



# ***Managing loneliness among offenders re-entering the community***

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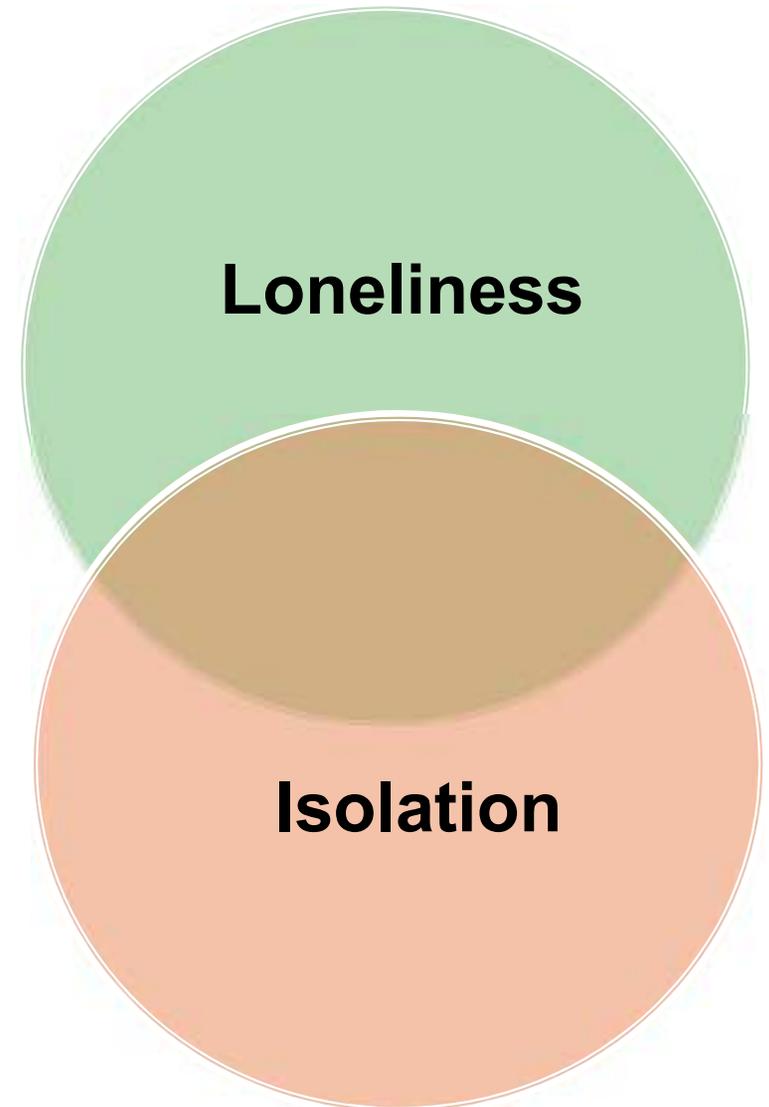
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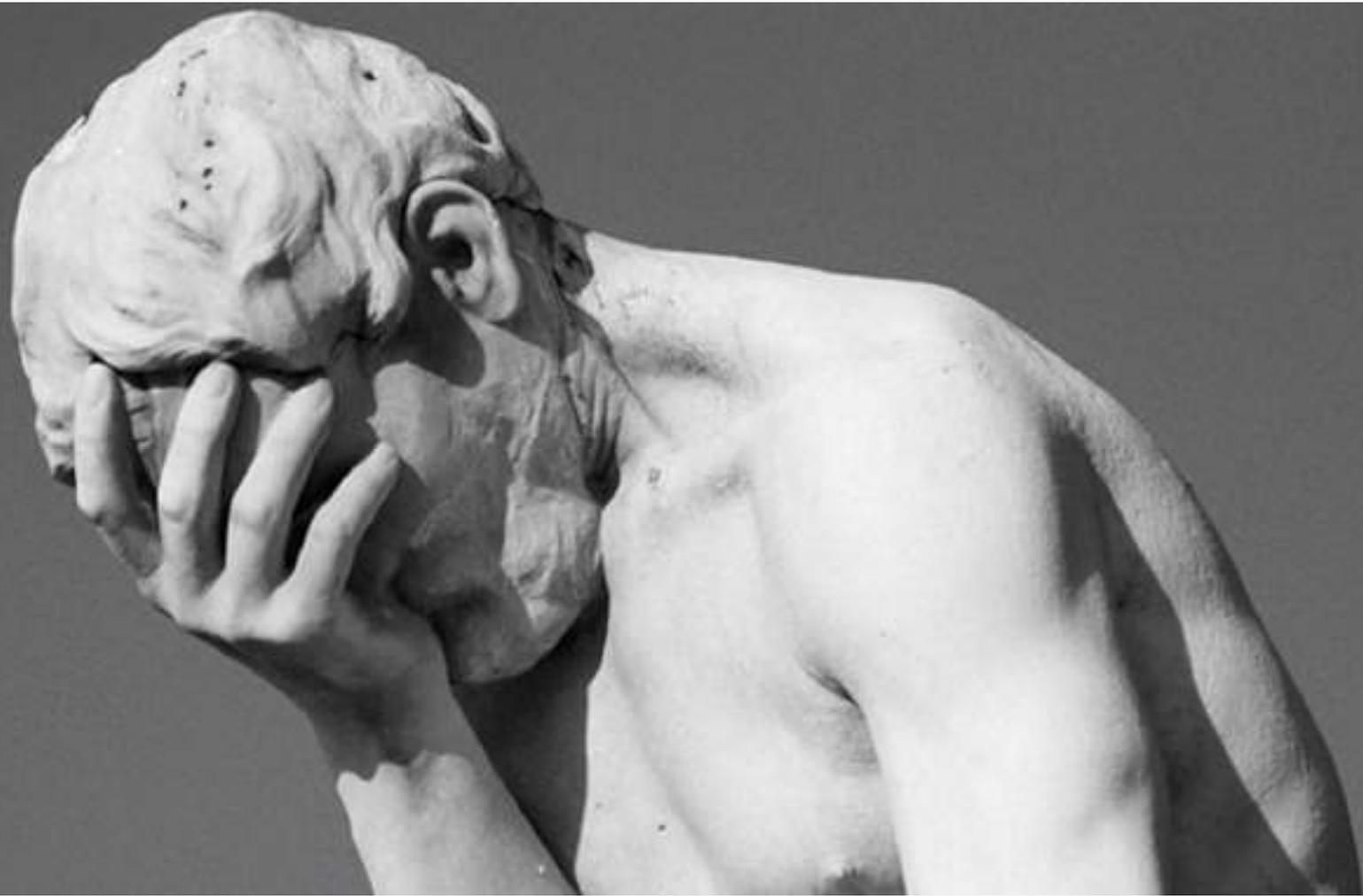


