

Volume 9, n 2, 2021

Editorial

Loneliness or isolation due to Covid 19 pandemic

Salvatore Settineri

Department of Biomedical and Dental Sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging, University of Messina, Italy

E-mail corresponding author: salvatore.settineri@unime.it



Keywords:

Clinical Psychology; Covid-19; Isolation; Loneliness; Pandemic.

Received: 31 July 2021

Accepted: 5 August 2021

Published: 8 August 2021

Citation: Settineri, S. (2021). Loneliness or isolation due to Covid-19 pandemic. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 9(2).

<https://doi.org/10.13129/2282-1619/mjcp-3183>

More than 18 months have passed since the editorial dedicated to fear of contamination (Settineri & Merlo, 2020a) which, like all public health editorials, has reflected on current events. Reflections on the relationship with that special object that is the disease characterized by its time and its spaces (today minor due to its global characteristics). The disease object is "special" for its complexity value that we can summarize in a multifactoriality that involves both intellectual and emotional processing. This involves risks of dispersion, a concept that is well suited to the word identity both individual and social.

We have seen it in our daily clinical practice and, last but not least, in the specifics of psychotherapy (Berking et al., 2008; Frisone, 2019; Plakun, 2020; Probst et al., 2020) as a moment of relationship and observation, in the deprivation of the gaze (and perhaps also of the voice), we have seen it in the collective phenomena measured by statistics one of the tasks it is that of the quantitative description of phenomena. We have seen this in the diversification of measures, heterogeneous in choices and compromises adopted both in Europe and in the individual regions of the same and not always supported by the common denominator of health. We have seen this in the restrictive choices and the ease with which they were evaded due to the ignorance of a "highly educated" population.

After all, the most logical thing that politicians and technical experts, very well prepared but more accustomed to polyphonic singing than to moderate singing, could do was to resort to general laws that in philosophical language we could call nomothetic, that is therefore linked to the common sense or even ethics (masks, distancing, private and public closures, etc.). These actions have also borne fruit but have been harbingers of relapses and perhaps they will make up for it if new solutions are not found. What was missing? While retaining the clinical approach, the psychological one was lacking, that is, one based on ideographic dimensions, based on the unpredictability of the uniqueness of human behavior. Since prevention and unpredictability is only an oxymoron, what should we resort to explain phenomena widely experienced by a part of the population, such as that of the "no vax" who here not only do not want to judge but not even resort to the easy denomination of "goat expiatory" for anything but edifying phenomena that feed them such as the reduction of freedom, easy recourse, for or against dictated by our Constitution, etc. However, it remains that in the end those who have paid, pay and will pay will always be the excluded, the marginalized, all those social categories that paid first in the great mourning events for mankind. They will pay in terms of mentalization, in terms of the relationship with health, in terms of paranoia, in terms of fragility to abuse a term that we should leave, like resilience, to the world of physics.

The danger of nomothetic studies, even if supported by correct statistical algorithms, is that of arriving at generalizations that leave perplexing such as that of Pauly et al. (2021), a multicentric study conducted on 126 adults aged between 18 and 84 years with questionnaires (already questionable for phenomena concerning creativity), that concludes on the relationships between creativity and loneliness demonstrable to the algorithm but implausible from experience and intuitive intimate resonance. More convincing and less specious are the references to the importance of social networks such as the Australian study by Smith & Lim (2020) that intended to underline how loneliness and social isolation must stand out but still be at the center of prevention as a temporal factor present even before the pandemic and, probably, even after. According to the aforementioned sense, the pandemic would have less causal value and more of differentiation than a phenomenon such as that deriving from a Gestalt perspective for which formal and chromatic variations can change the meaning of reading a phenomenon. The distinctions, such as those posed by the Anglo-Saxon language, recurring to the marking of aloneness (Costantini, 2019) to indicate a reduced network of interpersonal relationships refers us to the phenomenon of typological and well-known differences such as those towards the psychic object which is very different between the 'extrovert and introvert for whom the phenomena of loneliness are not all risk factors but, inverting the terms, protective factors.

Hence the sense of the "broken" relationships of the articles which, stopping at the nomotheticity, the result of generalization, join the modest chorus that makes psychopathological phenomena something to be used for other floats that have little to do with health.

