Introduction

Personhood, alone and together – Solitude, Silence and Loneliness in Context

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Introduction

Being alone is one of the central experiences of every person. Indeed, a person's life can be described in terms of the ebb and flow of togetherness. Birth itself is a separation (for the mother and for the child), and throughout infancy, togetherness and separation dominate the emotional and cultural formation of the person. The game of peekaboo is typically an infant's playful first lesson in how other people appear and disappear. Psychologists such as Bowlby (2005; Bowlby in Weiss, 1973) and Winnicott (1964, 1971) put separation and togetherness at the heart of their developmental theories, but all disciplines and all people are familiar with both separation and togetherness, in 'good' and 'bad' forms. 'Bad' separation may be experienced as loneliness, as bereavement, as rejection, as exile; 'good' separation may be experienced as exciting independence, freedom or as growing up. Likewise, togetherness may be experienced as love or as troubling co-dependency, as a comfort or as a trap, as friendship or as abuse. (A person may experience the opposites, together: a bereavement, for example, may be experienced, somewhat guiltily, as exciting freedom.)

Social organizations recognize and often celebrate coming together and separating. Families welcome new members (e.g. through birth or marriage) and commemorate loss (through leaving home to join another family, or through death). Workplaces, likewise, often have arrival and departure ceremonies, formal and informal, as do religious communities and friendship groups. Through the giving and taking away of citizenship or legal rights, nations, too, recognize coming together and departing. The experience of exile and of seeking refuge in a new country was as familiar to ancient societies as it is today. At every life stage, personhood is learned in large part through these experiences alone and together. This chapter – like this Handbook – focuses on various forms of aloneness, rather than togetherness. Aloneness appears to be less well understood than the togetherness. Loneliness may be a 'taboo' subject (White, 2010: 237), while exiles and refugees may, similarly, be politically taboo in some political climates (Kromolicka & Linka, 2018). There is, therefore, a need to explore the experience of aloneness in all its forms.

There are some (Hobbes, 1968; Stirner, 1963; Mijuskovic, 2012) who believe that aloneness, even loneliness, is the central characteristic of personhood; there are others (Macmurray, 1991, 2012; Buber, 1958, 2002; Stern, 2018a, 2018b; Wałejko, 2016) who see personhood as existing primarily in and through dialogue and community. Both of these positions – and much in

between and beyond these positions – are represented in this Handbook, and we as editors and contributors do not take a unified collective position on the fundamental (individual or social, alone or together) character of personhood. What should be emphasized, though, is that aloneness is important across the spectrum of philosophies from the most individually focused to the most communally focused. That is why we have attempted to bring together in a single volume a wide range of research on solitude, silence and loneliness (three forms of aloneness), to bring together research from a range of academic disciplines, and to bring together research from the whole lifespan. The chapter, therefore, describes some of the ways of understanding how aloneness is learned and develops over time, with implications for how it can be appropriately hosted, or mitigated or responded to – depending on its form and quality.

The chapter attempts to pick apart the three forms of aloneness (solitude, silence and loneliness) used to structure many people's accounts of the topic, and the processes involved in understanding aloneness are explored – both in disciplinary terms and in terms of various practice settings. The purpose of this Handbook is to bring together research of all kinds, and development of the volume is itself described in the conclusion of this chapter.

Being alone: Solitude, silence and loneliness in context

How are solitude, silence and loneliness best described, and how are they related to each other and to other forms of aloneness and separation? It is a complex field. Even the words themselves are dangerous friends of scholars. 'Lonely' derives from being 'alone' or 'all one' (OED, 2005), and for centuries was barely differentiated from aloneness or solitude. 'Solitude' itself has similar historic roots in being separate or alone or 'all one'. The two words seemed to develop their distinctive and – for many – contrasting meanings only in the nineteenth century. And in languages other than English, there may be one word covering all the various meanings of both solitude and loneliness, as in the French *seul*, or there may be a range of different words and meanings covering negative, neutral and positive senses of the terms. In Arabic and Hebrew, loneliness (i.e. words regarded as translations of the English word 'lonely') is particularly associated with the loss or absence of family, while in Hindi the synonyms 'dull' and 'surly' indicate a more grumpy emotion. Finnish loneliness seems to indicate distance ('out-of-the-way', 'remote') while Spanish has a whole set of rather positive characteristics ('serene', 'poised', 'easy') (Stern, 2014: 83–5). The word 'silence', meanwhile, has meanings related to the absence of all sound, the absence of speech, and the omission of a particular topic (OED, 2005), and has been categorized by Lees as either 'strong' or 'weak' – with weak silence involving denial, shame or fear (and, therefore, not being 'true' silence) (Lees, 2012: 59–60). Silence may be as much about disengagement as it is the absence of sound (Stern, 2014: 147–8), or the 'unsayability' or ineffability of particular topics (as in Wittgenstein, 1961, described in the Conclusion of this Handbook). The words are embedded in cultures that can disguise as much as reveal their meanings (as described in Chapters 7 and 8). Here, some descriptions of the three terms are given in contexts – the contexts being both disciplinary (e.g. how loneliness is seen differently by psychologists or theologians) and social (e.g. how silence is experienced in different practice settings).

