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Loneliness or Solitude: Which Will We Experience?

The recent evolution of the Internet, smartphones, and social media has muddled the ability of the average person to connect and work with others. Many individuals now prefer connecting with their virtual communities (e.g., those found on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Reddit, etc.) than the communities of the real world.[1] In tandem with this trend, there exists an increasing number of people who report having nobody to confide in, resulting in a fundamental loss of social ties and human contact that was usually present throughout the past generations.[2] Research

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[1] Ami Rokach, "Loneliness, Alienation, Solitude and Our Lives", in: *Addressing Loneliness: Coping, Prevention and Clinical Interventions*, ed. Ami Sha'ked, Ami Rokach (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3–19.

[2] Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades", *American Sociological Review* 71(3) (2006): 353–375.

from many different cultures, and especially in the West, has indicated that when individuals are able to substitute virtual reality for the real world, social connections become diminished, and individualistic goals become more heavily targeted.[3] Not only is loneliness linked to poor mental and physical health, but its rates have also increased in recent times. For instance, loneliness for middle aged adults and the elderly was estimated to be experienced by about 11–17% of this demographic in the 1970s. This number has now risen to 40%.[4] And this increase has been observed across the entire globe.[5] Interestingly, some have posited that loneliness has always been part of the human condition. This may help explain its infusion that extends from today's popular culture, such as themes found in cinema, music, and literature, as well as in foundational works of literature throughout our history, like Durkheim's writings on anomie. In any case, all writers have emphasized the notion that humans are social animals and greatly depend on their social relations for wellbeing. As Sonderby[6] puts it, there are two approaches to the conceptualization of loneliness. First, and arguably the favored theory, is the "social needs" approach which sees loneliness as it relates to social connections and its emotional impact. Secondly, is the "cognitive approach" which posits that the perception and personal appraisal of one's own quality of social relationships is what dictates loneliness.

The consequences of loneliness: it's toxic for your health

Undoubtedly, all of us are familiar with bouts of loneliness. While most temporary bouts may be resolved on their own or addressed by taking action (e.g., by seeking out social contacts or refining social skills), the pathology that follows prolonged and chronic loneliness often requires

[3] R. L. Friedman, *Widening the Therapeutic Lens: Sense of Belonging as an Integral Dimension of the Human Experience* (doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from PsychINFO, 2007 (Order No. AAI3268822); Rokach, "Loneliness, Alienation, Solitude and Our Lives".

[4] Stephanie Cacioppo et al., "Loneliness: Clinical Import and Interventions", *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10(2) (2015): 238–249.

[5] Cristina R. Victor, "Loneliness and Later Life: Concepts, Prevalence, and Consequences", in: *Addressing Loneliness: Coping, Prevention and Clinical Interventions*, ed. Ami Sha'ked, Ami Rokach (New York–London: Routledge, 2015), 185–204.

[6] Lars Christian Sønderby, "Loneliness: An Integrative Approach", *Journal of Integrated Social Sciences* 3(1) (2013): 1–29.

some type of intervention to overcome it. Left unchecked, loneliness has been seen in tandem with a host of detrimental concerns, including but not limited to, inconsistent sleep, cognitive disruptions, malaise, mental health concerns, and negative implication on physical health such as heart conditions.[7]

Social relations and health

Not only has loneliness been observed to correlate with increased mortality risk and depressive symptoms,[8] loneliness has also been theorized to have a physiological, physical and neurological impact. For instance, loneliness has also been observed to correlate with a compromised immune system;[9] heightened blood pressure;[10] heightened hypothalamic pituitary adrenocortical activity,[11] and inflammation.[12] Furthermore, loneliness has also been observed to relate to a heightened likelihood of Alzheimer's disease prognosis.[13] It is worthwhile to mention, the impact of loneliness is not solely limited the human population.

Review of the literature showcased how loneliness can affect the health of various animals as well;[14] i.e., "social isolation has been shown

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[7] John T. Cacioppo, Louise C. Hawkley, Ronald A. Thisted, "Perceived Social Isolation Makes Me Sad: 5-year Cross-Lagged Analyses of Loneliness and Depressive Symptomatology in the Chicago Health, Aging, and Social Relations Study", *Psychology and Aging* 25(2) (2010): 453–463; Hasida Ben-Zur, "Loneliness, Optimism, and Well-Being Among Married, Divorced, and Widowed Individuals", in: *Loneliness Updated*, ed. Ami Rokach (New York: Routledge, 2013), 23–36.

[8] Ye Luo et al., "Loneliness, Health, and Mortality in Old Age: A National Longitudinal Study", *Social Science & Medicine* 74(6) (2012): 907–914.

[9] Denise Dixon et al., "Social Support Mediates Loneliness and Human Herpesvirus Type 6 (HHV-6) Antibody Titers", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 31(6) (2006): 1111–1132.

[10] Cacioppo, Hawkley, Thisted, "Perceived Social Isolation Makes Me Sad".

[11] Leah D. Doane, Emma K. Adam, "Loneliness and Cortisol: Momentary, Day-to-Day, and Trait Associations", *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 35(3) (2010): 430–441.

[12] Steven W. Cole et al., "Transcript Origin Analysis Identifies Antigen-Presenting Cells as Primary Targets of Socially Regulated Gene Expression in Leukocytes", *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 108(7) (2011): 3080–3085.

[13] Robert S. Wilson et al., "Loneliness and Risk of Alzheimer Disease", *Archives of General Psychiatry* 64(2) (2007): 234–240.

[14] John T. Cacioppo, Stephanie Cacioppo, "Social Relationships and Health: The Toxic Effects of Perceived Social Isolation", *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 8(2) (2014): 58–72.

to decrease the lifespan of the fruit fly […] promote the development of obesity and type 2 diabetes in mice;[15] […] delay the positive effects of running on adult neurogenesis in rats;[16] increase the activation of the sympathetic adrenomedullary response to acute stressors in rats;[17] […] increase morning rises in cortisol in squirrel monkeys;[18] and elevate 24 hr urinary catecholamines and oxidative stress in the Watanabe heritable hyperlipidemic rabbit".[19]

Affective features

Following a comprehensive review of the literature involving a wide demographic that included children and youth, university students, and adults, Heinrich and Gullone have discovered that loneliness perpetually includes a large group of negative and upsetting sentiments.[20] Among them are feeling undesirable, disliked, and dismissed,[21] feeling miserable, and discouraged seeing oneself as unattractive, frantic, sad, and vulnerable.[22] Additionally, individual and social anxiety, rejection,

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[15] Katsunori Nonogaki, Kana Nozue, Yoshitomo Oka, "Social Isolation Affects the Development of Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes in Mice", *Endocrinology* 148(10) (2007): 4658–4666.

[16] Alexis M. Stranahan, David Khalil, Elizabeth Gould, "Social Isolation Delays the Positive Effects of Running on Adult Neurogenesis", *Nature Neuroscience* 9(4) (2006): 526–533.

[17] Sladjana Dronjak, Daniela Jezova, Richard Kvetnansky, "Different Effects of Novel Stressors on Sympathoadrenal System Activation in Rats Exposed to Long-Term Immobilization", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1018(1) (2004): 113–123.

[18] David M. Lyons, Chae M. G. Ha, Seymour Levine, "Social Effects and Circadian Rhythms in Squirrel Monkey Pituitary-Adrenal Activity", *Hormones and Behavior* 29(2) (1995): 177–190.

[19] J. T. Cacioppo, S. Cacioppo, "Social Relationships and Health", 61.

[20] Liesl M. Heinrich, Eleonora Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness: A Literature Review", *Clinical Psychology Review* 26(6) (2006): 695–718. See also: Ami Rokach ed., *Emotions and Their Influence on Our Personal, Interpersonal and Social Experiences* (New York–London: Routledge, 2017).

[21] Raymond F. Paloutzian, Craig W. Ellison, "Loneliness, Spiritual Well-Being, and the Quality of Life", in: *Loneliness: Current Theory, Research, and Therapy*, ed. Letita Anne Peplau, Daniel Perlman (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), 224–236.

