

# The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men Attending NVCC

By Kyani Alcin, Joseph Hsu, Nick Smith, and Benjamin Cressey

Psychology 211

Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences

Northern Virginia Community College, Loudoun Campus

**Dr. Rosalyn M. King, Professor**

December 2015

### **Abstract**

The main focus of this study was to gain a deeper understanding on the phenomenon of male loneliness and its effects on the college level of study. To solve this enigma, researchers must first understand the victims of this issue; how life may be different and what aspects are greatly affected. Through first person narratives guided by specific questions, this study explores the experiences of male college students attending Northern Virginia Community College on the Loudoun Campus. Through the eyes of fifteen (15) subjects divided into two groups, we gain a clear image of a week in the life of a college male and the many experiences he may face. Through phenomenological study, data gathered in the course of many interviews identifies relevant variables that affect the college going process. This research also analyzes previous literature on male loneliness, previous causes and effects of loneliness, and the different side effects of loneliness, in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

## **Table of Contents**

### **Abstract**

#### **I. Introduction**

Background and problem statement

Purpose of the Study

Major Research Question

Sub Questions

Hypothesis Statement

Theoretical Framework

Significance of the Study

Definition of Terms

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

#### **II. Literature Review**

Overview of Researched Loneliness

Overview of Research Question

Overview of Literature

Causes and Effects of Loneliness

Research Methodologies and Evaluation of Research Designs

Summary

#### **III. Research Design and Methodology**

Introduction

Overview of Research Design and Rationale

Sampling Design

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Field Testing

Data Analysis Plan and Procedures

Limitations of the Research Design

Internal and External Validity

Expected Findings

Ethical Considerations

### **IV. Analysis and Findings**

Interview Analysis

Narratives and Analysis

Personal Definition of Loneliness

Analysis and Summary of Themes

Time Management

Analysis and Summary of Themes

Amount of Alcohol/Drugs consumed

Analysis and Summary of Themes

Clubs or Teams in High School

Analysis and Summary of Themes

Overall Summary of Findings

### **V. Conclusion**

Gaps in Understanding and the Research

Summary of Key Findings

Implications and Recommendations for Further Study

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background and Statement of the Problem**

The most broadly accepted definition of loneliness is the distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships. This so-called cognitive discrepancy perspective makes it clear that loneliness is not synonymous with being alone, nor does being with others guarantee protection from feelings of loneliness. Rather, loneliness is the distressing feeling that occurs when one's social relationships are perceived as being less satisfying than what is desired. The problem that our team will attempt to resolve through research is to determine the self-assessment of loneliness in college males. Loneliness in male college students is very common.

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study comes from the general lack of information about the topic. Generally speaking, the mental wellness or general wellbeing of both sexes is becoming more an issue by the day. Society has moved from a time where one would assume that men are emotional rocks and "should not feel anything" because that was the woman's job, to fully understanding the importance of mental health and finding that just bottling up every emotion is not exactly the healthiest thing to do. Through this project we hope to help expose loneliness as an ongoing problem among college men; and possible gain information on how it may be impacting male NVCC students and their general performance.

#### **Major Research Question**

What percentage of male college students will self-assess themselves as lonely?

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### Sub Questions

- Does the loneliness of men differ by age and social group?
- Is there is a correlation between certain majors and the level of loneliness a person feels?

### Hypothesis Statement

**Scientific Hypothesis:** There is a large percentage of male students attending NVCC who will see themselves as lonely.

**Null hypothesis:** There will be no relationship between loneliness and college males.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework could also be the backbone of a research project. It is normally the past work other researchers have conducted that could be expanded upon by our work. For our project, our theoretical Framework comes from a brief report done by David Knox, Karen Vail-Smith, and Marty Zusman, (2005) entitled "*The Lonely College Male.*" Their data came from 377 anonymous students attending East Carolina University. The students ranged from local freshmen to sophomores; ages 18-20. Concerning their study, loneliness was defined as "negative feelings that exist when there is a discrepancy between what one wants in terms of interpersonal affection and intimacy and what one, in fact, has (Lauder, Siobhan, & Kerry, 2004)." From their study, a majority of the students were not lonely, but about a quarter of the men and 16.7% of the women both answered that they have "felt a deep sense of loneliness." In the sense of comparing quantity to quality, most students were generally fine and saw no problem in their social health, but the few that were affected, were severely affected; to feel a deep

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

sense of loneliness implies isolation or a downright removal from society. Even though most students did not feel loneliness at this level of severity, fifty-seven (57) percent of men and forty-three (43) percent of women admitted to looking for a life partner. This should be looked at with the mindset that these are 18-20 year-olds, but it should not be overlooked; a large percentage of male and female students were looking for a person to share their life with; they did not want to be alone. This may not seem significant by itself, but the idea that a small percentage of people feel extremely alone while the majority wants to be with another person is fascinating.