**@Eddy\_Elmer**

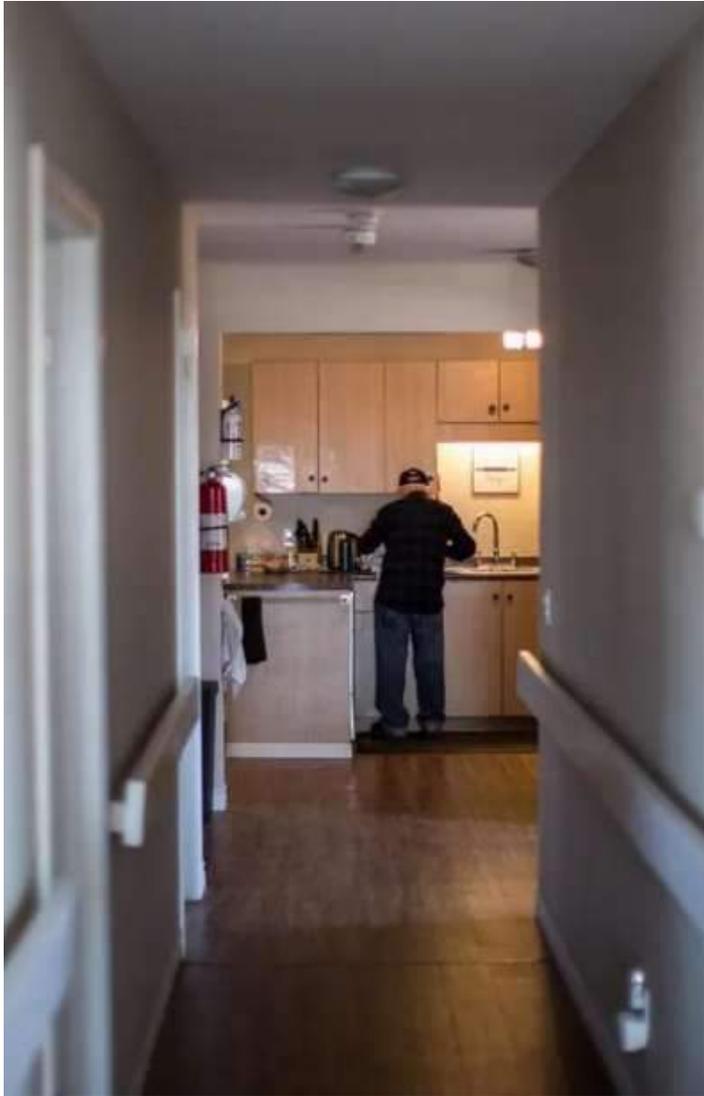
# What is Loneliness?

