

Navigating Loneliness In The 30s: How ‘Sahelis’ Help Us Cope With The Alienation Of Urban Life

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“Loneliness not only refers to the absence of the desired other’s presence but this very absence is perceived as a presence, albeit a presence that is felt in the manner of an absence, that is, as a privation or deprivation of the other”– John McGraw

It is generally maintained that our generation is in the ‘*age of loneliness*’. Loneliness may be described as a human experience that is associated with feelings of emptiness, abstinence, and alienation. Compactly placed, the state of loneliness could be conceptualised in a three-fold manner: in view of the deprivation aspect, denial of feelings of attachment, alliance and association; by considering the time component that deals with the time standpoint by emphasising the role of change in terms of the loneliness condition, and by highlighting the emotional element that appraises the emotional connotation of the condition.

The condition of loneliness is a phenomenon atypically associated with urban life. Loneliness in the city is not merely a state of ‘*being*’ alone physically, it is about a state of ‘*feeling*’ alone mentally/spiritually.

Urban women experience feelings of loneliness in a myriad of ways, including disconnection from the self, their partner, family members, friends and workmates. On one hand, we recognise women asserting a sense of freedom by ‘*living*’ alone in an urban framework, contrarily, on the other, we perceive them as ‘*feeling*’ alone.

Can we propound that living alone is responsible for feeling alone? Is being alone the same as feeling lonely?

