What the Male Loneliness Epidemic Really Teaches us

And it's not what you think...

By Shannon Crowley | Published 04/08/25

If you are a social media user or have been spying over someone else' shoulder as they peruse their Instagram Reels, you will likely have come across this topic. Whether an intentional find or something that slipped into your view, the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic' is currently a contentious cultural discussion penetrating the global sphere.

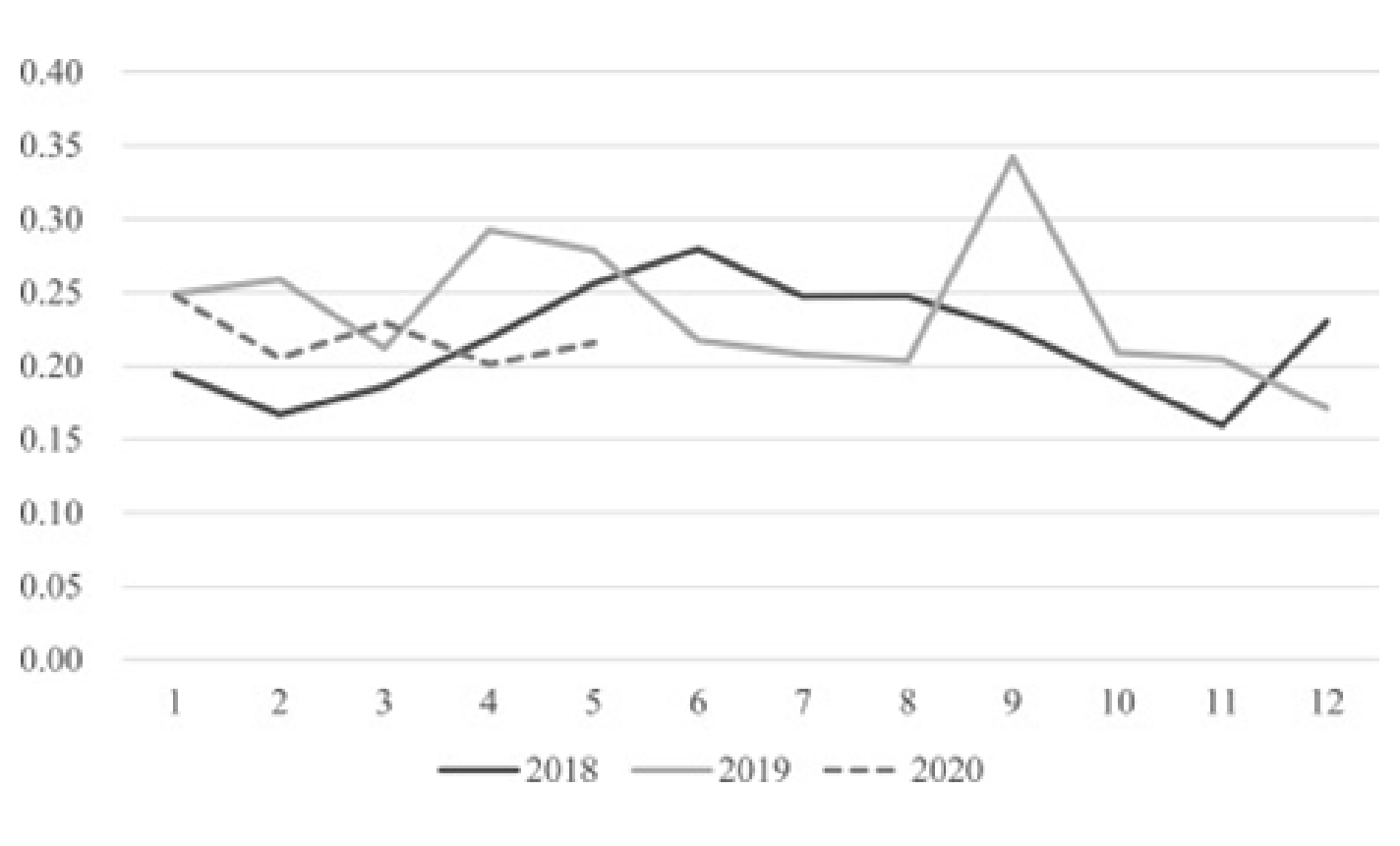
With the release of Adolescence, a thought-provoking Netflix short series which highlights the modern pressures on young teenagers, coupled with the growing divisive rhetoric from 'influencers' on social media, internet-manufactured social 'concerns' with murky ideologies and fact systems are growing in occurrence.

