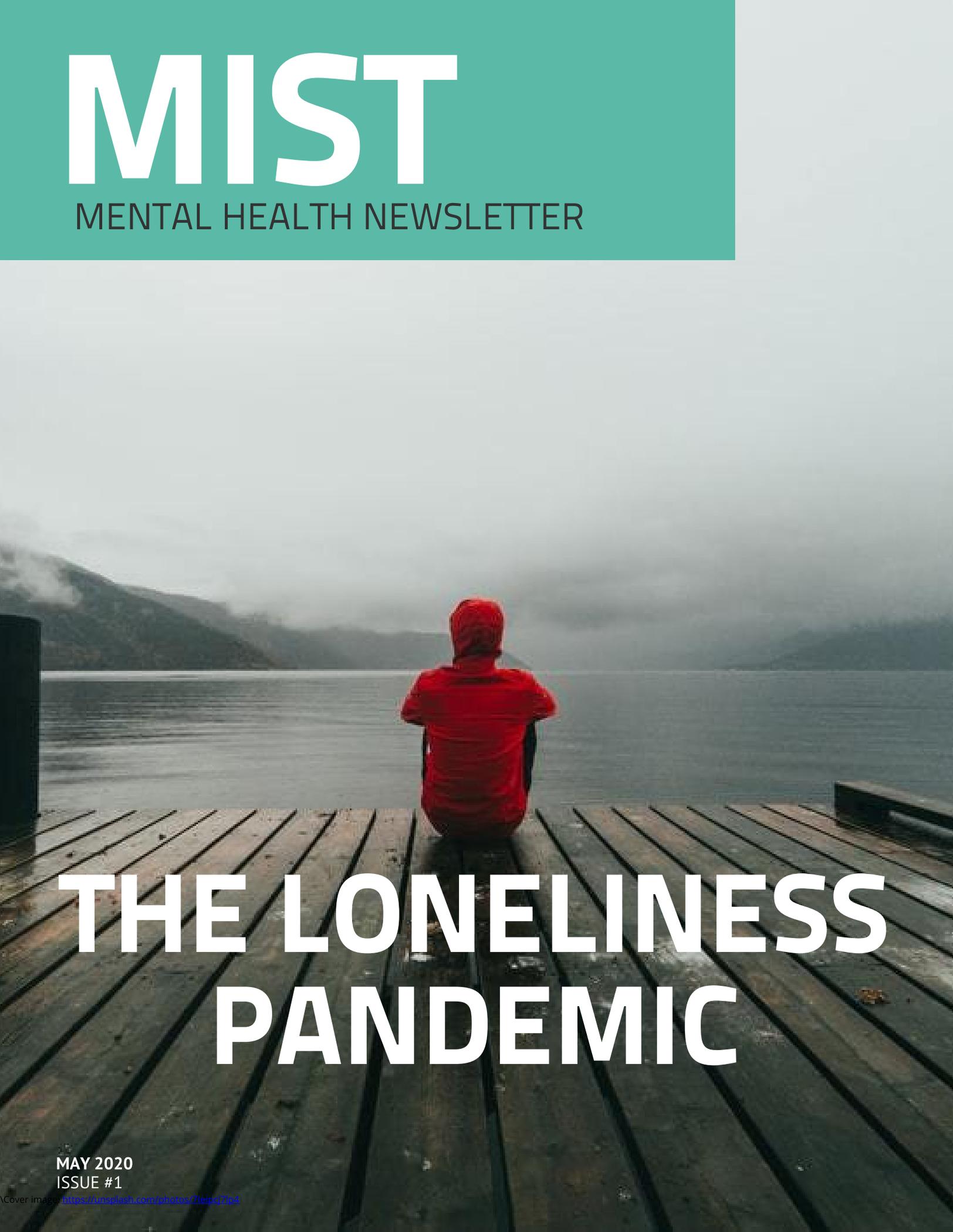


MIST

MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

A person wearing a bright red hooded jacket is sitting on a wooden pier, looking out over a large body of water. The scene is misty and overcast, with mountains visible in the distance. The person is seen from behind, centered on the pier.

THE LONELINESS PANDEMIC

MAY 2020
ISSUE #1

Cover image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/7leipq2lp4>



About MIST

MIST is an organization that was founded high school students at MICDS in St. Louis, MO. We aim to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness in India, Singapore, and the United States. Please see information on page 14 for how you can get involved with MIST by starting a chapter at your school or contributing to our next newsletter. Please email mist.teens@gmail.com with any questions.



