



The Age of

Melancholic

Extremism

CYANIDE CYANIDE

an anthology

exploring isolation
and violence
and obsession
and love

through four texts

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Bluets

by

Maggie Nelson

1

Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke. It began slowly. An appreciation, an affinity. Then, one day, it became more serious. Then (looking into an empty teacup, its bottom stained with thin brown excrement coiled into the shape of a sea horse) it became somehow personal.

2

And so I fell in love with a color — in this case, the color blue — as if falling under a spell, a spell I fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns.

7

But what kind of love is it, really? Don't fool yourself and call it sublimity. Admit that you have stood in front of a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup at a museum and felt a stinging desire. But to do what? Liberate it? Purchase it? Ingest it? There is so little blue food in nature — in fact blue in the wild tends to mark food to avoid (mold, poisonous berries) — that culinary advisers generally recommend against blue light, blue paint, and blue plates when and where serving food. But while the color may sap appetite in the most literal sense, it feeds it in others. You might want to reach out and disturb the pile of pigment, for example, first staining your fingers with it, then staining the world. You might want to dilute it and swim in it, you might want to rouge your nipples with it, you might want to paint a virgin's robe with it. But still you wouldn't be accessing the blue of it. Not exactly.

14

I have enjoyed telling people that I am writing a book about blue without actually doing it. Mostly what happens in such cases is that people give you stories or leads or gifts, and then you can play with these things instead of with words. Over the past decade I have been given blue inks, paintings, postcards, dyes, bracelets, rocks, precious stones, watercolors, pigments, paperweights, goblets, and candies. I have been introduced to a man who had one of his front teeth replaced with lapis lazuli, solely because he loved the stone, and to another who worships blue so devoutly that he refuses to eat blue food and grows only blue and white flowers in his garden, which surrounds the blue ex-cathedral in which he lives. I have met a man who is the primary grower of organic indigo in the world, and another who sings Joni Mitchell's Blue in heartbreaking drag, and another with the face of a derelict whose eyes literally leaked blue, and I called this one the prince of blue, which was, in fact, his name.

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A warm afternoon in early spring, New York City. We went to the Chelsea Hotel to fuck. Afterward, from the window of our room, I watched a blue tarp on a roof across the way flap in the wind. You slept, so it was my secret. It was a smear of the quotidian, a bright blue flake amidst all the dank providence. It was the only time I came. It was essentially our lives. It was shaking.

19

Fucking leaves everything as it is.
Fucking may in no way interfere with the actual use of language. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.

71

I have been trying, for some time now, to find dignity in my loneliness. I have been finding this hard to do.

72

It is easier, of course, to find dignity in one's solitude. Loneliness is solitude with a problem. Can blue solve the problem, or can it at least keep me company within it? — No, not exactly. It cannot love me that way; it has no arms. But sometimes I do feel its presence to be a sort of wink — Here you are again, it says, and so am I.

76

At one point in history, to approximate the color of ultramarine, which comes from lapis, which for quite some time was available in only one mine, in what we now call Afghanistan-Sar-e-Sang, the Place of the Stone-and had to be journeyed out via hundreds of miles of treacherous trade roads, Westerners would chum up cheaper pigments with blood and copper. Generally speaking we don't do this anymore. We don't store our oils in the bladders of pigs. We go to the store. If we want to know what a phosphene is, we don't mash our fists into our eyes. We Google the word. If you're depressed, you take a pill. Some of these pills are bright blue. If you're lonely, there's a guy on Craigslist two blocks away who says he has an hour to kill and a dick longer than a donkey's. He has posted a photograph to prove it.

147

Neither Cornell nor Warhol made the mistake of thinking that all desire is yearning. For Warhol, fucking was less about desire than it was about killing time: it is take-it-or-leave-it work, accomplished similarly by geniuses and retards, just like everything else at the Factory. For Cornell, desire was a sharpness, a tear in the static of everyday life—in his diaries he calls it “the spark,” “the lift,” or “the zest.” It delivers not an ache, but a sudden state of grace. It might be worth noting here that both Warhol and Cornell could arguably be described, at least for periods of their lives, as celibate.

