience, which is associated with the loss of life values, resources, confidence in the need for own existence. Prolonged loneliness can lead to serious consequences: anxiety, depression, autonomic disorders. Based on this interpretation and theoretical analysis, we can say that the feeling of loneliness negatively affects the development of personality. However, in psychology there is no agreement in solving this problem. Indeed, a large number of scientists focus on the destructive effects of this phenomenon, but the feeling of loneliness is ambivalent and can be considered in the plane of initiating constructive influences. The experience of loneliness, on the one hand, helps the personality to learn to be independent and autonomous, and on the other – causes inadequate reactions in conflict situations (Kolesnikova, 2015).

So, we understand that the feeling of loneliness is a rather complex phenomenon, which can be both constructive and destructive in the life of

the personality. There is no unified understanding of its nature in psychology and probably will not be, because this phenomenon is ambivalent. The experience of loneliness in youth has a range of reasons: from individual mental to somatic. Young people who are acutely lonely may be prone to antisocial behavior.

Thus, the phenomena of perfectionism and loneliness of youths should be considered as multidimensional constructs that affect all spheres of life of the personality and certain activities. A perfectionist of adolescence tends to set too high personal stereotypes and standards of the activities, strives for the highest perfection and results according to the accepted external reference model. Perfectionism is a socially determined phenomenon and largely depends on the style of upbringing and learning in childhood.

We assume that among the respondents – youths there will be a positive correlation between the psychological content parameters of perfectionism and loneliness; the obtained empirical results will have practical value and it is expedient to operationalize them in educational and professional training of students-psychologists.

3. Methodology and methods

The methodological basis of the empirical research of the relationship between perfectionism and feelings of loneliness in youths is an algorithm that combines a series of sequential actions with the use of psychodiagnostic techniques. The selection of psychodiagnostic tools was guided by the requirement of relevant reflection of the subject of research. This methodology has been tested by researchers in the study of adaptation (Blynova et al., 2020a; Kononenko et al., 2020; Plokhikh, 2006), emotional intelligence (Halian et al., 2020a; 2020b), innovation (Tsiuniak, et al., 2020), as well as in the research of mental expectations in various activities of respondents (Blynova et al., 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Popovych et al., 2020). All submitted sources belong in whole or in part to the scientific research related to the perfectionism and loneliness of the respondents.

Participants

The research was conducted in September-October 2019 among students of Kherson State University (Kherson, Ukraine) (n=45), Kherson State Agrarian and Economic University (Kherson, Ukraine) (n=25) and Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University (Severodonetsk, Ukraine) (n=25), employees of the supermarket “ATB” (Kherson, Ukraine) (n=8), servicemen of the military unit № XXX-XX (Druzhba village,

Chernihiv region, Ukraine) (n=17). Number of subjects n=120. It is important that the sample included young people who do not belong to the category of students. An average age of the sample was 19.3 years (SD = 2.02).

Instruments

For the organization of empirical research, during the first academic semester (2019-2020) targeted observation, questionnaires and psychodiagnostic techniques were used. The questioning was conducted in order to collect the necessary biographical information for the research of respondents.

Based on the above models of perfectionism and loneliness, we selected psychodiagnostic techniques that allowed to determine the psychological content parameters and state the psychological features of the studied phenomena: “Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” (“MFS”) (Hewitt and Flett, 1991) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991), “The Big Three Perfectionism Scale” (“BTPS”) (Smith, Saklofske, Stoeber and Sherry, 2016) (Smith et al., 2016), diagnostic questionnaire to determine the type of loneliness “Loneliness” (Korchagina, 2008).

“Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” allows to study the structure of perfectionism: self-centered perfectionism – high personal standards, constant self-esteem and censorship of behavior; perfectionism focused on other people – unrealistic standards for important people and socially conditioned perfectionism, that is, the belief that people are unrealistic in their expectations. The questionnaire consists of 45 questions and three scales; each of them measures the level of expression of one of the components of perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

The methodology “The Big Three Perfectionism Scale” consists of 45 statements. Perfectionism is seen as a multidimensional construct consisting of three components: “rigid perfectionism”, “self-critical perfectionism” and “narcissistic perfectionism”. “Rigid perfectionism”, which is a strict self-demand, timely and impeccable performance of activities, consists of two scales: “self-centered perfectionism” and “problems with self-esteem”. “Self-critical perfectionism” consists of four scales: “concern about mistakes”, “doubts about one’s own actions”, “self-criticism” and “socially ascribed perfectionism”.

