

Existential Isolation and Mental Wellbeing Outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

- A relatively novel focus of social psychology research, existential isolation (EI) is the experience of feeling that you are alone in your experience of the world; that no one shares your experiences or comes close to understanding it. ¹
- Shown to be distinct from feelings of loneliness. (Interpersonal Isolation)
 - Related to greater death-thought accessibility, depression, and anxiety. ²
- Higher EI among members of non-normative groups. (e.g. racial/sexual minorities, low SES)
- BUT, how existential isolation impacts mental wellbeing, particularly how it relates to self-perception, remains somewhat unclear/our understanding is limited.

METHOD (Survey Studies)

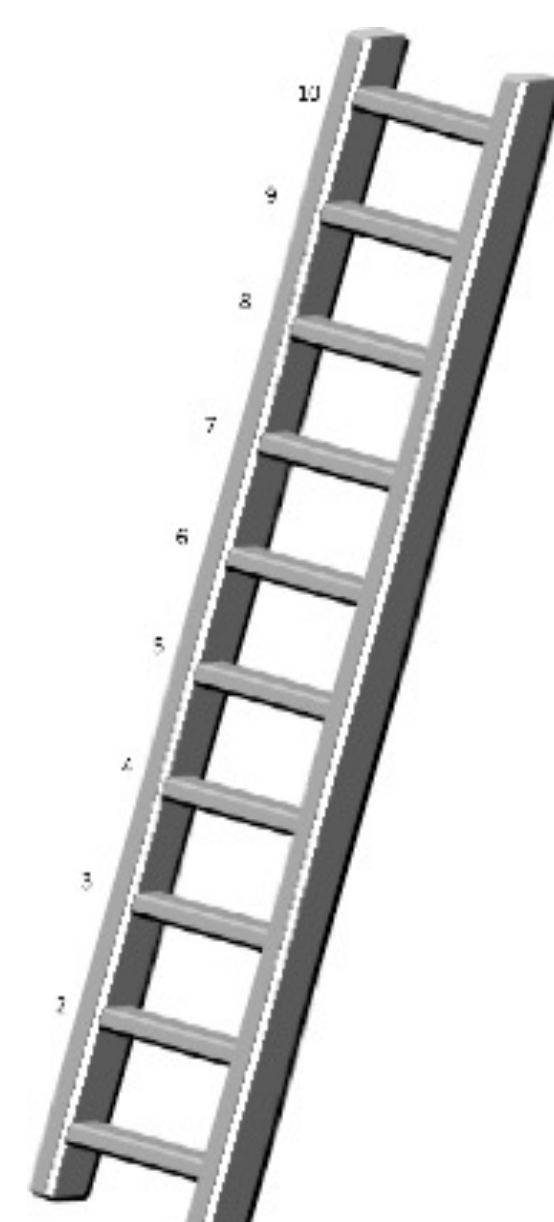
Participants

Study 1 (N = 302)
Undergraduate Students
Mean Age = 19.79 years
(SD = 2.08)

Study 2 (N = 200)
MTurk Workers
Mean Age = 34.86 years
(SD = 6.75)

Measures

- 1. MacArthur Subjective Social Status Ladder³**
 - Where on this ladder are you currently →
- 2. Existential Isolation Scale⁴**
 - e.g., People do not often share my perspective.
- 3. 8-Item Self-Dehumanization Scale**
 - e.g., I feel superficial, like I have no depth.



Study Aims & Hypotheses

1. Aim: Examine the association between feeling existentially isolated and different mental wellbeing outcomes.

2. Hypothesis: People high in existential isolation would report poorer mental wellbeing than those low in existential isolation.

RESULTS – Study 1

Table 1
Pearson Correlations between Existential Isolation and Outcome Measures

	Correlation (r) with Existential Isolation
Self-Dehumanization	.384***
Rejection Sensitivity	.194***
Rejection Anxiety Subscale	-.017
Rejection Expectancy Subscale	.333***

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

- Study 1: Results indicate that existential isolation is positively correlated with both self-dehumanization and rejection sensitivity.
- This suggests that highly existentially isolated individuals view themselves as less human than others and expect to be rejected by others.

REFERENCES

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RESULTS – Study 2

Table 2
Pearson Correlations between Subjective Social Status & Wellbeing Measures

	Correlation (r) with Existential Isolation	Correlation (r) While Controlling for Loneliness
Loneliness	.270***	-
Self-Dehumanization	.185***	.063
Rejection Sensitivity	.288***	.205**
Rejection Anxiety Subscale	-.010	-.102
Rejection Expectancy Subscale	.323***	.269***
Self-Esteem	-.278***	-.196**
Coping Self-Efficacy	-.337***	-.270***

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

- Study 2: Results largely replicate those found in Study 1, and show that existential isolation is negatively correlated with both self-esteem and coping self-efficacy, even when controlling for the effect of loneliness.

CONCLUSIONS

- Higher levels of existential isolation were positively correlated with greater feelings of self-dehumanization, rejection sensitivity, and loneliness, but negatively correlated with greater levels of self-esteem and coping self-efficacy.
- These findings provide preliminary evidence of an association between feeling existentially isolated and poorer mental wellbeing (poorer self-image and perceived inability to cope with stressors).

Future Directions

- Implications of this work for research examining the long-term wellbeing outcomes associated with feeling existentially isolated.
- These implications draw attention to the risk factors and possible negative outcomes of existential isolation, and can be utilized in practice.