THE SCALES OF LONELINESS

A roundtable discussion with Husna Ara, Fred Cooper, Jess Cotton and David Vincent

The people taking part in this discussion are academics and journalists who have written on loneliness in both a UK and international context. Part of our aim in this discussion is to reflect on some of the common assumptions about loneliness, and to historicise how loneliness has been responded to in the past decade, particularly in the context of COVID-19. We reflect on the usefulness of loneliness as a cultural and social term, and the difficulty of establishing a general language for an emotional state that has such varied and expansive meanings. We also wanted to put some pressure on the common assumption either that technology generates loneliness or that technology can provide catch-all solutions for the lonely. Given that loneliness scales are seen by many to take the measure of loneliness, we discuss the limitations of these scales as well as thinking of such an emotional state within the framework of an epidemic. We talk about the ways that loneliness is thought of structurally, and the ways that it is individualised as personal feeling.

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Jess: I wanted to start our conversation by asking everyone, quite simply, how you define loneliness. A basic question, but an important one nevertheless, it seems to me. When I was reading your work, some of the phrases that I come back to, I might have slightly misremembered this, Fred, but I think you talk about loneliness as a kind of unbelonging, or unattachment – I think there's a different word that you use, a state of abandonment perhaps – but it was this sense of not being part of something that resonated with me. David, I think at some point you talk about loneliness as a state of failed solitude, and Husna, you talk about a state of chronic loneliness that we're in as a way of theorising a loneliness that is socially produced without necessarily speaking in the language of crisis. How do you understand this word, and how has your research shifted your understanding of this topic?

Husna: I'm more interested in the social dimensions of it, but what really struck me was reading Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, who did research on how people become quite cognitively diminished when they're chronically lonely. Through interviewing patients with schizophrenia she arrives at a sense that loneliness is characterised by a sense of catastrophe in that people feel that they will never have meaningful interpersonal relationships again, so it's this idea – hopefulness and openness towards other people and our interactions with them – that I'm interested in.

One of the definitions that I try and hash out in the *New Internationalist*

is this idea of the difference between the relationships we have and the relationships we want, but I wouldn't insist on that distinction because there is always going to be space between the relationships we want and what is going on in our lives.

David: In my work on solitude, as you say, I define loneliness as failed solitude. By that I meant that the experience of solitude and loneliness match each other – that they arise from the same withdrawal from sociability. In the case of solitude, it's a managed withdrawal that enables individuals to make their way back to sociability whenever they wish. Whereas, in the case of loneliness, people find themselves unable to move back. They're either forced into loneliness, or the roads back into sociability are blocked for some reason or another. I was keen to treat the experiences as belonging to each other and to show that the key issue is not so much the direct experience, but the capacity to move between being by yourself and being in company, and why, for whatever reason, that movement breaks down. The question is then why the strategies for withdrawal escape your capacity to manage them.

Fred: I'd say I'm interested in *how* we define loneliness, but I'm also really interested in *why* we define it in certain ways, and how that then relates to specific sets of assumptions about how the world works or how people work. One of the reasons that loneliness really eludes a nice clean definition is because it's an idea that's under quite a lot of strain, in terms of different political uses and understandings and other kinds of contestation; and also just because it is used for this vast array of qualitatively different experiences.

One of the things I'm always really struck by in Frieda Fromm-Reichmann's work is that a lot of the time she's talking about this really entrenched, acute, or chronic loneliness that's probably beyond most of the ways we think of loneliness as an everyday emotion. She's writing about schizophrenic or catatonic states – the kind of extreme loneliness that can only be communicated through hand signals – and I sometimes struggle to think of that really extreme experience as being in any way analogous to much more common or everyday experiences of loneliness, which are still a huge problem. Surely we're talking about something different when we're talking about these experiences? So, I think I see it as an idea that's not big enough to contain all the different meanings that we put it in, and I'm interested in why we think of some things as loneliness and other things as not, and what effect defining an experience as loneliness has.

One of the articles I return to again and again is this brilliant essay by the nursing theorist Janet Younger, 'The Alienation of the Sufferer'.[1] She posits this fascinating scale that goes from connectedness through to solitude and then to loneliness but then to deeper states of alienation and estrangement that incorporate feelings of hostility and resentment and try to understand what happens when people don't really want to be connected anymore. There

1. Janet Younger, 'The Alienation of the Sufferer', *Advances in Nursing Science*, 17:4, 1995, pp53-72.

are some terms which probably do a better job of representing how people feel in extreme states of loneliness than loneliness itself does.