[22] Carin M. Rubenstein, Philip Shaver, "The Experience of Loneliness", in: *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy*, ed. Letitia Anne Peplau, Daniel Perlman, 206–223.

feelings of being irrational, rejected, and inferior have all been observed to be commonly reported trends for those who feel lonely.[23]

Cognitive features

Low self-esteem has been reported to be the most common attribute felt by lonely individuals, suggestive of the idea that self-esteem and loneliness hold a bidirectional influence in the growth and upkeep of each other.[24,25] This may help to explain why desolate individuals more commonly see themselves as second-rate, useless, ugly, unlovable, and socially clumsy; all of which intensifies with prolonged loneliness.[26] Described as a heightened propensity to self-focus and hyper-sensitivity to feelings of rejection,[27] self-consciousness is another marker of loneliness, which perhaps explains why lonely individuals are also more likely to view themselves as untrustworthy and not having desirable

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[23] Mohammadreza Hojat, "Comparison of Transitory and Chronic Loners on Selected Personality Variables", *British Journal of Psychology* 74(2) (1983): 199–202; David Mellor et al., "Need for Belonging, Relationship Satisfaction, Loneliness, and Life Satisfaction", *Personality and Individual Differences* 45(3): 213–218; H. Durell Johnson et al., "Peer Conflict Avoidance: Associations with Loneliness, Social Anxiety, and Social Avoidance". *Psychological Reports* 88(1) (2001): 227–235; Félix Neto, José Barros, "Psychosocial Concomitants of Loneliness Among Students of Cape Verde and Portugal", *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 134(5): 503–514; Shelley Hymel et al., "Loneliness Through the Eyes of Children", in: *Loneliness in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Ken J. Rotenberg, Shelley Hymel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 80–106.

[24] Benedict T. McWhirter et al., "Loneliness in High Risk Adolescents: The Role of Coping, Self-Esteem, and Empathy", *Journal of Youth Studies* 5(1) (2002): 69–84.

[25] Ami Rokach, Ami Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely: Loneliness in Intimate Relationships – Causes and Coping* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2013).

[26] Liesl M. Heinrich, Eleonora Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness: A Literature Review", *Clinical Psychology Review* 26(6) (2006): 695–718.

[27] Carolyn E. Cutrona, "Transition to College: Loneliness and the Process of Social Adjustment", in: *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research, and Therapy*, ed. Letitia Anne Peplau, Daniel Perlman (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982), 291–301; Warren H. Jones et al., "Relational Stress: An Analysis of Situations and Events Associated with Loneliness", in: *Understanding Personal Relationships. An interdisciplinary approach*, ed. Steve Duck, Daniel Perlman (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1985), 221–242; Julie Aitken Schermer et al., "Lonely People Tend to Make Fun of Themselves: A Behavior Genetic Analysis of Humor Styles and Loneliness", *Personality and Individual Differences* 117 (2017): 71–73.

social skills.[28] Making matters worse, lonely individuals tend to view their condition as an unchangeable trait that is inherent in their being,[29] leaving them powerless to make a change, while also externalizing their moments of success and attribute personal triumphs as due to chance.[30] When considering the host of cognitive features associated with loneliness, the trend becomes apparent – loneliness creates a negative feedback loop of misery, worthlessness, hopelessness and of course, loneliness. All of which further exacerbating the loneliness.

Behavioral features

As hinted at previously in the cognitive features concerning negative self-belief, loneliness also manifests itself behaviorally through inhibition and ineffective social skills.[31] This, however, may be partly explained by the fact that lonely individuals, ordinarily, are less inclined to face social challenges, lack assertiveness, have inept social skills, and often find themselves relinquishing control in group settings.[32] Interest-

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[28] John M. Ernst, John T. Cacioppo, "Lonely Hearts: Psychological Perspectives on Loneliness", *Applied & Preventive Psychology* 8(1) (1999): 1–22; Liesl M. Heinrich, Eleonora Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness: A Literature Review". *Clinical Psychology Review* 26(6) (2006): 695–718.

[29] Linda J. Koenig, Robin F. Abrams, "Adolescent Loneliness and Adjustment: A Focus on Gender Differences", in: *Loneliness in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Ken J. Rotenberg, Shelley Hymel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 296–322; Heinrich, Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness"; see also Sofie Danneel et al., "Developmental Change in Loneliness and Attitudes toward Aloneness in Adolescence", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 47(1) (2018): 148–161.

[30] Cecilia H. Solano, "Loneliness and Perceptions of Control: General Traits versus Specific Attributions", *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 2(2) (1987): 201–214; see also Karen S. Rook, Susan T. Charles, "Close Social Ties and Health in Later Life: Strengths and Vulnerabilities", *American Psychologist* 72(6) (2017): 567–577.

[31] John T. Cacioppo et al., "Lonely Traits and Concomitant Physiological Processes: The MacArthur Social Neuroscience Studies", *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 35(2–3) (2000): 143–154; Todd Jackson, Adam Soderlind, Karen E. Weiss, "Personality Traits and Quality of Relationships as Predictors of Future Loneliness Among American College Students", *Social Behavior and Personality* 28(5) (2000): 463–470.

[32] Heidi Inderbitzen-Pisaruk, Maggie L. Clark, Cecilia H. Solano, "Correlates of Loneliness in Midadolescence", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 21(2) (1992): 151–167; Hojat, "Comparison of Transitory and Chronic Loners"; De-Wayne Moore, Norman R. Jr. Schultz, "Loneliness at Adolescence: Correlates,

ingly, a common theme of a self-reported social skill deficit is the inappropriate use of self-disclosure,[33] which often sabotages the ability to make connections. The lonely individual's helplessness also translates to a more passive and inefficient approach to coping with stress,[34] as they often withdraw and disengage, and instead look for solution and help from others,[35] help which may not be readily available.

Our own perception of painful and chronic loneliness is one which has seen individuals become more demanding of those around them. This observation has also been corroborated by research,[36] where it has been noted that as one becomes more eager for social connection and validation, they wind up needing (and even demanding) attention, validation and social interaction. Curiously, lonely individuals also tend to be more critical of those around them and behave in an unneighborly way. It is important to note, this tendency to be critical of others is not done in an exclusively outward way as lonely individuals also tend to be highly critical of themselves. The propensity to be hyper critical is theorized to stem from a lonely person's tendency to possess high self-doubt; given that loneliness is stigmatized, the lonely view themselves as inherently inferior and would not believe someone in their right mind would accept them as they are, making them "worthy" of their own criticism.[37]

Anthropomorphism is a term used to portray the projection of human trait onto non-human objects. For example, we are all familiar with the idea of describing our pets as cheerful, miserable, having of a specific

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Attributions, and Coping", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 12(2) (1983): 95–100; Robert A. Bell, John A. Daly, "Some Communicative Correlates of Loneliness", *Communication Monographs* 52 (1985): 218–235.

[33] Lorrie K. Sippola, William M. Bukowski, "Self, Other, and Loneliness from a Developmental Perspective", in: *Loneliness in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Ken J. Rotenberg, Shelley Hymel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 280–295; Johanna Petersen et al., "Phone Behaviour and Its Relationship to Loneliness in Older Adults", *Aging and Mental Health* 20(10) (2016): 1084–1091.

[34] Ann M. Van Buskirk, Marshall P. Duke, "The Relationship between Coping Style and Loneliness in Adolescents: Can 'Sad Passivity' Be Adaptive?", *The Journal of Genetic Psychology: Research and Theory on Human Development* 152(2) (1991): 145–157;

[35] Cacioppo et al., "Lonely Traits and Concomitant Physiological Processes"; see also D. Matthew T. Clark, Natalie J. Loxton, Stephanie J. Tobin, "Multiple Mediators of Reward and Punishment Sensitivity on Loneliness", *Personality and Individual Differences* 72 (2015): 101–106.

[36] John T. Cacioppo, William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

[37] Terri Schultz, *Bittersweet: Surviving and Growing from Loneliness* (New York: T. Crowell, 1976); Cacioppo, Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature*.

character, or feeling sick. Yet, for lonely individuals, they may take this tendency and exaggerate it onto completely inanimate entities. Furthermore, lonely individuals tend to have stronger reactions to para-social interactions (i.e., when an intimate relationship is imagined to exist between TV viewers and a fantasy character, such as one of a movie or show they follow). Specifically, the literature has observed that lonely individuals placed a higher need to place a sense of belongingness with media characters,[38] and also became overly distressed over para-social break ups.[39] By the same vein, para-social relationships were also found to have a buffer on effects of loneliness, as the simple act of writing about a celebrity friend has been observed to created reduced feelings of exclusion.[40]

Who are the Lonely?

Although some populations are more vulnerable to the effects of loneliness, alienation, and social isolation, loneliness does not discriminate.[41] Anyone may experience loneliness. Though we have so far briefly touched on loneliness, social isolation, and the impacts of an absent or frail social and emotional supportive network – who, exactly, are the forlorn? Is it the individuals who feel detached, distanced and in isolation? How would they feel and act, and what are their attributes? How can we notice when *we* are the ones experiencing loneliness? Living in the new age, Laura Pappano noted that "we are losing touch. And we don't even realize it".[42] Other researchers endorse this stance and have observed that those of us who feel lonely will often find themselves drawn to watching other people, e.g., on TV, in stores, social media, etc.[43] Yet,

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[38] Wendi L. Gardner et al., "On the Outside Looking In Loneliness and Social Monitoring", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31(11) (2005): 1549–1560.