Solitude: From exile to ecstasy and enstasy

Solitude has been described in two contrasting ways, as a form of punishment and as a state to be sought for the sake of spiritual or personal development. One of the great ancient accounts of punitive

solitude is that of Ovid (2005). His poems of exile echo to the present day, with Green writing of exile as 'an all-too-familiar risk' in the light of the 'ruthless demands of two world wars and, worse, a variety of totalitarian ideologies' which 'have made the exile, the stateless person, the refugee, the *dépaysé*, a common feature of our social awareness' (Green, in Ovid, 2005: xiv). Ovid describes his 'sickness, senility and lassitude, but also . . . sloth, depression, [and] accidie' (Green, in Ovid, 2005: xxxiii), but not – it seems – loneliness, at least not in its fullest sense. Exile is loss, loss of place and of people. Even Ovid's own writings can go where he cannot go: 'Little book – no, I don't begrudge it you – you're off to the City / without me, going where your only begetter is banned!' (Ovid, 2005: 3, from *Tristia*). Alongside loss, Ovid describes rejection: 'I have lost all: only bare life remains to quicken the awareness and substance of my pain', he says, adding, '[w]hat pleasure do you get from stabbing this dead body?' concluding, '[t]here is no space in me now for another wound' (Ovid, 2005: 200, from *Black Sea Letters*). It is the combination of separation/loss and rejection that makes exilic solitude a punishment. Some punitive forms of solitude involve separation from all social contact, as in some types of solitary confinement in prisons.

Whether an imposed solitude is in fact a punishment is, in part, a subjective matter. Many will be familiar with parents punishing a child with solitude – sending the child to their room, for example. In a *loners' manifesto*, Rufus (2003) describes her puzzle over why this would be a punishment:

> When parents on TV shows punished their kids by ordering them to go to their rooms, I was confused. I loved my room. Being there behind a locked door was a treat. To me a punishment was being ordered to play Yahtzee with my cousin Louis. I puzzled over why solitary confinement was considered the worst punishment in jails. (Rufus, 2003: xxviii)

Rufus's prison example is a very old puzzle. Webb (2007) recounts the twelfth-century Cistercian William of St-Thierry, noting how a prisoner and a monk may both spend time in solitude in a cell. How can such an existence be a punishment for one and a time of freedom and happiness for the other? 'He who lives with himself', William says, 'has only himself, such as he is, with him', and this is a punishment for a bad person as in such solitude '[a] bad man can never safely live with himself, because he lives with a bad man and no one is more harmful to him that he is to himself' (quoted in Webb, 2007: 72). In contrast, a monk in solitude, of course, has a good person for company. Weir (in Chapter 5 of this Handbook) writes of the value of solitude to managers in industry – whether or not they are good people – but his hope is that it is a monkish reward.

Non-punitive forms of solitude are particularly common in religious discourses. In the Christian tradition, roughly at the time the religion became accepted within the Roman Empire, mystics developed a way of seeking solitude as hermits. St Antony is the best known of these, made famous by a biography describing his life, starting as a child who was 'wishing . . . to stand apart from friendship with other children' (Athanasius, 1980: 30) and continuing for many years living in a desert cave. That was a life of many hardships, yet one that is described as bringing Antony his wisdom. The Christian traditions of hermits, anchorites/anchoresses and monasteries since the fourth century have involved different forms of solitude – all described positively and often ecstatically: escaping from the limits of the self. (See also Chapter 9 of this Handbook.) Similarly, in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, there are positive solitude traditions, notably the yogic attempt to achieve 'enstasy' (*samādhi*), being at one with oneself – in contrast to ecstasy, in which a person escapes from the self. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (Zaehner, 1992), enstasy is achieved