Husna: Do you mean psychosis?

Fred: As a way of speaking about loneliness?

Husna: Yes.

Fred: If you say that to a psychiatrist now, that may not go down well – the psychoses are very well-established diagnostically – but if you go back seventy or eighty years, you have people very much not on the margins talking about psychosis as an extreme state of isolation. Some of the earlier work on schizophrenia (for younger people) and dementia (for older people) approaches them not just as clinical entities, but as what can happen to the human mind without the connections to fix it either in relation to other people, or in linear time. It's a far more difficult position to take now, but there's something in that way of looking at the mind – and the self – in relation to others that can get missed in strict disease models.

David: I think the problem that Fred is wrestling with – which is essentially one of degree – is critical and is really badly handled at the moment. In my current book I pick up the work of Vivek Murthy, who is the chief spokesman for loneliness in the USA. He wrote the book, *Together: Loneliness, Health and What Happens When We Find Connection*,[2] where he makes large claims for the scale of loneliness. When you track back to the research he is citing it turns out that it collapses those who view it as a major problem, those who view it as a minor problem, and those who view it as a problem which doesn't matter. In the UK, just 5 per cent of the population, and in the USA 4 per cent, belonged to the first category, where serious suffering might be taking place

There is an argument that loneliness in our fractured world is an emotion most people have at some point in their lives, and it is not necessarily harmful; it's just an experience that they factor into the process of changing jobs or lovers or homes. There are areas of deep psychological suffering which really are important, but the claim for an epidemic of loneliness merges all these categories into one, in a way that is extremely unhelpful in our understanding of what the problem is and what we should do about it.

Fred: I sometimes wonder if something can be a really useful idea for researchers in any number of disciplines, and a radical language of critique, if it's also ubiquitous, in a really flattened form, in popular culture. I write about loneliness and then I cook dinner and I listen to the radio and sometimes it seems as though every song is about romantic loneliness, new or old, and I worry it's become this sanitised, commodified thing which is perhaps in

tension with the critical research or activist work we do, connecting it with big structural problems.

Husna: I think there's a discord between campaigning language which tends to go for the simplest line and communicate to the largest amount of people – in climate justice discourse as well. It's just easier to communicate in ways that are really simplistic and sometimes false, not in every case but probably in the case of loneliness, to say everyone is suffering the same amount, or similar amounts. It's really extreme, but obviously that's not the case. Were you to build a campaign that really targeted the problem areas what would that look like, to try and merge that research in an effective way?

Jess: I wonder too, when we're talking about organising, are we talking about organising around an emotion, or a social condition? What exactly is loneliness, and to what extent are we talking about a withdrawal that is socially imposed or just an individual feeling? It seems to me quite a difficult subject to theorise, and then transform into a politics. The risk of organising around something like loneliness – like the risk that we've seen in the feminist movement of organising around trauma – is that it conflates very disparate states, and by drawing every feeling under an umbrella, you fail to acknowledge the structural differences that condition that feeling. It's hard to find a language that accounts for how socioeconomic resources inform our sense of loneliness, or isolation, or alienation. If these are the difficulties, what might some of the strategies be? Is a loneliness scale – whether it's UCLA or some of the other scales that we've mentioned – a useful way to think?

David: No is the short and long answer. There is absolutely no reason why loneliness can be graded from zero to 100, and that one person's loneliness is at thirty-two and another person's loneliness is at twenty-eight. And beyond that, there is no reason whatsoever why you should regard loneliness in terms of step changes – say four boxes. Those are observer categories, not experiential categories. I think that the quantification of loneliness has been a major misstep. Interestingly, there is little or no quantification of solitude.

There were some attempts to measure loneliness during COVID-19 by the Office for National Statistics and by the UCL survey and, after a small initial rise, there was no change. The lines are horizontally flat across the two years of the pandemic, and that seems to be a finding of some value. Beyond that I think that the whole measurement in those terms is bogus.

