

“Loneliness, Love, and All That’s Between: A Psychological Look at What Makes Us Lonely and What Keeps Us in Love”, by Ami Rokach

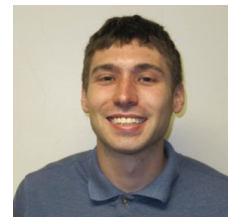
and

“Together and Lonely: Loneliness in Intimate Relationships: Causes and Coping”, by Ami Rokach and Ami Sha’Ked

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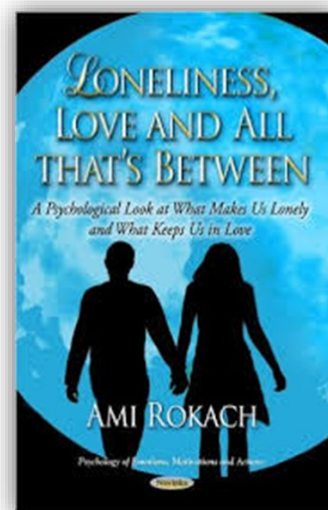
L*oneliness, Love, and All That’s Between* and *Together and Lonely* provide comprehensive overviews of loneliness in adult romantic relationships. Written from the perspectives of clinical psychologists engaged both in couple therapy and in academia, the books are an attempt to fill in a literature gap regarding the experience of loneliness despite being actively involved in an intimate relationship. To date, this experience has been largely unacknowledged, probably due to the counter-intuitive nature of the concept, as well as to the cultural value placed on romantic relationships in the U.S. as a primary safeguard against loneliness. Whereas *Loneliness, Love, and All That’s Between*, by Ami Rokach (2013), is written for broad readership, *Together and Lonely*, by Rokach and Sha’ked (2013), is more academically oriented. But both works overlap to a great extent.

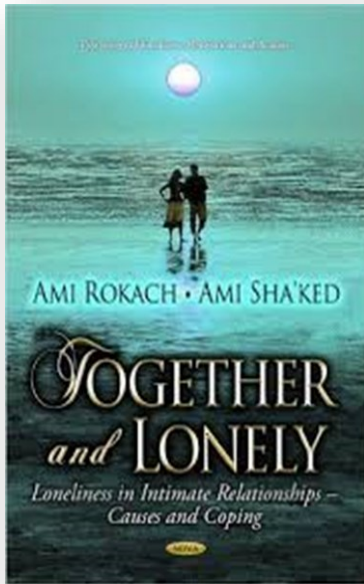
The content of *Loneliness, Love, and All That’s Between* is divided into two sections. One is on loneliness and love. The other is on marriage and the family: what can go wrong and how to make it better. Part one contains an overview of love and of loneliness, describing loneliness from multiple theoretical perspectives (e.g., attachment theory, Weiss, 1973; cognitive theory, Peplau & Perlman, 1982), differentiating it from other related concepts such as solitude and depression, and contextualizing it in American culture.

Further, Rokach identifies multiple aspects of the loneliness experience, including pain, anxiety, and resultant motivation; a sense of social inadequacy, alienation, and detachment; and an introspective experience with the potential for growth and discovery. Following Moustakas (1972), Rokach notes that anxiety characterizes the loneliness experience not only in the form of a symptom resulting from loneliness, but also in the form of loneliness anxiety, which involves the fear of being lonely and resultant actions taken in order to avoid loneliness.

Finally, he differentiates *transient or reactive loneliness*—which is situational in nature and amenable to couple therapy—from *essential loneliness* (Hojat, 1987)—which is a loneliness of the personality, tied to family of origin experiences, and amenable only to individual therapy. As an example, in a romantic relationship that lacks closeness due to one partner’s inability to open up to the other, partners with the inability to open up would experience essential loneliness, both in the relationship and in their life experiences prior to the relationship. In contrast, their partners would experience transient loneliness, which is only reactive to the other partners’ inability to open up.

Part two of *Loneliness, Love, and All That’s Between* contains a discussion of marital quality and its implications for loneliness. Also included here is a discussion of family dynamics—in historical context and in consideration of diversity—including the effects of marital quality on the family, as well as the role of family of origin experiences on the development of loneliness. Regarding the latter, Rokach draws primarily from personality theory (Shackelford & Buss, 1997) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973, 1980).





