

L O N E L I N E S

A SOURCEBOOK OF CURRENT THEORY,
RESEARCH AND THERAPY

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Chapter 1

Perspectives on Loneliness

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To me, it is the strangest thing that in Western Christian society, founded on the love of God and the fellowship of mankind, loneliness has become one of the hallmarks. We are the only people who have had drummed into them from childhood the impossible commandment to love our neighbors like ourselves, and yet so many of us eke out an existence as loveless and unloved atoms—free individuals in an open society, condemned to form part of the great, grey subculture of the lonely.

ROBERT BRAIN, 1976, pp. 259–260

Few of us have escaped the painful experience of loneliness. In the natural course of growing up our social relationships begin, change, and end. In infancy we first experience the distressing anxiety of being separated, often only temporarily, from loving caretakers. As children, we venture into a wider world of social relations where we try, not always successfully, to gain acceptance and friendship from peers. As we grow older, the excitement of starting in a new school, going to summer camp, or moving to a new town is commonly mingled with feelings of loneliness and loss. For teenagers, the exhilarating prospect of first love may in reality include experiences of love spurned or gone sour. As adults, our web of social relations continues to shift. Marriages begun in love and hope do not always last; children are born but ultimately leave the family nest. Old social ties are lost through separation, neglect, or death. Social transitions are a basic fact of life in modern society, and so is loneliness. For most of us, intense feelings of loneliness are short-lived; for others, loneliness is a persistent aspect of daily life.

This book brings together social science findings and perspectives on loneliness. Perhaps because loneliness is so commonplace, it has attracted less attention from scientists than other more exotic social phenomena. In an attempt to correct this long-standing neglect, we and other contributors to this volume have taken loneliness as the direct focus of our scientific inquiry.

The results of this collective endeavor have shed light on the experiences of loneliness that we have all known in our lives.

In this first chapter we present an overview of key concepts and issues. Our hope is to help readers organize and integrate the many facts and theories presented in this book. We begin by noting the social and theoretical importance of the study of loneliness. We next attempt to go beyond an intuitive understanding of loneliness and consider formal definitions of the phenomenon. After a brief survey of the history of loneliness research, we present a general framework for the study of loneliness that examines the experience of loneliness, its antecedents, and the ways people cope with loneliness. Finally, we describe the general goals and organization of the book.

WHY STUDY LONELINESS?

The question "Why study loneliness?" has several answers. One of the simplest, yet most important, is that loneliness is interesting. Whether because of our own personal experiences or naive curiosity, many social scientists want to understand the loneliness puzzle. A second reason for studying loneliness is that it is so widespread. For instance, Cutrona (Chapter 18) reports that three-quarters of college students experience at least some loneliness during their first term. While the proportion of lonely people in this group is atypically high, it is safe to say that loneliness is a fact of life for millions of Americans. Third, loneliness is unpleasant and can even have life-threatening consequences. It has been linked to alcoholism, suicide, and physical illness. By helping people overcome loneliness, the incidence of such problems may be reduced.

Fourth, loneliness often creates concern about the health of our social institutions. Loneliness reflects a breakdown in social interactions. As Fischer and Phillips point out (Chapter 2),

Sociology has always seen personal relations as the mortar of society. It is through such relations that people are taught norms that make for smooth social interaction, are assisted in times of trouble and become contributing members to a broader social life. When individuals are alone, they, by definition, do not benefit from social life; when a society has made isolated members it is prone to crumble.

Like alienation, high divorce rates, and widespread crime, loneliness is seen by some as a cause (or, if you prefer, a symptom) of social decay.

As a people, we are concerned—some might say obsessed—with the quality of our interpersonal relationships. Love and friendship are dominant American values. Not surprisingly, social psychologists have scrutinized the components of interpersonal attraction in some detail. Loneliness is, so to speak, the opposite side of this coin. Thus a fifth impetus for studying loneliness is that it may provide new insights about intimacy and friendship.

Sixth, loneliness research appears to be gaining momentum within the social

sciences. Now is a good time to be doing loneliness research. Journals and even granting agencies appear to be receptive to this new topic. The field has to some extent been mapped out, some of the basic issues have been identified, and the tools of the search developed. Yet the literature is still small enough to be manageable. And the terminology is still fresh enough so that the investigator can leave his or her mark.