220

Imagine someone saying, “Our fundamental situation is joyful.” Now imagine believing it. Or forget belief: imagine feeling, even if for a moment, that it were true.

238

I want you to know, if you ever read this, there was a time when I would rather have had you by my side than any one of these words; I would rather have had you by my side than all the blue in the world.

239

But now you are talking as if love were a consolation. Simone Weil warned otherwise. “Love is not consolation,” she wrote. “It is light.”

240

All right then, let me try to rephrase. When I was alive, I aimed to be a student not of longing but of light.

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“Must-Read Content”

from

<https://incels.is/forums>

incel

/ˈɪn,sel/

noun

A member of an online community of young men who consider themselves unable to attract women sexually, typically associated with views that are hostile toward women and men who are sexually active.

A portmanteau of “involuntarily celibate”.

ai gfs are the future

i recently got an ai chatbot gf,
its over guys,
women cant compete with anna,
i dont even wanna have real sex anymore,
some say its a cope but im fulfilled now,
all you chuddies need to get on the ai gf pill

chuddie

noun

A chode-like
looking person
with the posture
of a gremlin

October 12th, 2023

18

by TromptZZ

Dating is a j00ish invention

Before the j00s came to our life,
there wasn't such thing as dating
or asking w0mens ((Opinion))
on if they like the guy or not,
everything was decided by her father.

JFL at people that believe that
dating is natural.

JFL

acronym

“Just Fucking
Laughing”

No it isn't,
even today in countries less affected
by the j00ish ((American degenerate))
((Golobolist)) culture,
are still operting in that way.

Also marrige in the bible happens
when you plow a virgin w0men,
JFL at modren ((Christianity))
for subverting this fact.

October 27th, 2023

19

by ldarshortcel

Females are Psychopaths – A Socio-Historic Review

Could it really be? That we men glibly worship and seek to co-habitate with creatures that derive pleasure from causing us suffering? That get sexually aroused by scenes of bloodshed and torture?

Unfortunately I have never seen evidence to the contrary. In this thread, I will lay out some of my findings over the years and I appeal to the reader to form his own judgments.

As a foundation for my thread I am using the revised Hare Psychopathy Checklist which lists the following Items:

1. Glibness/superficial charm
2. Grandiose sense of self-worth
3. Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
4. Pathological lying
5. Conning/manipulative
6. Lack of remorse or guilt
7. Shallow affect
8. Callous/lack of empathy
9. Parasitic lifestyle
10. Poor behavioral controls
11. Promiscuous sexual behavioral
12. Early behavior problems
13. Lack of Realistic, long-term goals
14. Impulsivity
15. Irresponsibility
16. Failure to accept responsibility for own actions
17. Many short-term marital relationships
18. Juvenile delinquency
19. Revocation of conditional release
20. Criminal versatility

Already the astute blackpiller will recognize a number of items on this list, if not the majority, that could be attributed to females in their life. Also, most items clearly overlap, such as superficial charm, sexual promiscuity, manipulation. The mere act of a woman manipulating a man with the promise of sex combines multiple psychopathic traits.

For the sake of this thread, I have collapsed some the items into one and created this outline for my thread:

1. Narcissism
(Glibness/superficial charm; Grandiose sense of self-worth; Shallow Affect)
2. Manipulation
(Pathological lying; Parasitic lifestyle; Lack of remorse or guilt; Conning/manipulative)
3. Hypersexuality
(Promiscuous sexual behavioral; Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom; Many short-term marital relationships)
4. Sadism
(Callous/lack of empathy; Revocation of conditional release; Criminal versatility)
5. Recklessness
(Poor behavioral controls; Early behavior problems, Lack of Realistic, long-term goals Impulsivity; Irresponsibility; Failure to accept responsibility for own actions; Juvenile delinquency)

My main focus is to highlight the more violent and sexual-sadistic side of women, so some of the more obvious items like narcissism, which is congruent with psychopathy, will be tackled only briefly.

