

**6.5 Minutes With... Transcript**  
**Chikako Ozawa-de Silva**  
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Nicole Welk-Joerger, C21 Deputy Director: You're listening to 6.5 Minutes with C21 – an audio introduction to the topics, experts, and leaders who take part in the conversations hosted by the Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Studies.

In today's episode, Director Anne Basting speaks with Dr. Chikako Ozawa de Silva, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Emory University whose new book *The Anatomy of Loneliness* was just published in December 2021. Ozawa de Silva gives us some foundational definitions to consider when defining and tackling social infrastructures of loneliness.

Anne D Basting, C21 Director: And I think, the first question is really, how do you define loneliness?

Chikako Ozawa-de Silva: So, let me start with maybe one of the most known definitions of loneliness. *Loneliness*, by John Cacioppo, a leading scholar on loneliness. So he defined loneliness as perceived social isolation. It's a really good one, but I'll say loneliness is not just perceived social isolation, but it is perceived and *felt* social isolation. So I will add "felt" on top of the perception because small children, animals, also experience loneliness even though they might not be perceiving social isolation. So, what do I mean by that? You know, loneliness is a felt sense before even we are really aware cognitively. Actually, we often cannot even put into words what we are experiencing. Loneliness is not just a psychological phenomenon, but a biological and a social one as well.

So, eventually, as I was writing this book, I came to my own definition of loneliness studies: feelings of dissatisfaction that arise with regard to relationships to others or to the environment. So here, the key is I added the word "environment." So, we tend to think we have relationships with people and pets, maybe, but we also actually have relationships with certain

places, where we feel at home and strong connections, so I think you know the fact is that loneliness is a felt sense we feel in your body, but also we have relationships with places.

Basting: You also do a really interesting job of assessing kind of how people misunderstand loneliness. I wonder if you could share your perspective of the misperceptions around loneliness.

Ozawa-de Silva: Probably one of the most common misunderstandings with loneliness is thinking that loneliness is the same as depression. But it is very well known among researchers who study loneliness that not all depressed people are lonely and not all lonely people are depressed. So, depression is considered a broader concept. Maybe the second most common misunderstanding is you know thinking loneliness means being alone. But feeling lonely and **being alone** are not the same. So, loneliness researchers, in general, distinguish loneliness from social isolation and emphasize a cognitive appraisal and perception of experiencing loneliness. So, I think, you know, somebody could be physically alone -- My favorite example is a monk, who is meditating at the solitary hut for many years on, lovingness and kindness and interdependence. In such a monk, maybe alone physically, but not feeling lonely but then the opposite is the case. Somebody could be a really popular person surrounded by many friends and their family members, but then that person might be feeling extreme loneliness.

Basting: You guest-edited the volume of transcultural psychiatry to draw together anthropological research on loneliness from a wide range of cultures and contexts, with youth, with older people, refugees... did you see commonalities behind these experiences of loneliness? I think, in some ways, I'm asking is it somehow a universal experience? A human condition?

Ozawa-de Silva: So, I have to say, first of all, these are all experiences of loneliness. We need to reconceptualize what we mean by loneliness just feeling or being marginalized or uncared for and feeling unimportant are nothing but experiences of loneliness. So second of all, if I may, I'll say loneliness is not just in people's head, meaning perception. It is also a problem in people's body, that's why we feel loneliness even when we don't actually know we are experiencing knowingness, that happens sometimes. But again that's just a half picture of loneliness. I also locate loneliness in society in my book, what I need is a society can make people lonely. We shouldn't understand loneliness just in individuals'

issues, but also, it is in a societal issues. There is a type of a society that makes people feel uncared for, unseen, and unimportant, so that is what I call the “lonely society” in my book.

**Basting:** In your final chapter you affirm that lonely societies can indeed be transformed. It'll take imagination to do it, but what do you see as a few key steps toward it to fuel the imagination toward that transformation.

**Ozawa-de Silva:** Let me start with saying you know, there is no silver bullet to loneliness. I love, how you put it “imagination”, I will also say it takes time. Loneliness is a form of suffering, first of all, so therefore patience and acceptance are key. What do I mean by that? You know, loneliness is some kind of unmet expectations or social relationships. It is the kind of expectations not being met, that's what loneliness is. That means we have an option, you know we can focus on what we don't have, what we have lost, or we can focus on what we have. So that's what I mean about acceptance and patience.

So, to do something like that I think actually education is key and early education is important because cultivating patience, acceptance, and you know compassion toward others, and you know to ourselves, it takes time and it's better to have the kind of opportunities when you are young before people are experiencing severe loneliness. Knowing patience is key to cultivate resilience.

**Welk-Joerger:** To further engage with this interview, other conversations, and the participatory research and reading activities for Lonely No More, please visit our website at [uwm.edu/c21](http://uwm.edu/c21). If not there, we hope to catch you when you have another 6.5 Minutes to spare.