- Loneliness: perceived social isolation
  - painful emotion
  - mismatch between desired and actual relationships
  - subjective, not objective
  - independent of network size
    - can be lonely by yourself, in a marriage, or in a crowd
  - evolved to serve purpose
    - like hunger, thirst, physical pain





# Loneliness Among Offenders



- More likely than general population to be both isolated and lonely
- Loneliness ranked among top problems
  - within institutions
  - in the community



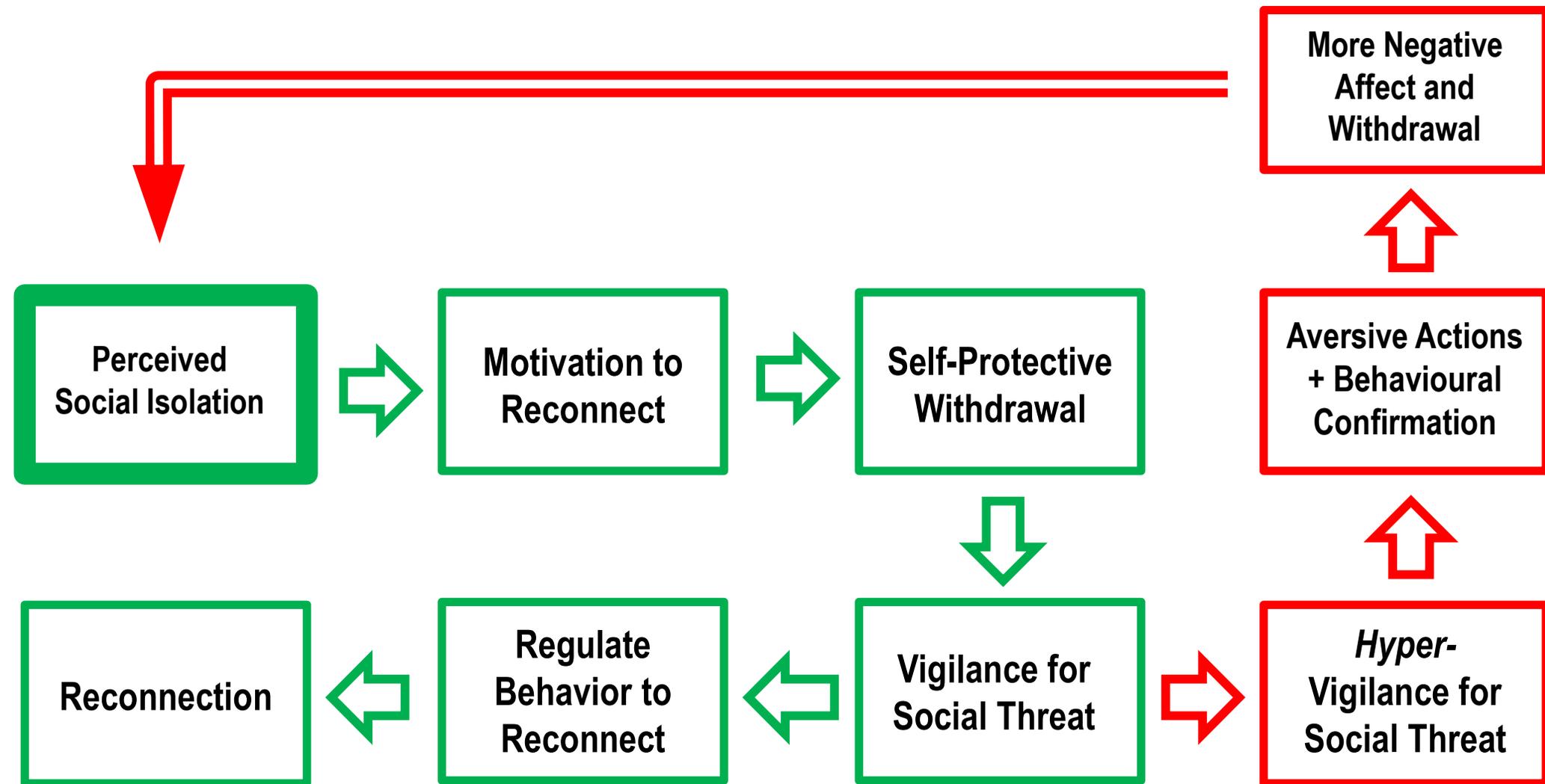
# Why is This Important?