[39] Seth Finn, Mry Beth Gorr, "Social Isolation and Social Support as Correlates of Television Viewing Motivations", *Communication Research* 15(2) (1988): 135–158.

[40] Jean M. Twenge et al., "Replenishing Connectedness: Reminders of Social Activity Reduce Aggression after Social Exclusion", *British Journal of Social Psychology* 46(1) (2007): 205–224

[41] Stephanie Cacioppo et al., "Loneliness: Clinical Import and Interventions", *Perspectives on Psychological Science,* 10(2) (2015), 238–249.

[42] Laura Pappano, *The Connection Gap: Why Americans Feel So Alone* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1.

[43] Richard Stivers, *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); see also Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely.*

everyone experiences loneliness in a different way, and though there are broad affective, cognitive, and behavioral implications that resonate with many, loneliness is not experienced in an entirely consistent manner from individual to individual.[44]

The stigma of loneliness

When individuals face loneliness, the vast majority are hesitant to concede, even to themselves, that they are truly lonely. We will, in general, deny exactly the same dejection that is presumably related to a large number of our negative feelings, and this may be attributed to the shame and stigma that is felt to admitting loneliness.[45] All things considered, it is generally accepted that loneliness ought not to impact "ordinary" individuals, i.e., the common misconception is that loneliness only impacts the old and disabled. However, loneliness has been found in all ages (e.g., especially in the incarcerated population),[46] and it appears that it is quite prevalent similar to that of the homeless,[47] and that of the psychologically troubled.[48] This heuristic, which could be logically understood when interpreted as a flawed defense mechanism, does not itself truly eliminate the pain of loneliness. The true disadvantage in this pattern of thinking is that a refusal to acknowledge loneliness creates an inability to address and work through it.[49] Odds are we would not spare a moment to uncover a pained family trauma, health conditions, or even mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression; yet few would transparently confess to being lonely. There is, unmistakably, a shame

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[44] Heinrich, Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness"; Rokach, "Loneliness, Alienation, Solitude and Our Lives", 3–19.

[45] Daniel Perlman, Purushottam Joshi, "The Revelation of Loneliness", *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 2(2) (1987): 63–76.

[46] Ami Rokach, "Loneliness in Jail: Coping Strategies", *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 41(3) (1997): 260–271.

[47] Marlee Bower, Elizabeth Conroy, Janette Perz, "Australian Homeless Persons' Experiences of Social Connectedness, Isolation and Loneliness", *Health and Social Care in the Community* 26(2) (2017): e241–e248.

[48] Vera A. Morgan et al., "People Living with Psychotic Illness in 2010: The Second Australian National Survey of Psychosis", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 46(8) (2012): 735–752. For a review, see also Rokach, *The Psychological Journey to and from Loneliness: Development, Causes, and Effects of Social and Emotional Isolation* (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2019).

[49] See Rokach, "The Experience of Loneliness: A Tri-level Model", *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 122(6) (1988): 531–544.

to being lonely.[50] As the saying goes, "to be alone is to be different. To be different is to be alone, and to be in the interior of this fatal circle is to be lonely. To be lonely is to have failed".[51] Society has been traditionally not understanding of those who expressed their loneliness. We, as authors of this review, thus consider it to be a main goal of society and of practitioners to understand that loneliness is part of life, which all of us experience sometimes, and when individuals are faced with these feelings, they can utilize the available resources to mitigate its harm.

Approaches to loneliness

The literature asserts that we are far more socially isolated today than in past generations. There exist a far greater number of people who report having nobody to confide in, leading to a more individualistic and disjointed society with fewer connected communities.[52] Due to the forces of stress as a result of an increasingly fast-paced environment with more intrusive technology and a higher tendency for consumerism, social isolation has taken over as we gradually allow these pressures to invade our personal lives and disrupt our capacity to create meaningful social contacts.[53]

With the rapidly growing usage of the Internet by adolescents and adults, pathological Internet use (PIU) has become a serious public health concern worldwide.[54] PIU can be defined as compulsive or excessive Internet use, causing negative personal, social, and professional consequences.[55] For example, individuals with severe PIU exhibit nu-

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[50] Mathias Lasgaard, Karina Friis, Mark Shevlin, "'Where Are All the Lonely People?' A Population-Based Study of High-Risk Groups Across the Life Span", *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 51(10) (2016): 1373–1384.

[51] Schultz, *Bittersweet,*15.

[52] McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Brashears, "Social Isolation in America"; Ami Sha'ked, Ami Rokach ed., *Addressing Loneliness: Coping, Prevention and Clinical Interventions* (New York–London: Routledge, 2015).

[53] Friedman, *Widening the Therapeutic Lens.*

[54] Francisco Tsz Tsun Lai, Joyce Lok Yin Kwan, "The Presence of Heavy Internet Using Peers is Protective of the Risk of Problematic Internet Use (PIU) in Adolescents When the Amount of Use Increases", *Children and Youth Services Review* 73 (2017): 74–78; Adriano Schimmenti et al., "Traumatic Experiences, Alexithymia, and Internet Addiction Symptoms Among Late Adolescents: A Moderated Mediation Analysis", *Addictive Behaviors* 64 (2017): 314–320.

[55] Yu Tian et al., "Associations between Psychosocial Factors and Generalized Pathological Internet Use in Chinese University Students: A Longitudinal Cross-Lagged Analysis", *Computers in Human Behavior* 72 (2017): 178–188.

merous academic problems.[56] Lonely individuals also tend to spend a great deal of time on the Internet, and use it to obtain social support from others, who are in similar social situations as them.[57] Connecting to others via the Internet does not provide the same feeling of social cohesion and connection as face-to-face interactions do.

We are also trending toward a life where virtual reality is steadily satisfying the social needs of our young adults, draining their ability and willingness to connect with others in the real world. Historically, the average human spent their entire lives in a single community and was granted an automatic sense of belongingness to the group at large. Today, however, a large chunk of people constantly move between neighborhoods, cities, countries and sometimes even continents in order to satisfy needs of employment, health, financial reasons, or quality of life. In fact, in America, almost 20% of the population displace themselves every year, and nearly 40% report an anticipation to move within five years.[58]

It is also possible that the devastating and increasing effects of loneliness can bring about increases in types and frequencies of reported emotional disorders in society at large. As Ben Lazare Mijuskovic asserted,[59] our social milieu is becoming contaminated, and ironically, separation is becoming one of the only things that we share with each other. Foolishly, our happiness is increasingly judged to be based on the shallow tendencies of our consumerist-driven world. Although responsibility and commitment toward one another is the true salvation of our communities, collaboration has dwindled, and it has instead been replaced by competition. Despite substantial increases in opportunities for electronic connections (e.g., smartphones, social media, emails, etc.), the number of people who report having nobody to confide in has been significantly rising in the past several decades, and social isolation rates have never been higher.[60]

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[56] Zeinab Nemati, Hossein Matlabi, "Assessing Behavioral Patterns of Internet Addiction and Drug Abuse Among High School Students", *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 10 (2017): 39–45.

[57] Xi Lu, Kee Jiar Yeo, "Pathological Internet Use Among Malaysia University Students: Risk Factors and the Role of Cognitive Distortion", *Computers in Human Behavior* 45 (2015): 235–242.

[58] Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Random House, 2000).

[59] Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2012).

[60] McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Brashears, "Social Isolation in America"; Sha'ked, Rokach ed., *Addressing Loneliness*; Anna Vannucci, Kaitlin M. Flannery,

As we discussed earlier, it is becoming increasingly more common for those who find themselves lonely and isolated to default to television viewing, and to the superficial nature of watching their favorite actors and celebrities on TV. From our own experiences as therapists, clients have even expressed that the chatter of the radio or television in the background is sometimes needed to fill the emptiness of a room. And as growing access to the Internet is becoming more available and integral in our lives, social media platforms are slowly becoming the main source of developing new friendships for adolescents and young adults, leading researchers to posit that these virtual connections are outright replacing our real-life ones.[61] And while increased Internet use is linked with elevated depression and loneliness rates,[62] equally concerning is the fact that it also increases the user's chances of increasing cyber intimacy while simultaneous deceasing social contract;[63] in other words, it creates a dependency and over-reliance on virtual relationship. Another, less intuitive and lesser-known repercussion of the Internet (and of innovative technology at large) is that it is rapidly widening humanity's knowledge about the brilliance of the universe which houses our earth. The awareness and acknowledgement of the actual minute impact that every one of us has upon life, in our opinion, stimulates anxiety and brings a sharp attention to our constraints and meanings, all of which potentially induce depression.