The third type of perfectionism – “self-critical perfectionism” (“narcissistic perfectionism”) also consists of four scales: “perfectionism, focused on others”, “hypercriticism”, “confidence that everyone owes me something” and “pretentiousness” (Smith et al., 2016).

The diagnostic questionnaire for determining the type of loneliness “Loneliness” is aimed at determining the depth of loneliness and its types: diffuse, alienating and dissociated. The diffuse type of loneliness is characterized by a combination of rather contradictory personality traits: resistance and adaptation in conflicts; the presence of all levels of empathy; excitability, anxiety; communicative orientation. The alienable type of loneliness is characteristic of people who tend to separate themselves from other people, norms and values. The dissociated type characterizes the most complex mental state of the subjects, both in terms of experiences and in terms of origin and reflection. First, the personality fully identifies with another one, accepts her way of life, and begins to trust. Subsequently, there is a sharp alienation, which reflects the true attitude of the personality to her. One side of the personality is accepted by it, and the other is categorically rejected (Korchagina, 2008).

Procedures

The empirical research was implemented in four stages:

1. Organizational stage – Ukrainian and foreign scientific sources have been generalized and analyzed; the conceptual and terminological field of research has been defined; the structure of the phenomena of perfectionism and loneliness has been specified.

2. Preparations of empirical research – methods have been selected; groups of subjects have been formed; a pilot study was conducted.

3. Research stage – psychodiagnostics of the phenomena of perfectionism and feelings of loneliness of youths on the basis of the developed diagnostic program has been conducted. The testing procedure took place in a group form. The research was based on the principles of confidentiality and voluntariness, guaranteeing the anonymity of the results.

4. Stage of analysis of the obtained data – quantitative and qualitative analysis of data, systematization and generalization of research results have been carried out.

The research is conducted according to ethical standards of committee on the rights of experiments of Helsinki declaration (2013).

Statistical Analysis

The following programs have been used for mathematical processing of the obtained data: “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences” v. 23.0 and “Microsoft Office Excel 2007”. Arithmetic mean value of parameters (M), standard error (Sx) and mean-square deviation (SD) were determined. Correlations were determined by the correlation coefficient Charles

Spearman (r_s). Differences between values of parameters at level $p \leq .05$ and $p \leq .01$ considered statistically significant.

4. Results and discussion

The estimation of the received psychological essential parameters by methods “MFS”, “BTPS” and “Loneliness” was carried out. Values on the scales of the minimum values (*Min*); maximum values (*Max*); arithmetic mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) are presented in Tabl. 1.

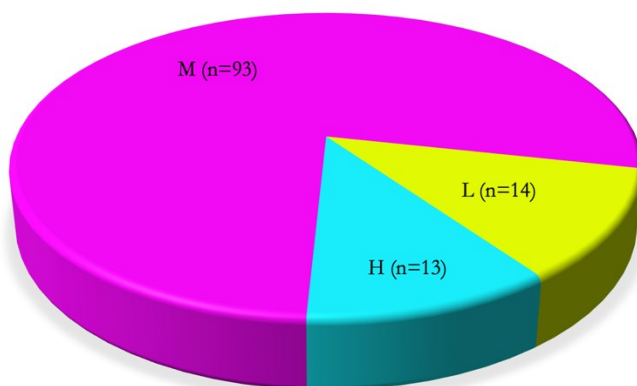
Table 1. Mean values and standard deviations of the scales of the studied parameters ($n=120$)

Scale	Min	Max	M	SD
“MFS”				
Self-centered	37.0	156.0	70.67	19.44
Focused on others	23.0	87.0	54.70	12.15
Socially determined	32.0	89.0	60.26	11.72
General	132.0	289.0	185.59	27.14
“BTPS”				
Rigid perfectionism	1.0	5.0	3.35	.95
Self-centered	1.0	5.0	3.27	.99
Problems with self-esteem	1.0	5.0	3.31	.87
Self-critical perfectionism	1.0	5.0	2.28	.95
Doubts about self actions	1.0	5.0	2.71	.91
Self-criticism	1.0	5.0	2.89	.90
Concerned about mistakes	1.0	5.0	2.75	.91
Socially conditioned	1.2	5.0	2.79	.69
Narcissistic perfectionism	1.0	5.0	2.66	.96
Focused on others	1.0	4.75	2.29	.94
Hypercriticism	1.0	5.0	2.34	.99
Confidence that everyone owes me something	1.0	5.0	2.64	1.05
Pretentiousness	1.0	4.55	2.48	.80
General level	1.18	4.11	2.85	.58
“Loneliness”				
Diffuse type	2.0	14.0	6.19	1.85
Alienable type	1.0	13.0	6.80	2.10
Dissociated type	2.0	15.0	7.40	2.51
A state of loneliness	1.0	18.0	7.57	3.26

Note: Min – minimum values; Max – maximum values; M – arithmetic mean; SD – mean-square deviation.

