

To be honest, after a year and a half of dating myself, I've spent countless nights snuggling up to a pillow wishing it had a pulse and daydreaming about my vibrator having a 'human companion' setting.

dependent on other people — a mindset that can eventually lead us to cluelessness as to what our actual desires and needs are.

A while ago a friend of mine lent me the book *Loneliness as a Way of Life* by Thomas Dumm. As I flipped through its pages, a surge of both familiarity and comfort came from the author's take on the difficulties of being alone.

In his book, Dumm points out how being alone has become a negative experience for people of all different races, genders and sexual identities, and how solitude, when approached with a healthy attitude, actually can be of utmost value in love, loss and life in general.

"For being alone is not only the worst we can experience," Dumm writes. "It is also the inevitable moment of some of our greatest experiences. In the solitude of ourselves we learn something that is otherwise unavailable to us — how to become who we are. This is no small accomplishment."

One of the biggest hurdles in being alone is doing just that. The steady increase of online social networks, dating and hook-up sites, plus the wonderful world of smartphone apps, has caused an enormous growth in socializing accessibility.

These readily available resources to the hook-up scene might be the exact reason so many folks these days experience being alone as an obstacle rather than a blessing.

People have an overwhelming amount of access to finding someone when they've got the itch. Dating and sleeping around have become the norm, and

apps like Tinder are an increasingly popular outlet for one-night fulfillment.

In the "Being" section of his book, Dumm examines how these fickle means of socializing are a spectacle that expends all of our energy — energy that could be spent nurturing our own resources to get to know ourselves and build healthier, richer connections with other people.

"The inclination of modern life, with its distractions and shallowness, obscures the deeper fact of our separation from each other," Dumm writes.

If you can "find yourself" amidst this readily available, steady sexual income, that's an empowering discovery on its own. On the other hand, some people might need to step back and take a good look at themselves, by themselves.

When you shut off your computer and put down your phone, you finally have time to work on yourself. But this could be a difficult state to uphold if you're used to the constant stimulations of scattered socializing. Or, as Dumm concludes at one point, "the condition of loneliness emerges from our attempts to solve the problem of divided love."

Maybe you're not in love with your dozens of Tinder crushes, but in the commitment to dating yourself, you could find your affections going towards someone who really, really deserves it: you.

SINGLEHOOD

I didn't choose to be single. My ass got dumped, and a shit-storm breakup ensued. What I did choose

was to take myself to the movies on a lonely night.

When the film ended, the lights came back to life and I walked myself home with a pleasant wine buzz and in that after-movie daze. The feeling of accomplishment was intoxicating; I did something for myself, by myself.

I wanted more.

So now I choose to continue finding out new ways to show myself love, exploring where I like to go, who I like to be around and what I like to do (and what I actually like in bed).

There are endless amounts of circumstances that cause singlehood: an abusive relationship, a spouse who disappears from your life unexpectedly or a relationship that just wasn't right. Sometimes, choosing to be single may not be the most viable choice to make for financial, health or familial reasons.

At any stage of your life, however, you always have the opportunity to devote time and energy towards getting to know yourself — or, rather, your self.

This may mean taking yourself out to dinner or sitting with yourself while watching the sun go down over those lazy, distant mountaintops. It could mean traveling by yourself or making a solo relocation to new digs, a new city.

And it could mean taking a few seconds out of the day to ask yourself how you're doing.

Whether you're in a relationship, sleeping around or a combination of the like, go to a movie, grab a drink or take a walk ... by yourself. Spark up an interesting conversation in your head and develop a relationship with the one person you'll always be with.

Say hello to yourself. ■

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