The paradoxical need for social connection and disconnection,
challenging the connection bias.

Alice Hortop
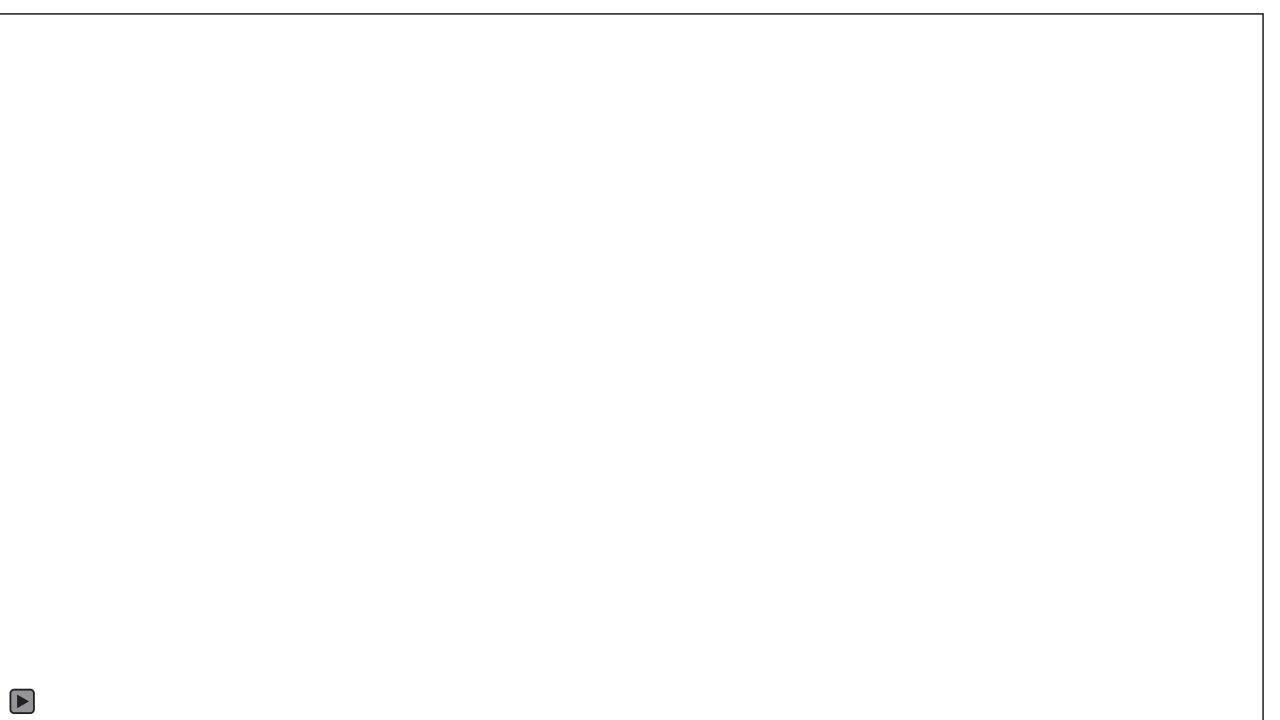The University of the West of England

Key definitions

- Loneliness: the unpleasant feeling people experience when they perceive their social networks to be lacking in quality or quantity (Coplon et al , 2019). Predicts life longevity curtailing by 26%. Fifth of our population purport being lonely (9 million +). (Campaign to end loneliness, 2018)

- Isolation has 5 attributes: number of contacts, feeling of belonging, fulfilling relationships, engagement with others and quality of network members. Antecedents to isolation include: lack of relationships, psychological barriers, physical barriers, low financial/ resource exchange, and prohibitive environment. Lack of belonging is an internal feeling. (Nicholson, 2009).

- Solitude: the situation of being alone, without other people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019)

- Exclusion: the act of not allowing someone or something to take part in an activity or to enter a place (Cambridge dictionary, 2019)

- Retreat: to go away from a place or person in order to escape from fighting or danger or to go to a quiet safe place in order to avoid a difficult situation (Cambridge dictionary, 2019)

The presenting concern

- Occupational therapists hold bias and heretic beliefs towards shared and co-occupations that encourage connection rather than solitary and parallel occupations that allow for disconnection.

- Our battle to define occupations and categorise them predominantly by function rather emotional need has potentially contributed to life imbalance.

- We recognise occupations are personally and socially constructed (Pierce, 2001), however we do not fully address the conflict of westernised living, the digital era and neoliberalism.

- Zemke and Clark (1996) promoted a predominance of solitary occupations saturating the literature, with the need to explore co-occupations. However, solitary occupation research tends to be limited towards per functionary activities such as washing and dressing and bathing.