'[w]hen a man puts from him all desires' and '[h]imself contented in the self alone', and 'when he draws in on every side . . . [a]s a tortoise might its limbs' (Zaehner, 1992: 326). Therapeutic solitude is recommended in many contemporary accounts, from Rufus (2003) extolling the virtues of solitude for 'loners', to Shepherd (2011, writing of her time in the Cairngorms), Sarton (1973, writing of her garden, for example), Koller (1990, in an isolated rural community), Kagge (2019, on polar exploration and mountain climbing) – all of whom describe relationships to 'nature' as central to human solitude (in the tradition of Thoreau, 2006). A whole genre of 'living with' or 'living like' non-human animals has added to positive accounts of solitude in recent years. Lindén (2018) provides a shepherd's diary, and this account, along with those of Jamie (2005, 2012), Foster (2016), and Wohlleben (2017), describes human solitude as rich in interaction – albeit not with other human beings. In such ways, solitude can be positive or negative. It can also, paradoxically, be achieved in company – in human company at times (Webb, 2007: 67, for example, describes solitude achieved in a busy family home while reading), but especially in the company of non-human animals and nature (Morton, 2017, and see Chapter 4 of this Handbook).

Given the variety of solitudes, how can solitude be best described? Koch's comprehensive account defines solitude as 'the state in which experience is disengaged from other people' (Koch, 1994: 44), with disengagement being fourfold, 'in perception, thought, emotion, and action' (Koch, 1994: 57). There is no 'pure' or 'perfect' solitude as 'the world is ultimately inescapable' (Koch, 1994: 76) except perhaps through death. But one can achieve more solitude the greater the disengagement, and the more ways in which one is disengaged. In Koch's account, solitude is an experience, neither positive nor negative – it can be chosen or enforced, an experience accompanied by pleasure or pain, joy or suffering. Although he extolls the value and the virtues of solitude, he is aware of its dangers and harms. This seems to be a tremendously broad definition of solitude, and yet it hangs on one characteristic that is all-too-often taken for granted. The disengagement is disengagement from 'other people'. Thoreau's solitudinous engagement with loons (Thoreau, 2006: 148), Shepherd's (2011) engagement with the Cairngorms or Lindén's (2018) engagement with sheep: are they *really* solitudinous? Naess (2008) describes a personal world in his deep ecology. Drawing on Spinoza (1955), he does not differentiate contact with (and, therefore, withdrawal from) human beings from contact with and withdrawal from other animals, plants and non-living objects. 'Personhood' in his account is therefore radically post-human – and closer, in that way, to Hindu accounts, where humanity is not as central to personhood as it is in most Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. And even the Hindu/Buddhist enstasy, in which a person withdraws from the whole world, is, in such a withdrawal, an achievement, also, of oneness *with* the whole world. As a result of enstasy through yoga, the person 'now . . . sees the self in all being standing, all beings in the self' (Zaehner, 1992: 348). So solitude involves disengagement from people (for Koch, 1994) and – in some traditions such as those of Hinduism/Buddhism – from all of the world, but in these senses it is ultimately impossible. Even in death, when it could be said (for those without a belief in reincarnation or the afterlife) that we achieve total disengagement, we also (at least) return – ashes to ashes, dust to dust – to the earth from which we came (see also Chapter 23 in this Handbook).

Researching solitude in settings

The literature on solitude includes a number of accounts in practice settings and across the lifespan. Positive versions of solitude in religious communities are described by theologians

