

Like saltwater for thirst

 By [Bronwyn Williams](#)

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"I'd once been like that, so lonely that I craved further loneliness. Even after I made a few friends at college, I would still go out of my way to create whatever conditions I needed that might allow me to be alone." ~ Yaa Gyasi, *Transcendent Kingdom*

Transcendent Kingdom is a book about our times, it covers difficult themes of immigration, mental health, racism, drug addiction, broken homes and our unbalanced relationship with the natural world with grace and honesty. But at its core, it is a book about loneliness and disconnection. It is a book that fearlessly explores just how we can be lonely even within our own homes, families and close relationships, and how we can be lonely even when we are surrounded by strangers.

Loneliness is one the key trends defining our society at the moment. Even as we are digitally connected to more strangers than we can name at the touch of a touchscreen, we are, like an Edward Hopper painting, increasingly disconnected in real life.

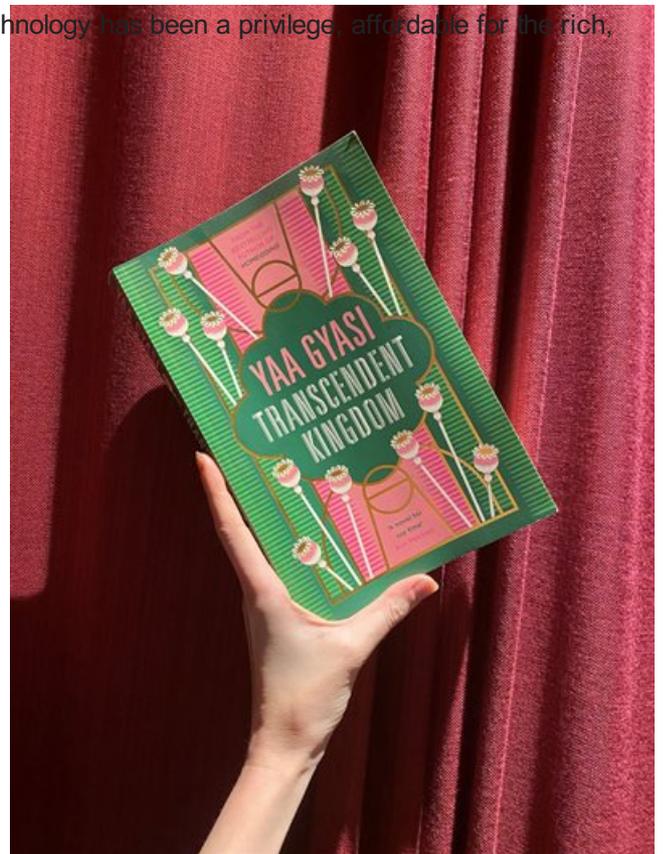
A disconcerting study found that 1 in 5 millennials in America have no close friends, and 1 in 4 (22%) have no friends at all. This should give us pause for thought, since humans are, after all, pack animals. We crave physical contact and social validation, which our digital existence is failing to deliver on.

A UK study found that for over 60 year olds, a video call with family made them feel even more lonely than having no contact at all, implying that for many, flattened digital connection is to satisfying loneliness what salt water is for quenching thirst. Likewise, when it comes to social validation, we are having to make do with the likes and retweets of strangers to make up for our lack of close interpersonal relationships. In other words, we have submitted quality relationships for quantity.

The lesson here for businesses is twofold. Firstly, the individuals who make up your teams are probably feeling lonely and disconnected, and this loneliness is likely to have an impact on their work satisfaction, team cohesion and energy levels. Secondly, your customers are also craving connecting and a human touch. No one wants to feel like a mere number.

As such, we are arriving at a tipping point. Up until now, largely, technology has been a privilege, affordable for the rich, but inaccessible for the poor. Now, however, as the cost of technologies fall (as Moore's Law dictates the costs of technology are prone to do), that picture is flipping. In the future, digital interactions will be for the masses, and real human touch will become more of a privilege reserved for the few who can afford to pay for a real person's real time and attention.

As Cathy O'Neil says, "The privileged, we'll see time and again, are processed more by people, the masses by machines."



ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

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