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“In this powerful book, Jeremy Nobel shows us how using the arts and creativity as ‘a gateway to imagination and empowerment’ can not only empower us to combat loneliness and isolation, it can profoundly change our minds and bodies.”

– Susan Magsamen, New York Times bestselling author of *Your Brain on Art*

Project UnLonely

Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection

by Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH

Loneliness has become a daily source of profound anguish for millions of people worldwide. This book offers a bold perspective to heal this personal and public health crisis.

During the 25 years Jeremy Nobel has been teaching at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, most of the developed world has experienced loneliness as a relentlessly expanding public health calamity. Now in **PROJECT UNLONELY: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection** by Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH (*on sale 10/3/23; Avery*) he explores what it means to be lonely, what it means to be creative, and what it means to be connected – to be UnLonely.

It's been well-publicized that loneliness increases your risk of dying early by 30% -- the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. But research has also linked prolonged loneliness to depression, suicide, substance abuse, cancer, dementia, diabetes, and diseases of the coronary, respiratory, and gastrointestinal system. Yet the causes reach far beyond the kind of physical isolation we experienced during the pandemic. For many, a complicating contributor to their disconnection from others is their broken connection with their inner selves. This predicament makes connecting with others feel fraudulent, elusive, or even impossible. This is why you can feel lonely in a crowded room of colleagues or neighbors, and why the lonely get lonelier.

As founder of the Foundation for Art & Healing, whose signature initiative is Project UnLonely, Dr. Nobel has spent almost two decades helping people recognize and understand loneliness in the hope of destigmatizing and healing it. He finds that loneliness falls into three distinct categories: Psychological (a longing for an authentic connection to another person), Societal (an overwhelming sense of not fitting in or belonging), and Existential (spiritual questions about the meaning and purpose within it). These

experiences of loneliness may be associated with specific life stages and may occur simultaneously. But, Dr. Nobel proposes that they all arise within five territories:

1. **Trauma:** Trauma changes our brains and how we make sense of the world around us, putting us on constant high alert, and thus changes our behavior towards avoidance, leading to greater levels of social isolation and increased risk for physical and mental illness.
2. **Illness:** Illness is always isolating, but life-threatening or serious chronic illnesses lead to a particularly high risk for loneliness, to say nothing of “rare diseases” that in aggregate burden one in ten Americans.
3. **Aging:** Aging comes with mental, physical, and social health challenges that increase the likelihood for loneliness. Significantly, the relationship between loneliness and cognitive impairment is bi-directional, meaning that loneliness in older adults increases the risk for dementia, while dementia increases the risk for loneliness.
4. **Difference:** Whether because of race, religion, gender identity, class, disability, or appearance, feeling different can lead to feeling marginalized, isolated, and lonely. It is not enough to work toward inclusion, we must work toward helping others to feel a sense of belonging.
5. **Modernity:** As our devices hijack our attention, we struggle to connect in real life. Social media in particular has disrupted our potential for healthy relationships as we are encouraged to endlessly perform and compare ourselves to others, with “success” measures by “likes” and “shares” rather than by any authentic engagement.

And yet, among the many hopeful signs that point to a future of healing, the most powerful may be creative expression. Making art acts as a gateway between your conscious and unconscious mind, requiring you to be fully present and engage the imagination, allowing what is hard to access to be expressed. With a deeper awareness of your thoughts and feelings, you are able to better connect with your essential self. Then sharing what you have made with others enables you to reveal that true self, offering the authentic connection with others that we seek in the modern vortex of distraction and anonymity. While loneliness ignites a vicious cycle, creative expression can ignite a virtuous one in the opposite direction. With an increased sense of self-connection and acceptance, positive behaviors such as self-care, seeking social support and supporting others are activated.

Sharing our unique self with others offers a rewarding celebration of our common humanity. Dr. Nobel hopes to destigmatize our loneliness and make sense of it for us all, identifying it as part of the human experience and a natural signal that we are in need of connection. Supportive, clear-eyed, and comforting, **PROJECT UNLONELY** will be the tool we rely on to help us navigate our crisis of disconnection.



JEREMY NOBEL, M.D., MPH, is a primary-care physician, public health practitioner, and award-winning poet with faculty appointments at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Harvard Medical School. He is the founder and president of the Foundation for Art & Healing (www.ArtandHealing.org), whose signature initiative, Project UnLonely, addressing the personal and public health challenges of loneliness and social isolation, has gained national visibility.

For more information, see artandhealing.org

*** AUTHOR INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST ***

MORE PRAISE FOR *PROJECT UNLONELY*

"Jeremy Nobel has done us all a great service: He's written a book that destigmatizes loneliness. With ample research and an array of stories, he explains why loneliness is not a private weakness but a public problem. Then shows how curiosity, creativity, and conversation can help cure what ails us. *Project UnLonely* is a vital read for our times."

— **Daniel H. Pink**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Drive*, *When*, and *The Power of Regret*

"Jeremy Nobel not only digs into what causes the terrible anguish of loneliness in a wide variety of contexts, he gives us a framework for reconnecting with ourselves and others in a meaningful way. We need this book now more than ever!"

— **Judson Brewer, MD, PhD**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Unwinding Anxiety*

"Nobel puts us in the middle of current, high stakes conversations that recognize how loneliness undermines health, as well as our chances for intimacy and democracy. Here he argues a path to connection that includes personal artistic connection— something no chatbot can provide."

— **Sherry Turkle**, Professor MIT, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Reclaiming Conversation* and *The Empathy Diaries*

"This grand tour of loneliness visits the pain of subjective experience, the insights of science, the threat of technology, and the promise of art to discover solutions to one of the great public health issues of our time. In our hyper-connected but ultra-isolated world, we all need Project UnLonely."

— **Thomas Insel, MD**, former director of the NIH and author of *Healing: Our Path from Mental Illness to Mental Health*

"Loneliness is a silent epidemic that no one talks about (because there is no one to talk to about it). Jeremy Nobel is the best friend and confidante we all need. Project UnLonely offers practical guidance and scientific context to how to fight loneliness in individuals and societies. His evidence-based

approach elevates artistic expression to its rightful position of being as important as diet, exercise, and sleep.”

— **Daniel J. Levitin, New York Times bestselling author of *Successful Aging***