

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Warwick		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D30 Philosophy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Raising the profile of loneliness on the political and public agenda		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013– 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Roles:</b>	<b>Period employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Kimberley Brownlee	Professor of Philosophy	01/01/2012 – 30/06/2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>9,000,000 people in Britain report feeling constantly lonely, a state correlated with a host of health risks including reduced immunity, depression, and suicide. Professor Kimberley Brownlee is the leading philosopher researching the human rights implications of loneliness. She argues that we have a human right against social deprivation and a right to make social contributions. She works with charities and service providers, including Human Rights Watch, Grapevine, and HMP Stafford, to raise awareness of these issues, develop their conceptual frameworks, advance their agendas, and hold authorities accountable. Her work has also greatly influenced public debate through interviews such as on BBC Newsnight, media, and public lectures to push social rights up policymakers' agendas. In the wake of COVID-19, Brownlee's work is receiving even greater attention.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Loneliness is an issue that affects everyone at some level; from the lonely older person who struggles to leave the house to socialise, to the left-out child on the playground, to the prisoner who is denied access to his family. In response to the Jo Cox Commission's Final Report (2017), the UK government made a material commitment to combat loneliness and unwanted isolation, appointing a Loneliness Minister and issuing a cross-government Loneliness Strategy (2018). Brownlee is the world-leading philosopher analysing the conceptual and normative dimensions of social human rights, loneliness, and belonging. Through an ongoing, multi-phase research project initiated in 2009, and including her 2020 book <i>Being Sure of Each Other</i>, Brownlee provides, first, the concepts and normative arguments to defend our basic interpersonal needs and, second, an explanation of why social deprivation, isolation, and loneliness are neglected human rights issues and moral tragedies.</p> <p>In the first phase of her work, Brownlee considered what value we should place on each person being adequately socially included (3.1); what social human rights we have (3.6); and what limits our social rights put on our widely accepted freedom to associate or not with whom we please (3.4, 3.5). Her core contributions include the following:</p>		
<p><b>a) A defence of a fundamental human right against social deprivation:</b> Brownlee has developed a defence of a fundamental, but unacknowledged human right against social deprivation where 'social deprivation' refers to a persisting lack of minimally adequate access to decent human contact (3.1, 3.6). She has also analysed the social needs that underpin this right, which include a deep, non-psychological need to contribute to other persons' survival and wellbeing (3.2, 3.3).</p>		
<p><b>b) An analysis of the social punishment we inflict on people who committed crimes:</b> In research done between 2010-2016, Brownlee assessed the social contribution injustices that we tend to do to people who have committed offences, notably, in how we speak of</p>		

them and in the concrete punishments that sever their social bonds (3.1, 3.3).

**c) An account of the underexplored domain of interactional freedom and inclusion:**

Brownlee shows that our social interests extend beyond our needs for close intimate connections. We have equally strong needs to be accepted within the broader social world, to be acknowledged enough of the time and responded to decently (3.1).

**d) A new framework to understand freedom of association:** In work done between 2012-2016, Brownlee rejected the liberal view of freedom of association, showing that it is secondary to social claim-rights and protects only those associations that honour consent, need, harm, and respect (3.1, 3.4, 3.5).

In the second phase, Brownlee is leading an AHRC international network to expand the theoretical debate on social human rights. Members include world-leading human rights theorists such as Henry Shue, and advisors such as Baroness Ruth Lister, David Archard (Chair, Nuffield Council of Bioethics), Kellie Payne (Campaign to End Loneliness), and Swaran Singh (Equality and Human Rights Commission, and Professor of Social and Community Psychiatry, University of Warwick). Brownlee was also PI of a Leverhulme Trust Project on The Ethics and Politics of Sociability (2017-2020, GBP235,000), which looks beyond the brute moral minimum of human rights to the social pre-conditions for human flourishing. All of her work deploys the methods of analytic philosophy, e.g. conceptual analysis, normative reasoning, and the study of examples and counterexamples.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

Professor Brownlee has published her research in monographs and in peer-reviewed journals.