Rokach outlines a number of suggestions for improving the quality of couple relations and alleviating loneliness in intimate relationships. In addition to therapeutic intervention—which may take the form of couple or individual therapy, depending on whether transient or essential loneliness is at play—Rokach notes the efficacy of marriage education as a preventative effort. He contrasts marriage education with the observation that therapy may only be initiated too late, after a couple has experienced irreparable damage.

In *Together and Lonely*, the need to belong—or to be socially accepted—is highlighted as a central and powerful factor in loneliness, as well as in psychopathology more broadly. The authors discuss the fundamental nature of the need to belong, and suggest that many of the presenting problems in psychotherapy may be best understood from a belongingness framework. As quoted in Baumeister and Leary (1995), for example, “a great deal of neurotic, maladaptive, and destructive behavior seems to reflect either desperate attempts to establish or maintain relationships with other people or sheer frustration and purposelessness when one’s need to belong goes unmet” (p. 521). Additionally, Fromm-Reichmann (1976) noted that “loneliness in its own right plays a much more significant role in the dynamics of mental disturbances than we have so far been ready to acknowledge” (Fromm-Reichman, 1960, in Mayer-Gaev, 1976; p. 14).

Rokach and Sha’ked note a number of therapeutic implications to conceptualizing psychopathology from a belongingness framework. First, following Moustakas (1961), they note that viewing such aspects of psychopathology as anxiety and depression as parts of normal and natural processes does a lot to de-pathologize psychopathology. Second, they suggest that a central aspect of therapy should be to acknowledge loneliness (even as a factor in couple therapy), and to establish a warm and genuine therapeutic relationship, as with Rogers’ (1959) client-centered therapy. Such a therapeutic relation can model the importance of connection and support to the client, and can empower the client to reach out to others and connect, since it is—in itself—a temporary source of belongingness for the client. Third, Rokach and Sha’ked note that loneliness anxiety (Moustakas, 1972) may be a principle motivator of couple formation. In other words, a relationship can be built primarily on its members’ attempts to escape loneliness. They point out that such a grounds for relationship formation is ill advised, since such a relationship is likely to result in loneliness anyway.

A number of other implications of acknowledging loneliness in intimate relationships can be noted. Loneliness in romantic relations may be a principle motivator for a number of relational interactions, including both relationship-building acts, and negative acts such as betrayal. In other words, relationship members may seek to alleviate their loneliness via seeking emotional supportiveness in the relationship, or by engaging in emotional infidelity. Also, the extent to which current therapeutic practices are effective (or a key ingredient in their effectiveness) may have to do with their acting as a source of interpersonal acceptance to clients. This may be the case in various approaches, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, as well as client-centered therapy. Also, the prevalence of social alienation may be taken in its own right as an indicator of the well-being of a society (Peplau & Perlman, 1982), since it contributes to such things as drug and alcohol abuse, rising violence and gang membership, and depression and suicide (Beck & Malley, 1998).

Finally, the central tenets of *Loneliness, Love, and All That’s Between* and *Together and Lonely* fit well into the framework of interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory; Rohner, 2016). According to Rokach, in *Loneliness, Love, and All That’s Between*, “...being in a romantic, or marital, relationship that deprives a partner of support, security, and a sense of stability, is likely to result in loneliness” (p. 111). Further, drawing from the work of Weiss (1973), Rokach notes “The partner may feel misunderstood, rejected and secluded, a target of criticism or hostility, lack of love, affection and intimacy from one’s partner” (p. 111). Loneliness in romantic relations is thus inherently tied to an experience of interpersonal rejection, and it can be expected to co-occur with other correlates of interpersonal rejection in ways suggested by IPARTheory.

Thus, for example, loneliness anxiety may be expected to be a risk factor for couple rejection in romantic relationships (and later for parent-child rejection) in cases where couple relationships that are a poor fit are nevertheless initiated and maintained for the sake of escaping loneliness. Also, the experience of loneliness in romantic relationships can be expected to be accompanied by hostility and aggression, impaired self-esteem, and other universal correlates of interpersonal acceptance-rejection. In sum, *Together and Lonely* is a valuable read for academics and therapists, and its counterpart *Loneliness, Love, and All That's Between* is an important book that deserves to be disseminated more broadly.

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**LOVE IS AN ENDLESS
ACT OF FORGIVENESS**
- Jane Karon