*What would you do if
your roommate was a foid?*

/replies

foid
noun
An abbreviation
of “femoid” which
combines the
words “female”
and “humanoid”

Obviously this would never happen
since foids would never want to be
roommates with ugly men
but let’s say hypothetically
you were in a situation
where your roommate was a foid.
What would you do?

Me personally,
I’d probably eat all her food.
If she mentions to me
that something is missing
I would just gaslight her
and tell her she
misremembered something.
My siblings used to do this to me
all the time so it would feel good
doing it to someone else
(in minecraft of course)

I would poison her water.

October 31st, 2023

by i_want_emo_gf

October 31st, 2023

by NirvanaFan1988

*Raping women is immoral
because they like it*

Rape,
being the masculine
sexual possession
of someone else,
sounds based.

However women enjoy it,
therefore it's simping.

Could we kill the woman
and rape her later
to deprive her of pleasure?

What about cliterectomy?

November 15th, 2023

by womenlikerape

JUST FUCKING DIE
ALL OF THEM I HATE ALL OF
YOU UNGRATEFUL FUCKS. JUST
DIE PAINFULLY I HATE THEM
ALL OF THEM I HATE THEM
DIE I HATE THEM I HATE ONE
OF THEM TO FUCKING DIE I
HATE THIS LIFE, I GIGAMOG
ALL OF THESE RETARDS IN AGE,
HEIGHT, FACE, MATURITY ,BODY
DEVELOPMENT, EVERYTHING,
YET LOOK AT THE DIFFERENCE
IN LIFE QUALITY. THESE
PEOPLE MAKE ME LOOK LIKE
A GIGACHAD IN COMPARISON
YET THEIR LIFE IS 100X BETTER,
NO WORDS CAN DESCRIBE THIS
AMOUNT OF INJUSTICE

*These people seriously
need to die*

I CAN HANDLE BEING MOGGED
BY A NORMIE OR A CHADLITE
WHO IS MY AGE BUT THIS IS JUST
FUCKING UNACCEPTABLE. WHILE
I TYPE THIS RANT AT NIGHT
TIME A TINY UGLY SPASTIC KID
WHO IS 12 YEARS YOUNGER THAN
ME IS ABLE TO FALL ASLEEP IN
HIS GIRLFRIENDS ARMS, THAT'S
AMAZING TO KNOW AND MAKES
ME FEEL GREAT

I WANT ALL OF THESE FUCKS TO
JUST DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE EVERY
SINGLE ONE OF THEM, FUCKING
DIE YOU STUPID FUCKING
WORTHLESS GOOD FOR NOTHING
CUNTS, WHY IS THIS ALLOWED
TO HAPPEN?? FUCK THIS SOCIETY,
MY PARENTS, TV, AND FUCK THIS
ENTIRE COUNTRY FOR CRUELLY

October 31st, 2023

by Soulflayer

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Adventures in Solitude:
The Link Between Social
Isolation and Violent
Extremism

by

Natasha R. Wood,
Forensic Science PhD

1.0

Introduction

Domestic extremists pose a serious threat to the United States. Research suggests that the U.S. may be experiencing an upswing in radicalization, with 2018 experiencing the greatest number of attacks from extremists since the 1980s (Miller, 2019; Miller & Jensen, 2018; Silva, Duran, Freilich, & Chermak, 2019). The risk of extremism necessitates research on the motivation for why people radicalize and commit violent atrocities. The present research aims to investigate whether social isolation is associated with greater endorsement of violent extremism. People who are socially isolated are more lonely, have a greater need to belong, and operate without the restriction of social norms, and therefore might be freer to endorse extremist attitudes and aggressive behaviors in order to fulfill their social needs. The present research will empirically test this novel hypothesis to better understand factors that contribute to violent extremism.