## Diseases & Medical Ailments Caused or Worsened by Chronic Loneliness

- Diabetes
- Mental health problems
- Suicide
- Poor health habits
- Poor medication adherence
- Substance misuse
- Poor sleep
- Accelerated aging
- Increased mortality
- Increased healthcare utilization

# Cycle of Chronic Loneliness



28

LIFESTYLE

News, Wednesday, December 2, 2009

# Is loneliness contagious?

Researchers find that desolate people make others feel the same

**The Washington Post**

Loneliness is like a disease... nations. And others hailed the work "I think it's an incredible piece of

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND GROUP PROCESSES

Alone in the Crowd: The Structure and Spread of Loneliness in a Large Social Network

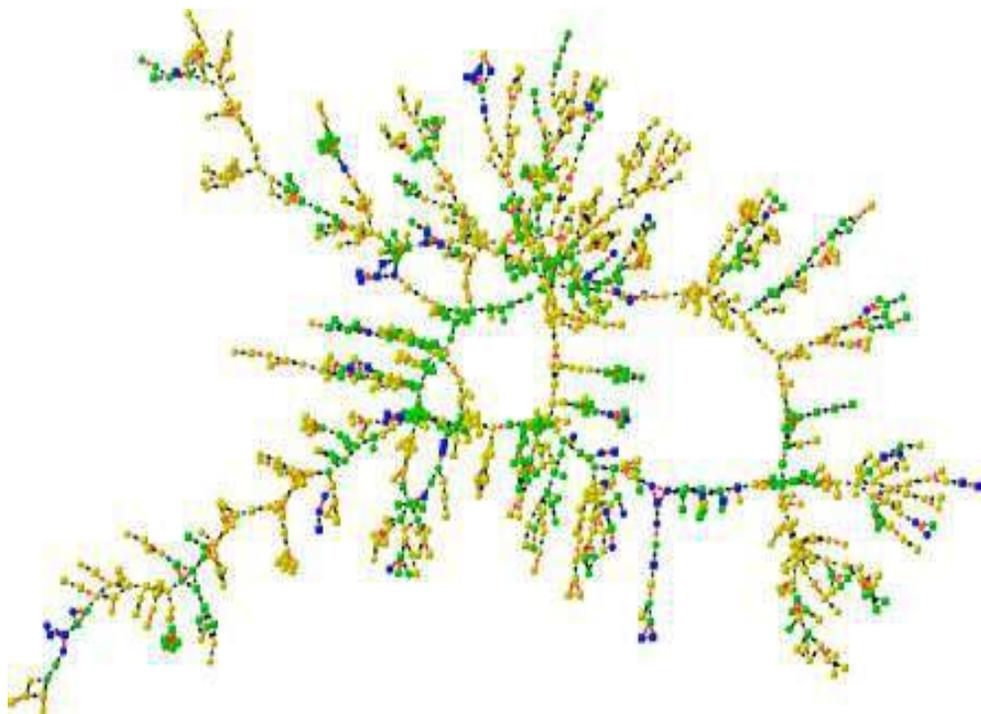
John T. Cacioppo  
University of Chicago

James H. Fowler  
University of California, San Diego

Nicholas A. Christakis  
Harvard University

The discrepancy between an individual's loneliness and the number of connections in a social network is well documented, yet little is known about the placement of loneliness within, or the spread of loneliness through, social networks. The authors use network linkage data from the population-based Framingham Heart Study to trace the topography of loneliness in people's social networks and the path through which loneliness spreads through these networks. Results indicated that loneliness occurs in clusters, extends up to 3 degrees of separation, is disproportionately represented at the periphery of social networks, and spreads through a contagious process. The spread of loneliness was found to be stronger than the spread of perceived social connections, stronger for friends than family members, and stronger for women than for men. The results advance understanding of the broad social forces that drive loneliness and suggest that efforts to reduce loneliness in society may benefit by aggressively targeting the people in the periphery to help repair their social networks and to create a protective barrier against loneliness that can keep the whole network from unraveling.

*Keywords:* loneliness, social network, social isolation, contagion, longitudinal study



