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# The Loneliness Epidemic and Capitalism

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## **Videos:**

“The Loneliness Epidemic: How Society's Dependence on Money is Leaving Us Alone and Disconnected”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5s4VYCWY6Y> (6:34 minutes)

“Capitalism and Loneliness”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKrc07BsIc4> (5:40 minutes)

## **Guide:**

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

## **Analysis Questions:**

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. In the Sustainable Human video, Charles Eisenstein said: “The people you look at every day—the people in the house across the street even—may not even be people that you know.” Does this reflect your experience? Why/Why not?
3. As quoted in the Stossel video, according to Johan Norberg's book, "When researchers compare...people with previous generations at the same stage of life, they don't find evidence of increased loneliness." Did this surprise you? Why/Why not?
4. Charles Eisenstein said: “We’re not involved in each others’ stories anymore.” What did he mean by this?
5. Johan Norberg said he was surprised that researchers didn't find higher rates of loneliness now, because it's less of a stigma to tell people that you feel lonely now. Do you agree that it's less of a stigma now? Why/Why not?
6. Charles Eisenstein said: “[We] don’t depend on each other in the way that most people did for most of human history, when your well-being depended on the health and gifts of the people around you.” How is modern society different? Do we not depend on the people around us anymore? Why/Why not?
7. Johan Norberg said that people who live alone and spend less time surrounded by other people are happier with the relationships they do have. How should we account for this when

we think about loneliness? Is the quality of relationships more important than the quantity?  
Why/Why not?

8. Charles Eisenstein said: "Gifts create relationships, whereas a money transaction does not create a relationship." What did he mean by this? Do you agree with him? Why/Why not?
9. The Stossel video showed that people are less lonely in market-oriented countries. Did this surprise you? Why/Why not?
10. Charles Eisenstein said: "On a deeper level, I think every human being has a need to be useful." Do you agree? Is it harder to be useful in a capitalist society? Why/Why not?
11. Johan Norberg said that capitalism "forces us to think about 'what does the other guy want?'"  
What did he mean by this?
12. Charles Eisenstein said: "This paradise of financial independence means that you don't need anybody, and they don't really need you either." Is this true? Can you think of any ways in which financial independence might allow someone to be more useful to others?
13. Johan Norberg mentioned the "double thank you." What is the double thank you?
14. Charles Eisenstein said: "Begin to orient toward the perception of gift." What did he mean by this?
15. Johan Norberg mentioned a study in Ethiopia that found that the closer people lived to marketplaces, the more generous they were. What was his explanation for this? Do you agree with his explanation? Why/Why not?
16. Do you think loneliness is a significant issue in modern society? Why/Why not?
17. Have you struggled with loneliness? If so, what do you attribute it to?
18. What are some healthy solutions to loneliness?
19. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
20. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
21. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
22. What else would you like to learn about this topic?