

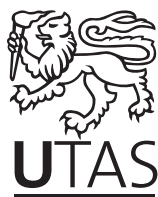


HOUSING *and* COMMUNITY RESEARCH UNIT

Loneliness in Australia

Paper No. 13

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Abstract

Further to previous theoretical work on loneliness and the condition of contemporary social bonds in 'liquid modernity', this paper reports on a new nationally representative survey, carried out in 2007, which examined loneliness in contemporary Australia. The paper identifies loneliness to be a potentially very serious and widespread problem with profound implications but it also highlights the most 'at risk' groups and the pattern of loneliness across the life course. It strongly suggests that loneliness has reached unprecedented levels and that it may have as much to do with reduced social connectivity and networks as the *quality* of the social bonds themselves. The paradox of contemporary loneliness is that our unswerving pursuit of freedom means we are, at the same time, unwilling to commit to the enduring and stable bonds we crave as lonely people. While significant loneliness was evident among most groups and ages the survey suggests that for men, particularly those who have separated from partnerships, loneliness has been a more serious problem that is endured for longer periods as well as being a problem they are less able to deal with than women. For example, while separated women are only twice as likely as married women to experience loneliness as a serious problem, separated men are over thirteen times more likely to develop loneliness as a serious problem than married men. The fact that marriage seems to insulate people so well against loneliness demonstrates how it may be the *nature* of the bond rather than relationships per se (their number and their frequency of interaction) that are important to understand in studies of contemporary loneliness. The paper also reveals that Australia has an unusual profile of loneliness as measured across the life course: whereas modern Western nations produces a shallow bowl-like curve where loneliness peaks in late adolescence/early adulthood and again in late old age, in Australia we have found a more dome-like curve where loneliness also peaks among those aged 25-45 (with a reprise among the over 80s).

Do our data suggest that loneliness is worsening in Australia? Yes they do. Flood's earlier (2006) study was based on the HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) Survey from 2001. He found that 16 per cent of both men and women aged 25 to 44 agreed with the statement 'I often feel lonely'. The nearest measure on our survey relates to those who agree with the statement 'How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life'. In 2007, 23 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men aged 25 to 44 claimed to be lonely once a week or more often. Another measure on our survey relates to those who agree with the statement 'Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times', and one might imagine that this is a slightly stronger statement about loneliness than Flood's. Even so, in 2007 34% of women and 33% of men aged 25-44 agreed with this. Put another way, one third of both Australian men and women in the prime of life have experienced loneliness as a serious problem at times. Surely this is new.

Sometimes you get so lonely,
Sometimes you get nowhere,
I've drifted all over the world,
I've left every place.

Please be mine,
Share my life,
Stay with me,
Be my wife.

David Bowie, *Be My Wife - Low* (1977)

Listen all you fools out there
Go on and love me I don't care,
Oh it's lonely at the top

Randy Newman, *Songbook Vol. 1*

1. Introduction

In a previous paper (Franklin 2009) it was argued that previous ways of conceptualising and measuring loneliness may not be consistent with Bauman's diagnoses of contemporary social bonds, contemporary individualism and the balancing act between freedom and loneliness. In a variety of works (Bauman 2000; 2003; 2005) the metaphor of liquidity was applied to a wide variety of relationships that once had a degree of solidity, continuity and reliability but which now act more like liquids. In this account, relationships, like liquids, no longer hold their shape in a way they once did; they tend to dissolve very easily and they have a very fragile and fluid composition; as with liquids, all attempts to hold or constrain them are prone to leakage and spills. Like liquids, they have a tendency to flow around obstacles intended to confine or constrict them. Unable to hold their shape for very long they no longer extend the same supportive or ontologically secure basis for social well-being. Bauman has identified the paradox of new demands for freedom and choice (especially to avoid relationship commitment) existing alongside apparent new opportunities for connectivity (especially through new technologies). Rather than comprising a new transition into the era of 'liquid modernity' where social bonds get a new lease on life, Bauman points to an emotional gap opening up where deep-rooted emotional needs for social bonds cannot be supplied by even the most energetic application of networking techniques and technologies. He argues that unlike relationships based on the enduring bond, contemporary forms of networking and electronic connectivity are ephemeral, lasting only for the duration of an encounter (they disappear when we go off line) or as long as our 'connections' continue to connect with us. Our sense of being connected relies on an increased *effort* to connect but this only ever generates an 'until further notice' quality.

Unlike 'relations', 'kinship', 'partnerships' and similar notions that make salient the mutual engagement while excluding or passing over in silence its opposite, the disengagement, 'network' stands for a matrix for simultaneously connecting and disconnecting; networks are unimaginable without both activities being simultaneously enabled. In a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices, enjoy the same status and carry the same importance. No point in asking which of the two complementary activities constitutes 'the essence' of network! 'Network' suggests moments of 'being in touch' interspersed with periods of roaming. In a network, connections are entered into on demand and can be broken at will' (Bauman 2003: xii).

The implication of this is not that new forms of relating to one another will substitute for previous forms but that there will be an emotional short-fall in the *quality* of the new bonds, with the implication that we may be lonelier. The previous paper (Franklin 2009) argued that this makes perfect sense in theory but asked whether there are any signs of it emerging in studies of loneliness (which coincidentally have also begun to feature more in recent studies of the elderly, the middle aged and the young (Andersson 1998, Flood 2005).

In this paper we will first review this argument in the light of the history of studies of loneliness. We conclude that in the past referred to by Bauman as solid modernity studies of loneliness were predominantly concerned not with the quality of interpersonal relationships but the breakdown of community and traditional forms of connectivity and network. As such loneliness was assessed using proxy measures, particularly the *density* and frequency of social connections, the types of social support they delivered and the emotional consequences of social isolation. We note that even recent studies have continued to use these proxy loneliness scales, often justified by sound arguments. It is widely known that using the word loneliness in questions tends to produce underreporting owing to the (not inconsiderable) social stigma of admitting loneliness (de Jong Gierveld 1998:74). Interestingly, in her study of a new Australian suburb in the early 1980s, for example, Lyn Richards (1991: 254) perceived a very widespread experience of loneliness in *Green Views* and despite good response rates in other data gathering exercises, *nobody* came forward from her call in the *Resident's Association Newsletter* to talk to her about their loneliness. However, the problem with not referring explicitly to respondent's experience of loneliness in surveys of socialability is that one is never sure whether even those with very small networks, frequency of interaction and degree of support are *actually* lonely. Equally, we now know that dense, frequent and even intimate relationships do not necessarily insulate people from loneliness (Kiley 1989). To a degree the various loneliness studies are a sensitive means of triangulating a variety of direct and indirect factors that often combine to produce loneliness. However, while they have proved very useful they tend to assume that relationships have a solidity and an evenness of emotional intensity that Bauman is now questioning.

At the risk of a degree of under-reporting therefore it was decided that to embark on a series of empirical exercises that would be based on self-reported loneliness solicited from questions that use the word loneliness directly.

2. Loneliness and Australia

In Australia loneliness has recently become seen as a major problem. Lindsay Tanner, MP for Melbourne describes it as a 'crisis of loneliness'¹ citing significance proportions of the elderly and young as at risk. Richard Flanagan (Moss, 2007) shares Bauman's view that while loneliness is a major problem for Australia it relates to a wider problem of individualism and a crisis of the social bond:

There is a crisis that is not political - an epidemic of loneliness, of sadness - and we're completely unequal to dealing with it. We're obsessed these days with believing that the answer is always individual, that it lies in ourselves. This takes every form of madness from self-help manuals to step aerobics, and is always about improving yourself. But the reality is, it lies in other people and making connections with them, yet it is a world where it's ever harder to make those connections.

Arnold (2001) made a similar observation about a very socially busy and pressured Australia which is paradoxically lonely:

'Forget about the Information Age: we live in the age of loneliness. In a world where marriage rates are dwindling, middle age is synonymous with divorce, and old age means a nursing home, people are bound to be very lonely. How many of our neighbors or colleagues do we really know as friends? How often do we turn on the television because we lack companionship?