The attention paid to those who, for social reasons or cognitive fragility, experience the combination of loneliness / isolation, and in particular the elderly, is also evident. The insistence on this last antinomy re-proposes the usefulness of the dimensional structure and this is a central nucleus of the editorial by Simard & Volicer (2020) which in three points reduce the problem by underlining the inverse correlation between emotional support and loneliness; a second inverse correlation between lack of empathy and loneliness and a third aspect between social support network and reduction of isolation. It is possible to conclude with a series of good tips that suggest, as examples suitable for Western cultures, on what to do. A series of actions (good deeds) certainly suggested by necessity and common sense. Therefore, the rarest heroic dimension emerges which led to the celebration of a part of the health personnel who did their duty as they always did, in conditions dictated by the stringent health economics. We hope that the progressive training in the field of Medical Humanities (Settineri & Merlo, 2020b) can spare us, in the future, both obvious solutions and learned strategies that sound like crocodile tears or just formal descriptions as a duty of presence in a particularly distressing global context (Delios et al., 2021; Farrell & Newman, 2020; Okruszek et al., 2020; Salari et al., 2020).

In this regard, less generalist observations are important, such as the commentary by Hwang et al. (2020) who noted that in some cases the distancing imposed by the pandemic was disproportionate in mental illness. For the latter, covid 19 could have been an opportunity, with due caution, to re-establish relationships interrupted by everyday life, by the habit that requires detachment from the sick relative or friend, from that circularity that what the complex imposes; in particular, the context of a pandemic requires a different focus on the articulation of emotions in the weakest, in the prevalence of negative emotions that isolation can favor, in the weight to be attributed (case by case) to the endogenous and exogenous factors of the disease and, not finally, the comorbidities that potentiate the biases. Other authors (Saltzman et al., 2020) have suggested that the pandemic was an opportunity for technology offers but for the latter it must not be just an acknowledgment and an assessment centered on the aspects that the technological imposes (Bernacki, 2016; Damarell et al., 2020; Frisone & Micali, 2020; Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020).

The leap that should await us, especially for the new generations and in particular for adolescents, is the reflective dimension that must follow the cognitive one as a synthesis between

the latter and the first. The reflection, on the contrary, without the preliminary study, risks being dangerous and everyone today generates paranoia, maladaptive behaviors (Cerniglia et al., 2019; Cheng, 2018; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Frisone et al., 2020b; McGue & Iacono, 2005; McLaughlin et al., 2011; Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996; Settineri et al., 2019) dictated by the lack of solid information, up to behavioral monstrosities. A consistent link should be done with reference to intolerance to uncertainty, a relevant dynamic strongly emerged as an influent factor in the onset of psychopathological conditions (Del Valle et al., 2020; Di Giacomo, 2020; Di Giuseppe et al., 2021; Frisone et al., 2020a, 2021; Gori et al., 2021; Lalor et al., 2021; Merlo et al., 2021a, 2021b; Merlo & Myles, 2021; Orrù, 2021; Somma et al., 2020; Urban & Urban, 2020). Asking questions can be an exercise of individual freedom aimed at consolidating one's biographical identity which, we recall, can be made from the reconstruction of the past, from the awareness of the present, from the preparation of the future as an internalization of experience. In the specific of the disease, what reflections will the relationship with other infections, other metabolic discomforts, other affective deprivations preserve? Will we still resort to further removals as normal functioning delegated to the unconscious?

Therefore, the approach to the description of experiences such as that taught by Phenomenology must be considered correct and a lasting privilege, that is, out of time, the teaching by the Masters in the deepening of the events. Borgna's last work (Borgna, 2021) nor does it bear witness to the rare riches of solitude and the frequent poverty of isolation. The use of maieutics, silence and other metaphors of human depth underlines how even in the most critical situations not a few men have been able to give the best of themselves. In the specific of this thematic general considerations of an existential type become an invitation to enter into the depth of consciousness, remembering Pascal's suggestion in which it is observed that "all of humanity's problems stem from the man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone"; this thought was highlighted also by Banerjee & Rao (2020) at the epigram of their editorial, underlined with a metaphor of the threads of anxiety shared by the whole world as a lesson in emotional preparation for loneliness in times of crisis, the cornerstone of public health.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any potential conflict of interest.