As far as issues go, this seemed to be a personal issue and the sufferers would be fine over time, but then there were the physical symptoms. From their study and general research, it was finally revealed “There is evidence of physical effects of loneliness. These include less sleep and higher mortality (Cacioppo et al., 2002). Loneliness is also associated with relapsing from recovery in patients with anorexia and bulimia nervosa (Stewart, 2004). With these symptoms now in mind, the problem seems less isolated. It can be noted that an irritable student may affect other student’s learning habitat or general study. This information will add significance to the research framework greatly and what we would need to know before heading into the field.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is surprisingly high. For many decades, Americans have always divided the sexes into specific archetype. The young male was always seen as the strong, masculine and emotionless rock that needed to provide for his family or else he was nothing. The young woman was seen less as an individual in society but more as either a mother (staying home, raise the children, make their man happy) or looking

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

for their significant other. With the recent change in society and from what we now know from science, these archetypes (types of people) do not represent our society as a whole. It is now acceptable for a woman to help or solely provide for their family; to be strong and independent. It is also becoming acceptable for men to be in touch with their emotions; to no longer be the silent sufferer from what may bother them. This study specifically covers an aspect of human emotion that normally would not be mentioned, Loneliness.

The most broadly accepted definition of loneliness is the distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships. This so-called cognitive discrepancy perspective makes it clear that loneliness is not synonymous with being alone, nor does being with others guarantee protection from feelings of loneliness. Rather, loneliness is the distressing feeling that occurs when one's social relationships are perceived as being less satisfying than what is desired.

As many know, loneliness is an issue for humans as we are social beings. John Cacioppo, a social neuroscientist stated that, "the brain goes into a self-preservation state that brings with it a lot of unwanted effects." Some of these effects could be increased stress and aging. If we as a society could be able to identify, and rectify these cases sooner, we would be bringing health to the students, and in turn, health to the colleges which they attend.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Loneliness:** "Being cut off from social interaction with others as perceived or true."

**College Student:** a Student (typically between the ages of 18-25yrs, but this can vary) is an individual taking classes at an established place of learning.



## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### **Assumptions**

As far as assumptions go, there are a few things that can be assumed regarding our research.

- There are a percentage of men on the college campus of NOVA that are lonely.
- College women are also lonely; the percentages of both men and women will probably be similar in range.
- All participants who choose to answer the survey will answer honestly; this could skew our results and cause general problems for the project as a whole.

### **Limitations**

- There may be limited amount of time to complete this study, to gain a sizeable amount of participants to adequately represent American college males, study may need longer than the few months of the semester.
- This study is limited to male students on campuses. Due to the time restraints and general lack of high transportation, it would be difficult to travel to other colleges around the state of Virginia, let alone the entire country.
- The authenticity of the responses we would get from our survey. As previously mentioned, we would have no way to test wheatear the students answering were being entirely truthful.

### **Delimitations**

The only delimitation of the study is that it is limited to college men only.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Overview of Research on Loneliness

Loneliness is a condition of human existence. Human beings are free; they are lonely at birth and they die lonely. The sense of loneliness constitutes the inner core, the central fiber of human existence but most of these individuals, under the influence of the society that labels loneliness as a pathological or a lower level of existence, tends to look at it negatively (Singh 1991). Most studies that are conducted on loneliness tend to focus on the general idea of being lonely, but it is important to remember that everyone is lonely for different way and reasons.

Everyone at some point in their lives will feel lonely. Some people though tend to be lonelier than others. For example, individuals who have experienced the only child situation, or if someone has to move around often due to their job or military affiliations may experience loneliness. Usually we think of elderly people as lonely, but ironically enough, it is the young adult who has to go through the loneliest moments of life. The bars are full of single, isolated men and women. Telephone companies are making billions of dollars on love lines for singles. People choose to marry because they feel lonely and they choose to divorce because they feel lonely (Singh, 1991).

Even though so many people feel lonely there is a large number of them that never seek help or answers to what they can do to help with this loneliness. According to Mushtaq, Shoib, Shah and Mushtaq (2014) loneliness can lead to various psychiatric disorders like depression, alcohol abuse, child abuse, sleep problems, personality

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

disorders and Alzheimer's disease. Loneliness is also one of the main links to why people commit suicide in the United States.

### **Overview of Research Question**

Researchers are at it more than ever right now trying to find out what the central cause of loneliness is. They want to find out how they can expand or improve upon the definition of loneliness, and whether all the new advances in technology have now changed the actual sense of loneliness at its core. It is important to understand what makes a person lonely and be able to identify ways to reduce or remove it in the future. Men tend to repress the feeling of loneliness in order to fit in the ridged social norms that society has deemed to be correct, the team that will work on this study want to see if men will assess themselves as lonely.

### **Overview of Literature**

The purpose of this study is to allow men to self-assess their loneliness; to expose the on-going issues pertaining to loneliness in relation to being a male on college campus. A vast amount of articles read have stated that loneliness is an issue and that it is affecting college campuses across the country. Of the many different studies conducted, most of them have accepted the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Emotional/Social Loneliness Inventory (ESLI) scales as the best at measuring loneliness.