such as William of St-Thierry (quoted previously), Georgianna (1981) on anchoress traditions (and see also Savage and Watson, 1991) or Julian of Norwich's (1966) writings as herself an anchoress. Hide (2001) describes Julian's use of 'oneing', a unity – the 'oneness' implied by 'alone' ('all one') and by 'solitude' – related, he says, to the modern word 'atonement' (i.e. 'at-one-ment') (Hide, 2001: 53). Jantzen writes of Julian's approach to solitude in the modern world, suggesting there might be 'part-time' anchoresses and anchorites 'of the heart' (Jantzen, 2000: xxiii). Negative portrayals of solitude are more common, unsurprisingly, in prison settings. Solitary confinement in prisons is a well-established practice, and there is some research there, such as Smith (2006) and Eastaugh (2017) which focus on the harm typically done by solitude in prison. The interesting work by O'Donnell (2014) addresses solitary confinement and also the 'pathological' loneliness of prisoners and the role of silence – and the ways in which some prisoners in solitary confinement are able to survive and live well beyond or even in prison, notwithstanding their incarceration. O'Donnell's work also refers to the work on solitude in monastic settings, mentioned previously. Another setting in which punitive solitude is studied is schooling. Barker et al. make an explicit link to prisons in their account of the practice in schools of isolating individual children or young people in 'isolation booths' or 'seclusion units' (also perversely referred to by many schools as 'inclusion units'), asking whether these forms of seclusion make the inhabitants 'pupils or prisoners' (Barker et al., 2010). There are positive accounts of solitude in school too, notably Lees's account of spaces for silence, away from others, as '[t]here is something magical about having a place to retreat to; a sanctuary for the mind that is laden with thoughts' (Lees, 2012: 100, and see Chapter 2 of this Handbook). Similar accounts can be found in Kessler (2000) and Lantieri (2001), quoted previously. In old age, solitude may be portrayed as inevitable as older generations and then contemporaries die, and the elderly are '[l]essened, impoverished, [and] in exile in the present day' (de Beauvoir, 1972: 498). That presents an interesting idea of being historically, rather than geographically, exiled.

Silence: Soundless, unvoiced or quietude

The overlap between solitude and silence in the work of Lees (2012), O'Donnell (2014) and many other quoted previously may suggest that silence is itself simply an oral/aural form of solitude, linked to dictionary definitions referring to the absence or omission of speech as well as the absence of all sound (OED, 2005, mentioned previously). I use that approach myself, saying that although silence is often described simply as the absence of sound, when people talk of silence they usually refer to a kind of disengagement. As Kierkegaard says, 'because the human being is able to speak, the ability to be silent is an art, and a great art precisely because this advantage of his [*sic*] so easily tempts him' (Kierkegaard 2000: 333). If solitude is a form of disengagement 'in perception, thought, emotion, and action' (Koch, 1994: 57), then silence may be experienced as primarily perceptual (not listening or hearing: aural) and actional (not speaking or making other intentional sounds: oral) disengagement (Stern, 2014: 147–8, Stern & Wałejko, 2020). This oral/aural disengagement is one way of understanding silence, among many ways – as with solitude. (Some of these various understandings are represented in this Handbook.) And, like solitude, silence can be a positive or negative, chosen or imposed, experience (Lees, 2012, and Chapter 2 of this Handbook). Silence is also, like solitude, ultimately impossible to achieve, at least for those with hearing. Those who have had hearing and who lose all hearing may experience this as total silence, although most people described as having profound hearing loss

will retain experiences of some sounds.[1] (It is difficult to describe those who have never had any hearing as experiencing 'silence', any more than human beings' inability to directly experience radioactivity can be experienced as a 'loss' of a sense that has never existed.) The phrase 'silent as the grave' does not indicate that the dead experience silence, but rather that the living can no longer hear from or communicate with those in the grave. Even that is an ambiguous phrase, as people may talk to the grave of friends or relatives, and find their 'silence' an encouragement to further talk. For that and related reasons, silence seems – more than solitude – to indicate the ineffable, as described previously with respect to Wittgenstein's silence (in the Conclusion to this Handbook).

