

## INTIMATE, RELATIONAL, AND COLLECTIVE FRIENDSHIPS

Written by Dr. Dale Johnson



**What makes a good life?** According to Robert Waldinger, who describes the results of the longest study on happiness, **inner-circle relationships** are better predictors of health and happiness than **IQ, wealth, or social class**. These close relationships also are our primary defense against **intimate loneliness**. (1)

Vivek Murthy, writing in *Together* indicates that the three friendships of *intimate, relational, and collective* roughly correspond to the three dimensions of loneliness. **Intimate relationships are close friends and confidantes with whom we share deep bond of mutual affection and trust.** We rely on this small set of people (usually about 15 people at any given time) for protection, support, and sustenance. These are our romantic partners, the close friends and family that we depend on in a crisis, the people we want to spend time with on a frequent basis. These inner-circle relationships **are our strongest mutual bonds.** They require **the most time and energy.** (2)

As essential as our **inner-circle relationships** are, the middle circle or relational friendships, which may expand our friendships to **150 or so, is just as vital.** We need casual friends and social relationships that offer shared support and connection. In this social region, we may not necessarily know one another's deepest secrets, but we enjoy having our lives intersect. **Middle-circle friends provide a vital buffer against Relational loneliness.** Whatever our age, humans tend to meet one another by gathering, and we tend to gather around shared interests, physical activities, food and celebrations. **Belonging to a group can help reduce stress, repair emotional damage, and promote meaning and purpose.**

We need **casual friends** and social relationships that offer shared support and connection. We need to belong to communities of people – neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and acquaintances – with whom we experience a sense of **collective identity.** There are plenty of people in our lives who connect to us more peripherally but still **contribute to our sense of belonging.** These **outer-circle relationships are amicable acquaintances** we build through occasional interactions and can expand our social network up to **five hundred people or more.** **A sense of shared purpose and interests with this set of people helps stave off Collective loneliness.**

(1) Robert, Waldinger, *What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness.* November 2015, TED, 12:36, <https://www.ted.com/talks/robert/waldinger>.

(2) Vivek H. Murthy, *Together*, New York: Harper Wave, 2020, pp.218-221.