Jess: There have been dozens of articles saying that COVID-19 changed loneliness, that living in a state of isolation was damaging on many social and psychological levels. That is the default position. If we're saying that there's been no change, does that shift how we understand loneliness or certainly this perceived crisis of loneliness?

David: I think it doesn't shift our understanding so much as caution us against the use of statistics in that way.

Jess: Maybe there's a difference, then, between states of isolation and states of loneliness? Fred was talking earlier about Janet Younger and the different scale of connectedness – solitude, loneliness, alienation – but perhaps these are all quite different measures. And maybe there is an element of hopefulness in the idea that there wasn't this extreme moment of loneliness that was produced during the pandemic?

Fred: I agree with David completely that the measurement scales for loneliness have just been completely bad and they don't really contribute anything. In fact, I think they do less than nothing because they end up constraining these really rich and deep experiences into a preconceived set of questions that barely touch the sides. And what we get are a set of public discourses on loneliness which then follow these logics rather than the complexities of how people actually feel and why.

I don't know how to separate the question on COVID-19 from my own cognitive dissonance, because surely it must have had an effect. I wonder whether this might have been counterbalanced by more people proactively worrying about and reaching out to their loved ones, but so many fleeting interactions – the kinds of things that really sustain a lot of people, like chats in charity shops – were lost. Whenever I read that there was little or no change, I wonder who gets invited to collaborate on the never-perfect creation of statistics, and whether participation in research – at least in something like these broad social studies – speaks to a certain set of resources which might also be a protective factor. Knowing everything we do about the pandemic and how public health responses to it were organised – asking people, literally, to isolate, but without any significant mental health scaffolding to allow them to do so safely – I find it hard to believe.

David: Rethinking this issue, I looked up the aspirations of the government's Loneliness Strategy, which you all know about – keep in touch with friends, contact organisations, set a routine with online activities, volunteer. Those are all things that happened at scale with COVID-19 and you might argue that, in those terms, COVID-19 delivered the aspirations of the government's loneliness strategy far better than the government itself ever could.

I do think that the one area that needs much more insight is the effect of bereavement, the single most direct cause of serious loneliness. Acute bereavement was experienced by over a million people following 225,000 deaths from COVID-19. If I were going back to the pandemic to look at the aftermath and examine the impact on loneliness, I would start with bereavement. I'm sure there must be work going on out there on the topic since it's a major conversation coming out of COVID-19.

Fred: I think a lot of people, myself included, don't have a really forensic sense of what they're feeling at any time. Quite frequently people just feel bad, and then they make meaning around it from the tools and narratives available to them. So it might well be that some people have been encouraged to think about the way they feel more in terms of grief than loneliness but, of course, we know that grief and loneliness are closely interrelated. Particularly in the context of the pandemic, where difficult and painful emotions are constantly ebbing, flowing and overlapping, there's a lot of space for loneliness to get tangled up with dread, anxiety, grief, anger, or frustration. All of these are bound up with loneliness, but it might not be that loneliness is the thing that people automatically define themselves as feeling, especially if they have recently lost a loved one and then have this big emotional event to hang the way they feel on. I don't think it's always easy, especially statistically, to disentangle loneliness from other kinds of emotion or experience, and our need to do so might also be its own kind of problem.

Husna: That's really interesting. Are you saying that language is just an approximation for emotions, or that diagnostic criteria tries to describe really complicated mental states that clearly don't necessarily fit, and they are just placeholders for the articulation of feeling that needs to be given?

Fred: That's a really good and difficult question. Probably both to an extent. I guess what I think is that we have a certain set of feelings and frequently they do actually tally quite well with a relatively appropriate word or state. At the same time, it's quite well-established that the way we feel is shaped by language, and the ways we are encouraged to name our problems then shapes how those problems are directly experienced. At the present, loneliness is fairly visible as a concern, and that helps give form to what might be a more internally inconsistent or inarticulate languishing or sorrow. These words come and go, at least across long historical scales, and they constantly change – if only slightly – in meaning. It's quite likely that other terms will replace loneliness in the future as the most common way of describing a sense of relational lack, in the way that saying you feel melancholy might be idiosyncratic in 2023. This isn't just about expression, it changes how something is felt, experienced and lived, so I see it as a dialogue I think.

Husna: Why do you think it's become this zeitgeisty word in the last decade or so?

