Coaching Ourselves through Transitions

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International Offices at Caltech
My Role at Caltech

• For more than 15 years, I have been assisting international scholars and their families, as well as US citizens, when moving to SoCal:
  • Cultural and Relocation Advisor at Caltech
  • Facilitator for the Caltech International Spouses Club
    • Spouse ‘Networker’

• The key word that unifies my different functions is connectivity

• I am adding another hat, offering CONNECTIVITY COACHING

• My approach is focused on MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS both professional and non-professional
Homesick or Lonely? A Bit About Me

• What is the difference between homesickness and loneliness?

• The self-fulfilling prophecy

• The importance of meaningful connections (emotional rewarding)

• I am here to help, as a Connectivity Coach, an Antidote to Loneliness
About You, the Participants

• What are your current transitions – are you arriving or leaving Caltech?

• What are the cultural nuances that you are noticing?

• What are the expectations that you are decoding?

• What are your questions?
Definitions of Loneliness

• Loneliness involves the subjective feeling of isolation (not a diagnosis – UCLA Loneliness Scale).

• Unwanted solitude, driven by a discrepancy between how you perceive your relationships versus what you want or expect from them.

• Unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relationships is deficient either qualitatively or quantitatively.

• Loneliness is social pain—a psychological mechanism which motivates individuals to seek social connections. It is often associated with an unwanted lack of connection and intimacy.
Stopping the Circle Before it Becomes Chronic

The Vicious Circle of Loneliness

Social pain activates in the brain defensive behaviors* → dangers and hostility everywhere and with everyone “the maladaptive social cognition” → pays more attention to others but understands them less → misinterprets neutral faces as hostile, neutral voices as aggressive → suspicion, contempt, or aggression** → distress others → more self-centered and disengages to protect herself → more feelings of isolation → the lonely person is considered as a cold/unfriendly person by others, whereas she is not.

However, the Environment Plays a Key Role

The Minister of Loneliness in UK talks about a Social Prescription

* pregenual anterior cingulate cortex

** Studies show that conveying a message in a good way is critical: 93% of communication is in the voice tone and body language, and 7% in the content of what is being said.
A Loneliness Gene?

- Does loneliness is a dormant gene that is activated depending on a situation OR does loneliness, when triggered, activates other genes (anxiety, depression)?

- What about depression: while some scientists differentiate depression (you don't want to see anyone) from loneliness (you are craving to see meaningful people), others link both. The question is: which starts first: depression and then you end up lonely OR because you are lonely you feel depressed?

- Scientific literature is not clear yet about the heredity of loneliness.

- The good news is the key component of the environment.
Medical and Social Costs and Possible Solutions/Preventative Ideas

• Increase in levels of cortisol (stress hormones) and inflammation

• Increase risk of heart disease, arthritis, and Type 2 diabetes

• 64% increase in the risk of developing dementia (Alzheimer’s)

• Reduction in life span equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day

• Greater reduction in life span than obesity

• A Pill for Loneliness to counteract the hyper vigilance for social threat

  Research underway at University of Chicago

• The Minister of Loneliness

  United Kingdom, Jan 2018
  Japan, Feb 2021
The Virtuous Circle of Volunteering

 Called Social Prescription in UK, Volunteering Generates “The helper’s high”. It boosts the happy hormones: oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin

Studies have demonstrated that serving others shift the focus away from oneself. Volunteering reaffirms that you have a value to give and share

Giving to someone in a worse situation than yours (at least, perceived so by you) → you realize how useful/helpful you are → lower the self-centered thought → you give but do not expect back → reinforces the self-worth + self-esteem + self-love → the non-expectation of reciprocity is the key to soften loneliness feelings

Giving advice is more beneficial than receiving it:
- Middle School students helping resistant learners
- Overweight people assisting others doing a diet
Connectivity Coaching
How to switch subjective feelings of loneliness into intentions to develop meaningful relationships

