

James Morton

Hellman

English 2500

2/23/2025

Rhetorical Analysis of "The Loneliness of the American Worker"

Workers today have been becoming increasingly lonely inside the workplace. In the article "The Loneliness of the American Worker," Te-Ping Chen outlines the increasing loneliness and isolation U.S. Her article's audience is a variety of people but is mainly focused on professionals in the work world, human resources people, and wall street journal readers. She argues to the audience throughout, choosing to focus on relevant information, such as workplace statistics, to these people. She gives examples of employees experiencing the substitution of technology for interpersonal interaction. She points out that the need for productivity is another major reason for the increasing use of technology and remote meetings.

Chen distributes a variety of interviews, data, and research to argue her intentions and prove the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. She also provides data on increasing loneliness and its impacts and highlights the surgeon general's "Loneliness epidemic" as a primary reason for the present importance of her argument. The article is effective in arguing that interpersonal relationships in the workplace are necessary and welcome through every pathos, logos, ethos, and a variety of rhetorical devices.

In one section of the article, Chen focuses on small talk and its impact on workplace belonging. She starts it with the line, "Office chitchat, sometimes an unwanted distraction, seems to provide more benefits than many people realize," says Jessica Methot, an associate professor

at Rutgers University who studies social ties at work." (Chen). This brief introduction effectively introduces the benefits of small talk as it intertwines all three appeals.

She starts with pathos by describing small talk as "office chitchat." She uses this relaxed word choice to relate the audience to a shared experience they have had at work. This shared experience of professionals helps create this "we're in this together" mindset used throughout the article. It also suggests to the audience that there is more to this seemingly unimportant communication, implying that it is related to loneliness in the workplace and should be given more thought.

She reinforces this claim by recognizing that it has come from a researcher and is meant to lend credibility to what was said through ethos. This added credibility is likely important if the audience does not fully connect through the pathos or to reinforce further what the audience already has experienced. These appeals demonstrate the importance of interpersonal communication to the audience, making the article's primary claim effective. Furthermore, it also introduces a secondary claim that in-person communication is vastly superior to online communication because all the audience's experiences are guaranteed to be in person. Following this she provides more logos to support her claims.

She continues, "In a study of 100 employees at different workplaces, Methot and fellow researchers surveyed participants throughout the day. They found those who had engaged in small talk reported less stress and more positivity toward co-workers." (Chen). Finally, she uses logos to prove the idea to the audience; she effectively provides data to support the claim made by the researcher earlier. It also provides reinforcement for the audience's own experiences allowing them to connect their professional experiences with tangible data. This connection to

the audience's professional life and all three appeals serves to strengthen Chen's argument about the importance of these relations.

Chen transitions from logos to pathos by emphasizing how survey participants reported reduced stress. She supports this emotional interaction in the workplace with data, which allows her to connect to the audience by giving a reason for them to care. Chen proposes this benefit to professional workers by suggesting that their experiences in the workplace can be improved through more interpersonal interaction. By raising the importance of office small talk, Chen supports her central claim that interpersonal relationships reduce loneliness. She also reinforces her secondary claim that technology increases loneliness by suggesting that small talk cannot happen in online interactions. She also does this by bringing up online meetings in the next section.

Chen focuses on how online meetings have impacted these personal interactions in the following section. She starts by providing the data from the company Perceptyx: "A 2023 survey by employee experience and analytics company Perceptyx found people who described themselves as "very lonely" tended to have heavier meeting loads than less-lonely staffers." (Chen). Chen uses this data as logos and ethos to support her secondary claim that using technology, specifically online meetings, to increase productivity hurts the worker in various ways.

Chen names the company here to give the audience an authoritative body supporting the data. By intertwining this ethos alongside the logos, she effectively supports her claim to the audience through the evidence of meetings. For this reason, surveys of many companies are used throughout the article. By providing these logos, she gives facts to the audience so that they can interpret her secondary claim. This secondary claim continually strengthens the primary claim of

the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace by providing reasons to the audience why they are disappearing now rather than ten years ago.

Chen uses an interview with Kelly Roehm, who outlines how she is lonelier here than at her last job despite being in many more meetings. It also highlights that all these meetings are online, implying that it has a significant impact. Chen includes the words "glazing" and "zombie" from the interview to reinforce to the audience the dehumanizing characteristics of online meetings. The emotions these words evoke in the audience will likely aid in the connection between the interview and the audience. The pathos supports her primary claim about the importance of feeling more in the workplace rather than reducing their connection with others.

Chen uses this interview to give a relevant experience of another person in the professional world, which immediately allows the audience to relate to the experience. The experience she gives and the words she uses to connect to the reader's emotions also establish ethos to the audience of non-professional workers or human resources officers through this interview.

Later in the article, she interviews the co-founder of SoulCycle, who says, "One challenge is that American workers have sacrificed connection for productivity." (Chen). She includes this as a direct call back to her thesis and gives one perspective on why people will often meet online over in person. By providing this perspective, she argues with ethos and pathos to reinforce her claim. She uses a business owner whom readers will respect, and the interview's anecdote prompts the audience to think about their meetings to analyze their own lives. This allows the audience to think about how online meetings are less personal to them than in-person ones.

These two appeals in this interview are effective and lead into her central theme of how the need for productivity and the use of technology hurts personal relationships in the workplace, increasing loneliness. She does not comment on either of these interviews, but her inclusion of specific pieces of each interview allows the audience to interpret her message. The audience intends to relate to the experiences given and then assess her thesis, which makes her argument very compelling as it relies on examples rather than opinions.

Overall, Te-Ping Chen's article demonstrates through pathos, logos, and ethos the significant impact of loneliness in the American workplace through many means. All her data, interviews, and specific word choice inclusions support her appeals. She uses pathos to connect with the audience's own experiences, logos to support this connection, and ethos to verify the data she provides. These rhetorical devices support her argument about the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace and how the increasing use of technology is hurting them. She effectively proves to the audience that connections in the workplace are needed to reduce loneliness and that the increasing use of technology damages these relationships.

Works Cited

Chen, Te-Ping. "The Loneliness of the American Worker." *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 May 2024, www.wsj.com/lifestyle/workplace/american-workers-loneliness-research-35793dc4. Accessed 23 Feb. 2025.