ADOLESCENCE

Origins

As a society, we often downplay 'loneliness' as merely a passing emotion, or one that we feel but do not feel compelled to address as a severe issue and one which we should vocalise. However, loneliness, like US Surgeon general, Vivek Murphy articulates, is an "urgent advisory" and represents a major public health risk for society (Shankar, 2023). Loneliness has been identified as a catalyst for degenerating mental health and direr well-being choices, some of which can lead to suicide (Shankar, 2023).

A study by the National Library of Medicine in 2023 titled, "Loneliness, Social Isolation, and its Effects on Physical and Mental Health" revealed an increase in cases of suicidal ideation between 2019 and 2020 (Shankar, 2023). Notably, these years were infamously configured by the most catastrophic global pandemic of the 21st century, Covid-19.



Loneliness and Covid 19

We remember this time vividly, much to our discontent and efforts to bury these memories with better ones. Our lifestyle consisted of internal, mostly sedentary tasks in the space of our greatest comfort, our homes. To those who were lucky enough to live with their families, partners or other company, this period of isolation may have not felt as harrowing, retrospectively. However, the chilling reality of being 'trapped' alone with yourself in an inanimate living situation was impossible for many.

A study into the relationship between loneliness and Covid 19 determined a definite increase, irrespective of cultural differences, race, gender and other categorical influences. The National Library of Medicine discovered that the prevalence of 'severe loneliness' skyrocketed from 6% prior to Covid 19, to 21%. Evidently, government mandated isolation significantly disrupted the workplace, our ability to engage in community and family and have the freedom to explore outside of our controlled worlds. These factors combined, pump the vital lifeblood of human happiness, connection.

It is unsurprising therefore, the toll this isolative lifestyle had on our collective mental health, evidently to varying extents. Interestingly, loneliness in and beyond the pandemic was documented in both genders through the scientific and psychological lens.
This feels fair considering as you may recall, your genitalia or gender was not a determinant to whether you participated in government mandated isolation, and certainly not a precursor for the subsequent feelings that ignited from longstanding periods of isolation and an absence of human contact.

The National Library of Medicine determined in a 2021 study that women are more likely to have depressive symptoms both before and during Covid, and pregnant women in particular are a high-risk group for anxiety, with records of 18-25% (Matulis et al., 2021).

LET'S GET
vaccinated!
vaccinated!
VACCINE

Beyond the world of masked faces, the revolving door of vaccines and hysteria, we seem to have forgotten that this was a shared experience and have somehow become more polarised as a people. Covid, in its success in 'social distancing' us, signposted the moment we disconnected from each other, and started having stronger relationships with our phones.