David: I think the answer to that question lies at least partly in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*[3] and in the widespread apprehension that in late capitalism social relations are breaking down, communities are breaking down. Loneliness in that sense becomes a metonym for a much larger sense

3. Robert Putnam, B*owling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster, 2001.

of the failure of the entire late capitalist venture. Those who go into this field are seeking a way of measuring a yet larger failure in the way that social relations have been conducted in a particular socioeconomic environment. At that point some of this debate begins to lose its shape altogether. That's why I think there is so much concern and why there is this bizarre interaction with the term epidemic.

Fred: I can be a bit mixed on this. On the one hand, historically speaking, loneliness has been framed as a crisis for seventy or eighty years at least, and was bound up with critiques of me-first individualism, kind of a precursor to ideas like neoliberalism. But then I do also think there is something specific about late capitalism as David says, it's just that it's a problem when people assume it but don't do the work to explain precisely how and why this is a more isolating time than before – if indeed it is. Considering that I work on past loneliness 'crises', which often frame loneliness in strikingly similar ways to the present, I'm not completely against the idea that there's something novel about the last twenty or thirty years, I just think there's a burden of evidence and argument for us to say precisely what it means. It can't just be this lazy attachment of loneliness to, for example, short-term technological change, or even these big shifts in politics, society, culture, relationships, work, which undoubtedly play a vast part. But you have to show how.

David: It's worth pointing out that one of the truths that COVID-19 has taught us is that all the work we and other scholars of loneliness have done has had absolutely no effect whatsoever. No one is listening to us. Loneliness – and the sense of panic associated with it – has not diminished despite our experience of a real pandemic.

Jess: We've spent half the session talking about how loneliness is slippery, we don't know really what it is, and how it might be covering a broad array of sensations of feeling bad. The loneliness industrial complex, one might be tempted to say. Is loneliness a liberal way of thinking? Are we thinking about the individual mood of a certain state that is not quite working? Is there a way to think of loneliness in more structural terms? Or is this the problem with history of emotions research?

Husna: All of the solutions touted on the Campaign to End Loneliness[4] website are basically interpersonal and platforming technocratic solutions, that are basically hyped up ways of checking in on people using digital technology, which doesn't really make a lot of sense if you're an older person who doesn't have great access to technology in the first place. So how do you build structures that are more robust than that? I don't know, it's a good question.

David: There are some obvious benign interventions which would probably help, and investing in libraries, which are in danger of being totally defunded, is one. I could go through a list of changes that would be beneficial but are unlikely to happen under this or probably the next government. We need to be cautious about the possibility of intervention, particularly in the medical arena. Whether this is a problem to be 'solved' is I think a large, open question. I think it's better to think about loneliness as a failure of interpersonal strategies and what one can do to reinforce those strategies to achieve other outcomes.

Fred: There has always been a tension between the liberal definition of loneliness – as a problem that is isolated, that is happening to you, that is in some way your responsibility in the first place, that is about personality, your inability to cultivate relationships – that it's your responsibility to think your way out of, and the idea that it's the responsibility of other people to intervene. Alongside this, there are more structural readings, which try to understand histories, institutions and contexts in and through which people become lonely, and then try to think about responsibility beyond the individual. It's probably most useful to think of these as constantly in a state of contention, but also overlapping and converging in a lot of different places. This changes over time, and we're in a position now where the individual model is predominating and the structural model is mostly confined to academia, activism, some charity work and some iterations of experience where people who feel lonely understand how politically framed and inflected that is. How I see our job is to build on and elaborate that structural critique and push back against the individualisation and medicalisation of a wider and deeper failure to organise how we live.

David: I'm sure that's right, Fred. I think you mentioned Peter Townsend. It's interesting that *Poverty*[5] was his great book, measuring the arc of change in industrial society and using poverty as an indicator of failure. He co-wrote one of the best articles on loneliness and bereavement as a side project. It was the beginning, then, of broadening the key measures of success and failure, of historical change in capitalist societies. In his major book, he established that poverty was an indicator of whether capitalism was working. Everybody accepted that and it continued to be the subject of measurement and debate. What loneliness represents is an additional broad-brush measure of the arc of industrial capitalism, a way of calculating its success and failure. That's why it's become so entrenched and, as you say, Fred, why we're not going to get rid of it. Jess says should we regard it as structural? I think it is regarded as structural by many and that's why it's become so embedded in the way we think about ourselves.