- Pizur-Barnekow and Knutson (2009) use solo television watching as an example in their definition of solitary occupations although I feel this occupation is a social surrogate; people infrequently build a relationship with their television.

- I fear solitary or solo occupations have not been considered in the modern digital age beyond promoting mindfulness and mediation.

A friend in need is a friend in deed

○ The 'Buffer Hypothesis' proposes friendships protect against ill health (Coleman and Iso-Ahola 1993 cited in Glover and Parry, 2017) Humans are naturally social beings (Pierce, 2001) and we feel pain, anger and despair when socially dismissed (Hood, 2011).

○ Friendships develop due to commonality and reciprocity (Glover and Parry, 2017).

○ Connection dominates through our health and well-being models e.g. the popular 5 ways to well-being: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give (www.Gov.uk, 2008).

○ Connection also dominates the positive psychology literature as a focus for research. We have a rapid decline in close friendships and civic engagement since the 1940's and 50's (Seligman 2003, Peterson, 2012, Achor, 2011 and Lubomirsky, 2010, Putman cited by Harris, 2017).

○ Heretic's assumption of more social connections will make us happy.

○ Dominant belief in our culture that solitude is unhealthy and indicates illness (Naidoo et al, 2014 Nguyen et al, 2018, Detrixhe et al, 2014) Detrixhe et al (2014) cite research previously correlating seeking solitude with narcissism, self indulgence, neuroticism, social hostility and an unnatural state, at risk of losing their minds. Creates an impact bias.

The Luxury Trap

- Pre-agricultural revolution we lived in small groups of up to 150. Groups divided when they reached 150 members. Simple nomadic existences with few possessions (Harari, 2014).

- A mere 10,000 years ago the agricultural revolution began transforming our lives rapidly requiring we localise to our fixed food sources and begin the hard graft of farming. Post agricultural revolution we live in condensed societies in vast numbers. Tied to our possessions.

- Harari refers to the pre-agricultural foragers as the 'original affluent society' due to the benefits of their lifestyle: shorter working hours, greater variety of work, better nutrition, improved health once through early infancy due to less disease from living in close quarters on mass and without conditions associated to modern living e.g. repetitive movements or stationary tendencies.

- In contrast modern affluent societies work on average 40-45 hours weekly and developing societies 60-80 hours (Harari, 2014).
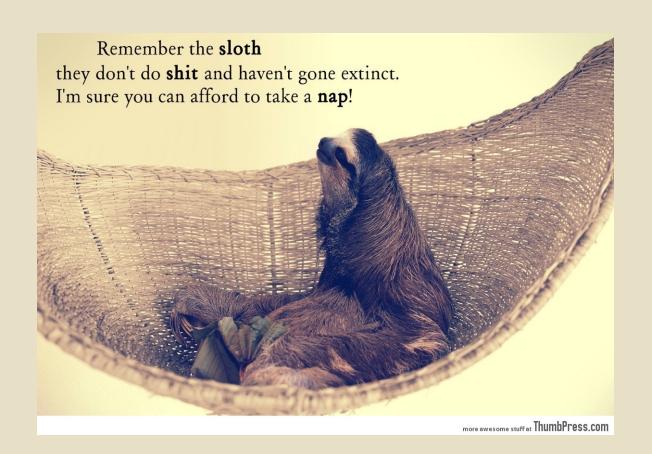
What are expectations of our out of work time?

Do we have a slow backlash?

- McMindfulness?

- Slow movements?

- Sloth life?

- Hygge trend?

- JOMO versus FOMO

- Single tasking

Remember the **sloth**
they don't do **shit** and haven't gone extinct.
I'm sure you can afford to take a **nap**!

more awesome stuff at ThumbPress.com

Grooming fatigue

◦ 148 Golden Number for the size of our Neocortex. The larger the group the more sophistication is required in the skills of social grooming. (Dunbar, 1993) Social grooming releases dopamine and is faster than ever (Harris, 2017)

◦ The era of social platforms has increased our interconnectedness and social grooming speed. The human brain hard wires to share and releases dopamine when felt heard (Harris, 2017).

◦ Information-load paradigm (Gleick, 2011) and Paradox of choice (Schwartz, 2005 and Gilbert, 2004). Phelan and Kinsella (2009) recognise greater collectives profound influence on what individuals 'consider true, worth knowing and doing'; challenging the idea that individual's have choice in their occupational engagement that shape their occupational identity.

◦ In one minute 72 hours of content is uploaded on to You Tube, 5.5 million Snapchat videos will be viewed and 216,000 photos will go up on Instagram… You're so behind (Harris, 2017) Platform engagement creates more concrete thought than abstract thought.

