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The Exposures of Loneliness in Harry Styles' *As It Was*

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengungkap aspek kesepian dalam lagu *As It Was* karya Harry Styles. Kesepian sangat bersifat subyektif dan secara luas dianggap bervariasi berdasarkan kisah hidup subjek. Di lagu ini, Harry Style berbicara tentang bagaimana karakter tersebut menerima perubahan, kehilangan, dan menemukan kembali diri sendiri. Tulisan ini menjawab pertanyaan tentang; bagaimana kesepian terungkap dalam *As It Was* karya Harry Styles? Melalui metode kualitatif dan analisis konten dengan proses mendengarkan, mengutip, dan menganalisis sumber tertulis, penelitian ini ditinjau dengan Teori Kebutuhan Sosial Robert S. Weiss tentang enam tuntutan sosial yang, jika tidak terpenuhi, berkontribusi pada kesepian. Itu adalah keterikatan, integrasi sosial, kepedulian, penegasan nilai, rasa percaya, dan bantuan di masa sulit. Kesimpulannya, lagu tersebut menggambarkan kesepian, terutama karena kurangnya integrasi sosial individu dengan orang lain.

Abstract

This research is a study to reveal loneliness in Harry Styles' song As It Was. Loneliness is very subjective and is widely considered a stable attribute by psychologists, which means that individuals have distinct set-points for feeling lonely, and they vary around these set-points based on their life circumstances. On this song, Harry Style talks about accepting change, losing and, rediscovering oneself. So, how may loneliness be exposed in Harry Styles' As It Was? Using qualitative method and content analysis by listening, quoting, and analyzing written resource, this research is reviewed with Robert S. Weiss' Social Needs Theory of six social demands that, if unfulfilled, contribute to feelings of loneliness. Those are attachment, social integration, nurturance, affirmation of value, a sense of trusted partnership, and guidance in difficult times. In conclusion, the song depicts loneliness, especially due to the lack of social integration with other persons.

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Introduction

Loneliness is a sad sensation that arises when a person perceives his or her social ties to be insufficient in quantity, and especially in quality. Loneliness is very subjective; an individual might be alone without feeling lonely and can feel lonely even when surrounded



by several people (Weiss et al., 2020). Psychologists typically believe loneliness to be a stable attribute, which means that different people have various set-points for feeling lonely, and they vary about these set-points depending on their life circumstances. Individuals' feelings of loneliness normally remain relatively steady throughout adulthood until they reach 75 to 80 years of age. Loneliness is linked to sadness, a lack of social support, neuroticism, and introversion (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997; Hawkley, 2023). The lead song from Harry Styles' album, *Harry's House*, is *As It Was*, which was released on April 1, 2022. Harry wrote the song, which lasts two minutes and 47 seconds, with composers Thomas Hull and Tyler Johnson. Harry Styles' *As It Was* referring to Harry's loneliness and others' anxiety as he distances him from outside world. Fans think the song also makes an implicit reference to Harry's romance with Olivia Wilde (LyricFind, 2022; Pham, 2023).

This article answers the question of how may loneliness be exposed in Harry Styles' *As It Was*? By accentuating the lyrics, this paper reveals the exposure of loneliness in Harry Styles' *As It Was*. Styles prefers to write in broad strokes about his experiences, dreams, and whatever motivates him, but never about a single person (Ami, 2022; LyricFind, 2022). This paper explores the relations between the song, the lyrics, the singer, and also the audience's actions and reactions towards the song of *As It Was*.

There are three previous studies that correspond to this article. The first one is entitled *The Loneliness of Joker* composed by Sean Redmond in 2021 (Redmond, 2021). This writing underlines matter of representation of city spaces, social deprivation, political corruption, family breakdown, and mental illness. The second one is entitled *The Lonely Heroine: Portrayal of Women Scientists in Films* done by Denise Kool, Nathalia Helena Azevedo, and Lucy Avraamidou in 2022 (Kool, et al., 2021). This article explores the situation of loneliness through heroine characters related to occupation, socio-political theme, and time frame of feminism. The third one is entitled *The Analysis of Loneliness theme in Of Mice and Men* written by O. KH. Ganiyeva and Z. T. Rajabova in 2023 (Ganiyeva & Rajabova, 2023). This writing shows how loneliness is always the nature of human beings confronted by the both individual and societal experiences regarding own self and otherness as well.

