

Modern Isolation is Painful and Obscure

Authors Note:

Modern isolation is a topic that is very hard to discuss. There is no evidence that such a phenomenon exists because it hasn't been officially recognized. Therefore, the evidence in this paper, and the definition of modern isolation, is defined through literature.

This paper has grown into a more detailed version of what I originally wrote up. It has also been trimmed and reorganized. More specifically, the first paragraph had the sentence starting "Put simply..." was added. I needed to define the term in plain English before trying to explain it through literature. I also changed the first paragraph from being general to specifically me, as this paper is really talking about how I feel. The ending sentence is now my thesis, stating that modern isolation is painful and obscure (using different words).

There are many more subtle changes that have occurred, but the most important change is the order in which the paragraphs are represented. I have put the more tangible Purdue University reference to legitimize the argument, and have delved into literature to show its parallel with what this professor has said. In the body of this paper I discuss first how isolation can be obscure in societies, and then I go deeper for how it can be painful. Depression is addressed but now in a smaller scope as it is more a tangent to the topic discussed. This paragraph was trimmed to keep the paper in focus of the main topic.

For further revision, I have added a couple of paragraphs addressing the indirect research that is occurring. This clears up the confusion on whether or not society realizes that this topic exists.

Enjoy!

Few people recognize what modern day isolation looks like. Not the type of isolation that is associated with geographical location, but social isolation. Put simply, modern isolation is the subtle social ostracism of an individual. I find that even living in a city filled with unique and fun individuals, I can still feel alone. It's slightly fulfilling to see interactions between others but simply seeing is not enough. Without physically experiencing these interactions it's hard to fully understand and partake in the pleasures of socialization. Life isn't fun when I have no one to console my most private details. Conversations that happen late at night where you really get to know someone intimately, I find, are the most euphoric of all; small talk is pushed out of the way and the deep dark secrets start to be revealed. Unfortunately, without these experiences I feel a disconnect between the community and myself and no one is able to recognize this torturous disconnect.

From an outside perspective, it's very hard to see this isolation. Everyday interactions with friends can give the illusion that you know them. In reality, it's very easy to talk to someone for years and not know what type of person they find interesting, what their passion is, or how they really feel about others. A way to see whether or not someone is experiencing isolation is to listen in on their conversations. If the topic at hand never gets past the weather or what they've done that day, they probably aren't having any meaningful conversations. This is not to say that small talk never occurs with those who aren't isolated. The greatest of friends can have a conversation that never gets past the weather. Mainly the difference between someone who is isolated is that every conversation they have doesn't get past the weather. Consequently, those important details only come out with a fair amount of trust. It's hard to trust people who have socially isolated you.

According to Professor Kipling Williams at Purdue University, the second stage of dealing with ostracism is coping. Often times this second stage masks what is actually going on. (Neubert) "For example, some of those who are ostracized may be more likely to engage in behaviors that increase their future inclusion by mimicking, complying, obeying orders, cooperating or expressing attraction."

Modern isolation isn't the typical ostracism that is talked about. A person isn't excluded from activities, but they are excluded from having intimate relationships. Thus, the reaction of someone who is experiencing this relational ostracism might try to appear tight knit with the community to hopefully get somewhere. Unfortunately, these actions put a shadow on the overall problem. Mimicking rarely provides a sound solution.

Additionally, mimicking makes it very hard to pinpoint when a person is ostracized or if they are genuinely happy. Thus, there hasn't been research specifically on this topic because it's hard to define more or less quantify. Literature and music provide the evidence that such a thing exists. Numerous books and songs will talk about the same thing in their own way. One of those commonly touched upon themes is coping with isolation through mimicry as described above.

Coping with isolation can take many different forms. There are many songs that have obviously provided comfort to people who feel this way. "Not Over You" by Gavin Degraw states it beautifully with his lyric, "If you ask me how I'm doin' I would say I'm doin' just fine. I would lie and say that you're not on my mind." The idea of masking one's emotions is not new. People have been looking at modern isolation for a long time, it's just rarely discussed outside of literature or music.

Speaker for the Dead by Orson Scott Card also discusses this topic. In this book, the main character, Ender, is called to a distant planet to perform a sort of funeral for a father who just passed away. Instead of performing the typical funeral that only highlights the best of a person, Ender revealed secrets of the deceased father that no one wanted to hear. In fact, the secrets Ender revealed are so controversial that Ender offends everyone at the funeral for his crude call outs in community ostracism. He indirectly stated that a community didn't know one of its members. Calling out all those who talked down that one person behind closed doors is a very bold move. That is exactly what Ender did.

