

LONELY LENNIE IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *OF MICE AND MEN*¹

Elfath Akdawidjaja², Angelika Riyandari and RM Sri Suryaningsih³

Abstract: Loneliness is an emotional state when an individual finds him/herself'S lack of qualitative interaction with other people. It does not only occur by the absence of other people around, but it also occurs with the presence of the others. The case study of Lennie Small provides A descriptive illustration of loneliness as the discussion reveals that Lennie suffers from psychological and cognitive loneliness. The feeling of loneliness itself is caused by being unable to fit in and being abused and rejected by others. The study also reveals how Lennie attempts to cope with loneliness through the desire for someone and by crying.

Keywords: loneliness, psychological, cognitive, cope.

INTRODUCTION

Any individual may have experienced loneliness. It is a feeling that deals with the relation to other people. When a person feels a lack of contact with other people, loneliness occurs. It is very common in human life because human being is a social creature.

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² Elfath Akdiwidjaya., S.S. <elfath_3434@yahoo.com> is an alumnae of the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang.

³ Angelika Riyandari, S.S, M.A. <goen2ike@yahoo.com> and Dra. Rosa Maria Sri Suryaningsih, M.A. <rmsrisuryaningsihyahoo.com> are lecturers of the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang.

Loneliness is an enduring condition of an emotional state that arises when a person feels estranged from, is misunderstood or rejected by, and/or lacks appropriate social partners for a desired activity, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy (Rook 1984:209).

The absence of other individuals around them frequently results in loneliness. Yet, people may not realize that being among others does not always keep them away from being lonely. As a matter of fact, the quality of human interaction determines whether a person suffers from loneliness or not.

Paradoxically, loneliness frequently occurs in heavily populated cities; in these cities many people feel utterly alone and cut off, even when surrounded by throngs of other people . . . Quantity of contact does not translate into quality of contact (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/loneliness>).

It means, an individual occasionally finds him/herself being lonely even though he/she is surrounded by other people, making contact or interaction with them, or even having relationships with them. This state of loneliness can be seen from a case study of Lennie Small, the main character of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Through the course of the story, it can be revealed that Lennie has a meaningful friendship with George Milton, who lives among other people and makes contacts with others. However, there are so many indicators showing that Lennie suffers from loneliness.

By reviewing the case of Lennie, it can be seen how loneliness may occur in a certain circumstance despite the presence of other people. Therefore, in order to find out how loneliness can emerge within anyone, it is necessary to discuss what happens with Lennie. The study itself has three objectives: to reveal the kind of loneliness experienced by Lennie, to reveal the cause of his loneliness and to find out the way he copes the loneliness.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE LONELINESS

In the story, Lennie suffers from two kinds of loneliness, they are Psychological and Cognitive Loneliness. Psychological Loneliness is the

kind of loneliness resulting from the feeling of being rejected and left out, especially the loss of previous close contacts like parents.

The psychological imperative cautions against being rejected or left out, which will lead to feelings of being involved and rejected, which lead in turn to feelings of guilt for self-mistreatment because previously valued close contacts have been lost. Parental loss may be viewed as rejection and increase the likelihood of loneliness in children (Corsini 1984:350).

Lennie is an orphan. His Aunt Clara took him when he was a child and raised him like her own son. Like any other parents, Aunt Clara took care of Lennie with sincere love and affection, in spite of the fact that Lennie is intellectually insufficient. It is not surprising, then, as Aunt Clara passed away, Lennie feels so lonely. For him, Aunt Clara was the only person in the whole world who could understand and accept him. Such a parental loss has made Lennie suffers from loneliness. This state of loneliness is implied through the words of George, Lennie's companion.

I knowed his Aunt Clara. She took him when he was a baby and raised him up. When his Aunt Clara died, Lennie just come along with me out workin' (Steinbeck 1972:44).

Lennie also suffers from Cognitive Loneliness. It is the kind of loneliness that derives from obstructions of communication, like a lack of intelligence, in order to survive in the society.

