

## Where to Turn: A Conceptual Re-Imagining of Loneliness and its Relationship to Depression

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**Abstract:** Loneliness is a double-edged sword even the most extraverted person will face. Although everyone will find a way to cope in an abundance of ways; it is important to note that loneliness is not a phenomenon that Americans solely face, rather it's a worldwide result of unoccupied stimulation; from the Kudokushi in Japan to young children eating alone during lunch because their family does not have enough money for clean clothes, thus many kids isolating that individual. Nevertheless, the creative minds of people have come up with ways to curb this existential circumstance with various resources like ancestry.com, psychotherapy, social media (technology), marriage, bearing children, suicide, solace, athletics, sexuality, or even that substance that fills our brain with transient happiness, along with others. This paper will attempt to uncover the underlying factors that play a role in the phenomenon known as loneliness.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is hard to escape the inevitability of being lonely. Every person, culture, even some animals feel lonely at times. Isolation may come because of loneliness but very seldom is loneliness the result of isolation. For example, some people may choose to isolate themselves and feel rather content as it is an escape from the milieu of life. However, as people, its seldom that we choose to be lonely in a pursuit towards happiness. As a result, from loneliness, we replace it with various items, people, or other things that we grow attachments too. If grown excessively it may develop a hoarding disorder to where it is physically difficult to discard certain possessions, regardless of their value. (300.3, F42)

### 2. RELATIONSHIPS

Acquiring a relationship with people would fight against loneliness but there is that occurrence where they may leave, die, breakup; whatever the case maybe, they are not around for a period. That could be debilitating if not handled in a productive way. Having a divorce may cause loneliness, not only for the child but the parents involved. Unless the relationship was volatile to where a divorce is the healthy choice. There are people who will get married despite being lonely, hoping that the new-found love will promptly take them out of their despair and into a new light. However, in this day in

age, divorce is happening at an alarming rate, as well as cohabitation. In the article about how family systems unleashed an epidemic of loneliness by Hymowitz & Anderson (2019) the writer posits, "marriage creates kin, cohabitation does not." This is especially important to note because of the networks created when one marries into a family and what one would do for their kin.

There's a difference of what someone would do for kin and what one would do for their girlfriend or boyfriend that share a child together. (Hymowitz & Anderson, 2019) Loneliness may also creep into the strongest of people, single parents. Caring for their kin, while not having any spousal support, may be a daunting task. Who does the parent turn to when their spouse or partner left them to care for their 3 children alone? This aspect is also a hard feat because of the instance of being both parents at the time. Usually one parent would be the disciplinary one and the other, nurturing. Whereas now, one person has to be both and that could create issues for the children as well as themselves, in the future.

### 3. SOLACE

Loneliness can have such a complex affect on an individual stemming from brain changes, somatic illnesses, or even behavioral responses that may seem odd or off put by other entities. Isolation is usually the response to being

lonely. However, some individuals, such as introverts, may find solace in being isolated. Being able to escape from the world and finding comfort in being with themselves, in that moment, may be calming. A rather isolated introspection towards monotonous and bleak interactions that rarely reach deeper than the surface level questions. That may be why many introverts befriend extroverts, to compensate for being silent. Although, if taken to extremes, mental distress may develop into a disorder. For instance, creating another personality to cope with being lonely or to help in certain situations. One mustn't isolate themselves for feeling lonely; rather one could isolate themselves to learn about the self. Just like everything that is good or bad, moderation is key. Relationships aren't bad to have, some would argue they are essential. Though it is possible to have a relationship with oneself and lead capable lives.

#### 4. SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Some individuals may placate the feeling of loneliness by using a substance (i.e. methamphetamine, alcohol, nicotine, heroin, marijuana, etc.), in that case the substance only brings a temporary release from being lonely. The use of substances may even provide a warm or fuzzy feeling that confuses the user of happiness, belonging, or love. This is a dangerous facet of being lonely because it can quickly turn into an addiction. Not only will one turn to substances to fill that lonely void, but it will impact the brain as well which could lead to a more dangerous mental state than loneliness.

#### 5. PERSONALITY

Similar to the solace aspect, personality plays a role into whose more susceptible to loneliness. However, everyone will experience loneliness in their life. In fact, extraverts and introverts experience it in a different way, which may be worth researching. There's a cliché quote that states the loudest person in the room is usually the saddest/loneliest. Though one shouldn't put all their money into that quote. There are many times where a person is in a group setting though is silent and feels as though they can not get a word in or relate to the others. This may be due to anxiety, selective mutism or any disorder that hinders one's communication. The personality is very important in loneliness. For example, introverts may be more susceptible to loneliness because of their innate nature of being quiet, reserved and thoughtful. Yet if one is introvert, they may require more of a push to go meet others and speak with people in an

articulate way. If their attempt to meet others fails, then loneliness may creep in and unmotivated the individual to stop meeting people in the future. As was said earlier, loneliness loves unoccupied stimulation

#### 5.1. Socioeconomic Status

Sometimes the wealthiest people will associate themselves with other wealthy people because of the difficulty there is to relate to the other 99% of the world. Further, individuals in a lower economic background may find it hard to relate to the former. However, everyone has common ground to relate too because we all need to survive, love or belong, need fun, freedom, and power. Our basic needs are our common ground in which we build interactions on.