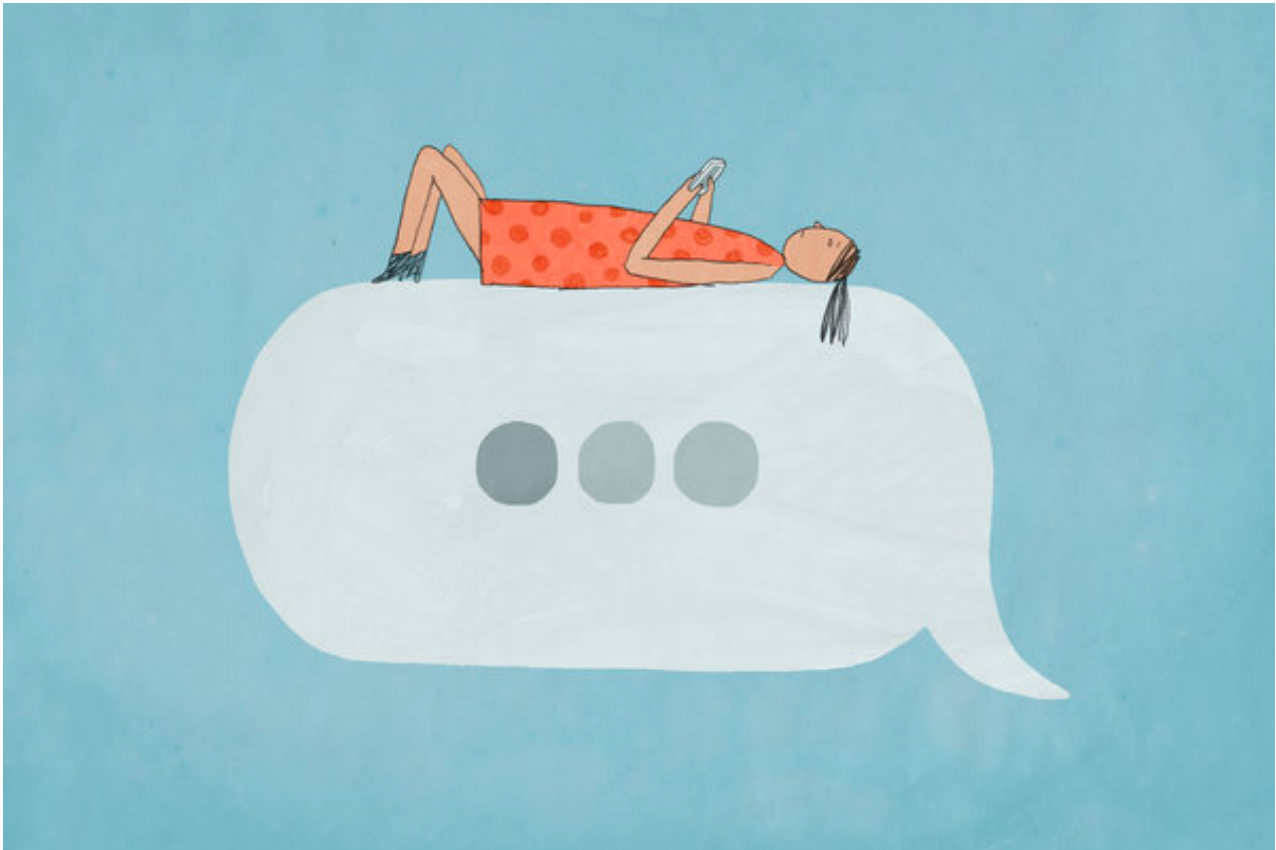


Image: [The New York Times](#)

This weekend while listening to ‘*Jane Kahan Mera Jigar Gaya Ji*’ on my speaker while reading a book, I wondered about urban loneliness. Am I lonely or alone? As women who choose not to lead a conventional lifestyle, how do we deal with urban loneliness?

One could stay with family or by oneself, but amidst all this chaos how do we create a home for ourselves while meeting strangers, watching certain kinds of reels on Instagram, and being proud parents of our adopted dogs, cats, and plants?

In the physical world, we restore and build ourselves with our sahelis; our girlfriends. Our sahelis have a calming effect on us. They give us a sense of belonging and a sterling connection. They help us heal, rebuild and become. They impact who we are. Moreover, they help us cope with urban loneliness

How and where, as women in their early 30’s, do we seek and understand healing? What do we do so that our imagination does not run riot on ourselves? Sometimes, in movies and shows like *Wake-up Sid*, *Life in a Metro*, *Made in Heaven*, and *Ladies Special*, they hint at what we do to cope with our dark emotions.

From eating a packet of chips to holding ourselves and patiently waiting for someone’s presence to arrive, we all take solace in contingency, possibility, and above all, hope. Sometimes this urban loneliness is like the toxic air of Delhi – as much as you don’t like it, it is still part and parcel of your existence. Healing and repudiating urban loneliness is a cryptic engagement, altogether.

Also read: **'Can I At Least Get A New Shah Rukh Khan Film?': Navigating The Loneliness Of The Absence Of Love**



Image: [The New York Times](#)

Sahelis: A possible key to surviving loneliness

Comedian Prashashti Singh's **latest stand-up comedy** on the importance of solidarity, empathy, and self-love which our girlfriends or *Saheli's* are capable of exhibiting, throws significant light on the value of sisterhood for women.

Recently in the movie *Darlings*, the duo of mother-daughter confides in each other as *Sahelis* do. We heal with our darlings/ sahelis while living in the late 21st century with hesitation, guilt, shame, and ambiguity. Instagram accounts such as *Brown Girl Gazin*, *I am Like Other Girls*, *Sanskaari Sass*, etc., virtually help women fight negativity and self-doubt and encourage self-love and care. These accounts carry messages of sisterhood, affinity, and correlation.

In times of loneliness, connecting with one's sahelis serves as an outlet to share one's emotions, concerns and thoughts. Our girlfriends are intuitive beings and they are proficient in reading our minds, perhaps owing to the similarity of our gendered realities

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How do these virtues get manifested in the journey of overcoming urban loneliness? Building social connections serves as a coherent window for the alleviation of loneliness from the lives of urban women. These connections could be instituted virtually and physically.

Having sahelis does not just amplify your social circle quantitatively, instead, there evolves an amplification of the overall wellbeing, both spiritual and physical. Our sahelis act as catalysts for healing in times of loneliness.

From sharing relevant motivational posts on social media to planning a salon session, our sahelis offer practical support to us. They foster self and community healing.

