# SOCI 323
# Social Psychology

## Session 14 – Loneliness

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# Session Overview

We established in the previous session that humans have an innate need to affiliate or seek out others in a cooperative way. Despite this need, some people have a difficulty in approaching others because of social anxiety-concerns with evaluation and fear of rejection. This often results in loneliness for the individual concerned with can have quite dire consequences for a person's wellbeing.

In this session, we shall explain why loneliness occurs and explore the strategies one can employ to reduce loneliness and improve social interaction with others. At the end of the session, the student would be able to:

- Define and explain social anxiety

- Define and explain Loneliness

- Identify and explain the sociological and psychological causes of loneliness

- Makes suggestions as to how one can initiate and sustain meaningful interactions with others to avoid getting lonely.

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Definition of Social Anxiety

- Definitions of Loneliness

- Psychological Explanations of Loneliness

- Sociological Explanations of Loneliness

- Avoiding Loneliness

- Sample Question

- Session Summary

- References

# Reading List

- Please read chapter seven (7) of the required text and the article on this session posted on Sakai.

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Topic One

# DEFINING CONCEPTS-SOCIAL ANXIETY AND LONELINESS

# What is Social Anxiety?

- Social anxiety is defined as the unpleasant emotion people experience due to the concern with interpersonal evaluation. Social anxiety makes the individual

➢ **avoid social interaction**. It can happen when a person is with others or even when he is alone and anticipates interaction, say a date, an interview etc.

- But if misery loves company, then why would a miserable person withdraw from others? The answer that has been provided is that you avoid affiliation only when the source of the anxiety involves other people, real or imagined. Thus, if anxiety is emanating from yourself, you seek others, but if it is from others, you withdraw from them.

➢ **engage in increasingly unpleasant social exchanges**. Thus, fearing and 'expecting' negative reactions from others, socially anxious individuals often act in ways (avoiding eye contact, nervous & jittery) that fulfill the self-prophecy. The consequence of this is social isolation and **lone**

# What is Loneliness?

- Loneliness is generally a lack of meaningful interaction with others. It also refers to the discrepancy between the level of social contact a person needs and what he has.

- 'Having a smaller or less satisfying network of social and intimate relations than one desires' (Franzoi, 2000).

- "The unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively' (Peplau & Perlma, 1982; in the Encyclopedia of marriage and Family, Vol. II).

- **Loneliness is a subjective experience**. It is the individual's place to know and say he is lonely. **Loneliness is not the same as solitude or being alone**.

- Research suggests that lonely and non-lonely people do not differ in the quantity of their social interactions. However, they differ in the quality of such interactions. Lonely people often report that they do not have others with whom to share personally important matters , because they felt others may not understand them, dismiss their problem or are just afraid of others negative reactions if they revealed their true selves and concerns.

- Loneliness is basically of two types namely the **chronic** (long term trait), and the **short-lived brief experience.**  Every individual occasionally experiences loneliness. It is when loneliness becomes chronic or a long term trait that help must be sought.

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Topic Two

# PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF LONELINESS

# Psychological Explanations of Loneliness

- Trauma-Bereavement

- Relational Transitions

- Childhood Home Environment

- Internal Crises-Sense of Failure

- Existential Loneliness

Topic Three

# SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF LONELINESS

# Sociological Explanations of Loneliness

- Changes in family patter (increasing nucleation of the family

- Large sizes of organizations cities/communities within which people live and operate)

- Frequent Relocation

- Pervasive spirit of competition and individualism

# SOME CONSEQUENCES OF LONELINESS

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# Some Consequences of Loneliness

- Being less friendly, less warm, less honest and open, (evasive) and easily angered.

- Lonely people have negative impressions of themselves (low self-esteem) and expect those who interact with them to think same about them, which the latter often does because of the lonely person's behavior.

- Lonely people do not make good first impressions. In their interactions, they talk more about themselves and have less interest in what their partner has to say.

- Lonely people perceive others in a negative light (as less competent, inferior etc) they have low self-esteem.

- Lonely people may find alternatives for social interaction by:

- Immersing themselves in their occupations.

- Indulging in wishful fantasies or daydreaming.

- Engaging in self-destructive activities (drug and alcohol abuse, indiscriminate sex etc).