Given these half-dozen arguments for studying loneliness, and the many others that could be articulated, it may seem odd that social scientists have only recently begun to investigate loneliness. There are at least two factors that may have delayed attention to loneliness. First, many people are embarrassed by being lonely; it is awkward and not something they readily admit. This stigma may spill over to investigators studying loneliness. People sometimes look askance at loneliness researchers, perhaps wondering if their research is motivated by some unresolved "personal problem." Indeed we have both been asked such questions by reporters, students, and even colleagues. Second, research psychologists have often idealized the experimental method as the most valid approach to study reality. But there is no convenient and ethical way to manipulate loneliness in the laboratory, and so this topic requires the use of other, perhaps less fashionable methods.

Whatever the earlier barriers to loneliness research, the study of loneliness expanded rapidly in the 1970s. Loneliness is now a topic in good currency. And that in itself is a reason for studying it.

LONELINESS: WHAT IS IT?

When members of the general public are asked by pollsters about loneliness, they have no difficulty answering. Most people can unhesitatingly report whether or not they are presently lonely. Lay people may not all share exactly the same concept of loneliness, but intuitively they know what loneliness is. For everyday purposes, they have a satisfactory implicit referent for the concept.

Several more formal definitions of loneliness have been offered by social scientists. A dozen such definitions are shown in Table 1.1. There appear to be three very important points of agreement in the way scholars view loneliness. First, loneliness results from deficiencies in a person's social relationships. Second, loneliness is a subjective experience; it is not synonymous with objective social isolation. People can be alone without being lonely, or lonely in a crowd. Third, the experience of loneliness is unpleasant and distressing.

The varying definitions of loneliness given in Table 1.1 reflect differing theoretical orientations. These theoretical biases are related to some important aspects of the ways in which loneliness is conceptualized. In particular, these differences center around the nature of the social deficiency experienced by lonely individuals.

One approach emphasizes inherent human *needs for intimacy*. Sullivan

Table 1.1. Twelve Definitions of Loneliness

I define loneliness as the absence or perceived absence of satisfying social relationships, accompanied by symptoms of psychological distress that are related to the actual or perceived absence. . . . I propose that social relationships can be treated as a particular class of reinforcement. . . . Therefore, loneliness can be viewed in part as a response to the absence of important social reinforcements (Young, Chapter 22, p. 380, italics in original).

Loneliness is caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relationships. . . . Loneliness appears always to be a response to the absence of some particular type of relationship or, more accurately, a response to the absence of some particular relational provision (Weiss, 1973, p. 17).

Loneliness . . . is the exceedingly unpleasant and driving experience connected with inadequate discharge of the need for human intimacy, for interpersonal intimacy (Sullivan, 1953, p. 290).

Loneliness . . . is an experienced discrepancy between the kinds of interpersonal relationships the individual perceives himself as having at the time, and the kinds of relationships he would like to have, either in terms of his past experience or some ideal state that he has actually never experienced (Sermat, 1978, p. 274).

Loneliness is an experience involving a total and often acute feeling that constitutes a distinct form of self-awareness signaling a break in the basic network of the relational reality of self-world (Sadler & Johnson, 1980, p. 39).

Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively (Perlman & Peplau, 1981, p. 31).

Loneliness is a sentiment felt by a person . . . [experiencing] a wish for a form or level of interaction different from one presently experienced (Lopata, 1969, p. 249-250).

Loneliness . . . refers to an affective state in which the individual is aware of the feeling of being apart from others, along with the experience of a vague need for other individuals (Leiderman, 1980, p. 387).

We define loneliness as: the experiencing of a lag between realized and desired interpersonal relationships as disagreeable or unacceptable, particularly when the person perceives a personal inability to realize the desired interpersonal relationships within a reasonable period of time (de Jong-Gierveld, 1978, p. 221).

Loneliness [is] a feeling of deprivation caused by the lack of certain kinds of human contact: the feeling that someone is missing. And since one has to have had some expectations of what it was that would be in this empty space, loneliness can further be characterized as the sense of deprivation that comes when certain expected human relationships are absent (Gordon, 1976, p. 26).

Loneliness is an adaptive feedback mechanism for bringing the individual from a current lack stress state to a more optimal range of human contact in quantity or form. "Lack stress" means too little of a given input, human contact in this instance (Flanders, Chapter 11, p. 170).

