

Abstract

The main objective of this dissertation is to create a theory on loneliness based on an interdisciplinary approach. The author has proposed a tentative self-based theory of loneliness and has tested this theory against empirical data. These data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and in addition participants were asked to write their experience of loneliness. Participants were chosen through purposive and snowball sampling methods.

The empirical data collected has confirmed the proposed theory of loneliness. The theory, which presupposed an entity "the Self", provides an explanation for the causes of loneliness. In accordance with the views of various thinkers who have addressed the problem, "the Self" is continually seeking objects of enjoyment. When "the Self" perceives of the object "Aloneness," it becomes misled into believing it is alone, as the object "Aloneness" has a connotation of being without others. This state of confusion entirely contradicts the Self's nature in indulging objects of enjoyment and causes a deflated state of mind. This deflated state of mind caused by the confusion is often called loneliness, although in fact this is incorrect, as the Self is not actually alone, but with the object Aloneness.

Volitional thinking regarding Aloneness can be distinguished on two levels. When the Self perceives Aloneness, enjoyment becomes impossible, giving rise to the first level of loneliness. If the Self continues behaving in the same manner, then it moves to the second level, which is the meaninglessness of being or the state of not knowing why the Self should continue its existence.

The study has showed that loneliness can be differentiated into six different types based upon the stage of perceived Aloneness. However, explanations for several types of loneliness need to be improved as it is neither concise nor wide enough to cover observed reality. In addition, the order in which the types of loneliness are classified may also need to be changed.

The first level of perceived Aloneness consists of three types:

Simple loneliness is caused from a recent loss of object of enjoyment which has been integrated into a part of one's living content. The object lost does not necessarily have to be the one that the person likes or dislikes, but when it is gone the person perceives him/herself as being alone.

Interactional loneliness comes from a state of detachment from others or not being in a state of satisfying interaction with another person.

Loneliness of a separate existence comes about when a person perceives human lives as separate existences and therefore believes that no one can understand another person's feelings and empathize with them.

The last three types of perceived Aloneness are as follows.

Relational loneliness arises from lack of relationships with other beings or from the perception of a lack of such relationships.

Loneliness of being different emerges when a person believes that they lack commonality with others, whether it's through different perspectives, background or experiences.

Lastly, existential loneliness comes when a person ponders about the meaning of existence and finds no satisfying answer.