Methodology “The Big Three Perfectionism Scale” was used to determine the general level of perfectionism. As a result of processing and interpretation of the collected data, the following distribution of levels of perfectionism has been obtained (see Fig. 1).

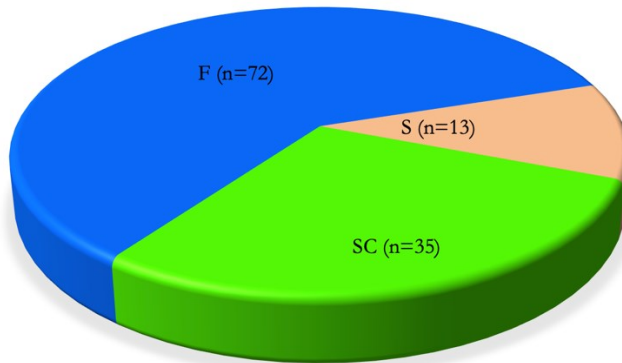
The obtained distribution is normal, the main part of the respondents M (n=93) showed an average level of perfectionism, which indicates the tendency of youths to the manifestation of perfectionism, which does not border on pathology and allows to function normally in society, to perform activities.



Note: level: H – high; M – medium; L – low.

Fig. 1. *Levels of perfectionism of respondents according to “BTPS” (n=120)*

To determine the prevailing type of perfectionism in youth, the method of “Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” has been used (see Fig. 2).



Note: type: SC – socially conditioned; S – self-centered; F – focused on others.

Fig. 2. *Distribution of respondents by types of perfectionism according to “MFS” (n=120)*

Youths are characterized by perfectionism, which is self-centered. They tend to make extremely high demands on themselves, their activities and their results. Such individuals are characterized by excessive self-criticism, the establishment of unrealistically high personal standards, which makes it impossible to accept their own imperfections, mistakes and failures. The least pronounced form of perfectionism among youths is perfectionism focused on other S (n=13). It is associated with the intensive development of reflection. Young people are more immersed in themselves, looking for their own imperfections, and do not pay much attention to others.

The general state of loneliness and its types have been determined by the questionnaire “Loneliness”. The expressed high level of feeling of loneliness is established n=18. Loneliness is an integral part of life for such respondents, without it they may feel unnecessary and excluded. We cannot be sure that loneliness is a unipolar construct in their lives, because the state of loneliness can have both positive and negative effects on the personality. The nature of the impact is determined by the peculiarities of intrapersonal genesis.

Statistically significant correlations between different forms of perfectionism and feelings of loneliness have been established using the Charles Spearman correlation coefficient (rs) in Tabl. 2.

Table 1. *Significant correlation coefficients between indicators of perfectionism and feelings of loneliness (n=120)*

Types of loneliness	S	SC	PS	RP	CM	DA	Scr
Diffuse	-.243**	.273**			.343**	.326**	.297**
Alienable	-.212*			-.208*		.199*	
Dissociated		.294**			.224*		.213*
General	-.183*	.212*	-.0275**	-.256**	.203*	.295**	.206*

Note: S – self-centered perfectionism; SC – socially conditioned perfectionism; PS – problems with self-esteem; RP – rigid perfectionism; CE – concern for mistakes; DA – doubts about their own actions; Scr – self-criticism; ** – $p < .01$, * – $p < .05$.

Self-centered perfectionism is negatively related to the diffuse type of loneliness ($p = -.243$; $p < .01$), which is based on the constant identification of a person with various objects (people) that are for role models. SC is also negatively associated with the alienation type ($p = -.212$; $p < .05$), which can be traced in the mechanisms of separation from other people and the world, as well as from the values and norms of the social group. Also, the indicator of self-centered perfectionism is negatively related to the general state of loneliness ($p < .05$), which is controlled loneliness, and is a variant of experiencing psychological isolation. Such a person sets too high standards, tends to focus only on own purpose, does not distance from people and identifies with them.