Jess: I want to bring us back to this question of loneliness and technology. I know there have been a few mentions that technology doesn't offer great

5. Peter Townsend, *Poverty in Ulster and the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living*, Penguin, 1979.

resources for tackling loneliness. The digital turn of the past twenty or thirty years is such a big topic in many ways, that's often broadly assumed to be connected to new kinds of loneliness, and loneliness is often mobilised to evoke the experience of the disconnect of the digital turn. So, when we speak about loneliness, we're often talking about the bare minimum, perhaps, that we need from each other, that is challenged by new forms of technological labour and connection. Can we have the same kinds of relationships across screens? Is that a useful way to think about this topic?

Husna: To me it feels obvious that you can't have the same kind of relationships across screens. The question is: can you have good kinds of relationships across technology, in a way that is democratically managed? I feel torn on this question. I was at a talk last month and someone on the panel said that the internet is now our 'third space' and that really depressed me because it felt like giving-up on the idea of space being important. It felt to me indicative of my generation washing their hands of the idea of community centres. The idea of public space was heavily deprioritised and went unquestioned. At the same time I respect the work of people like Mindy Seu who see technology as something that can be used in radical ways, and cyberfeminists have been using it for decades to popularise critiques of the metaverse and give us more knowledge that helps people navigate the internet in ways that are helpful and safe for them. You see attitudes among marginalised communities who feel really strongly about organising across Twitter and they know it sucks in loads of ways but there is this attachment to community online that feels difficult and wrong to push up against in a way. I wouldn't want to. At the same time, I also feel like there's this sense that, yes, I probably wouldn't have said that to a person in real life in that way in which I've Tweeted that, and what does that do to the self? That discord between who you want to be and who you are online, you're not fully in control of. And I don't like that discord. So yes, it's a really mixed picture I think.

Jess: Throughout this discussion I've been thinking about loneliness in relation to ideas of public life. During the pandemic, there was an evisceration of public spaces. We were forced into spaces of privacy and there was – and I don't think there's been enough written on this – this sense of diminishment of what it was to exist as a public person. Of course, digital publics were there, which allowed some people to make use of the public performance of the self online. As a third space, the internet was very useful during this period in creating a sense of a public, even if it could not hope to replicate the sense of community and dialogue and connection one finds in quote-unquote ordinary non-digital spaces.

David: Two brief points: when we talk about technology we have to start with print, correspondence, books and then much later the telephone. This notion

that communication technology begins with the smartphone in 2007 or the internet in the 1990s and before that it's the stone age is, I think, deeply unhelpful. The communication technology of say the sixteenth century was as much about overcoming loneliness, but in different ways to how our Zoom discussion is working now. The second point, very briefly, is that I think the central experience of COVID-19 would have been infinitely worse without the developments of digital communication. By the time it happened those who couldn't use the internet were becoming a small minority. The digital divide was almost gone and the use of the web in different ways was critical to the survival of lockdown.

Jess: Perhaps, on the other hand, we wouldn't have got, or put up with, the same state of isolation – of lockdown – if we didn't have the digital tools at our disposal, because people would have needed to meet up more frequently. There is that two-sided relationship between states of isolation and technological connection perhaps?

David: There were WhatsApp groups which facilitated people physically meeting up. It was a very close interface between much older forms of engaging with each other and technological processes. They are not separate at this point.

Fred: I think one of the things that's really valuable about understanding technology in this capacious and long historical sense – and what I think a historical understanding of technology can do to our understanding of loneliness – is that we can look back and think about what technology means. So, an example I've written about is the radio as a technological innovation that's simultaneously invested in anxiety and hope over connection. I think that's true of most of our new techniques of communication, that they come with mixed emotions. We should understand that as a form of historical continuity, and whatever the actual interface is, it's always accompanied by hopes and fears. I think there's a really good way not of getting anywhere close to an objective look – which obviously doesn't exist – but of trying to disentangle how we understand loneliness and technological change from some of our anxieties, from some of the assumptions that things are necessarily always going to get worse. I hope this might allow for a more clear-headed look at what the specific technologies are and how they work, how they change our subjectivities, how they change our brains, and how they change the way we relate to one another. Maybe then we can try and assess what's happening without the fear of change, because we can see that's been a central feature of historical concerns about loneliness in relation to technological innovations that are now so completely normalised that it seems absurd that anyone was ever worried about them. And this long temporal lens can also help us understand that some of the things we're so worried about now might seem absurd in fifty years time.