The cognitive imperative mandates that we be able to send and receive messages so as to survive in society. Barriers to communication like a foreign language lead to feelings and isolation, while a loss of intellect (e.g., organic brain disease) impairs reminiscence and creativity (Corsini 1994:351).

Since his Aunt Clara died, Lennie has been traveling throughout the country with George to work on ranches. Going to new places and meeting with new people are considerably new experiences for Lennie. Such an experience usually requires the ability to interact with other people. He does not have any problem with the language or talking, but his intellectual capability is below the average of others. Therefore, he does not always have proper understanding acquisition. The gap between Lennie's level of intelligence and the social demands drives Lennie to feel lonely. This

tendency is shown by what George says about him, i.e. Lennie is a nice person and a good worker, even though he is not bright.

He ain't bright. Hell of a good worker, though. Hell of a nice fella, but he ain't bright. I've knew him for a long time" (Steinbeck 1972:38).

Therefore, from the case study of Lennie, it is obvious that loneliness does not always occurs due to the absence of other people around, but it also emerges from parental loss and the lack of intellectuality.

THE CAUSES OF LONELINESS

There are many causes of loneliness. In *Of Mice and Men*, the case study of Lennie Small reveals that the main character suffers from loneliness because of two reasons. The first cause is that Lennie is unable to fit in. This reason comes from the feeling that he is different from other people, that he cannot meet common demands of the society, that he is not "normal." As a result, he feels all alone.

Being unable to fit in. Sometimes lonely individuals feel as if they are "a black pearl in a box of shining jewels." They feel like a misfit, someone who cannot fit in with the rest of the crowd. Very often there are feelings of wanting to be like everyone else, to be "normal" instead of standing out and being rejected because of it (http://www.webofloneliness.com/causes_of_loneliness.htm).

Lennie is considerably different from the common society because he has an intellectual defect. He does not quite understand about the situation around, about the proper attitudes and behavior and about the common sense. Consequently, Lennie becomes an annoyance to the rest of the society. In fact, he is often involved in troubles mostly due to his stupidity. Sometimes, Lennie does not even realize that he is in trouble or that he is disrupting other people. Certainly, it makes Lennie consider that people cannot understand him. Therefore, he is lonely. George Milton, Lennie's best friend, describes this unfortunate condition of the way Lennie fails to fit in the society as follows:

"Course Lennie's a God damn nuisance most of the time," said George. "But you get used to goin' around with a guy an' you can't get rid of him."

"He ain't mean," said Slim. "I can see Lennie ain't a bit mean."

"Course he ain't mean. But he gets in trouble all the time because he's so God damn dumb. Like what happened in Weed " (Steinbeck 1972: 45).

The second cause that makes Lennie lonely is that he is being abused and rejected by others. Due to one or other reasons, people sometimes treat him in a rejecting manner, like assaulting him with abusive words.

Being abused and rejected by others. In this case, people outside of the lonely individual have treated this person in a rejecting manner. These include things like being lied to, being made fun of, being abandoned or rejected (by family and friends), being told abusive things like, "you're no good", or "we don't want you around." In these cases of verbal and psychological assaults, individuals develop defensive walls to protect themselves from this negative environment, often times shutting out both people that can help them as well as those that can harm them (http://www.webofloneliness.com/causes_of_loneliness.htm).

Lennie is often caught into trouble as a result of his own foolishness. He is too dumb to realize that his actions may produce unwanted outcome. Therefore, it is no wonder that people, despite the fact that they are aware of Lennie's defect, occasionally abuse and reject him. Considering other people's treatment to him, Lennie becomes lonely. An obvious example of abusive behavior that results from Lennie's foolishness can be seen from what Curley does to Lennie when he thinks that Lennie is laughing at him. Curley beats Lennie up even though Lennie is not sure of what he has done wrongfully.