# How Loneliness Affects Re-Entry



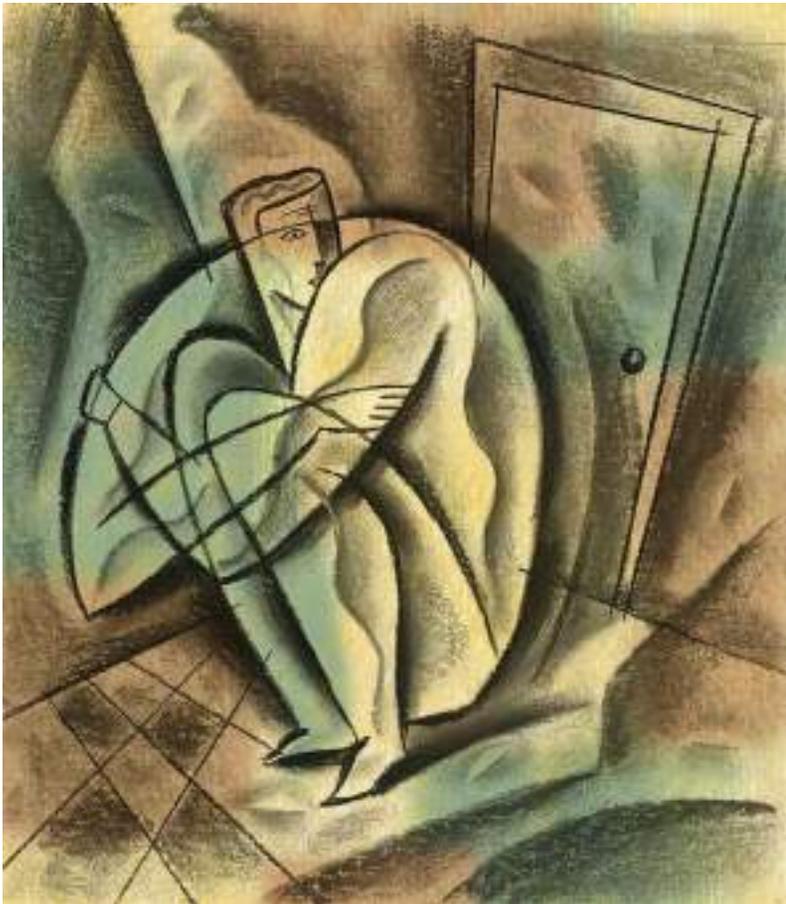
- Can impair ability to re-connect
- Passivity, demotivation
- Nothing to look forward to
- Reduced self-esteem
- Less self-efficacy
- External locus of control
- Hopelessness
- Meaninglessness, boredom
- Short-term focus
- Reduced impulse control
- Self-focus, less cooperation
- Hostility, aggression, recidivism

# Lingering Effects of Confinement



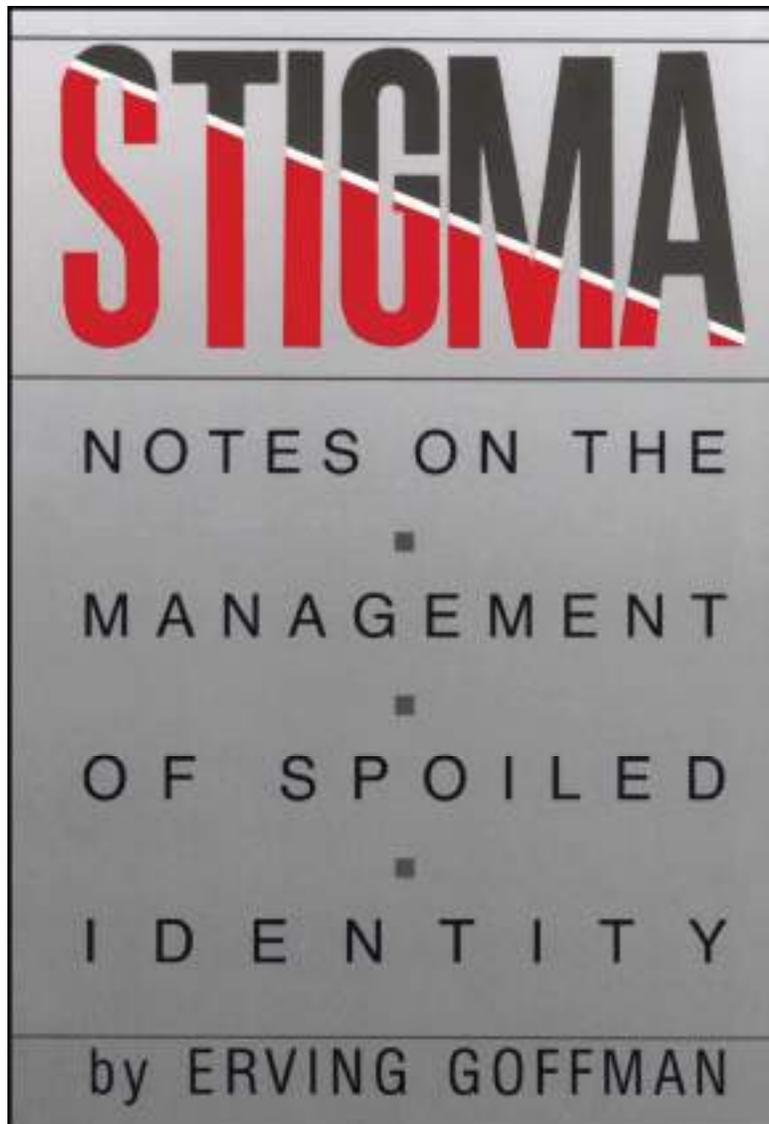
- Prolonged isolation from loved ones: profound sense of loss
- Disrupted milestones
- Lack of (positive) contact with staff, inmates
- Discontinuity in care, supervision
- Segregation: passivity, external LOC
- Hypervigilance for social threats
- Hiding emotions, keeping to self, never admitting loneliness
- For older offenders
  - ageism, intimidation, bullying, passivity, benign neglect
  - lack of motivation or ability to start new relationships
- Impact of coming from a *total institution*

# Difficulty Adjusting to Social Life



- Overwhelmed by people
- Social anxiety and hypervigilance
- Atrophy of social skills
  - social skills that were adaptive in prison may not be adaptive outside
- Where to meet new people?
- Smartphones, social media
- Overwhelmed by choices
- End result: fear, dependency, withdrawal

# Effects of Stigma



- Real and perceived rejection
- Some offenders *highly* stigmatized
- Older offenders: dual stigma
- Self-consciousness and rejection sensitivity
- Hard to find housing, work, healthcare, services
- Hard to hide criminal history
- Fear of being discovered on Internet
- Frustration, hostility giving up on people, withdrawing

# Challenges to Family Reconnection



- Desire to pick up where things were
- Rush to make up for lost time
- Ties become fragile, distant over time
- Family is ill, has died, moved on, no longer interested
- No “life story” to return to
- If older: no time to start new family
- Family is dysfunctional
- Estrangement from children; loss of custody; communicate via tech
- Loss of valued family roles
- Family/offender fear unpredictability
- Offender fears for family safety

# Dating Challenges



- Forgetting how to date
- Jumping in too soon
- Idealized views of relationships
- High expectations
- Avoidance of relationships until financially stable
- Impact of stigma
  - rejection
  - pre-emptive rejection

“When I first got out, I had a friend tell me her friend thought I was cute and was asking about me. I asked if her friend knew I just got out of prison; she said no. I suggested she tell her friend. So, she got back to me and told me the girl was still interested even after learning I was on parole and lived with my parents. I decided that was a red flag. She is probably super open-minded and a great person, but that was a deal breaker for me at the time.”

– **Brian Wood, *Beyond Bars*, September 17, 2018**

# Friendships



- Supportive, prosocial friends reduce loneliness
- But hard to meet; where to start?
- When unable to develop healthy, meaningful relationships, lonely offenders may return to old, antisocial friends
- Reinforces loneliness

# Location of Residence



- Placement away from family
- Community not welcoming
- Ageist or age-inappropriate
- Unsafe neighbourhood
- Loss of neighbourhood connections
  - intentional distancing
  - gentrification
- Return to area with triggers
- Miss old community in prison

# Mental Health and Personality

## ■ Pre-existing mental health conditions

- depressive disorders
- social anxiety disorder
- PTSD
- delusional disorders
- cognitive impairment
- substance abuse

## ■ Personality

- excessive shyness
- neuroticism
- insecure attachment
- rejection sensitivity
- lack of social and intimacy skills
- self-focus, lack of empathy
- low self-efficacy
- external locus of control

# Spotting Signs of Loneliness



- Social withdrawal
- Passivity, self-neglect
- Indiscriminate sociality
- Purposeful loitering
- Rejecting support; ambivalence
- Social, rejection sensitivity
- Hypervigilance, suspiciousness
- Anger, irritability
- Compulsive behaviour
- Unrestful sleep
- Vague complaints about health
- Distinguish from depression

# Assessing Loneliness



- Consider loneliness on par with other factors affecting re-entry success
- Assess during release planning and CRF intake: (eg, *UCLA Loneliness Scale*)
- Dig beneath surface a bit
- Ask CRF staff to observe
- Consider unique reasons for offender's loneliness
- Consider *type* of loneliness
- Assess *quality* of relationships not just quantity

# Destigmatizing Loneliness



- Don't be afraid to ask directly
- Discuss during programs
  - not easy for men...
- Emphasize
  - it's normal; serves a purpose
  - it's not just you; anyone can get stuck in cycle
  - it's not trivial
- Consider your own loneliness and attitudes toward it
  - subtle actions reinforce lonely offender's negative views of self and others
  - feeling judged can deter disclosure

# EASE Back into Social Life (Cacioppo, 2018)

## **E:** Extend Yourself Slowly

- small social interactions in safe spaces
- break the ice (eg., ask/offer help)
- can be nonverbal
- use conversation pieces
- similar to desensitization

## **S:** Be Selective

- look for the right people, in the right places
- pick activities that are meaningful and enjoyable in their own right

## **A:** Have an Action Plan

- plan regular, sustained activities
- don't need to be directly social
- do even when you don't feel like it
- adds structure to your day
- reduces inertia, mind-wandering, depression

