


point that I had forgotten that Freud had held those views, and found myself hoping that somewhere, in another dimension, Freud is having a dinner party discussion with this interesting author (and that I am also invited). Holmes then explores how religion can be used more defensively, just as indeed psychotherapy can be at times.

This book made me reflect on many things. In the past I have noticed how some psychotherapists see religion as being the antithesis of psychotherapy, whereas others see it as being part of the same whole. I think this book has helped deepen my understanding of psychotherapy, and indeed psychiatry and people. It is definitely not just a book for psychotherapists. It also made me think about why people (including Freud himself) can get so worked up about how psychotherapy is conducted and I started

to wonder about why we have so many conversations about the art and science of psychotherapy, when actually perhaps what we should be thinking about is the spirituality of psychotherapy.

Katy Mason , Guild Lodge Forensic Psychiatry Service, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust, Preston, UK.
Email: katy.j.mason@doctors.org.uk.

doi:10.1192/bjp.2024.288

Declaration of interest

None.

Psychiatry in music

'Eleanor Rigby': loneliness, depression and suicide in older adults

Nadine A. M. Abdalla 

The Beatles shaped a music *revolution* in the short period they lasted (1960–1970). With the release of the albums *Rubber Soul* (1965) and *Revolver* (1966), the change in The Beatles' song themes was evident. They became more ambiguous, making the listener pay more attention to the lyrics to figure out their meaning. This essay analyses the mental health themes in the song 'Eleanor Rigby', credited to the Lennon–McCartney partnership, on the album *Revolver*.

'Eleanor Rigby' is a song with a sombre mood due to its lyrics and the exclusive use of a string octet arrangement. The song revolves around two characters, Eleanor herself and Father McKenzie, a priest. According to Paul McCartney, Eleanor represents an old lady who never achieved her dreams. The lyrics evoke loneliness, existential despair and isolation, with Eleanor dying alone and Father McKenzie remaining socially isolated at the song's end.

Analysing this song from a medical perspective is a great asset to increase mental health awareness concerning depression in the geriatric population and the overlooked public health problem in this age group, which is suicide. Social factors contribute to depressive symptoms in older adults, including loneliness, social isolation, relationship difficulties and unemployment.

Loneliness is a mismatch of the social connectedness an individual craves and what they have. In the first verse, Eleanor's behaviour shows that she covets connection, whether by picking the rice thrown at the newly-weds after their weddings, wearing make-up or 'putting on a mask' (a happy or brave face) to disguise her sorrow and misery. The line 'Who is it for?' accentuates her disconnection and social isolation.

Social isolation conceptually differs from loneliness; it means an objective lack of social contact. The lyrics highlight that 'No one comes near' Father McKenzie. This passage underscores his social isolation and loneliness because he yearns for connection (continues writing sermons) and, as a priest, would typically have many social interactions but does not.

Since Father McKenzie's age is unknown, emotionally and socially, his and Eleanor's storylines emphasise feelings of 'being invisible' across all ages: a significant issue per se. However, Eleanor's age draws attention to the urgent need to address loneliness and social isolation in older adults, which are strongly associated with depression, suicidality and even increased cognitive decline and dementia.

Due to The Beatles' timelessness and popularity, it is relevant to interpret 'Eleanor Rigby' to increase awareness concerning depression, loneliness and suicide in the geriatric population, as these are public health concerns. Hopefully, this perspective will offer valuable insights for clinicians and inspire research to *help* 'save lonely people' from their agony.

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Royal College of Psychiatrists.

The British Journal of Psychiatry (2025)
226, 252. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2024.301