Media Literacy: The Skillset of the Modern World

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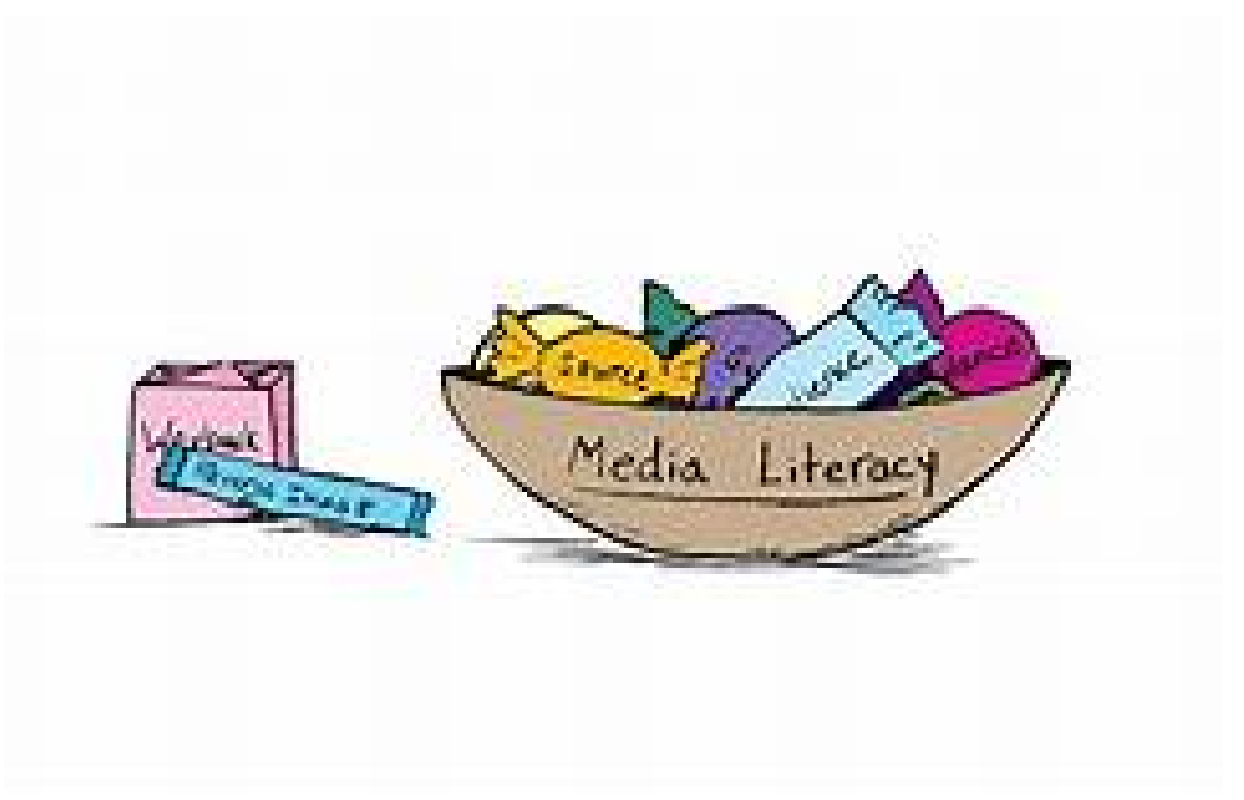
We need terms like 'media literacy' to highlight the dangers of passive content consumption in this hybrid world of illusion, superficial entertainment and altogether superfluous information. As the industry of deceit, the media is attributed with exacerbating social tensions and political issues. With the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic', the media single-handedly twisted an unfortunate trend of loneliness and record-high suicide rates into a narrative of misogyny and division of two genders.

In the Emmy nominated short series, 'Adolescence', we truly see how human emotion can be weaponized by social media to create corrosive social dynamics that endanger society. 'Adolescence' spotlights a 13-year-old teenage boy, Jamie who by the first episode has been implicated in a murder investigation (Waxman, 2025).

We understand throughout this series that Jamie is a victim of bullying both by his classmate and murder victim 'Katie' and the larger cohort. The subject of his harassment is of great significance to the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic' currently unfolding. In addition to his low self-esteem and unregulated impulse control, the show makes specific highlight of 'online incel propaganda' when identifying the psychology of his decision to murder Katie.