Psychological views of loneliness

It has been observed that around 32% of adults report experiencing loneliness, and in 7% of the cases, these are described as intense experienc-

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Christine McCauley Ohannessian, "Social Media Use and Anxiety in Emerging Adults", *Journal of Affective Disorders* 207 (2017): 163–166.

[61] Malka Margalit, *Lonely Children and Adolescents: Self-Perceptions, Social Exclusions, and Hope* (New York: Springer, 2010); Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely: Loneliness in Intimate Relationships – Causes and Coping* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2013); Vannucci, Flannery, Ohannessian, "Social Media Use and Anxiety in Emerging Adults".

[62] Robert Kraut et al., "Internet Paradox: A Social Technology that Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-being?", *American Psychologist* 53(9) (1998): 1017–1031.

[63] Hayeon Song et al., "Does Facebook Make you Lonely?: A Meta Analysis", *Computers in Human Behavior* 36 (2014): 446–452

es.[64] Obviously, nobody wishes to be lonely. But what is the true experience of loneliness? Some describe it as a distinctive or undifferentiated stressor, while others view it as a response to our circumstances and consequently classify it as existing in various types. Despite this being an interesting and intellectual way of conceptualizing loneliness, it is artificial. Viewing loneliness as a unified experience fails to describe its finer intricacies. In order to explain what we mean, we will first provide a quick outline of the physiological approaches to loneliness.

Nearly a century ago, literary works have postulated that the birth of a baby ended the definitive association that the fetus once had with the mother.[65] That partition, although it causes one to be brought out from a soothing environment and creates feelings of dread, loss, and possibly momentary loneliness, also creates the necessary conditions for individuals to develop into their own unique selves, to acknowledge their differences, and to understand the influence of their creative will. As such, birth is described as the start of individualization,[66] and as a child grows independent at some point, perhaps for the first time, they understand the great concern that is loneliness. To avoid this fear, which some have likened to starvation,[67] the child – and this applies to adults as well – seeks out relatability through shared thoughts, values, beliefs and morals. Similarly, loneliness has also been described as a reaction to social and emotional emergencies where a child's endeavors to engage with grown-ups were met with a lack of validation or punishment.[68] As such, the child views him or herself as a failure and as one who is unable to draw meaning and closeness with other people. In these situations, an evolutionary conceptualization of loneliness would be that loneliness signals to the child that they need to promote new mechanisms of survival, dictating that they must turn their attention to try and learn new social skills in order to fulfill their need of connecting with others.

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[64] See Louise C. Hawkley, Michael W. Browne, John T. Cacioppo, "How Can I Connect with Thee? Let Me Count the Ways", *Psychological Science* 16(10) (2005): 798–803.

[65] Otto Rank, *The Trauma of Birth* (Oxford: Harcourt, Brace, 1929).

[66] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon, 1941).

[67] Ibidem.

[68] Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: Norton, 1953).

All things considered – what is loneliness?

Aside from the evolutionary conceptualization of loneliness, there have been many other endeavors to portray and characterize this state. There are the theoreticians who put together their portrayals with respect to what they found in their clinical practice, there are scholars who have drawn conclusions based on research, and there are others – whom we personally agree with – who have gone with a phenomenological approach which focuses on asking individuals to depict their own experience and state of loneliness. In referencing the various takes on the definition of loneliness, we must mention an important contribution from Frieda Fromm-Reichmann's,[69] who stated that rigorous scientific explanations must be considered to truly understand loneliness. Until this claim,[70] loneliness was viewed merely as psychological condition, and measurement tools emphasized individual differences, rather than the actual effects of being lonely.[71] Another widely influential contribution to our understanding of loneliness comes from Robert Stuart Weiss,[72] who stated that loneliness could be of either the emotional or the social type. Emotional loneliness was described as the state occurring when an individual lacks an intimate partner and feels isolated and anxious as a result; social loneliness, on the other hand, was used to describe bored and unfulfilled individuals who felt that their social networks were insufficient in meeting their social needs.

Cognitive theorists considered loneliness to be the consequence of having social relations that do not meet one's personal and subjective expectations, resulting in psychological distress.[73] Importantly, this def-

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[69] Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, "Loneliness", *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes* 22 (1959): 1–15.

[70] Ibidem.

[71] James J. Lynch, William H. Convey, "Loneliness, Disease, and Death: Alternative Approaches". *Psychosomatics* 20 (1979): 702–708; Anne Letitia Peplau, Dan Russell, Margaret Heim, "The Experience of Loneliness". in: *New Approaches to Social Problems: Applications of Attribution Theory*, ed. Irene Hanson Frieze, Daniel Bar-Tal, John S. Carroll (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979), 53–78; Robert Stuart Weiss ed., *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1973).

[72] Weiss ed., *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation*.

[73] Anne Letitia Peplau, Daniel Perlman ed., *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982); Stephanie Cacioppo, John T. Cacioppo, "Do you Feel Lonely? You are Not Alone: Lessons from Social Neuroscience", *Frontiers in Neuroscience for Young Minds* 1(9) (2013): article 9: 1–5

inition emphasizes the idea that being alone is not needed to experience loneliness. For example, when most people envision the word loneliness, they imagine someone being isolated from others. While this may accurately represent loneliness in some conditions, loneliness can also be experienced while in the presence of other people (e.g., being in a crowded train or bus). Another experience of intense loneliness could be found in a romantic relationship that is fading that leaves both individuals feeling a lack of connection. Although this does not meet the criteria for social isolation, within the context of love and intimacy, the crushing anguish of loneliness can still be clearly felt.[74] Researchers have also suggested that the mere presence of others is not enough; instead, our social needs require individuals to support, trust, interact and motivate one another in order to safeguard against loneliness.[75]

Typically, it is acknowledged both by researchers and laymen alike that being distant from everyone else, feeling alone, seeing oneself as disliked, irrelevant and neglected will bring about an encounter that meets the criteria for loneliness. In our analysis of the literature, we found there to be seven themes that have been put forth by the various theoretical orientations and which are characteristic of loneliness' experiences: 1. Feeling lonely is a result of loss or separation; 2. It may begin in as early as childhood, or even birth, and has the ability to be consistent throughout one's life; 3. It is related to a lack of purpose or meaning; 4. It is difficult to endure; 5. It propels people to find significance and connection; 6. It may have an evolutionary root; and, 7. It brings forth the potential to seek out growth, improvement and change.

Furthermore, based on the different theoretical perspectives and our own research,[76] some of which has spanned over the last four decades, three distinctive characteristics of loneliness can be described as:

1. Loneliness is a ubiquitous experience and is central to being human.
2. Although shared by us all intermittently, loneliness is fundamentally a personal and individual encounter that is affected by personal and situational factors.

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[74] John T. Cacioppo, James H. Fowler, Nicholas A. Christakis, "Alone in the Crowd: The Structure and Spread of Loneliness in a Large Social Network", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 97(6) (2009): 977–991; Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely*.

[75] Stephanie Cacioppo et al., "Loneliness: Clinical Import and Interventions", *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10(2) (2015), 239.

[76] For a comprehensive review see: Rokach, *The Psychological Journey to and from Loneliness*.

3. Loneliness, which is an intricate and multidimensional experience, is in every case intensely painful, troubling and idiosyncratic.

Recognizing that we belong in a boundless and magnificent universe, if brutal social conditions are embedded in our environment, then self-alienation, emptiness, and a feeling of insignificance are practically inescapable. Every individual who strolled on this planet has encountered loneliness, whether they would like to admit to themselves or not. In our opinion, loneliness is an output that is created when certain environmental conditions are "aligned". Put in a different way, to be human is to inescapably experience loneliness. We view loneliness itself as a non-dominant recessive trait, which expresses itself when the necessary inputs are "toggled". These inputs are almost always intense disruptions to one's reality, e.g., unfulfilled affection, belongingness, intimacy, alienation, or even the philosophical pondering of death.[77]

In researching loneliness, a unique stance that has veered from the conventional methods traditionally utilized to measure and validate that one is lonely, it has been posited that one's mere subjective and phenomenological experience of loneliness is enough to indicate that one is lonely.[78] While academics and theoreticians expressed that loneliness is best represented as a singular concept, and at times conceptualized as having two types (e.g., social and emotional loneliness[79]), we opine that it is much more complex than that. For example, research on loneliness indicates that it is a multidimensional experience that can best be described through five different dimensions.[80] Each dimension, independently, may bring about some psychological disturbance. However, when we experience two or more of these elements together, we always experience it as loneliness.

Emotional distress

The most salient dimension of inner turmoil, pain, and emptiness is the emotional distress that accompanies loneliness. When one experiences

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[77] Rokach, "Loneliness Then and Now: Reflections on Social and Emotional Alienation in Everyday Life", *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues* 23(1) (2004): 24–40.

