

Navigating the Depths of Solitude: Loneliness and Social Isolation in “Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine”

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Abstract

Loneliness encompasses the unsettling sensation of solitude or detachment, while social isolation denotes a dearth of social connections and limited regular interaction. Living independently does not inherently induce loneliness or social isolation, just as being in the company of others does not preclude feelings of loneliness. Loneliness permeates Eleanor’s existence, shaping her interactions with others and reinforcing her sense of alienation. Through Eleanor’s perspective, the novel sheds light on the profound impact of social isolation and the human need for connection and belonging. Despite her outward appearance of being ‘completely fine’, Eleanor’s journey towards healing and self-discovery is marked by moments of vulnerability and profound introspection.

Eleanor’s social awkwardness serves as a poignant reminder of the stigma surrounding mental health issues and the challenges faced by those who do not conform to societal norms. Through her character, Gail Honeyman skilfully explores the complexities of mental illness, challenging stereotypes and advocating for empathy and understanding.

Loneliness and the need for human connection

Loneliness is a universal human feeling that is multifaceted and unique to each person. Loneliness is also defined as a psychological mechanism that drives people to seek social interactions. It is frequently related with a perceived lack of connection and intimacy. Loneliness overlaps but is distinct from solitude. Solitude is just the state of being separated from others; not everyone who experiences solitude is lonely. When the novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* begins, the protagonist, Eleanor, is isolated. She views her loneliness as unavoidable and immutable, despite her early focus with Johnnie, which reveals her desire for human interaction. When her illusions about him are shattered, she exposes an underlying sadness and sense of worthlessness, fueled by loneliness.

Eleanor's Isolation from the world

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine depicts the lives of a young woman working in Glasgow, and it is a somewhat bleak depiction of the mundane aspects of everyday existence. Eleanor's terrible childhood leads her to avoid touch with other people. When June Mullen, a social worker, arrives to check on Eleanor, she freely acknowledges that he was the first visitor, she had since November last year. Aside from social workers, Eleanor only welcomes utility workers into her flat to read the metre. Until Raymond joins Eleanor's life, she has no social guests. Eleanor frequently spends the entire weekend alone after stopping at the grocery on her way home from work on Fridays for a frozen pizza, wine, and vodka. Eleanor's loneliness is so severe that she refuses to sit with herself, instead turning to drink to relieve the anguish caused by her lingering trauma.

Impact of traumatic past

For much of the work, the reader is unaware of Eleanor's awful, traumatising history because she constantly represses it, opting instead to deny that she feels any pain as the title implies, she is 'completely fine'. Eleanor rejects ownership of her history in two ways: by denying it and assuming a distorted sense of reality, and by externalising the sentiments she associated with her past and projecting them onto other people or objects in order to detach herself from these painful memories. Eleanor avoids the difficult task of confronting her past and her pain directly by denying it and disassociating herself from her emotions. This leads to a climactic moment of mental breakdown when a fog machine at one of the musician's gigs awakens memories of the house fire that killed her mother and sister, and Eleanor's manufactured world of denial collides with reality. Eleanor eventually realises that isolating herself from her history only brings short relief, and that in order to recover, she must accept, internalise, and work through her grief.

Coping mechanisms to escape reality

Eleanor develops a rigid daily schedule to provide structure and consistency in her life. This pattern includes set hours for meals, work, and leisure activities, which help her feel in control and grounded. Eleanor frequently engages in intricate fancies and daydreams to cope with the unpleasant realities of her life. These thoughts frequently include romanticising her crush on a local singer or seeing a glamorous future for herself. Eleanor enjoys intellectual pursuits such as classic literature and classical music. Taking part in these activities allows her to escape her loneliness and find refuge in the worlds of art and literature. Eleanor uses alcohol to dull her emotional agony and alleviate loneliness. She frequently drinks alone at home, using alcohol to temporarily escape her situation. These are some of the coping methods Eleanor used to avoid reality and social awkwardness.

Importance of kindness

The book stresses how small acts of kindness may profoundly transform someone's life. From assisting a man who fell, which began a new friendship, to how that man's daughter made

Eleanor feel better about herself by offering to give her a simple haircut, the kindness shown to others in the book made me think that we, too, should adopt that way of living more as we all deal with struggles every day. There is a very poignant moment near the end of the book when Eleanor is brought flowers by her colleagues, which reminded me that a good gesture, no matter how tiny, is not insignificant. It will count as something for someone else, and it should be done more frequently.

Embracing Friendship

While Eleanor and Raymond get quite close over the course of the novel, their connection doesn't become romantic. Raymond tends to be the first proper friend to Eleanor in her life. He is someone who doesn't turn his back. Their friendship is genuine, and heart warming. Their relationship proves that kindness can be found everywhere. Unlike other people in her life, Raymond comforts her and lends his ear to understand the problems of Eleanor. Only people who feel isolated and lonely know the real value of finding a person to give vent to their pent up feelings. The author made it clear that while Raymond coming into Eleanor's life was an important aspect of her journey of self-repair, he was never any kind of romantic goal or object, because it reinforces that the end of the novel is really a beginning, it's Eleanor finally turning that corner and owning her illness and working with it.

Healing and Road to recovery

Eleanor grew up without knowing her father, and her mother was abusive both physically and emotionally. The emotional abuse causes her to hear her mother's voice in her head, telling her she isn't good enough, and as a result, she has extremely poor self-esteem. The severe violence has left her face terribly damaged. This is one of the reasons she avoids social situations and prefers to be alone. Eleanor's distorted sense of self-worth and shaky grasp on reality illustrate the long-term consequences of abuse and trauma. She learns to take responsibility of her feelings through her counselling sessions and what she infers from them, and we can connect to this, even if only unconsciously, because it's easy to push things away, deal with them later, or yell at someone else when we're feeling down. Then, when it's too late and all these things come back, it's a lot to cope with, so take a stand, confront it head on, and remember that there is always someone willing to help.

Conclusion

Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine serves as a guideline to spread awareness about the plight of lonely people, and how they survive in this world by revealing moral courage and determination. The author, Gail Honeyman insists on the importance of being heard. She also throws light on how a small act of kindness has ceaseless power to completely transform the life of a person.

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