# INQUIRY INTO PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF LONELINESS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

# A Submission To
# The NSW State Government's
# Loneliness Inquiry

## Contents

Hello,

I would like to begin by thanking the government for the opportunity to contribute to this most important inquiry.

Loneliness has become a major crisis across this nation (if not the world), which recieves only a small fraction of the attention it deserves. Thousands, probably millions of Australians have been suffering in silence and hopelessness, so an inquiry such as this has been long overdue.

I make this submission as a NSW citizen who has been suffering from constant loneliness for more then 20 years. My intention is to draw upon this experiance to offer you useful insight into the causes of loneliness, the factors that sustain it and/or make it worse, the currant lack of any meaningful remedies for it, and the changes that need to be made.

I have tried to make this submission as complete as it possibly can be. Nonetheless, I may have failed to explain my concerns or views clearly, or otherwise failed to address some of these issues adequately.

If you have any questions you would like me to answer, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me and ask them, even if you are concerned they may be uncomfortable for me to answer. It's much better that we address the difficult questions now, rather then allow these issues to persist unaddressed, inadequately addressed, or inappropriately addressed.

I hope you find this submission useful.

Thank you in advance for whatever considderation you are willing to give to the concerns I raise, and the reccommendations I make within.

My Thanks and Kind Regards,


31/10/2024

# Defining "Loneliness"

Before you begin to investigate the loneliness crisis throughout NSW, it is absolutely crucial that you clearly understand what loneliness truly is.

Loneliness is not:
- A lack of proximity to other human beings;
- A lack of exposure to other human beings, or;
- A lack of contact or civil interaction with other human beings.

(Although these conditions are often connected[1] to loneliness)

Loneliness is an unsatisfied need for **meaningful** and **positive** connection with one or more other human beings.

You will no doubt hear this clarification repeated to you many, many times over the course of this inquiry, to the point where it will probably become tiresome. But it is important to be clear about this, because you won't be able to recognize or appreciate the proper remedies for loneliness until you really understand what loneliness is.

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| **Reccommendation 1:** | Insure that all future anti-loneliness policy has a primary objective of cultivating meaningful relationships, and does not stop at merely increasing peoples' exposure to other people. |
| **Reccommendation 1-a:** | Insure that the success of all future anti-loneliness initiatives is evaluated by the number of meaningful relationships it has cultivated, not simply on the amount of human-to-human interaction it has caused. |

This, in turn, is important, because addressing loneliness with the wrong remedies will often be extremely harmful to the lonely person, and make the problem much worse, not better.

As you are seeking to develop strategies to address loneliness in NSW, it is equally crucial that you understand these harms, and how they occur.

## The Perils of Misunderstanding Loneliness

Historically, careless observers, acquaintances, family members, therapists, ect. have often looked at lonely people and decided: *"Oh, their just lonely because they don't get out enough!"* And so, under the pretext of 'helping' the lonely person with their loneliness, they send that person off to some arbitrary social function, where they will be surrounded by a mass of random people.

This 'remedy' is based upon the observer's woeful misunderstanding of the lonely person's problem. They define loneliness as merely being a lack of proximity to other human beings, and hence, the very straightforward cure for loneliness is to simply place the lonely person in the presence of other human beings - they don't care who.

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[1] The manner of these connections can vary greatly. In some cases, loneliness is a direct consequence of these conditions. In some cases, these conditions co-occur with loneliness; a person may be lonely **and** isolated from other people, however their loneliness doesn't decrease when they are in the company of other people. In some cases, these conditions have become a **consequence** of loneliness - a person who once frequently interacted with others, yet felt constantly lonely while doing so, may stop making the effort to socialize with others, since they found no benefit in doing so.

Because this approach completely ignores the significance of **meaningful connection** between people, it does not address the **actual** problem. For this reason, this approach will usually fail to genuinely remedy a person's loneliness. When it does succeed, the success almost always comes down to miraculously good luck, rather then any soundness in the strategy.

Contrary to common assumption, these failures are not benign.

Many people tend to assume that the lonely person will be no worse off for attending some random social function; that, even if they don't meet anyone they 'click' with, they've lost nothing by taking the chance. But this is not true.

Socializing is a costly endeavor - certainly in terms of time and energy, and often also in financial, emotional, mental and spiritual terms. We want something for our investment, and we naturally feel cheated and somewhat bitter when that investment doesn't pay off[2].

Unproductive socializing slowly but surely eats away at our faith in humanity. We start out with the belief/hope that humanity is capable of providing good, meaningful, trustworthy companionship. But with every social function we attend where the people completely fail to live up to that expectation, we are building up a body of evidence that our initial assumption was wrong; that there is no capacity in humanity for meaningful companionship.

This, in turn, makes future socializing increasingly difficult, as how can you get enthusiastic about having to go mingle with humanity, when you've been persuaded[3] that humanity is just tiresome trash? And this, in turn, can cause even more problems, as people at future social functions you attend may become resentful if you aren't able to convincingly feign enthusiasm about being there. This can easily become a vicious cycle[4].

Losing hope in the potential for meaningful companionship can also mean losing hope that life has the potential to be worth prolonging, and thus make the lonely person more inclined to be suicidal, or otherwise depressed.

It must also be noted that many social environments can often be unkind to a newcomer who is incompatable with the norms, values, or aspirations of that environment. These sorts of frosty welcomes can be traumatic experiances for lonely people who have been carelessly pressured into attending them.

People who adhere to the mistaken belief that loneliness is simply a lack of exposure to other humans can sometimes be unwilling listen to the contradictory viewpoints of lonely people themselves. This can lead to a harmful relationship between the lonely person and the acquaintance[5] who refuses to listen to their point of view[6].

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[2] This becomes increasingly true the longer we have been investing in this strategy.
[3] Through extensive life experiance.
[4] i.e. You find it difficult to feign enthusiasm about meeting certain people. → They are offended. → They respond by treating you rudely/coldly. → You find it **even more** difficult to feign enthusiasm when you next meet them. → ect. → ect.
[5] Or family member, coworker, therapist, ect.
[6] Which, in itself, can increase the lonely person's sense of loneliness, as not being listened to is an alienating experiance.

Such people tend to set their own criteria to determine whether or not their acquaintance is lonely, disregarding the lonely person's own experiance of their predicament. This, in effect, means that they are trying to solve a completely different 'problem' to what the lonely person is actually dealing with[7]. And because they are seeking two different outcomes, they are not guaranteed to agree on whether an outcome should be considdered a success, a failure, or even a catastrophe.

The acquaintance may be delighted that the lonely person attended some highly-populated social function that the lonely person themself did not enjoy. This can lead to the acquaintance pressuring, or even bullying the lonely person to attend more social functions similar to the first one, as the acquaintance wishes to repeat the supposed 'success' they enjoyed the first time around.

The acquaintance is unlikely to listen if the lonely person protests that this strategy is not alleviating their loneliness. The acquaintance may respond with a remark like: *"Your not lonely! Look at how many people you are spending time with now!"*

If the lonely person falters in sticking to this social program[8], the acquaintance may criticize the lonely person and blame them for 'being lonely[9] again'. In essence, this means that the lonely person is being told that they are at fault for their own loneliness! Even though their supposed 'transgression'[10] can't reasonably be demonstrated to be the cause of their actual loneliness. This victim-blaming attitude can escalate to the point where the acquaintance even accuses the lonely person of 'wanting to be lonely', or 'enjoying their loneliness'; neither of which could be further from the truth.

Unfortunately, this distorted mindset can become contagious within the community. The acquaintance may end up spreading rumors amidst the community that the lonely person *"wants to be lonely"*, or *"doesn't deserve any sympathy or support, because they've only got themselves to blame for their loneliness"*, which will severely undermine the lonely person's chances of getting any actual help from that community.

Unsympathetic relationships like this can often compound the lonely person's sense of loneliness, since they serve as an overt reminder that the world simply doesn't understand and/or respect them. If a person has multiple antagonistic relationships like this, with no positive, supportive relationships to act as counterbalance, it can increase their sense of loneliness and isolation exponentially, and lead them to feel incredibly depressed and hopeless.

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| **Reccommendation 2:** | Insure that your anti-loneliness system is considderate of people who have previously been treated unkindly, with regards to their loneliness.<br><br>Insure that it is set up to be patient and gentle with them. |
| **Reccommendation 2-a:** | Insure that it is able to offer them help to deal with, or resolve this past trauma, if needed. |

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[7] The lonely person is trying to remedy the absence of meaningful connection in their life; while the acquaintance is merely trying to remedy the shortfall of exposure to other humans in the lonely person's life.

[8] i.e. Because it was not alleviating their loneliness, and they were recieving no benefit from it.

[9] Keeping in mind that the acquaintance defines loneliness very differantly from how the lonely person defines it. Therefore, they don't acknowledge that the lonely person has been lonely all along, even when they had a vigorous social schedule.

[10] i.e. Not attending enough of the random social functions that the acquaintance has told them to attend.

These are just some of the many consequences that arise from a poor understanding of loneliness within the community. In developing your strategy to address loneliness, you should remain mindful of these potential pitfalls, and take care to insure that your strategy neither inflicts these sorts of harms upon lonely NSW citizens directly, nor encourages[11] these existing harmful behaviors within the community.

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| **Reccommendation 3:** | Build your anti-loneliness policy on core principals of compassion, respect, and attentiveness to the people it serves. |

## What the Solution Looks Like

Having clarified the problem somewhat, and loosely explored *what not to do*, we can now begin to envision what a proper solution to the loneliness crisis should look like.

Loneliness revolves around the core character of the person who is suffering it. It is about that person's lack of meaningful connection with others, and each individual is going to be unique in terms of what sort of people they are able to truly connect with. So any approach to remedying a person's loneliness needs to be thoughtfully tailored to the specific individual it is intended for.

So the first step of any such approach is going to be to listen - **really** listen to the lonely individual, to understand who they really are and what sort of people they are yearning to connect with.

This has to be done without any criticism or judgement; the lonely person needs to be able to talk freely and honestly.

One noteworthy measure that is necessary here is the freedom to honestly state if they don't feel any meaningful connection with their existing 'family' or 'friends'. This may entail a desire to be transplanted out of these groups, and into a much more compatable group that would take on the role of a surrogate family for them.

It also needs to be done with a minimum amount of preconception about what the lonely person needs or wants. It is folly to presume that any individual privately agrees with every societal norm[12], or the 'helper's' own personal standards about what defines a good relationship.

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| **Reccommendation 4:** | Build an anti-loneliness system to meet the reality that each lonely person is unique, with unique needs. A system that gets to know each patient, before tailoring a specific, thoughtful solution to fit them. |

The next step is the one that can potentially be the most difficult: finding people who match the description that the lonely person has given of the sort of companions they need. This can be especially difficult if the 'helper' doesn't roll in the same circles as the sort of people who their lonely friend has described; or if they are not on good terms with the people they know who do fit this description.

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[11] Neither deliberately nor inadvertantly.
[12] The mere fact that they are lonely in the midst of the broader community can often be a strong indicator that they are not compatable with one or more of the core principals upon which that community is based.