[78] Rokach, *The Psychological Journey to and from Loneliness*.

[79] Weiss ed., *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation*.

[80] Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely*; Ami Rokach ed., *Emotions and Their Influence on Our Personal, Interpersonal and Social Experiences* (New York–London: Routledge, 2017).

the breadth of this distress, the pain pushes them to find respite and a desire to get out of one's pain and misery. A commonly reported feeling during these moments is the feeling of aimlessness, anxiety, and fear. Yet pain, and the knowledge gained from it, is essential for one to understand the root of a problem, and therefore acts as the first step toward healing.[81]

Social inadequacy and alienation

This aspect of loneliness mainly centers around the perception (rather than actual) of social isolation that stems from evaluations individuals tend to make when comparing themselves to the social world of others. As we experience it in the present moment, loneliness causes a sense of self-devaluation. Through this lens, one may easily frame their world through the perspective that others are actively shunning them, leading to the hypothesis that they are not worthy and must be flawed or defective socially. Perhaps counterintuitively, these situations lead individuals to strive toward curtailing any further alienation by choosing to not let anyone else get close or intimate with them, leading to what was coined as self-generated social detachment. Essentially, this is a cynical view on social relationships that operates under the premise that rejection prevents the opportunity for others to hurt an individual, since they are never close to others to begin with. Put another way, lonely individuals' negative self-view creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Interpersonal isolation

When asked to describe loneliness, most people often think about and describe the conditions of interpersonal isolation. This feeling of aloneness is most related with; i.e., the perceived absence of social support and the painful sensations of dismissal that we might experience when we feel we cannot associate and depend on others. The sentiments felt are akin to having been overlooked, undesired, or forgotten. There is longing for closeness that describes friendships or intimate romantic commitment, which permits one to feel treasured and esteemed, cared for, and needed. There can also be situational elements of loneliness that exacerbate its effect and make it even tougher to withstand. This can in-

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[81] Dean Ornish, *The Spectrum* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007).

clude, but is not limited to, physical health problems, low socioeconomic status, infrequent or inconsistent contact with one's support system, and zero contact with one's community in events such as volunteering.

Stated differently, humans are social creatures whose biological survival relies upon social connections.[82] Through this lens, the ability to connect is incorporated into our biology; that is, there is not merely a capacity for human attachment, but a biological need for it. To help clarify the experience of feeling left out, we will explain interpersonal isolation through an intuitive point of view that draws from evolutionary psychology and neurobiological attachment. Humans need attachment to one another to survive. Thus, when bonds or attachments are severed, it places great physiological and psychological distress on the individual. In those times of stress, they become more vulnerable to a host of illnesses and diseases, and even become more likely to die prematurely. Evolutionarily, the simple fact that human beings are helpless at birth means they need to be dependent on their caregivers for a very long time, and consequently, are very prone to feeling left out or alone. However, even when dependence is achieved in adulthood, a bond with others is still needed to optimally maneuver through the complex and dangerous world. Thus, this primal need to connect can be both a blessing and a curse depending on the context and whether it is being fulfilled.

Self-alienation

Self-alienating behavior, which regularly is associated with severe mental health problems, portrays the human response to intolerable agony. When the pain of loneliness is beyond what the individual can bear, the reaction can vary to include dissociation, estrangement, and/or detachment from the self, all of which acting as a misguided effort to minimize the pain of alienation. Denial is a component that depends on depersonalization and may therefore function admirably in the short run. Another mechanism typically at play here, which is also linked to depersonalization, is denial. Although denying the fact one is self-alienated can work as a safeguard in the short-term. It is also a marker indicating that one has begun distancing themselves with one's self-concept in an attempt to run away from the immense pain that loneliness can bring.

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[82] Jacqueline Olds, Richard S. Schwartz, *The Lonely American: Drifting Apart in the Twenty first Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

Growth and discovery

Although loneliness can be excruciating, a lesser-known component to the experience is that it can be beneficial towards one's personal growth and development. As we already mentioned, research has suggested that loneliness can act as a prompt to encourage inward reflection which may lead the individual to re-evaluate their social world, priorities, and take accountability over mistakes, and thus, grow from it.[83] Akin to the folklore of the mythical phoenix, a creature which sets itself ablaze so that it can later rise from its\ ashes, loneliness can transform our pain into renowned understanding of human nature, consequently making way for a *new* strengthened version of ourselves which can better maneuver interpersonal relationships and become more intensely involved in life. These moments can also lead to newfound creativity, personal strength, and new meaning attached to life that was not there previously.[84] Importantly, the aspect of loneliness that can lead to positive outcomes has not been as clearly elucidated in the literature.[85] Yet, while loneliness may benefit the individual, we wish to emphasize that this is not a universal experience for all those who experience it.

The shades of loneliness

So far, we have drawn from the available literature to describe loneliness. Next, we will clarify what chronic and transient loneliness are and how these two elements differ, and we will further clarify what loneliness is not. In doing so, we must discuss some relevant constructs which stem from loneliness including depression, anxiety, and solitude.

The psychosocial features and the presence of romantic relationships have been labelled as two core elements of loneliness, with the latter being labelled as a protective factor.[86] Essential loneliness and tran-

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[83] Clark E. Moustakas, *Loneliness* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1961); Ami Rokach, Heather Brock, "Loneliness: A Multidimensional Experience", *Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior* 34(1) (1997): 1–9; William A. Sadler, Thomas B. Johnson, "From Loneliness to Anomia". In: *The Anatomy of Loneliness*, ed. Joseph Hartog, Audy J. Ralph, Yehudi A. Cohen (New York: International Universities Press, 1980), 34–64.

[84] Rokach, Brock, "Loneliness: A Multidimensional Experience".

[85] Olivia Sagan, Eric D. Miller ed., *Narratives of Loneliness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.

[86] Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely.*

sient loneliness (also referred to as reactive loneliness) are two common forms of loneliness that commonly observed in the presence of intimate relationships. This is like the separation made between endogenic and reactive depression in which the previous one is believed to be an immutable characteristic of an individual's makeup, as opposed to being a response to a life event. Ultimately, essential loneliness is a primal dimension to an individuals' disposition. Thus, essential loneliness is often credited as being a result of one's personality characteristics and natural development (e.g., self-esteem, feelings of social inadequacy, and a consistent inability to develop intimate relationships, to name a few). Essential loneliness has been conceptualized as a state of being disconnected and not belonging, while also being attributed to early attachment disruptions.[87] Transient, or reactive, loneliness on the other hand is typically set off due to undesirable interactions and dynamics in a relationship, thus having more of an ability to be changed, improved, and overcome.[88] A helpful way to distinguish between essential and transient loneliness is by length of time. Transient loneliness is often short-lived and situation-specific, and while it can undoubtedly cause acute pain, it is ultimately a temporary condition. Essential loneliness, however, is persistent, chronic, and long-lasting.[89] Put another way, individuals who experience essential loneliness are more likely to lack social abilities, have greater difficulty taming social deficits, and usually believe that they have an undesirable and unmalleable personality.[90]

Therefore, it is within the realm of possibility to experience transient loneliness through brief bouts of the experience. These occasional bouts often resolve with time and often do not have long-term implications.[91] But, when loneliness is persistent in a person's life, the experience may

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[87] Mohammadreza Hojat, "A Psychodynamic View of Loneliness and Mother-Child Relationships: A Review of Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Findings", *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 2(2) (1987): 89–104.

[88] Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely*.

[89] Daniel Perlman, Letitia Anne Peplau, "Toward a Social Psychology of Loneliness", in: *Personal Relationships in Disorder*, ed. S. Duck, R. Gilmour (London, UK: Academic Press, 1981), 31–56; Perlman, Peplau, "Loneliness", in: *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, vol. 2, ed. H. S. Friedman (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), 571–581.

[90] Perlman, Peplau, "Loneliness".

[91] Enrico DiTomasso, Samantha R. Fizzel, Bryn A. Robinson, "Chronic Loneliness within an Attachment Framework: Process and Interventions", in: *Addressing Loneliness: Coping, Prevention and Clinical Interventions*, ed. Ami Sha'ked, Ami Rokach (New York: Routledge, 2015), 241–253.

be considered as chronic loneliness, and this may entail a host of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive implications.[92] Additionally, it has observed that the chronically lonely have significantly more severe depression, anxiety, global loneliness and neuroticism, while also possessing lower levels of self-esteem, confidence, extraversion and an external locus of control.[93] As such, they also often view themselves as less socially adept than those who experience transient loneliness.[94] Personality traits are also different between these types of loneliness;[95] for instance, the chronically lonely direct their interpersonal deficits inwardly and attribute them to stable characteristic, the transiently lonely, however, are less self-critical in their perceptions, as they often recognize situational and personal factors as playing a role in their experience with loneliness.[96] Given that treatment programs are often most applicable to the chronically lonely, we will examine research which characterizes these findings.