This paper reports the first of a studies in which basic data about perceptions of loneliness in Australia was sought. We asked whether people were ever lonely and for how long; whether loneliness was ever a serious problem for them; whether they found the telephone and email useful when they were lonely; what they thought had caused their loneliness and who they turned to for help when loneliness was a problem for them. The results indicate that loneliness seems to have increased since the last significant study was undertaken in 2000. It suggests that while loneliness is experienced across the age spectrum, those groups that are typically the subject of loneliness concerns, (the elderly and the young) report less loneliness and less serious loneliness than those groups in the middle years of life. It suggests that those leaving family homes and entering into dependent living, new partnerships and the child-rearing period are particularly vulnerable. It also shows very strong gender variations in the intensity and experience of loneliness in which men, for example, seem particularly vulnerable following relationship breakdown. The paper concludes by suggesting why this may be and what new work, particularly qualitative work, is required to explore and answer these questions with more precision.

Before we report on the data, it is important to understand the kind of society and the shifts in the nature of social relationships that may be underlying this new epidemic of loneliness. We turn first to the writings of Zygmunt Bauman, whose work on the nature of the social bond in recent years and 'liquid modernity' has particular relevance.

3. Loneliness and Liquid Life

Contrasting the contemporary era of 'liquid modernity or life' with the immediately prior period of 'solid modernity' Bauman identifies a major discontinuity in the *quality* of social relationships as all levels of society where solid commitments gave way to contingent, flexible and conditional arrangements – all of which have an unsettlingly 'until further notice' character. Such changes can be identified with political and policy commitments (where such solid things as 'full employment' and 'regional policy' gave way to 'flexible' and 'free market' patterns of capital investment); with employment commitments (where cradle-to-grave employers/employees gave way to short term contracts etc), and with personal, marital and familial relationships (where solid, lifetime commitments to partners, friends and family gave way to 'until further notice' relationships resulting from freer divorce, serial partnerships, social and spatial mobility etc).

As a result of these shifts Bauman argues that we have traded commitments and security for freedoms and choices, and, as a result of that we spend more time 'between relationships', in 'insecure relationships' and find it increasingly difficult to commit ourselves to others, generally. Thus it was argued in a previous paper (Franklin 2009) that the nature of loneliness has changed in terms of how it is perceived and experienced. Whereas it was once associated with those who were detached from social relationships, today it increasingly stems from the *nature* of social relationships themselves. They still exist but they no longer work in the same way. The old sociological relationships are still named and enacted, but they enact something different, something *less*. Whereas once a great many people were woven together with long chains of dependency and secure commitments to enduring ties, today we have extensive and built-in structures of loneliness.

Although it is possible to romanticise this (see Willmott 1987), the solid modernity of the first three quarters of the twentieth century seemed to be characterized by stronger bonds and greater commitment and continuity of social relations generally. The first studies of loneliness suggest that it was considered to be a relatively rare thing and confined largely to a sub-section of the elderly (Townsend 1973). Most people married and had a lifelong commitment to their family; most people remained in the same job for long periods or at least in the same area and enjoyed overlapping and relatively complex ties of kinship and friendship (Wilmot, 1987; Franklin 1989). Loneliness

first became a social issue and problem in the 1960s in relation to the manner in which post-war development and decentralising relocations of industry began to adversely affect former industrial (particularly inner city) communities. Even then, the concern was predominantly expressed in relation to older people who had depended (historically) for their social support upon kinship structured around sedentary industrial settlement (Sheldon (1948); Townsend 1973; Weiss 1973). The social and spatial mobility of labour became something of a scandal of loneliness relative to the elderly in the 1960s and 1970s but the scandal did not extend to other relationships which were assumed to be relatively solid.

As a result of loneliness being first associated with older dependent people whose social networks were fragmenting and moving away, and with it their social support, initial sociological investigations of loneliness conceived of it as *social isolation*. Social isolation could be measured in terms of social connectivity, the numbers of people in our life and the frequency with which we see/interact with them. To this purely network measure the UCLA Loneliness Scale, now one of the most widely used means of measuring and assessing loneliness, added a substantive sequence of types of support we might receive from such social contacts. In this way, loneliness in the social science has tended to use these measures as a proxy (and definition) for loneliness itself. In this context it is interesting that in the index to Lyn Richards (1991) study of an Australian suburb, the entry for loneliness says: 'See Social support and networks' (Richards 1991: 323). While ostensibly attempting to avoid underreporting which was proven to result from using the term loneliness in questions, the problem with this approach is that these proxy measures may or may not correspond with whether people *feel* lonely, or not. In addition, it also makes it difficult to research the *causes* of loneliness as well as what the sufferers feel as an emotional experience/trauma.

In the past, the durability and contractual nature of relationships and social support were assumed, particularly by social anthropology which grew out of legal studies, to be part of their very constitution. The problem with conceiving loneliness in this way now is that while we may well find very similar levels of connectivity (and possibly more given the internet and much deeper penetration and use of the telephone) and the type of social support (e.g. to spouses, friends and work colleagues) historically/culturally associated with it, the *quality* and emotional

3. Loneliness and Liquid Life

intensity of the relationship may have changed. While loneliness studies always considered aspects of emotional experience as well as the scale of social involvement in understanding loneliness few considered seriously that loneliness could vary with the *quality* and security of relationships.

In *emotional* terms human beings evolved as tightly, socially bonded creatures whose psychological needs and drives were related to very high levels of social dependency, social closure and the enduring nature of social bonds. The anthropological record shows that in our hunting and gathering pasts the size of the day-to-day relationships within foraging bands was relatively small; that the rituals and social practices associated with belonging and identity were very highly developed and that the freedom to vary membership, belonging and identity was restricted even if a degree of mobility and flexibility often permitted conflicts to cool off and resolve. Historically, the numbers of contacts may therefore matter far less than the quality and intensity of the relationship, of which continuity and commitment would be paramount.

In these terms loneliness as a felt experience in modernity may have been less about size and frequency of network or the amount of social support that was delivered to you than feeling *wanted*, feeling a part of a relationship or social corporation, feeling the love or support of people unconditionally *committed* to you. After all, as we know, some people who are very happy have very strong partnerships but very small social networks (Granovetter 1973).

Now that we are not so dependent on others, now that we have created instead a political economy of individual freedom, the costs of social dependency in terms of commitments, duties, loyalties and social indebtedness to others are perhaps too high. Perhaps in a generalised way, it has become more difficult to commit ourselves to precisely the sort of relationship we still crave (through loneliness). This is the paradox that lies at the centre of loneliness. This form of what might be called *freedom loneliness*, was explored by Michel Houellebecq in his futuristic (2003) novel, *The Possibility of an Island*.

Like him we *might* understand the contemporary paradox of loneliness as a transitional phase. A transitional period in which emotional and institutional adjustments have to be made in respect of the development of a more robust individualism. We have certainly reached a point where the social relations of marriage, family, community, neighbourhood, even friendship etc, *persist* yet lack their previous (but defining) qualities. Specifically they lack the commitment, meaning and emotional definition that they once had and indeed Bauman has referred to the institution of the family as a zombie institution, one that is both alive and yet dead and it may be that other institutions have developed this quality. For instance, in relation to the Australian suburb, which surely plays a role in the specific nature and impact of loneliness in Australia, Lyn Richards (1991:179) showed that 'many were socially isolated but few craved community'. Similarly, 'the ideology of the family community is all about avoiding the omnipresent dangers of invasion of space, knowledge and time (Richards1991: 275). Such a realisation has implications therefore for how we study loneliness.

4. Studying Loneliness

According to Flood (2005) 'Early work on loneliness distinguished between two types, social and emotional loneliness, each associated with social isolation and emotional isolation respectively. 'Social loneliness results from the lack of a network of social relationships with peers (Green *et al.* 2001, p. 281), and can be remedied by social contact. Emotional loneliness results from the absence of a reliable attachment figure such as a partner, and can be remedied by finding a close, intimate bond (van Baarsen *et al.* 2001, p. 120)' (Flood 2005:6). The trouble with this formalistic interpretation (and any measurement based on it) is that this also reproduces the assumption that the presence of relationships of different types prevents or cures loneliness. However according to Stack (1998) there are too many married people reporting loneliness in too many surveys for this to be any kind of precise guide.

While recognising this distinction between social and emotional loneliness the most recent Australian study (Flood 2005) nonetheless continued to use a battery of 10 questions to produce a 'summed index of personal social support and friendship' as a proxy for loneliness. Five of Flood's Likert-types questions probed for responses to statements where social support and friendship might be lacking and five probed for responses to statements where social support and friendship might be readily available. According to Flood, the answers to these could not be easily apportioned into emotional or social loneliness clusters, which is why he opted instead to sum them into a single scale of loneliness. The weakness of this procedure is the built-in assumption that the availability of social support and friendship reduces the possibility of loneliness and the absence of it *produces* it. If Bauman is correct however we might expect to find substantial degrees of loneliness in a relatively well connected and supported society such as Australia. Only one of Flood's ten questions asked for responses to the statement 'I often feel very lonely'. Although Flood's study is valuable and interesting, his discussion of loneliness is nonetheless compromised by his continued assumption that it is a function of social connectivity and social support.