**3.1 Brownlee, Kimberley** (2020) *Being sure of each other: an essay on social rights and freedoms*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780198714064

**3.2 Brownlee, Kimberley** (2016) 'The lonely heart breaks: on the right to contribute socially'. *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 90 (1). pp. 27-48. doi:[10.1093/arisup/akw008](https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akw008)

**3.3 Brownlee, Kimberley** (2016) 'Don't call people "rapists": on the social contribution injustice of punishment'. *Current Legal Problems*, 69 (1). pp. 327-352. doi:[10.1093/clp/cuw009](https://doi.org/10.1093/clp/cuw009)

**3.4 Brownlee, Kimberley** (2016) 'Ethical Dilemmas of Sociability'. *Utilitas*, 28 (1). pp. 54-72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820815000175>

**3.5 Brownlee, Kimberley** (2015) 'Freedom of association: it's not what you think'. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 35 (2). pp. 267-282. doi:[10.1093/ojls/gqu018](https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqu018)

**3.6 Brownlee, Kimberley** (2013) 'A human right against social deprivation'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 63 (251). pp. 199-222. doi:[10.1111/1467-9213.12018](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9213.12018)

AHRC Funding: **Brownlee, Kimberley**. Social Human Rights. Ref: AH/S011013/1. May 2019 - June 2020 (**GBP35,257**)

Leverhulme Trust Funding: **Brownlee, Kimberley**. Investigating the Ethics and Politics of Sociability. Ref: RPG-2017-052. October 2017 – June 2020 (**GBP235,213**)

Leverhulme Trust Funding: **Brownlee, Kimberley**. Legal and Moral Theory: Philip Leverhulme Prize. September 2013 – August 2016 (**GBP70,000**)

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Brownlee's impact is achieved through a multi-dimensional intervention affecting key players in politics and society. The reach of her impact within the UK extends to the third sector, highly placed members of the UK government, and the general public. Beyond the UK, her work has influenced public debates about social rights in Australia, Canada, and the US, and has been highlighted on social media in Brazil, Greece, China, Germany, and Egypt, among others.

**a) Impact on NGOs and Policymakers**

Since the beginning of the impact period, the profile of loneliness as a political issue has risen significantly in the UK, with new policies and a Loneliness Minister now in place. Brownlee's work has contributed to raising the profile of this issue on the political agenda, and she has worked with several key NGOs to develop their lobbying and advocacy strategies:

**1) Human Rights Watch (HRW):** HRW is a global NGO that advocates for governments and businesses to change or enforce their laws to stop injustices, and as such, their work affects millions of people's lives (5.1c). Brownlee was approached by HRW to advise and inform their 2018 HRW Report: *Unmet Needs: Improper Social Care Assessments for Older People in England* (5.1a). HRW discussed Brownlee's idea that, although we have no human right to be provided with a friend, nevertheless we do have a right not to have our bonds forcibly severed or arbitrarily disrupted once they are established (3.1, 3.2; 5.1b, 5.1c). The subsequent HRW Report brought out Brownlee's research in the case study of Mary Redman, a long-time social care service user, who said that the social workers who came to her home in 2016 to re-assess her needs had decided beforehand to reduce her support. As a result, her personal assistant of 30 years, who had become a treasured friend, was forced to find work elsewhere (5.1a; 5.1c). Brownlee and Redman attended an embargoed Roundtable on the Report preceding its launch, at which Redman endorsed Brownlee's analysis of her case, that social care offers a way for *both* users and support workers to feel useful because social bonds are reciprocal joint-narratives through which we become witnesses to each other's lives and friends invested in each other's wellbeing (3.1, 3.2). Following publication of the report, the findings were published by *The Guardian* and in *Politico's London Playbook*, as well as prompting an op-ed in *The New Statesman* (5.1c). HRW also met with the Department of Health and Social Care, an MP, the Consul General to the Prince of Wales, and a member of the House of Lords to discuss the report (5.1c). HRW has stated that Professor Brownlee's ideas "proved invaluable to the shaping of the report" and that 'the report would not have achieved the level of influence it has done without [Brownlee's] contribution' (5.1c).

**2) APPG on Wellbeing Economics:** The New Economics Foundation (NEF), a think-tank that seeks "to transform the economy so it works for people and the planet", drew on Brownlee's work when advancing their agenda through the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Wellbeing Economics for which they serve as the secretariat. In 2016, the NEF Director organised a Roundtable (with 50 attendees) at the Houses of Parliament on social deprivation. Fellow speakers included Baroness Lister, Lord O'Donnell, Lord Layard, Dr Simon Sandberg, and Sir John Hills. Baroness Tyler, a co-organiser of the event, wrote to Brownlee afterward that: "It was particularly valuable to hear your thoughts on the role of social isolation and its effects on the concept of social deprivation. Despite on-going media coverage of loneliness and the evidence of its effect on health and wellbeing, it is still failing to gather the attention it deserves in aspects of policy such as service planning. An idea such as yours to make social contact a right could be an interesting way to shift the debate and highlight its centrality." (5.2). Subsequently, loneliness was a focus of the APPG's May 2019 open letter to the Chancellor ("A Spending Review to Increase Wellbeing") which highlighted social care and community services as key to preventing loneliness. The review recommended that expenditure on these areas needs to rise by over £5 billion, with significant savings to the NHS and criminal justice predicted as a result (5.2). Through the APPG Roundtable, Brownlee also established a link with Baroness Lister who is now an advisor to her AHRC Social Rights Network (5.3).