Curley was balanced and poised. He slashed at Lennie with his left, and then smashed down his nose with a right. Lennie gave a cry of terror. Blood welled from his nose. "George," he cried. "Make 'um let me alone, George." He backed until he was against the wall, and Curley followed, slugging him in the face (Steinbeck 1972:69).

It can be inferred from the case study of Lennie that an individual may suffer from loneliness because he/she is unable to fit in and being abused and rejected by others.

THE ATTEMPTS TO COPE WITH LONELINESS

There are a number of ways to cope with loneliness. Usually, lonely individuals try to cope with loneliness in any ways they can do, even though it is merely as an instant reaction or a temporary solution. The most important thing is that those efforts reduce the pain of being lonely. In the case of Lennie, it can be seen that there are two different attempts of coping with loneliness.

The first attempt in coping with loneliness is the desire for someone. It is an expectation from the lonely individual to someone there to share thoughts and feelings, as well as to having someone to care for.

The desire for someone. The most frequent way that people coped with feelings of loneliness, as mentioned in the poems, was by imagining having someone there. In some cases it was romanticized, having the knight in shining armor coming to rescue them from their loneliness, or having the perfect lover or friend. In other cases though, it was just something more general, just to have someone there to share our thoughts and feelings with, having someone to care (http://www.webofloneliness.com/causes_of_loneliness.htm).

It is not strange that Lennie has the desire for someone because he finds himself excluded from the society considering his intellectual defect. Lennie knows that most people cannot understand and accept him. It makes him lonely. He tries to overcome his loneliness through the expectation for somebody who is willing to love him and to take care of him like his late Aunt Clara. The indication of this sincere desire is shown in the novel when Lennie expresses his relieve for having George around.

Lennie broke in. "*But not us! An' why? Because . . . because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why.*" He laughed delightedly (Steinbeck 1972:15).

The second attempt in coping with loneliness shown by Lennie is crying. It mostly is an instant reaction of pain. However, since loneliness causes pain, lonely individuals sometimes cry to reduce the pain of their loneliness, or merely because they cannot think of other way to overcome loneliness.

Crying. The second most frequent activity reported was crying. Pain is usually accompanied by tears, therefore loneliness would also be accompanied by tears (http://www.webofloneliness.com/causes_of_loneliness.htm).

Lennie suffers from loneliness mostly because of his lack of intelligence. He is frequently unaware that his actions drive people to get rid of him and to reject his presence. Lennie's stupidity is proven to be the source of troubles. It is predictable, then, that Lennie cannot find a way out of his painful loneliness. Therefore, he finds that the easiest way to cope with loneliness is crying. It may not solve the real problem, but at least it will ease the pain and makes him relieve. The indication of this attempt is shown in the following:

Lennie's lip quivered and tears started in his eyes. "Blubberin' like a baby! Jesus Christ! A big guy like you." Lennie's lip quivered and tears started in his eyes (Steinbeck 1972:10).

Therefore, from the case study of Lennie Small, it is obvious that two examples of coping with loneliness are the desire for someone and crying.

CONCLUSION

Loneliness does not always occur by the absence of other people. It can also happen through one or several other ways. The experience of loneliness suffered by Lennie Small in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* shows other viewpoints about loneliness.

The case study of Lennie reveals that the main character of the novel suffers from two kinds of loneliness. The first kind is Psychological Loneliness that occurs due to parental loss. The second one is Cognitive Loneliness that occurs due to the lack of intellectuality, which always makes him get into troubles with other people.

The study also reveals that there are two causes that make Lennie suffer from loneliness. The first cause is being unable to fit in because Lennie fails to meet the demands of the society considering intellectuality. The second cause is being abused and rejected by others because Lennie's intellectual defect always gets him in troubles.

The discussion has another finding, i.e. Lennie has two attempts in coping with loneliness. The first attempt is the desire for someone, considering the fact that nobody else understands Lennie and takes care of him, except his late Aunt Clara and his only friend George.

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