In our view therefore it might be useful to adopt an approach that avoids constructing proxy measure of loneliness and to concentrate instead on self-assessed measures, and for this reason our study was based only on questions about loneliness itself. In our view the contemporary period may have created very specific conditions and experiences of loneliness and so we were as much interested in the experience of loneliness as a form of suffering as its causes and its amelioration. We were interested in who had experienced loneliness and how often; whether loneliness had been a serious problem for them; how long the feeling or experience of being lonely lasts; what they felt had caused their loneliness; how loneliness made them feel and who they turn to for help (and whether the phone and email were helpful).

5. Data and Method

We developed several questions to examine loneliness in Australia. These were included as a module in the 2007 *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes* (AuSSA; see Phillips et al. 2008).¹ The AuSSA is a cross-sectional survey of Australians aged 18 and over, the third survey in a biennial series. The sample was drawn on a random basis from the 2007 Australian Electoral Roll, administered via mail out, mail back questionnaires between the 11 July and 2 November 2007. The sample was stratified to be proportional to the population of each state, with three questionnaires administered to separate samples of the Australian electorate. There were 2,769 respondents to the survey in which our questions were included representing a response rate of 41%.

We asked the following questions and were able to cross tabulate answers to these against a wide range of other social data including class, gender, age, income, marital status, educational attainment, religion, region, state and locality type etc. Key bivariate cross tables are appended at the end. However a summary of key data is contained in Table 1 below.

1. How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?
2. Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times
3. How long do periods of loneliness last for you?
4. What was the main cause of your last experience of loneliness?
5. How useful is the telephone during periods of loneliness?
6. How useful is email during periods of loneliness ?
7. What best describes how you feel when lonely?
8. Who do you turn to for help when you are lonely?

¹ AuSSA data were obtained from the Australian Social Science Data Archive, Australian National University, Canberra.

6. Results

6.i. How many suffer from loneliness in Australia?

Even though there was considerably less concern and thus attempts to measure loneliness around the mid-twentieth century, at least two British studies (Sheldon 1948; Tunstall 1963) now 'classics', provide something of a baseline for loneliness among the elderly. While 21% reported feeling loneliness often or sometimes to Sheldon, almost 40% reported loneliness often or sometimes in a recent survey that replicated the original instrument by Victor, Bowling, Bond and Scambler (2006). According to Victor et al however, these data deriving from quantitative social surveys appear to under represent the true extent of loneliness. In their study they used both qualitative and quantitative instruments and while 38% reported significant loneliness in the quantitative study, 58% reported significant loneliness in the qualitative study.

Table 1:

The experience of loneliness: those for whom a) loneliness is a serious problem and b) is experienced at least once a week or more (per cent)

	Loneliness a Serious Problem	Lonely > once a week
Women	28.6	19.5
Men	26.5	17.8
p	.13	.15
Aged 18-24	37.7	29.8
25-44	33.6	21.8
45-64	25.7	16.8
65+	20.5	15.0
p	<.001	<.001
Marital status		
Single (never married)	44.5	33.3
de facto	33.0	20.5
Married	18.4	10.4
Divorced	43.1	30.2
Separated	50.8	47.7
Widowed	45.7	41.3
p	<.001	<.001
Town <25K	26.2	17.8
Town >25K to 100K	27.6	18.6
Outer metro >100K	27.7	19.6
Inner Metro >100K	28.8	18.6
p	.75	.84
Degree	28.1	16.5
Non-degree	27.6	19.6
p	.40	.04
Self assessed class		
Upper	23.1	7.7
Upper Middle	25.7	14.5
Lower Middle	28.6	20.5
Working	28.2	22.2
None	31.5	18.5
p	.44	.001
Do you have a religion?		
Yes	25.8	18.2
No	31.6	20.1
p	.001	.13
Born in Australia	27.2	18.5
Born elsewhere	28.7	20.0
p	.25	.23
Individual Income		
Income \$0-\$15,599	31.0	23.6
Income \$15,600-36,399	29.9	19.4
Income \$36,400 - 77,999	27.3	18.4
Income \$78,000+	18.7	10.4
p	<.001	<.001
Prefer to be by themselves?		
Most of time with others	24.9	19.7
More with others	26.0	17.0
More alone	28.0	17.5
Most of time alone	37.5	31.3
p	.006	<.001

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2007).

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Equally (but significantly), those reporting 'never lonely' seems to have dropped significantly from 79% to 61%. Interestingly, Tunstall's 1963 measure of social isolation was defined as less than 21 direct, face-to-face contacts per week. He found 21% of his sample to be socially isolated by these criteria but if Victor et al had applied the same criteria to their sample the socially isolated would currently amount to 75%.

Another recent British study by Demakakos (2006) used the UCLA Loneliness Scale to investigate loneliness among those aged 52 and over. Using measurements of 'feeling left out', 'lack of companionship' and 'isolation from others', around 30-35% of the 50-52 year olds were lonely often or most of the time. The proportion of those other age groups experiencing loneliness remained constant until the mid-seventies when it rises steeply to between 38 and 50%.

In our Australia survey loneliness among the elderly is no less serious where 50% of the population over 61 report the experience of loneliness. If we take people who experience it at least once a month as an indication of a more chronic experience of loneliness then the proportion of seriously lonely seniors is between 26% and 29% - still an alarming number perhaps.

While concern for loneliness among the elderly has not abated and still drives the largest single research effort on loneliness, recent surveys by Flood (2006) in Australia, Perlman (1990) in Canada and the Ministry of Social Development (2006) in New Zealand have been warranted by concerns for rising rates of loneliness in other age groups. These concerns all focus around an entirely new phenomenon: the growth of single person households and single person living, particularly among young adults, the divorced/separated and those delaying or avoiding marriage altogether.

Almost seven million English people (or 13% of the population) live alone, 'four times more than in 1960' (Bennett and Dixon 2006). In Australia things are no different: Flood (2006) found 12% of his sample of 25-44 years olds living alone. Lone person households increased from 18.8 % per cent of household in 1986 to 24 % in 2001 (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2006) and are projected to increase from 1.8 million to 3.7 million in 2026 - a rise of 105 per cent (ABS 2005). While of course it is entirely appropriate to identify these changes as symptomatic of rising rates of loneliness, it must be

remembered that they *are* only symptomatic and must not be confused with cause. Put another way, aloneness or being alone in one sense or another does not automatically translate to loneliness. Many people prefer to be alone, enjoy their own company or are not at all bothered by those periods of time when they are separated from those with whom they share a bond. Equally it is possible to feel loneliness in large crowds, in busy social networks, in families, in functioning households, *in relationships*. According to Dan Kiley (1989) between 10 and 20 million Americans suffers from what he calls living-together loneliness. This is why self reported loneliness studies are more interesting for us, because they identify who is not happy with their solitude.

According to Andersson's review of studies of loneliness (1998:267), many studies seem to agree that 'at least one person in four reports loneliness to occur constantly or fairly often and around 25% of the population currently appear to be lonely from most nationally representative samples in Western societies. Based on our monthly experience of chronic loneliness we can say that on average 36.4% of Australians report this, but the proportion between 25 and 44 is far higher at 42% and only just over a quarter never experience loneliness at all.

The trouble with this 'frequency of experience' data is that one has no way of knowing how to judge the seriousness of given levels of experience/exposure. It *seems* somewhat shocking, certainly it has grown since the 1960s evidently, but is there a normal degree of loneliness in the human condition and where should we begin to be concerned, if at all?

We therefore asked respondents asked whether loneliness had ever been a serious problem for them? The responses were surprising. Thirty-four per cent of those between 25 and 44 report loneliness to be a serious problem for them at times. On the face of it the 18-24 year age group are even worse with 38% reporting loneliness as a serious problem, but when we controlled for all other variables aside from age it is the middle aged band between 25 and 44 who suffer serious loneliness the most (see Table 3).

