Special Issue: Feminist Loneliness Studies
Guest Edited by Shoshana Magnet and Celeste E. Orr

Outline of Theme

To date, there remains no comprehensive feminist analysis of the structural conditions that both produce and intensify experiences of loneliness. This special issue aims to remedy this gap. That is, this issue seeks to address what a Feminist Loneliness Studies can contribute to understanding the complexities of this complicated emotion. For example, what is the unique loneliness of the feminist killjoy who calls out, or calls in, existing forms of queerphobia, racism, and sexism? What does it mean to be a politicized person and how does that result in both alienation and isolation? What might the relationship be between white supremacy and loneliness? How is loneliness both individual and systemic, and what is the relationship between the two? What distinctive forms of loneliness are created by ableism, sanism, neoliberalism, capitalism, globalization, and the gig economy? Ought loneliness be avoided at all costs? What are the ethics of loneliness?

This special issue will unpack and theorize the potential perils and generative possibilities offered up by this profound emotion. What deep human needs does loneliness feed and, in turn, what human needs remain unfulfilled as a result? Is there a relationship between loneliness and feminist action and, if so, how might we seek to understand that relationship? Establishing a Feminist Loneliness Studies in this special issue will provide us with the space we need to begin addressing and comprehending loneliness.

Justification

Described as one of the most significant public health challenges of our time, loneliness is on the rise. In fact, according to the National Health Service, loneliness increases the risk of premature death by approximately 30% (NHS; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton 2010). While ill health is often assumed to be one of the primary causes of loneliness, there is good evidence that loneliness causes ill health (NHS). In other words, so many of us are missing those crucial, mysterious, or, in Adrienne Rich's terms, alchemic relations with others: "[t]he possibilities that exist between two people, or among a group of people, are a kind of alchemy. They are the most interesting thing in life" (Rich 1995: 270).

Distinguished from solitude, loneliness invites many definitions, from, for example, psychology, economics, and health studies. Nevertheless, loneliness is typically characterized by feelings of unwanted aloneness, seclusion, and isolation that result from a lack of meaningful connections with human and nonhuman animals alike (Brown 2010; Willis 2017). While feminists have yet to fully grapple with the meanings, ethics, causes, and consequences of loneliness, research into loneliness proliferates: from the development of a "loneliness scale" at the UCLA, to *Psych Central*'s "The Loneliness Quiz," to memoirs exploring individuals' experiences of loneliness, to research in social work, health, and psychology on the relationship between disconnection and loneliness (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980; Grohol 2018; Btoen, Cacoppp, and Patrick 2008; White 2010; Barthes 2010; Cheever 2008; Frie 2017).

While alienation is a definitive feature of capitalism, post-industrialism and (economic) precariousness exacerbates alienation from one's self, family, friends, and community by demanding workers be flexible, mobile, and never completely "unplugged" from work (Jameson 2003). From neoliberal discourses that emphasize hyper-individuality and often reduce communication with people outside of work, to online self-promotion and branding, to economic precarity and poverty, to cultural shifts in families and relationships, to new forms of information and communication

technologies, various structural forces facilitate staying home by oneself (or at least detached from people one shares a home with), rather than venturing out into the world.

In fact, given these structural forces and increasing metrics on loneliness, some governments are taking action. For example, the UK appointed a Loneliness Minister (Tracey Crouch), effectively confirming that loneliness is a serious public health problem worthy of governmental intervention. That being said, we cannot ignore the connection between governmental totalitarianism and loneliness. Journalist Maria Popova, drawing from Hannah Arendt, details that loneliness is the necessary emotional precondition to the rise of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism necessitates that "people have lost contact with their fellow men (sic) as well as the reality around them; for together with these contacts, men (sic) lose the capacity of both experience and thought" (Popova 2016: n.p.). In other words, "[l]oneliness is personal, and it is also political. Loneliness is collective" (Laing 2016: 439). With the continued presence and rise of totalitarian and alt-right regimes all over the globe, the concern with loneliness ought to be theorized and examined more thoroughly.

In addition to critically examining the organizational structures that produce loneliness at epidemic levels, this special issue will also think creatively about feminist possibilities for combatting, living with, and thinking differently about loneliness. What role do queer, feminist re-imaginings of the family – including broadening familial structures through the inclusion of chosen families – have in challenging loneliness? How do co-housing initiatives grow out of feminist cohabitation and economic precarity, and how might these initiatives shape different relationships to loneliness? How do disability, trans, and intersex studies and activist collectives combat loneliness? What are the productive possibilities of loneliness? And, what is the relationship of loneliness to art practice and creativity?

Possible Topics
Possible topics might include but are not limited to:
- How do globalized forms of capitalism structure loneliness?
- How do contemporary forms of racism structure loneliness?
- How does the prison industrial complex function as a loneliness-machine?
- How does the logic of elimination defining settler-colonialism undermine Indigenous philosophies and knowledges concerning community?
- Are loneliness and solitude so different, or is the border between the two experiences/emotions more porous than we would like to think?
- What can an understanding of emotional justice contribute to a Feminist Loneliness Studies?
- Feminist Killjoys and loneliness
- What are the complex relationships between social media and loneliness
- What are the ethics of loneliness?
- Poverty, economic precariousness, and loneliness
- Loneliness in and about LGBTQI, mad, and disabled communities
- Loneliness, debility, and (slow) death
- Alienation, Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), and incels (involuntary celibates)
- Totalitarian and alt-right regimes and loneliness
- Combatting and living with loneliness
- Loneliness, pets, and nonhuman animals
- Medicalization, pathologization, and loneliness

Submissions
We invite authors, academics, activists, and artists to submit manuscripts (6,000-8,000 words) accompanied by an abstract (300 words) and keywords by **15 November 2019**. Please entitle the email subject as "Manuscript Submission: Special Issue on Feminist Loneliness Studies."

Please submit manuscripts to both Shoshana Magnet (smagnet@uottawa.ca) and Celeste E. Orr (corr@stlawu.edu)

For more information on *Feminist Theory*, including the journal's style guide, can be found at https://journals.sagepub.com/home/fty