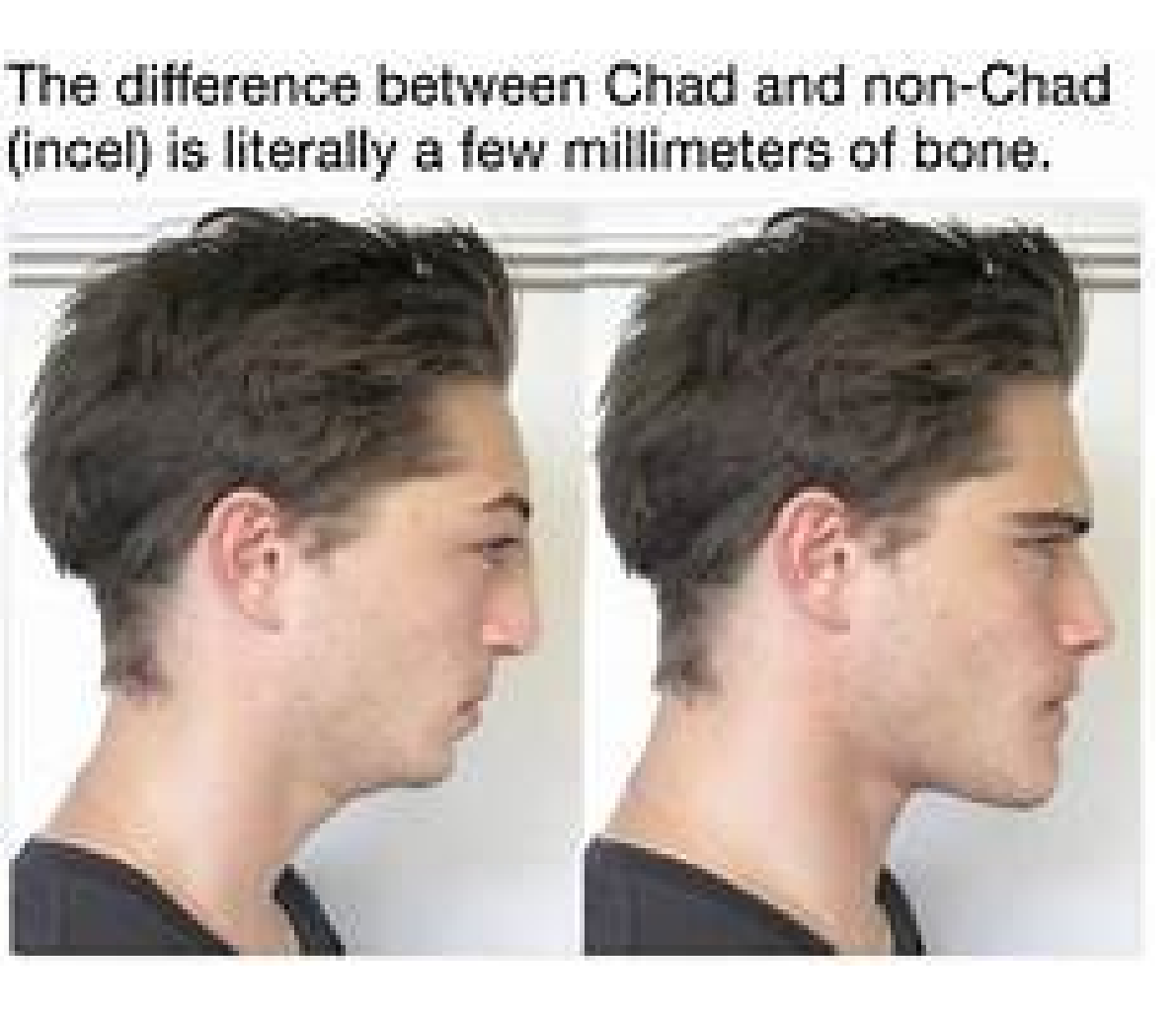
We all felt uncomfortable in ourselves at Jamie's age, itching with growing pains and acne. However, whether an object of bullying or not, we can agree that murder is an extreme and highly unnatural solution, which establishes a chilling precedence for the coercive control of social media ideologies that find new ways to stigmatise insecurity and weaponise emotion.