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Picture by Nandita Satheeskumar

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The Obsession With Productivity During Quarantine

By: Selina Balci



Due to social distancing orders, we're all forced to stay at home, which leaves most of us with a lot of time. Many people are seeing this as an opportunity for self-improvement; to do things they wouldn't have had enough time otherwise to do and learn things they wouldn't bother learning otherwise, like picking up an instrument, learning a new language, deciding to finish a book every week, etc., and many of us are getting influenced by this trend glamorizing productivity. It's like we're all suddenly feeling compelled to get out of quarantine as an enhanced version of ourselves--if you feel like picking up new hobbies and skills is helping you out, if it's working for you, that's great! However, I know there are a lot of us that are under enough stress, so know that you do not, by any means, have to "improve" yourself by the end of our current situation.

The media has an obsession with productivity. There are countless articles, videos, and images supposedly giving advice on how to make the most out of your free time, how to work towards becoming an "ideal" human being when really, the most we can put an effort to do given the circumstances is be an alive human being. Taking time off to relax has always been poked fun at, like it's wrong, or something to be ashamed of--especially nowadays, it's the subject of countless memes that are meant to be "relatable" in some way; these memes are supposed to make us feel bad and lazy for our simple need for downtime.

In addition, many prominent celebrities in desperate need for attention after not being in the spotlight anymore have been encouraging others to join in on the quest to "improve" oneself. They've been sharing "secrets to success", their daily routines, their diets, their unconventional habits, all things that mislead the population into believing they need to reach these certain expectations set by millionaires, CEOs, gold medalists... These can all be helpful at times, but during this time of crisis, not everyone can afford to leave basic survival aside and strive to pave their way into massive success just because they found a short window of free time. The world's under so much stress right now, we don't need another layer of pressure as we struggle to reach this new expectation.

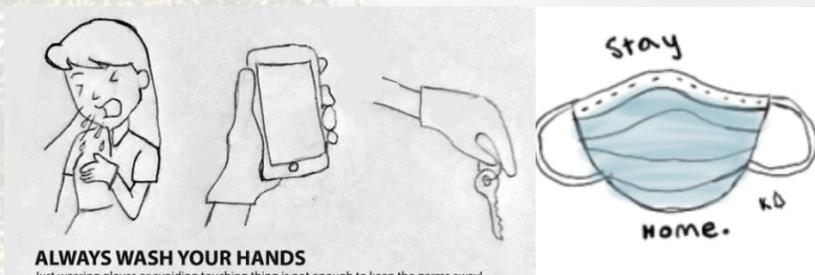
Don't feel compelled to "make the most" out of the excess daily time we have in this moment of crisis. Don't compare yourself to all the millionaires in their massive mansions who have never in their life had to worry about their next meal, and ignore all of those articles and videos and memes that make you feel obligated to reach a certain expectation. You do not need to have achieved anything by the time all of this is over--just focus on your own health and wellbeing.

Bored During Quarantine?

By: Siri Battula



- 1. Download Duolingo :** With some extra time on your hands, it is a good time to improve on a foreign language you're learning or pick up a new one altogether.
- 2. Bake Away:** Make yourself and your family a delicious treat. Not only do you get to have some fun baking, but get a delicious reward!
- 3. Have a Netflix Party:** Do you miss your friends' live commentary on your favorite show? Watch Netflix with your friends online with Netflix Party.
- 4. Get Crafty:** It is a great time to make some art or make something awesome from scratch. Bring your artsy side out!
- 5. The Classics:** Puzzles, board games, and more! You probably have a few board games in some corner of your house. This is a great time to make use of them and spend some time with your family.
- 6. Offer a Helping Hand:** Many hospitals are short of face masks and other supplies. If you can sew, why not help out? Reach out to an older person in your neighborhood to see if they need to get anything from the store that you're going to stop by. Just remember that we're in this together!
- 7. Catching up:** When is a better time to catch up with some old friends? Having some social interaction is essential during these times. We only have to physically distance from each other, Facetime is still at your fingertips.
- 8. Get Moving:** Being quarantined might keep you away from the gym, but you can still be active! It is important to keep moving both for your mental and physical health during these times. Whether it's on YouTube or on a workout app, find some workouts to do at home.
- 9. Explore the World of Podcasts:** You're probably running out of Netflix shows and YouTube videos. So give your eyes a break and explore some podcasts. Check out Shelly's podcast review on the next page! There are probably some that you will love out there!
- 10. Lastly, but most importantly: Stay safe, clean, and healthy!**