Do these data represent suggest that loneliness is worsening in Australia? Yes they do. Flood's earlier (2006) study was based on the HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) Survey from 2001. He found that 16 per cent of both men and women aged 25 to 44 agreed with

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the statement 'I often feel lonely'. The nearest measure on our survey relates to those who agree with the statement 'How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life'. In our survey of 2007, 23 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men aged 25 to 44 claimed to be lonely once each week or more often. Another measure on our survey relates to those who agree with the statement 'Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times', and one might imagine that this is a slightly stronger statement about loneliness than Flood's. Even so, in 2007 34% of women and 33% of men aged 25-44 agreed with this. Put another way, one third of both Australian men and women in the so-called prime of life have experienced loneliness as a serious problem at times. Surely this is new.

6.ii. Loneliness and marital status

Loneliness varies considerably by marital status with marriage itself being a good insulator against it. Fifty-five per cent of married people report never being lonely as compared with only 34 per cent of de facto partners, but even the divorced and the separated are less lonely than the single-never-married among whom only 20 per cent report never being lonely.

If we look at loneliness as a serious problem the view is very different but still alarming. Loneliness has been a serious problem for forty-five per cent of the single as compared with 43 per cent of the divorced, 51 per cent of the separated, 47 per cent of the widowed and 33 per cent of de facto partners. However, even 17 per cent of married people in Australia have a serious problem with loneliness.

On the whole, women seem to be a little more prone to loneliness than men though it may be a bigger problem to resolve for men than women. Only 41 per cent of women never experience loneliness as compared to 47 % of men and around 28% of both genders seem to experience loneliness as a serious problem.

Men are relatively insulated against loneliness through the life cycle as compared to women, but only until separation or divorce. At this point things can go very badly wrong for them and they become the loneliest category of Australians we found. Men who are separated or divorced have very high rates of loneliness compared with women in the same category of marital status. Seventy per cent of men separated and 51 per cent of divorced men report loneliness as a serious problem compared with only 38 per cent of separated women and 39 per cent of divorced women.

Widowed men suffer loneliness (60% report it as a serious problem) more than widowed women (42%). Equally, men are more insulated by marriage (only 16% report loneliness as a serious problem as compared with 21% women).

Multi-variant analysis shows that controlling for all other variables, marriage is indeed a great predictor of loneliness, apparently acting as an insulator against it, particularly for men (see Table 3). Remarkably perhaps, it also shows that while separated women are only twice as likely as married women to experience loneliness as a serious problem, separated men are over thirteen times more likely to develop loneliness as a serious problem than married men. Even more significant, separated men are over eighteen times more likely than married men to suffer loneliness more often than once a week as compared with only 3.33 times more for separated women.

Men also suffer from extreme forms of loneliness far more than women as a result of divorce and widowhood but they are also more prone to experiencing loneliness as a serious problem when they are single and in de facto relationships.

We can say that marriage is thus very good for men as far as combating loneliness is concerned and Flood (2005) was surely correct to say that men need women far more than women need men. However we would make the caveat that it is the *sort of relationship* that they make with women that is critical.

Why are men so vulnerable to partnership breakdown? Part of the answer must draw on kinship and marriage norms. Australian men often leave the largely male company of their bachelor days if and when they form partnerships and joint households with women partners. Frequently, their new social circle is predominantly drawn from their wives and partners circle of friends and family (Flood 2005). Thus when partnership breakdown occurs, and it occurs more frequently than in the past, men are left less supported than women. The social ties and friendships that men make within their wife/partner-centred social network are real enough and in most cases rich and supportive, but they evaporate once their relationship with a spouse or partner terminates. In the TV show *Curb Your Enthusiasm* the American comedian Larry David points to an emerging social etiquette whereby friends and family make it explicit who they are 'with' once a partnership breakdown has been made public. The figure of Larry David (playing himself) slowly realising that almost all of his social circle are now 'with Cheryl' is comedic, but poignant.

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According to Flood (2006),

Separation and divorce do have an indirect effect on social isolation among men. Men tend to have fewer close persons in their primary social networks than women, and are more likely to nominate their spouse or partner as the person to whom they feel closest. In couple households men are more likely to rely both on the direct support of their partners and on the greater social network maintained by those partners. But if they separate or divorce, men's levels of social support return to the low levels experienced by their single counterparts (Flood 2006: vii).

In addition,

The data suggests that men rely on their wives or de facto partners for their emotional and social needs to a greater extent than women who draw on wider sources of support. Men in most couple households experience far higher levels of personal support than men who live alone, but this is not as true for women. While women in childless couple households also report high levels of support, women in couple households with young children report levels similar to those experienced by women who live by themselves. This finding suggests that a relationship with a spouse or intimate partner is a more important source of support for men than it is for women. In short, men need women more than women need men. (Flood 2006:viii).

The problem men face with loneliness generally and perhaps particularly once they have been separated and return to single life or parenthood is illustrated by answers to our question which focussed on who people turn to for help when they are lonely.

Almost a quarter of the sample (24 %) reported turning to 'nobody' suggesting that either they had nobody to turn to, felt it difficult to broach the subject with people (and there is anecdotal evidence that people avoid admitting loneliness) or that they thought it would not or could not help.

However women are a lot less likely to turn to nobody than men. Only 16% of women said nobody as compared with 35% men and the evidence shows that Australian men seem reluctant to turn to the same types of help as women.

So, for example, thirty-six per cent of women turned to a friend as compared with only 25% of men. Twice as many

women asked their GPs for help as men. Forty-one per cent of women turned to their family as compared with only 33 per cent of men, and 2.9% of women turned to counsellors as compared to only 1.9 % of men. So while men suffer almost as much loneliness as women they also seem to suffer it alone more and have fewer people or feel they have fewer people to turn to.

There is also a consistent relationship between class and education and the type of people who are turned to for help. Working class people are far more likely to turn to nobody than the middle classes and the more educated. Only around 15 per cent of graduates say they turn to nobody as compared with 30 per cent of those with no educational qualifications and thirty-two per cent with trades qualifications. The better educated are also more likely to turn to a friend and their family so there seems to be wide variations in how acceptable it is to talk about loneliness in different Australian class cultures.

The proportion that turn to nobody also increases with age in our sample. This could be a generational effect (it may be less stigmatising to admit of loneliness among today's younger generations) or it could be a life cycle effect (as one progresses into one's retirement years the pool of available sympathetic ears may dwindle).

Very few people across Australia seem to think it is something their GP can help with (1.4 % turn to their GP) or a counsellor (2.4 %) and most talk to their family, probably because these are people who will keep such disclosures 'within the family' and out of public circulation and possibly also because their parents, siblings and children may broach the subject with them.

Questions also probed the usefulness of the telephone and email (there was not space to do proper justice to the internet and this will be the subject of a later investigation). We asked whether the telephone is useful during times of loneliness because there is an embodied element to this engagement even if it is only 'voice' and also because the telephone bridges the great differences that are often involved in moves in Australia. Overall 81 per cent found the telephone useful. However it was another question that split men and women: eighty-six per cent of women agreed while only 74 per cent of men agreed. A greater proportion of women strongly agreed (28 %) than men (11 %) and this may support other finding that men communicate less or find it more difficult to communicate when they are lonely.

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We also asked whether respondents found email useful during times of loneliness and almost half (47 %) agreed that it did. Here the difference in response between men and women was even greater: while fifty three per cent of women agreed only thirty seven per cent of men agreed. In fact, 41% of men disagreed with the proposition. Again, this may indicate men's reluctance to talk about loneliness, their reluctance to commit or engage, or maybe their lack of social skills to build close relationships. Future work needs to look into internet but we already know that, counter-intuitively, there is a positive relationship between internet use and loneliness (Coget et al 2002).

However with email there were further divisions based on educational attainment and social class. The most dramatic difference was between those with degrees and higher degrees on the one hand (56 % and 63 % respectively) and those with none or trades certificates (34 % and 35 % respectively). This indicates that in addressing loneliness we need to be mindful of the compounding effects of age, marital status, gender and class/education.

6.iii. What causes loneliness?

It is all very well for sociologists to diagnose the causes of loneliness using their wider angles and perspectives of social and cultural change in modernity but how do the lonely give account of it? Respondents were asked what the main cause of their loneliness was and it was hoped that their answers would cast some light on the accuracy of Bauman's rather gloomy prognosis about the quality of contemporary social bonds.

Table 2:
The Causes of Loneliness (per cent)

When you last felt lonely, what was the main cause?