Researching silence in settings

There are various settings in which silence is researched. St Augustine talks of his infancy, being 'quietened by bodily delights' (Augustine, 1991: 7). A small but growing current literature on silence for children and young people includes the work of Lees (2012), mentioned previously, which provides a particularly useful distinction between what she refers to as 'weak' and 'strong' silence, the former being framed in this chapter as negative or punitive, the latter as positive and sought. Lees also distinguishes between 'techniqued' and 'untechniqued' silences, with the former including meditative and mindfulness practices, the latter simply taking opportunities for a quiet and reflective time. (See also Chapter 11 in this Handbook, on adolescent silences.) Alerby writes about schools while drawing on the whole lifespan of experience of oppressive silencing. 'Whoever has been forced into silence', she says, 'for example through repression and the exercise of power, can eventually experience him or herself to have no voice, and therefore unable to be heard' (Alerby, in Hägg & Kristiansen, 2012: 71, and Chapter 14 of this Handbook). Sauntson and Borba (Chapter 13 of this Handbook) write of the relationship between silence/silencing and sexuality. Alongside oppressive silence is the silence of complicity: '[i]t is not the evil nature of evil people, but the silence of good people that is dangerous, according to Hannah Arendt' (Alerby, in Hägg and Kristiansen, 2012: 71). Fanon, similarly, writes of political silences and 'the silenced nation' (Fanon, 1963: 57, and see also Chapter 6 of this Handbook). Alerby also describes positive uses of silence such as increasing the length of time teachers wait for a response, which leads to not only longer answers but also more reflective and speculative answers (Alerby, in Hägg & Kristiansen, 2012: 73, and see also Chapter 10 of this Handbook). Both positive and negative versions of adult silence are described, such as in the idea of the 'quiet professional' (in contrast to the 'silenced' professional) as promoted by Pirrie (2019, and see Chapter 15 of this Handbook). References to silence in old age are more often negative. The 'unvoicing' of the elderly is commonly described, with Arendt casually referring to 'marginal social conditions like old age' (Arendt, 2004: 615). One form of silence that is, to an extent, 'chosen' and yet usually portrayed as negative is that of selective mutism. Although such self-silencing may be portrayed in popular fiction as experienced as a response to trauma (as in Hannibal Lecter's portrayal in Harris, 2006), there is evidence that it is more symptomatic of extreme social anxiety without prior trauma (Black, 1995).

Loneliness: Emotion or existential state

Solitude and silence are both 'experiences', and are both at least somewhat subjective experiences of aloneness. Wordsworth writes of wandering alone, and in noticing some daffodils, achieves

a sense of solitude, an example of 'the . . . communion with the natural and the spiritual world that can be reached through contemplation in solitude' (Bound Alberti, 2019: 207, and see also Chapter 7 in this Handbook). Both solitude and silence can be associated with and experienced alongside a whole range of emotions, positive and negative. Loneliness, in contrast, is *itself* an emotion, at least in current usage (Bound Alberti, 2019). The origins of the words 'lonely', 'alone' and 'solitude' are similar (as described previously), all relating to 'oneness'. Yet, as it has developed since the nineteenth century (in some social contexts), loneliness has become an emotion and, as an emotion, combines a negative affect (i.e. pain or suffering) with an associated interpretation of that pain (as in the theory of emotions of Spinoza, 1955: 173–85). One of my own definitions of loneliness in this form was 'loneliness is pain accompanied by the idea of love that is now absent, when that pain is accompanied by self-rejection, for example because the absence is thought to be "deserved"' (Stern, 2014: 182). More recently (Stern, 2021), I have written of the 'three dimensions' of loneliness, these being, first, a sense of separation (whether physical or attitudinal); second, a sense of rejection; and third, a sense of self-rejection – with all accompanied by pain or suffering. Such an emotion-definition of loneliness is clearly context-dependent, and there are – as mentioned previously – several authors (notably Mijuskovic, 2012 and Domeracki, 2018, and Chapters 16 and 1 of this Handbook) who describe the 'lonely' situation of human beings as a necessary existential state. In that model, loneliness is no longer seen as an emotion – as people may not experience pain or suffering (or may not recognize their pain/suffering) but are still essentially lonely.

Research loneliness in settings

There seems to be a much larger (and rapidly increasing) literature on loneliness, in contrast to the literatures on solitude and silence, perhaps because many see loneliness as an 'ailment' to be 'cured'. The loneliness literature includes extensive accounts of professional approaches in psychology (Margalit, 2010, Chapters 17 and 18 of this Handbook), counselling (Moustakas & Moustakas, 2004), public health (Hammond, 2018) and education (Stern, 2014) (all mentioned previously). Childhood loneliness research has a shorter history than adult loneliness research. Rotenberg notes how some deny any loneliness exists prior to adolescence (in Rotenberg & Hymel, 1999: 5), and he notes that there was little research literature on the topic until the 1980s (in Rotenberg & Hymel, 1999: 3), albeit with a much larger literature now available. However, the foundations were laid in the psychotherapeutic literature of Winnicott and Bowlby in the 1960s and 1970s (described above, and see also Chapter 16 of this Handbook). Adult loneliness research was given a considerable stimulus by the popularity of the idea of the 'lonely crowd' (Reisman et al., 2000, first published in 1961) and Yates's (2009) eleven short stories on the theme of loneliness first published in 1957, 1961 and 1962 (including one account of childhood loneliness). Weiss's (1973) account is perhaps the most influential early book of research on loneliness, and it explores adult and elder loneliness (and see also Chapters 19 and 22 of this Handbook). On elders, Townsend notes the difference between being 'socially isolated' and having 'an unwelcome *feeling* of lack or loss of companionship' (Townsend, in Weiss, 1973: 181, original emphasis). For him, '[o]ne of the most striking results of the whole inquiry was that those living in relative isolation from family and community did not always say they were lonely [, even if a] . . . few people liked to let their children think they were lonely so the latter would visit them as much as possible' (Townsend, in Weiss, 1973: 181). That finding – based on the observation