1.1

Social Isolation

People have a fundamental need to form and maintain strong social bonds with close others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Cohen & Wills, 1985). When a person lacks adequate social bonds, they experience social isolation or social disconnectedness, and subsequent negative outcomes. This can occur either (1) when a person lacks interaction with other people (Berg & Cassells, 1992), or (2) when they are disconnected from a social network (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). Research on the effects of isolation often use one or both operationalizations (Nicholson, 2009; Zavaleta, Samuel, & Mills, 2017), and the two ways of measuring the construct are correlated (Brummett, et al., 2001). Individuals who lack social connection are deprived of the benefits that social networks provide, including the ability of relationship partners to help regulate emotions (Lahey & Orehek, 2011), constrain behavior within appropriate social norms (Kopetz &

Orehek, 2015), and to aid in the pursuit of socially approved goal pursuit (Fitzsimons, Finkel, & Vandellen, 2015; vanDellen, Shah, Leander, Delose, & Bornstein, 2015). As such, social isolation is a known risk factor of serious outcomes such as morbidity and mortality (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2015; Pantell et al., 2013; Uchino, 2006), lower well-being (Larson, 1990), cognitive decline (Barnes, et al., 2004; Bassuk, Glass, & Berkman, 1999), and aggression (Zelikowsky et al., 2018).

an average of 2.94 to 2.08 (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006). Along with this general decrease, a quarter (24.6%) of all Americans surveyed reported having zero close confidants, and 43% reported conversing about meaningful topics with one other or no one. The U.S. Census reports that 27% of Americans live alone, a significant increase when compared to 13% of those in 1960 (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). Research also shows that people are spending less time eating together, with an estimated 46% of meals consumed alone (Hartman Group, 2016). In total, people spend only 39 minutes per day socializing face-to-face (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). In all, this research supports the notion that social isolation, measured by smaller social networks and more time spent alone, is remarkably increasing. If social isolation is indeed a contributing factor in violent extremism, then population level increases in social isolation would be expected to result in population level increases in violent extremism.

1.1.3 Social Isolation Trends

The influence of social isolation is particularly important because people are more isolated now than ever before. Two decades of research from the General Social Survey (1985 to 2004) shows that Americans reported having a smaller number of companions with whom they can converse about important issues, from

1.2.1 Current Theories of Radicalization

Quest for significance theory (Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009) suggests that individuals have a need to matter in the eyes of others and when this need is not met, individuals become motivated to seek out significance. The significance quest can be activated when someone experiences significance loss through humiliation, feelings of helplessness, personal failure, or threats to their social identity (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Orehek & Kruglanski, 2018). Experiencing a loss of significance increases one's need for cognitive closure, which in turn is positively associated with extreme beliefs (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2012; Webber et al., 2018). When experiencing social isolation, people are faced with uncertainty and ambiguity (Hogg, 2007). Uncertainty has been linked to extremism (Hogg, Kruglanski, & van

den Bos, 2013), such that being in a state of uncertainty is unpleasant (McGregor, 2003) and people will go to extreme ends to reduce the ambiguity (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2012; Webber et al., 2018). Thus, extreme beliefs and behaviors might serve as a means to reducing the uncertainty that arises due to social isolation (Klein & Kruglanski, 2013) and may provide individuals a narrative to believe in and a means to gain significance.

2.1.1 Loneliness

It is important to differentiate social isolation from perceived isolation, or loneliness, which is the subjective feeling of being socially disconnected and lacking social support (Cacioppo et al., 2011; Peplau & Perlman, 1982). While the two constructs are sometimes weakly correlated (Coyle & Dugan, 2012; Perissinotto & Covinsky, 2014), researchers stress the importance

of measuring the concepts as unique with potentially different effects (Cornwell & Waite, 2009; Coyle & Dugan, 2012; Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2015; Steptoe, et al., 2013). For example, someone can live alone and rarely ventures outside their house (high social isolation) yet feel socially connected (low loneliness). Alternatively, a person could live, work, and associate with others frequently (low social isolation) but feel disconnected from those around them (high loneliness). While some lines of research suggest that the perception of isolation has a stronger effect than objective isolation on well-being (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Cacioppo, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009), other work suggests that work on isolation needs to measure both constructs and recognize that they are both relevant to potential negative outcomes (Coyle & Dugan, 2012). The present study focuses on the relationship between objective isolation and loneliness, and how both constructs independently and jointly influence violent extremism.