Those three studies above have similarities in underscoring loneliness compared to this research. Meanwhile, the difference is located at how this research not only analyze song lyrics as one of literary works, but also correlate such indications between longingness and



loneliness as well. This one is also pointing the novelty of this research as it could also widen the perspectives between literature and psychology through connecting issues between longingness and loneliness.

Method

The researchers use qualitative method by listening, quoting, analyzing, understanding, and developing theory from Robert S. Weiss and the other studies. Content analysis is used as the data analysis technique to pay more attention to the dedicated meanings in the literary works. Written data sources like offline and online books, website pages, articles, song reviews, and analyses are used to explain and to reveal the exposure of loneliness in Harry Styles' *As It Was* and to find the truth of loneliness. The researchers listen to the song to analyze the data, read carefully the related theory, and then advance to connect the source of the data to the theory. Here, Harry Styles' song *As It Was* is the object while Robert S. Weiss' idea is a tool to analyze. Furthermore, greater elaboration on contrary analysis is presented.

Results and Discussion

The Relations of Self and Otherness in Harry Styles' *As It Was*

As It Was is the lead single from British singer Harry Styles' third studio album, *Harry's House* that was released on April 1, 2022. Styles co-wrote the song with the song's producers, Kid Harpoon and Tyler Johnson. *As It Was* received positive reviews from music critics and debuted at the top of the UK Singles Chart, marking Styles' second number-one hit after *Sign of the Times* in April 2017. The song remained at the top of the UK Singles Chart for 10 weeks, becoming the longest-running number one and best-selling single of 2022 in his native country (Pham, 2023; Wang, 2022). It was also his second number one hit in the United States. The song spent 15 weeks at the top of the Billboard Hot 100, achieving the longest-running US number one by a UK performer and the fourth-longest-running number one in the chart's history. Its music video has been viewed for 540.929.242 as per 27 June 2023, 15 months after its released date.

On the melodies of the song, Harry Styles delivers contradictory effects. He mixes bright '80s synthesizers with a somber voice and melancholy lyrics. Some speculate that *As It Was* refers to his upbringing during his parents' divorce. In the second half part of the second verse might be a reference to how, in the aftermath of Styles' self-destructive conduct. He is



stated to recount a phone conversation where the receiving line indicates he is on pills. He also reflects on his father's flaws but also his affection for him (Ami, 2022; Wang, 2022). Styles also says in an Apple Music interview that *As It Was* represents a transition that occurred during the pandemic era. He was forced to slow down and played roles as multiple identities. It is due to his roles as a friend, a brother, and a son at the same time. Many fans believe Styles' girlfriend Olivia Wilde influenced the meaning of *As It Was*.

Then, the full lyrics of the song is the following;

¹
[Intro]

(Come on, Harry, we wanna say goodnight to you)

[Verse 1]

Holdin' me back

Gravity's holdin' me back

I want you to hold out the palm of your hand

Why don't we leave it at that?

Nothin' to say

When everything gets in the way

Seems you cannot be replaced

And I'm the one who will stay, oh-oh-oh

[Chorus]

In this world, it's just us

You know it's not the same as it was

In this world, it's just us

You know it's not the same as it was

As it was, as it was

You know it's not the same

[Verse 2]



Answer the phone

“Harry, you’re no good alone

Why are you sitting at home on the floor?

What kind of pills are you on?”