Relationship breakdown	12.2
Death of a loved one	9.9
Moved to a new place	5.1
Friend moved away	2.7
Other (non specified)	22.9
Don't know	14.2
Not applicable	33.0

Source: *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2007)*

In multiple choice-type questions respondents were offered the choice of very emotional events that disconnect them socially, such as relationship breakdown, death of a loved one, a spatial move and a friend moving away. Even though loneliness is not reducible to connectivity it was considered that these options would probably have captured a large proportion of the loneliness cases (as trigger events), but this was wrong. These accounted for less than half (44 per cent) of cases. Thirty-four per cent of the respondents ticked the 'Other' box and 21 per cent the 'Don't Know' box indicating that perhaps the causes are complex and not particularly clear, even to those who suffer from loneliness. Clearly, more work will need to be done here but it is completely conceivable that many find themselves lonely and cannot quite grasp how or why it happened, particularly if their social network is fairly normal. It was clear from Lyn Richards (1991) study that loneliness was taken to be a normative aspect of the demand for privacy in Australian suburbs. More qualitative work needs to be done but something of a clue to be followed up was offered in responses to another question on how loneliness made them *feel*.

Only 18 per cent said that 'isolated' best describes how they felt and only 9 per cent felt 'rejected'. It is tempting to read the low numbers reporting 'isolated' as support for the idea that the majority of lonely people are not actually socially isolated. It would be unlikely that respondents would report feeling 'isolated' unless they were removed in some way from the cut and thrust of social life so we can take this as supporting the idea that loneliness in the contemporary context thrives in the socially connected cities we live and work in and inside social networks. Aside from Richards' discovery that loneliness was widely regarded as culturally normative in suburban Australia, prior studies, such as Bryson and Thompson's (1972) study of *Newtown* in the late 1960s also unearthed a very barren social world in new suburban neighbourhoods. They found that the proportion of people who had made no friends in their locality varied between 37-76%. Twenty-five per cent of their sample said their suburb was 'not central enough', 24% said it was 'too far from friends', 14 % said it was too far from shops and transport and 14 % said it was too far from work Bryson and Thompson (1972:136). Since this period of course suburban expansion has placed a large number of Australians even further out and even more distributed across space.

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Relatively few people in our study reported feeling rejected or a failure and there are clearly those whose loneliness relates to the loss of specific others. What is interesting and requires a follow-up, is the large numbers of people reporting feeling 'alone'. To say they are alone in this context may mean they felt unattached, uncommitted-to, unloved, uncared for, 'with nobody' and for social beings this is clearly disturbing and the serious implications for health and well-being are now well established (see Franklin 2009 for a review). Thirty-five per cent said that loneliness made them feel 'alone'. When such a large proportion of respondents identified with feeling 'alone' it may signal a fatalistic recognition that they feel alone generally or abstractly; that although they are very much among other people, the only connection or bond they have made or are likely to make will inevitably be very loose, unsubstantial and ephemeral and perhaps disappointing.

Similarly, relatively few people (8 per cent) said loneliness made them feel 'a failure'. So, if most felt well-connected and socially acceptable, then we must consider seriously the question of the *quality* and nature of relationships rather than merely their number and frequency.

Sixty-one per cent of men attributed their loneliness to causes other than disconnecting causes in comparison with only forty-one per cent of women. This relates to one of Flood's findings that women are better connected and maintain closer relationships (especially with friends and relatives) than men. Thus, women are more likely to be lonely as a result of a disconnecting incident. The data *seems* to suggest that men's loneliness related more to their failure to make and maintain relationships than to their disconnection per se. A lot of this must remain speculation at this stage but it does identify potential fruitful pathways for qualitative research. In particular it would be useful to track biographies of loneliness and, in the case of men and women who lose a partner, how patterns of dependency and independency are formed before, during and after partnerships.

Among 'other causes' there may be a large number of both sexes who have failed to make, or declined making, any strong or permanent bonds with partners and maybe also friends. Again this may signal a generalised reluctance to 'commit' to relationships in a manner we once did. In this sense loneliness may be a surprising (and unwelcome) form of suffering since it is an artefact of the expression of choice and free will rather than the result of conditions beyond our control. Many people may not wish for the encumbrance

of attachments and commitment yet find they cannot live in such a way entirely happily. The source of their unhappiness may not be very well understood and indeed it may have very deep social-psychological roots.

In psychological terms we evolved as tightly socially bonded creatures, the psychological needs and drives being related to very high levels of social dependency. Now that we are not so dependent on others, now that we have created instead an economy of individual freedom, the costs of social dependency in terms of commitments, duties, loyalties and social indebtedness are perhaps too high. In their absence however we feel alone, because we are alone, but it is more than just a perception of aloneness. It is a negative feeling, an aching for something that *is* hard to put a finger on, *is* hard to describe because it relates to the essentially abstract realm of the social. The social is a *paradoxically* abstract concept which we are acutely aware of but, at the same time, seldom articulate as such. It thus gives rise to a form of suffering the presence of which is palpable but the description of which remains illusive/intangible.

Women seemed to be better able to identify why they were lonely and perhaps this is because they form clearer and deeper relationships with others. Far fewer men report loneliness resulting from death of a loved one (11 per cent) in comparison with women (17.5 per cent). Women are far more likely to feel lonely following a move to another place and thus leaving friends behind (9.1 per cent attribute their loneliness to this) than men (5.4 per cent) and are more likely to feel lonely if a friend moves (5 per cent) than men (3 per cent). We have seen other studies which show how Australian men's social bonds with other men are more tenuous, less expressive and brittle in comparison with women's friendships (Connell 1995; Bank 1995), and this is confirmed here. As Banks argues, 'men's projections of their masculine identity enacted through their relationships with each other have not hit the lofty 'friendship' ideals as prescribed by Colling [in 1992]'.

Class does appear to determine some elements of loneliness. Australians who graduate with Bachelor or higher degrees report far more loneliness resulting from spatial migration (18 per cent) than those with no qualifications or trade qualification (8 per cent). Those with no educational qualifications or trade qualifications also attribute far more loneliness to the death of a loved one (19 per cent) than those with bachelors or postgraduate qualifications (9 per cent). Clearly the social bonds between family members

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among non-migrating working class Australians are stronger and more important than middle class movers and are therefore less likely to create a sense of loneliness.

Loneliness arising from spatial detachment or loss can also be seen in elevated levels of loneliness in some states. Queensland for example has an elevated level of people attributing their loneliness to a move they have made recently and conversely, South Australia shows an elevated level of people attributing their loneliness to people who have moved away – often, one supposes, to Queensland....

Loneliness arising from the death of a loved-one becomes steadily more significant among older cohort. Whereas only 7 per cent of those aged 18-30 identify this as a cause of their loneliness (which is less than half the average), it rises to 17 per cent for those in their fifties and 40 per cent for those in their 80s and this suggests that the manner in which we address loneliness as an issue will need to take into account the special needs of genders, age groups, areas affected by migration and so on. Conversely loneliness attributed to spatial movement tends to recede through the life course.

While respondents' views of the causes of their loneliness are very insightful we are also in a position to analyse the social origins of loneliness using regression methods. We decided to investigate the frequency, severity and chronology of loneliness in Australia.

The dependent variables were derived from the following questions:

1. *'How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?'*
(Responses: Once a week or more versus less often or never)
2. *'Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times'*
(Responses: Agree versus disagree)
3. *'When you last felt lonely, how long did the feeling last?'*
(Responses: Longer than one day versus less often)

As these three variables are dichotomous, data were analysed using binary logistic regression models (Agresti and Finlay 1997). The independent variables included sex, age groups, marital status, religious denomination, country of birth and income groups, all coded as 1/0 'dummy' variables for regression analysis. We also used responses to the question: 'In your free time, do you prefer to be with other people or do you prefer to be by yourself?' to control for the possibility that loneliness is at least partly a result of lifestyle choice. In other words to assess if those who prefer to be 'loners' are actually more lonely than other people.

6.iv. Multivariate Results

The three dependent variables - loneliness is a serious problems, lonely more often than once a week and those experiencing loneliness for longer than one day - are examined in Table 2. Odds ratios from the binary logistic regression analyses are presented in the tables to facilitate the interpretation of the regression estimates.² Given the relatively large sample size, statistical significance is indicated by asterisks to show significance at better than the 95%, 99% and 99.9% levels.

The results suggest that three sets of independent variables are consistently associated with all three dependent variables – age, marital status and income, although gender appears to have little influence in the multivariate case.

