

Tools for opening the lonely black box and changing young adults' perspectives of their loneliness

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1 Introduction

While the pandemic was happening, almost everybody felt the experience of being lonely, which researchers has been described as a “non-pleasant subjective feeling” (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2012; de Jong Gierveld et al., 2006; Peplau, 1998). While many only experiences loneliness briefly as a temporality state of an emotional discrepancy, some are experiencing loneliness as a more extended encounter – which can have fatigue consequences for the lonely, e.g. due to sleep loss which can lead to depression, among other consequences (Matthews et al., 2017), and have an impact on how the lonely are perceiving themselves (Jones et al., 1982; Lodder et al., 2016; Wittenberg & Reis, 1986), regarding their peers when it comes to own perception on their social skills.

In Denmark, where this doctoral project is taking place, 18% of young adults aged 18-30 are in a demographic survey (Lasgaard, 2019), self-reporting that they often feel lonely. But we need to figure out how we reach out and what needs to be done from the loneliest own perspective, as Maes et al. (2022) critiques in their paper examine different surveys framework to see if a person is lonely, which tends to generalise and assumes that loneliness in some ways can be measured; it does not come with solutions that can provide indications for how we might tackle this societal issue.

Many volunteer organisations are trying to help, but many need to learn how to navigate the personal stories that the attendees seeking the organisation's help need.

My doctoral project is designing lo-fi tools to gather stories about loneliness. This will help the volunteer organization create sustainable communities and meaningful activities that alleviate loneliness. