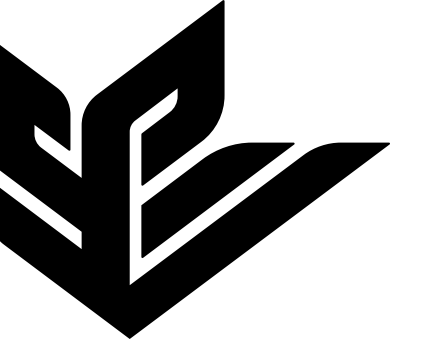


Exploring loneliness in committed relationships: What role does quality of relationship play?



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ABSTRACT

Loneliness is an aspect of the human experience that has garnered increasing attention as links between loneliness and negative health outcomes have been discovered across medical and mental health fields. Research on loneliness has highlighted relationship status as a prominent influencing factor on individual's experiences of loneliness, underscoring findings that those in more committed relationships may experience less loneliness. This has clinical implications for therapists, particularly those working with couples who might assume that individuals in committed relationships are unlikely to experience loneliness because of their committed relationship status. This study focuses on the experience of loneliness in committed relationships and aims to examine quality of relationship as an influential factor on the link between relationship status and loneliness.

INTRODUCTION

- Loneliness has been found to be related to a number of health concerns, including depression, substance use, disordered eating, heart disease, & suicidality (Mund, Ludtke, & Neyer, 2019; Yang, 2019).
- Relationship status plays an important role for loneliness as the absence of significant social relationships- especially in terms of lack of closeness and intimacy- leads to a greater perception of loneliness (Russell, Cutrona, Rose, & Yurko, 1984).
- Extensive research has shown that individuals in committed relationships experience less loneliness than those in single or in less-committed relationships (Adamczyk, 2018; Bucher, Neubauer, Voss, & Oetzback, 2018). However, committed relationships do not guarantee closeness and intimacy, and little research has been done to examine quality of relationship as an influential factor on the link between relationship status and perceived loneliness (Bucher et al., 2018).
- We believe a clearer understanding of this link will better guide clinicians to assess and treat loneliness in committed relationships.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- This study aims to examine the link between quality of relationship and loneliness for individuals in committed relationships within the United States.
- H1: It is believed that the lower the quality of one's relationship, the higher one's sense of loneliness will be.

METHODS

Participants

- Sample will consist of 500 adult individuals between the ages of 25 and 55, who are in a committed, monogamous relationship and living in the United States of America at the time of the study. Researchers will not require both participants to complete the survey to be included in the study.
- Participants will be recruited through physical advertisements placed in various public library branches and Starbucks locations around King County.

Procedures

- Participant responses to two assessments will be collected online.

MEASURES

Quality of Relationship

- Quality of relationship will be measured with the 39 item Quality of Relationship Inventory (Pierce, 1991). Responses from this inventory will be summed to create a final score for participant's self-reported quality of relationship.
- The Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI) assesses the meaningfulness and the positive role of the partnership, along with the extent to which one could turn to one's partner for support. The items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, resulting in a sum score ranging from 0 to 39, with higher scores representing higher quality.
- Studies on the QRI indicate reliability and construct validity of the QRI scales as measures of the quality of a specific relationship (Pierce, 1997).

Loneliness

- Loneliness will be measured with the 20 item UCLA Loneliness Scale, Version 3 (Russell, 1996). Responses from this assessment will be summed to create a final score for participant's self-reported degree of loneliness.
- The UCLA Loneliness Scale assesses perceptions of available support within a specific relationship and global perceptions of available support.
- Studies indicate the UCLA Loneliness Scale is highly reliable in terms of internal consistency (coefficient alpha ranging from .89 to .94) and test-retest reliability over a 1 year period ($r = .73$) and has desirable psychometric properties, including convergent, concurrent, and discriminant validity (Russell, 1996; Pierce, 1991).

RESULTS

- Summed scores from participant's responses will be analyzed to determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between a participant's quality of relationship and degree of loneliness.
- A simple linear regression model will be used to analyze data



DISCUSSION

- Prior research illuminated the importance of addressing persistent loneliness in therapeutic treatment based on the connection between loneliness and negative health outcomes like depression, substance use, disordered eating, suicidality & heart disease, (Mund, Ludtke, & Neyer, 2019; Yang, 2019).
- Further research indicates individuals in committed relationships are less likely to experience loneliness than those who are single or in less committed relationships. However, these findings do not indicate the absence of loneliness in committed relationships and little is known about variances in loneliness within the population of individuals in committed relationships.
- This study investigates the variances in experiences of loneliness within committed relationships and the role of quality of relationship as an influencing factor.
- We believe that understanding the relationship between quality of relationship and loneliness will allow clinicians to better assess and treat individuals experiencing loneliness within a committed relationship.
- Clinician responsibility in assessing for loneliness is critical due to social stigma around loneliness (Mann, Bone, Lloyd-Evans, Frerichs, Pinfold, Ma, Wang & Johnson, 2017). This is particularly true for individuals within a committed relationship who may feel additional social pressures around disclosing loneliness, especially in couple or family sessions.
- Future research should explore gender differences in the experience of loneliness within a committed relationship as well as compounding and protective factors that might further shape an individual's experience of loneliness.