

Loneliness, my colleague

I have spent much of my life knowing i am lonely and that very same amount of time thinking that I know that it's just me with this feeling. The feelings of loneliness thrive on rejection, real or perceived so I started doing the very thing that loneliness does not want you to do. I started talking to other people. I can't say I feel much less lonely, or much better but I can say that I was wrong. I'm not the only person with that overbearing feeling of solitude. Not even close. In fact, virtually everyone feels lonely. Unbearably so. I've learned that my lonely voice might never go away but it isn't even half as loud when I talk to other people.

Loneliness and wallowing and dare i say self pity are helpful to me from time to time. They allow me to sit in the worst parts of myself, releasing inhibitions that when kept pent up can make you very sick. I know that sickness very well. In lock down I didn't have a bad time, I loved it but the second lockdown was far from similar. The experiences were about as close as 21st cousins. Theres no very artsy or clever way to say this so I'll just say it. I got incredibly depressed. My OCD presented in the most intense, disturbing way I've ever experienced even now. I don't know what triggered what, but I was fine one day and then the next I woke up and Auntie Snix was back in a way she hadn't been before. I read once that it is good to name the bullying bit of your brain so it's something separate from you and since I am unbearable and an ex-theatre kid, I named mine after Santana Lopez's alter ego in Glee. A few months into this episode the actor who played Santana passed away, Naya Rivera. A little parasocial, I can admit but I felt a sense of survivor's guilt. I hadn't yet recovered from my latest encounter with auntie snix but I was making my way through it. I'm sure I'd have come up with a different name for her if I hadn't been a Gleek (told you I'm unbearable), but I doubt it would've felt as right. I felt guilt about using something of Naya's to survive in a time when I didn't believe I deserved to live but she had a little boy who needed her and she wasn't afforded survival. I think that was my strangest feeling of loneliness. I couldn't watch that show for comfort anymore as I would inevitably end up in a weird, unreasonable state of grief. I feel guilty just writing this, what I felt couldn't even hold a candle to what anyone who knew her went through. I think that's a part of loneliness. It can cause very weird feelings that you don't really know what to do with and they don't really have anywhere to go. It's very clever in that way, forms its own vicious vacuum. A finger trap, the more you try to resist the more embedded you become. It never stops or gives up but it becomes manageable when you wave a white flag and accept its presence.

Eventually (with 20mg daily of my beloved SSRI and a loyalty card to CAMHS), I got out of my funk. I cut ties with Auntie Snix. And I acknowledged that I was being fucking

weird about the whole thing. Labelling my ocd and depression helped and auntie snix was the perfect name for her. There's some things you can't wrap your head around when you're experiencing loneliness in 4D with surround sound and when you get back to just that regular almost natural loneliness (loneliness lite, if you will) it can be really tempting to punish yourself for whatever weird and nonsensical and borderline nutso thing you might've convinced yourself of in that time. Like a pervy sailor being tempted into the water by a siren taking off her shell bra, Auntie Snix was desperate to lure me back to her. She promised me comfort because even if it made me pray to any god that would listen that I wouldn't wake in the morning at least it was something I knew. At least things would already be bad so I wouldn't be in constant fear of having that huge switch from fine to being an empty vessel again. I had gotten used to my constant state of being so low I felt that I was being buried, much further than the typical six feet, it felt safe. The kind of safety that only loneliness is willing to provide you with.

When you get that temptation, it would be a lot easier to go back to it. It is safe, it is comfortable, but you can't have anything else outside of it. You have to turn the sexy mermaid away because, as gorgeous as she looks, she has no problem gouging your eyes out and eating insides of your body you didn't even know existed. There's a lot of talk right from childhood about treating others how you would like to be treated, a lot about loving thy neighbour but there's not much about being loving thy self. I imagine that's at least a little due to the very British tradition of hating yourself and being polite to people you hate and gossip about behind their backs.

I have come to realise that you have a duty to part ways with the toxic comfort of loneliness. It can still come around from time to time, but it needs to be more of a colleague that works in a different office that you only see at the company christmas party and less of a best friend so close they're in your nana's will. But you have a duty to keep it at that. If there is anyone in the world that you care for, you owe it to them to love thy self even when you're lonely.

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