In our view, loneliness is caused by the absence of an appropriate social partner who could assist in achieving important other-contingent goals, and the continuing desire for such social contacts (Derlega & Margulis, Chapter 10, p. 155).

and Weiss represent this view. Fromm-Reichmann (1959, p. 3) belongs in the same camp. She maintained that a universal need for intimacy "stays with every human being from infancy throughout life." Weiss (1973) argued that vulnerability to loneliness may be part of our evolutionary heritage. He cited

Bowlby's (1973) work on attachment behavior, suggesting that "proximity-promoting mechanisms" may have survival value. Weiss (1974) has identified six essential provisions (e.g., social integration, guidance) of relationships. The implication of such an analysis is that one's relationships must adequately satisfy an inherent set of social needs, or the individual will experience loneliness.

A second approach to conceptualizing loneliness emphasizes *cognitive processes* concerning people's perception and evaluation of their social relations. From this perspective, loneliness results from perceived dissatisfaction with one's social relationships (Flanders, 1976; Sadler & Johnson, 1980). For example, Lopata (1969) defined loneliness as "a wish for a form or level of interaction different from the one presently experienced" (p. 250). Cognitive approaches (Peplau & Perlman, 1979; Sermat, 1978) propose that loneliness occurs when the individual perceives a discrepancy between two factors, the desired and the achieved pattern of social relations. Peplau and Perlman (1979) further suggest that loneliness can be seen as one endpoint of a continuum for evaluating social relations. In their view, each person has an optimal level of social interaction. When the person's social relations are suboptimal, he or she experiences the distress of loneliness; in contrast, when faced with excessive social contact, the person may experience the distress of "crowding" or feel an "invasion of privacy" (Altman, 1975). Evaluations of one's social relations are influenced by comparisons with one's own past experience and with the experiences of other people.

A third approach to loneliness identifies insufficient *social reinforcement* as the main deficiency experienced by lonely people. Young's chapter in this book takes such an approach. According to this view, social relations are a particular class of reinforcement. The quantity and type of contact a person finds satisfying are a product of his or her reinforcement history. One may learn, as Young points out, that confiding in a friend is rewarding. Relationships can assume secondary reinforcer status. Periods of isolation can cause deprivation, thus enhancing the subsequent reward value of social contacts.

The social needs and cognitive approaches to conceptualizing loneliness differ in two major ways. First, the needs approach emphasizes the affective aspects of loneliness; cognitive approaches emphasize the perception and evaluation of social relations and relational deficits. Thus proponents of the needs approach suggest a rather direct link between relational deficits and subjective reactions to these deficits. In Sullivan's (1953) words, "There is no way that I know of by which one can, all by oneself, satisfy the need for intimacy" (p. 271). In contrast, cognitive approaches (e.g., Peplau, Russell, & Heim, 1979) emphasize that cognitive processes play a central role in modulating the intensity of loneliness that results from deficits in sociability.

Second, advocates of the needs approach have suggested that people may experience loneliness without explicitly defining themselves as lonely or consciously recognizing the nature of their distress. Since people may have difficulty acknowledging loneliness to themselves or to others, it has been suggested (Fromm-Reichman, 1959; H. E. Peplau, 1955) that loneliness may be

most recognizable to clinicians through the defensive behavior it triggers. In contrast, cognitive theorists emphasize the lonely person's perceptions and reports of relational inadequacies, and direct attention to those people who do label themselves as lonely. In this regard, the needs approach has been more closely tied to a psychodynamic tradition and to work with patient samples, while the cognitive view has been more closely tied to empirical survey research with students and members of the general public.

Young's reinforcement view of loneliness has not been emphasized in drawing these comparisons. His analysis is rooted in cognitive behaviorism rather than traditional reinforcement models. As a cognitive behaviorist, some of Young's views are closely akin to the purely cognitive approach to loneliness. For instance, with regard to our first comparative dimension, Young sees people's affective reaction to their social deficiencies as moderated by their automatic thoughts. However, with regard to our second comparative dimension, Young, like other clinicians, takes the view that symptoms without self-labeling are sufficient grounds for diagnosing an individual as lonely.

Up to this point we have been discussing loneliness as the aversive response to social deficits. This, in our view, is the dominant way loneliness has been used by social scientists. However, some writers, such as Moustakas (1961), believe that loneliness can lead to personal growth and creativity. Although this conceptualization of loneliness can be found in both philosophical and clinical discussions, it is of only secondary importance to the current research being done on loneliness. The contention that isolation can have positive results will be examined more closely in Part 1 of this volume.