Those aged under 65 are approximately two to three times more likely than the oldest age category to have experienced loneliness as a serious problem and to experience loneliness more often than once per week. Equally, the youngest category of 18-24 year olds and the over 65s are far less likely to experience loneliness on a weekly basis than those aged 25-64 and it is among the 25 – 44 age group that both serious and frequent loneliness is most acute. This finding runs counter to most other studies of loneliness where the loneliness-age curve is described as a shallow 'u' (Anderson 1998:267). The Australian loneliness-age curve would seem to be a relatively deep dome shape.

² Odds ratios (OR) for each independent 'dummy' (1/0) variable need to be compared with their respective reference group. OR larger than 1 indicate an effect that is larger than the reference group. For example, in the first column of Table 2, those aged 18-24 are 1.77 times as likely as the reference group aged 65 and over to have experienced loneliness as a serious problem, as opposed to not experiencing loneliness as a problem, controlling for the other variables in the regression model. Alternatively, OR less than unity suggest a negative association. For example, again in the first column of table 2, the highest income group (i.e. \$77,777+) are 2.63 times less likely than the lowest income reference category to have experienced loneliness as a serious problem, as opposed to not experiencing loneliness as a problem.

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Table 3:
Loneliness is a Problem and Lonely once a week or more (Odds Ratios)

	Loneliness a Serious Problem	Lonely more often than once a week	When Lonely lasts longer than 1 Day
Men	1.22	1.21	0.96
Aged 18-24	1.77*	1.67	0.69
25-34	3.67***	2.91***	1.48
35-44	3.45***	2.53***	1.64*
45-54	2.67***	2.12**	1.49
55-64	2.26***	2.06**	1.17
65+ (referent)	1	1	1
Married (referent)	1	1	1
Single	3.71***	4.48***	1.97***
de facto	2.12***	2.22***	1.69*
Separated	4.20***	6.94***	2.03*
Divorced	3.55***	3.73***	1.84**
Widowed	6.71***	9.43***	1.26
Degree	1.16	0.92	0.86
Catholic	0.90	1.04	1.06
No Religion	1.12	1.04	1.07
Other Rel. (referent)	1	1	1
Born in Australia	1	1	1
Born in UK	1.21	0.87	0.79
Born Other Country	1.27	1.39*	1.67**
Middle Class	1.20	0.99	1.08
Other Class (referent)	1	1	1
Income <\$36,400	1	1	1
\$36,400-\$77,777	0.65**	0.72*	0.75*
\$77,777+	0.38***	0.42***	0.54**
Prefer to be by themselves	0.85	0.92	0.95
R ²	.15	.16	.06
N	(2243)	(2247)	(1320)

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Source: Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2007).

Marital status is also related to loneliness. In particular, being married is associated with being less lonely, and being lonely for a shorter period of time compared to all other marital statuses. Being widowed and separated are related to a higher level and duration of loneliness with the widowed being over nine times more likely to experience loneliness than the married and the separated almost seven times more likely. Those in de facto relationships are more than twice as likely as married people to suffer loneliness as a serious problem and experience it more often than once

a week, while singles are almost 4.5 times more likely to experience these extremes of loneliness.

Higher levels of income appear to be linked to lower levels, frequency and duration of loneliness. For example, those in the highest income category are 2.38 times *less likely* than the lowest income reference category to have experienced loneliness more than once a week, as opposed to experiencing loneliness less often.

Regression results also suggest that there is little statistical difference between those who prefer to spend their leisure time with others and those who prefer to spend their time alone as a predictor of severe and frequent loneliness. This was surprising and it may be another way in which our data indicate that loneliness may arise even among those whose networks and social life appears at first sight to be very active. One result, for those who prefer to be 'by themselves' in their spare time, is not statistically significant at the 95% level, even with this large national sample. This is an interesting finding in itself. If we can take this variable as a proxy measure of social connectedness or at least an indicator of a respondent's pattern and/or character of sociability then this may mean that many people experience loneliness while in the midst of an ostensibly busy social life. Certainly it means that those who see themselves as sociable are no less prone to experiencing serious and prolonged forms of loneliness than those who are loners by choice. We should stress that is a proxy measure, however.

Gender differences are very clear in the way marriage and other marital statuses relate to loneliness. Our data show very clearly that the impact of not being married on loneliness for men is far stronger than it is for women (see Table 3). One of the most significant findings concerns gender differences in levels of loneliness among separated, divorced and widowed men and women. Separated men are over thirteen times more likely to experience loneliness as a serious problem than married men whereas separated women are less than twice as likely to suffer serious loneliness as married women. Men are also considerably more likely to be lonely more often than once a week as a result of separation (eighteen times more likely than married men) than women (3.3 times more likely than married women). Indeed, men are significantly more prone to serious and prolonged loneliness than women as divorcees, widowers and single persons.

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It is also important to stress that the estimate for each individual independent variable in these models hold after statistically adjusting for the influence of every other independent variable, that is to say, sex, marital status, education, religious denomination, self assessed class location, income and whether people prefer to be alone in their free time.

Table 3:

Loneliness is a Problem and Lonely once a week or more by Gender (Odds Ratios)

	Loneliness a Serious Problem		Lonely more often than once a week	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Aged 18-24	2.06*	1.54	2.66*	0.93
25-34	4.51***	3.00**	4.24***	1.87
35-44	3.51***	3.58***	3.25***	1.85
45-54	2.70***	2.26**	2.51**	1.72
55-64	2.44**	2.25**	2.05*	2.18*
65+ (referent)	1	1	1	1
Married (referent)	1	1	1	1
Single	3.15***	4.40***	3.51***	6.50***
de facto	1.75*	2.27**	2.33**	1.77
Separated	1.93	13.38***	3.33**	18.10***
Divorced	2.61***	5.27***	2.52**	6.69***
Widowed	5.42***	11.46***	8.19***	15.73***
Degree	1.04	1.33	0.91	0.93
Catholic	1.03	0.68	0.86	1.36
No Religion	1.01	1.18	0.72	1.50
Other Rel. (referent)	1	1	1	1
Born in Australia	1	1	1	1
Born in UK	1.47	0.97	0.77	0.98
Born Other Country	1.23	1.29	1.47	1.29
Middle Class	1.14	1.26	1.06	0.89
Other Class (referent)	1	1	1	1
Income <\$36,400	1	1	1	1
\$36,400-\$77,777	0.71*	0.60*	0.65*	0.90
\$77,777+	0.36**	0.39***	0.33*	0.56
Prefer to be by themselves	0.89	0.79	0.88	0.91
R ²	.12	.22	.14	.23
N	(1243)	(1000)	(1245)	(1002)

Given that these are social data, the r-squared statistics suggest a reasonable amount of the variation in the 'serious problem' ($R^2.15$) and 'lonely more often than once a week' ($R^2.16$) dependent variables is explained by the models, although the models is a much poorer fit for the duration of loneliness variable ($R^2.06$). Notably, age and marital status are less strongly associated with the duration of loneliness than with the seriousness, or frequency of loneliness measures.

7. Conclusions

We do have a serious problem with loneliness in Australia with large numbers reporting chronic and problematic levels of loneliness relative to studies conducted in other nations. There are some particular reasons why Australia may be so vulnerable: geographical separations are more acute when job moves are made; cities are vast and social networks are stretched over sprawling suburbs), many settlements around growing cities are very new, commuting distances are significant and significant moves are made upon relocation as first time buyers, partnership separation, divorce, leave home etc. The sociology of marriage and family in Australia also suggests that a significant degree of segregated marriage patterns and a very large number of Australians are living alone. Australia also has a significant proportion of migrants from overseas.

Although there is not a lot of baseline comparative data this study suggests that loneliness increased over the period 2001-2007 and may be set on an upward trajectory although more systematic surveying is called for. Again there are lot of structural reasons why loneliness would be increasing. Increases in single living, sustained levels of divorce, separation and relationship breakdown all combine to increase loneliness. However we have also shown some evidence that supports the notion of loneliness resulting from declining commitments to social bonds (loneliness among socially active people; loneliness in marriage and de facto relationships, for example).