Ringin’ the bell

And nobody’s coming to help

Your daddy lives by himself

He just wants to know that you’re well, oh-oh-oh

[Chorus]

1

[Bridge]

Go home, get ahead, light-speed internet

I don’t wanna talk about the way that it was

Leave America, two kids follow her

I don’t wanna talk about who’s doin’ it first

[Outro]

(Hey)

As it was

You know it’s not the same as it was

As it was, as it was (LyricFind, 2022)

Like other recent songs, the main idea of the song is about its easy-listening music alongside with simple lyrics. Still, many people undermine this kind of pop song due to its light meaning. However, many young people love this kind of song, making the song gets its importance in understanding the reflection of youngsters’ world (Akbar et al., 2023; Fitriani et al., 2023). Therefore, though a song is considered lighter than the other songs, its reflection of people’s everyday life could not be ignored. It is also applied to this song. The lyrics are not too long and not too deep in its literal meanings. However, people still listen to it as proved by its popularity in Billboard chart for many weeks. It is always better to accentuate



the trivial aspects to uplift the philosophical meanings of the lyrics of the song (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Pujimahanani et al., 2023).

As many people said, the lyric on the Verse 2 is interesting because it contains a word “daddy” which may lead the audience towards the speculation that this song is about Styles’ father. He reflects on his father's flaws but also his affection for him. The lyric on the Bridge is also interesting because it mentioned “her” (Pham, 2023; Wang, 2022). It means Harry talked about a woman, and fans speculated that the woman is Styles’ girlfriend at the moment who was Olivia Wilde. It is known that Olivia Wilde has two children as it is said in the Bridge and she is also American just like the lyric of “Leave America”.

The song ultimately involves the relation between self and otherness. The character in the song must look at himself while still considering the other persons as well. He will still believe in anything though there is no hope. This brings senses of loneliness in the aspect of criticizing any social connection from own self (Russell et al., 1984; R. S. Weiss, 1987). As an individual, he does not want to move forward, but as part of society and a friend of others, he must stay strong to help others as well. This situation indeed brings such hardness to him as stated in the theories and analyses in the following.

Loneliness and Social Competences

Loneliness, or the perception of a lack of healthy social connections, has been associated to shorter lifespan, especially in elderly people, who are more likely to experience social isolation due to a combination of factors including aging, disease, widowhood, and mobility issues (Smarandreetha et al., 2023; L. A. Weiss et al., 2020). However, that idea widens to any age today. Even any children who lost their parents may also feel such loneliness. The concept of loneliness expands to various matter of life, but mostly it is about missing social indications in life. People is getting more individual and they have to deal everything by him/herself. Being lonely then is also such sign that include severe situations of lacks of something or someone in life.

5 One of the most popular definitions of loneliness includes both social and emotional loneliness. Loneliness is a subjectively negative feeling connected to a perceived absence of a larger social network (social loneliness) or absence of a specific desired companion



(emotional loneliness) (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997; Sulistiyowati & Jati, 2023). Both subjective and objective loneliness are bad for human beings. Almost those who suffer loneliness do not realize that they are already in this situation for a long time. They will be aware of that when they are pushed to meet someone seen previously in any trauma (Annasai et al., 2023; Attamimi et al., 2023). They will feel awkward as if they never get in touch with anyone beside him/her own self.

Social loneliness is shown in how people react to the condition where he/she belongs. In further conception, it always relates to other person in singular or plural aspects. This aspect accentuates matter of loneliness as lacks of individuals meaning caused by the presence of the other people (Pasopati et al., 2022; R. Weiss, 1975). One person will feel lonely if he/she is left by anyone in his/her life. The social points are also inseparable with the personal loneliness. The personal one or emotional loneliness is inward feeling that a sufferer feels in the middle of any loneliness. He/she already understands that the person is lonely and intentionally blocks life from the others. The emotional one is rather more neurotic than the former since it amplifies deeper feelings of the sufferers. In many times, the emotional aspects are related to unique cases that are quite unhealable.