The Male Incel

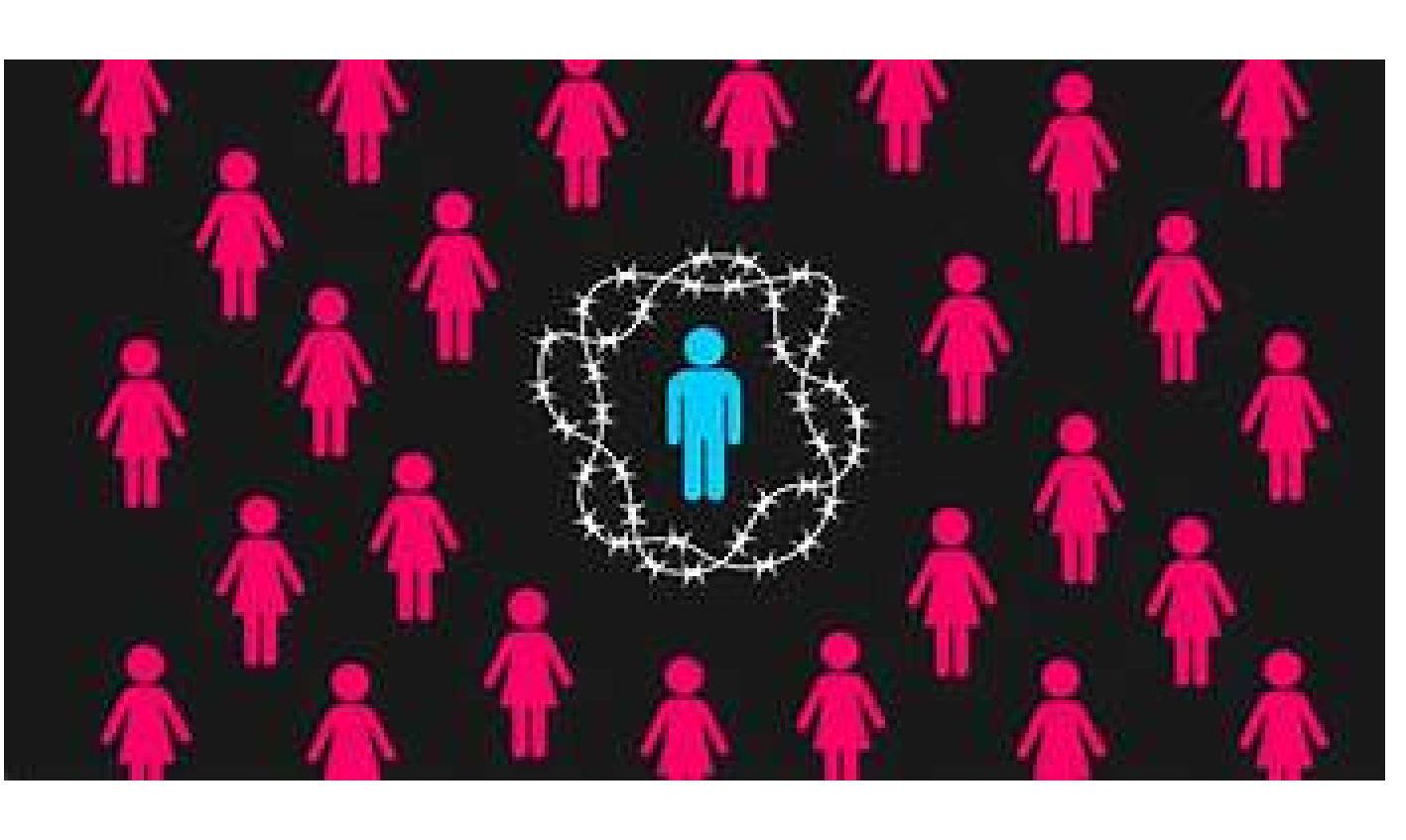
The 'incel' is a conjunction of the two words, "involuntarily celibate". If you are unfamiliar with the term, it essentially describes an online community of heterosexual young men who consider themselves unable to attract a romantic/ sexual partner (SBS The Feed, 2023). This term has prolific demographic associations with virgins and young boys and breeds in private chat rooms on Discord and Reddit. Alongside the unsettling perception that these men are 'unfairly' denied romantic intimacy from women, this social group spins extremist views tied to the inferiority and dehumanisation of women and domestic violence and 'rape' culture (Contributor, 2025). To its extreme, this misogynistic ideology endorses complete male agency over female bodies (SBS The Feed, 2023).

The 'incel' is intrinsic to the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic' and helps contort society's disregard and stigma around male mental health into an accusatory narrative that implicates women. On average, men are 4 times more likely to commit suicide than women and are less likely to seek professional support for mental illness, only making up 36% of all psychological therapy referrals (Supekar, 2024). Substance abuse and overdose rates have disproportionate associations with men and overall, the male life expectancy has been significantly reduced due to exponential rates of premature death (Supekar, 2024).


The difference between Chad and non-Chad (incel) is literally a few millimeters of bone.