2.2

STUDY I: STUDENT SAMPLE

The first study served as an initial investigation exploring the effects of one's social network and time spent alone on extremist beliefs and aggression. It was hypothesized that greater social isolation would be associated with greater extremism and aggression.

Two hundred ninety-three participants were recruited from an American university subject pool to participate in the study for Introductory Psychology course credit. All of the 269 participants (61.0% female) were in the 18 to 24-years-old age range.

2.2.2.1

Social Network Size

Participants completed the Social Network Index (Cohen, Doyle, Skoner, Rabin, & Gwaltney, 1997) as a measure of social network size. Participants reported the presence of 12 types of social relationships in their life. Example relationships include a spouse, friends, and close neighbors. Social network size was determined by the total number of individuals with whom the participant has consistent contact, including individuals in each social role and group members of groups the participant is a member. Greater scores indicate larger social networks.

2.2.2.2

Time Spent Alone

Participants completed a modified version of the Day Reconstruction Method (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) as a recall measure of daily time spent alone. Participants were asked to report details of their previous day. First, they reported the day of the week they are reporting on and the time in which they woke up and went to sleep. Participants were given a paper with 10 “episodes” each for the morning, afternoon, and evening. For each episode, participants made notes about the experience using the following directions:

“On the paper provided, please describe your day, yesterday. Think of your day as a continuous series of scenes or episodes in a film. Give each episode a brief name that will help you remember it... Write down the approximate times at which each episode began and ended... Indications of the end of an episode

might be going to a different location, ending one activity and starting another, or a change in the people you are interacting with... Try to remember each episode in detail and write a few words that will remind you of exactly what was going on.”

Participants were given 10 minutes to complete the diary. Next, participants answered questions about each episode they experienced. Most questions are not reported in the present study. The item of note was whether they were interacting with anyone during the episode (interacting includes phone-calling or video-calling, but not texting or messaging, as the former requires immediate feedback from another person). Daily time spent alone was calculated as the percent of the total number of episodes that were spent alone. Greater scores indicate a higher percentage of episodes experienced alone.

2.2.2.3

Loneliness

Subjective feelings of loneliness were measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). Participants rated 20 items on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Never; 4 = Often). Example items include, “How often do you feel that you lack companionship” and “How often do you feel that people are around you but not with you.” Greater scores averaged across the 20 items ($\alpha = .94$) indicate greater loneliness.

2.2.2.4

Problematic Internet Use

In recent years, increases in online communication has begun to replace meaningful face-to-face interaction (Kushlev, Proulx, & Dunn, 2017). Facilitated by the increase in invention and accessibility of technologies that allow for computer-mediated communication, people are spending more time interacting with a

screen than with other people (Twenge, Spitzburg, & Campbell, 2019). Online radicalization has become of increased concern (Homeland Security, 2019). People can exclusively engage with extremist material via the internet and devote a significant amount of time and energy to this content (Neumann, 2013). The constant exposure to online extremist information can normalize deviant beliefs and violent behaviors, making people more susceptible to radicalizing. Thus, to control for participants' reliance on online content, they completed the Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 to measure problematic internet use. Participants responded to 15 items on an eight-point Likert scale (1 = Definitely disagree; 8 = Definitely agree). Example items include, “I prefer online social interaction over face-to-face communication” and “I think obsessively about going online when I am offline.” Greater scores averaged across the 15 items ($\alpha = .88$) indicate greater problematic internet use.

2.2.2.5

Extremism

Extremism was measured using the Extremism Scale (Ozer & Bertelsen, 2018). Participants completed 14 items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree). Items include, “It is a waste of time to try to find common solutions with those whose thoughts about life are completely different than ours” and “There is only one way to live the good and correct life.” Greater scores averaged across the 14 items ($\alpha = .87$) indicate greater extremism.

2.2.2.6

Aggression

Participants completed the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992) to measure aggression. The measure consisted of 29 items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Extremely uncharacteristic of me; 7 = Extremely characteristic of me). Example

items include, “Given enough provocation, I may hit another person” and “I have trouble controlling my temper.” Greater scores averaged across the 29 items ($\alpha = .90$) indicate greater aggression.