### **Causes and Effects of Loneliness**

As with anything that affects human life, it is hard to pinpoint the exact cause of loneliness. Poor emotional intelligence can play a role in loneliness. Anxiety is another important factor in creating loneliness. Depression is also one of the central causes of loneliness.

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is an important factor in understanding loneliness. EI refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), four different branches of EI include: perceiving emotions, reasoning with emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. Emotion is a basis for human nature. “Perhaps we humans have tried too hard to *civilize* ourselves, trying to deny our true animal nature – our emotional nature – along the way.” (Payne, 1985, p. 2) A few studies have provided direct evidence to the role of EI in the experience of loneliness, among them, Zysberg (2012) suggesting that EI provides a protective effect against feeling lonely, beyond what is accounted for by personal characteristics and personality traits in a sample of young adults. A study done by the Behavioral Science Institute and School of Psychology revealed that “prospective links between understanding and managing emotions and loneliness for both females and males. Perceiving and using emotions were prospectively linked to loneliness in males only” (Wols, Scholte, & Qualter, 2015, p. 40).

Anxiety is one of the causes of loneliness. Anxiety itself is caused by a stressor, or stressful situation. It is one of the most commonly noted causes of psychological mental issues (Grasgreen, 2012). When students were asked for their primary reason for seeking help with concern to psychological issues, anxiety was most cited at forty (40) percent (Grasgreen, 2012). Trait anxiety is caused by a constant use of a stress inducing schema, or one which does not prevent stress. It is when someone is hyper-vigilant against stressors (Somerville, Whalen, & Kelley, 2010, p. 417).

Depression has been identified as a serious health concern, particularly among college students (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007, p. 534; Weitzman,

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

2004, p. 269). Depression is more than just a feeling of sadness. The depressed individual may begin to lose interest in things they enjoyed. Though medication can help with stability in depressed individuals, it cannot save the individual. “*Similarly, loneliness, independent of depression, has been linked to elevated systolic blood pressure, poor sleep, changes in body mass index, and increase tobacco product and alcohol consumption*” (Cacioppo et al., 2002 p. 416). Loneliness was [is] related to an increased use of passive coping strategies, which, in turn, was a risk factor for later depressive symptoms (Vanhalst, Luyckx, Teppers, & Goossens, 2012).

### **Research Methodologies and Evaluation of Research Designs**

From the reviewed literature, there were multiple different methodologies that could be applied to this specific research. Some researchers have focused on the survey approach. This would include a survey with answer choices that varied from one through five on a chart, how lonely do you feel, to your general enjoyment level on a scale from one to ten. Other researchers preferred the mixed methods approach, opening with a survey, but transitioning to more of an experimental design. This experiment tested students who were classified as lonely and checked if they acted differently from students where not classified as lonely.

### **Summary**

The goal of this study is learn about the ongoing issue that is affecting college campuses across the country and to also expose ways to deal with loneliness. If a person is suffering from the issue and their general wellbeing is being affected, it is extremely important that they receive help. From the reviewed literature, it was learned that loneliness can be viewed as condition of human existence and that loneliness can lead to

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

various psychiatric disorders. It was also learned that the ESLI and UCLA scales are considered to be the most reliable in this specific section of the field and that even though there are multiple different methodologies, the survey was seen as the easiest method.

### **Chapter 3**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is gain a better understanding of loneliness and how it affects men on the college level. The specific aim of the researchers is to describe to the best of our abilities, the phenomenon of college male loneliness and how this can affect their psychological wellbeing. Other factors that could be affected include social status, self-esteem, work ethic, personal enjoyment of life, and personal health

### **Overview of Research Design and Rationale**

The first step in creating the research design was to identify and define the problem to be addressed. For this study, the problem to be addressed was male loneliness and its effects on a college level. Even though loneliness has been broadly studied and both men and women have been analyzed, there has not been a study that approached the issue from a phenomenological perspective. This type of research focuses on the researcher's interpretation of the issue and comparing this to a specific subject's interpretation of the issue. This concludes with the researcher's thoughts on the issue while also considering the subjects thoughts and how their interpretation differs from the researcher's previous thoughts. The previous studies that have be conducted by researchers did not focus on a specific person's personal experience. For this reason, the researchers chose to use a qualitative phenomenological research model. Due to the level of personal involvement of this study, data collection would only be possible by engaging directly with the subjects. Thus, a phenomenological research design will be used.

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

The second step in the process is locating the participants. The researchers will use a purposive sample design to select the informants. A Purposive sample design involves the researcher selecting the participants. Its purpose is to gain specific representative samples, so the researchers would select only those who fall into predefined categories (Men who attend NVCC, who identify as lonely.) The sample size will include 10 to 15 individuals. If the researchers do not have a sizeable amount of subjects, they will also use Snowball Sampling: participating subjects may volunteer other subjects.

To ensure the research complied with all ethical considerations, a written informed consent form was designed in order to gain the subject's consent and to make the subjects aware of the nature of this study.