EARLY WORK ON LONELINESS: WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

The experience of loneliness may well be as old as the human race. Mijuskovic (1979) recently criticized those who suggest that loneliness is a recent product of modern society, arguing instead that "Man has always and everywhere suffered from feelings of acute loneliness" (p. 9). Certainly a concern about isolation and loneliness can be found in ancient writings. For example, the Book of Genesis emphasizes the pain of solitude, noting that after God created Adam he observed, "It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help mate." Although the history of loneliness itself is long, the psychological study of loneliness is very young.

A comprehensive survey of the psychological literature on loneliness (Peplau, Russell, & Heim, 1978; see also the bibliography in this volume) documents the growth of psychological work on loneliness. Of the 208 publications available in English from 1932 to 1977, only 6% were published before 1960. These early works were almost exclusively commentaries by clinicians based on their observations of patients. Best known from this period are the theoretical writings of Sullivan (1953) and Fromm-Reichmann (1959). Other articles dealt with loneliness among special groups including children (Bakwin, 1942), adolescents (Collier & Lawrence, 1951), old people (Shel-

don, 1948), wives of servicemen (Duvall, 1945), and alcoholics (Bell, 1956). A major emphasis among early theorists (e.g., H. E. Peplau, 1955; Von Witzleben, 1958) was the importance of distinguishing loneliness from such related states as solitude.

In the 1960s, 64 new publications on loneliness appeared. Although many continued to rely on clinical observations, empirical research became more prominent. For example, several major projects investigated loneliness and social isolation among older adults (Blau, 1961; Donson & Georges, 1967; Lopata, 1969; Lowenthal, 1964; Shanas et al., 1968; Turistall, 1967). The 1960s also witnessed the publication of the *Lonely Crowd* (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney, 1961) and other sociological analyses of the impact of changing society on personal relations and loneliness. Early in the 1960s, Moustakas (1961) published the first of his popular books on existential loneliness, following an earlier tradition begun by Fromm (1955). Also noteworthy is the fact that three empirically based doctoral dissertations were completed in the 1960s (Bradley, 1969; Eddy, 1961; Sisenwein, 1964); these works all emphasized the need to develop measures to assess individual differences in loneliness.

Work on loneliness grew rapidly in the 1970s. An important early milestone was the publication of *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation* by Weiss (1973). This book did much to stimulate interest in loneliness and provided insights that have guided empirical investigations. Research was also fostered by the publication of a simple and reliable instrument to assess individual differences in loneliness—the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978; Chapter 6). Today research on loneliness is flourishing.

Several continuities between earlier work and current trends are noteworthy. The long-standing interest in clinical applications of work on loneliness can be seen in the development of systematic intervention programs to help lonely people. The measurement of individual differences in loneliness has become sophisticated, and has clarified conceptual distinctions between loneliness and related states. An early focus on the affective components of loneliness has been broadened to include studies of the cognition and social behavior of lonely people. Sociological interest in social integration has led to careful studies of social networks and a better understanding of who is socially isolated. Previous research has emphasized careful description and measurement. The time now seems ripe for the development and empirical testing of more complex theoretical models of loneliness and of the processes that produce and maintain it.

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS

As the body of research and theory on loneliness increases, it becomes important to have a general framework for organizing and integrating concepts and

findings. In this section we will briefly present such a framework; elsewhere (Perlman & Peplau, 1981) we have elaborated on these ideas in more detail. Two principles underlying this analysis are: (1) that loneliness is a response to a discrepancy between desired and achieved levels of social contact; and (2) that cognitive processes, especially attributions, have a moderating influence on loneliness experiences.

We find it useful to distinguish among antecedents of loneliness, characteristics of the experience of being lonely, and ways in which people cope with loneliness. However, in loneliness as in many similar phenomena, causality is complex and probably circular. For example, the extent to which low self-esteem is an antecedent cause of loneliness or a consequence of the experience of loneliness is unclear; it may well be both for some individuals.

Antecedents of Loneliness

Two distinct classes of causes of loneliness can be identified. The first concerns events or changes that precipitate the onset of loneliness. Thus the death of a loved one may trigger loneliness. A second class of causes concerns factors that predispose individuals to become lonely or to persist in remaining lonely over time. Thus a person's lack of social skills may make it difficult to develop or maintain satisfying social relationships.

Precipitating Events

Our general definition of loneliness as resulting from a relational deficit suggests two types of changes that may trigger loneliness. Perhaps most common are changes in the person's *actual social relations* that lead to relationships falling below an optimal level. The ending of a close relationship through death, divorce, or breakup often leads to loneliness. Physical separation from loved ones, as when children leave home to go to college or when a family moves to a new community, is a common antecedent of loneliness. Loneliness is affected not only by the presence or absence of relationships, but also by qualitative aspects of social relations. Thus decreases in satisfaction with relationships may lead to loneliness.