◦ 80% of Americans smart phone users check their phones within 15 minutes of waking up (IDC, 2013)

◦ Disconnecting from Facebook for just a week including reduced stress levels, close one engagement and feeling more satisfied from their activity engagement. (Wiking, 2017)

Is the west full of extroverts?

◦ People feel overwhelm with the constant exposure to so many different people and are overstimulated. Environments suited to extroversion dominate and increase pressure to be extrovert in our daily lives e.g. shared offices and group working. (Cain, 2015)

◦ People frequently believe they are extroverts due to cultural influences but are often not, performing as an extrovert is tiring if this is not your natural tendency. (Cain, 2015 and Little et al, 2007)

◦ People have the ability to adopt 'free traits' for personal projects of passion e.g. a naturally quiet person can speak to a room of people if passionate enough on the subject importance. (Little et al, 2007)

◦ Increasingly people connect on a superficial level possibly due to the growing time constraints of grooming too many shallow social connections.

◦ Group think (Lehrer, 2012). Group think extroversion, time in groups and mass connection is best? Time in solitude is bad?

My relationship with disconnection…

- I know what loneliness is.

- I know what solitude is.

- I know what exclusion and isolation is.. For me these required retreat and protective isolation. The easiest way to avoid rejection and stigma is through withdrawal (Christiansen, 1999).

- Time to heal. To learn new self identity.

- I know returning inwards to rebuild, focusing on preventing disintegration of important relationships. (Parry and Sinew, 2004 and Zandi et al, 2017) Time to cocoon away from pain, to create distance to heal and challenge long held conceptions of what life should be. (Daniulk, 2001)

- Solitude and parallel occupations can be healing.. Feelings of purpose, mastery and autonomy can be achieved alone.

- Me personally: poetry, learning to grow life, commuting, studying, hygge, lagom, understanding myself, re-evaluating family as a form.

Wearing grief

It surrounds me, inches pad my broken body,
As the fruitless years pass, the padding grows,
A physical barrier, consciously and uncomfortably worn.
Visible grief, heavy on my bones,
Heavy with judgment,
And the irony?
The unwanted padding of grief.
Traps you into the childlessness that caused it,
Fat people aren't allowed to be mothers.

‹ Mum New Number
20:10, 14 Jun

⋮

Just finished reading your research, I enjoyed your writing style, the content was very thought provoking, gave me insight I would never have had. Thank you for letting me into your world, I feel proud of your work and I realize more than ever what an important subject you're revealing. Good luck my love xx from your very proud Mum xx

The haven of the commute

- Culture of practicing concentration leads to less opportunities for day dreaming. Slight boredom and solitude generate ideal opportunities for day dreaming. (Harris, 2017)

- The social surrogate that glows light blue requires little activation energy (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013 and Achor, 2011).

- FOMO versus JOMO

- Loss of third spaces (Oddenburgh) e.g. sea swimming at Weston.

Benefits of solitude and disconnection

- Lack of opportunities for self-soothing through childhood can leader to greater feelings of loneliness in adulthood, known as Egotistic desolation (Zilboorg, early 1930's cited in Harris, 2017)

- 'Individuation' your ability to appreciate yourself (Jung, 1967) comes from opportunities for introspection.

- Identity expresses through our engagement in occupation, not just social ones. (Christiansen, 1999)

- Retreating to solitude appears to help reduce high intensity emotions (Nguyen et al, 2018)

- Retreats give short term improvements to health and well being (Naidoo et al, 2014)

- A lack of day dreaming reduces creativity, processing and generating new ideas (Fox, 2015) aha moment equivalent to orgasm in the brain (Immordino yang et al, 2012).

- Italian "Dolce far niente" translates to "it is sweet to do nothing"

- Enhances mental freedom, minimise self consciousness in others company and gives free reign for thoughts and actions (Harris, 2017). Allows time to appreciate others and create greater closeness.

- High preference for solitude is related to positive well being rather than a sign of mental illness. It can indicate secure attachment, 'growing aloneness', related to self-actualisation and linked to exceptional achievement. Findings show people who are able to engage solitude for growth are warm with excellent friendships (Detrixhe et al, 2014)

- Aloneness as a concept is being studied as positive from the negatively viewed isolation and loneliness. Factors that enhance aloneness including: balance of interpersonal interactions, ability to use alone time to develop skill or attribute over time and temperamentally based. Allows for positive stress appraisal, reduces over stimulation, allows exploration of our uniqueness, opportunities for self regulation, evocative memory processing and reduces feelings of being one of the masses. (Dietrixhe et al, 2014 and Coplan et al, 2019).

- God gave us memories so we might have roses in December, J.M. Barrie.

- When opportunities for alone time are taken away, distress can increase. (Dietrixhe et al, 2014) Aloneliness refers to distress caused by a lack of quality alone time (Coplan et al, 2019).

William Henry Davies

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

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