#### 5.2. Race, Ethnicity and Culture

Loneliness does not discriminate towards race, ethnicity or culture. Many military families uproot to live in places they know little about. Consider this anecdote, a Caucasian military family moving to china because their parents were stationed there. Now the child must go through academia perhaps with no knowledge of a culture around them. Or what about the African child who is adopted into a white family from Kansas; who, now, must learn English, learn about discrimination in America all while being the only ethnic person in the family with hair that is a bit more tangled. That's lonely. Perhaps, this is why, so many adopted children become "successful." (i.e. Derek Jeter, Jamie Fox, Marilyn Monroe, Bill Clinton, Steve Jobs, etc.) The loneliness may push them to believe "no one is like me" Which may have negative or positive effects. Another perspective is the feeling no one is like me and truly believe they have an inability to connect with others. Again, negative or positive outcomes could emerge; however, each race, ethnicity or culture has their own way of handling being lonely.

#### 5.3. Sexuality

This factor may be one of the most important aspects of loneliness because there may be a societal taboo when sexuality is mentioned; which creates a "hush hush" environment. However, taboo is only existent when one deems the subject so. If people are willing to speak about sexuality, there wouldn't be such discourse when one is attracted to another sex. Sexuality doesn't necessarily have to be orientation either. Sexuality is how people dress, speak with one another, convey themselves, and

how they carry themselves. In some case culture could be tied into sexuality. When a person appears to be a male wearing a dress there becomes a cognitive dissonance where their preconceived notions are challenged. This may be the reason why some transgendered people often get stared at in public. Though if everyone is staring at one person it may feel as though they are the only person in the world that is being ostracized.

### **5.4. Technology (Cell Phones, Social Media, Etc.)**

In an article about loneliness and its association with technology, researchers have found that Internet and social media engagement exacerbate feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety, according to a 2014 annual survey of college students. Through social media there are places one could reach that was otherwise challenging. Speaking to someone from Uruguay and becoming friends is going to be very difficult when they both get off the computer. Some relationships function on technology whether it be long distance or off one of the dating platforms (i.e. eHarmony, Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, etc.) there are moments when technology could help build relationships but as one gets offline, the feelings of loneliness start to creep in. Maybe the person on the internet is not who they were portraying to be. This could be mentally debilitating when people come and go in life, especially if there was a strong enough bond. Some individuals who are lonely may post a lot on their profile, may exaggerate their popularity on their page or in person.

### **6. STUDYING ALONE; WORKING ALONE**

Over the last two decades, more and more people have begun to take online classes and have begun to work “at-home”, perhaps on their computers, laptops, doing phone surveys or interviews online. Working or studying from home has become a widespread practice over the last several years. There are a number of reasons for setting work or study sessions up in this manner. Among good reasons for this type of situation are: flexibility, convenience, and economic savings. There is the fable of the person who sits at a desk at home wearing bunny slippers. Telecommuters will say, “I got a little warm, so just slipped on my tank top prior to this meeting.” Parents of young children and/or multigenerational families can find the convenience they need for transporting family members to and from school, doctors’

appointments, etc. And, when it comes to economic savings, the telecommuter can realize: potentially less money spent on professional clothing, dry cleaning, haircuts, purchased lunches, bus fare, parking, and numerous other work-a-day related expenses.

From a business perspective, the industry saves money on providing desk space, parking and cafeteria infrastructure, cleaning of facilities, etc. According to the website <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/cut-oil>, “Telecommuting could save U.S. over \$700 billion a year and much more.” The source cites the following specific savings: US business can save over \$500 billion a year in real estate, electricity, absenteeism, and turnover and productivity, that’s more than \$11,000 per employee per year. Additionally, business can increase national productivity by 5 million man-years or \$270 billion worth of work [as well as savings] on utilities, janitorial services, security, maintenance, paper goods, coffee and water service, leased parking spaces, transit subsidies, ADA compliance, environmental penalties, equipment, furniture, and office supplies. With current telecommunications equipment, telecommuters can have online web-based meetings with colleagues at different offices in other states, thus further reducing travel costs for corporations. The article goes on to discuss how telecommuting benefits consumers/telecommuters. Among those benefits, per the article, employees can gain back the equivalent of 2-3 weeks’ worth of free time per year, that would otherwise be spent commuting; could save between \$2000 and \$7000 in work-related costs; experience cost savings in elder care and/or child care; and, could qualify for tax breaks based on utilizing a home office for making a living. Additionally, savings can be experienced by the nation as a whole, in terms of: reducing greenhouse gases; reducing wear and tear on highways; and, increased safety due to fewer auto accidents resulting in injury or death.