Drawings by Siri Battula and Keller Goldstein

A Review: The *I Weigh* Podcast

By: Shelly Bhagat



Competitive people: They're always trying to be the star of the show, the winner of every competition, the headline of the news. Maybe you're a competitive person in some way or another. So are a lot of other people, including me. Or maybe, you're just sick of this hyper-competitive world, and you're just taking it easy. I totally get that, too. Either way, have you ever stopped to think of why this world we're living in is so competitive? That's because our society praises independence above collaboration.



Jameela Jamil

Recently, I listened to actress and TV host Jameela Jamil's podcast *I Weigh*. In this podcast, which is primarily focused on mental health and shame, Jamil (who you might recognize from the TV show *The Good Place*) interviews and has vulnerable conversations with leaders, performers, activists, and influencers to challenge society's definition of worth. In the particular episode I listened to, she interviewed former US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who recently conducted a study and wrote a book, *The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, about loneliness and how it impacts our physical health.

Loneliness is an extremely complex and stigmatized topic. As Murthy states in the podcast, loneliness is the feeling that we do not have enough social interaction in our lives. This feeling depends on the quality and strength of our friendships and not the number of friends that we have. For example, we often feel lonelier when we are around people who we do not connect with, as opposed to people we connect well with. Strong friendships are with people who we feel most comfortable truly be ourselves around.

An interesting thing that I learned from this podcast is that loneliness is a natural signal, just like hunger or thirst. Back when humans lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, there was a danger of being alone, and the feeling of loneliness was a signal to remind people to interact with others. According to Murthy, when we feel lonely, stress hormones are released which cause inflammation to our bodies when loneliness persists for a long period of time. This causes us to focus on ourselves and can cause a downward spiral of self-doubt which can sometimes cause us to feel depressed or anxious. But unlike satisfying hunger or thirst, surrounding ourselves with people does not always help to ease loneliness unless we are with people we can truly connect with. The best way to keep ourselves from feeling lonely is to surround ourselves with people that make us happy that we can reach out to if we need it.

(continued on next page)

Most people tend to isolate themselves when they feel lonely, upset, or depressed. Our society prompts us to give people space when they are going through a hard time. However, Vivek Murthy critiques this and suggests that we should reach out and check on friends or loved ones who may be struggling, even if they don't want to talk. Just taking five minutes out of your day to connect with someone (even if it's through text or a phone call because meeting is no longer possible) can really make someone's day or even your own and can ease someone's, or maybe your own, loneliness.



Vivek Murthy

These days, life seems to revolve around social media now more than ever since there isn't much to do. As Jameela Jamil states in the podcast, social media has changed predominant culture in a way that it puts wealth, fame, and power in the center of our lives. While social media can help us connect with each other, it also causes some people to feel lonely as they compare themselves to other people. Our society also praises people that achieve success in their field independently, as opposed to achieving success by collaborating with others. As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the many reasons why our society is so competitive. As many people try to single-handedly gain wealth and fame, they often lose touch with others, ending up too busy to have a social life, and end up feeling lonely. This also makes it hard for us to be vulnerable around others because of the personal high status we feel like we have to build. We need to question whether achieving wealth or becoming famous is more important than the social bonds we have created. We should definitely continue to work hard to achieve our goals in life, but we do still need to take time out to take care of ourselves and those we care about.

Collaborating and connecting with others is essential to creating change in this world. Humans are social creatures, and we are hurting ourselves when we force ourselves to neglect social interaction for the sake of our own success. After all, connecting with others does help us feel happier and less lonely, even if you're an introvert like me and are perfectly happy with being alone. I highly recommend this podcast, which is available on Spotify or Apple Podcasts, to anyone who is interested in learning more about mental health, including mental health in the lives of celebrities. Stay safe, everyone!