Data will be collected during interviews. Within pure phenomenology, the researcher must allow data to emerge, so there can be a structured questionnaire but the questions should be open ended. Due to the fact that this will be a phenomenological study with a questionnaire, structured questions will be used to spark conversation. It is crucial in this type of research that the interviewers suppress their own biases and predispositions and allow the subject to speak freely.

The data capturing process will consist of a recording of the interview and notes taken while the recording is analyzed. Finally, the explication of the data collected was based on Hycner's (1999) explication process. The term explication is investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole.



## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### Sampling Design

*Purposive:* The study uses a purposive sampling design. The first step in the sampling design is to select the participants who will be used in the study. In doing this, only those who are men, and are students on campus, were selected. There are fifteen men participating, all who commute to NOVA Loudoun Campus. They were split into groups, one of men who were single, the other with those in relationships.

	<b>Group 1 - Single</b>	<b>Group 2 - Partner</b>
<b>Loneliness Definition</b>	Deep, emotional, clear responses	Simplified explanations, tendency toward physical aloneness instead of mental
<b>Time Placement</b>	Mixed	Tendency toward busier work and school schedules
<b>Drug/Alcohol Consumption</b>	Almost None	Regular consumption
<b>Teams/Clubs</b>	Not as Physical Clubs (reading, TSA, anime)	Physical Clubs (Football, tennis, theatre)

Fifteen men from NOVA Loudoun Campus were invited to the study and informed thoroughly on its details. Those who found the details to be good agreed, and signed a consent form. After which the *Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) Loneliness Phenomenon Questionnaire* was applied via a conversational interview.

The researchers conducted unstructured, phenomenological interviews, which were recorded. Interviews took between 4 minutes and 10 minutes. After which the researchers interpreted the data received, searching for the sought out knowledge and information on and related to loneliness. After which, the data from all of the interviews were measured and certain common elements found in relation to the theme.

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### **Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation**

#### *Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) Loneliness Phenomenon*

*Questionnaire* was created by four students attending Northern Virginia Community College. This questionnaire was created with the intent to investigate the problem of lonely men on campus. It was formed with questions independently generated from the four NVCC student researchers. The structured questions are worded in a way that will allow for the subjects to expand upon their personal experiences. Each interview will have varying content due to the fact that each subject will have varying experiences with loneliness.

### **Field Testing**

The questionnaires were tested on a few people that fit the criteria: they were college males.

The original instrument before field testing is presented in figure 1.

#### **Figure 1**

#### **The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men Attending NVCC Questionnaire**

1. How often do you feel unhappy?
2. Do you play video games often?
3. How much time do you spend on the computer per day?
4. How many sexual encounters have you have since coming to NVCC?
5. How much alcohol have you consumed since coming to NVCC?
6. Have you ever seen a psychiatrist before?
7. How would you best describe loneliness?
8. Were you apart of any clubs or teams in high school?

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

9. Were you planning on coming to NVCC originally or a university (if so, which one)?
10. Do you live alone/ with family/ roommate?
11. How would you describe your relationships with classmates/professors?
12. Are you on any prescribed medication?
13. How many hours do you work per week?
14. How many hours do you dedicate to studying/school work?
15. How would you describe your relationship with your coworkers?
16. How many hours do you spend with friends per week?
17. How would you describe your relationship with close friends/family?
18. What do you spend your free time on? (What are your hobbies and interests?)
19. On average, how much sleep do you get per night?
20. Do you ever just “feel tired/ have no energy” throughout the day?
21. Have you ever experienced loneliness before?

After field testing the original questionnaire, we realized some of the questions were somewhat repetitive and covered the same ground. Because the interviews will be recorded, we found it more convenient to condense the original questionnaire to a smaller set of questions that participants could answer more open-endedly. We also found that the order of the questions could be revised so the questionnaire begins with more general questions to propel the participant’s thought process forward.

The revised questions are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2****The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men Attending NVCC Questionnaire****Loneliness Based on Opinion**

1. How would you best describe loneliness?
2. How often do you feel unhappy?

**Time Management**

3. How much time do you spend on the computer/ Play video games per day?
4. How many hours do you spend per week? (At school, home, and work)(Based on these hours, do you have time to enjoy hobbies/ interests)

**Personal Habits**

5. How many sexual encounters have you had since coming to NVCC?
6. How much alcohol/drugs have you consumed since coming to NVCC?

**Precollege**

7. Have you ever seen a psychiatrist before?
8. Were you apart of any clubs or teams in high school?
9. Were you planning on coming to NVCC originally or a university (if so, which one)?

**Social life**

10. Do you live alone? With family? Roommate?
11. How would you describe your relationships? ( At school, home, work)

**Self-Health**

12. Are you on any prescribed medication?
13. On average, how much sleep do you get per night?

14. Do you ever just “feel tired? Have no energy? Throughout the day?”

### **Data Analysis Plan and Procedures**

According to Hycner, the term “analysis” is avoided in phenomenological research because it means breaking the data into parts (often resulting in loss of the whole phenomenon). Instead, the term explication is favored because it implies “investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (1999, p.161)

According to Hycner’s (1999) explication process, the five steps are:

- *Bracketing and phenomenological reduction*

The researcher “brackets” own personal views or preconceptions “in a sense that in its regard no position is taken either for or against” (Lauer, 1958, p. 49), the researcher’s own presuppositions and not allowing the researcher’s meanings and interpretations or theoretical concepts to enter the unique world of the informant/participant (Creswell, 1998, pp. 54 & 113; Moustakas, 1994, p. 90; Sadala & Adorno, 2001).