that elderly respondents were more likely to say they were lonely if their children were present – is an excellent example of how context can affect how a person responds to research questions. Loneliness is an ethical as well as political issue for people of all ages (see Horowski, Wray, and Iwański, in Chapters 20, 21 and 22 of this Handbook).

More recently, along with 'ministers of loneliness' (described previously), concerns over loneliness in old age has also led to the setting up of the 'campaign to end loneliness', which quotes Holt-Lunstad in saying that 'lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day'.[2] Similarly, *The Silver Line*[3] is a helpline for lonely, isolated, elderly people – founded by Esther Rantzen, who had previously set up *Childline* for children and young people.[4] It should be said, however, that some of the accounts of loneliness in recent research and practice – including that of *The Silver Line* – conflate various forms of social isolation with loneliness. Research based on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (such as Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008) ask about 'the subjective experience known as loneliness' (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008: 5), and yet the scale never asks about loneliness itself (e.g. 'have you felt lonely?') but instead asks about various forms of social isolation (see Stern, 2014: 49–50).

Conclusion: A handbook

There is a growing body of research on solitude, silence and loneliness, from various academic perspectives and practitioner and public policy contexts. The disciplines and fields in which I have found valuable work on the topic include education, philosophy, psychology, theology, history, sociology, literary and cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, health and gerontology – and there are no doubt many more accounts in other disciplines and fields. Currently, the significant bodies of research tend to reside in separate disciplinary 'islands'. As editors of and contributors to this volume, we hope to respect each of the islands while at the same time recognizing the separate 'islands' as forming an *archipelago*.[5] That is, we believe there is now a need for a book that brings together the various 'aloneness' issues, and we wish to create an alliance out of the archipelago. This sets out to be the first book to do that comprehensively, providing a serious overview of the field that might be termed 'aloneness studies', or for Domeracki (2018, and Chapter 1 of this Handbook) 'monoseology'. What brings all of the authors together is a concern for how the experiences of solitude, silence and loneliness develop over time across the lifespan. It is therefore a distinctly 'educational' project, not because the authors are all educationalists or because we focus on formal educational institutions, but in the sense of considering how we learn to be alone, in good and bad ways – whether in families, communities, workplaces, care homes or, of course, in schools and higher education. We do not attempt a single view of being alone, or of the separate concepts of solitude, silence or loneliness. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, that would be impossible if we are to reflect the different perspectives and cultures represented in the literature. Yet this is still an 'alliance', an alliance that recognizes the importance of understanding solitude, silence and loneliness in their social contexts, and that recognizes the value of bringing disciplines, settings and cultures together in dialogue.

There are other types of aloneness or separation that this Handbook does not address in such detail (if at all), such as boredom, various 'separating' forms of mental health concerns (such as schizophrenia), conditions on the autism spectrum, shyness and social anxiety, or sensory and other physical impairments (e.g. related to hearing or speaking). There are specialist disciplines

and practice settings that will be covered in more detail than others, given a Handbook written by thirty authors based in eleven different countries across five continents. Yet we do hope to provide an anchor text that is the result of collaboration and dialogue, as well as systematic disciplinary research across the range of both positivist and interpretive research methodologies. There is, we believe, a critical mass of scholars researching in this area and we hope to stimulate further growth in the study of, and professional practice related to, solitude, silence and loneliness. Each of the three core concepts has its own section of the Handbook, introduced by one of the editors. All the authors of chapters will specialize in one of the concepts, yet – as I know from my own research – it would be impossible to keep all the loneliness out of solitude studies, or all the silence out of loneliness studies, and so on. We invite readers to join us in asking how the 'aloneness' aspects of personhood can be understood, together. Some of our own conclusions are drawn together in the final Conclusion chapter to this Handbook.