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Understanding Introverts and Extroverts

By: Emma Scally



There are fundamental psychological differences in introverts and extroverts, contrary to popular belief that introversion is a “learned behavior.” This was first proven in the studies of Jerome Kagan, who dedicated his career to studying the physiologies and personalities of children. In 1989, Kagan launched a groundbreaking longitudinal study regarding the fundamental differences in temperament between introverts and extroverts. His team gathered a group of five hundred four-month old infants and measured their reactions to new stimuli. They found 20% of the infants displayed severe responses to tests, such as crying and thrashing, 40% remained quiet and placid, and the remaining 40% fell somewhere between the two extremes. Kagan postulated that the highly-reactive 20% of infants would grow to be introverts; the low-reactive 40%, extroverts. The research team followed these subjects through their formative years, and Kagan’s predictions eventually came to fruition. As recorded by psychologists like Kagan, introversion is a biological trait, dictated by the brain and independent of any learned or observed behaviors. Society’s view of introversion is often stereotyped and misinformed, not taking into account the individual’s temperament. We need to stop telling kids to “stop being shy” and “be more outgoing,” because it is often a trait out of their control.

On Susan Cain’s website “Quiet Revolution,” teacher and blogger Susan Grannenam offers fifteen tips on parenting an introverted child. All of the advice has the same underlying message: respect an introvert’s boundaries and help them understand that being “quiet” is not a defect. Cain echoes this sentiment in the personal anecdotes of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking*. She documents the story of a father named Jim and his intensely introverted daughter, Lily. Unlike most parents, Jim embraced his daughter’s nature; he introduced her to new situations slowly, always respecting her opinion and providing strategies for social interaction. Children who are nurtured like Lily will ultimately self-regulate social wariness and fear, actively applying social tips in their everyday life, and will overcome the most stifling aspects of introversion.

Introverts should also be encouraged to explore their interests and take refuge in such restorative niches when feeling overstimulated. According to Cain, introverts who pursue their passions throughout their life are more likely to choose a profession in which they will thrive. Not only can they employ their specialized skills in group settings where may be otherwise difficult to contribute, but also use them as an opportunity to recharge. Introverts who pursue their interests will be energized and more prepared to alter their personalities in situations where it is necessary to be more assertive or outgoing. This postmodern philosophy of personality situationism is championed by acclaimed Harvard Psychology Professor Dr. Brian Little, who posits in [an article from Harvard Magazine](#) that introverts who spend more time on their passions and “core projects” can better alter their traits and act as “pseudo-extroverts” when necessary (“Introversion Unbound”). This skill will aid introverts at school and in the workplace, helping to ensure that their talents are less often overlooked.

Now, we know that introverts can not only survive, but actually thrive if given the right guidance. Introverts possess quiet power: they are intuitive, empathetic, and can be persuasive without coming across as overly-assertive. They are too often undervalued for not having the loudest voice or being “antisocial.” Educators, parents, and mentors should pay more attention to the quiet kids and understand that being introverted is not something that needs to be fixed.

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MIST Stickers

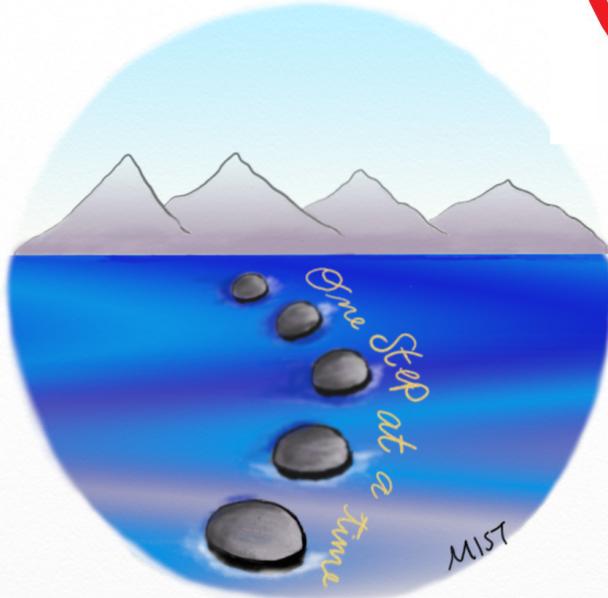


Contributors:



MIST STICKERS COMING SOON!

During quarantine MIST club members sketched up some sticker designs. We are very excited for you guys to get these! All the money collected from the sale will be donated to NAMI, one of the nation's largest mental health organizations. Stay tuned for a link to the stickers!



