

An Archival Look at Being Alone Versus Being Lonely: Impact on Social Anxiety Posts on Reddit

DEPARTMENT OF
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INTRODUCTION

Social Anxiety and loneliness appear to be connected due to increased discomfort and vulnerability. However, research is unclear if being alone or the added condition of loneliness (i.e., perception of unfulfilled social needs) is related. It is expected that those who are lonely will have a higher social anxiety score than those who are alone. Additionally, we conducted a second study to further explore the condition of loneliness, in which lonely individuals surrounded by others will have higher scores of social anxiety than individuals who are lonely while being alone.

METHOD

Archival coding of Reddit Posts

Study 1

- Participants coded as lonely ($n = 30$) if they responded to a page asking how to cope with loneliness.
- Participants coded as alone ($n = 30$) if they responded to a page asking if alone time is healthy.

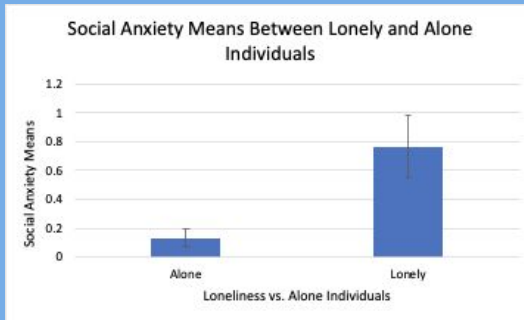
Study 2

- Participants coded as lonely with others ($n = 30$) if they replied to a page describing being lonely when around other people
- Participants coded as lonely while alone ($n = 30$) if they commented to a page detailing advice of accepting being alone and lonely.
- Social anxiety was coded as the frequency of distinct features of social anxiety (e.g., embarrassment, withdrawal, etc.) within each participant's comment for both designs.

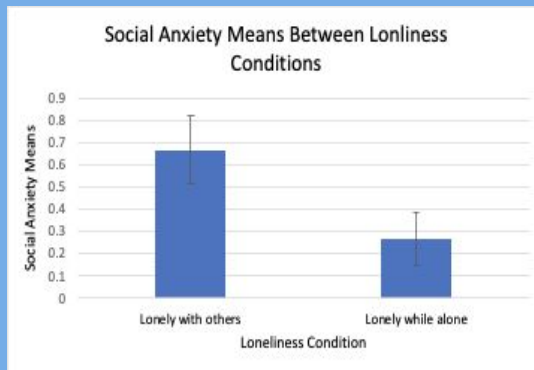
Sample Quote

"I'm lonely, yet I have crippling social anxiety that basically makes my brain shut down when I'm talking to someone i know no more than moderately well."

Study 1:



Study 2:



Sample Quote

"I constantly felt like a burden and unwanted, always "the other", even around family and close friends."

RESULTS

Study 1

- Significant effect of lonely individuals posting more social anxiety comments than alone individuals ($t(34.1) = 2.85, p < .05$).

Study 2

- Significant effect of lonely individuals around others posting more social anxiety comments than lonely while alone individuals ($t(58) = 2.07, p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

- Our results indicate lonely individuals stated more social anxiety symptoms than alone individuals.
- Lonely people with others also demonstrated high social anxiety compared to lonely people while alone.
- Findings are compatible with the theory that loneliness is correlated with negative effects while being alone is a neutral state that can potentially lead to positive feelings.
- In particular, minorities may experience greater social anxiety as they may perceive a social disconnect with others due to dissimilarity.
- More globally, intervention may examine how to combat the loneliness the COVID pandemic has forced upon individuals, regarding lockdowns and isolation.
- Future implications may explore if there are any conscious mechanisms alone individuals employ to reduce social anxiety.

Loneliness is associated with greater social anxiety than being alone.