**3) Grapevine:** In 2019, Brownlee provided the CEO and Deputy CEO of Grapevine (an award-winning Coventry-based charity that helps isolated and disadvantaged people to build better lives) with a conceptual framework for their work based on her research on interactional rights. Brownlee had in-depth discussions with the CEO in September 2019 and in May 2020, and as a result Grapevine states that 'we have amended our monitoring and evaluation systems to ask our beneficiaries if, as a result of our support other people turn to them for support and not simply, as now, if they have people to turn to'. Grapevine also states that their work with Brownlee has led them to become 'committed to uncovering whether being useful to others is retained or strengthened right now online' (5.4). During the Covid-19 pandemic, in May 2020 Brownlee began another strand of work with Grapevine in order to determine whether mediated forms of social contact can satisfy social needs. She has provided the charity with an 'extremely useful template of interaction types' which is being used to analyse the activities and social connection opportunities offered to the people Grapevine works with. Drawing on this work, Grapevine is investigating which interaction settings 'give people the best chances to feel useful

and valued'. The changes which Grapevine has enacted are helping to 'strengthen the social situation of up to 1,500 people a year' (5.4).

**4) Policing and Criminal Justice:** Brownlee's article in the influential *Aeon* magazine (2017) 'Stop Calling People Who Commit Crimes "Criminals"', was noticed by the Senior Management Team (SMT) of HMP Stafford who invited her to visit the prison (a national hub for men who have committed sexual offences) to advise them on their citizenship-focused rehabilitation programme, which eschews the reductionist language that Brownlee cautions against (3.3). During her visit in December 2017, she advised on how to expand the culture change that HMP is effecting by changing their terminology (referring to people as 'residents' not 'prisoners' and their duties as 'maintenance technician' not 'bin man', etc.) After her visit, the SMT wrote, 'Really lovely to meet you and have the opportunity to show you our citizenship approach to rehabilitation and discuss the importance and use of terminology' (5.5a). Her work has also been highlighted on Twitter by Prison Reading Groups, a UK organization which funds and supports reading groups in prisons (5.5b).

**5) UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC):** Brownlee's work has informed conversations within the Commission, which examined her work at a meeting in March 2016 (5.6a). This examination of her work, introduced by Prof. Anna Lawson (Leeds Law School), drew on evidence Brownlee submitted to the House of Commons Health Committee Inquiry on Primary Care 2015 (5.6b), which emphasised the need to attend to the social dimensions of primary care, maintaining persistent connections between carers and receivers. In the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, in June 2020 Brownlee provided the EHRC with a reading list on loneliness and isolation, which is being merged with current EHRC reading lists to strengthen them in relation to the pandemic. The EHRC have also requested a copy of 3.1, to include in the Commission's library (5.6c).

**6) Policy Briefs and Written Evidence:** In September 2019, Brownlee and Dr David Jenkins published a policy briefing on *Improving the Loneliness Strategy* (5.7), which they shared with Baroness Lister and other contacts. In May 2020, Brownlee, Jenkins, and Dr Katy Wells submitted evidence to the Human Rights Joint Committee on the impact of the COVID-19 response on the right to adequate housing, focusing on people living in overly-dense or isolating conditions. Furthermore, Brownlee also contributed to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology's survey of the research community's concerns about COVID-19, which resulted in 13 reports being published online.

#### **b) Impact on Public Debate**

The concept of *loneliness* attracts much public and media debate on issues such as social care, solitary confinement, and lockdowns. The Jo Cox Commission's Final Report (2017) drew widespread public attention, finding that over 9,000,000 adults in the UK are often or always lonely. Brownlee's work has contributed significantly to these debates, by providing rigorous theoretical backing to arguments, and by stimulating conversation by the media, opinion shapers, documentary makers, and the wider public.