For this reason, we need to be able to trust that any potential 'helper' has access to some higher-level 'helper' of their own, who has an extensive understanding of the broader community, and is therefore much more familiar with sub-clusters within that community who the original 'helper' may not have been familiar with. Ideally, this sort of support system should be built into a hierarchy, so that if the second-level 'helper' gets stumped, they are able to turn to their own 'superior'[13] for assistance, ect., ect.

| Reccommendation 5: | Build your anti-loneliness system as a network with a hierarchy, so that it's staff are easily able to confer with their colleagues, to find the best remedies, companions, and communities for their patients. |
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Throwing the lonely person into some random, or lazily-chosen social situation and 'hoping for a miracle' must be regarded as a measure of last resort. The 'helper' should be able to make a thoughtful case for why they believe a social function is likely to fulfill the lonely person's needs. They should have a decent understanding of what sort of people are likely to be attending this function, and be able to demonstrate that these people meaningfully align with the description(s) the lonely person has given for the type(s) of person they wish to meet.

The lonely person needs to have every right to state that the 'helper's' effort to set them up with new companions has not alleviated their loneliness. They should be encouraged to clarify, as much as they are able, why they believe the effort has failed, and/or why the companions they were set up with were an inappropriate match. As much as possible, they should not be made to feel as if **they** are the problem; as if they are under some obligation to feign a connection with strangers who they feel no genuine connection to.

The lonely person needs to have every right to discontinue any social program the 'helper' sets them up on, without fear of being abused, demeaned, publicly slandered, or otherwise punished for doing so.

| Reccommendation 6: | Build your anti-loneliness system on the principal that both the system, and the 'helpers' who staff it, are servants of the patient, not the other way around. |
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| Reccommendation 6-a: | Commit to only staffing the system with people who are able to sincerely dedicate themselves to this principal. |

The distress that lonely people suffer from unsatisfying and/or harmful social experiances needs to be respected. The anti-loneliness strategy must strive not only to create meaningful relationships, but also to avoid inflicting senseless emotional harms and burdens upon the people it's intended to help. That's not to say that the strategy cannot take risks, as eliminating all risk would be impossible. But it should strive to minimize senseless 'risks'.

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[13] i.e. A third-level 'helper'.

| Reccommendation 7: | Insure that your anti-loneliness system is mindful of the potential for harm, through mishandling of cases of loneliness. |
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| Reccommendation 7-a: | Factor the prevention of unwise risks into the principals that guide your anti-loneliness system. |

When a 'helper' suggests social functions for the lonely person to attend, the lonely person must always have the right to freely choose which ones they do and do not attend. Such choices may be based off the lonely person's need to recuperate[14] from their previous social outing; or they may be based off the lonely person's interest in re-encountering a specific person, or people, who they only expect to attend certain social functions.

The lonely person's dissatisfaction with the 'helper's' efforts to set them up with new companions, and/or their reluctance to attend particular social events, should **not** be misconstrued as them wanting to remain lonely, or not wanting any outside help to remedy their loneliness. It should merely be recognized as an indication that the help provided thus far has not been appropriately tailored to fit the lonely person's needs. 'Helpers' must not take a "My way or the highway!"-type approach towards helping lonely people.

## My Story

I've been struggling with loneliness ever since I finished highschool.

After highschool, I got very few opportunities to meet new people.

I would frequently be summoned to various social gatherings with the people I'd gone to highschool with, but only on very few occasions did they bring anyone new along to these functions. In particular, there were almost no single women at these gatherings, which, as a heterosexual man hoping to find a girlfriend, was incredibly frustrating for me.

On top of this, these gatherings were all terribly boring. Also, it increasingly became apparent that me and the old schoolmates at these gatherings had very differant values and very differant worldviews, and did not sincerely enjoy each other's company. Before long, these relationships became toxic.

By this point, these social gatherings became the loneliest times in my day-to-day life; far lonelier then the times when I was literally alone. It was the loneliness of a soldier stuck in enemy territory: your surrounded by other people, and they all harbor ill-intent toward you. I was trapped in situations I didn't want to be in; I had no idea what the people there wanted from me; I had no idea why they were being so unkind to me; I had no idea how to fix any of it; and there was nobody I could turn to for help with any of it.

Keeping our encounters civil increasingly depended on me play-acting a character who was nothing like myself, and was not the sort of person I would want anything to do with. That's a very lonely experiance, because it makes you keenly aware that the people around you actually dislike you; the person they actually want is someone who is very differant to you.

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[14] Physically, emotionally, financially, ect.

And as you live out that sort of unsavory maskerade, you feel the whole course of your life veering off in a direction that you know you don't want to go. So you come to realize that these people are poor guides, who you don't want exerting any influence over your life. And that becomes a very lonely situation, too, because now you find yourself facing life, with all it's confusing and distressing challenges, all alone, without anyone you can turn to for trustworthy guidance or support.

Whenever I expressed any dissatisfaction with the fact that I scarcely got to meet any new people at these gatherings, I was blamed for it. People criticized me for not making enough of an effort; for not showing up to enough of these gatherings for their liking. Admittedly, I had skipped quite a few; but I had attended a countless amount of them.

In retrospect, I can't fault myself for the effort or persistance I put in trying to appease these people. Instead, I fault myself for being foolish enough to believe that if I just tried hard enough, they'd eventually see fit to introduce me to people they knew - from work, college, their own families, ect. - who would've been good matches for me.

There were occasions where I heard people[15] making prejudiced remarks about people like me; about people like the woman I hoped to marry, and the friends I hoped we'd have together. And after a great deal of reflection, I've come to realize that no matter how hard I tried to appease or accommodate these people, they never would have introduced me to any of these similarly-natured people they were complaining about. Because they resent people like us, and they don't want us to find happiness.

It soon became apparent that I was trapped in this toxic relationship with these people. Whenever I tried to excuse myself from some gathering, I would be threatened with public defamation - having roumers about being *"an antisocial loser"*[16] spread around about me[17]. Considdering the difficulty I was already having in finding new friends/a girlfriend, the last thing I needed was that sort of social handicap. Or else, I'd be guilt-tripped with accusations that my reluctance to attend this particular gathering proved that I wasn't trying hard enough to meet new people. Of course, when I got to these gatherings, there was never anyone new there - something the people who had summoned me would have known in advance.

I never had the right to say "no" to any of these summons - and I was made to pay heavily whenever I did.

The mental health toll on me from being trapped in this situation was extreme. One noteworthy consequence of this is that I now worry a great deal about getting trapped in other undesirable situations. So even if I do get to meet a potential new friend/girlfriend/roommate/ect. in the future, I don't know if I could wholeheartedly embrace these opportunities, because I'd be so damned worried about how on earth I'd get out of these situations if they turned sour.

With nowhere else to turn, I eventually turned to the mental health system to get the help I needed to meet new friends. The therapists I dealt with were beyond useless.

One of them, who barely listened to the specifics of my situation[18], just dismissively put me on pills which only made me fatter. Considdering the difficulties I was already having in finding a girlfriend, the last thing I needed was to be made less physically attractive[19].

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[15] Including a therapist I had.

[16] Or similar.

[17] Threats they followed through on. Word would often get back to me, from other sources, that these unflattering roumers were being spread around about me.

[18] I had to repeatedly explain my circumstances, because he'd forget who I was between sessions.

Beyond that, the only "help" these therapists would offer with my loneliness problem was to send me back to the toxic relationships with my old schoolmates! One of my therapists actually seemed quite lost, or perhaps defeated, when I confirmed that there was no one else in my life[20] I could turn to to get introductions to new people.

The therapists had no interest, and perhaps no capacity, to help me meet new people! This was a massive shock to me at the time, as knowing what a menace to one's mental health loneliness can be, I'd just blindly assumed that the mental health system would've had a down-pat procedure in place for helping lonely like-minded patients to meet one another.

After several years, my old schoolmates eventually stopped harassing me. I guess the novelty must've worn off.

Even though that meant that I was spending much, much less time in the company of other people; even though it meant I'd essentially lost my only means of potentially meeting new friends - of potentially meeting my future wife, I was far, far less lonely once those people were out of my life then I was when they were still in it.

That's not to say that I am not lonely.

I am miserably lonely. I am suicidally lonely. And there isn't a minute that's passed in the last 20+ years of my life, when I haven't prayed for some miracle to bring the woman I'm meant to marry into my life - and ideally, a whole family of close, beloved, trusted friends along with her.

But trying to force that miracle into being by mindlessly attending a series of random social functions, with no regard for how compatable/incompatable I might be with the other attendees is a catastrophically bad strategy. It does not produce **any** positive results; it only aggravates underlying frictions between incompatable people. And the mental health costs are devastating. I know, because that was my life, **for years!**

Throughout my life, I have listened to people pushing these claims that: *"If you just keep going to social functions, you'll eventually end up with the people you connect with. If you don't end up with people like that, then that's on you for not trying hard enough."* I would almost be inclined to call it dogma, because the people who keep pushing these ideas refuse to listen to anyone who disputes these claims, and/or who refutes them with extensive personal experiance that contradicts them.

For a long time, I bought in to these claims and I blamed myself for not having enough patience, endurance, and/or charitability to perservere with the endless series of tiresome social functions I was summoned off to, with a genial smile on my face. I blamed myself for the fact that I'd never gotten to meet my future wife, or my true family.

But over the years, I've come to realize that those claims are just a dirty lie, sold to desparate, gullible[21] people.

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[19] People commented to me on how noticeable my weight gain was during this period.

[20] They inquired about the possibility of turning to my extended family for help meeting new people. However, my relationship with my family was no better then my relationship with my old schoolmates. Members of my family had made many of the prejudiced remarks I referred to previously.

[21] Desparation breeds gullibility, as when you are desparate, you'll cling to any sliver of hope you can find, even when your common sense is telling you not to trust in it.

I reflect back on those years, and I realize I never stood a chance. Not because there was something wrong with me (as I was often told to believe); but because the board was never set up for me to have any chance of winning.

I sometimes ask myself questions like: *"What if I'd been gay?"* To the best of my knowledge, I never met any gay men at any of these social gatherings. So a gay man in my position, hoping to meet a romantic partner at one of these gatherings would've been up the creek.

Likewise if I'd been a lesbian. I think there may have been one lesbian that showed up to a couple of the earlier gatherings, but if she wasn't someone you 'clicked' with, you wouldn't have gotten another chance of finding a romantic partner.

Likewise if I'd been looking for a partner who embraced traditional Islamic values, or traditional Buddhist values, or traditional Hindu, Sikh, or Jewish values, ect., ect. To the best of my knowledge, there was never a single Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist who came to any of these gatherings. Regardless of how persistantly you attended these functions, you would never have encountered anyone from one of these worldviews, if that was who you were looking for.

Some time ago, I was struck by a statistic I heard: supposedly, **10%** of the overall adult population are so dumb, even the army won't take them! When I was regularly attending social gatherings, the dumbest guy I knew was **in** the army! Which just goes to show how limited my social opportunities were. A whole 10% portion of the population was represented by **0%** of the people I got to personally meet during those years! I'll bet there are probably some social gatherings where people like this make up at least 30% or 40% of the attendees. How come I never got invited to one of these?

It all goes to show how broken and inadequate the *"just keep going to social functions, and you'll find who your looking for"*-approach is. The deck is always loaded, and some people will never get the card they are looking for, no matter how many hands they play! It goes beyond a question of luck or persistance; it's a question of the whole approach being unfit for purpose.

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The key takeaway from my story is that I got very, very few opportunities to meet new people; and the handful of opportunities I did get never included anybody who was a good match for me.

That was where I really needed help - help that I could never find.