These statistics and our pre-conceived relationships with stigma around male mental health has created a deplorable discrepancy between male and female mental health, this we understand. So, the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic' is not a question of whether male loneliness is real, because we can recognise that loneliness is at an all-time high. However, as earlier statistics indicate, loneliness although of greater prevalence among men, is a public health risk.

*Therefore, if this is a societal issue, implicating people regardless of gender or sex, the real question we should be asking is why men are isolated in this issue, and why women are deemed **'responsible'**.*



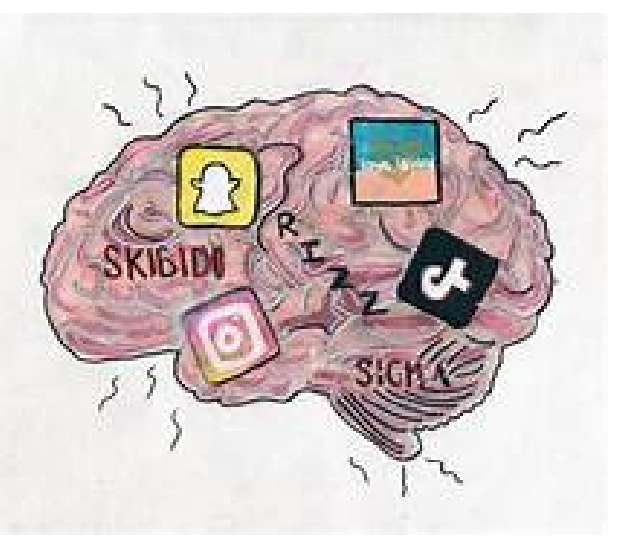
As a society, we have misconstrued a serious health concern into a convoluted 'whodunit', and volatile gender wars. This is what happens in a society afflicted by a poverty of emotional intelligence.

Our Poverty of Emotional Intelligence

Unfortunately, the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic' and its associations with 'Incel' culture represents a greater public health risk, the decline in emotional intelligence. While glossed over in education, emotional intelligence or 'EI' is a school of psychology that largely imparts on our lives. As a four-part framework, it targets well-being, self-control, emotionality and sociability (Fugère, 2021). Simply hearing these components, you may have epiphanic insight into the degree which emotional intelligence is absent in the ideologies of this social group. Given this, we can understand that the sensationalism of the 'Male Loneliness Epidemic' and its divisive messaging is a glaring example of the poverty of emotional intelligence, and we have only to look beyond the specificity of this individual social concern, to understand that this problem is overpopulating our society.

Emotional Quotient
EQ
Emotional Intelligence
EI

Extremist terrorist groups, 'toxic masculinity vs toxic femininity', 'conservatives vs liberals', 'Meninists', this issue spans the four corners of the internet and finds its way into family dinner conversations and office mingling. Really, it is no surprise. Just remember who you turned to when Covid was descending on your life and creating strain and burnout.



It wasn't your family, it was your phone, in social media. We have not lost this addiction, and like cigarettes, it will keep eating away at our body and mind until we reject temptation and passivity.

The 'Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire' was conducted between the years 2001 and 2019. It included 60 studies with 17,000 participants. Within this census, targeted studies concluded that access to technology in each country was associated with, "lower levels of well-being and control" (Fugère, 2021). Interestingly, they also found that declines in emotional intelligence were, "stronger as the proportion of females in the sample decreased" (Fugère, 2021).

It is easy to take this finding at face-value and allow it to greater deepen the gender gap. However, if we want to eradicate this perpetual issue, we need to be more discerning. This does not indicate that men have an inferior capability for emotional intelligence, rather it demonstrates that the surplus of online content geared towards men, especially young men, is so corrosive and manipulative, that men in our society are experiencing a greater struggle to emotionally regulate and reflect, develop empathy and most importantly possess strong media literacy.

Once we stop trying to fight each other and **all** better exercise emotional intelligence, we can recognise that a divisive mindset is futile, and social media is not our friend. Rather it is our fiend, considering the veins of hatred, apathy and isolation which course through our society can be traced to it unequivocally.

It is important that you ask yourself, is the internet really the hub of connectivity as we so often characterise it, if in our search for virtual connection, we actually end up just disconnecting from each other?

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