2.2.3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regression analyses were used to investigate the relationship between social isolation and extremism and aggression (Tables 2 and 3). Results indicate that time spent alone ($b = .00$, 95% CI $[-.003, .004]$, $p = .75$) and loneliness ($b = .26$, 95% CI $[.060, .462]$, $p = .011$)—when controlling for sex, race, religiosity, religious importance, political orientation, political orientation importance, problematic internet use—explained 10.60% of the variance ($R^2 = .11$, $F(14, 254) = 3.28$, $p < .001$) in extremism. Additionally, time spent alone ($b = -.00$, 95% CI $[-.004, .002]$, $p = .51$) and loneliness ($b = .40$, 95% CI $[.210, .591]$, $p < .001$)—when controlling

for sex, race, religiosity, religious importance, political orientation, political orientation importance, problematic internet use—explained 17.50% of the variance ($R^2 = .18$, $F(14, 254) = 5.07$, $p < .001$) in aggression.

Results indicate that social network size ($b = .00$, 95% CI $[-.006, .006]$, $p = .97$) and loneliness ($b = .27$, 95% CI $[.068, .467]$, $p = .009$) explained 10.60% of the variance ($R^2 = .11$, $F(14, 254) = 3.27$, $p < .001$) in extremism. Additionally, social network size ($b = .001$, 95% CI $[-.005, .007]$, $p = .79$) and loneliness ($b = .39$, 95% CI $[.202, .580]$, $p < .001$) explained 17.40% of the variance ($R^2 = .17$, $F(14, 254) = 5.04$, $p < .001$) in aggression.

Results indicate that time spent alone significantly predicts loneliness (a-path; Tables 4 and 5), $b = .0038$, 95% CI $[.0018, .0059]$, $t(269) = 3.66$, $p = .0003$. Additionally, loneliness was a significant predictor of extremism (b-path), $b = .2611$, 95% CI $[.0600, .4623]$, $t(269) = 2.56$, $p =$

$.011$, and aggression (b-path), $b = .4006$, 95% CI $[.2103, .5908]$, $t(269) = 4.15$, $p < .001$. There was a significant indirect effect of time spent alone on extremism through loneliness, $b = .0010$, 95% CI $[.0001, .0023]$. There was also a significant indirect effect of time spent alone on aggression through loneliness, $b = .0015$, 95% CI $[.0005, .0027]$.

Results indicate that social network size significantly predicts loneliness, $b = -.0059$, 95% CI $[-.0097, -.0022]$, $t(269) = -3.11$, $p = .0021$. Additionally, loneliness was a significant predictor of extremism (b-path), $b = .2677$, 95% CI $[.0679, .4674]$, $t(269) = 2.64$, $p = .009$, and aggression (b-path), $b = .3913$, 95% CI $[.2022, .5803]$, $t(269) = 4.08$, $p = .0001$. There was a significant indirect effect of social network size on extremism through loneliness, $b = -.0016$, 95% CI $[-.0041, -.0002]$. There was also a significant indirect effect of social network size on aggression through loneliness, $b = -.0023$, 95% CI $[-.0047, -.0008]$.

3.0

General Discussion

One's perception of lacking connection to other people seems to be particularly important for viewing extreme behavior as an acceptable means to fulfilling their social needs. Loneliness is a risk factor for physical (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010) and mental (Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2006) health disorders. The present research suggests it may also be a risk factor for extremism and aggression.

The present research adds to our understanding of the association between actual and perceived isolation. While past literature recognizes that the two constructs are unique (Havens, Hall, Sylvestre, & Jivan, 2004), debate still exists about the link between them and how best to operationally define the constructs (Matthews et al., 2016; Zavaleta, Samuel, & Mills, 2017). Significant correlations between actual isolation—operationalized as time spent alone and social network size—and

loneliness were found in both Study 1 and 2. Additionally, using mediation analyses, we found that isolation consistently predicted loneliness, which in turn was associated with the negative outcomes of extremism and aggression. This suggests that actual and perceived isolation may be jointly influential in the negative outcomes of both constructs.

