

Understanding Loneliness Through Science

March 12, 2015



Loneliness may be a fundamental part of the human condition, but scientists have only recently begun exploring its causes, consequences, and potential interventions. A [special section](#) in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#), aims to bring these strands of inquiry together, presenting a series of articles that review the current state of scientific research on loneliness.

The section, edited by psychological scientist David Sbarra of the University of Arizona, investigates loneliness across multiple levels, from evolutionary theory to genetics to social epidemiology.

“As a group, these articles set the bar high for future research on loneliness,” Sbarra writes in his [introduction](#) to the special section. “At the same time, they also contain ‘something for everyone’ — they are accessible, thought-provoking ideas that can be tackled from many different perspectives.”

In this special section:

- [J.T. Cacioppo and colleagues](#) argue that loneliness is not unique to humans but is likely part of a biological warning system that, like signals of hunger or pain, enhances chances of survival and reproduction for members of various social species.

- [Goossens and colleagues](#) explore the potential genetic basis for loneliness, highlighting the need to integrate a whole range of approaches, from genomics to behavioral science, in understanding the underpinnings of loneliness.
- [Holt-Lunstad and colleagues](#) present an analysis of over 70 studies, including data from more than 3 million participants, demonstrating a link between social isolation, loneliness, living alone and greater odds of mortality, even after taking various other factors into account.
- [S. Cacioppo and colleagues](#) review various types of existing interventions (one-on-one, group, community) that provide social support, increase opportunities for social interaction, and teach social skills as a way of preventing or mitigating the negative effects of loneliness.
- [Qualter and colleagues](#) approach loneliness from a lifespan perspective, showing that people of all ages experience a motive to reconnect with others in order to mitigate loneliness. While the motive to reconnect is often constructive, the researchers point out that it can sometimes spur thoughts and behaviors that exacerbate feelings of loneliness.

According to Sbarra, these articles “display a breadth, depth, and collective synergy that will not only spur answers to the questions outlined above but will also open lines of inquiry that are currently unexplored and will be highly generative in time.”

The special section is available online at:

<http://pps.sagepub.com/content/10/2.toc#SpecialSectiononLoneliness>.