The Principles of Coaching: 3-Step Process Questioning
• Current situation (what is happening)
• Goal settings (what do you want to happen)
• Strategies and actions (what do you need to do to achieve your goals)

Exploring The Thoughts
• Rational: facts, evidences OR Irrational: “learned” beliefs, security needs & values, expectations and bias
• Empirical: must everyone respond the way you do, or would other people respond differently and that is ok
• Helpful (is the way you approach/think about the situation is helpful/successful)

Developing Realistic Perspectives
• Changing thinking is changing feeling and then changing action with a greater sense of control. Realizing (mentally) and acting your own set of values and beliefs. Ultimately, you generate your own ideas, solutions and decisions.
• You accept fallibility; therefore, you trigger the Self-Acceptance $\rightarrow$ Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Self-Confidence
Examples of Thought ➔ Feeling ➔ Behaviors

- **Thought:** I just moved here, everything is so different ... the size of freeways... (confusion, comparison)

- **Feeling/Emotion:** homesickness

- **Behavior:** take time to adjust, withdraw, on the long run ➔ loneliness
Examples of Thought → Feeling → Behaviors

• **Thought:** I know he doesn’t like me (mind reading) or I know you are going to break up with me (fortune telling)

• **Feeling/Emotion:** self critic, rejection and impacts on self worth/esteem/confidence/love

• **Behavior:** aware of your lack of confidence and assertiveness → loneliness
Examples of Thought ➔ Feeling ➔ Behaviors

- **Thought:** I feel so distressed that I’m sure this meeting will be a disaster (emotional reasoning)
- **Feeling/Emotion:** anxiety
- **Behavior:** overwhelmed ➔ fatigue ➔ loneliness
Examples of Thought ➔ Feeling ➔ Behaviors

- **Thought**: I should/must/have to/ought to like...
  - For example: I feel guilty because I should have been able to finish this project by the deadline.
  - (a mix of various twisted thinking)

- **Feeling/Emotion**: a mix of various feelings but mostly self pressure or pressure on others, perfectionism, never enough, judgmental

- **Behavior**: nervosity and activity (# energy) ➔ no time for others ➔ loneliness
Fallibility vs. Failure

Being fallible is NOT being weak and failed

• We all make mistakes
• It’s all right to ask for help
• You don’t have all the answers nor are you expected to have
• Comparing yourself to others is not worth the effort
• You need to belong (openness creates closeness)
• Watch out! Perfectionism is around
• Self acceptance of not being perfect, but reaching to excellence
My Coaching Approach

• **No Stigma**: Admitting you are lonely is as if you have failed in life’s most fundamental domains: Belonging (community), Love (intimacy), Attachment (family and friends) → **Everyone has felt lonely**

• **Alone is Not Lonely**: You can be socially isolated and feel lonely or You can be socially isolated and not feel lonely or You can be socially not isolated and feel lonely → **social isolation vs. social disconnection vs. loneliness**

• **Creating Space for Trust and Safety**: I am your ally → **I am committed to help you find your very own solutions.**
 Transforming Thoughts to Achieve Goals

• Heighten awareness of the self-defeating, self-criticism and criticism of others
• Decode your social cues
• Explore your inside-outside
• Be aware of the compensations: hyper-achiever, controller, hyper vigilant, perfectionist, victim, avoider, restless, rationalizer, pleaser.
• Give yourself actions (the 1% progress)
• Practice! It’s a process!
• Become your own coach by the end of the program (6-8 sessions).
If You Want a Coaching Experience

• Send me an email at: bavouac@caltech.edu to set up a meeting.

• Session details: I offer a package of 6 sessions/person, to be completed with 2 months. Each session is on one-on-one and lasts 45 minutes; it can be on zoom, on the phone, or in my office at Caltech (International Scholar Services, 266 S. Chester Avenue).