- *Delineating units of meaning*

This is a critical process in the explicating of phenomenological data in which the statements in the given interviews that shed light on the phenomenon (loneliness in NVCC students) are extracted and “delineated” (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999).

- *Clustering of units of meaning to form themes*

After examining the list of “delineated units”, certain themes may be explicated to further progress our phenomenological study. ). “Particularly in this step is the phenomenological researcher engaged in something which cannot be precisely

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

delineated, for here he is involved in that ineffable thing known as creative insight” (Hycner, 1999, pp. 150-151).

- *Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary, modifying it*

A summary that incorporates all the units and themes elicited from the data to give a holistic context. The researcher conducts a ‘validity check’ by returning to the participant to ensure the proper essence of the interview has been correctly ‘captured’ (Hycner, 1999, p. 154).

- *Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary*

After completing the first four processes, the researcher looks “for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154).

Common themes may have significant differences and minority voices are important counterpoints in the process of phenomenological research.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

The experiment suffers from the following limitations: sample size, self-reported data.

The sample size is affected by the location (Northern Virginia Community College) which limits our available sample pool. Time is another limitation imposed on this research study as it is being conducted and concluded in one semester’s (Fall 2015) time.

Another limitation is that the data will be qualitative and participants may exaggerate experiences.

### **Internal and External Validity**

The external validity is the ability of the study to be generalized, while the internal validity is how well the study is actually preformed. The internal and external validity are

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

impacted greatly by the limitations of the study, but the guidelines detailed in the research proposal are worthy of future pursuit.

### **Expected Findings**

The hypothesis states that there will be a valid percentage of college males that identify as lonely. The underlying idea is that a large percentage of college students overall are lonely, but this study is limited only to men.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During the course of this study, no participants will be at physical risk. The ethical considerations will follow the Code of Conduct (Ethics Code) and the American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists. Due to the nature of the study, the participant's wellbeing and confidentiality is of top priority. The participants will be informed about the nature of the study and its purpose overall. Stated in the consent form, participants will be able to withdraw at any given time from the study and have their information destroyed. All recordings of the participants will be destroyed after the data has been analyzed.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of the research study is to investigate the phenomenon on the Northern Virginia Community College pertaining to loneliness. Through this research, we hope to help expose loneliness as an ongoing problem among college men and possibly gain insight on how it may be impacting male NVCC students and their general performance. The ultimate purpose of this study is to identify the common themes to inhibit this "loneliness" phenomenon.

## **Chapter 4**

### **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

#### **Research Findings and Discussion**

##### **Interview Analysis**

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of loneliness and how it affects men on the college level. The specific aim of the researchers is to describe the phenomenon of college male loneliness and how this can affect their psychological wellbeing. For this reason, two groups were contrasted; subjects in group one were not in a romantic relationship; subjects in group two were currently in a romantic relationship.

The subjects were asked various questions that would give the researchers more insight into their personal lives and possibly help understand the phenomenon of loneliness better. They all had various definitions of the term loneliness; ranging from physically being alone to a more emotional perspective. Most of the subjects mentioned being involved in a group or team during high school. The two groups were divided on whether to go to Nova originally or to go to a different college.

##### **Narratives**

##### **Personal Definition of loneliness**

##### **Group 1: Subjects not currently in a romantic relationship**

Subject 1

*“Loneliness is like being alone or by yourself”*



## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### Subject 2

*“ahhh let’s see, well in a simple term, feeling like you’re alone, even if you’re in an area completely surrounded by people, you still feel as if you’re the only one in a room. I guess the best kind of analogy would be, you’re in this box and its dark and you’re completely alone. It’s kind of like death in a feeling”*

### Subject 3

*“Loneliness, I would say loneliness is more not described by how you feel, but oneself, you could be around many people, it’s not just a physical thing, it’s more of a feeling”*

### Subject 4

*“Feeling like you cannot connect, not only being alone.”*

### **Analysis and Summary of Themes**

While there definitions differ in specifics, all of the subjects are in agreement that loneliness can be connected to being alone. Subjects two and three both mention that an individual can be surrounded by people and still feel alone. Subject four mentions that being alone is when a person feels like they cannot connect with others and that it is not only about the people around you. These thoughts are slightly contrasted by Subject one, who states that loneliness is like being alone or by yourself. Subjects two, three, and four see loneliness from a more emotional or mental perspective, while Subject 1 sees it from a literal or physical perspective.