In addition to changes in actual social relations, loneliness can also be triggered by *changes in the person's social needs or desires*. Life-cycle changes in a person's capacities or desires for social relations may precipitate loneliness if they are not accompanied by correspondent changes in actual relations. Sullivan (1953) posited a developmental sequence in which children of different ages have different needs and social skills. In his view, loneliness first becomes possible during the preadolescent era, when a "need for intimacy" is added to earlier needs for tenderness and acceptance. Developmental changes undoubtedly occur after adolescence as well. Sheehy (1976) suggests that for many successful professional people, midlife brings a renewed interest in cultivating friendship—an increased desire to have a rich

set of social relations in addition to work. Other experiences, such as psychotherapy or consciousness-raising groups, may also encourage individuals to reassess the importance and quality of their social relations. Finally, situational changes, such as periods of stress, may affect people's needs or desires for companionship and intimacy.

In summary, the onset of loneliness is triggered by a change in either actual social relations, or in the person's needs or desires for relationships. Theorists generally agree about the types of events that precipitate loneliness. But they differ in how they conceptualize the processes leading to loneliness. Thus the changed relationships may be seen as deficient because they fail to meet basic social needs, because they do not fulfill personal desires for relationships, or because the changed relationships lead to lower levels of social reinforcement.

Predisposing and Maintaining Factors

A variety of personal and situational factors increase an individual's vulnerability to loneliness. Such factors may increase the likelihood that a person will become lonely, and also make it more difficult for the lonely person to reestablish satisfying social relations.

As later chapters document, research is beginning to identify a set of *personal characteristics* that are consistently linked to loneliness. Lonely people are apt to be shy, introverted, and less willing to take social risks. Loneliness is often associated with self-deprecation and low self-esteem. For at least some people, inadequate social skills, perhaps stemming from childhood, contribute to loneliness. Personal characteristics such as these may contribute to loneliness in several related ways. First, such characteristics may reduce a person's social desirability and limit the person's opportunities for social relations. Second, personal qualities may influence a person's own behavior in social situations and contribute to unsatisfactory patterns of interaction. Third, personal qualities may affect how a person reacts to changes in his or her actual social relations, and so influence how effective the person is in avoiding, minimizing, or alleviating loneliness. Thus personal factors may predispose people to loneliness and make it harder for them to overcome loneliness when it does occur.

It is important to emphasize that *cultural and situational factors* also affect a person's chances of being lonely. Such an emphasis may help to correct a tendency (Peplau, Russell, & Heim, 1979) to overestimate the importance of personal factors in causing loneliness and so perhaps to unjustifiably "blame the victims" of loneliness for their social difficulties. Sociological theorists have long suggested that loneliness is exacerbated by cultural values and institutions. Slater (1970), for example, described a basic conflict between American values of competition, uninvolvement, and independence—and basic human needs for community, engagement, and dependence on others. To the extent that social institutions such as public schools and private corporations emphasize rugged individualism and success through competition,

they may foster loneliness. By creating unrealistic expectations about relationships, the popular media may also contribute to feelings of social inadequacy and loneliness.

Features of a person's more immediate social situation can also influence the likelihood of loneliness. Research on interpersonal attraction (Berscheid & Walster, 1979) has documented a number of factors that increase social interaction, foster group cohesiveness, and so presumably influence loneliness. For example, a well-documented finding is that physical proximity fosters liking. As a result, the architecture of housing units affects social interaction and friendship formation. The individual who lives or works in a physically isolated location should be more vulnerable to loneliness. Most generally, loneliness is affected by the match between the individual's needs, desires or skills, and the realities of his or her social environment. For the outgoing social risk taker, physical isolation may be less of a problem than for the shy individual. The extent to which a person is similar to others in the environment in attitudes, values, and background may also play a role.

The Experience of Loneliness

Empirical research is beginning to identify typical signs and symptoms of loneliness. (See chapters by Horowitz et al.; Jones; Paloutzian & Ellison; Rubenstein & Shaver; Russell.) Our discussion of the manifestations and correlates of loneliness considers affective, motivational, cognitive, and behavioral factors as well as social problems. It is of course often difficult to draw the line between relatively changeable characteristics that accompany loneliness and more enduring factors that may have caused the loneliness to occur in the first place. Our emphasis here is on potentially transient features of the experience of loneliness.