• The coaching sessions are entirely free for the Caltech community: students, postdocs, staff, visitors, and faculty.
Self Coaching Key Questions

• Should I stay at Caltech or leave?
• Should I stay in academia or move to industry?
• What aspects of academia go well?
• Should I stay in the U.S. or return home?
• What aspects of the U.S. please you?
• Am I lonely because the U.S. is a difficult place or is this something I need to address so that I don’t carry it with me to my next opportunity?
• Who is there to support you?
Definitions

Unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relationships is deficient either qualitatively or quantitatively. (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2008) https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1744-6198.2008.00114.x

Unwanted solitude, driven by a discrepancy between how you perceive your relationships versus what you want or expect from them. (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1981-24820-001


Loneliness is social pain (John Cacioppo, Louise Hawkley, 2011) https://nyaspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2011.06028.x?casa_token=ZK0S2FC6rtgAAAAA%3Apr7l8Io7Xw_f8szbMLcnjLcE7g1kgb3O3hTxG9EZMsHnoUFh0DKQf7nJj7ENHosPjTe3SbkGbd0


Genetics and Heredity

Neuroscientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology identified a region of the brain they believe generates feelings of loneliness. (Gillian Matthews, Edward Nieh, 2016) https://www.cell.com/cell/fulltext/S0092-8674(15)01704-3

Loneliness has a genetic substrate that is moderated by social environments (J. Cacioppo, S. Cacioppo, 2012) https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17405629.2012.690510


Environmental factors determine in a dynamic fashion how genes that contribute to loneliness are expressed. (Spithoven, S. Cacioppo; Goossens, 2019) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331600296_Genetic_Contributions_to_Loneliness_and_Their_Relevance_to_the_Evolutionary_Theory_of_Loneliness

Loneliness predicted changes in DNA transcription that in turn dampened the body’s ability to shut off the inflammatory response Louise Hawkley https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3874845/
Medical Pathologies

Coronary heart disease and stroke (N. Valtorta, M. Kanaan, S. Gilbody, 2015)
https://heart.bmj.com/content/102/13/1009.abstract

Cortisol raise and vascular resistance  (J. Cacioppo, S. Cacioppo, 2014)
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5130104/

Reduction in life span similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Vivek Murthy, 2017)

Stress hormones and inflammation, risk of heart disease, arthritis, Type 2 diabetes

Cognitive decline, dementia (TJ Holverda, 2012)
https://jnnp.bmj.com/content/85/2/135?version=meter%20at%20null&module=meter-Links&pgtype=Blogs&contentId=&mediaId=%25%25ADID%25%25&referrer=&priority=true&action=click&contentCollection=meter-links-click

Cognitive decline (Donovan and Al.  2016)

For General Information

Depression’s Unholy trinity: Dysregulated stress, immunity, and the Microbiome (Joana S. Cruz-Pereira, Kieran rea, Yvonne M Nolan, 2020)

A Pill for Loneliness ( J and S. Cacioppo, 2016)
https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT02826577

The Minister of Loneliness
Alone is not Lonely

Loneliness and social isolation don’t necessarily go hand-in-hand (Julianne Holt-Lunstad and Timothy B. Smith, 2015 & 2016)

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691614568352

Emotional rewarding relationships (Carla Perissinotto, 2021)
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4383762/

Difference between loneliness and social isolation (Louise Hawkley , 2021)

Social disconnection is different from social isolation (Eric Klinenberg, 2018)
https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA527374462&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=22699740&p=HRCA&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7E7aec0c37

Loneliness Gender (Soest, Luhmann, 2020)

Social Isolation in America (Paolo Parigi and warner Henson II, 2014)
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Meta Analyze 70 studies encompassing 3.4 million people: prevalence of loneliness peaks in adolescents and young adults, then again in the oldest old (J. Holt-Lunstad, 2017)

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Non Verbal Communication
https://ubiquity.acm.org/article.cfm?id=2043156

The Virtuous Circle of Volunteering
Give and Take by Adam Grant https://www.adamgrant.net/book/give-and-take/