The emotional points of loneliness also intersect with social isolation. In realities, loneliness has been worsened by the social isolation that people must do according to pandemic era. The pandemic has affected significant public health and policy problems because of their detrimental effects on lifespan, mental and physical health, and well-being (Aulia et al., 2022; Hawkley, 2023). It is related to both points of limitations and restrictions of the movement of people. Though the cases are involved in pandemic era, the situations could also be applied to everyday life where loneliness usually lies amongst people. The mentioned limitation is due to border of the self that could not realize his/her own by the fullest. Someone could not move freely because he/she thinks that the person is never capable to do it. This point affects and being affected by loneliness in wider conditions (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Pujimahanani et al., 2023). In matter of restriction, the free movement is stopped by the existence of other matters, people, and even regulations. People are being lonely since they keep being reminded that each of them will only be able to do everything by him/her own self. They could also be stopped by the other parties who have bigger power than him/her.



The matter of loneliness is ultimately being mentioned by Robert S. Weiss in his Social Needs Theory (Russell et al., 1984; R. Weiss, 1975). He describes that everyone is always sociological in the person's essence and existence. Though someone may say that he/she is very individual, the utterance of it is going to indications of many people. In other words, people will only be less related to societal aspects, but not in total ones. Anyone is always attached to social values and yet being disciplined by those aspects. Even if they state that they are powerful enough to do things alone, they will only be more in an aspect but will always be less in the other side (Hawkley, 2023; R. S. Weiss, 1987). In further matter, many utterances that underline about the fullest abilities to do anything by his/her own self are actually such denials in matter of sociological contents. It is because those who speak about it are being selfish to the society (Pasopati, 2016; Smith et al., 2023). Moreover, they only think that some points could represent all aspects at once. While doing so, people who speak like that will only refuse humans' individual natures as parts of bigger societal courses.

Weiss states in his Social Needs Theory that people could never be escaped totally from social contents (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997; R. Weiss, 1975). It is because individual natures always require the presence of the other people. If the social needs could not be fulfilled, people will feel loneliness. There are six main indications of social needs of people in their everyday life. First, it is about attachment. The more people are attached to anyone, the more they leave out any loneliness. In this case, the attachment is not merely accompaniment, but also mutual respect among people. It is not about being negatively involved, but it requires more understandings in positive reciprocal conditions.

The second one is about social integration. This one is wider than the first one. By being integrated, people could go out from who they really are towards what are really needed by societies. Though sometimes societal aspects are trivial, those are needed to integrate individuals into closed societal relations (Russell et al., 1984; R. S. Weiss, 1987). In the case of Indonesia, being involved in social integration also means making more familial relations with other people. It is needed to embrace more values of togetherness that will be beneficial for the individuals in advance.

The third one is about nurturance. For those who lacks nurturance, they will always feel incomplete worse than other people will. Lacanian psychoanalytical sense already tells that everyone will always feel incomplete, as people will always lack of someone or



something (Hawkley, 2023; Russell et al., 1984). However, the condition will be more severe if they only rely on their nature out of any nurture points at all. Those who never got nurturance tend to have inability to do nurturance in the future as well. It is more about emotional and physical ability to nourish own self and bring better care to other people. If someone is not provided with any care, he/she will also be careless in advance (L. A. Weiss et al., 2020; R. Weiss, 1975). Therefore, to avoid any loneliness, people should always be helpful to others and open their minds to accept any help from others as well.

The fourth one is about reassurance of worth. This point is needed to strengthen self in matter of being individual. Sometimes, someone could not heal him/herself. Even someone could not ameliorate his/her own doings. Only other people could do that and it will automatically enhance someone's worth. By doing so, self-esteem and self-confidence could be promoted furthermore and it will shape better everyday life (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997; Russell et al., 1984). If people are being lonely, they feel that life does not worth him/herself anymore. To avoid that, lonely persons should be open to public matters so that he/she could be more existent and people will appreciate his/her efforts furthermore.

The fifth one is about sense of reliable alliance. In this case, alliance is about any friend or accompaniment. The existence of own self is nothing without existence of other self. Therefore, through existentialism point, being true to oneself is actually similar to being good to others. In this certain point, being responsible to otherness will also build more assurance towards great existence of own self. Being hurtful should not be such obstacle to build more self-awareness. People should build any further better confinement to show any self-worth towards other persons (Russell et al., 1984; Stone, 2020). Any loneliness could be eroded by shaping more senses of trusted partnerships.