References

1. Banerjee, D., & Rao, T. S. (2020). Psychology of misinformation and the media: Insights from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry, 36*(5), 131. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijsp.ijsp_112_20
2. Berking, M., Wupperman, P., Reichardt, A., Pejic, T., Dippel, A., & Znoj, H. (2008). Emotion-regulation skills as a treatment target in psychotherapy. *Behaviour research and therapy, 46*(11), 1230-1237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2008.08.005>
3. Bernacki, J., Błażejczyk, I., Indyka-Piasecka, A., Kopel, M., Kukla, E., & Trawiński, B. (2016, March). Responsive web design: testing usability of mobile web applications. In *Asian Conference on Intelligent Information and Database Systems* (pp. 257-269). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. 10.1007/978-3-662-49381-6_25
4. Banerjee, D., & Rai, M. (2020). Social isolation in Covid-19: The impact of loneliness. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020922269>
5. Borgna, E. (2021). *In dialogo con la solitudine*. Giulio Einaudi Editore.
6. Cerniglia, L., Griffiths, M. D., Cimino, S., De Palo, V., Monacis, L., Sinatra, M., & Tambelli, R. (2019). A latent profile approach for the study of internet gaming disorder, social media addiction, and psychopathology in a normative sample of adolescents. *Psychology research and behavior management, 12*, 651. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2147%2FPRBMS211873>
7. Cheng, B. (2018). *Adolescent Depression and Suicidality in the USA: A Look at YRBS Profiles and Health Risk Behaviors as Predictors in the Past 10 Years* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University).
8. Cicchetti, D., & Rogosch, F. A. (2002). A developmental psychopathology perspective on adolescence. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 70*(1), 6.
9. Costantini, B. (2019). La solitudine ai tempi del COVID-19. Riscoprire le relazioni interpersonali e la solitudine nella società iperconnessa. *Alpha Omega, 22*(3), 421-438.
10. Damarell, R. A., Lewis, S., Trenerry, C., & Tieman, J. J. (2020). Integrated Care Search: development and validation of a PubMed search filter for retrieving the integrated care research evidence. *BMC medical research methodology, 20*(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-020-0901-y>
11. Del Valle, M. V., Andrés, M. L., Urquijo, S., Yerro-Avincetto, M., López-Morales, H., & Canet-Juric, L. (2020). Intolerance of uncertainty over covid-19 pandemic and its effect on anxiety and depressive symptoms. *Interamerican Journal of Psychology, 54*(2). <https://doi.org/10.30849/ripij.v54i2.1335>
12. Delios, A., Perchthold, G., & Capri, A. (2021). Cohesion, COVID-19 and contemporary challenges to globalization. *Journal of World Business, 56*(3), 101197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2021.101197>
13. Di Giacomo, D. (2020). Public Health emergencies and quarantine: virtual patient engagement as challenge and opportunity for Mental Health strategy. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology, 8*(2). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2533>
14. Di Giuseppe, M., Nepa, G., Prout, T. A., Albertini, F., Marcelli, S., Orrù, G., & Conversano, C. (2021). Stress, Burnout, and Resilience among Healthcare Workers during the COVID-19 Emergency: The Role of Defense Mechanisms. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 18*(10), 5258. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18105258>
15. Farrell, H., & Newman, A. (2020). Will the coronavirus end globalization as we know it?. *Foreign Affairs, 16*.

16. Frisone, F. (2019). Mask as an epiphenomenon of the complex in psychotherapy. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2235>
17. Frisone, F., & Micali, R. (2020). The new-look of PubMed: A brief description of the changes in PubMed. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2534>
18. Frisone, F., Alibrandi, A., & Settineri, S. (2020a). Problem gambling during Covid-19. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2457>
19. Frisone, F., Settineri, S., Sicari, P. F., & Merlo, E. M. (2020b). Gambling in adolescence: a narrative review of the last 20 years. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 38(4), 438-457.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10550887.2020.1782557>
20. Frisone, F., Sicari, F., Settineri, S., & Merlo, E. M. (2021). Clinical Psychological Assessment of Stress: A Narrative Review of The Last 5 Years. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, 18(2).
doi.org/10.36131/cnfioritieditore20210203
21. Gori, A., Topino, E., Craparo, G., Grotto, R. L., & Caretti, V. (2021). An empirical model for understanding the threat responses at the time of COVID-19. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 9(1).
<https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2916>
22. Gusenbauer, M., & Haddaway, N. R. (2020). Which academic search systems are suitable for systematic reviews or meta-analyses? Evaluating retrieval qualities of Google Scholar, PubMed, and 26 other resources. *Research synthesis methods*, 11(2), 181-217. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jrsm.1378>
23. Hwang, T. J., Rabheru, K., Peisah, C., Reichman, W., & Ikeda, M. (2020). Loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International psychogeriatrics*, 32(10), 1217-1220.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610220000988>
24. Lalot, F., Abrams, D., & Travaglino, G. A. (2021). Aversion amplification in the emerging COVID-19 pandemic: The impact of political trust and subjective uncertainty on perceived threat. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 31(2), 213-222. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2490>
25. McGue, M., & Iacono, W. G. (2005). The association of early adolescent problem behavior with adult psychopathology. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 162(6), 1118-1124.
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.162.6.1118>
26. McLaughlin, K. A., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Mennin, D. S., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2011). Emotion dysregulation and adolescent psychopathology: A prospective study. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 49(9), 544-554. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2011.06.003>
27. Merlo, E. M., Sicari, F., Frisone, F., Costa, G., Alibrandi, A., Avena, G., & Settineri, S. (2021). Uncertainty, alexithymia, suppression and vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy. *Health Psychology Report*, 9(2), 169-179. <https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr.2021.104078>
28. Merlo, E. M., Stoian, A. P., Motofei, I. G., & Settineri, S. (2021). The Role of Suppression and the Maintenance of Euthymia in Clinical Settings. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1534.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.677811>