I needed help to meet **new** people; deliberate, thoughtful, compassionate help, to meet people I would've been well suited with, especially a well-matched girlfriend.

I needed people to respect the fact that mindlessly sending me to random social functions, with random people[22], was doing me much more harm then good. I needed people to respect my preferance to not attend any social function where they knew[23] I would be unlikely to meet any new people I would be likely to connect with.

I needed the mental health system to respect that there's a differance between agoraphobia, and simply being incompatable with the social circle you are currantly locked in to.

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[22] 'Random', not necessarily in the sense that I'd never met these people, but rather in the sense that there was no regard for whether or not we were compatable with one another.
[23] Typically, these people knew well in advance who would and who wouldn't be attending these gatherings.

I needed - in fact I **still** need - a society that understands and respects the subtleties of loneliness. One that strives to reduce the overwhelming cost of pursuing meaningful relationships, and to maximize the rewards people get for the effort they put in.

## Where Can We Go For Help?

The first and perhaps most important question you can ask, regarding the loneliness crisis in NSW is: *"Who can lonely people turn to for help?"*

And once you discover that the answer to that question is, essentially: *"nobody"*, you'll probably have come a long way to understanding the nature of the loneliness crisis, and why it is as bad as what it is.

Currently, our society tends to rely mostly on benevolent family members, carers, coworkers, friends, acquaintances, ect. to help unite lonely people with their kindred spirits. Unfortunately, under this culture, anyone who doesn't have such a benevolent figure[24] in their life is pretty much screwed.

Occasionally, you might hear in the news about some small-scale grassroots project being run to combat loneliness. All the ones I've heard about seem to share the same basic flaw that I reference in previous sections[25], in that they are based on the principal of gathering random groups of people together and just hoping that a connection will miraculously form between some of them. I can't recall ever hearing of any such project that carefully explores the character and needs of it's participants, in order to insure that it's placing them into a like-minded group.

This is quite understandable given the meager resources that most of these projects seem to opperate on. Most of these projects seem to be run by either one person, or a very small group of people, on essentially a voluntary basis. You can't fault them on commitment or effort. But nonetheless, the inadequacies of these approaches remain.

This is not to say that these projects are complete failures. Most of the news segments/articles that cover them will include a few success stories - testimonies of participants who do indeed feel less lonely, meeting up with the other participants of the program. But as I've previously pointed out[26], these successes apparently depend entirely on good luck.

People who need a more deliberate and reliable approach towards remedying their loneliness, sadly, have nowhere to turn.

Frankly, I think it's a sad testament to our priorities as a society, when we run prudent PSA's after every ad on TV that deals with the gambling of our money (*"Chances are your about to lose"*), yet our entire national strategy towards loneliness hinges on rolling the dice over and over, until we get a lucky win.

Many people mistakenly believe that lonely people can turn to the mental health system for the careful, attentive, well-resourced help they need to remedy their loneliness; especially if their loneliness has escallated to the point where it has made them clinically depressed, suicidal, or otherwise "mentally ill". However, my understanding is that this is still not the case.

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[24] Or who might have well-meaning figures in their lives, but these people lack the contacts to be able to offer the lonely person any meaningful assistance.
[25] e.g. Pg. 3, under "The Perils of Misunderstanding Loneliness"; Pg. 7, under "What The Solution Looks Like".
[26] Pg. 3, under "The Perils of Misunderstanding Loneliness"

Traditional therapists are forbidden, by the internal rules of the mental health system, from offering their patients real help with their life problems[27], or even meaningful advice on how to remedy these problems. Some therapists unofficially refer to this as: *"the golden rule of therapy"*.

So instead of setting a lonely patient up with a new romantic interest, new friends, a new job[28], new roommates, ect., traditional therapists just focus on altering the patient's brain, to minimize their unseemly outward responses to their loneliness. Therapists will pressure their patients to *"manage"*, *"cope with"*, and/or *"accept"* their lonely situation. Occassionally, they may opt to try to dull their patients' despair with drugs, or even harsher techniques such as electroshock therapy.

Traditional therapists focus solely on minimizing the **symptoms** of loneliness, such as depression, suicidalness, anxiety, ect.; they refuse to address the actual problem: the patient's lack of meaningful relationship(s).

**It is imperative that you understand that the <u>main</u> reason why the mental health system fails to remedy it's patients' loneliness is not a shortage of means or resources, but a question of their intent. The mental health system, and the therapists within, have no intention of helping lonely Australians find meaningful connections with others!**

Until these indecent intentions are corrected, we can't even begin to explore what sort of resourcing problems the system might have, in terms of it's capacity to combat loneliness.

There are very ambiguous therapists working within the mental health system called "psychosocial support" therapists, and I've found it extremely difficult to pin down precisely what these people do. Supposedly, these therapists help patients with real-life[29] problems, such as loneliness. However, I am yet to encounter any patients of psychosocial support therapists who will state that their therapist set them up with a new romantic partner, cluster of friends, friendly roommates, ect. So my currant understanding is that psychosocial support therapists do not actually offer meaningful assistance with remedying their patients' loneliness.

If they do, this is a very well-kept secret; and I think it would be very much in the public interest for the particulars of this service to be prominantly published, including:
- The amount of requests they get to be united with new romantic partners, friends, ect.;
- The resources they have available to them to help them serve their patients in this regard;
- Their success rates;
- Their failed attempt rates;
- The average total cost of this treatment program to the patients (in both financial terms, and in terms of time invested)[30]; and,
- The numbers of psychosocial support therapists offering this sort of service, particularly in proportion to the number of traditional therapists in the state, along with how their distribution compares to that of traditional therapists.

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[27] e.g. Loneliness.

[28] i.e. Where the patient might have good prospects of forming closer relationships with his/her new coworkers then he/she did at their previous workplace (if any).

[29] i.e. As opposed to problems that exist predominantly or entirely within the patient's head, (e.g. schizophrenia, chemical imbalances, ect.), which traditional therapists tend to prefer to work with.

[30] While emotional & mental costs are the most important ones to considder in this sort of program, unfortunately there is no way to meaningfully measure and record these factors.

| Reccommendation 8: | Investigate the "psychosocial support" system's ability to help lonely people find meaningful relationships, and it's success rates in doing so. |
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| Reccommendation 8-a: | Make this data publicly available, in plain English. |

In the absence of any satisfying data in this regard, I think we need to presume that there is no adequate system in place for helping NSW residants remedy their loneliness.

As a NSW resident who has been desparately lonely for the past 2 decades, I can assure you that if any such system **does** exist, it is bloody well hidden.

## A "Whole of Government" Approach

Almost all of the major reports being published these days regarding mental health and/or suicide advocate for the government to take a "whole of government" approach towards addressing these issues. This is because there is scarcely an area of government policy formation that doesn't have a bearing on citizens' mental health, or suicide statistics.

I believe that you will ultimately discover that the same is true for the issue of loneliness[31], and that loneliness is likewise a problem that can only be adequately addressed with a "whole of government" approach.

In particular, all areas of government policy which govern the places where citizens spend the bulk of their time (e.g. employment policies, education policies, housing policies, ect.), and which influence the types of people they are most likely to come into contact with on a regular basis, ought to take into account their effect on peoples' loneliness.

Things like employment and housing policy should be completely redesigned, so that citizens will be sent to work and live amongst people who they are highly compatable with. Cultivating meaningful, dedicated relationships should rank among these policies' highest objectives, as well as being one of the government' s highest objectives, overall.

| Reccommendation 9: | Commit to a "Whole of Government" approach to addressing loneliness. |
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## A Therapy-Like Solution Is Necessary

The system you devise to remedy NSW's loneliness crisis ought to revolve around an interview process that resembles modern therapy.

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[31] Which is very often tied to mental health and suicide.

The lonely person will go into a secure office with their designated 'helper' and bare as much of their mindset as possible, including their most intimate, most cherished values, beliefs, and ambitions; and they will likewise describe the sort of companions they are seeking in similar specific detail[32].

The process should have all the same safeguards and protections that modern therapy does, such as doctor-patient privelage which forbids the 'helper'/therapist from ever disclosing what their patient has told them[33]; and which protects any and all records of what the patient has disclosed from being seen by anyone[34], without the patient's express permission.

The reason for this is because the process will never work unless that patient feels completely safe to talk freely about who they truly are, and what sort of companionship they need. If the 'helper'/therapist can't learn precisely what the patient is seeking, they will have next to no chance of successfully finding it for the patient.

Many lonely people have become accustomed to being judged and abused when disclosing aspects of their true self, or their aspirations for the sorts of relationships they wish to have. So they will never feel safe to speak freely about such things unless they can do so in an environment that is safe, sealed, and confidential.

Even people who have not experianced much abuse will likely find it difficult to bare their mindset so intimately to a stranger. Making the process safe and confidential will make this much easier for the patient, speed up the process of them disclosing the necessary key details, and therefore make the entire system much more efficient.

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**Reccommendation 10:**   Build your anti-loneliness system around a confidential, one-on-one interview process, in which the 'helper' thoroughly gets to know the patient, and understand their needs.

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That being said, you must be mindful that this will rarely be a quick process.

More often then not, it will likely take many hours of discussion for the 'helper'/therapist to develop an adequate understanding of their patient, and the sort of companions their patient is seeking.

Nonetheless, you must also be mindful that this time-consuming, and perhaps expensive process is an excellant **investment**. If done well, the handful of man-hours that go in to it will produce a lifetime of love, loyalty, and belonging for the patient. The benefits outweigh the costs to an astounding degree.

I'm not suggesting that this intensive therapy-like process is necessary to remedy every case of loneliness. But it will be necessary for a great many of them. And in many other cases, it will produce far better results - even when fully weighing cost vs. benefit - then a more slipshod approach would.

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[32] In most cases, these descriptions of the person's 'ideal companions' will likely be a strong reflection of themselves, so once the 'helper' has a thorough understanding of the patient, there will probably only be a minimal additional workload involved in determining what sort of companions they seek.

[33] Short of being compelled to do so by a warrant, of course.

[34] In particular, there must be iron-clad guarantees that nobody in the government can ever see the patient's records, aside from members of the anti-loneliness system, and even then, only for the express purpose of finding meaningful companionship for the patient.

**The Need to Intergrate the Anti-Loneliness System With the Mental Health System**

In order to build a truly effective system for remedying loneliness that works for all NSW citizens, we need to go further then merely replicating the mental health system's practice of getting to know it's patients in a safe, confidential environment. We need to intergrate the mental health system with the anti-loneliness system, so that the best loneliness remedies we have available can be appropriately incorporated into the patient's mental health treatment.

"Mental illness" and loneliness frequently go hand-in-hand.

Because "mentally ill" people have different thoughts, feelings, experiances, beliefs, ect. to the general population, they often find it especially hard to find people who they can meaningfully connect with.

Adding to this is the ongoing societal stigma against "mental illness" and "mentally ill" people, which often leads to many members of the community wanting to keep such people at arms length, and often also involves warning/advising their friends/family/acquaintances to keep these people at arms length.

Because of this, "mentally ill" people are often deprived of many of the subtle mechanisms that exist within society to help reduce loneliness. They don't get favorable introductions to strangers; they don't get reccommended as often for job postings, or potential romantic matches.

Ergo, "mentally ill" people are more likely to need formal help to remedy their loneliness.