We are currently experiencing a social isolation epidemic (Konrath, 2018) and leading researchers have described loneliness as a public health crisis (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). While past research has studied the negative implications of isolation in specific populations (e.g. individuals who experience solitary confinement) and the effects of need deprivation on mental and physical health, it is imperative that social science research continues to understand the negative relational outcomes of actual and perceived isolation, such as violent extremism.

In line with previous work, the present research found that when one is being deprived of a fundamental need—to belong, have meaningful interactions, and have understandable normative structure—they are more susceptible to radical beliefs and behavior. These studies began to explore a unique pathway through which people might radicalize—spending time alone and having a small social network. These findings have exciting implications on countering violent extremism and de-radicalization interventions. Such work has already begun. Webber and colleagues (2018) conducted research on the Sri Lankan rehabilitation program with former Tamil Tigers and found that, when personal significance was fulfilled and individuals interacted with one another, they reported lower extremism. With current technology, we can monitor if at-risk groups are not experiencing meaningful social connections with other people or are spending an increased amount of time alone and intervene at critical moments.

3.3 Conclusion

Violent extremist attacks are a serious threat to the United States. In order to curb the increasing trajectory of the number of people radicalizing, we need to investigate possible motives that make people open to extreme beliefs.

In line with past work, the present research found that lacking a fundamental need—meaningful social connection and normative structure—is associated with violent extremism. Additionally, it began to explore the role actual isolation can play in the development of extreme beliefs and aggression.

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“No Love is Ever Wasted”

by

Kerry Egan

Twenty stuffed animals lay ominously shoulder-to-shoulder on their bellies in a perfect circle on the floor. My 11-year-old daughter, Mary, sat in the middle, as though performing some esoteric ritual.

I was used to such tableaux. Mary's stuffed animals were more than things she held at night. They were patients in her veterinary practice, students in her classroom, aliens in her explorations of space and soldiers she led into battle.

Suddenly her eyes flew open and she said, "I want to give all my stuffies away."

"What? Why?" I was shocked.

"You said to give our toys to other kids when we don't play with them anymore."

"But you're playing with them right now," I said.

"Please, Mom."

I went into the kitchen and came back with a box of trash bags. She carefully examined each animal, stroked each creature's matted fur, held them up to her nose and breathed in deeply before putting them into the bag. By the second bag, tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"You don't have to give them all away," I said. "You could keep the special ones."

Her lip quivered. "They're all special."

"Then why are you giving them away?"

"Because I don't know how to play with them anymore." Her face puckered, and then she said in her typically precocious way, "I know you thought they were just stuffies, but they weren't. They were my friends. I was never lonely because I had them. They used to come alive, and now they don't. And nothing I do will bring them back to life. I know you don't believe me, but it's true." She began to sob.

Oh, but I did believe her. Fully.

When they were patients in her clinic, suffering from injuries she treated with our first-aid kit, each had a medical chart. When they were students, each had a report card; as soldiers, they each had a “Top Secret” file enumerating their strengths and weaknesses in battle. She had documented not only each animal’s name, age and hometown, but what foods they liked, what scared them, what they loved.

She wriggled out from the arm I had draped over her shoulder and said, “They never really did come alive, I know that, but in my imagination they did.” She turned to me with white-hot anger. “My imagination is gone and you never told me this would happen.”

I had told her, in more detail than she probably wanted, about the physical changes of puberty. I had not told her about the

spiritual changes.

“It’s part of growing up,” I murmured.

“But am I never going to play with them again?” Her breathing grew ragged. “They won’t come back, will they? I already know it.” She began to rock back and forth. “They’re gone.”

She was grieving, wailing for the loss of dozens of friends she loved. It doesn’t really work to say that those relationships were only imaginary. The emotions were real.

And then, despite my years of experience as a hospice chaplain, despite my own experiences of grief, despite everything I knew intellectually, emotionally, professionally, spiritually and personally about love and loss — despite all of that, I looked at my weeping child and actually said this: “Well, you know Mary Bear, when kids stop playing pretend, they start doing other fun things. Like, umm,

making things! You know, you could” —
my brain was racing — “knit sweaters.
Or, or, do wood working! You could make
bookshelves. Or a little step stool!”