## **E:** Expect the Best

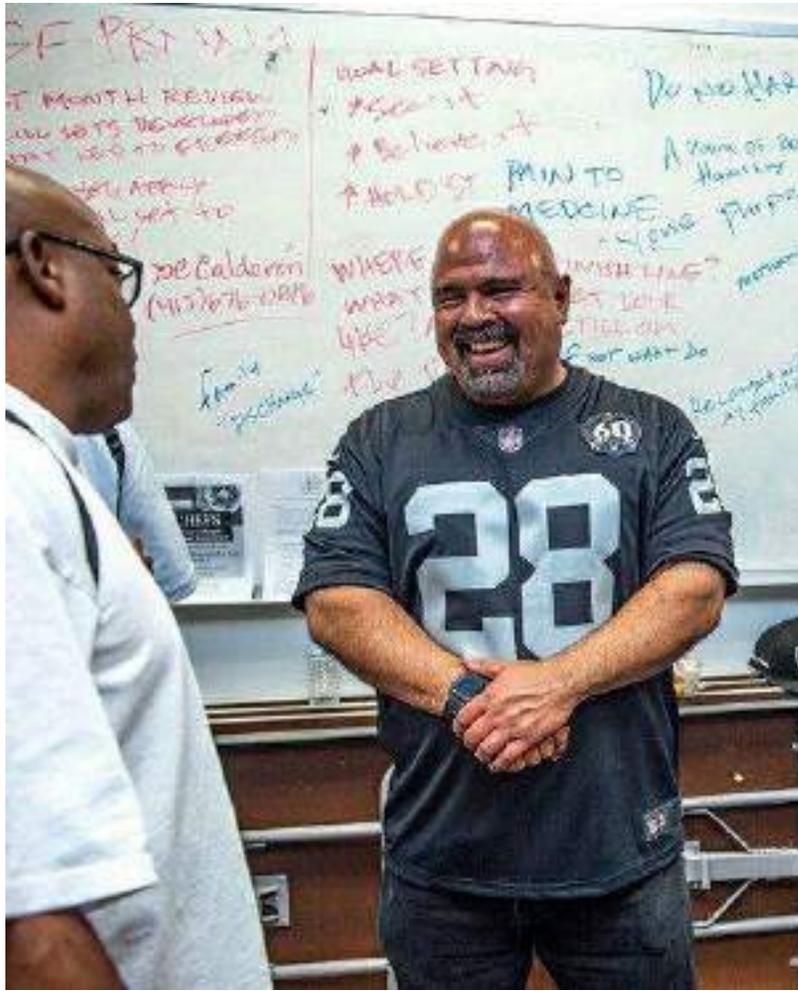
- remember how loneliness affects social perceptions
- give people a chance
- give them benefit of the doubt
- don't expect too much, too soon
- diary of positive interactions

# Easing into Groups: Facilitated Access



- New groups and unfamiliar situations can be overwhelming for anyone, but especially offenders
- Be extra supportive on front end
  - accompany to programs
  - provide moral support
  - help explain group's culture
  - encourage persistence
  - model appropriate social skills
  - gradually withdraw support as confidence builds

# Effective Group Programming



- CRF and other community programs can reduce loneliness, if done well
- Do *with*, not *for* offenders
- Active vs. passive
- Avoid socializing for its own sake
  - especially for men
  - paradoxically, can reinforce loneliness
- Include group activities with purpose
  - leadership, mentoring roles
  - builds confidence, social skills, sense of usefulness, self-control, self-efficacy, and internal locus of control
  - all of which help reduce loneliness

# Dr. Stephanie Cacioppo on Helping



- “The worst thing you can do to a lonely person is try to help *them*. If you know somebody who’s lonely, ask them to help *you*. Being shown respect, being depended upon, being made to understand your own importance – all these things can give a lonely person a sense of worth and belonging.”

Previous Project

Next Project

# Pumped for Parole



View Photos

Guardian angel Communities

## The people making a difference: the man setting up woodworking 'sheds' to combat loneliness

When Philip Jackson moved back to the UK from Australia, he felt compelled to support fellow lonely souls in his town. Now, for a momentous event, it's his turn to be treated



📷 Philip Jackson at Barnsley Men's Shed. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

# How a Montreal organization helps former prisoners adjust to the outside world



New book chronicles over 20 years of Open Door

[Marisa Coulton](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 21, 2022 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: February 21



Before the pandemic, Open Door held weekly meetings at a Montreal church plus special events like this Christmas party. (Submitted by Peter Hulsh)

# Support for Long-Term Offenders



**Service Oxygène**



- Re-entry programs can help isolated offenders build new social networks
- Peer support programs can increase understanding, sense of belonging, self-respect, positive mood, and loneliness
- Some longer-term offenders are skilled in coping with loneliness, more than younger ones





The logo for COOSA features the word "COOSA" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is replaced by three overlapping circles: a red circle at the bottom, a blue circle at the top, and a yellow circle in the middle, all overlapping each other and the letter "O".

