

# John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*: the impact of loneliness on a person

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Unfortunately, it affects more people than can be fathomed, and holds no cure. Many think that loneliness only affects the weak and emotionally detached, but in fact, it affects many more people than meets the eye. Loneliness can be seen everywhere, and in everyone. In school, at home, in public, in movies, and even in books. Through both subtle and obvious denotations, John Steinbeck displays how loneliness can influence and infect even the most powerful characters in *Of Mice and Men*, such as Curley, who in fact is one of the most egotistical and influential characters on the ranch, is shunned and detached from the other members.

Loneliness can affect any person regardless of age, health, or status. Take for example Curley, a character from John Steinbeck's classic *Of Mice and Men*. Curley works at a ranch, where his father is the boss. Regardless of what many might think, nepotism never comes into play in this novella, which is evident in the way Curley acts and the way he is treated. ". . . He got it comin' to him. Sometimes I'd like to bust him myself." This quote was said by none other than Curley's Wife. Curley essentially shuns his wife from seeing the outside world, making her bitter towards him. Ultimately, Curley doesn't think before he acts, and does things that make even the people close to him despise him. All of these factors in turn make him lonely. How can one so powerful be so alone? This question does seem puzzling, and in many cases, yields no answer. In Curley's case, however, there are many examples that demonstrate how a man like him could be so lonely. Take for example, this quote from Candy: "Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's all the time picking scraps with big guys". Candy is stating that Curley loves to pick fights on people bigger than he is, and he just enjoys to

fight in general. This attitude of hostility generally makes people (including Curley) unlikeable, and therefore lonely. “ Results of a three year longitudinal study of trajectories of adjustment found that individuals who were both withdrawn and aggressive had the highest self-reported levels of loneliness...” Curley, as a result of being aggressive, experiences a lot more loneliness than many other powerful characters. If someone is lonely they usually try to overcome it. Either by making friends, engaging in activities, or trying to fit in in any way possible. Unsurprisingly, Curley doesn't use any of these. In fact, Curley, throughout the entire book, does nothing to change or fix his loneliness.

Most of the times when Curley has dialogue or is mentioned in the book, he is either looking for his wife, or looking for trouble. “ Curly burst into the room excitedly. “ Any you guys seen my wife?” he demanded. ” Curley continuously does the same things around the ranch, leaving no time to make friendships or fix his appearance. He cares too much about what other people are doing to care about himself. He also cares too much about his physical “ might” than his own feelings, shown perfectly in this quote: “ Then Curley's rage exploded. “ Come on, ya big bastard. Get up on your feet. No big son of a b\*\*\*\* is going to laugh at me. I'll show you who's yella. ” Curley always takes everything towards him personally, and therefore gets angry at each action towards him. All this anger leaves no time for Curley, let alone any man, to fix their problems. With no time to change his ways, this leaves Curley lonely throughout the entire novella. As stated in the last paragraph, Curley does nothing to try to fix his loneliness, so some of the repercussions

of this can be seen later in the book. Some people have very little control over their anger and tend to explode in rages. " Raging anger may lead to physical abuse or violence. Some people who fly into rages have low self-esteem, and use their anger as a way to manipulate others and feel powerful. " Curley pent up all his anger (Which in turn, makes him lonely as stated in the previous paragraph. ) and at the last part of the book, explodes. " He worked himself into a fury. " I'm going to get him. I'm going for my shotgun. I'll kill the big son-of-a-b\*\*\*\* myself. I'll shoot ' im in the guts. Come on, you guys. "

Only an enraged person would say something like this. All of the anger that caused his loneliness was building up inside of him, and he finally let it all go after the death of his wife. Curley did nothing to fix his loneliness, making him more angry, and finally that anger releases and causes a major string of events in the book, including Lennie's death. " What makes us happiest and content in life? Some people may point to fabulous fame and fortune. Yet hands down, surveys show that friends and family are the real prize. Even though our need to connect is innate, some of us are always home alone. "

Loneliness is one of the biggest mental health problems in our modern age. It affects the young and the old. It is so easy to see that there are therapists devoted to it. Even writers, such as John Steinbeck, uses it as a central theme in his novella, *Of Mice and Men*. John Steinbeck shows how loneliness can affect anybody, regardless of their whereabouts in life. Curley, a powerful yet angry ranch-hand, feels loneliness at its worst and does nothing

to change it. Unfortunately, this hurts several characters and their chance at success.