SOLITUDE - A PATH TO HEALING FROM SOCIAL LONELINESS

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Abstract

In the context of the contemporary society, in which interactions take place mainly through social networks, solitude acquires an essential therapeutic value for healing the loneliness felt by digitally hyperconnected individuals. Although virtual environments offer the illusion of proximity, they often favour the superficiality of relationships and the constant comparison, which intensifies the feeling of affective isolation. Solitude, as an intentional practice of detachment from the digital flow, therefore becomes a necessary space for restoring authenticity and reconnecting with one's own interiority. By suspending artificial social stimuli, individuals can analyse their real emotional needs and assess the impact of online validation addiction on their mental balance. Solitude facilitates the rediscovery of the capacity for self-reflection, diminished in the era of information speed, contributes to the development of a stable identity, independent of the reactions of others, and promotes affective autonomy, essential for healthy relationships. Detached from the pressure to perform socially, the individual can cultivate his internal resources, such as creativity, introspection and resilience. Therefore, loneliness does not represent a break from the world, but a form of self-discovery, which allows the reconstruction of authentic human bonds, and for people excessively connected to social networks, it becomes a necessary and effective way of healing the loneliness generated by superficial digital interactions.

Keywords: *loneliness, solitude, social networks, communication, self, introspection.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Man is a social being who, throughout history, has sought to satisfy his needs within various communities. Abraham Maslow identified that the individual has five needs, namely physiological, security, belonging, self-esteem and self-development (Pahon, n.d.).

The physiological needs (water, food, shelter) made the individual seek the company of groups, aware that it would have been difficult for him to hunt or cultivate alone and that he would have been exposed to the risk of not surviving. Today these needs are met, partly through personal effort, and partly through the services of the community to which individuals belong.

The need for stability, security, protection, order, made the individual look for ways to protect his purchases, defend himself from dangers and strengthen his family. These needs are provided today by the structures of the society which, like those of the ancient period, were specialized and intended for defense and order.

Moving on to the third level, the individual felt the need to belong and manifest emotions, that is, love. This need manifests itself through the construction of interpersonal relationships, friendship, family building, the feeling of being part of a group. In this sense, the individual has developed the ability to communicate needs, to share feelings and especially to enjoy or suffer when the group responds or does not respond to these needs.

Self-esteem (confidence, success, independence), as the fourth individual need, comes as an understanding of personal value, of individual autonomy, but also as a form through which respect from others comes (recognition, status). The individual feels the need to be validated, to be recognized as useful, to be praised and above all to be placed in the hierarchy of those who contribute to the development of the community.

The last need of the individual is to achieve the maximum potential, to manifest creativity, morality, to understand and accept facts, to find the meaning of life.

Analysing the five dimensions, in the current social context, in which connections between individuals are made, both in physical and online format, we find that the penultimate two have

acquired, for over 85% of people, an extremely important role.

People want to feel loved, to know that they are part of the family and community, that they are useful, that they are important and, above all, to be successful people, recognized by society.

Interestingly, by connecting people to the "global village," the individual, regardless of education, profession or potential, has taken very high benchmarks for material well-being (what he sees outside the community and the country), while the patterns of mental and emotional well-being are difficult to identify and, above all, very difficult to individualize.

People want to copy successful models, even if some are virtual, they want to live like those who promote themselves online and suffer both because they have distanced themselves from reality and the community, and because they don't give themselves breaks of solitude to reflect on "I know who I am" and "I know what my needs are."

2. SOCIAL LONELINESS IS NOT JUST IN STATISTICS

"Loneliness is not a victory over others, it is actually a personal shipwreck."

Octavian Paler (Felea, 2013)

In order to talk about social loneliness statistics are needed, firstly because the numbers are significant and secondly because they also clarify some of the causes of this loneliness.

A 2024 study on the use of the digital environment in Romania shows that we have 18.06 million internet users, 13.3 million social media users, of which 11.73 million users are aged 18 and over.