Indicators of diffuse and dissociated types of loneliness are positively correlated with socially conditioned perfectionism ($p < .01$), which is a person's confidence that other people have extremely high expectations of him, which is very difficult, almost impossible to meet. Also, socially conditioned perfectionism is positively associated with the general state of loneliness ($p = .212$; $p < .05$). A person who believes in the importance of meeting the standards of the environment will identify with various objects that will seem ideal to him.

Problems with self-esteem as a component of perfectionism are negatively correlated with the general state of loneliness ($p = -.275$; $p < .01$). Respondents with self-esteem, which will be adequate only if successful, usually will not demonstrate a tendency to harmonious solitude.

Indicators of rigid perfectionism, which can be traced in meticulous demands on themselves, timely flawless and error-free performance of activities, are in negative dependence on indicators of alienable type ($p = -.208$; $p < .05$) and general loneliness ($p = -.256$; $p < .01$).

It has been established that such elements of perfectionism as overestimated self-criticism ($p=.206$; $p<.05$), doubts about one's own actions ($p=.295$; $p<.01$) and concern for mistakes ($p=.203$; $p<.05$), directly proportional to the state of loneliness of the personality. We can explain this by the fact that it will be difficult for a person who is constantly looking for shortcomings and fixates on them, to build relationships with others.

Indicators of the diffuse type of loneliness are directly dependent on concerns about mistakes ($p=.343$; $p<.01$), doubts about one's own actions ($p=.326$; $p<.01$) and overestimated self-criticism ($p=.297$; $p<.01$). Respondents with constant doubts and confidence in the wrongness of their actions will tend to seek standards of imitation among others.

Doubts about one's own actions will only contribute to the gradual alienation from other people, because the connection between this element of perfectionism and the alienating type of loneliness is established at $p<.05$ level of significance ($p=.199$).

The dissociated type of loneliness, which has the most complex state of experience because it combines mechanisms of both identification and alienation from others, is positively correlated with concern for mistakes ($p=.224$; $p<.05$) and self-criticism ($p=.213$; $p<.05$).

The conducted empirical research allows operationalizing the obtained empirical results in educational and professional training of students-psychologists, emphasizing the following aspects:

1. Optimization of the level of perfectionism, the formation of adequate standards and constructive requirements for themselves and others, a sense of satisfaction with the process of activity, a tolerant attitude to own mistakes and others' mistakes.
2. Development of adequate self-esteem, holistic self-perception, positive self-esteem through self-knowledge, ability to comprehend their own prospects.
3. Development of a conscious attitude to the future, skills of its planning, formulation of the purposes.

5. Conclusions

1. Theoretical analysis of the problem of perfectionism and loneliness of youths has been realized. The characteristics of perfectionism of young people are established: extremely high level of self-demands and focus only on the "successful"; perception of others as constantly criticizing and demanding something; constant comparison of oneself with others; evaluation and planning of self-activities on the principle of "all or nothing".

2. It has been established that loneliness is characterized by shyness, insecurity, low self-esteem, high conflict, constant walks with the “self”, unsuccessful learning or rejection in general, false, aggressive behavior.

3. It has been established that socially conditioned perfectionism, concern for mistakes, doubts about one’s own actions and self-criticism have a positive significant connection with the feeling of loneliness in youth ($p < .01$). However, rigid perfectionism and self-centered perfectionism are inversely related to feelings of loneliness. We assume that the cause of loneliness can be too high demands on others and insecurity in their own actions, while the focus of high standards on themselves does not always provoke the development of internal isolation from society.

4. It has been determined that young people are more prone to extremely high demands on themselves, their activities and its results, that is, to self-centered perfectionism. The least pronounced form is perfectionism focused on others. This is due to the intensive development of reflection, young people are more immersed in themselves, looking for their own shortcomings, and do not pay much attention to others. A pronounced high level of loneliness ($p < .01$) was recorded for $n=18$ subjects. Loneliness for them is an integral part of life, which provokes an inner feeling of detachment. We cannot be sure that loneliness acts as a unipolar construct in their lives, as it can have both positive and negative effects on the personality. It has been determined that such elements of perfectionism as problems with self-esteem, self-doubt and concern about problems are usually the causes of types of loneliness bordering on pathology.

5. It has been noted that the research allowed to obtain empirical results, which should be operationalized in educational and professional training of students-psychologists, emphasis was placed on important areas of actualization.

Acknowledgments

The research was conducted within the framework of fundamental scientific practical themes of the Department of Education of Children with Visual Impairments of Mykola Yarmachenko Institute of Special Pedagogy and Psychology and Department of General and Social Psychology of Kherson State University, the state registration number is 0119U101096.

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