Benefits of distance education, as stated in this linked article, <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/distance-learning/advantages-and-include>: the ability of the student to set her or his own learning and study pace; being able to get an education despite living in a remote or difficult to access area; and, developing skills in planning and research.

From an academic standpoint, colleges, universities, as well as secondary and elementary schools, institutions can realize

economic savings in terms of fewer professors for course load, increased enrollment numbers because of the convenience and cost –savings a student might experience by enrolling in online courses. Additionally, in both business and in schools, there is alleviation of anxiety and fear that students and workers may be experiencing with regard to all types of violence and bullying in work and school settings. There are, however, downsides to telecommuting. Among the downsides, per [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/telecommuting-the-pros-cons\\_b\\_8454260](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/telecommuting-the-pros-cons_b_8454260), employees can experience difficulties with work and personal boundaries. If other family members are at home, the telecommuter can feel torn between responsibilities to family and to their job. Telecommuters can feel left out of social activities. Students who telecommute may miss out on important development of social skills; adults may lose touch with social skills they have learned in the past. Telecommuters miss out on opportunities for comradery with colleagues and complain of loss of creativity in the work place, without face to face collaboration. Instructors complain of not having direct interaction with students: they get only a voice asking a question, or email interactions.

Larger scale problems can occur also, in terms of what would constitute a workers' compensation case, if an employee injures himself on the job while at home. Network security and privacy can be compromised when the work setting is moved outside of institutional walls.

There are some specific realms in education where face to face interaction is imperative-theatre, drama, nursing programs, speech/language programs and teacher training programs.

In some instance modeling is imperative. Students need to see a competent, effective, efficient trainer or instructor. There needs to be interaction and give and take with immediate feedback- for example, in phlebotomy classes-the student needs to be supervised "just in case" anything may go wrong.

In both realms- working at home, and taking classes at home (or online) individuals are bereft of the company of their peers or supervisors. Some individuals need that human contact and support. Some individuals thrive on the support of their colleagues and fellow students and co-workers. Bereft of this support, some people feel lonely isolated and adrift.

## 7. THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION

As indicated earlier, there will be times when loneliness will take ahold of us all. Studies support this and suggest that there are three types of eras in which loneliness will affect us. Researchers have found that loneliness will impact an individual's life with a spike in the late 20's, mid-50's, and late 80's. (Doheny, 2018) However, wisdom was a coping mechanism to curb the loneliness. In this study researcher, DilipJeste, MD, saw that when an individual has the capacity to self-reflect, be empathic, and have compassion may help individuals when they feel lonely (Doheny, 2018). However, wisdom can be changed throughout the years; the researcher suggests that being able to have friends from multiple stages of life and learning from the experiences one has builds a rapport with others where they feel they can build a network with. This may contribute to the loneliness we see during each age group as in the late twenties people are finding themselves, trying to etch out their corner of the world and build careers sometimes sacrificing relationships. During the mid-50's, people may go through a midlife crisis, in the 80's friends and loved ones start to pass. However, saying wisdom will trump loneliness isn't studied often or associated; wisdom is gained through experience and that's why it is so hard to make a concrete answer that wisdom will decrease loneliness.

## 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Loneliness can do many things to an individual whether that be in the work place, relationships, mentality all in which has no designation to race, ethnicity or culture. However, each culture may have their view on loneliness and what comes of it. There are therapeutic interventions that help with the feeling of loneliness although no scientific data that associates wisdom with age. People will have to cope with being lonely at least once in their life. Technology can help bridge the gap of loneliness and communicating with others is beneficial. However, introverts may have a challenging time getting to open up to people. On the other hand, extroverts may be disguising their loneliness with gregarious behaviors. Business' could suffer from isolation. Though some companies thrive off of the isolation aspect like telemarketers. There are pros and cons to being lonely but to make sense of the loneness is how one will escape the dark place of being lonely. Questions such as am I isolating myself? Do I need to introspect or



reflect on some situations? Or why am I feeling isolated? By asking oneself those questions could open up dialogue that helps makes sense of what we feel.

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**Citation:** Aaron L. Johnson, et al. *Where to Turn: A Conceptual Re-Imagining of Loneliness and its Relationship to Depression*. *ARC Journal of Psychiatry*. 2019; 4(3): 22-26

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