We have also shown that the demography of Australian loneliness is very different to that found in other comparable Western countries. Whereas the typical pattern of loneliness across the lifecycle features a shallow dish or u-curve, where loneliness peaks among young adults and the very old, the Australian pattern is a shallow dome-like or an n-shaped curve where loneliness peaks among those in their mid-20s to mid-40s. This may point to severe problems among those in early stages of the marital/partnership and family cycle and may be exacerbated by high mortgage and dual-career stresses. While very high levels of loneliness among elderly and early adult Australians are shocking enough on their own (and mirror international findings elsewhere), it is our discovery of the highest levels of loneliness among groups hitherto protected from loneliness by their partnership and childrearing years that is most disturbing. This more than anything leads us to speculate that Bauman may be correct to point to shifts in the nature of relationships (the strength of social bonds)

rather than the shrinkage of social networks; and even that the new networking culture may be a symptom of a serious collapse of the social bond, rather than its salvation.

Who are the at-risk groups? We can single out the young singles, the recently separated especially men and the divorced and widowed, but the fact is loneliness seems to be quite acute throughout the life course and of course we all pass through each of these stages.

What can be done and what sort of problem is it? It might be that because so much of this suffering is self-inflicted, an artefact of freedom rather than oppression that we are simply in the middle of a transitional phase towards a more perfected form of individualism, where we steadily become less prone to loneliness as our expectations and emotional hard wiring becomes more adjusted. Towards what Houellebecq (2006) refers to as *The Possibility of an Island*. We suspect that the health costs of loneliness will become one reason why governments might want to try out some initiatives to ameliorate the problem. For instance just putting old people together in day centres is not an answer to their loneliness as one old woman told me very clearly.

We suspect also that new experimentations with internet and other face-to-face relationships will be tried out. Bauman suggests that although this connectivity and networking does not replicate older solid forms of bond, when skating on thin ice speed is of essence and so an increase in the traffic of networking may mask out a lot of the emotional time spent being lonely.

Certainly this study strongly suggests that more qualitative research is required to investigate some of the questions our survey has thrown up. Why are those in the prime of life, amidst so many people and with sociable dispositions so lonely? Why do so many report being alone and what does alone *mean*? Has the nature of social bonds in Australia changed? Are they more fragmented, less secure and *less sought after*? How in biographical terms do the two genders differ in their experience of loneliness and is there something about Australian gender relations (such as segmented marital patterns) that make Australians more prone to loneliness? Equally, is there something about the nature of Australian masculinity that makes it difficult for men to cope in times of greater mobility, greater relationship breakdown and very sprawling social networks (an artefact of our peculiarly sprawled urban form)?

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We also need to investigate the various strategies that people adopt to cope with increasing loneliness. Clearly, the internet is an important social space that needs to be investigated quantitatively and qualitatively in respect of loneliness but we also need to investigate how our relationship with companion animals (which seems to be growing stronger and more significant in recent years) have responded to our difficulty with human-human relationships (Franklin 2009).

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Bivariate Tables

Crosstab

J2 Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times	1 Strongly agree	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	32 8.7%	34 8.2%	42 7.8%	36 6.3%	20 4.6%	11 4.3%	6 7.8%	181 6.8%
	2 Agree	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	116 31.4%	88 21.3%	115 21.3%	121 21.2%	65 15.1%	34 13.4%	19 24.7%	558 21.0%
	3 Disagree	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	126 34.1%	178 43.0%	200 37.1%	225 39.4%	192 44.5%	118 46.5%	34 44.2%	1073 40.4%
	4 Strongly disagree	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	95 25.7%	114 27.5%	182 33.8%	189 33.1%	154 35.7%	91 35.8%	18 23.4%	843 31.8%
Total	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	369 100.0%	414 100.0%	539 100.0%	571 100.0%	431 100.0%	254 100.0%	77 100.0%	2655 100.0%	

Crosstab

			1 Single,				5 Separated but not		
J2 Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times	1 Strongly agree	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	51 12.0%	20 9.3%	59 3.6%	25 13.3%	7 10.8%	17 13.4%	179 6.7%
	2 Agree	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	138 32.5%	51 23.7%	244 14.9%	55 29.8%	26 40.0%	41 32.3%	556 20.9%
	3 Disagree	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	149 35.1%	98 43.3%	691 42.1%	75 39.9%	27 41.5%	44 34.6%	1079 40.5%
	4 Strongly disagree	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	87 20.5%	51 23.7%	649 39.5%	32 17.0%	5 7.7%	25 19.7%	849 31.9%
Total	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	425 100.0%	215 100.0%	1643 100.0%	188 100.0%	65 100.0%	127 100.0%	2663 100.0%	

Crosstab

			1 Single,				5 Separated but not		
J1 How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?	1 At least once a day	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	42 9.9%	8 3.7%	49 3.0%	16 8.5%	12 18.5%	21 16.7%	148 5.5%
	2 At least once a week	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	99 23.3%	36 16.7%	123 7.4%	41 21.7%	19 29.2%	31 24.6%	349 13.1%
	3 At least once a month	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	112 26.4%	47 21.9%	234 14.2%	35 18.5%	10 15.4%	28 22.2%	466 17.4%
	4 At least once a year	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	81 19.1%	51 23.7%	331 20.0%	45 23.8%	9 13.8%	16 12.7%	533 19.9%
	5 Less often / Never	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	90 21.2%	73 34.0%	916 55.4%	52 27.5%	15 23.1%	30 23.8%	1176 44.0%
Total	Count % within L23 R: What is your current marital status?	424 100.0%	215 100.0%	1653 100.0%	189 100.0%	65 100.0%	126 100.0%	2672 100.0%	

Bivariate Tables

Crosstab

				2 Upper	3 Lower			
J2 Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times	1 Strongly agree	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	1 7.7%	54 6.2%	57 7.2%	50 6.6%	19 9.5%	181 6.9%
	2 Agree	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	2 15.4%	169 19.4%	168 21.3%	164 21.6%	44 22.0%	547 20.8%
	3 Disagree	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	5 38.5%	325 37.4%	344 43.7%	323 42.6%	72 36.0%	1069 40.7%
	4 Strongly disagree	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	5 38.5%	321 36.9%	219 27.8%	221 29.2%	65 32.5%	831 31.6%
Total	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	13 100.0%	869 100.0%	788 100.0%	758 100.0%	200 100.0%	2628 100.0%	

Crosstab

				2 Upper	3 Lower			
J1 How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?	1 At least once a day	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	0 .0%	31 3.6%	43 5.4%	56 7.4%	16 8.0%	146 5.5%
	2 At least once a week	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	1 7.7%	95 10.9%	119 15.0%	113 14.8%	21 10.5%	349 13.2%
	3 At least once a month	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	4 30.8%	142 16.3%	158 19.9%	119 15.6%	35 17.5%	458 17.4%
	4 At least once a year	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	3 23.1%	191 22.0%	150 18.9%	147 19.3%	31 15.5%	522 19.8%
	5 Less often / Never	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	5 38.5%	411 47.2%	322 40.7%	326 42.8%	97 48.5%	1161 44.0%
Total	Count % within K1 Which social class would you say you belong to?	13 100.0%	870 100.0%	792 100.0%	761 100.0%	200 100.0%	2636 100.0%	

Crosstab

J3a How Long Lonely?	1 Less than one day	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	159 49.5%	148 46.4%	178 46.6%	192 50.9%	114 51.1%	72 59.0%	19 41.3%	882 49.3%
	2 At least one day	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	84 26.2%	70 21.9%	87 22.8%	80 21.2%	46 20.2%	22 18.0%	16 34.8%	404 22.6%
	3 At least one week	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	24 7.5%	28 8.8%	27 7.1%	28 7.4%	14 6.3%	10 8.2%	2 4.3%	133 7.4%
	4 At least one month	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	8 2.5%	13 4.1%	14 3.7%	5 1.3%	3 1.3%	3 2.5%	2 4.3%	48 2.7%
	5 More than one month	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	11 3.4%	17 5.3%	20 5.2%	20 5.3%	14 6.3%	2 1.6%	2 4.3%	86 4.8%
	6 Dont know	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	36 10.9%	43 13.5%	56 14.7%	52 13.8%	33 14.8%	13 10.7%	5 10.9%	237 13.2%
Total	Count % within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	321 100.0%	319 100.0%	382 100.0%	377 100.0%	223 100.0%	122 100.0%	46 100.0%	1790 100.0%	