The last one is related to any guidance needed in difficult times. This one is also crucial in social needs since many people got desperate because they think that they are burdened by the whole problems of the world (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997; Stone, 2020). Even if they ask for help, people will only give utterances of advices and nothing else. However, the guidance should not be said merely as material. In wider cases, people with severe mental condition will feel better if she/he understands that there is guidance if he/she is feeling lost in a wild situation. This one is to pretend any worsened neurotic condition that could endanger people's lives.



The completely five aspects above alongside with emotional and social loneliness indicate that social competences are always needed. Loneliness is an idea out of any social competence. Somehow, those who are lonely eventually know that they can socialize with others, but they never know what makes them feel that way. That is the task of societal senses and standards to always take care of any loneliness. The task is also related to bring back anyone who has lost his/her ways to be good again.

As It Was and Exposure of Loneliness

According to various concepts and theories above the song of Harry Styles indeed include some aspects of loneliness. Moreover, the loneliness is shown since there is conditions of tensions between being individuals and parts of societies. Here are the detailed analyses done by indicating each line of the lyrics:

[Verse 1]

Holdin' me back

Gravity's holdin' me back

I want you to hold out the palm of your hand

Why don't we leave it at that?

Nothin' to say

When everything gets in the way

Seems you cannot be replaced

And I'm the one who will stay, oh-oh-oh

As It Was begins with a gloomy tone as Styles sings about being held back as stated in the first line of the Verse 1 “Holdin’ me back”. He also speaks about himself who was placed in one spot in the second line “Gravity’s holdin’ me back”. While in the third line “I want you to hold out the palm of your hand” and “Why don’t we leave it at that?”, he wishes someone to reach out to him and bring him to go out. Given that the song was inspired by life under lockdown in COVID-19 era, these thoughts are understandable, since the entire world



was forced to learn how to cope with new feelings of isolation and separation (Hawkey, 2023; Wang, 2022).

Moreover, this Verse 1 refers to the indicator of loneliness according to Weiss which is social integration. The character in the song will stay since the other person could not be replaced at all. This aspect also shows the needs of reliable alliance or friend that has gone from the character's life. As the other people is absent, the character must suffer loneliness. He/she has no one to nurture and to be nurtured. In short, this verse underlines matter of longingness that has been accompanied with loneliness itself.

1

[Chorus]

In this world, it's just us

You know it's not the same as it was

In this world, it's just us

You know it's not the same as it was

As it was, as it was

You know it's not the same

The chorus then represents a change from the past that is openly admitted by Styles as the detail in the Verse 1. The lyric of "In this world, it's just us" was repeated two times and the next line "You know it's not the same as it was" was repeated three times, giving the meaning about a change from the past a huge emphasis. With lockdown as the backdrop, the remaining words of the song might be taken as Styles' own problems and reflections about loneliness, as well as a fresh love for closeness and human connection (Pham, 2023; Wang, 2022).

The Chorus also underlines that the longingness is still intact since the character imagines that the world is only between the two persons. The character knows that things have changed, but still he could not move forward. This sense is about loneliness due to lack of attachment and nurturance. Though the character emphasizes matter of togetherness, but he/she tells that nothing is the same as before. He/she desires more attachment with other people as what happened beforehand (LyricFind, 2022; Wang, 2022). In advance, by having



such attachment, he/she also requires nurturance as such help from other people. If he/she is losing that, indeed, he/she is having loneliness.

¹
[Verse 2]

Answer the phone

"Harry, you're no good alone

Why are you sitting at home on the floor?

What kind of pills are you on?"