Affective Manifestations

Loneliness is an unpleasant experience. Fromm-Reichmann (1959) described it as painful and frightening. Weiss characterized it as a "gnawing distress without redeeming features" (1973, p. 15). Empirical research adds detail to this depiction. Loneliness has consistently been linked to depression (Bragg, 1979; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Weeks, Michela, Peplau, & Bragg, 1980). Lonely people report being less happy, less satisfied, more pessimistic, and more depressed (Bradburn, 1969; Perlman, Gerson, & Spinner, 1978). Despite the frequent co-occurrence of loneliness and depression, it appears useful to distinguish between the two concepts. Depression is a much broader phenomenon than loneliness; people can be depressed for a variety of reasons; hence depressed people are not invariably lonely.

Lonely people often feel anxious and describe themselves as tense, restless, and bored (Loucks, 1974; Perlman et al., 1978). Other affective correlates of loneliness have been less fully documented. There is some evidence that

lonely people may feel hostile toward others (Moore & Sermat, 1974; Loucks, 1974). In one study (Russell et al., 1978) lonely college students were apt to feel angry, self-enclosed, empty, and awkward. Similar results were obtained among a sample of older adults studied by Perlman et al. (1978).

Motivational Manifestations

Two seemingly contradictory images of the motivational aspects of loneliness have been reported. On the one hand, some authors consider loneliness arousing. For instance, Sullivan (1953) believed loneliness was a "driving" force that motivates people to initiate social interactions despite the anxiety such interactions may hold for them. Weiss (1973) echoed this theme, indicating that "the lonely are driven to find others" (p. 15). In contrast, loneliness has also been described as decreasing motivation. For instance, Fromm-Reichmann (1959) contended that true loneliness creates a sense of "paralyzing hopelessness and unalterable futility." A study by Perlman (unpublished research) found that lonely people endorsed statements indicating apathy, such as, "At times I feel worn out for no special reason," and "My strength often seems to drain away from me," and they rejected the statement "I have a lot of energy."

Several factors may help resolve the apparently paradoxical motivational properties of loneliness. First, loneliness may arouse motivation for interpersonal contact but diminish motivation for nonsocial activities. Second, loneliness may be arousing yet interfere with the effective channeling of one's energies required to complete tasks successfully. Third, different types of loneliness may have different motivational properties. For example, nondepressed loneliness may be arousing, while depressed loneliness may involve decreased motivation. Fourth, loneliness may have different motivational properties over time. Whereas the onset of loneliness may be arousing, the persistence of loneliness over long periods of time may be debilitating (Gerson & Perlman, 1979). Fifth, cognitive factors may mediate the motivational force of loneliness. Perhaps the perception of personal control over one's loneliness motivates people to seek ways of alleviating their distress (Schulz, 1976). Last, but equally plausible, lonely people may fluctuate in their moods, alternating between periods of high and low motivational arousal.

Cognitive Factors

Recent research (see chapters by Jones; Peplau, Miceli, & Morasch; Young) has focused on the impact on loneliness of cognitive processes of attention and attribution. There is some evidence that lonely people may generally be less able to concentrate or focus their attention effectively (Perlman, unpublished research). Several studies suggest that lonely people are highly self-conscious or self-focused (Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981). That is, they dwell on their own actions to a greater extent than do nonlonely people. This heightened self-focus may be reflected in subtle aspects of interpersonal behavior, such as asking fewer questions of others.

Weiss has suggested that lonely people are often highly vigilant about interpersonal relationships:

The individual is forever appraising others for their potential as providers of the needed relationships, and forever appraising situations in terms of their potential for making the needed relationships available . . . [Loneliness] produces an oversensitivity to minimal cues and a tendency to misinterpret or to exaggerate the hostile or affectionate intent of others. (1973, p. 21)

To date, however, evidence in support of this hypothesis has not been gathered.

Research by Peplau and her colleagues (Chapter 9) suggests that lonely people are typically eager to explain the reasons for their distress. Understanding the causes of loneliness may be seen as the first step toward predicting, controlling, and ultimately alleviating loneliness. The type of attributions that individuals make may have significant effects on their optimism about the future, their affective reactions to loneliness, their self-esteem, and their coping behavior. Thus the first-year college student who attributes her loneliness to temporary situational factors may feel more hopeful about improving her social life than another student who attributes his loneliness to relatively unchanging aspects of his personality. It has also been proposed that attributions may influence, in some measure, whether or not a lonely person becomes depressed. Believing that one's loneliness is due to stable features of one's personality may be especially likely to induce depression (Michela, Peplau, & Weeks, 1980). Attributions may also help explain the common finding that lonely people have lower self-esteem. For at least some people, blaming oneself for prolonged loneliness may lead to a decline in self-esteem.