Bivariate Tables

Crosstab

J7a Loneliness - Which best describes how you felt?	1 Sense of Loss	Count	195	111	306
		% within L1 R: Gender	18.4%	14.9%	17.0%
	2 Isolated	Count	189	133	322
		% within L1 R: Gender	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%
	3 Rejected	Count	97	62	159
		% within L1 R: Gender	9.2%	8.3%	8.8%
	4 Alone	Count	379	253	632
		% within L1 R: Gender	35.8%	34.1%	35.1%
	5 A Failure	Count	62	71	133
		% within L1 R: Gender	5.9%	9.6%	7.4%
	6 Other	Count	54	37	91
		% within L1 R: Gender	5.1%	5.0%	5.1%
	7 Dont Know	Count	82	76	158
		% within L1 R: Gender	7.8%	10.2%	8.8%
Total	Count	1058	743	1801	
	% within L1 R: Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Crosstab

									Remote	Other Remote,	
Loneliness a problem Dichotomy J2	Disagree	Count	1229	132	126	149	277	15	28	1956	
		% within Urban/Rural	72.2%	70.6%	69.6%	71.6%	75.3%	68.2%	82.4%	72.4%	
	Agree	Count	473	55	55	59	91	7	6	746	
		% within Urban/Rural	27.8%	29.4%	30.4%	28.4%	24.7%	31.8%	17.6%	27.6%	
Total	Count	1702	187	181	208	368	22	34	2702		
	% within Urban/Rural	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

Crosstab

J8a Loneliness - Who did you turn to for help?	1 Nobody	Count	174	261	435
		% within L1 R: Gender	16.1%	34.8%	23.8%
	2 A Friend	Count	389	192	581
		% within L1 R: Gender	36.0%	25.6%	31.7%
	3 GP	Count	17	7	24
		% within L1 R: Gender	1.6%	.9%	1.3%
	4 Family	Count	446	248	694
		% within L1 R: Gender	41.3%	33.1%	37.9%
	5 Counsellor	Count	31	14	45
		% within L1 R: Gender	2.9%	1.9%	2.5%
	6 Other	Count	24	27	51
		% within L1 R: Gender	2.2%	3.6%	2.8%
Total	Count	1081	749	1830	
	% within L1 R: Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Bivariate Tables

How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life? * R: Age (10yr categories) * R: Gender Crosstabulation

Female	How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?	At least once a day	13	10	14	21	9	7	5	79
			5.3%	4.1%	4.6%	7.2%	4.2%	4.8%	11.9%	5.3%
		At least once a week	65	38	40	32	19	15	5	214
			26.6%	15.6%	13.2%	10.9%	8.9%	10.3%	11.9%	14.4%
		At least once a month	60	53	49	56	34	23	9	284
			24.6%	21.7%	16.2%	19.1%	15.9%	15.9%	21.4%	19.1%
Male	How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?	At least once a day	6	11	18	13	13	4	5	70
			4.8%	6.4%	7.7%	4.7%	5.9%	3.6%	14.7%	6.0%
		At least once a week	26	20	33	31	15	10	3	138
			21.0%	11.7%	14.1%	11.1%	6.8%	9.0%	8.8%	11.8%
		At least once a month	31	33	33	46	21	14	5	183
			25.0%	19.3%	14.1%	16.5%	9.6%	12.6%	14.7%	15.6%
Total	Total	At least once a day	51	59	78	54	39	14	4	299
			20.9%	24.2%	25.7%	18.4%	18.2%	9.7%	9.5%	20.1%
		Less often / Never	55	84	122	130	113	86	19	609
			22.5%	34.4%	40.3%	44.4%	52.8%	59.3%	45.2%	41.0%
		Total	244	244	303	293	214	145	42	1485
			100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Crosstab

J4a Loneliness - What was the main Cause?	1 Relation Breakdown	Count	181	140	321
		% within L1 R: Gender	17.8%	19.0%	18.3%
	2 Death loved one	Count	178	81	259
		% within L1 R: Gender	17.5%	11.0%	14.7%
	3 Moved	Count	98	40	133
		% within L1 R: Gender	9.1%	5.4%	7.6%
4 Friend Moved	Count	49	23	72	
	% within L1 R: Gender	4.8%	3.1%	4.1%	
5 Other	Count	333	267	600	
	% within L1 R: Gender	32.7%	36.2%	34.2%	
6 Dont know	Count	185	186	371	
	% within L1 R: Gender	18.2%	25.2%	21.1%	
Total	Count	1019	737	1756	
	% within L1 R: Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life? * R: Gender Crosstabulation

How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?	At least once a day	Count	79	72	151
		% within R: Gender	5.2%	6.1%	5.6%
	At least once a week	Count	215	139	354
		% within R: Gender	14.2%	11.7%	13.1%
	At least once a month	Count	287	184	471
		% within R: Gender	19.0%	15.5%	17.5%
At least once a year	Count	304	229	533	
	% within R: Gender	20.1%	19.3%	19.8%	
Less often / Never	Count	624	560	1184	
	% within R: Gender	41.4%	47.3%	44.0%	
Total	Count	1509	1184	2693	
	% within R: Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Bivariate Tables

Crosstab

J2 Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times	1 Strongly agree	Count	98	84	182
		% within L1 R: Gender	6.5%	7.1%	6.8%
	2 Agree	Count	332	229	561
		% within L1 R: Gender	22.1%	19.4%	20.9%
	3 Disagree	Count	613	473	1086
		% within L1 R: Gender	40.7%	40.1%	40.5%
	4 Strongly disagree	Count	462	393	855
		% within L1 R: Gender	30.7%	33.3%	31.9%
Total	Count	1505	1179	2684	
	% within L1 R: Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Crosstab

J1 How often do you personally experience loneliness in your life?	1 At least once a day	Count	19	21	32	34	22	11	10	149
		% within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	5.1%	5.1%	5.9%	5.9%	5.1%	4.3%	13.0%	5.6%
	2 At least once a week	Count	91	58	74	63	34	25	9	354
		% within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	24.7%	14.0%	13.7%	11.0%	7.8%	9.8%	11.7%	13.3%
	3 At least once a month	Count	91	86	82	102	55	37	14	467
		% within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	24.7%	20.7%	15.2%	17.8%	12.7%	14.5%	18.2%	17.5%
	4 At least once a year	Count	72	108	122	106	78	33	9	528
		% within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	19.5%	26.0%	22.6%	18.5%	18.0%	12.9%	11.7%	19.8%
	5 Less often / Never	Count	96	142	229	269	245	150	35	1166
		% within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	26.0%	34.2%	42.5%	46.9%	56.5%	58.6%	45.5%	43.8%
Total	Count	369	415	539	574	434	256	77	2664	
	% within age10 R: Age (10yr categories)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times * R: Age (10yr categories) * R: Gender Crosstabulation

Female	Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times	Strongly agree	Count	25	14	19	21	10	7	2	98
			% within R: Age (10yr categories)	10.2%	5.8%	6.3%	7.2%	4.7%	4.9%	4.8%	6.6%
		Agree	Count	73	55	66	67	35	24	11	331
			% within R: Age (10yr categories)	29.9%	22.6%	21.8%	23.0%	16.4%	16.7%	26.2%	22.3%
	Disagree	Count	88	108	114	111	94	64	21	600	
		% within R: Age (10yr categories)	36.1%	44.4%	37.6%	38.1%	43.9%	44.4%	50.0%	40.5%	
	Strongly disagree	Count	58	66	104	92	75	49	8	452	
		% within R: Age (10yr categories)	23.8%	27.2%	34.3%	31.6%	35.0%	34.0%	19.0%	30.5%	
Total	Count	244	243	303	291	214	144	42	1481		
	% within R: Age (10yr categories)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
Male	Loneliness has been a serious problem for me at times	Strongly agree	Count	7	20	23	15	10	4	4	83
			% within R: Age (10yr categories)	5.6%	11.7%	9.8%	5.4%	4.6%	3.6%	11.8%	7.1%
		Agree	Count	43	33	48	54	30	10	7	225
			% within R: Age (10yr categories)	34.7%	19.3%	20.5%	19.4%	13.9%	9.1%	20.6%	19.3%
	Disagree	Count	37	70	85	113	97	54	13	469	
		% within R: Age (10yr categories)	29.8%	40.9%	36.3%	40.6%	44.9%	49.1%	38.2%	40.2%	
	Strongly disagree	Count	37	48	78	96	79	42	10	390	
		% within R: Age (10yr categories)	29.8%	28.1%	33.3%	34.5%	36.6%	38.2%	29.4%	33.4%	
Total	Count	124	171	234	278	216	110	34	1167		
	% within R: Age (10yr categories)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

(Endnotes)

1 Lindsay Tanner Address to The Sydney Institute, May 4 1999