

Existential Isolation Unlimited

Prof. dr. Siebrecht Vanhooren, KU Leuven (Belgium)

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Unexpectedly, we – in large parts of the world and throughout Europe – have been affected by COVID-19 and the measures of our governments. For us, existential therapists, it is clear that what we are experiencing is nothing else than our human condition and our ultimate concerns, but maybe in a more crystalized way. Many people are becoming more aware of their ultimate concerns these days. They become aware of their frailty and finiteness, what makes or doesn't make sense in their lives, but also of – being locked down – the state of our relationships and of their existential isolation. It is not a coincidence that studies have reported more anxiety, depression, and domestic violence than before. Although we are all locked-down (of have been), the locked-down experience has mostly served as an amplifier of our personal situation.

Some of us, who have been all by themselves, have felt extremely lonely and are craving to touch or to be touched, whereas others, who lived in tiny apartments with children and partners husbands, have been fighting for some privacy or time to themselves. Others on the contrary have felt more connected to the human race and society than usual, sewing masks for their families, friends and local hospitals.

In any way, it is highly possible that we are heading for important shifts in how we will encounter the other, or shifts in how we experience ourselves in connection to the other during the next weeks en months. How will we feel when we meet a stranger who doesn't wear a mask and is getting to close? Will we still shake hands in the future? How will our children experience sexuality in the broadest sense of the word. What will it mean to touch or to be touched? Are we heading for an even more distant physical relationship with the other in our individualized western society? Will we find new ways to connect and to feel connected?

All these questions without answers – general questions and very personal questions about our own situation - might even makes us feel more isolated and frightened. At the same time we all have the need to make sense to what is happening and to stay connected or to reconnect with ourselves and others. From an *experiential-existential perspective*, making sense is more than wondering and thinking. Making sense of our situation is impossible without establishing contact with our situation. The most direct and precise way to understand where we are right now, is to contact our intuition, to get emotional clarity through checking our bodily felt sense of our situation, as Eugene Gendlin (1973) suggests. When it comes to our existential isolation or our lack of space, the experiential-existential approach suggests something that sounds like a paradox. There is no need to diminish or fight our sense of isolation or lack of space. What we need to do is to connect to our felt sense of our existence. In this case we will contact our felt sense of being existentially lonely or having no space to ourselves, in order to hear what it means to us and what it needs. Experiential-existential *focusing* exercises might help us to contact our current existential challenges, to make sense of what is happening, and to find new directions in how to deal with our lives.