- Addiction for Television or radio, which contents (often about failed relationships and sadness) tend to justify and deepen the individual's social isolation.

Topic Five

# PREVENTING LONELINESS

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# How not to become Lonely

- Admit the problem and appropriately situate the causes of the loneliness experienced

- Obtain training in social skills

- Make oneself attractive

# Social Skills Training: Some Do's

- Social skills training is a behavioral training program designed to improve interpersonal skills through observation and modeling of socially skilled trainers, role playing various problematic social encounters and behavioral rehearsal- observing one's own social interactions on a videotape. The focus or content of such social skills training programs include lessons on how to:

- **Speaking politely and fluently on the phone**. Regulate your mood before interaction. This involves a mental control or imposition of constraints on your emotions (neutrality), overcoming whatever anxiety you feel before interactions. This way you do not commit social blunders that makes others find you unattractive.

- **Initiate conversation and/or social relationships**. This involves training in active listening, empathetic responding, communicating respect, self-disclosure etc

- **Maintain and deepen social interactions** by learning to give and receive compliments, command over the use and interpretation of non-verbal-communication and avoiding and managing interpersonal conflict.

# Social Skills Training

- People who have been trained in social skills generally tend to pay attention to others during interaction (Kupke et al, 1979). Socially skilled people direct more questions towards their conversational partners and make more positive statements about them. The unskilled are however more self-focused and less responsive when conversing. They engage in 'conversational narcissism'- habitually turning conversational topics to themselves.

- Again socially skilled persons are able to recognize and conform to social norms. Socially skilled people know when to speak and when it is appropriate or not to discuss certain subjects. Unskilled people do not know when and where to say what and how to say it. Thus, they engage in simultaneous behavior. They make others, especially new acquaintances very uncomfortable by disclosing very personal details about themselves, such which are often considered violations of the norm, improper and may discourage future interactions.

- Thus, training in social skills is basically to teach socially anxious and lonely people how to interact more effectively with others which will result in an increase in self-esteem and fulfilling social relationships.

# Making Oneself Attractive 1

- Baron, Byrne and Branscombe (2006) provide some suggestions on how to make yourself attractive. These include:

- **Making proximity work for you**. In other words do not passively accept environmental conditions or settings. For example, at a party, you can move around and chat with people instead of sitting all by yourself in your little corner or at your table throughout. This is quite to do at cocktail parties. But even here, it is possible not to hang on to only one person, but to move around and interact with several other persons.

- **Creating positive effect**. Smile! Compliment others. Say positive things instead of complaining and criticizing. Do not bore others with your worries or problems.

# Making Oneself Attractive 2

- **Making the most of your own appearance and look beyond the appearance of others**. In other words, do your best to look presentable with respect to your weight, hair, clothes, make-up etc. You must try not to judge others based on stereotypes about their appearance. For example, some people in your community may be prejudiced about men who braid their hair or wear earrings because it perhaps does not conform to social norms. But, it is possible to know and like people for who they are and not on the basis of how they dress, their skin color or any other physical appearance. This is not to say however that these do not matter in your assessment of others.

- **Emphasizing Similarities and Minimizing Differences**. You often find that people hold different views from yours on several issues and about several people. When interacting with such persons, you can openly state your opinions without going into arguments with others about their beliefs. When you disagree, discuss the issue in an open-minded manner without judging or attacking the other person. In other words, you can agree to disagree. An objective presentation of your views has the potential to win others over to accept your position. Remember the section on persuasion?

# Sample Question

Social skills' training is critical for improving interpersonal relationships and reducing loneliness. How justifiable is this statement?

# Session Summary

- We have established in this session that though we all sometimes experience temporary bouts of loneliness, other people experience chronic loneliness because of social anxiety.

- Several psychological and sociological explanations can be given for loneliness. However, it is important to note that loneliness is mostly as a result of some people's inability to initiate and/or maintain good social relationships with others because of a lack of social skills.

- To overcome loneliness then, individuals must strive to amongst others, obtain social skills training and also work to make themselves attractive by enhancing their appearance and behavior and learning to create positive effect.

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# References

- Robert, B. and Branscombe, N. (2012). Social Psychology. 13th Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.

- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2007) Social Psychology. 6th Edition. Pearson Education Inc.

- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2010) Social Psychology. 7th Edition. Pearson Education Inc.