In general, the chronically lonely identify as being less socially skilled, they feel that they have less social support than others and they are prone to maladaptive or self-destructive coping strategies under times of stress. Since these individuals are typically more rigid in social situations and lack competence in maneuvering through these challenges, they are more prone to social mishaps, have more difficulty regulating emotions, and as previously stated, have a higher propensity for inappropriate self-disclosure. They also lack authenticity in interpersonal interactions, often responding in a way that does not accurately reflect their inner thoughts and beliefs and are more pessimistic with social discourse. Altogether, the amalgamation of these factors results in behaviors that lead to instability and insecurity, both of which result in unfulfilling interpersonal relationships.[97]

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[92] Louise C. Hawkley, John T. Cacioppo, "Loneliness Matters: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Consequences and Mechanisms", *Annals of Behavioural Medicine* 40(2) (2010): 218–227.

[93] DiTomasso, Fizzel, Robinson, "Chronic Loneliness within an Attachment Framework".

[94] Ibidem

[95] Mohammadreza Hojat, "Comparison of Transitory and Chronic Loners on Selected Personality Variables", *British Journal of Psychology* 74(2) (1983): 199–202.

[96] Cutrona, "Transition to College".

[97] DiTomasso, Fizzel, Robinson, "Chronic Loneliness within an Attachment Framework".

Loneliness anxiety

The modern conceptualization of loneliness anxiety comes from the work of Clark E. Moustakas[98] who, in his work, articulated a distinction between loneliness anxiety and existential loneliness. Existential loneliness is the perception of life that treats misfortune as a necessary condition of life, while also believing that humans are born and die as a distinct and separate entity. This state is considered as the outcome of every single person.[99] In contrast, loneliness anxiety is an intense fear which emanates from the mere potential for loneliness to creep in and cause the person much pain and suffering. This is the same fear that often makes individuals attempt to block out, deny and avoid pain; all of which being attempts to diminish the qualm associated with loneliness to escape the realization of alienation.

Knowing that loneliness is vital to being alive and that in some cases it cannot be evaded, we all eventually learn to dread the miserable suffering and excruciating pain that loneliness can make us feel. A relevant analogy is that of hunger; while the typical human experience is to eat when we are hungry, those who have suffered through prolonged periods of starvation can become dysregulated with food. That is, these individuals will not wait for hunger queues to prompt them to eat food. Instead, an obsession over making sure they do not starve again develops, and this manifests into eating, buying, and storing food incessantly. Here, these individuals have developed an anxiety over the possibility of prolonged hunger, and their behaviors toward food lessens their anxiety toward this possibility.

When it comes to loneliness, a similar tale unfolds. Since loneliness is a universal experience, many individuals have, knowingly or unknowingly, developed loneliness anxiety. There is not a soul on earth which appreciates the hopelessness and helplessness associated with loneliness. Thus, periods of loneliness are often marked by frantic attempts to tie in social involvement into one's life, and this is done in a way that denies and pushes the reality of loneliness.[100] Similar to individuals who have experienced excruciating starvation, in an attempt to grasp at the prospect of companionship, lonely individuals often fall prey to bad social engagements, superficiality among the relationships they have with

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[98] Clark E. Moustakas, *Loneliness and Love* (Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972).

[99] Ibidem.

[100] Moustakas, *Loneliness*.

their peers, and display clinging attachment to those responsive to this behavior.

An observation among lonely individuals is that they have issues initiating and keeping social contact.[101] Rather than this being reasoned to be due to a lack of social skills or social sensitivity, the theory proposed by = researchers observing this trend is that social motivation is the main culprit.[102] This finding has been corroborated by others as lonely individuals have been observed to experience performance anxiety in social settings due to the fear of being negatively evaluated, causing them careful interactional behavior and, in some instances, avoidance altogether.[103] Despite the intention of minimizing opportunities for negative evaluation, these behaviors end up having the opposite effect, as it weakens the lonely individual's ability to partake and engage in social interaction.[104] This protective self-defense mechanism also ends up making lonely individuals appear callous, less friendly, and withdrawn,[105] diminishing their motivation to seek social contact.[106] The mindset, tending towards increased social anxiety coupled with hypercautious social behavior, has been labeled as a prevention-focused mindset. Almost serving as a hyper fixation, the motivations behind this mindset is to reduce the chance for any possible negative outcomes, serving as the same outcome that loneliness anxiety is designed to avoid.[107]

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[101] Gale M. Lucas et al., "Increasing Social Engagement Among Lonely Individuals: The Role of Acceptance Cues and Promotion Motivations", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36(10) (2010): 1346–1359.

[102] Lucas et al., "Increasing Social Engagement Among Lonely Individuals".

[103] See: John T. Cacioppo et al., "Loneliness as a Specific Risk Factor for Depressive Symptoms: Cross Sectional and Longitudinal Analyses", *Psychology and Aging* 21(1) (2006): 140–151.

[104] Ulrich Stangier, Thomas Heidenreich, Karin Schermelleh-Engel, "Safety Behaviors and Social Performance in Patients with Generalized Social Phobia", *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy* 20(1) (2006): 17–31.

[105] Paul A. Pilkonis, "The Behavioral Consequences of Shyness", *Journal of Personality* 45(4) (1977): 596–611; Stangier, Heidenreich, Schermelleh-Engel, "Safety Behaviors and Social Performance".

[106] Sandra L. Murray, John G. Holmes, Nancy L. Collins, "Optimizing Assurance: The Risk Regulation System in Relationships", *Psychological Bulletin* 132(5) (2006): 641–666.

[107] Marilynn B. Brewer, "The Psychological Impact of Social Isolation: Discussion and Commentary", in: *The Social Outcast: Ostracism, Social Exclusion, Rejection, and Bullying*, ed. Kippling D. Williams, Joseph P. Forgas, William von Hippel (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 333–345; E. Tory Higgins, "Beyond Pleasure and Pain", *American Psychologist* 52(12) (1997): 1280–1300.

Solitude

Lonely people are not necessarily alone. Being alone is the objective reality of being geographically isolated from others. Essentially, the two states can be mutually exclusive, as one can be alone and not lonely. Recalling past memories, daydreaming, and planning a trip are all examples of being alone while not necessarily being lonely. Therefore, being alone is neither "good" nor "bad". A brilliant conceptualization of the distinction between loneliness and solitude is the idea that solitude to the *glory* of aloneness, while loneliness is the *pain* of aloneness.[108] Work from Duke University[109] has identified nine different sorts of solitude, which were later classified into three categories: the solitude of self-expansion (self-discovery and creativity), negative solitude (feeling lonely and wanting a diversion), and solitude associated with a sense of connection with others (intimacy and spirituality). Although it is widely understood that loneliness and solitude are distinct concepts, it should be noted that solitude, rather than loneliness, allows people to engage in self-exploration and creativity.[110] In our opinion, "negative solitude"[111] is simply another name for "loneliness", and it does not holistically represent the word "solitude". Being lonely is not necessarily being alone, as we mentioned earlier.

The deciding factor of how we feel is not the circumstance itself, but our perception of it. Loneliness will undoubtedly be felt when we are alone and when we desire human interaction and companionship. However, solitude is defined as the desire and need to be alone and not wishing to be in the company of others at that particular time. It is possible to find immense joy and fulfilment in isolation when we need time for ourselves and wish to get away from the incessant barrage of everyday tasks, chores, expectations, stimulation, and inconveniences. When we are alone and at peace, we can ponder, meditate, contemplate, write, engage in hobbies, etc. While spending time with family and friends

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[108] John T. Cacioppo, Louise C. Hawkley, Ronald A. Thisted, "Perceived Social Isolation Makes Me Sad: 5-year Cross-Lagged Analyses of Loneliness and Depressive Symptomatology in the Chicago Health, Aging, and Social Relations Study", *Psychology and Aging* 25(2) (2010): 453–463.

[109] Christopher R. Long, *A Comparison of Positive and Negative Episodes of Solitude* (Unpublished manuscript, Duke University, 2000).

[110] See: Christopher R. Long, James R. Averill, "Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 33(1) (2003): 21–44.

[111] Long, *A Comparison of Positive and Negative Episodes of Solitude*.

may be cherished, solitude is also a treasured time, our time, that may help us revitalize, reenergize, and reinvigorate.[112] Thus, solitude may be described as the freedom from the demands of others, and an allowance to attend one's needs and desires.[113] In laymen terms, solitude may be described as the "happy introvert" who prefers to stay in by themselves.