The mental health system is not only frequently called upon to help lonely "mentally ill" patients, it is actually in an excellant position to do so!

Invariably, most people who are deemed "mentally ill"[35] by society will pass through the mental health system at some point in their lives. Therefore, the mental health system is the entity that is most likely to meet other people who have a very similar mindset to the patient, and who are therefore the most promising candidates for being able to form a meaningful bond with him/her.

The mental health system is in an ideal position to set lonely abnormal-thinkers up with like-minded matches, because it encounters these people all the time! Or, at least, far more frequently then the average citizen does.

For this reason, the mental health system needs to redesigned to incorporate a strong anti-loneliness focus; with a key measure being to set it's lonely patients up with other like-minded patients, for romance, friendship, employment, house/apartment-sharing, ect. Depending on the case, this may involve a lone therapist setting their own patients up with one another; or it may involve multiple therapists collaborating to see if they can find any good matches between them.

The mental health system will need to be set up with appropriate resources to allow these sorts of collaborations.

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[35] Or in any other way unacceptably abnormal in their mindset.

| Reccommendation 11: | Rewrite mental health policy so that it is an explicit duty of the mental health system to set lonely patients up with other patients who they are highly-compatable with, for romance; friendship; house-sharing, in accordance with the patients' wishes. |
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| Reccommendation 11-a: | Insure that the mental health system is given all the necessary resources to be able to perform this duty adequately. |

**The Fear of "Dragging People Down"**

There is a common and dreadful misconception that setting mentally ill/suicidal people up with romantic partners[36] is a bad idea, because it will just lead to the mentally ill/suicidal person *"dragging the other person down into their pit of misery"*.

Situations like this will be avoided if mentally ill/suicidal people are matched properly.

Well-matched partners will have closely-matched tastes, in terms of what sort of circumstances they find desirable, and what sort they find undesirable. Thus, with a well-matched pair, you won't have a situation where one partner is content with a particular set of circumstances, the other is miserable, and the miserable partner winds up dragging the happy partner down into their misery. Either both partners will be happy/content about their mutual circumstances, or both will be miserable about them.

If you have a situation where one partner is miserable, and the other is not, then that is a dead giveaway that you've matched an incompatable pair up with one another. Situations like this are ones that the system should take all due care to avoid, as much as possible.

In worst-case scenarios, it won't be a case of one person dragging another down into their misery, it will be a case of two people accompanying and supporting one another through mutual misery[37], which they would both have otherwise had to suffer through all alone.

Regardless of whether we are talking about people who are content with their lives[38], or miserable, **lonely** people will always benefit from being set up with a **<u>well-matched</u>** companion, alongside who they will weather the good times, and the bad.

**Guarding Against Therapist Prejudice**

One of the most important considderations we need to take into account when devising any system to combat loneliness is the position of trust that the 'helpers'/therapists involved will hold, and the unfortunate potential for unethical people to abuse this trust.

This is a phenomenon we already see far too often in our existing mental health system.

One of the more common forms of therapist abuse that can be found in the mental health system are cases where the therapist tries to use their position of power to hijack the course of the patient's life.

Patients go into therapy, seeking the therapist's assistance to achieve certain life goals; only for the therapist to decide that they don't like those goals that the patient has laid out, and instead begins coercing the patient to pursue a brand new set of goals which the therapist themself has devised.

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[36] Some people will argue this even in regards to more plutonic relationships.
[37] Hopefully while recieving all the external help they need, as well.
[38] Speaking beyond the burden of their loneliness, of course.

I'm sure you can imagine how this sort of exploitation might carry over to a system for remedying loneliness.

Sad to say, it is already effecting the lives of some mental health patients who turn to therapy, looking for a remedy to their loneliness. Many therapists will try to exploit the loneliness of their patients to try to brainwash or reprogram those patients into seeking a very differant sort of companion to the type they've been seeking up till now. Usually, this is done to make the patient's relationship ambitions align with the values of the therapist. The entire therapeutic program becomes about delivering the most agreeable outcome for the **therapist**, not the patient.

The most notorious example of this practice is probably "gay conversion therapy"[39]; although there are countless other forms that this sort of unethical treatment can take, as well.

A few weeks ago, while preparing this submission, I was reminded of the ever-present risk of this sort of exploitation when I encountered a video clip[40] of a talk given by the famous therapist, Dr. Jordan Peterson.

Quoting Dr. Peterson in the clip (he's referring to a hyperthetical romantic partner):

> *"If she's deluded enough, or terrified enough to worship you in your currant form then, well, **that doesn't say much for her**, and it certainly isn't very helpful for you."*

For the purposes of this discussion, whether you agree with his statement or not is beside the point. The point is that Dr. Peterson is readily expressing contempt for another person's chosen romantic partner.

And while this clip is only from a public talk he gave, in which he is speaking entirely in hypertheticals, his remarks certainly beg the question about how he conducts himself as a therapist, with regards to lonely patients seeking romantic relationships.

Could you trust a man, who makes a public statement like the one above, to do everything in his power to unite a lonely patient with a romantic partner who would adore and support that patient for who they truly are? Or would he be so wracked with contempt over the thought of the patient finding such a compatable match, that he wouldn't be able to bring himself to help the patient to get there? Indeed, would he be so wracked with contempt that he might actually sabotage the patient's efforts to find such a relationship?

The statement certainly begs the question.

I can't speak to Dr. Peterson's conduct or quality as a therapist. But I can say with absolute certainty that there are therapists in the mental health industry who allow their treatments to be clouded by their own personal contempt for their patients, and, in some cases, contempt for their patients' cherished romantic partners, or cherished ideals of a romantic partner. Therapists who, if pushed to express their honest opinion about such a romantic partner - real or hyperthetical - would probably make a remark very similar to Dr. Peterson's, e.g.: *"If she loves you as you currantly are, **then that doesn't say much for her**."*

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[39] i.e. Therapy that is designed to erase the homosexuality of a patient, and reprogram them with heterosexual aspirations, as these are the only sort of romantic/sexual relationship aspirations that the therapist in question finds respectable.

[40] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnUfXYGtT5Q&t=81m16s

Therapists/'helpers' who allow their own personal prejudices to undermine the treatment of their patients could easily become an absolute menace to whatever system you devise to combat loneliness in NSW, and especially to the lonely people who place their trust in it.

Therefore, a key permanent considderation of your anti-loneliness strategy will need to be a system of checks and legally-enshrined patient rights, to guard the vulnerable, lonely people who depend on your strategy against prejudiced therapists/'helpers' with a personal agenda.

We need protections to insure that every patient of the system can trust that their 'helper'/therapist will set them up with the sorts of people they aspire to be with, if that 'helper'/therapist is in a position to do so. And, as much as possible, we must prevent unethical therapists/'helpers' from coercing their patients to abandon their own relationship aspirations, and instead pursue the sort of relationships which the therapist/'helper' idealizes.

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| **Reccommendation 12:** | Change the mental health laws to make it a crime for any therapist to neglect to set their patient up with a sought companion, if it is determined that it was in the therapist's power to do so.<br><br>Treat refusal to provide meaningful assistance with a patient's loneliness just as seriously as any other manner of a therapist neglecting or disregarding a patient's basic needs or rights. |
| **Reccommendation 13:** | Create laws to protect patients of both the existing mental health system, and any new anti-loneliness system you create, from being exploited by their therapists/'helpers'.<br><br>Make it illegal for a therapist/'helper' to attempt to overwrite a patient's relationship goals with their own, unless they get an express request from the patient to do so.<br><br>Make it illegal for a therapist/'helper' to treat their patient in a fashion that is designed to achieve different ends to the patient's own stated goals for the treatment. |

**A Further Note on Exploitive Therapists**
The predicament of the sort of exploitive therapists I describe above is somewhat understandable, particularly within the context of a State Loneliness Inquiry. Despite the critical remarks I make above, I believe that we need to approach these people with some degree of sympathy.

For the most part, the motives that drive therapists to attempt to coerce, exploit or brainwash patients in this fashion are largely grounded in their own concerns about loneliness.

Like most of us, these therapists don't want to wake up one morning to find themselves trapped in a world they don't understand. They don't want to gaze out at their local community and find themselves surrounded by incomprehensable aliens, driven by incomprehensable values and incomprehensable ambitions. They don't want to look around one day and realize that there is virtually nobody around them who's values they can trust in; who's viewpoints make sense to them; who they can genuinely connect with.

This is the very essence of loneliness.

And so when they are confronted with a patient who's values, beliefs and aspirations are grossly incompatable with their own, you can understand how it poses a legitimate threat to their sense of community.

A single misfit is typically too intimidated to be any real threat to the established culture around them. They are small and powerless, and will usually try to conform to the surrounding culture, as best they can, in order to avoid antagonizing people.

But, if you are that person's therapist, what happens if you set that person up with a like-minded companion? Now you have two misfits who are agreeing with one another, supporting one another, and encouraging one another to build a life together that aligns with their own hopes and values. Now, instead of living in good, respectable street, made up entirely with trustworthy, sensible neighbors (albeit with a couple of shy loners), you now have that one house in the street where that pair of wackos live, and often enough you find yourself shaking your head as you walk past it, and wondering what the world is coming to.

Now let's go even further. Let's say you help these two patients even more with their loneliness, and set them up with even more friends. Well now you have a counter-culture; a recognizable portion of the overall population who reject the standards and norms that you and your longstanding neighbors have built your community upon. Now, your probably starting to lose faith that you can engage with other members of your neighborhood and count on getting a sensible response[41].

Let's go even further, and add even more new like-minded companions into this lonely patient's orbit. Well now your healthy, connected community has become an unhappy, divided culture, with little to no common principals uniting you. Whereas once you felt and knew that you were a member of your community, now you are a visitor in a foreign environment. Even if you still own a house on the street, you have lost your **home**.

I think that concerns like this play a significant role in the unfortunate cases of therapists trying to manipulate and brainwash their patients. And I would hesitate to say that these concerns are paranoid. The way that our western culture has changed, even over just the last 10 years, is astounding. So it's very understandable why many therapists might be concerned about surrendering the culture and community that has given them a lifelong sense of connection and belonging.

That being said, manipulating and exploiting their vulnerable patients is **not** an acceptable solution to this problem. A patient has the right to expect ethical, respectful treatment from their therapist, and if offering such treatment is incompatable with the therapist's loyalty to his/her culture, community, or values, then the therapist should transfer that patient to another therapist as soon as possible.

The concerns these therapists have about losing their community and culture are valid, and they should be factored in to the state's strategy for combating loneliness[42]. But exploiting their vulnerable patients is not the answer.

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[41] Since what makes sense to you may not make sense to your neighbor, and vice-versa.
[42] For a more in-depth explaination, see "The Pitfalls of Lazy 'Inclusion' Policy".

## Social Reeducation Is A Poor Solution

Out of the many people who **do** understand that loneliness is about a lack of meaningful connection, not a lack of exposure to other humans, a significant portion fall prey to another problematic misconception: that lonely people are merely unable to connect with the people around them because they *"don't know how to behave around others"*.

This invariably leads to the subsequent misconception that the solution to peoples' loneliness is to reeducate them on how to talk and act like a normal person, so that they can fit in with normal society, after which, according to this theory, they will no longer be lonely.

But in truth, not only does this strategy rarely succeed in **genuinely** remedying peoples' loneliness, it is often quite harmful to them, and can even **increase** their sense of loneliness.