Behavioral Correlates of Loneliness

In thinking about the behavioral manifestations of loneliness, it is at times difficult to distinguish among behavior that accompanies loneliness, behavior that leads to loneliness in the first place, and behavioral strategies for coping with loneliness. We have discussed social skill deficits in our earlier section on the antecedents of loneliness. Here we consider aspects of the affiliative behavior and interpersonal style of lonely adults.

Very few studies have attempted to document the actual behavior of lonely individuals (see review by Jones, Chapter 15), and this seems to be an especially important direction for future research. Available data suggest three possible behavioral manifestations of loneliness. First, lonely people may show different patterns of self-disclosure than nonlonely people. It may be that lonely individuals either pour out their hearts to listeners, or keep their personal lives extremely private. Second, the behavior of lonely people may reflect a greater self-focus than that of nonlonely people. Third, data linking loneliness to self-reports of shyness and low social risk-taking suggest that lonely people may be less assertive in their social interactions.

Social and Medical Problems

Loneliness has been linked to a variety of problems affecting not only individuals but also our society as a whole. Some evidence suggests that loneliness is related to adolescent truancy and behavior problems (Brennan & Auslander, 1979) and to suicide (Wenz, 1977). The possible negative implications of loneliness for mental health are suggested by findings that loneliness is correlated with depression and anxiety.

Also of interest are the possible effects of loneliness on physical health. Lynch (1977) has argued that loneliness makes people susceptible to serious illness and promotes the overuse of various medical services. However, most of the data cited by Lynch are based on measures of social isolation rather than loneliness. More direct evidence on the health consequences of loneliness is beginning to accumulate. First, to the extent that loneliness creates anxiety or depression, lonely people may exhibit some of the physical signs that frequently accompany these states, such as disturbances in eating or sleep patterns, headaches, or nausea. Some support for this has been presented by Paloutzian and Ellison (Chapter 14) and Rubenstein and Shaver (Chapter 13). Second, loneliness has been correlated with alcohol consumption. Perlman (unpublished research) found that lonely people may drink as a response to personal problems and feelings of stress, whereas nonlonely people drink more often to participate in group social activities. Third, there is some evidence that lonely people are more vulnerable to physical illness (Peplau, Russell, & Cutrona, unpublished research). Future research is needed to document more fully the relationship of loneliness and health, and to clarify the possible causal links involved. While in some cases loneliness may be detrimental to health, in other instances illness may precipitate loneliness.

Coping with Loneliness

Our framework suggests three general ways in which people can cope with loneliness. Coping strategies may seek to establish satisfying social relations by (1) changing the person's actual social relations, (2) changing the person's social needs or desires, or (3) reducing the perceived importance of the social deficiency.

Probably the most direct and satisfying way to overcome loneliness is to improve one's social relations. This can be done by forming new relationships, by using one's existing social network more fully, or by creating "surrogate" relationships with pets, TV personalities, radio talk show hosts, or the like. We are only beginning to understand ways in which lonely people try to improve their social relations (see chapters by Cutrona; Lopata et al.; Paloutzian & Ellison; Rook & Peplau). Since most lonely people cope without the benefit of professional guidance, research identifying the most effective self-help strategies would be especially useful.

A second general approach to coping with loneliness is to reduce one's desires for social contact. In the short run this might be accomplished by selecting tasks and activities that can enjoyably be done alone, rather than choosing activities that the person only enjoys with company. Lonely people may also reexamine their standards for social relations. Over time, adaptation may occur as lonely people develop new habitual levels of social relating. Weiss (1973) commented that persistent loneliness may lead people to "change their standards for appraising their situation and feelings, and, in particular, that standards might shrink to conform more closely to the shape of bleak reality" (p. 228). Weiss does not consider this an adequate solution to loneliness; research on the effectiveness of such coping efforts is needed.

A third way people may cope with loneliness is to try to reduce the importance of the social deficiency they are experiencing. Some people may deny feelings of dissatisfaction and loneliness, or may devalue the importance of social relations. More often, perhaps, lonely people may try to distract themselves from their painful feelings by throwing themselves into their work, drinking to "drown their sorrows," or other such activities. Some of the negative health consequences of loneliness may result from such maladaptive coping activities.