29. Myles, L. A. M., & Merlo, E. M. (2021). Alexithymia and physical outcomes in psychosomatic subjects: a cross-sectional study. *Journal of Mind and Medical Sciences*, 8(1), 86-93.
<https://doi.org/10.22543/7674.81.P8693>
30. Moroianu, L. A., Moroianu, M., Toma, A., Barbu, R., Ardeleanu, V., & Nitoi, L. C. (2021). Psychopathology in Patients Diagnosed with Sars Cov 2: a Brief Report. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 9(1).
<https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2982>
31. Nesse, R. M. (2019). *Good reasons for bad feelings: insights from the frontier of evolutionary psychiatry*. Penguin.
32. Okruszek, Ł., Aniszewska-Stańczuk, A., Piejka, A., Wiśniewska, M., & Żurek, K. (2020). Safe but lonely? Loneliness, anxiety, and depression symptoms and COVID-19. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 3222.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.579181>
33. Orrù, G., Bertelloni, D., Diolaiuti, F., Mucci, F., Di Giuseppe, M., Biella, M., ... & Conversano, C. (2021, May). Long-COVID Syndrome? A study on the persistence of neurological, psychological and physiological symptoms. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 575). Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9050575>
34. Pauly, T., Chu, L., Zambrano, E., Gerstorf, D., & Hoppmann, C. A. (2021). COVID-19, time to oneself, and loneliness: Creativity as a resource. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbab070>
35. Plakun, E. M. (2020). Psychotherapy in the Post-COVID-19 era. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice*®, 26(4), 309-312.
10.1097/PRA.0000000000000476
36. Probst, T., Stippel, P., & Pieh, C. (2020). Changes in provision of psychotherapy in the early weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown in Austria. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(11), 3815.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17113815>
37. Rosenstein, D. S., & Horowitz, H. A. (1996). Adolescent attachment and psychopathology. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 64(2), 244. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-006X.64.2.244>
38. Salari, N., Hosseini-Far, A., Jalali, R., Vaisi-Raygani, A., Rasoulpoor, S., Mohammadi, M., ... & Khaledi-Paveh, B. (2020). Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Globalization and health*, 16(1), 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-020-00589-w>
39. Saltzman, L. Y., Hansel, T. C., & Bordnick, P. S. (2020). Loneliness, isolation, and social support factors in post-COVID-19 mental health. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12(S1), S55.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000703>
40. Settineri, S., & Merlo, E. M. (2020a). Fear of contamination. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(1).
<https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2424>
41. Settineri, S., & Merlo, E. M. (2020b). Medical Humanities & Clinical Psychology. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2896>
42. Settineri, S., Merlo, E. M., Alibrandi, A., Sicari, F., Dritto, I. P., Strangis, F., & Frisone, F. (2019). Personality and phobias in adolescence: age and gender in psychopathological expressions. *Journal of Mind and Medical Sciences*, 6(2), 304-310. <https://scholar.valpo.edu/jmms/vol6/iss2/17>

43. Simard, J., & Volicer, L. (2020). Loneliness and isolation in long-term care and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 21(7), 966-967. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2020.05.006>
44. Smith, B. J., & Lim, M. H. (2020). How the COVID-19 pandemic is focusing attention on loneliness and social isolation. *Public Health Res Pract*, 30(2), 3022008. <https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp3022008>
45. Somma, A., Marelli, S., Galdi, G., Castelnuovo, A., Mombelli, S., Ferini-Strambi, L., & Fossati, A. (2020). Latent Changes in Perceived Quality of Sleep Related to the COVID-19 Quarantine Measures in Italian University Students: Understanding the Role of Personality and Internalizing Symptoms. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2550>
46. Urban, M., & Urban, K. (2020). What can we learn from gritty persons? Coping strategies adopted during COVID-19 lockdown. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2518>



©2021 by the Author(s); licensee Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology, Messina, Italy. This article is an open access article, licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported License. Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2021).

International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

DOI: 10.13129/2282-1619/mjcp-3183