As a rule, lonely people don't really want to be 'accepted' for their talent in play-acting a phony character: the proverbial "normal" person. They don't care to be 'accepted' only when they are reciting from a script they've been trained to recite, or when they are behaving in a way they they've been trained to behave.

They want to be accepted for who they genuinely are. They want to be able to speak their mind freely, and find that their mindset is aligned with the people around them. They want to be able to act naturally, without having to double-check or over-think every action, and not have any fear of inadvertantly offending the people around them, because their natural way of behaving is perfectly normal amongst the people around them.

**Genuine** connection with others is simply not achievable in any situation where a person does not have freedom of expression[43]; where they are required to embody a lie 24/7.

Worse still, when you have a situation where a person is praised whenever they play-act a phony persona they've been taught to portray, and attract peoples' scorn whenever they say or do anything that is true to themselves, that firmly drives the point home for that person that nobody likes them for who they are; people only like them for their ability to pretend to be someone their not. This realization will amplify their sense of isolation and loneliness immensely.

For this reason, any sort of measure that is geared towards 'socially reeducating' lonely people into fitting in with their surrounding society should **not** be regarded as a major solution to the loneliness crisis.

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| **Reccommendation 14:** | Avoid leaning on any sort of "social reeducation" system (or similar) as a major component of your anti-loneliness strategy. |

Browbeating lonely people into fitting in with "normal" society will not make them less lonely. Instead, we need to transfer these people into communities where they will naturally be regarded as normal, just by being themselves.[44]

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[43] Admittedly, there is a rare exception to this rule, when you have one or more suppressed people who are able to silently express their mutual displeasure about this suppression to one another, and thereby offer one another sympathy and moral support.

[44] Again, see "The Pitfalls of Lazy 'Inclusion' Policy".

The lonely person is not a defect that needs to be corrected; they are simply misplaced, and need to be sent to wherever they truly belong.

## Exceptions to the Rule

Admittedly, there are situations where social reeducation may produce some minor benefits, if executed carefully and consentually.

There may be aspects of a person's conduct, in which they themselves don't have any particular preferences, where they would be quite willing to defer to other peoples' expectations for them; but they need to have these expectations clearly and specifically explained to them.

So for example, one area where you might see this is in fashion choices. Some people often get the impression that others think less of them because of the clothes they wear. They themselves don't particularly care about what they wear, so long as it's comfortable, so they would be quite willing to dress in a manner that appeases the people around them. But because they don't understand what other people want in this regard, they need to have it explained to them, clearly and in specific detail.

Or alternatively, perhaps the person does want to express their personality via their clothing choices, but they don't understand the 'language' of fashion well enough to be able to use it to convey a message to others that will be interpreted the way that the person intends. So, once again, they might benefit from some outside instruction on how they ought to dress, in order to be percieved the way they wish to be percieved.

These are just examples, of course. The potential benefits of social reeducation aren't limited to the subject of fashion.

It must be noted however, that whatever benefits there may be to social reeducation are very superficial, and as such, will not directly reap any significant benefits in terms of remedying major cases of loneliness.

Social reeducation can help to make engagements between differently-minded people more civil and agreeable; but if the people are so divided in their core mindsets that they need to be 'educated' on how not to offend one another, there is little potential for a genuine meaningful connection between them.

Thus, social reeducation, if it is utilized at all, must be recognized as being only a very weak tool for dealing with the loneliness crisis; not one of it's predominant techniques.

But more importantly, when we do explore the usage of social reeducation, we must be extremely careful to insure that we never allow it to be used in a coercive manner.

It can be an extremely seductive perspective, to see lonely people themselves as being the ones who are at fault for their own loneliness; and therefore to believe that the very straightforward solution to this loneliness crisis is to firmly condition them into speaking and acting exactly the same way as all the "normal" people around them. Some people might even describe this as "tough love".

We must remain ever-mindful of the limitations of social reeducation - both in practical terms, and in ethical terms. We must insure that it is only ever used to help people to make concessions they are willing to make; never to pressure them to surrendering their right to express what they truly think or believe.

| Reccommendation 15: | Create laws to protect vulnerable patients from being unwillingly subjected to "social reeducation"-type treatments. |
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# The Need For a Non-Educational Alternative to College

One of the most significant points in a person's life where they stumble in to long-term loneliness is when they transition from (legal) childhood into adulthood; which usually coinsides with the end of highschool.

In terms of loneliness, young people who don't go to college face significant disadvantages compared to people who do.

People who go to college get a whole institution where they get to mingle all day with people their own age. They get to be part of a distinct college community, and they likely feel a bond to this community. They get to move out of their parents' house, and move in to a dorm, or frat/sorority house, with roommates their own age. They get to go to countless parties and other social functions with high turnouts, and therefore have higher chances of meeting new people. Most of the clubs they encounter will be rooted in the college, and therefore be almost entirely oriented towards bringing together people of their own age.

The fact that most of these elements cultivate relationships between people of similar ages is especially important in regards to romance, as it means you have a large pool of mostly-unattached young people, many of who will be hoping to find someone of a similar age to themself, to build a life with. If you are a young adult, and that is your aspiration, then college is perhaps the best market to find what you are looking for[45].

In contrast, people who don't go to college have to rely on good luck, or perhaps assistance from friends/family, to help them get many of these opportunities. And even in a best-case scenario, they are unlikely to be exposed to as many young people their own age, on a consistant basis, as a college student.

There is no formal structure set up to help them as they transition into their adulthood, and to maximize their exposure to other people their own age, who are all going through the same process together.

What we need is a set of institutions that are similar to the colleges, except without the education.

Places where young adults, who don't want to be educated, can go to live, and surround themselves with people their own age. Instead of sending the attendees to classes with their classmates, we send them to well-paying jobs with other young members of their pseudo-college. Part of these earnings will be used to pay their fees for attending the pseudo-college.

We build the institutions with parrallels to the dorms and frat/sorority houses of college, so that young adults can move out of mum & dad's house, and into a new home environment with friends their own age.

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[45] Unless, of course, the type of partner you are seeking is not the sort of person who would go to college.

We build the campuses with a key focus on cultivating socialization, with quads and other facilities designed to give the attendees space to socialize freely. We encourage a lively, yet civil, party culture, to further encourage new social opportunities. We attempt to foster a culture where these institutions are not just places to live, but **distinct communities** that the attendees all belong to, and ideally, feel connected to.

We build the institutions to encourage and support various groups and clubs, to allow attendees to bond over their special interests.

We build them with a caring, well-staffed, well-resourced administration, who are committed to helping the attendees under their care, whenever they might need help. An administration that respects the fact that these people are in the midst of a transition unlike anything they've ever had to face before in their lives, and may well be overwhelmed and/or extremely confused about any aspect of that transition. An administration that respects the life/career ambitions of it's attendees, and consistantly factors these ambitions into it's management of the attendee's case, especially with regard to job assignments. An administration that is mindful of the bonds of friendship and/or love that may develop between attendees, and consistantly factors these bonds into it's management of the attendees' cases[46]. An administration that understands that they may often need to transfer attendees to a differant job that suits them better; or rehouse them with new roommates, who they might get along better with. An administration set up to deal with all of the most common needs of people that age, including mental health.

Crucially, we take care that these institutions don't just coldly boot it's attendees out the door after they've been there for 4 years, and tell them: *"That's it. Your on your own now. Adios!"* We insure that they give leaving attendees as much assistance as they need to smoothly transition out into the wider world, including providing them with agreeable long-term jobs.

Growing up, finishing highschool, starting your career is bloody hard, confusing, and scary as hell. **Nobody** should have to go through that all alone. But that's precisely what we condemn young people to, if they don't go to college.

We need to do better. We need a system in place to insure that, regardless of whether or not a young adult gets a college education, they **all** have access to an institution and an environment where they will not have to face the countless challenges of becoming an adult alone. Institutions and environments that give each and every one of them the best possible opportunities of forging lifelong friendships with people their own age, and even life-partnerships.

| **Reccommendation 16:** | Build a series of non-educational college-like institutions for young people who don't go to actual college. |
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[46] e.g. A boyfriend and girlfriend may wish to be reassigned to live together, and/or to work together at the same job.

# The Pitfalls of the "Gig Economy"

Employment is not what it used to be. Whereas in our parents' generation it was quite common for someone to have the same job more-or-less for life, now it is quite rare.

So far, Australia's various governments seem to have been very supportive of this change in the nature of the workforce - the so-called "gig economy". However, I question whether or not this support has been given with due considderation for the mental health and loneliness impacts of this change.

Spending your life bouncing from one short-term job to another gives you minimal opportunity to forge meaningful relationships with your coworkers, as nobody's ever in one job long enough to really get to know one another.

These negative impacts can be especially damaging if a person's constantly-changing employment requires them to be constantly moving homes, preventing them from putting down any roots, and forging any meaningful relationships outside of work.

It's a problem that is as much about becoming demoralized, with regards to forming relationships, as it is about the practical difficulties associated with moving around all the time.

If you know that your just going to be shipped out of this workplace in six months, do you really want to get attached to any of your new coworkers, knowing that your just going to have to leave them behind? Are you going to invest any effort or emotional commitment in attempting to build a real friendship?

And it doesn't just effect individuals who happen to live a "gig economy" life either, it effects everybody who lives and works within the "gig economy" culture.

If you are the lone member at your workplace who has been working there consistantly for years, while all the other staff comes and goes, then the question still stands: are you going to invest any effort or emotion trying to build a friendship with this or that coworker, when you know their just going to be gone in six months?

Within the broader community, it makes meaningful relationships more difficult to establish, since the community is made up of less and less people who will be staying put long enough to forge meaningful relationships.

Really great friendships - not to mention great marriages - aren't built overnight, or over a couple of months. It takes time and presence.

Sometimes you might be fortunate enough to encounter a couple of older people who have been friends for decades. They were probably best men at each others' weddings; probably godparents to each others' children. And they both know beyond any doubt that if there's ever anything wrong, they can always count on the other to have their back, come hell or high water. And one of the main reasons for the strength of that bond is that you have to measure the amount of time they've spent together in tens of thousands of hours.

I often worry whether younger people these days will ever get the chance to form bonds like that. Our lives have been made so inconsistant by the powers that be, none of us get the chance to have individuals who become constant fixtures of our lives - and as a consequence, indispensable close friends.

There was a really heartbreaking story that came out of Arizona not long ago[47], about a woman who died at her office desk, and none of her coworkers noticed **for 4 days!** Making it even sadder is the apparent fact that there was no one at home wondering where the hell she was during that whole time, either.

I think that story's a sad testament to the times we live in; about how the culture of friendship within the workplace is not what it used to be. I suspect that there were probably a fair few NSW citizens who, after encountering this headline, asked themselves: *"If **I** died at work, would anybody notice?"*, and didn't like the answer they came up with.

Just think about that for a second. How can anyone live or work in an environment that is that indifferant, that disconnected, and **not** feel lonely?

There may not be a distinct connection between the "gig economy" and this particular tragedy. But I think it's fair to say that the "gig economy" certainly isn't helping to nurture closer relationships within our workplaces. If anything, it's an absolute menace to them.

From a government standpoint, there may be a strong financial appeal to shifting to a "gig economy". But money isn't everything. I'm hoping that the mere fact that you've initiated this inquiry means that you understand that, at least to some degree.