Facebook, one of the social networks used by Romanians, had 9.05 million users, equivalent to 45.9% of the total population, and the average time spent on social networks is 13 hours per month (Sendsms, 2024). We might think that the number of hours is acceptable if we were sure that everyone sits or surfs for only 30 minutes a day, but it was found that almost half (48%) admitted to staying three hours a day, 21% spend more than four hours a day, and 93% at least one hour a day (Mihaila, 2023).

As for the reasons why people access these pages, they refer to information regarding the public figures they follow (42%), celebrities and entertainment (42%), fashion and lifestyle (41%), i.e. from a world to which too few belong (Rotaru, 2023).

YouTube had 13.30 million users, equivalent to 67.4% of the total population of Romania, the average monthly time spent by users is 30 hours per month (Sendsms, 2024). Podcasts on this channel are accessed for interviews with personalities (30%), interviews with experts in different fields (27%) or education and personal development (26%) (Rotaru, 2023).

TikTok registers at the beginning of 2024 over 8.97 million Romanian users aged at least 18 years, and users spend the most time on Tik Tok, 32 hours and 31 minutes on average, per month (Baltoi, 2024). Let us not forget that an official TikTok report shows that 27,000 accounts tried to manipulate the elections in Romania in favour of the party AUR and Calin Georgescu (Popovici, 2025), a subject that, although not related to loneliness, proves that, many times, what we see in the posts is not related to reality but to the manipulation of emotions.

Instagram is used by 5.30 million Romanians. The average monthly time on Instagram is 9 hours per month, LinkedIn had 4.20 million Romanian members aged 18 or over at the beginning of 2024, Pinterest, with 2.68 million Romanian users, Snapchat with 2.56 million Romanian users, and X (Twitter) with 1.51 million Romanian users (Baltoi, 2024).

Returning to loneliness, in an EU-wide survey of 25,000 people, around 16% of Romanians feel lonely most often or all the time. The results of the survey highlight that people who feel lonely all the time or almost all the time are at least 20% more likely to have depressive episodes than the others.

Heavy use of social media has also been associated with increased loneliness, and online sites *"lack the privacy and quality of offline interactions."*

Loneliness among younger respondents was higher than among the older ones, as major life events tend to disrupt social media and make anyone likely to feel lonely, the report said (Cristescu, 2023).

In a study by Save the Children Romania, organized on a sample of 5000 children, 40% of those interviewed say that they happen to browse the internet for no particular purpose, and 31% say that they spent less time with their family or doing things for school because they surfed the internet and 28% tried unsuccessfully to spend less time online. The same study reveals that almost 13% of children say that it happened with a high frequency that they did not eat or sleep in order to be online and 23% did not feel at ease at all that they could not stay on the internet.

More and more children and young people feel sad or even develop depression because they compare their achievements with those of the celebrities or vloggers they follow on social networks, and in recent years global data show that 1 in 4 adolescents aged between 15 and 18 feel lonely, some studies even indicating percentages of over 50% (of participants who feel lonely) (Edupedu Editorial Team, n.d.)

Social media can increase the negative effect of loneliness through a more frequent exposure to negative feedback and the presence of ostracism tendencies (exclusion from online social media groups, events, and discussions).

Studies show us that the intense presence on social media makes us more unhappy due to the perpetual tendency towards social comparison, as well as the perpetuation of bad news and of the morbid: it fuels depression, anxiety and even suicidal tendencies, it affects our attention and concentration, it affects our psychic image of our body, exposing us to altered, retouched images, to a perfection that we may intuit does not exist, but which seems irresistible to us. "This is how we should look" becomes stronger in our psyche than the more modest "this is how we can look," it becomes a follow-up environment, a vehicle for bullying and crime that has children and adolescents as victims in particular (Melnicu, 2025).

3. SOLITUDE IS NOT JUST FOR INTELLECTUALS

I find happiness in moments of solitude, where I can recharge my energy from Saturday night to Monday morning.

Audrey Hepburn (Citatul.ro, n.d.)

Technology is constantly developing, making communication easier than ever, and as a consequence, we have generations of people who do not know what it means to spend time alone and many of them struggle to find happiness.

The main advantages of solitude are the following: self-knowledge and reflection**, creativity and productivity, freedom and inner peace, emotional recovery, intellectual and emotional independence.**

Self-knowledge and reflection are ways of looking at who we are and, especially, what we want to be.