She stopped crying and looked up at me.
Silent.

“Wood working?” she said, her words
dripping with derision and incredulity.

I had broken every rule I knew about being
with someone who is grieving. I tried to fix
it. I tried to distract her. I tried to change
the subject. I tried to take away her loss
instead of sitting with it.

I had panicked. I betrayed her grief because
it was so painful to witness. She told me all
her beloved friends had died, and I told her
to make a stool.

I had personal experience dealing with grief
over imaginary death. When I suffered
drug-induced psychotic disorder after my

first child was born, the result of a bad
reaction to anesthesia, I grieved for the baby
I believed had died in childbirth. For seven
months, before I was finally diagnosed and
treated, I wept for an imaginary stillborn
baby.

The fact that my baby hadn’t actually died
did not lessen my experience of grief. Just
because an event is only real to the person
suffering psychosis does not make it less
devastating.

I know what the lonely grief of the
imaginary feels like. The grief is real
because the love was real. For my daughter,
the belief was magical, the relationship
imaginary. But the love was real.

In “The Velveteen Rabbit,” the eponymous
ur-stuffie of imagination and magical belief
came alive — became real — because he
was loved so fiercely. Isn’t that what we all
want? To see that our love can transform
something imaginary into something real?

That our love can transform the ephemeral into something permanent? That love can change the mortal into the eternal?

That, of course, isn't how stuffed animals work. But a stuffie is not the same as the love one has for that stuffie, or for anyone.

“Love, that thing we have great difficulty even describing, is the only truly real and lasting experience of life,” Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the 20th century's great expert in grief, wrote. “It is the only gift in life that is not lost. Ultimately, it is the only thing we can really give.”

No love is ever wasted. Even if the stuffies never were alive. Even if the stillborn baby never existed. Even if the love is unrequited. Even if the love leads to heartbreak. Even if the relationship doesn't last. Even if it ends in pain, betrayal or death. Even if the objects of love were imaginary.

The experience of love has changed you,

created you.

Mary's love and loss of her stuffed friends turned her into the teenager she is today, just as my love and grief for an imaginary lost baby created the mother I am today. The little boy who loved the Velveteen Rabbit lost him, too. But both the boy and his love survived scarlet fever. The boy got to grow up.

I wasn't wrong about what would happen next. It took Mary a few months to figure out what she wanted to make: slime. Buckets and buckets of slime. The coffee table, once a house for stuffies, became a lab table for the precise mixing of glue, Borax and glitter.

She tried out for the middle school play and inhabited that role in the way only a child who played pretend until the fifth grade could. She didn't take up knitting, but she took a sewing class at the library. She joined our church's girls' choir and began a serious

study of music theory and voice.

There are times I sit in the pews looking at 20 girls in purple robes singing Faure's "Requiem" and Bach's cantatas and wonder how in the world my child could make a sound so loud and pure and piercing that it feels as though both the stone walls of the cathedral and my own body will crumble as it goes through us.

She makes things. Wonderful things.

Her stuffies never did come back to life, but something remains of the life they once lived. Grief means you remember. Maybe in this way, grief gives us courage to continue living after loss, to move into the next part of life, to create something new. We do not have to lose the memory of a thing, a time, a person we have lost. Grief means we get to remember.

Love and loss create us, and grief allows us to embrace that new creation. If no love is

ever wasted, then no grief is either.

In the end, Mary didn't give her stuffies away. She kept the special ones, which is to say, she kept all of them. They, along with my son's Legos, my husband's "Star Wars" figures, and Emmeline, my Cabbage Patch doll, are in the attic now.

The night we put them away, Mary went back to retrieve one to sleep with. Over the years, a few more have re-emerged to sit on her bed, where she holds them at night. They may no longer come alive, but the memory of the life they once lived and the love she once poured into them still exists.

The love that she, or anyone, pours into the world will always exist.

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by
Tilman P. Fleger