Please recognize the critical importance of workplace relationships, both plutonic and romantic, and the indispensable role of the workplace in instigating and nurturing meaningful relationships in our lives.

Please recognize the necessity of consistant, long-term employment, in allowing our workplaces to fulfill these roles. And please stand up for an economic model that favors long-term[48] employment at a single job/workplace, and thereby conscientiously defends dedicated, long-term workplace friendships; even if it comes at a significant financial cost. Some things are so precious, and so essential, there's no amount of money that can ever justify their loss.

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| **Reccommendation 17:** | Commit NSW to an economic system that favors long-term (ideally lifelong) employment for it's citizens, over short-term employment. |
| **Reccommendation 18:** | Carefully examine existing employment & workplace policy to find ways to encourage and cultivate stronger friendships in the workplace. |

## Notes on Your Terms Of Referance

### f - The Financial Costs of Loneliness to the NSW Budget

Although this is a reasonable line of inquiry, I would ask you to please be mindful that it will make many people suspicious of the true intentions of this inquiry, and of any measures it devises at it's conclusion.

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[47] https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/woman-found-dead-at-work-in-wells-fargo-office-after-four-days/news-story/8584c886a005e9fdececaf28f87677b1
[48] Ideally, lifelong.

Specifically, people will be asking: *"What is this inquiry really trying to do? Remedy the unbearable loneliness of suffering NSW citizens? Or squeeze more money out of the NSW taxpayer? And if there are any forks in the road where our government has to make a clear decision between bolstering their budget, or helping their despairing lonely citizens find happiness, then where do their true loyalties lie?"*

I touched on these concerns a little bit in the previous section about the "gig economy".

There is a great deal of overlap between loneliness and "mental illness"[49]. And the "mentally ill" community have a long, unhappy history of listening to government officials define their anguish in terms of the burden they imposed upon the state/fedral budget.

I notice it much less often now, but there was a time not so long ago when every single statement government officials made about mental illness or suicide began with the phrase: *"Mental illness costs Australia X million dollars a year..."*

These statements always let us know where we stood with our elected officials. Their primary concern was not our unbearable anguish, it was the money that was missing from their precious budget. And that's always been of great concern to us, because there's always a way to make a buck, if your prepared to ignore the human suffering it causes[50]. Many of us have painful personal experiances of dealing with people[51] who unreasonably prioritized financial interests over our mental wellbeing.

There are some uncomfortable echoes of that mentality in your question about the financial impacts of loneliness upon the NSW budget. So please approach this question with sensitivity.

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| **Reccommendation 19:** | Insure your anti-loneliness policy is ever-respectful of the emotional, mental, and spiritual cost of loneliness. |
| **Reccommendation 19-a:** | Avoid placing people or organizations with a known fixation on money in key roles within your anti-loneliness strategy; or balance the presence of such people/organizations with others who are known to favor the mental health needs of the community. |

But to answer the question you pose: I expect you'll find that the answer is mostly good news - you are unlikely to discover that loneliness imposes any significant **new** financial costs upon the state budget. Most of the financial impacts of loneliness will already be factored in to your accounting, recorded as financial impacts of mental illness.

Most of the outward signs of loneliness are things like depression, suicidalness, anxiety, irritability, 'brain fog', ect. - behaviors that tend to be labelled as "mental illnesses". Thus, the financial consequences of these behaviors - unproductiveness/underproductiveness, excessive sick leave, burdens upon the health system, ect. - ought to already be recorded in the state's accounts as impacts of mental illness.

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[49] For simplicity's sake, I use the term "mental illness" here, but I am also referring to instances of distress, depression, anxiety, suicidalness, ect. that may traditionally be labelled as "mental illness", but in reality have nothing to do with any sort of brain malfunction, and are instead a response to poor life circumstances.
[50] Either by action or inaction.
[51] Including therapists.

This also means that there is good news, financially speaking, with regards to remedying the crisis, as much of the cost for the new remedies required can be fulfilled by redirecting the money already being spent to treat these mislabelled cases of "mental illness"!

Patients and the government already spend untold amounts of money on treating the **symptoms** of loneliness (e.g. depression, suicidalness, ect.), with lengthy, ineffective treatments such as medications or "talk therapies", instead of addressing the **true cause** of their anguish. Why not redirect all that wasted money to a new system that will actually try to cure their loneliness[52]? A system that will actually introduce them to new people who they will be likely to connect well with?

**Loneliness, Suicidalness, and the Economy**
When it comes to properly understanding the link between loneliness, mental health, and your state economy, I think it's important for you to consider the following:

Your economy depends entirely upon having a population that want to live to see tomorrow.

If people don't want to live to see tomorrow, then what use are the supermarkets that sell food that'll keep them from starving to death? Or the water board that provides them with clean water? Or the hospitals that extend their lifespans with all their medical marvels? Or the electric and gas industries that keep them from freezing to death in their homes?

What use is a state economy to a person who doesn't want to survive? And if an economy is of no use to a person, then neither is money. So why would they wear themselves out at some job trying to earn it?

Now, if a person is all alone, why would they want to live to see tomorrow, if tomorrow is just going to be another sad day of loneliness?

That's just a very simplistic summary of the issue. There's a lot more subtleties to it, and varying levels of severity then what I've just described[53]. But hopefully, those questions will help you to understand the basic essence of how loneliness negatively impacts the state budget.

**a - How Loneliness is Measured and Recorded**
As clarified in the previous section, "Defining Loneliness", loneliness is a deeply personal experiance. It is not easily identified by observable details, such as the amount of time the sufferer spends in to company of other people, the amount of time they spend talking to other people, ect.

The only way you will be able to know if people are lonely is to ask them.

And this is where you may run in to problems, because many lonely people may be suspicious about why somebody is asking them that question, or what the potential consequences of answering *"Yes"* may be.

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[52] And, by extension, all the financial shortfalls it causes.
[53] e.g. Some people may not be made suicidal by their loneliness, but they may be debilitated with depression, and become a less-then-ideal worker.

Loneliness has been regarded by society and the government as a non-issue, or a low-priority issue for a very long time now. And a lot of lonely people have probably become somewhat cynical that anything meaningful will ever be done about it. So answering: *"No"*, to the question: *"Are you lonely?"* may feel like a quick and easy way of avoiding an uncomfortable interrogation that they no longer believe will lead to any meaningful results.

Additionally, anyone who has ever been treated unkindly for expressing their loneliness[54] will be naturally inclined to not make this admission again, for fear of being lashed out at again.

In many ways, it all comes down to who - or what - is asking the question. For example, some people might be embarrassed admitting to their family GP that they are lonely, when asked; but they may feel much more comfortable ticking a box to that effect on an indifferent census form.

I think that there are a lot of lonely people out there who are most eager to talk about their loneliness, and will freely admit to being lonely when asked.

But you should be aware that there will also be a lot of lonely people out there who have their reasons to not admit to being lonely, at least not until the government demonstrates a serious intention to try to genuinely help it's lonely citizens.

These wary/cynical citizens may make any statistics you attempt to gather on loneliness in NSW unreliable.

## b - The Identification of Populations Most at Risk of Loneliness and Social Isolation

There are no doubt many sections of the population that will fall under this category.

However, one particular group that I would like to once more remind you of is young adults who do **not** go to college[55].

These people have to endure all the challenges and turmoil of coming into adulthood, without the benefit of an institution that provides them with the companionship and support of a large community of similarly-aged peers undergoing the same challenges alongside them.
Therefore, they are especially prone to being lonely; however, they often seem to be overlooked when lists are made of groups that are prone to loneliness.

On a related note, I would also suggest you consider older people who have not had much education[56], as these people are denied many of the opportunities that are offered to more educated people, which can impact their social opportunities. They also tend to be generally less respected then educated people, which can lead to a chronic sense of rejection/isolation, and can further limit their social opportunities[57].

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[54] e.g. By being blamed for their own loneliness, being criticised for *"not making enough of an effort"* to meet new friends, ect.
[55] Discussed in detail previously, in "The Need For a Non-Educational Alternative to College".
[56] Say full-highschool education, or less.
[57] e.g. A person may be less inclined to introduce an uneducated person to their friends/family if they consider that person to be sub-standard, and thus 'unworthy' of meeting their friends/family.

# Myths About the Impacts of Technology on Loneliness

There are myths you commonly hear these days about the role technology - especially smartphones - plays in our modern loneliness crisis.

It's quite common to hear people lament: *"Everybody's always looking down at their phones these days, instead of talking to one another!"*, as if this phenomenon is the root cause of everybody's loneliness.

What we are failing to do is to ask why these people are staring at their phones instead of talking to the people around them. Nobody is putting a gun to their head and forcing them to look at their phones! The decision to invest their attention in their phones, rather then the people in their immediate vicinity is a completely voluntary one. And I think that we need to be open to the probability that this is a logical decision; that people are **wisely** investing their time and attention in their phones, rather then the people around them, because their phones offer the more enriching experiance[58]!

Thus, the true nature of the problem isn't that people have been given an alternative to engaging with the people around them; the problem is that the people around them are a poor-quality experiance! Or, at least, a distinctly poorer experiance then staring at your phone screen for the same length of time.

There's this faulty presumption that if everybody just puts down their phones and start talking to one another, we'll all become the best of friends. This is merely a variation on the common misconception I previously described, under "The Perils of Misunderstanding Loneliness"[59], that loneliness can be cured simply by sending the lonely person into some random social environment, where they'll encounter numerous other random people.

Quite often, getting lonely people to look up from their phones and engage with the people around them will yield negative results, not positive ones. In getting to know these people, the lonely person can discover that they are unpleasant, boring, offensive to their values, depressing, disappointing, ect. They may find it more difficult to respect those people after getting to know them then it was beforehand. And it may make them more conscious of how barren their day-to-day environment is, in terms of it's ability to provide them with **meaningful** human connection. In other words, getting to know the people around them better may in fact amplify their sense of loneliness.

I believe that we should be viewing smartphones and similar technology not as a principal cause of modern loneliness, but rather as an anaesthetic to it. They mightn't be doing much to cure the problem; but they do help, in that they make the burdensome obligations of venturing into lonely, unsatisfying social environments much more bearable. They numb us to the sad reality that all the people around us are hopelessly incompatable with us, and therefore dull our awareness of our actual loneliness.

Most of my own troubled efforts to find a meaningful relationship[60] occurred before the smartphone craze began. And regrettably, even for the brief span when they did overlap, it hadn't yet become socially acceptable to spend all night staring at your phone. Nonetheless, the moderate amount of distraction I was able to get from technology during those years was a definitely helpful, and made it easier to get through otherwise tiresome social functions with a polite smile on my face.

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[58] In both the short-term, and long-term.
[59] Pg. 4
[60] See "My Story".

In the years since, as so-called "mobile phone addiction" has become more normalized, I've occassionally attended social gatherings where there have been younger people who never looked up from their phones, and been very impressed with their approach to the social function. Their way is the right way! Having paid attention to these entire functions myself, I can attest that they were agonizingly boring. So the wisest possible approach to them was to simply ignore them, and try to find a more enriching way to spend one's time.

The young people in those scenarios, who are silently glued to their phones throughout the entire function, aren't the tragic figures in the picture. The tragic figures are the 'grown ups' who are endlessly nattering away at one another with polite small talk, desparately trying to sell the illusion that they aren't bored out of their skulls!