David: Just as a footnote to that, I did a lot of work earlier in my career on the history of literacy, and just the same anxieties were associated with the spread of popular newspapers as are now attached to the web. Loneliness is about communication and its failure, and it's bound up very closely with early communication technologies. Can I also just say, if today's topic is 'loneliness and technology', I would want to talk about the technology of house construction, for instance, of wall construction, of the silent spaces within houses and the way these developments enable people to lead solitary or lonely lives inside homes. There are other technologies that matter in this game.

Jess: Yes, absolutely. The issue thinks about these technologies of loneliness or isolation – of the infrastructures and structures and cultural forms that produce, exacerbate or alleviate loneliness – not simply of digital technologies. I'm actually writing something right now on the boarding house and you've got lots of mid-century British writers who talk about porous walls in the 1940s and 1950s, so characters hear each other involuntarily. There's this mixture of anxiety of not having a sense of privacy – hearing the radio or other people's voices at any and all times through those walls. There is a difficulty in not being able be alone, and a sense of uncertainty about what company is reliable, and this sense of unreliability is experienced as loneliness. On the one hand people were lonely in these new communal living spaces; on the other hand, there was this sense that they could never be by entirely themselves. And then there's slightly later work of the 1970s, by writers like Buchi Emecheta, who talk of the different forms of council housing and being moved from a precarious, flimsy built structure where you can hear people through the walls where there is a sense of community, to then this sense of isolation.[6] Being a 'Robinson Crusoe' (the Thatcherite fantasy), as she says, and very isolated and not having the connection. So there is, she suggests, a constant negotiation between belonging and individualism that is part of the state and care, and housing and architecture, which allows for the feeling of being held by social structures, and being in a position where you feel able to create community.

6. Buchi Emecheta, *In The Ditch*, Penguin, 2023.

David: The other point worth mentioning is the great demographic event of the rise of single person households on a scale that not many people have got hold of. It's the biggest single demographic change since the industrial revolution, and has a lot to do with how people manage their own company, and how they do it well. There has not been a rise in loneliness that parallels the rise of single person households. The absence of a crisis attached to the transition should make a major contribution to any understanding of change since the Second World War.

Jess: The state of singleness might be useful to think alongside loneliness.

Denise Riley has an article 'The Right to Be Lonely'[7] where she talks about what it means to think about states of singleness and obviously all the political parties right now are organised around the idea of the couple, the family. We don't have a political language that thinks of forms of community and kinship that might exist outside those states, despite anxieties that the nuclear family was exploding three or four decades ago.

7. Denise Riley, 'The Right to Be Lonely', *differences*, 13:1, 2002, pp1-13.

David: This is why we've got a housing crisis: everyone wants to live in their own accommodation and it's very expensive to provide.

Jess: And no one can afford it, of course. A housing crisis also because it's profit driven.

Husna: Can I just ask – coming back to the question of technology – how does this historical reasoning about our changing relationship to technology and fear apply to technologies like deep fakes and artificial companions? There is a sense that it's a new territory. I'm not advocating that we be extra fearful about it because I don't think that helps, but how do you think about these new technologies?

Jess: You often read articles on loneliness that open with an anecdote about Japan where everyone has their loneliness robotic or human-robotic companion and so there is the impulse to think about the extreme example – the picture of loneliness as intimacy provided by robots or people who act as we think robots might. At the heart of which is, of course, the value we place on connection, without which the fear is that we become robots ourselves. They become the sites of all our anxieties about loneliness, but also they are fairly new extreme examples and unlikely to replace the need for connection that we've been discussing.

Fred: I'm always resisting an impulse inside myself that is also very much there, that nothing replaces human connection. One thing we haven't talked about is touch. Online communities are incredibly valuable spaces and sometimes really emotionally significant, but what does it do if you never have a hug or a handshake or a pat on the back? These are different ways of knowing and being known. It feels important to identify the areas where companion technologies can help and where they might add to a sense of alienation, or not deserving human company; augmenting rather than replacing real contact and care.

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