They give us the space we need to process emotions, evaluate personal goals, and find solutions to problems, without external influences.

In solitude, crystallized intelligence has the opportunity to think critically about what we are, what we have, what represents us as personal values and offers us ways to follow that are not related to what we see around us but to what represents a model that we set out to follow but did not succeed due to the crowd of models on social media.

Intra-personal emotional intelligence, in moments of solitude, has the possibility to observe which are the emotions that overwhelm us, which are the roots of these emotions (thoughts) and which are the actions that we have done and bring us remorse and which are the actions that we have not done and have attracted regrets.

Interpersonal emotional intelligence also has the opportunity to reflect on the way we understand those around us, on the way we have interacted with other people, on the empathy we have and on the way we have used it or would need to use it.

The reflection process is one of questions and ans manage to accept diversity, our degree of tolerance to frustration, but especially "the transformations that our personality has undergone during online dialogues."

Creativity and productivity are enhanced through intense focus, which helps us boost authenticity and focus. I state this because 32% of Romanians who have access to internet say

they use artificial intelligence tools daily, and 13% say they do it weekly, which reduces the authenticity of the messages, the degree of challenge of the creative capacity and especially the intellectual and emotional effort caused by the process of creating a certain material.

Solitude also cultivates inner peace, that state of well-being in one's own company, reducing emotional dependence on others and protecting against wrong social choices.

The fear of not being alone makes us look for any type of company, engages us in sterile or contradictory dialogues, encompasses us in the nets of answers to any problem, whether we know it or not, whether it is a need of ours or not, whether it helps us or confuses us.

The inner peace given by the emotional independence from others, by the need for attachment, by the need for permanent validation, gives us the necessary framework to see inside ourselves, to see and analyse our set of values, to analyse our physiological needs, of belonging, of self-esteem, of personal development, without relating them to the words of those online, without comparing them to the standards of others, without wanting to look like someone.

Introspection, related to who we are and where we are going, helps us to move away from the risk of making the wrong choice of counselling, mentoring or friendship relationships, thinking from tail to head the Romanian proverb "Tell me who you are with so I can tell you who you are."

When we know who we are, when we know what we can do, when we know why we do something, when we know who uses what we do, we are able to remove the tendency to conform to the demand of the masses, of a majority that we are not sure is acting in the spirit of values, that it is not ignorant or manipulated, that it is not artificially created.

We need, and solitude offers us, emotional recovery, mental rest and energy recovery, because the presence on social media is overwhelming.

We live, unintentionally, emotions such as anger, fear, disappointment or disgust, for facts, attitudes or people, whom we do not know very well, but who know how to formulate emotional messages.

We get involved and suffer emotionally for events outside the family, the community or the country, which do not directly affect our lives but that we feel obliged to analyse. They make us suffer even though we have no tool or way of influencing their progress or stop their manifestation.

In this case, solitude refers to a rational and emotional detachment and to answering questions about how much it affects us and how much we can intervene.

It also refers to questioning about what and how important it is, a certain something, for the world we live in, as well as about how relevant it is, that something, for what we are or want to be.

A final dimension analysed is that of individual independence and individual access to happiness in healthy relationships, without the fear of being alone.

Solitude, not being loneliness, gives us the space and time to discern between being part of the many and noisy or building ourselves the group of those who share common values, interests or expectations.

The fear of loneliness makes us offer the space of too much which is always the enemy of much, makes us believe that if we take a "sabbatical" time frame we will be forgotten, we will no longer exist as social figures, that we will no longer count in the equation of communication.

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

"*A man can be himself only as long as he is alone; if he does not love solitude, he will not love freedom either; for man is free only when he is alone.***"**

Arthur Schopenhauer

In the end, we would like to say that solitude is not a refuge reserved only for intellectuals, but a profoundly human experience, accessible to anyone seeking tranquillity, clarity or self-discovery.

It can become a space for personal growth, healing and reflection, regardless of one's level of education or concerns.

Solitude does not separate people, but brings them closer to themselves.

Solitude could represent the path to individual wisdom.

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