Although the terms alone and lonely are derived from that very same English root, which means "all one", they are not equivalents. Many people with miserable relationships or who feel misunderstood with family and friends are far lonelier than those who mainly dwell independently but consider themselves to have meaningful relations with friends and family. It is possible to feel lonely without being alone, yet it is also possible to be alone without being lonely. According to theologian Paul Tillich, solitude is the kryptonite of loneliness.[114] And yes, solitude may be appreciated only by individuals who would not feel lonely when they are alone. If their alone time is chosen and accepted, they can benefit enormously from it. Donald Winnicott, a key figure in the evolution of psychoanalysis, further emphasized the necessity of being alone, claiming that it is even a requirement for having secure attachments.[115] He distinguished between attachment and dependence, by interpreting being alone on the premise of a notion of the "false self", which would lead to a person who desperately tries to fulfil the wishes of everyone around them.[116] In this way, solitude can be reframed as the opportunity to analyze one's wants, goals, and aspirations.[117] Thus, solitude may lead to inner growth, increased self-understanding, creativity, and self-renewal.

In today's technologically-frenzy society, our ability to be left alone has been tested. Yet, solitude is not a separation of everyday life but rather an integral component of having a meaningful existence.[118] It is thus no wonder why solitude is at the heart of many meditative and spiritual traditions, with its state functioning as a catalyst for grounding oneself and inching closer with the authentic realities of existence.

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[112] See also: Cacioppo, Patrick, *Loneliness*.

[113] Long, Averill, "Solitude".

[114] See: Carin M. Rubenstein, Philip Shaver, "The Experience of Loneliness", in: *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy*, ed. Letitia Anne Peplau, Daniel Perlman (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982), 206–223.

[115] See: Anthony Storr, *Solitude. A Return to the Self* (London: Harper and Row, 1988).

[116] Ibidem.

[117] Long, *A Comparison of Positive and Negative Episodes of Solitude*.

[118] Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000).

This idea has led some to think of the blessings of solitude as providing reassuring aloneness, thoughts of boundless possibilities, and a sense of independence;[119] in other words, by doing nothing, we are able to ponder everything.[120]

Traditionally, solitude was thought to be essential for spirituality, enlightenment, and creativity. Several religious and mythological figures have been described as having spent significant amounts of time in solitude, extending from the Abrahamic (Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, etc.), to the Dharmic religions (e.g., Buddha, Guru Nanak, etc.), and extending to the mythology of the ancient Greeks. To name a few, Jesus' journey into the wilderness, Buddha's meditation under the Bo Tree, and Odysseus' 10-year voyage into his homeland were all moments where solitude led to enlightenment. In fact, many spiritual, theological, creative, and aesthetic advances have emerged from isolated experiences, which in turn, has influenced countless social movements and practices.[121]

Great writers, such as Kafka, Gibbon, and Rilke, and philosophers to the likes of Kant, Hume, and Wittgenstein, have produced some of their finest work during moments of solitude.[122] One famous example is that of Henry David Thoreau, an American poet and philosopher, who willingly isolated himself to in the Walden Pond for more than two years in order to seek solitude.[123] Thoreau ascribed his prolific writings to the creative energy gained during moments of solitude, and as he maintained, there is no companion as companionable as solitude.[124] It has been noted that several of the globe's greatest minds seldom built intimate bonds or raised families, rather, they required solitude to create and become.[125] Beethoven, to name another well-known example, became increasingly isolated as his deafness progressed, and had a tough time forming close relationships as a result. As Storr[126] commented, Beethoven's deaf world

[119] Rosemarie Rizzo Parse, "The Humanbecoming School of Thought in 2050", *Nursing Science Quarterly* 20(4) (2007): 308–311.

[120] Richard Mahler, *Stillness: Daily Gifts of Solitude* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC, 2003).

[121] Long, Averill, "Solitude"; Peter France, *Hermits: The Insight of Solitude* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); Rokach, *The Psychological Journey to and from Loneliness*.

[122] Storr, *Solitude. A Return to the Self*.

[123] Henry David Thoreau, "Walden", in: *Walden and Other Writings by Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joseph Wood Krutch (New York: Bantam 1981), 105–341 (original work published 1854).

[124] Ibidem.

[125] Storr, *Solitude. A Return to the Self*.

[126] Ibidem.

allowed him the freedom to detach from the intrusive sounds of the external environment and from the rigidities of the material world, while also granting him the ability to tap into more of his unrealized potential. In his novel *The Plague*, novelist Albert Camus wrote that in order to self-discover, we must individually retreat from the world of work and embrace and face our own natures.[127] These transformative moments of solitude have also been seen across cultures and across time, leading some to observe that "as part of a rite of passage into adulthood, tribal cultures in North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia have sent adolescents alone into the wilderness to seek wisdom. Individuals who undertake these rites expect to grow beyond their ordinary selves, and often they do have unique experiences".[128]

Although solitude can be a beneficial experience that causes one to grow and flourish, this capacity must first require one to be okay with the total absence of social interaction.[129] As it has been described, the healing and growth-promoting process of solitude allows access to our untapped potential, resulting in unique revelations, greater understanding about ourselves and the world, as well as an enhanced ability to connect to others[130] . Solitude has been demonstrated to alleviate a person's dependence on people for company and sharpen one's sense of personal control.[131] Thus, incorporating more opportunities for solitude may enable lonesome individuals to manage the depression that can accompany extremely long spells of loneliness in a better way.[132] So much so, improving solitary skills has been advocated as part of therapeutic modalities for the lonely. When we are in solitude, we have the chance to take care of ourselves. As these moments allow for improvement, self-aware-

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[127] Albert Camus, *The Plague*, transl. Stuart Gilbert (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1970).

[128] Rae André, *Positive Solitude: A Practical Program for Mastering Loneliness and Achieving Self-Fulfillment* (New York: HarperColins, 1991), 13.

[129] Reed W. Larson, "The Solitary Side of Life: An Examination of the Time People Spend Alone from Childhood to Old Age", *Developmental Review* 10(2) (1990): 155–183.

[130] Moustakas, *Loneliness*.

[131] Ami Rokach, "Surviving and Coping with Loneliness", *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 124(1) (1990): 39–54; Karen S. Rook, Letitia Anne Peplau, "Perspectives on Helping the Lonely", in: *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy*, ed. Letitia Anne Peplau, Daniel Perlman (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982), 351–378.

[132] Carilyn Z. Fuchs, Lynn P. Rehm, "A Self-Control Behavior Therapy Program for Depression", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 45(2) (1977): 206–215.

ness, and meaning, it may translate to fuller insight into one's needs, while also equipping one with the necessary skills to be in accepting and loving relationships with others.[133] Solitude relieves the individual of dependence on others for company, which may increase one's sense of personal control.[134] As Abraham Maslow[135] described when discussing self-actualization: whatever one can be, they must be. Put differently, this is the only way to be genuine to with oneself. It is our belief that this authenticity can almost only be discovered through solitude. And this is also why those who practice solitude are often regarded as being able to contribute to social exchanges in novel, significant, and distinctive ways.[136] In fact, during the past several thousand years, solitude has been regarded as an act of devotion, and prayers were made in a solitary fashion by the nuns and monks of many religions.[137] Essentially, solitude increases the capacity to ponder one's thoughts and feelings, existence, and the universe.[138]

Loneliness and solitude

Although both loneliness and solitude refer to being alone, how we experience it distinguishes the two constructs. When we wish to be around people, feeling forgotten, irrelevant, and abandoned by everyone around us, we get lonely and long for another's presence and love. On the other hand, those of us who want solitude are seeking it for the exact opposite reason: they prefer and require being alone in order to participate in pursuits that are held dear, such as introspection, getting in touch with nature, reading, and/or relaxing from the continual onslaught of stimuli in our daily lives. Where loneliness is uncomfortable, tiring, and has a variety of detrimental repercussions, solitude can be described as invigorating and revitalizing.

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[133] Sharon S. Brehm, *Intimate Relationships* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992).
[134] Rokach, "Surviving and Coping with Loneliness"; Rook, Peplau, "Perspectives on Helping the Lonely".
[135] Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
[136] Merton, *Thomas Merton*.
[137] France, *Hermits*.
[138] Long, Averill, "Solitude".