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### **Group 2: Currently in a relationship**

#### Subject 1

*“I think, I think the misconception of loneliness is that people feel like or think that you need to be alone, like you need to be by yourself to be alone but I think more to me loneliness be in a room full of people but like still feel like out of the picture. I guess. If that makes sense”*

#### Subject 2

*“You know not having anyone to talk to when you need, that’s how I would describe it”*

#### Subject 3

*“With nobody with you I suppose”*

#### Subject 4

*“I think um someone who feels loneliness has nowhere to turn, it at a dead end, is at rock bottom, and has no way to get out. I think loneliness is temporary, and it just takes time for the solution to pop up, but that temporary time of rock bottom or sorrow-ness is called loneliness.”*

### **Analysis and Summary of Themes**

Unlike group one, group two’s definitions mostly differ in content. Subjects one and four believe that loneliness is deeper than physically being alone, while subjects two and three see it as mostly physical. For subject two specifically, loneliness is when an individual has an issue and has no one to speak to. Subject four agrees with this to a point, stating that when someone feels lonely, that person has nowhere to turn and is at a dead end. The

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

difference is that Subject four sees an end to loneliness and that it is only temporary, while Subject two does not. Subject one feels that there is a preconceived notion that loneliness is only physical, and that true loneliness more than having no one to talk to.

When looking at the answers from both groups one and two, the differences are clear: group one focused mostly on deeper meaning behind loneliness while group two were split between physically being alone and deeper meaning behind loneliness. Excluding Subject one, all of group two mentioned not having a person to confide in as a cause or symptom of loneliness. The value of having another person who can understand ones problems is important. This statement can be expected though, because group two was comprised of subjects who were in romantic relationships. This idea was never mentioned specifically by group one, all of whom were not in a romantic relationship.

### **Time Management (Hours spent per week)**

#### **Group 1**

Subject 1

*“How many hours do I spend at home, ahhh I’d say about roughly around, like a rough around average 18 hours apart”*

Subject 2

*“School – 5-6hrs Home (2-3hours on campus?) 1:40m) Work – 15hrs”*

Subject 3

*“Work 28hrs a week, school about a class every few days, home the rest of time”*

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### **Analysis and Summary of Themes**

In this specific category, all subjects' answers varied: times at home ranged from 134 to two while times at work ranged from 15 to twenty-eight (28). It is important to notice that Subject one did not mention a job, but is out of the house for about eighteen (18) hours. This time could be spent at Nova or with friends, but that is unclear from his response.

### **Group 2**

#### Subject 1

*“Umm, probably like uh about an 8 hour week schedule. One class each day, hour an half each long. I tend to usually go home just around the time when I go to sleep but mostly I’m out, with friends or at somebodies house playing games or something like that.( and at work) yeah, like 25 -35 hours a week”*

#### Subject 2

*“70% AT SCHOOL or work.”*

#### Subject 3

*“21 credits for school, round 2 or three hours for each credit for each class, on top of SGA all the meetings, here at least 40-50 hours a week. I go home to sleep and eat dinner when I can. 40 hours of work in week”*

### **Analysis and Summary of Themes**

All of the subjects spend a majority of their days either at work or at Nova. Subject three dedicates 40 to 50 hours to Nova per week while Subject one only dedicates eight hours.

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

Subject two's response is a bit broad in seventy (70) percent but the sentiment is clear. It is interesting to notice that the subjects who spent the most time at work or school were from group two; in relationships. It could be assumed that they would dedicate a good percent of their week with their significant other, but that is not the case. This is contrasted by group one, who mostly spend their time at home.

### **Amount of Alcohol/Drugs consumed sense coming to Nova**

#### **Group 1**

Subject 1

*"Ahhh, coming to nova I've consumed none, but I've had maybe 2 beers at home. That's pretty much it though"*

Subject 2

*"No not really"*

Subject 3

*"No I haven't"*

#### **Group 2**

Subject 1

*"Umm, say like, maybe like every other weekend by buddies will go and have a good time"*

Subject 2

*"I could not tell you. I have no idea I don't keep track"*

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

Subject 3

*“No drugs, lots of alcohol”*

### **Analysis and Summary of Themes**

Subjects from group one mostly stayed away from drugs and alcohol. With the only exception being Subject one, who had maybe two beers at home. This is contrasted heavily by group two, who all seemed to drink regularly. Subject two stated that he could not tell me the exact amount of alcohol he had consumed since coming to Nova.

### **Clubs or Teams in High School**

#### **Group 1**

Subject 1

*“Yes, Track team”*

Subject 2

*“part of any clubs or teams in high school... ahhh, I tried to join a few clubs in high school but, none of them really peeked my interests ahhh, so I'd say no”*

Subject 3

*“Yes. First club reading club, literature battle next, TSA, which was technology students association. Anime club. Creative lit”*

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### **Group 2**

#### Subject 1

*“Yes, (a lot of them) yep, I mean I was in theater for like all of high school”*

#### Subject 2

*“I was a part of football team, track team, and that’s it”*

#### Subject 3

*“Yes, baseball team”*

### **Analysis and Summary of Themes**

Most subjects from group one and group two had been involved with clubs or teams during their time in high school. Both groups had a member participate on the track team, but that is where the similarities end. Group one’s clubs were less physically demanding than group two’s. One subject of group one had been involved in Reading club, Technology Students Association, and Anime club, while members of group two had been involved in football, baseball, and theater.