THE GOALS AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

Given the growth of work on loneliness at the beginning of the 1980s, the timing seemed excellent for developing a sourcebook on loneliness. The network of active scholars was still relatively small. Communication among loneliness scholars had begun through informal channels and at professional meetings. In May 1979, with the sponsorship of the National Institute of Mental Health, we organized at UCLA a research conference on loneliness (Rubin, 1979). The three days of meetings brought together scholars doing work on loneliness and closely related fields, and provided further encouragement to our idea of compiling a sourcebook of current research, theory, and therapeutic techniques.

The response from colleagues to our initial proposal for this volume was enthusiastic. By the fall of 1979 we had the necessary commitment from Wiley-Interscience as publisher and from potential contributors. Collectively, we began the process of transforming our blueprint for a book into reality. What we wanted to do was bring together the theoretical and empirical work of social scientists currently studying loneliness. We wanted both conceptual and empirical analyses because we are convinced that each enhances the other. We also believe that effective interventions to alleviate loneliness must be based on conceptual and empirical analysis of the phenomenon. Thus we wished to tie current perspectives on therapy for loneliness into the other two main elements of the volume.

We had several goals for the volume. We wanted to provide a relatively

comprehensive perspective on contemporary work on loneliness. Thus we felt the volume should be eclectic with regard to theory and method. Second, we wanted chapters that would summarize and synthesize information. Given the large number of specific studies of loneliness, it would not be possible to publish even a representative sample of research reports in a single volume. Therefore we wanted chapters that would provide overviews of major research projects or integrations of available information on specific topics. Third, despite our respect for the importance of methodological rigor, we wanted the chapters written so they could be fully appreciated by readers with only modest research training.

This volume is organized into five major substantive sections. The first section focuses on aloneness. It is clear that loneliness is not the same as being alone. But it is equally clear that social isolation is often a key precursor to loneliness. The chapters in this section document who is alone in America and consider the consequences of solitude on people's moods and self-reported satisfaction. As noted earlier, an important question considered here is: Does solitude have positive effects?

The second section of the book presents methodological and conceptual issues in the study of loneliness. The first chapter by Weiss presents a distinguished scholar's view of where the field is and what issues it must face. The other two chapters provide accounts of efforts to measure loneliness and to identify types of loneliness.

The third section is on theoretical approaches to loneliness. The first chapter provides a brief overview of theoretical analyses. The next chapters provide statements of three contemporary conceptual frameworks.

The fourth section focuses on the experience of adult loneliness. It presents findings from four major research programs. Two chapters (Rubenstein & Shaver; Paloutzian & Ellison) provide information on such questions as: Who is lonely? What emotions are common among lonely adults? What do lonely people do to cope with their experiences? Jones discusses the social attitudes, skills, and behavior of lonely people. Horowitz, French, and Anderson attempt to uncover people's "prototype" or typical image of the lonely person. These researchers examine how such images of loneliness influence our judgments of loneliness in others, and how they relate to the social behavior and feelings of lonely individuals.

The fifth section considers loneliness throughout the life cycle. Rubin's chapter identifies three main reasons why young children lack friends. Brennan presents data and theory about loneliness among adolescents. Cutrona reports a longitudinal study of the course of loneliness during students' first year at college. Lopata and her associates look at another major transition point in life, widowhood. Finally, Peplau and her associates consider loneliness and aloneness among old people.

The final section is on therapy for loneliness. The first chapter by Rook and Peplau provides a general overview of issues and strategies for helping lonely people. Young's chapter is a detailed presentation of his cognitive

behavioral therapy. His work represents one of the few well-developed therapeutic efforts addressed specifically toward combating loneliness.

In many subfields of psychology, the discrepancies in research findings outweigh the consistencies. Fortunately, loneliness is an area in which there has been a striking consistency in many of the major findings reported by different investigators using varying methods. There is also agreement on many of the issues worth addressing. Thus, throughout this volume, you will find what we consider a healthy cross referencing and overlap of ideas and results. Naturally, every question has not yet been answered, nor is there perfect agreement among investigators. Such tensions are crucial if the area is to grow and evolve.

Nonetheless, we are confident that by the end of your reading of this volume, you will have a clear, essential portrait of the lonely person. Along with the other contributors to this volume, we have spent several years coming to understand loneliness. For us, the effort has been both challenging and rewarding. We trust you will share in our enthusiasm, gain from our insights, and consider making your own contributions to loneliness research in the 1980s.

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