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### Isolation

Humanity at its core is a social species. We grow up living in towns, going to schools where we meet other people and we practically spend our entire lives influencing and being influenced by a practically infinite number of people. This can be said to be true due to the modern explosion of social media. One could now connect with any remote person within seconds on virtually any social media platform. There are not many instances in life where someone gets to experience what it truly feels like to be alone. Modern controversies have arisen with the rise of dangers in mental health being associated with loneliness or the lack of fitting in socially. It seems that there is a drive to be a part of a social group of people and without it or without feeling like it, people get sad and therefore depressed. Regardless of this upcoming epidemic, in modern times usually when a person feels alone or lonely, chances are, they are not truly alone. There will still be people around them, new people to meet, perhaps a family or some friends. It can be seen in many works of fiction such as Duncan Jones' film *Moon* or Warren Ellis' graphic novel, *Orbiter*, the effects on the man of true and pure isolation and loneliness. These effects are damaging to health and often cause a person to act out. Social assimilation is a necessary component to a healthy human's life and without it, a person will not function, think or act correctly.

Any modern person can tell you that if one was to get on a bus or train to leave somewhere and they left their smartphone home for the day, this would trouble and disturb them

deeply. This person now has no immediate connection to the social world. This simple incident that lasts for less than 24 hours can drive person mad or riddle them with anxiety. In Sam Bell's case in *Moon*, he lived alone in space for a total of 3 years, or even John Cost and his isolated misadventure in space lasting 10 years. In *Moon*, Sam Bell is tasked with a 3-year contract to man a mining plant on the moon that supplies earth with its energy source He-3. He sits up there alone, with no companion besides his computer GERTY 3000. A broken satellite prevents him from communicating live with the people of earth so his only form of contact is out of date video messages from his family back home. In the film, it is supposedly Sam's final weeks on his contract and when it ends he plans to return to Earth to reunite with his family. Though this seems optimistic it is shown several times throughout the film, the mental toll Sam endures from being isolated on the moon. Graham Glancy in his book *The Psychiatric Aspects of Solitary Confinement*, describes the effect of pure isolation as, "...perceptual distortions and hallucinations, affective disturbances, difficulty with thinking, memory and concentration difficulties, disturbances of thought content, and problems with impulse control" (362), and this is the exact effect that Sam is shown to undergo.

Many hobbies take time away from Sam's isolation and epic boredom such as growing plants and working on wooden models. Sam actually is shown talking to these plants as if they are human and can communicate with him. No evidence is shown that these plants are able to communicate with Sam so it can be assumed that they cannot and his mentally disturbed mind is making this up to fill the void that is nothingness as he is alone, far from any human. Sam is also shown to hallucinate, such as when he burns his hand because his mind wanders off to hallucinate about some unmentioned woman sitting in a chair as he is cooking. It can be assumed that this was a hallucination because this neither this vision or this woman are ever mentioned

again in the film. The main plot of the movie explores a mysterious conspiracy behind Sam's contact when he is involved in an accident with the mining equipment and is then saved by a clone of himself, who was awakened when Sam seemed to have died. This Clone Sam is shown to be quite mellow throughout the film but the original Sam introduced, who is found out later to also be a clone, is very erratic and spontaneous. Obviously, the Clone Sam has just been awakened and given Sam's memories before the isolation so therefore his mind has little to no effect of solitary confinement, explaining his calm demeanor and Sam's erratic and obsessive behavior. There is a scene where the Clone Sam ruins the wooden model that Sam has spent time building and he lashes out at the Clone Sam, causing a fight where he gets hurt. This impulsive violent misbehavior is a clear indicator of the stress caused on Sam's mind by being alone in space.

Obviously, extended time alone leaves a harmful mark on a person. *Orbiter*, like *Moon*, explores this well but also introduces the exposure to something completely new and unknown. John Cost, the lone survivor on a NASA space shuttle that went missing out of orbit 10 years ago, returns to Earth in a flesh covered spaceship that leaves everyone on Earth completely baffled. Not only was Cost lost in space for an extreme amount of time, devoid of any social human interaction, but he encountered some Alien life that obviously influenced his travels and life. Dr. Anna Bracken, the psychologist tasked with talking to John to figure out more of what happened to him, is warned of his violent tendencies. John assaulted and killed a soldier upon his landing, and obvious sign of impulsive violence, a known sign of mental issues caused by isolation. But as Anna learns, John isn't just traumatized and erratic in nature, he revels and marvels as he talks about his journey and the things he has experienced. His interaction with some unknown alien life has taken a seemingly positive toll on him. It as if he wasn't completely

alone, like Sam. This call to explore the unknown revives the defeated humanity and everyone rushed to explore this alien upgraded space shuttle and try to dissect and figure out how the space shuttle flew around the universe for 10 years to return in better condition and with a living soul. Perhaps John was exaggerating or hallucinating, despite the alien evidence. He claims they were friendly but this cannot be assumed for sure, after all the rest of the crew is dead. If John is hallucinating or having trouble thinking properly, these are all signs of the effects of isolation on the human mind and can very well be true. The new explorers of space at the end of *Orbiter* should stay wary as the man they interrogated could not have been in the right state of mind after his landing.

Mental health should be something we take a closer look into especially when it derives from a feeling of loneliness. Those who are separated or separate themselves are evidently in danger. This is true for minor acts of exclusion and especially true for solitary isolation like that expected in *Orbiter* and *Moon*. The same effects presented in these works are also present in other films and works such as Robert Zemeckis' *Castaway*, where a man is isolated on an island and his insanity propels him to talk to a painted volleyball. Future endeavors in space travel should, and hopefully will, take these possible mental effects into consideration when planning missions and voyages. Perhaps keep a full crew on board or develop some long distance live communication. Maybe this seems impractical but at one point, human travel to Mars was thought to be impractical and now, within the next decade, is a very real possibility. One should never take advantage of the social interactions that are presented daily because they are key to what humanity is and how it will prosper in the future and as it can be seen, extended time spent alone can be damaging to one's health and then consequently, others who they may eventually come back into contact with.

Works Cited

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