

Examining Reasons for Loneliness Among Gender and Sexual Minority Emerging Adults in College

Amelia Blankenau, Occidental College | Dr. Andrea Hopmeyer, Occidental College | Dr. Amy Wax, CSU Long Beach

I. Introduction

Loneliness

- “a sad or aching sense of isolation; that is, of being alone, cut off, or distanced from others”
- Associated with depression, anxiety, and suicidality
- Experienced at higher levels during college than any other age
- Gender and sexual minority emerging adults are at an increased risk for experiencing loneliness compared to heterosexuals

Research Questions

- What are the underlying reasons for loneliness among emerging adults in college?
- Do reasons for loneliness vary as a function of gender or sexual identity?

Table 1. Structure Matrix for Exploratory Factor Analysis

Variable	When you are lonely, how often is it because...	Factor Loadings	Eigen value	Variance Explained (%)
Friendship-Needs Deficits	you lack a close friend you can trust?	.89	8.57	25.20
	you lack a close friend who listens to you?	.90		
	you lack a close friend you can be your authentic self with?	.91		
	you lack a close friend you can share concerns with?	.93		
	you lack a close friend who validates your feelings?	.88		
Romantic-Needs Deficits	you lack a romantic partner you can share your intimate feelings with?	.94	4.57	13.45
	you lack a romantic partner to be emotionally intimate with?	.95		
	you lack a romantic partner you can trust?	.84		
	you lack a romantic partner who provides support and encouragement?	.88		
	you lack a romantic partner to be physically intimate with?	.73		
Gender Identity Concerns	you are questioning your gender identity?	.77	3.70	10.88
	you feel confined by societal gender roles and expectations?	.52		
	you feel that your gender identity is not accepted by your friends and family?	.86		
	you feel that your gender identity is not supported by the college?	.82		
	you feel uncomfortable expressing your gender identity?	.87		
Future-Related Concerns	you are uncertain about the future?	.81	2.52	7.42
	you are uncertain about your career path?	.91		
	you are uncertain about your academic path?	.83		
	you need to be self-sufficient?	.57		
	of financial uncertainties and needing to meet your financial obligations?	.45		
Social-Needs Deficits	you lack a group of friends?	.83	1.67	4.92
	you do not have people to go out with?	.84		
	you find it hard to meet new people?	.80		
	you do not have a lot in common with the people around you?	.73		
	you are not involved with campus or community organizations?	.59		
Sexual Identity Concerns	you are questioning your sexual identity?	.71	1.44	4.23
	you feel that your sexual identity is not accepted by your friends and family?	.81		
	you feel that your sexual identity is not supported by the college?	.64		
	you feel uncomfortable expressing your sexual identity?	.82		
	you are questioning your religious beliefs?	.60		
Sociopolitical Identity Concerns	you are questioning your moral beliefs and values?	.75	1.22	3.58
	you are questioning your political beliefs?	.69		
	you are negotiating the intersectionality of your identities?	.79		
Intersectional Identity Concerns	you are negotiating the intersectionality of your identities?	.79	1.07	3.15
	you are questioning your racial/ethnic identity?	.69		

Note. $n = 692$. Structured matrix derived using principal axis factor extracting method with oblique (Promax) rotation. Standardized factor loadings.

II. Methods

Participants

- 692 students enrolled in a small liberal arts college in the western United States ($M_{age} = 19.87$, $SD = 1.27$, range = 18-29)
- **Gender Identity:** 69.8% cisgender women, 26.6% cisgender men, and 3.5% transgender or nonbinary
- **Sexual Identity:** 60.6% heterosexual, 7.2% gay or lesbian, 15.8% bisexual, and 16.1% other sexual minority
- **Ethnicity:** 25.3% Asian, 4.2% Black/African American, 45.1% White, 13.2% Hispanic/Latinx, 10.2% Biracial or Multiracial, and 1.7% Middle Eastern
- **Class Standing:** 27.1% first year students, 33.4% second year students, 23% third year students, and 16.5% fourth year students

Measures

- Loneliness in Context Questionnaire for College Students (Asher & Weeks, 2014)
- Reasons for College Loneliness Questionnaire (Hopmeyer et al., under review)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Friendship-Needs Deficits	622	2.30	1.10	-								
Romantic-Needs Deficits	622	2.34	1.06	.14**	-							
Gender Identity Concerns	618	1.36	.58	.17**	.17**	-						
Future-Related Concerns	621	2.83	.92	.36**	.11**	.25**	-					
Social-Needs Deficits	621	2.38	.97	.68**	.15**	.14**	.35**	-				
Sexual Identity Concerns	622	1.51	.71	.18**	.14**	.58**	.26**	.20**	-			
Sociopolitical Identity Concerns	623	1.70	.70	.17**	.11**	.32**	.34**	.15**	.32**	-		
Intersectional Identity Concerns	622	1.90	.92	.23**	.08*	.33**	.35**	.22**	.34**	.43**	-	
Loneliness	645	2.31	.71	.53**	.23**	.21**	.34**	.62**	.26**	.22**	.22**	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Loneliness

Predictor variables	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β
Gender			
Cisgender Woman	-.04	-.08*	-.12
Transgender/Nonbinary	.02	.01	-.15
Sexual Identity			
Gay or Lesbian	.03	-.01	-.01
Bisexual	.18***	.04	.02
Other Sexual Minority	.16***	.06†	.03
Reasons for Loneliness			
Friendship-Needs Deficits		.17***	.16***
Romantic-Needs Deficits		.12***	.12***
Gender Identity Concerns		-.01	-.08
Future-Related Concerns		.07†	.07†
Social-Needs Deficits		.44***	.44***
Sexual Identity Concerns		.07	.05
Sociopolitical Identity Concerns		.07†	.08*
Intersectional Identity Concerns		-.01	-.01
Woman X Gender Identity Concerns			.05
Transgender/Nonbinary X Gender Identity Concerns			.20†
Gay or Lesbian X Sexual Identity Concerns			.01
Bisexual X Sexual Identity Concerns			.04
Other Sexual Minority X Sexual Identity Concerns			.05
R^2	.04	.45	.44
R^2 change	.05***	.41***	.00

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. † marginal significance. Standardized beta coefficients.

III. Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis

- Eight factors (reasons for loneliness) emerged (see Table 1)

Bivariate Correlations

- Each reason for loneliness was significantly and uniquely correlated with loneliness (see Table 2)

Hierarchical Linear Regression

- Friendship-needs deficits, romantic-needs deficits, social-needs deficits, and sociopolitical identity concerns significantly predicted loneliness (see Table 3)
- Future-related concerns emerged as a marginally significant predictor of loneliness
- Gender identity was a marginally significant moderator of the relationship between gender identity concerns and loneliness
- Sexual identity was not a significant moderator of the relationship between sexual identity concerns and loneliness
- Identifying as bisexual or another sexual minority significantly predicted loneliness, compared to heterosexuals

IV. Conclusions

- Emerging adults identified deficits in close relationships (i.e., friendships and romantic partnerships), difficulties integrating socially, and negotiating identity-related concerns as reasons for their loneliness
- Loneliness in college is tied to the key psychosocial tasks and interpersonal relationships that are central to this stage of life
- Results indicate the need for college administrators to implement new programs and provide resources to decrease loneliness on college campuses, especially for gender and sexual minority students
- Future research should examine reasons for loneliness that are specific to bisexual and other sexual minority emerging adults

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