### **Overall summary of Findings**

Throughout this study, each of the subjects had their own definition of loneliness that ranged from physically being separated from one’s peers, to not being able to connect with others and feeling like that disconnect is eternal. When comparing the two groups, group one’s responses felt more focused on the disconnect from others; feeling as if other people might not understand you and that the severity of this feeling can be

## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

compared to death. Group two, the group that had subjects who were in relationships, saw loneliness in a slightly different light; they agreed that loneliness in a severe state is not good, but they felt that loneliness was a lack of a person to confide in and not just people in general. The loneliness group two was speaking of was based on the idea of not having a loved one to go home to or spend their free time with; the person in their life that they love and can trust. A difference between group's one and two was to be expected, but their general thoughts on loneliness were so divided on the aspect of having a connection with a specific person verses having a connection with a group of people that it needed to be stated.

When asked about time management, subjects from group two spent most of their week either at work or at Nova. Subject two stated that they spent seventy (70) percent of their time either at school or at work. Subjects one and three spend around eight hours per week on classes at Nova; subject three dedicates forty (40) to fifty (50) hours a week to the Student Government Association (SGA) while subject one spends most of his free time with friends. This is contrasted by group one, who's subjects mostly spent their time at home. Subject three works twenty-eight (28) hours a week and has two to three one hour classes a week, the rest of his week is spent at home. Subject one dedicates eighteen (18) hours per week to an unmentioned activity while the rest that time is spent at home. Subject two dedicates fifteen (15) hours to work, five to six hours to school, and the remanding week to home. It is significant to state that subjects from group two spend a majority of their time at either Nova or work and not with their romantic partners. It was to be expected that subjects from group one spent most of their time at home, but subject one's unaccountable time is interesting.



## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

When asked about the group's alcohol and drug consumption since coming to Nova, the groups differed heavily in response. Subject two from group two stated that he could not remember how much he had consumed of either due to him not keeping track. Subject's one and three both admit to drinking alcohol on a normal basis, but subject three denies taking any drugs. Apart from Subject one, all of group one had not taken drugs or alcohol since coming to Nova. Subject one had a few beers with his family, but nothing above that. The contrast between the two groups is interesting due to subjects in group two being in relationships and consuming alcohol, while subjects in group one were not in relationships and did not consume alcohol.

Members from both groups recalled being involved with clubs or teams during their high school years. Subjects from group two named track, football, baseball, and theater as groups they had collectively been involved in. Group one recalled track, reading, literature battle, technology students association, anime, and creative literature as their collective clubs of choice. While both groups named track as a club, the rest of their choices differ in content. Group one's clubs were less physically demanding and required less of a united effort when compared to group two's clubs. Aside from track, literature battle and TSA, the clubs from group one are mostly teams that would meet to converse on their respective topics while the teams from group two focused on working together to achieve a common goal.

## **Chapter 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Gaps in Understanding and the Research**

The research provided a good understanding of loneliness on a whole, but it did leave a few questions. Because this was a phenomenological study, the subject's responses could not be measured in the way that chemicals could be measured; it would need to be interpreted deeply. This is technically a flaw due to the nature of this study; the researchers are interpreting the answers given to specific questions given to subjects. It is possible that the answers and information given could be misinterpreted. The questions could also be misinterpreted by the subject, and the answers given would be skewed due to that misinterpretation. Another issue that might affect this study would be the subject's definition of loneliness and how a man should behave. Although the definition is changing, the majority of college men believe that a man must be big and strong; they are taught to not be lonely and not how to deal with being lonely.

#### **Summary of Key Findings**

Ultimately the researchers came to the conclusion that loneliness was less of a "diseased" emotion to be avoided, but rather an experience which simply would occur. Most notably of the study participants was the difference between single and those with a partner. Those with a partner tended to present dumbed down, simplistic explanations of loneliness, and tended not to be lonely, and overall not as emotionally engaged by the questions and conversation. By comparison those who were single offered a much deeper, clear perspective on loneliness, and were much more emotionally engaged.

**Implications and Recommendations for Further Study**

The study seems to imply a few things. Firstly, that loneliness is not, as considered by traditional values, a “bad” emotion, but rather has a role to play in lives from time to time. Secondly, there seemed to be an implied relationship: Those who were currently feeling or experiencing loneliness had a much clearer image of what exactly it was, and its purpose. Even when they were not directly experiencing it, but were enduring an alone-ness, being single, this relationship was present.

As for recommendations the researchers strongly feel the need for a larger study, which may further open the door to understanding in this area. They also agree that a longer, more detailed survey and more time for conversation would provide better detailed responses and hence, better understanding, of the intricate relationship between men and loneliness.