Quarantine and Pets:

How our Four Legged Best Friends Can Help us Through a Time of Social Isolation

By: Cate Cody



Quarantine is both a time to reconnect with ourselves and our family, and reflect during alone time which seems all too present in our everyday lives. While online classes provide some structure, there are still so many more hours in the day at our disposal with sports, clubs, and other activities coming to a halt. The stress of the virus itself as well as the general uncertainty over when life as we once knew it will resume makes quarantine a trying time for us all. We have both a heightened and decreased sense of communication, as face-to-face interaction with people other than our immediate family is minimal, yet texts, emails, and facetime calls become more depended on than ever to keep us all in touch with our friends and loved ones who we can't be with as much as we are accustomed to.

One email I received from a frequently attended restaurant referred to this period of time as the Great Pause, and I couldn't help but think of how appropriate this name was for the span of slow-paced days and cancelled plans which are so universal to today's population. In this time of mourning, worry, and stress, people around the world are trying to do their best to grapple with these precarious and unpredictable days and the changes they have brought.

Living in social isolation is one of the most difficult byproducts of the coronavirus to deal with, and it is something that we are all universally experiencing together, no matter our differences. It seems that, in a way, we are ironically bonded and brought together through our shared experiences created by the very thing which requires us to stay apart. However, finding comfort in this unsettling time becomes increasingly difficult as more questions arise over the nature of the virus as well as when we will be able to resume our normal, everyday lives. The scariest factor about this situation seems to be the uncertainty around it; it's a completely unprecedented event, and no one fully understands the characteristics of the virus or how long we can expect to be affected by it.

In a more positive light, quarantine has given us an increased amount of time to focus on what is truly important to us, and find comfort in our family members and friends, whether that be in the form of an in-person conversation with an immediate family member or over the phone with our friends.

One of the most meaningful relationships which quarantine gives us more time to invest in is the one with our pets. With our normal daily routines disrupted, we now have more time to

Continued on next page

spend with our most unconditionally loving and supporting friends who would otherwise see us leaving for school or work every morning.

Recent studies suggest that spending time with our pets can have positive impacts on some of the side effects associated with quarantine, including increased stress levels and feelings of loneliness. Interacting with animals has shown to be effective in both lowering cortisol levels and decreasing blood pressure, as well as increasing feelings of emotional support and well-being (NIH). This, paired with the opportunity they give us to be more in the moment, makes spending time with your pets a great way to temporarily take your mind off of quarantine.

Animals can also motivate us to be more active, which is another key factor in managing stress and isolation. Exercising releases endorphins which can reduce stress, help with symptoms of depression, and improve mental health overall (American Humane). Going for a

walk or hike with your dog is a great way to get outdoors and take a break from sitting at a computer all day for zoom classes.



Picture courtesy of Cate Cody

Sterling with his best friend, Thor.

For me personally, quarantine has provided a great opportunity to spend more time at the barn with my horse, Sterling, who was quite confused why I was showing up so often in the mornings instead of in the afternoon, but wasn't one to complain because he knows I'm always carrying plenty of treats in my pocket. Being able to have more time in the moment with him instead of wondering how in the world I'm going to finish the endless amounts of homework and studying I have to do has been a really great way to

appreciate the slower pace of my daily life during quarantine, and really makes me appreciate the good I can find in this bleak situation.

Overall, animals have been so helpful in allowing us to focus on the positive areas in our lives, bringing a sense of comfort which can be a great way to temporarily detract from all of the uncertainty that surrounds us in the world today. Coping with the effects of quarantine isn't easy, but with your pets, you don't have to go through it alone.

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The Girl in the Corner

By: Arushi Katyal



I guess you could say that I'm a bit of a loner. I'm an only child, and I don't have very many friends. The closest thing to a late night party I have had is when our robot stopped working the night before the competition, and the entire team stayed up late to work on it. This was a different type of rager, when we were all losing our minds deciding on who to blame for the broken drive base. I've never had a boyfriend either, unless you count the time when I had to fall in love with a donkey during a middle school version of "A Midsummers Night Dream". Those were by far the most romantic 5 minutes of my life. Also, I spent a suspicious amount of time hiding in the bathroom during a school dance. I'm often the girl in the corner, but I am lucky in that I have never felt lonely.

I think that one of the things that cause loneliness is when we are in a situation where we feel pressured to develop a part of ourselves that we are not, and then we find that part replacing who we really are. We begin to feel detached from ourselves and alone because we are surrounded by what we are not, and pushed towards becoming that. So, loneliness is not the only child, the person who stands alone in parties, or the one who stands out in a crowd. Actually, it often is that girl who stands in the middle talking to everyone, but feels trapped in a personality that isn't hers.

