As I read the chapters of this remarkable anthology on the subject of loneliness, I was surprised to learn that prior to this book members of our profession had not examined the subject of loneliness in an orderly investigative manner.

Because loneliness, to varying degree, spares none of us and is a much examined subject in literature, theater, and film, as well as a frequent subject in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy and, to a degree, in general conversations between friends, its conspicuous absence in analytic literature is all the more striking. Why this is so is unclear and perhaps worthy of future studies. I have often wondered if perhaps the shame and social stigma of admitting to loneliness, in both childhood and adulthood, is one reason that it is mainly portrayed in fiction rather more directly in real life. It has always felt confessional when I have personally admitted to it in my own treatment or in conversation with a friend. Yet productive hours of analytic work about loneliness allow it to shed important insight into one’s past and present. This book is the kind that encourages one to think about this subject both personally and professionally.

In the foreword, Dr. Harold P. Blum defines loneliness as “a painful longing for the missing absent love object.” He is careful to distinguish it from solitude, in spite of an overlap in the terms. Loneliness is usually highly troublesome, while solitude is maybe sought for and treasured, even when unavoidable. The beauty of this book is how ideas in one part have been expanded and explored by other writers elsewhere in the book. An example of the many ways solitude can be discussed is illustrated in the chapter “Artist’s Solitude and the Creative Process,” by Danielle Knafo. Here, the author discusses the poignant and heroic memoir Bell and the Butterfly, written by the journalist Jean Dominique Bauby. Bauby was totally paralyzed by a massive stroke, which left him with the single motion one eyelid. Knafo writes, “He felt intensely suicidal until he discov-
social work and psychoanalytic practice. I maintain that psychoanalysis is by its very nature a form of psychotherapy that puts above all else the freedom of the individual to make his or her own choices, regardless if they are viewed by others as foolish, morally wrong, or are incomprehensible.

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References

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studying the biology of grief and trying to make some sense of her emotional state. We are grateful for her efforts and her generosity in sharing them with us.

Gottlieb is also particularly impressed with Dr. Lucille Spira, another friend and colleague, whose article “Shades of Loneliness: Psychological and Social Perspectives” describes biological and sociodemographic factors, often overlooked by psychoanalysts focusing on the unconscious. Such concern fails to account for the impact of reality factors of age, gender, educational status, widowhood, and so on. Spira is also one of the editors of this volume.

This is a thoughtful, well-written collection by writers with much to say about the subject of loneliness. Additionally, I found this collection enjoyable reading.

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