Isolation in a close-knit community is often overlooked. When a community member does such a good job at hiding their emotions, the community doesn't worry about that person. They aren't showing the common signs that raise red flags. When a person doesn't raise those flags, they get stuck in what I like to call the *I Never Told You Phenomenon*. The person wants to trust someone but no one gets close to that person because they seem content. Thus, isolation occurs and emotions are bottled up and pain ensues. Humanity has depended on intimate socialization to such an extent that it has become a vital part of life: so much so that a lack of intimacy hurts.

Dealing with this hurt for years on end can cause behaviors to occur that are viewed as horrific. Domestic violence, shootings, depression, and more extreme actions can take place. The movie *Good Will Hunting* gave a fairly accurate example of the cognitive distress one can have from not being able to trust people. As soon as Will gets close to his girlfriend he starts to freak out, not wanting to share intimate details with her. If Will can't share anything with a person who has been close to him, there is no way his conversations with his friends have had any more depth.

Without trust a person has no one to turn to. Bottling up all these truths and emotions is hard. Continuing this isolation for years generates so much stress and barriers to expressing emotions. Lacking the ability to trust people is what causes the I Never Told You Phenomenon. *In Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng, a daughter Lydia Lee dies from an unknown cause. Throughout the book Lydia's life and all the secrets she never told are unraveled. As the plot twists and turns with truths that seem horrific, it becomes easier to see why Lydia's parents couldn't understand the potential for their daughter to commit suicide. The faking and hiding of friends with the complete illusion of what was going on in Lydia's life rung very true to many real-life situations.

These pieces of literature and music perfectly frames the life many humans have gone through. Although a community might think they know a person, when they sit down to write a eulogy they

might realize how shallow their understanding was. Close friends should be able to describe their friendship in detail, going past the listing of their favorite colors and foods.

Many more examples of modern isolation have popped up in society but no one has identified this phenomenon. Due to a lack of official identification, official research cannot be conducted. A scientist cannot propose an experiment based off the book *Everything I Never Told You*. Modern Isolation is in a very similar situation that depression was decades ago. Once depression was announced as an official illness that could be identified, the research poured in. Previous to this announcement, the progress made in solving the issue of depression was little to none. Even today, many people are arguing that clinical depression is not getting enough attention considering the alarming rates at which depression is being identified. Looking at Modern Isolation, it is quite obvious that society acknowledges this exists at a subconscious level. The fact that a paper like this has to be written to discuss the I Never Told You Phenomenon (which I coined) shows that there isn't anyone dissecting the mystery that plagues so many people. It is true that related research on depression and ostracism help shed light on Modern Isolation, but nothing is directly addressing a growing issue.

Not looking at this issue directly is a problem. Humanity is at one of its fastest growing eras in history, making the causal link as to why this is happening that much more complex. No one knows the link between new technologies and ostracism. Current research is struggling to keep up with predicting the effects of social media on the social creature that is humanity. Our culture is changing so fast making anything less than the full attention of a scientist quite useless. Research cannot partially focus on one topic and hope to get accurate and timely results.

Further investigation of the implications for what this situation might trigger could help to solve problems that have been a mystery to humanity for a very long time. Depression is a serious side effect that seems very plausible to occur from modern isolation. Recent research on depression is heavily

focused on the brain chemistry aspects of depression and less on the situational causes. This is understandable as traumatic events are usually associated with trigger points for depression, but this particular I Never Told You Phenomenon seems like a consistent event that could help explain some cases.

Isolation is a serious matter that is defined in everyday culture. It isn't easily recognizable and is seldom talked about, but nonetheless it is a phenomenon I can personally assure you exists and needs to be addressed. Even in the most populated areas, a person can feel disconnected from society and alone. When no one has these important intimate social interactions with one person it's hard for that person to feel included, and thus isolated.

Works Cited

Card, Orson Scott. *Speaker for the Dead*. New York: Tor Books, 1986. Book.

DeGraw, Gavin. "Not Over You." *Sweeter*. By Gavin DeGraw. 2011. Compact Disc.

Good Will Hunting. Dir. Gus Van Sant. Perf. Matt Damon. 1997. CD.

Hard Time. Dir. Alexander Singer. Perf. Colm Meaney. 1996. CD.

Neubert, Amy Patterson. *Professor: Pain of ostracism can be deep, long-lasting*. 10 May 2011. Website.
19 February 2017.

Ng, Celeste. *Everything I Never Told You*. New York: Penguin Press, 2014. Book.