**1) Media:** Brownlee's defence of a human right against social deprivation (3.6) has influenced public debates in the UK and abroad via media appearances, public lectures, and interviews. In March 2020, during the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brownlee discussed loneliness and self-isolation on BBC Newsnight (average viewing figures of 837,000 over the course of the broadcast) (5.8a). Other interviews include BBC Radio Coventry (2019) on self-service checkout counters, Philosophy Bites (UK, 2015) (downloaded 55,000 times) (5.8b), and Hullabaloo RRR Radio in Melbourne (2014) on social rights. In 2018, Brownlee co-produced a video with BBC Ideas on 'Do We Have a Right Not to Be Lonely?' (2018) (25,000 views within 12 hours of release; 67,000 views by March 2020; 5.8c). Viewers such as Home-Start Scotland (a local community network of trained volunteers and expert support helping families with young children) tweeted: 'amazing simple effective animation from Kimberley Brownlee' and publicized the video to their followers (5.8d). The video was also the focus of a Reddit discussion, sparking over 260 comments debating topics such as whether social media helps to solve or contributes

to loneliness, and how we can measure loneliness (5.8e). It also prompted CBC Radio (Canada, 2018) to interview Brownlee for a documentary on urban loneliness, which was commissioned after a Vancouver City survey identified loneliness as citizens' Number One concern. Brownlee co-wrote an article on social prescriptions for *The Conversation* (2018), which was cited in *Mental Health Today* (2019) (5.8f). Also, Brownlee's article in *Aeon*, 'The Self-Reliant Individual is a Myth' (2016), has been downloaded over 51,500 times and generated 49 comments, becoming *Aeon*'s second-most popular opinion piece at the time of writing (5.8g). On Facebook, it has been referenced over 3,500 times (5.8h), and on Twitter it sparked debate worldwide, being retweeted over 80 times and discussed in Australia, the USA, the UK, Canada and Norway (5.8i).

**2) Opinion shapers:** Brownlee has influenced key contributors to public debates about loneliness, including George Monbiot (*Guardian* columnist) who cites Brownlee's conceptual analysis of the *need to belong* in his book *Out of the Wreckage* (2017) (5.9), and who appeared alongside Brownlee and Kim Samuel, the Director of the Samuel Centre for Connectedness, in a public workshop on 'The Meaning and Politics of Loneliness' (Oxford, 2017). Brownlee's work is also cited in *Public Square* (a journal on urban design) and by the US-based Form-based Codes Institute (on urban design) (2016). Through a background interview, it also informed Francine Russo's article on loneliness, *Scientific American Mind*, 2016.

**3) Public Events:** Brownlee has spoken on several high-profile panels on these themes including 'The Structure and Quality of Life', with Bill Bryson (London, 2018, 100 attendees); and a Human Rights Day panel on health and sociability for the Law Society of England and Wales (London, 2014; 75 attendees). Brownlee has also given several public lectures on social rights including the 2019 Julius Stone Address, University of Sydney (accredited as 1.5 CPD points for Australia-based solicitors and barristers, with 80 attendees); a Current Legal Problems Lecture, UCL (1 CPD point with the SRA and BSB, with 60 attendees); the Berry Public Lecture, Vanderbilt University; a Castan Centre for Human Rights Lecture (Melbourne); a Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture (London); and a lecture at Duke University Hospital (North Carolina). She was commissioned to write the 'Freedom of Association' entry (2019) for the world-leading *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, which is widely cited beyond academia, and has written on rights for the award-winning *Lacuna magazine* (2014, 2015).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1** Human Rights Watch evidence: (a) Human Rights Watch Report (2019) *Unmet Needs*; (b) Email correspondence with Bethany Brown, Human Rights Watch researcher; (c) Letter from Bethany Brown.
- 5.2** (a) Email correspondence with Baroness Tyler of Enfield; (b) *A Spending Review to Increase Wellbeing: An Open Letter to the Chancellor*, Report by the APPG on Wellbeing Economics (2019)
- 5.3** Letter from Baroness Lister of Burtersett.
- 5.4** Letter from Grapevine.
- 5.5** HM Prisons evidence: (a) Email correspondence with HMP Stafford; (b) Prison Reading Groups tweet
- 5.6** UK Equality and Human Rights Commission evidence: (a) Email correspondence with the Deputy Head of the Division of Health Sciences, University of Warwick; (b) Written evidence for House of Commons Inquiry on Primary Care 2015; (c) Email correspondence with EHRC re: reading list additions.
- 5.7** *Improving the Loneliness Strategy* Policy Briefing.
- 5.8** Media evidence: (a) Newsnight viewing figures; (b) Philosophy Bites download figures; (c) BBC Ideas video viewing figures; (d) Tweet from Home-Start Scotland; (e) Reddit thread discussing Brownlee's BBC Ideas video; (f) *Mental Health Today* article (2019); (g) *Aeon* magazine article download statistics; (h) Facebook shares of *Aeon* article; (i) Tweets re *Aeon* article.
- 5.9** Development of Brownlee's ideas in *Out of the Wreckage*.