### References

- Bryman & R.G. Burgess (Eds.), *Qualitative research* (Vol. 3, pp. 143- 164). London: Sage.
- Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkley, L. C., Crawford, L. E., Ernst, J. M., Burleson, M. H., Kowalewski, R. B., ... & Berntson, G. G. (2002). Loneliness and health: Potential mechanisms. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *64*(3), 407-417.
- College. (n.d.). Retrieved October 22, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/college>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S. E., Golberstein, E., & Hefner, J. L. (2007). Prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among university students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *77*(4), 534-542.
- Grasgreen, A. (2012). Colleges don't always help with mental health issues, student survey shows. *Inside Higher Education*.
- Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic concepts for qualitative research*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.
- Hycner, R.H. (1999). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. In A.
- Knox, D., Vail-Smith, K., & Zusman, M. (2007). The Lonely College Male. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 273-279.
- Lauer, Q. (1958). *Phenomenology: Its genesis and prospects*. New York: Harper.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

- Mushtaq, R., Shoib, S., Shah, T., & Mushtaq, S. (2014). Relationship Between Loneliness, Psychiatric Disorders and Physical Health ? A Review on the Psychological Aspects of Loneliness. *Journal Of Clinical & Diagnostic Research*, 8(9),14.doi:10.7860/JCDR/2014/10077.488
- Payne, Wayne Leon (1985). A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence; Self-Integration; Relating to Fear, Pain and Desire. Dissertation, The Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities
- Sadala, M. L. A., & Adorno, R. deC. F. (2001). Phenomenology as a method to investigate the experiences lived.: A perspective from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's thought. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 37(3), 282-293
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, cognition and personality*, 9(3), 185-211.
- Singh, R. N.. (1991). Loneliness: Dynamics, Dimensions and Many Faces. *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 21(1), 109–120. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41420990>
- Somerville, L. H., Whalen, P. J., & Kelley, W. M. (2010). Human bed nucleus of the stria terminalis indexes hypervigilant threat monitoring. *Biological psychiatry*, 68(5), 416-424.
- Vanhalst, J., Luyckx, K., Teppers, E., & Goossens, L. (2012). Disentangling the Longitudinal Relation Between Loneliness and Depressive Symptoms: Prospective Effects and the Intervening Role of Coping. *Journal Of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 31(8), 810-834. doi:10.1521/jscp.2012.31.8.810

The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

Weitzman, E. R. (2004). Poor mental health, depression, and associations with alcohol consumption, harm, and abuse in a national sample of young adults in college.

*The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 192(4), 269-277.

Wols, A., Scholte, R., & Qualter, P. (n.d.). Prospective associations between loneliness and emotional intelligence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 40-48.

Wright, K. B., King, S., & Rosenberg, J. (2014). Functions of Social Support and Self Verification in Association with Loneliness, Depression, and Stress. *Journal Of Health Communication*, 19(1), 82-99. doi:10.1080/10810730.2013.798385

## **Appendix**

Informed Consent

Data Collection Instrument

The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men Attending NVCC  
Release Form for Use of Photograph/Video Recording

Kyani Alcin, Joseph Hsu, Nick Smith, and Benjamin Cressey, Researches  
Dr. Rosalyn M. King, Professor  
Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences  
Northern Virginia Community College, Loudoun Campus  
NovaProject215@yahoo.com

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby give my permission to the researchers to use any photos or video recording material taken of myself during [his or her] research on The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men Attending NVCC. The photos and videotape material will only be used for research purposes and for the presentation of the research. The information will be analyzed for further interpretation. I understand that the researchers have permission to edit video footage or select photos as they see fit. I understand that my name, likeness and other identifying information will be incorporated as part of the research. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for photos or video footage of me to be used in this research project. To protect my privacy, all recordings and photos will be destroyed after data is obtained. The information you provide will not be shared with anyone. If I do not withdraw my permission, I understand that my permission is given in perpetuity (without a concluding date). I understand that I will not be compensated for the use of my likeness unless agreed upon as part of the larger research project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men attending NVCC

### **The Self-Assessment of Loneliness Amongst Men Attending NVCC Questionnaire**

#### **Loneliness Based on Opinion**

1. How would you best describe loneliness?
2. How often do you feel unhappy?

#### **Time Management**

3. How much time do you spend on the computer/ Play video games per day?
4. How many hours do you spend per week? (At school, home, and work)(Based on these hours, do you have time to enjoy hobbies/ interests)

#### **Personal Habits**

5. How many sexual encounters have you have since coming to NVCC?
6. How much alcohol/drugs have you consumed since coming to NVCC?

#### **Precollege**

7. Have you ever seen a psychiatrist before?
8. Were you apart of any clubs or teams in high school?
9. Were you planning on coming to NVCC originally or a university (if so, which one)?

#### **Social life**

10. Do you live alone/ with family/ roommate?
11. How would you describe your relationships? ( At school, home, work)

#### **Self-Health**

12. Are you on any prescribed medication?
13. On average, how much sleep do you get per night?
14. Do you ever just “feel tired/ have no energy” throughout the day?