**COOSA**

**OTTAWA / d'OTTAWA**

Circles of Support & Accountability  
Cercles de soutien et de responsabilité – CSR

# Social Inclusion Despite Exclusionary Sex Offense Laws: How Registered Citizens Cope With Loneliness

Criminal Justice Policy Review

1–19

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Tusty ten Bensel<sup>1</sup> and Lisa L. Sample<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

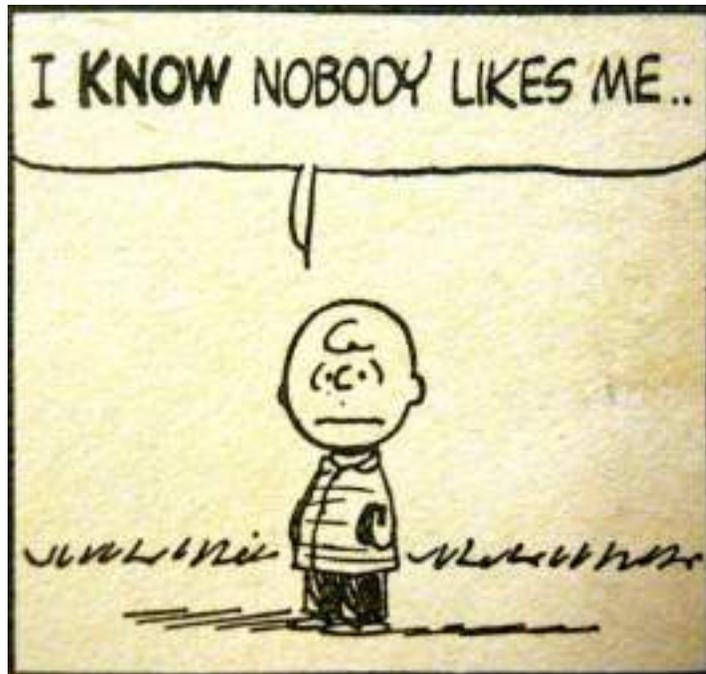
The use of social media has become associated with empowerment, social capital, and social inclusion for members of marginalized groups in society. Few groups in today's social environment are as marginalized, if not more, than sex offenders. This article explores the use of social media among 112 registered sex offenders who are in the community, no longer under correctional control, and self-report no reoffending. Self-reports of desistance were triangulated through interviews with 38 spouses/relatives of registrants and arrest data. Unlike prior studies of sex offenders' use of social media to facilitate offending, we found the use of social media helps create informal social networks, reduces loneliness, and provides a sense of empowerment among sex offenders and their family members. These are all factors important to promoting public safety and reducing sexual recidivism.

# Improve Existing Relationships



- Work with what's available
- Do inventory
- Re-connect and cultivate most promising relationships
- Be more open, vulnerable
- Aim for diverse mix
- Don't put eggs all in one basket
- Resist social comparison

# Examine Perceptions and Beliefs



- Social perceptions
  - Is this true?
  - How do you know?
  - Are there other explanations?
- Unproductive beliefs
  - Relationships just happen; you don't have control over them
  - I've never had any friends
  - It's very hard to make friends when you're older
  - My loneliness will never end
  - I can't tolerate this

# Improve Coping Skills

A profoundly original exploration  
of solitude and its role in the lives  
of creative, fulfilled individuals

## SOLITUDE



A RETURN TO THE SELF

"An excellent book... *Solitude* is humane,  
well written, equally distinguished by  
scholarship, insight and common sense."

— *The New York Times* —

ANTHONY STORR

- Tolerate isolation & loneliness
  - name it
  - turn isolation into solitude
  - practice mindfulness
  - examine fear of being alone
- Enhance positive emotions
  - reminiscence
  - novelty
  - thinking about triggers

# Other Strategies



- Pets
  - direct + indirect benefits
- Digital literacy
  - computers
  - Internet
  - active vs. passive use
- Self-care

ARTICLE

DOI: 10.1038/s41467-018-05377-0

OPEN

# Sleep loss causes social withdrawal and loneliness

Eti Ben Simon<sup>1</sup> & Matthew P. Walker<sup>1,2</sup>

Loneliness and social isolation markedly increase mortality risk, and are linked to numerous mental and physical comorbidities, including sleep disruption. But does sleep loss causally trigger loneliness? Here, we demonstrate that a lack of sleep leads to a neural and behavioral phenotype of social withdrawal and loneliness; one that can be perceived by other members of society, and reciprocally, makes those societal members lonelier in return. We propose a model in which sleep loss instigates a propagating, self-reinforcing cycle of social separation and withdrawal.



For questions or slides:  
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Thank you for listening!