This reflects a certain wisdom in the way younger generations use their smartphones, in the context of socializing. In instances where my generation would waste time, energy, and mental wellbeing trying to rework a hopeless set of conditions into a productive social encounter; modern generations avoid this futile, self-destructive behavior and instead use that time productively, by having positive experiances on their phones. They've eliminated much of the mental wellbeing **cost** of the all-too-common useless periods of socializing, and thereby made socializing **a better investment** for themselves then it ever was for us.

I'm not suggesting that it isn't sad that most younger people spend so much of their time staring at screens instead of having real face-to-face interactions with others. It is very sad.

But the solution to this problem isn't to try to pry the phone out of their hands.

The solution to the problem is to change their environment so that the people around them are a far more enriching experiance to behold then whatever is on their phone screens. This is where your efforts ought to be concentrated in this regard, on a system that relocates people into environments where they genuinely enjoy the company of the people around them more then losing themselves in their phone.

Please avoid scapegoating smartphones and similar technology as an excuse for the loneliness crisis. Doing so will only distract your attention from the real underlying issues that cause people to prefer the company of their phone to the company of the people around them.

| **Reccommendation 20:** | Avoid scapegoating smartphones & technology as a cause of loneliness. |
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| | Remain mindful of the positive role such devices play in mental wellbeing and decreasing loneliness. |

# The Pitfalls of Lazy "Inclusion" Policy

Over the past few years, western society has become particularly interested in pursuing "inclusion": the melding of minority or fringe groups into environments where they've traditionally had little to no presence.

While the motives behind this "inclusion" agenda are largely compassionate and admirable, I strongly believe that, if executed carelessly[61], "inclusion" policy will almost certainly have catastrophic impacts upon the extent and magnitude of loneliness in our society.

In extremely simplified terms, "inclusion" policy seeks to create environments composed of different types of people. This is not a problem when the differences encompassed by this policy are trivial ones which are unlikely to impact the members' ability to relate to one another. However, modern "inclusion" policy tends to try to build environments out of **radically** different people. This **is** a problem, in terms of exacerbating the loneliness crisis.

As a general rule, any environment where the members need a tutorial on how to interact with one another without offending anybody, is an environment that is going to be extremely prone to loneliness. Because the members of that environment clearly aren't intuitively aligned in their standards, if they need to be taught how to interact amicably.

Unfortunately, these are the sorts of environments that modern "inclusion" policy is creating in droves.

Meaningful connection - which is what this inquiry is essentially all about - requires a fairly high degree of like-mindedness between the participants. In fact, they need to be so like-minded that they are able to communicate freely, openly, and intuitively; without constantly having to guard their words for fear of offending one another, or constantly having to translate their thought processes into arguments that the other person can understand.

Relationships that require this much mental effort may be functional. But they will always be haunted with a sense of distance and loneliness, as every instance where the participants catch themselves being afraid to say something[62], or having to explain something they believe should go without saying, will silently remind them that "we are really not on the same page!"

Now imagine that effect repeated to the extent that it describes your relationship with pretty much everybody in your work environment, or neighborhood, or family.

Training courses/seminars that teach people how to be sensitive to other peoples' perspectives may go a long way towards minimizing conflict. But a thriving community[63] is more then just the absence of conflict, it is the presence of a deep sense of connection, agreement and commonality between all the members.

You may be able to train people **how** a person of a radically different mindset wishes to be treated. But you'll never be able to teach them to genuinely comprehend **why** that person wants to be treated that way.

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[61] I believe that our governments and other major institutions currantly are pursuing inclusion in a careless, thoughtless fashion.
[62] i.e. For fear of offending the other person.
[63] Including workplace communities.

Subsequently, all their interactions will feel somewhat scripted and fake. The people involved will all be playing a role, dictated by the training they've received. They won't be able to interact as their authentic selves, and therefore they won't be able to connect with one another.

I had a Christian upbringing, and I can't begin to count the number of times I heard the phrase: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."* while I was growing up. And I can assure you, one of the loneliest experiances you can have is to find yourself in an environment where that creedo doesn't work! Environments where the people around you don't appreciate being treated the way you want to be treated; nor do you appreciate being treated the way that they seemingly wish to be treated.

You may be able to learn how to behave in order to accommodate the other people, but even if you do, your relationship will still be riddled with massive problems.

Only the most talented actors will be able to properly handle these other people in the manner that pleases them. Anybody less simply won't be able to get all the nuances of the behavior right, because the mindsets are just too foreign for them. With every slip-up you make, you remind the other people that your not really one of them, so they'll never appreciate you as much as a genuine member of their group; and more then likely, you'll probably just unsettle them as a broken immitation of a genuine member of their group[64].

But the biggest problem is the personal anguish you face in knowing that your betraying your own principals, by not *"Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you."*; by living your life in contradiction to what you considder to be desirable/respectful/acceptable human conduct. You have to become the sort of person you would not want to be around.

At the same time, you don't want to upset or offend anybody if you can possibly avoid doing so, as this likewise violates the creedo of:*"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."*[65] So now you are trapped in a hopeless ethical catch 22 that will play utter hell with your sanity.

This is what happens when you place people in environments that are not aligned with their personal values and principals; including environments that are designed to have **no** values or principals![66] Because if the environment isn't shaped by a set of principals and values, then there can be no trust that the other people there will treat us as we would wish to be treated. That's what values and principals are: a mutual agreement within a community on how everybody wants to be treated!

And if you don't have that trust, then you don't have a community; you have a disconnected, **lonely** cluster of random people, wandering around aimlessly and apprehensively, just hoping to avoid trouble with one another.

I'm not suggesting we just dismiss the plight of alienated people. Quite the opposite. In a loneliness inquiry, they should be among the highest of your considderations, as they are some of the worst victims of loneliness.

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[64] Not unlike the notorious "uncanny valley" that roboticists and animators often have to contend with, where they build androids or animated characters that are *almost* convincingly human. But because they fail to perfectly reflect some of the subtle nuances of genuine human beings, the come off as being disturbingly **inhuman**, and generally unsettle the people who encounter them.

[65] Since you would not want other people to upset, unsettle, or offend you, if it were in their power to avoid doing so.

[66] e.g. For the sake of being "inclusive" to all individuals who might be alienated by a particular set of principals and values.

But mindless "inclusion" is not the answer to their problems. It will only make their problems worse, not to mention creating brand new problems for existing, thriving communities.

The solution to their loneliness is to either find them existing environments that are already built upon a code of principals that align well with their own; **or**, to cultivate **new** environments where they will naturally fit in.

Environments composed entirely out of their kindred spirits. Environments where nobody needs a training seminar to learn how to avoid offending the other people there, because they naturally share the same values as one another. Environments where everybody *"Does unto others as they would have them do unto themselves"*, and finds that this creedo is an impeccable guide for maintaining close, connected relationships within that community.

The search for meaningful connection often feels like looking for a needle in a haystack. We should be striving to make our overall society a mechanism that delivers to each citizen the stack with as many needles as possible, and as little hay as possible; not indiscriminately mixing all the hay and needles together, and leaving that mess for the isolated individuals to sort out.

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| **Reccommendation 21:** | Commit to being cautious, thoughtful and evenhanded with any and all government policy that promotes "inclusion". |
| **Reccommendation 21-a:** | Thoroughly consider the loneliness impacts "inclusion" policy is likely to have on people who will be entering in to the environments effected by these policies. |
| **Reccommendation 21-b:** | Thoroughly and fairly consider the impacts on any and all existing communities and/or organizations who's principals or standards might be effected by any "inclusion" policy you endorse. |
| **Reccommendation 22:** | Commit to defending the longstanding principals and standards of established communities. |
| **Reccommendation 22-a:** | Support communities, without bias, to find amicable solutions to conflicts that may arise over these principals or standards. |
| **Reccommendation 23:** | Help scattered, lonely individuals with like-minded principals, values, and aspirations to come together to build new communities (workplace, residential, recreational, ect.) built upon these common values and aspirations. |
| **Reccommendation 24:** | Commit to factoring social environment compatability in to all of your future anti-loneliness policy. |
| **Reccommendation 25:** | Make identifying the principals and standards of established communities within NSW (workplace, residential, recreational, religious, ect.) a key priority of your anti-loneliness system.<br><br>Then use this knowledge to assign the lonely people who turn to the system for help to the communities that best align with their own character. |

We hear the words "acceptance" and "tollerance" being chanted all the time at picket rallies these days. But, deep down, I believe that most people don't want to be merely "accepted" or "tollerated", they want to be loved; they want to be regarded as full-fledged, regular members of their community. They want to be meaningfully connected to the people around them. They want to **not be lonely**.

"Inclusion" policy may be able to give them many things. But it can't give them that. At least, not without taking a great deal of care to understand the character of the individual, and to find an environment that aligns with that character.

Considdering that this is a loneliness inquiry, I would ask you to remain ever mindful of that.

## The Lack of Considderation For Heterosexual Sex

Although it may be an uncomfortable topic to discuss, this inquiry needs to considder sex. In particular, heterosexual sex.

There have been countless reports released over the past few years, from Australia's various governments, and other organizations, in relation to mental health and/or suicide in Australia. Many of these reports make special mention of mental health/suicide crisises within the LGBT community, and the need for special new initiatives to give this community the extra help it needs. Loneliness, alienation, ect. are often specifically mentioned in these sections, as particular issues of concern within the LGBT community.

In contrast, there has been a glaring absence of concern in these reports for the heterosexual community, and it's own struggles with a loneliness crisis.

The absence of any such discussion might give our leaders the impression that there is no significant loneliness crisis within the heterosexual community. Unfortunately this is not the case.

I am a terribly lonely heterosexual man, who is desparately yearning for the companionship of a loving wife. And I am frequently encountering heterosexuals - of both genders - in places like online mental health forums, who are in the same predicament. Many have all but given up hope of ever having a loving marriage - a loving **<u>sexual</u>** relationship, and the loss of this hope has clearly devastated them, and taken a horrendous mental health toll.

It's important that you understand just how significant sex is, in relation to loneliness.

As I hope I've managed to successfully explain throughout this submission, loneliness is not a question of the **quantity** of one's relationships, but the **quality** of them. Having 1,000 neighbors who all know your name, and will smile at you when you offer them a friendly *"G'day!"* is no substitute for one loyal mate who you can sit down and have an open heart-to-heart talk with, without fear of judgement or rejection.

Sex is arguably the single most intimate act a person can engage in. It is a moment where we bare ourselves completely - literally and figuratively - where we render ourselves naked and vulnerable, before another person. Where we join ourselves/share ourselves with them in a manner that has no equal or comparison. Where we offer the absolute pinacle of trust to another human being, and (hopefully) experiance the absolute pinacle of togetherness with a human being, in return.

If you don't have someone in your life who you can make love with, there is a tier of human connection in your life that is unfulfilled. And just as having 1,000 friendly casual acquaintances can't make up for the absence of one proper mate who you can count on when the chips are down, so too will you find that no amount of lesser-quality contact in one's life can make up for the absence of sex in one's life.

Loneliness is the unfulfilled need for connection of a certain calibre; and if a person has an unfulfilled need for the level of human connection that only comes through the intimacy of sex, then they will be facing a crisis of loneliness. And just like any other crisis of loneliness, it may weigh on them so heavily that it drives them to depression or suicide.

It may seem like a tacky or perverted spin on the issue of loneliness, but it is as real and legitimate as the anguish suffered by people who simply cannot find anyone to have a heart-to-heart conversation with; and it deserves the same level of respect, concern, and investigation from this inquiry.