If loneliness means entails detachment from yourself, then recognizing loneliness means recognizing what you are not. But for that, you must first know who you are. If you ask me : "Arushi, who are you?" I would say "I'm feisty, and too lazy to finish this senten--. But also, I am well intentioned." Who else fits that description? Many people. Maybe even you do. That doesn't make us the same, because we are more than the sum of a couple of adjectives. Even describing yourself is impossible because we are more than what we can even understand, but still, no one will ever know us as well as we know ourselves. So when loneliness begins to take pieces of us, our idiosyncrasies begin to fade, very few people will see that other than us.

Let's take a situation : The nerd always sits at the table with other nerds and talks about biochemistry. But that nerd feels lonely today, because a part of her wants to be social as well. Even she wants to wear makeup, look pretty, and have a boyfriend. But no one will understand her, because to them she is the sum of a couple adjectives : smart, hardworking, industrious. In this scenario, it doesn't matter if the nerd has 3 friends or 10, or is an only child. What she needs is someone who understands her, and that "someone" needs to be her. I want to end by saying this : To all the people in my life who might feel lonely : I'm sorry that I might not know how to recognize you. But to all of you, I did read this quote recently : "loneliness is a sign that you are in desperate need of yourself." And that is something for all of us to think about.

An Interview With Vasudha Daver



Photo courtesy of Vasudha Daver

**Interviewed by Shelly Bhagat and
Siri Battula**

Vasudha Daver is a licensed professional counselor in private practice in Boulder, Colorado with over 10 years of experience in the field of mental health. She has worked in a variety of clinical settings such as the Asian Pacific Development Center, The Mental Health Center of Denver, Youth Villages in the greater Boston area, and most recently as a psychotherapist at the University of Colorado Boulder. Vasudha specializes in trauma informed counseling with teenagers, college students, graduate students, and young professionals that is rooted in social justice and intersectionality. You can learn more about her practice at www.innermoksha.com & on instagram @innermokshawellness

Shelly and Siri: How can people cope with loneliness during this period of social distancing?

Vasudha: Staying connected is important. I have found that dedicating about 15 minutes or so a day to socialize with a friend without any distractions can be really helpful.

Another way to combat loneliness is to do something nice for someone else. Send a friend a letter, bake cookies for a neighbor, or check in on a friend and see how they are doing.

S&S: How can we keep ourselves motivated and productive during quarantine?

V: I get asked this question a lot. As we navigate living our lives inside of our homes, it is important to create a schedule for the day. I have found that if I spend a few minutes in the morning or the night before creating a plan for the next day, I tend to hold myself accountable and stay motivated. Movement is also really important. Getting up and walking around (either inside or outside) can help us from feeling low in energy or bored.

Also, don't forget that this is a difficult time and it is okay to have moments where you are not productive. We have to be gentle with ourselves as we manage this uncharted territory.

S&S: How can introverted people maintain a social life?

V: It is important to ask yourself the following question, "What do I need right now?". By checking in and giving yourself space to figure out what you need is a great way to know when and how you would like to socialize. If being in a group chat or large virtual group hangout is overwhelming, schedule one on one hangouts. Find a way that works best for you!

S&S: What is the best way to cope with uncertainty, especially in this time?

V: It is okay to have a lot of varying emotions and thoughts about what is happening in the world and the ways that it is impacting you. Talk about it with a loved one, vent, allow yourself to feel all of your emotions, and stay connected to one another.

How to Get Involved With MIST



1. Join or start a club at your school!

To do this you can reach out to:

Shelly Bhagat: sbhagat@micds.org

Siri Battula: sbattula@micds.org

mist-support@gmail.com

To find our club curriculum or instructions on how to start a club visit our website written below.

2. Present at your school or community events

If there is somewhere you would like to present and spread awareness about mental health, reach out to us. We can provide you with presentations and researched information! Again, just contact Shelly or Siri.

3. Contribute to our Newsletter

Love writing articles or are good at designing pages? You can help us with the newsletter! Email Siri or Shelly if interested or fill out the survey.

4. Reach out to us if you have other ideas to get involved!

Our website: <https://mist-support.weebly.com/>

MICDS club page:

<https://micdscsc.wixsite.com/opportunities/mist>

Please fill out the survey to give us feedback:

<https://forms.gle/4TZ3i3RNVM9qS8sKA>