Loneliness during a pandemic

When the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic in 2020 and closures of schools, businesses, and social venues in many parts of the world were mandated to prevent the spread of the virus, a cascade of events related to loneliness unfolded. Countries declared states of emergency which resulted in strict public health measures and effectively put cities, states, and some entire countries, under lockdown. This led to imposed physical isolation which was accompanied by economic instability, fear of infection, and stress surrounding the uncertainty of the future, all of which giving rise to loneliness that was experienced as a major factor of the pandemic.[139] While social interaction was a sought-after activity that would, commonly, bring pleasure and the feeling of being part of a larger group, COVID-19 and its restrictions increased the fear of contagion from social interactions, and made even limited interactions within closer social circles to be deemed as "dangerous".[140]

Prior research has shown that these types of disruptions are related to heightened loneliness, depression, and anxiety.[141] Moreover, the imposing of physical mobility restrictions like quarantining was likely to increase the experience of loneliness,[142] as they could have increased the discrepancy between desired and perceived social relationships, and prevented or seriously limited social interactions which are the building blocks for adaptive functioning.[143] As a result, the levels of loneliness, as well as the levels of depression and anxiety, have increased significantly

[139] Wendy E. Ellis, Tara M. Dumas, "Physically Isolated but Socially Connected: Psychological Adjustment and Stress Among Adolescents During the Initial COVID-19 Crisis", *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science* 52(3) (2020): 177–187.

[140] Samantha K. Brooks et al., "The Psychological Impact of Quarantine and How to Reduce It: Rapid Review of the Evidence", *The Lancet* 395 (2020): 912–920.

[141] Nicholas Leigh-Hunt et al., "An Overview of Systematic Reviews on the Public Health Consequences of Social Isolation and Loneliness", *Public Health* 152 (2017): 157–171.

[142] Annelies Wilder-Smith, David O. Freedman, "Isolation, Quarantine, Social Distancing and Community Containment: Pivotal Role for Old-style Public Health Measures in the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Outbreak", *Journal of Travel Medicine* 27 (2020): 1–4.

[143] George A. Bonanno et al., "What Predicts Psychological Resilience after Disaster? The Role of Demographics, Resources, and Life Stress", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 75(5) (2007): 671–682.

during the COVID-19 pandemic.[144] This led to the observation of various maladaptive coping strategies as a result of the stress experienced during the COVID-19 restrictions. Mainly, loneliness in the form of denial, substance use, and behavioral disengagement played a significant role in the trajectory of mental health outcomes, and that loneliness is a notable partial mediator of subsequent depression and anxiety, which may seriously and negatively affect one's life and functionality.[145]

Some food for thought

The present authors wish to advance a somewhat different point of view relating to loneliness during the pandemic. It is obvious that lives were disrupted, that people were afraid of contracting the disease, and that social interactions were severely curtailed. However, that does not necessarily have to result in loneliness. Take, for example, the idea of eating dinner and skipping dessert. That would not make one hungry; rather, it might merely indicate that something is missing. Similarly with the pandemic, there is no question that the restrictions that were instituted during the pandemic curtailed social interaction, causing us all to yearn to be connected and to belong. However, connection is indeed possible with today's technological advances and social media. Where there was no physical proximity, the connection did not nevertheless completely disappear. And so, the feeling of yearn for others' proximity, companionship, and closeness, yet still not feeling necessarily lonely, occurred simultaneously.

Having COVID-19 in the rearview mirror, we are able to look back and notice the stressful time which had all of our relationships disrupted due to the then imposed restrictions. Yet, oddly, if we reflect on the matter, we are also able to recognize how quickly we have taken this ability for granted. As normalcy has returned, we have quickly shifted to our pre-pandemic old ways of sitting in restaurants next to love ones while also being able to disregard each other and be lost in our smartphones. It behooves us to highlight that we have taken interpersonal relationships for granted, and maybe even abused them, prior to the pandemic, and

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[144] William D. S. Killgore et al., "Loneliness: a Signature Mental Health Concern in the Era of COVID-19", *Psychiatry Research* 290 (2020): 19–21.

[145] Sebastian Freyhofer et al., "Depression and Anxiety in Times of COVID-19: How Coping Strategies and Loneliness Relate to Mental Health Outcomes and Academic Performance", *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 682–684.

are starting to do so again today. Being mindful of this, the COVID-19 pandemic should redirect our attention from ourselves to the world and to friends around us. For when we are "in trouble" the ones we turn to are our friends, and those who care about us. We suspect, and it is not yet backed by research, that those who were lonely before the pandemic, experienced loneliness during that time, and will probably also be lonely when it is back to normal. The only difference was that it was no longer stigmatizing to declare loneliness during the pandemic. Instead, complaining of being lonely and blaming it on COVID-19 made you part of the larger society who viewed the situation similarly.

Conclusion

In closing, loneliness is a multidimensional construct, and its state can be conceptualized as producing up to five distinct outcomes for those who experience it, either in tandem or independently. This includes emotional distress, a sense of inadequacy and alienation, interpersonal isolation, self-isolation, and a markedly changed awareness of oneself.[146] Loneliness is non-discriminative – every person from every walk of life will experience it at some point in their lives, and this experience is not an undifferentiated stressor but instead uniquely felt by those who experience it. The manifestations of these symptoms, while distinctive, are predominantly predicated upon the type of loneliness experienced. That is, it depends on whether loneliness arose due to a personal predisposition that may have roots in early attachment disruptions (i.e., essential loneliness) or due to a reaction to one's environment and life changes (i.e., transient loneliness). Nevertheless, for all individuals, the pain of loneliness may be excruciating, principally impacting one's self-esteem.[147] In the presence of loneliness, we default to blaming ourselves for feeling that way to begin with, and thus attribute our state to harsh negative self-appraisals. In turn, this further exacerbates our loneliness and allows us to continue to fall prey to those negative evaluations, creating a negative feedback loop that is difficult to get out of.[148] This problem,

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[146] Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely*.
[147] Benedict T. McWhirter et al., "Loneliness in High Risk Adolescents: The Role of Coping, Self-Esteem, and Empathy", *Journal of Youth Studies* 5(1) (2002): 69–84.
[148] Rokach, Sha'ked, *Together and Lonely*; Heinrich, Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness".

however, is not solely an individual one, as society harbors prejudiced and stigmatized notions toward the lonely, which later lends up being self-inflicted by those who experience it.

It is important to re-emphasize, however, loneliness can sometimes lead to positive outcomes. For instance, loneliness can act as catalyst which spurs individuals to re-evaluate their social world and sharpen their social skills.[149] In this way, loneliness can be used as a marker for growth and self-discovery. On the other hand, solitude, is a state which always produces positive outcomes for those who experience it. The state of solitude can be simply described as the luxury of escaping a demanding and stimuli-filled environment. While both loneliness and solitude are typically experienced alone, the perception that distinguishes the two is vastly different; loneliness is despised and troublesome to deal with, while solitude is intentionally sought after and provides a soothing and therapeutic effect. Times of solitude are cherished and may lead to the potential for enhanced capacity for intimacy, discovery, creativity, and spirituality,[150] while times of loneliness always include internal and social hardship.

Today, in a world where the prevalence of loneliness and individualization is increasing, disconnection seems to be the sole connection that most of us share. Making matters worse is the reluctance for us to admit, not only to our social networks but also to ourselves, when we are lonely. In this way, the COVID-19 pandemic brought us together in our collective isolation and allowed us to admit it openly without being stigmatized. While we are still learning the full extent of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, thankfully, a positive byproduct is that we all experienced loneliness, together. This has granted us the ability to overcome the heuristic that only the "weak" are susceptible to being lonely. Knowing that nobody is impervious to its effects, the hope is that it will enhance our ability to empathize with those who are lonely, either now or in the future, and hopefully also encourage us to accept it when we ourselves experience it. Another such positive aspect of the pandemic was the wake-up call that it forced upon; that is, it allowed us to rethink and reframe our social networks and no longer take them for granted. We, consequently, realized the importance of our support

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[149] Moustakas, *Loneliness*; Rokach, Brock, "Loneliness: A Multidimensional Experience"; William A. Sadler, Thomas B. Johnson, "From Loneliness to Anomia", in: *The Anatomy of Loneliness*, ed. J. Hartog, A. J. Ralph, Y. A. Cohen (New York: International Universities Press, 1980), 34–64.

[150] Long, *A Comparison of Positive and Negative Episodes of Solitude*.

system, deservedly giving it more value than the average person had given it in the past.

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Summary

Loneliness, social isolation, aloneness, and solitude are frequently used interchangeably but are actually different. Loneliness is particularly salient now, due to the international restrictions on social activities imposed as a result of COVID-19, which brought loneliness into open discussion worldwide. The article highlights loneliness as a multidimensional construct and reviews its impact on cognitive, behavioral and affective functioning. In doing so, particular attention is given to loneliness as it manifests through the various life stages, as well as how personal predisposition and contextual factors may exacerbate it. in this article we also review solitude, and a clear distinction between loneliness and solitude is established. Finally, we conclude by addressing the global claims of loneliness during the pandemic and its implications. We offer a point of view which may assist in coping with it.

Keywords: loneliness, solitude, alienation, isolation, consequences of loneliness, COVID-19