Ringin' the bell

And nobody's coming to help

Your daddy lives by himself

He just wants to know that you're well, oh-oh-oh

The mention of the phone in the third line of the Verse 2 "Ringin' the bell" appears to be a direct reference to his nightly phone calls with his goddaughter, which Styles revealed in interviews that he was in the habit of doing nightly phone calls during lockdown (LyricFind, 2022; Wang, 2022). It is also where he got the voice clip from the start of the song "*(Come on, Harry, we wanna say goodnight to you)*". No doubt, the phone conversations were a critical source of communication between the two, and he appears to have discovered a deeper respect for that action (Pham, 2023; Wang, 2022). As many people said, the lyric on the Verse 2 is interesting because of its fifth line "Your daddy lives by himself", which may lead us to the speculation that this song is about Harry's father. He reflects on his father's flaws but also his affection for him.

Besides its background of reality of the song, the lyrics implicitly show such loneliness. It is due to attachment and needs of guidance from other people in Weiss' perspective. The attachment is seen from longingness to live with any person that he/she loves. To stay away from other person will mean lost in any interaction that exactly emphasizes matter of loneliness (Qualter, 2015; R. Weiss, 1975). The guidance is needed since the lyrics accentuates the idea of having older person to be near him/her. The guidance in this sense is absolute since the pills relate to any bad thing that people may consume if



there is no one beside him/her self. In this sense, communication is the most needed aspect in order to strengthen the self out of any bad feeling and suspicious situations among them.

¹
[Bridge]

Go home, get ahead, light-speed internet

I don't wanna talk about the way that it was

Leave America, two kids follow her

I don't wanna talk about who's doin' it first

The lyric on the Bridge is also interesting because it mentions “her” which means Harry talks about a woman. Almost all fans of him speculated that the woman is Harry’s girlfriend at the moment who was Olivia Wilde (Ami, 2022; Pham, 2023). However, in this context, it reads more like a short list of ways to flee or force an adaptation to a changed world. The mention of the two kids may be a reference to anyone who was made transient during that time. It is known that Olivia Wilde has two children as being said in the Bridge. She is also an American just like the lyric “Leave America” alongside with any ambiguity that follows (Pham, 2023; Wang, 2022).

The main idea of the lyrics on the Bridge is to show that any hope should always be persisted for the future. The character in this song would like to forget any past event since he/she realized that it has touched the sense of loneliness. He/she is longing for better things but he/she prefers leaving all things behind. This is related to the lacks of social integration and nurturance in Weiss’ perspectives (Russell et al., 1984; R. Weiss, 1975). Both of them could not be separated since both are shown in past memories of the character in the song. The Bridge indicates that light-speed internet is not about abundant bandwidth, but it is about fast forward from real life. The character wants to go forward as fast as possible so that he/she could leave out any loneliness either (Hawkley, 2023; Qualter, 2015). He/she also does not care who will do it first, but the one that is clear is the deed needed to do as soon as possible. It seems that longingness has become loneliness and it has made such frustration towards the character.



From all lyrics in the song, all of them show various matters of loneliness. The song may be involved as being private and personal as seen from the detail of his lyrics to the purpose of the music (Ami, 2022; Wang, 2022). Whether he is discussing his romance, his loneliness in lockdown, or, more likely, a combination of the two, there is a maturity and longingness of past events. The lyrics interestingly also show that people should always go forward. Though it is likely in popular music, the song implicitly tells people that loneliness could always be intact with other people.

Conclusion

In the lyrics of Harry Styles' *As it Was*, it can be concluded that lack of social integration and even longingness have strong connectivity to someone's prolonged loneliness. Loneliness also can be triggered by some other condition such as lack of attachment, lack of nurturance, lack of affirmation of value, lack of a sense of trusted partnership, and lack of guidance in difficult times. All of the lacks are sensed in the song of *As it Was*. Various aspects of triggering reasons are related to loneliness of the song, but the most prominent one is about longingness and preference to always move forward. Further recommendation for future research could be done by accentuating relations between longingness and loneliness in other literary works such as films and novels. Other recommendation is to insert more psychoanalytical aspects such as trauma and desire to the connection between longingness and loneliness.

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