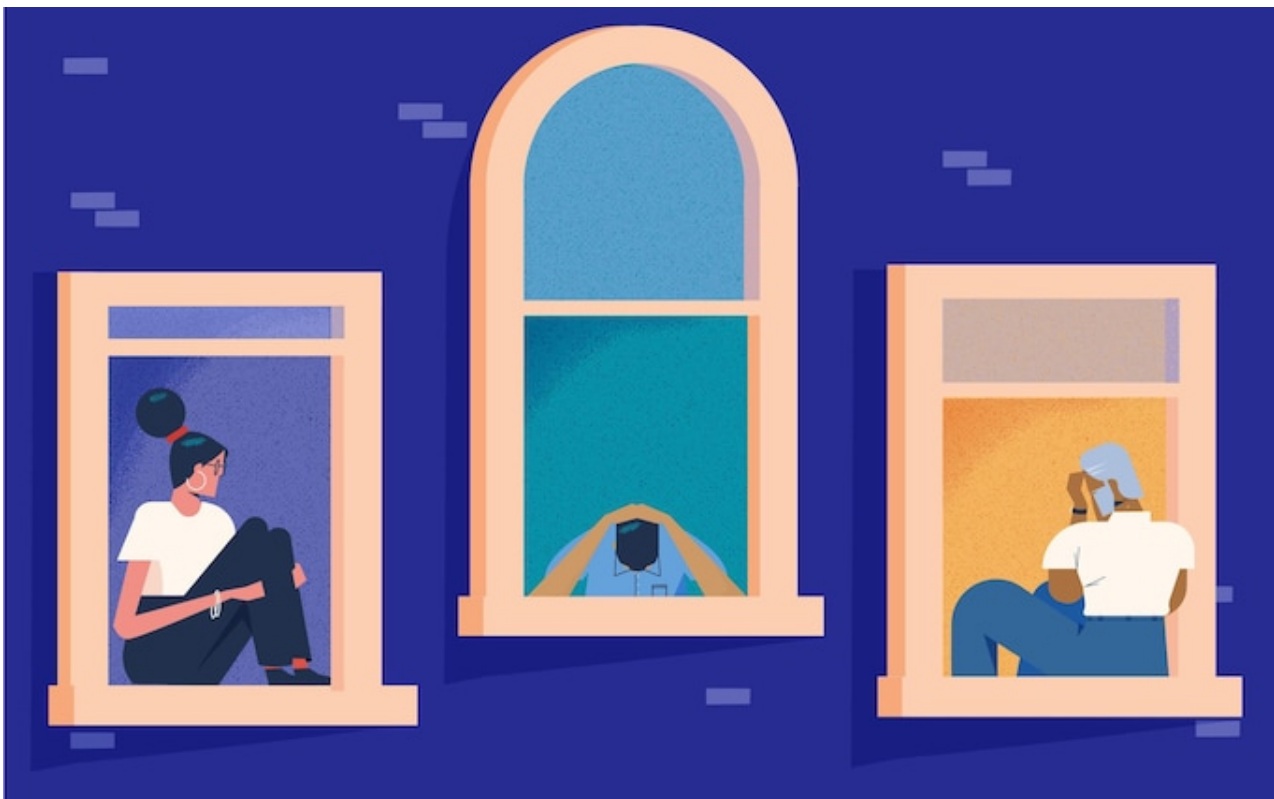


Image: [The Telegraph](#)

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So, what values nurture and enrich this bond? True girl-friendship is about compassion, trust and responsiveness. What do we learn from our sahelis that ultimately helps us cope with loneliness?

To indicate a few learnings; we learn the act of self-care, participation in purposeful activities, value of gratitude and human connection. Most important of all, we learn that *'we are not alone!'*

"It is possible to place ourselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and "be there" with another person without masks, pretenses, even without words. Such a moment of relating is called "I-Thou". The bond thus created energises each person

resulting in true dialogue, true sharing” – Martin Buber

Also read: **‘Home Is Where Your Real Self Takes A Nap’: Coping With The Loneliness Of Hometowns Through Films**

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