This unmet need for heterosexual relationships has not gone completely unnoticed by our society. But the overall response to it has been troubling, to say the least.

Too many people who are aware of this crisis tend to downplay it's severity, and/or the anguish experianced by the people who are caught up in it. They dismissively decree that this loneliness is just something that the sufferers need to *"learn to live with"*, *"need to cope with"*, *"need to accept"*, ect., in dignified silence.

Among these efforts to downplay this crisis are claims by some that: *"People are only so obsessed with sex because the media has conditoned them to be obsessed with sex."*[67] For example, some people claim that men mainly want to have sex because media such as the James Bond movies has conditioned them to believe that you need to have lots of sex to be a "real man". These claims are, overall, grossly inaccurate and misleading.

Peoples' need for sex is generally far more personal and imbedded then anything that can be significantly shaped by the media, or culture.

It also tends to be less about one's relationship with one's self[68], and more about their relationship with the outside world. People need sex in order to know that there is something in the world that is so wonderful, it is a genuine pleasure to curl up intimately in bed beside it. This is an important experiance, in order for us to understand the extent to which life can be good, on a regular basis; and therefore plays a significant role in helping us to decide whether we wish to prolong our lives, or not.

At the same time, it also demonstrates the world's capability to be compatable with us: in that it has provided us with a partner who thinks we are so wonderful, **they** find the idea of curling up naked in bed with us to be immensely desirable. This demonstration of strong compatability - even if it is only with a single person - can be essential for someone to believe that they belong in the world; that it isn't just some awful cosmic screw-up that they've been delivered to this place they largely don't fit with.

Unfortunately, the poor public response to the heterosexual loneliness crisis doesn't end with these misconceptions.

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[67] Or words to a similar effect.

[68] e.g. A man's ability to percieve himself as a "real man", based off the amount of sex he's having.

In a more disturbing trend, numerous people have set themselves up as self-appointed judges of what makes someone worthy of having a heterosexual relationship, and what makes them unworthy of one. These supposed 'experts' prey upon the desperation of lonely heterosexuals, in order to coerce them into adhering to that 'expert's' own personal world view, under the assertion that if the lonely person does so sufficiently, *the universe*[69] will reward them with a heterosexual relationship.

There is also another concerning trend, where some movements seem to be trying to remedy this crisis by having the effected people turn to their own gender for the fulfillment they need, rather then the opposite one.

While there is nothing wrong with such initiatives, as such, it would become a serious problem if our leaders mistakenly percieve these initiatives as large-scale solutions to the heterosexual loneliness crisis.

For example, one such initiative I've heard of is a program where groups of straight men, who are unable access any physical intimacy from a woman, get together to give one another hugs.

No doubt, such programs will be of benefit to some people. For some people, this will indeed satisfy the level of physical intimacy they've been craving. Different people have different levels of needs, with regard to human connection.

However, in many other cases, a program such as this will offer no significant benefit to a person with unsatisfied sexual needs. They require a much higher level of intimacy - the level that only comes via sex; and for a heterosexual, that intimacy can only come from the opposite gender.

A person's need for connection is often binary in nature: it is either fulfilled, or it is not. There is no inbetween or partial solutions. So for many people deprived of a sexual relationship, there is no noticeable difference in quality of life between a lifestyle where they have no intimate physical contact, and a lifestyle where they have no sex, but they are able to get a hug. Either way, the level of human connection they personally need is unfulfilled, and so they are wracked with loneliness.

We need to be cautious with programs such as this, that we fully appreciate their limitations. We need to remain ever-mindful of the fact that, while these programs that revolve around lesser levels of physical intimacy may benefit some, others will need a system that helps them find a sexual relationship.

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| **Reccommendation 26:** | Insure that the importance of sex, with regards to loneliness, is fully acknowledged and duely considdered by your anti-loneliness policy. |
| **Reccommendation 27:** | Make it a primary objective of your anti-loneliness system to set lonely people yearning for a romantic/sexual relationship up with well-matched lovers. |

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[69] Or *'God'*, ect.

The other concerning question about such initiatives is whether they are (inadvertantly) encouraging the two genders to retreat away from one another, at a time when we should really be focussing on building more bridges between the two, and collaborating to find more/better ways to bring straight women together with straight men.

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Without neglecting any of the existing calls for measures to address the pressing loneliness and mental health needs of the LGBT community, it is important that you also dilligently investigate and address the sexual loneliness needs of the heterosexual community.

A key component of whatever system you devise to remedy NSW's broader loneliness needs must be a system to set lonely people seeking a heterosexual relationship up with highly-compatable partners.

| Reccommendation 28: | Insure that your anti-loneliness policy gives all due attention to sexual loneliness issues within the heterosexual community, and that the needs of the heterosexual community are adequately tended to, alongside the needs of the LGBT community. |
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## List of Reccommendations

| Reccommendation 1: | *Insure that all future anti-loneliness policy has a primary objective of cultivating meaningful relationships, and does not stop at merely increasing peoples' exposure to other people.* |
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| Reccommendation 1-a: | *Insure that the success of all future anti-loneliness initiatives is evaluated by the number of meaningful relationships it has cultivated, not simply on the amount of human-to-human interaction it has caused.* |
| Reccommendation 2: | *Insure that your anti-loneliness system is considderate of people who have previously been treated unkindly, with regards to their loneliness.*<br><br>*Insure that it is set up to be patient and gentle with them.* |
| Reccommendation 2-a: | *Insure that it is able to offer them help to deal with, or resolve this past trauma, if needed.* |
| Reccommendation 3: | *Build your anti-loneliness policy on core principals of compassion, respect, and attentiveness to the people it serves.* |
| Reccommendation 4: | *Build an anti-loneliness system to meet the reality that each lonely person is unique, with unique needs. A system that gets to know each patient, before tailoring a specific, thoughtful solution to fit them.* |
| Reccommendation 5: | *Build your anti-loneliness system as a network with a hierarchy, so that it's staff are easily able to confer with their colleagues, to find the best remedies, companions, and communities for their patients.* |
| Reccommendation 6: | *Build your anti-loneliness system on the principal that both the system, and the 'helpers' who staff it, are servants of the patient, not the other way around.* |

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| **Reccommendation 6-a:** | *Commit to only staffing the system with people who are able to sincerely dedicate themselves to this principal.* |
| **Reccommendation 7:** | *Insure that your anti-loneliness system is mindful of the potential for harm, through mishandling of cases of loneliness.* |
| **Reccommendation 7-a:** | *Factor the prevention of unwise risks into the principals that guide your anti-loneliness system.* |
| **Reccommendation 8:** | *Investigate the "psychosocial support" system's ability to help lonely people find meaningful relationships, and it's success rates in doing so.* |
| **Reccommendation 8-a:** | *Make this data publicly available, in plain English.* |
| **Reccommendation 9:** | *Commit to a "Whole of Government" approach to addressing loneliness.* |
| **Reccommendation 10:** | *Build your anti-loneliness system around a confidential, one-on-one interview process, in which the 'helper' thoroughly gets to know the patient, and understand their needs.* |
| **Reccommendation 11:** | *Rewrite mental health policy so that it is an explicit duty of the mental health system to set lonely patients up with other patients who they are highly-compatable with, for romance; friendship; house-sharing, in accordance with the patients' wishes.* |
| **Reccommendation 11-a:** | *Insure that the mental health system is given all the necessary resources to be able to perform this duty adequately.* |
| **Reccommendation 12:** | *Change the mental health laws to make it a crime for any therapist to neglect to set their patient up with a sought companion, if it is determined that it was in the therapist's power to do so.*<br><br>*Treat refusal to provide meaningful assistance with a patient's loneliness just as seriously as any other manner of a therapist neglecting or disregarding a patient's basic needs or rights.* |
| **Reccommendation 13:** | *Create laws to protect patients of both the existing mental health system, and any new anti-loneliness system you create, from being exploited by their therapists/'helpers'.*<br><br>*Make it illegal for a therapist/'helper' to attempt to overwrite a patient's relationship goals with their own, unless they get an express request from the patient to do so.*<br><br>*Make it illegal for a therapist/'helper' to treat their patient in a fashion that is designed to achieve different ends to the patient's own stated goals for the treatment.* |
| **Reccommendation 14:** | *Avoid leaning on any sort of "social reeducation" system (or similar) as a major component of your anti-loneliness strategy.* |
| **Reccommendation 15:** | *Create laws to protect vulnerable patients from being unwillingly subjected to "social reeducation"-type treatments.* |
| **Reccommendation 16:** | *Build a series of non-educational college-like institutions for young people who don't go to actual college.* |
| **Reccommendation 17:** | *Commit NSW to an economic system that favors long-term (ideally lifelong) employment for it's citizens, over short-term employment.* |
| **Reccommendation 18:** | *Carefully examine existing employment & workplace policy to find ways to* |

*encourage and cultivate stronger friendships in the workplace.*

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| **Reccommendation 19:** | *Insure your anti-loneliness policy is ever-respectful of the emotional, mental, and spiritual cost of loneliness.* |
| **Reccommendation 19-a:** | *Avoid placing people or organizations with a known fixation on money in key roles within your anti-loneliness strategy; or balance the presence of such people/organizations with others who are known to favor the mental health needs of the community.* |
| **Reccommendation 20:** | *Avoid scapegoating smartphones & technology as a cause of loneliness.*<br><br>*Remain mindful of the positive role such devices play in mental wellbeing and decreasing loneliness.* |
| **Reccommendation 21:** | *Commit to being cautious, thoughtful and evenhanded with any and all government policy that promotes "inclusion".* |
| **Reccommendation 21-a:** | *Thoroughly considder the loneliness impacts "inclusion" policy is likely to have on people who will be entering in to the environments effected by these policies.* |
| **Reccommendation 21-b:** | *Thoroughly and fairly consider the impacts on any and all existing communities and/or organizations who's principals or standards might be effected by any "inclusion" policy you endorse.* |
| **Reccommendation 22:** | *Commit to defending the longstanding principals and standards of established communities.* |
| **Reccommendation 22-a:** | *Support communities, without bias, to find amicable solutions to conflicts that may arise over these principals or standards.* |
| **Reccommendation 23:** | *Help scattered, lonely individuals with like-minded principals, values, and aspirations to come together to build new communities (workplace, residential, recreational, ect.) built upon these common values and aspirations.* |
| **Reccommendation 24:** | *Commit to factoring social environment compatability in to all of your future anti-loneliness policy.* |
| **Reccommendation 25:** | *Make identifying the principals and standards of established communities within NSW (workplace, residential, recreational, religious, ect.) a key priority of your anti-loneliness system.*<br><br>*Then use this knowledge to assign the lonely people who turn to the system for help to the communities that best align with their own character.* |
| **Reccommendation 26:** | *Insure that the importance of sex, with regards to loneliness, is fully acknowledged and duely considderd by your anti-loneliness policy.* |
| **Reccommendation 27:** | *Make it a primary objective of your anti-loneliness system to set lonely people yearning for a romantic/sexual relationship up with well-matched lovers.* |
| **Reccommendation 28:** | *Insure that your anti-loneliness policy gives all due attention to sexual loneliness issues within the heterosexual community, and that the needs of the heterosexual community are adequately tended to, alongside the needs of the LGBT community.* |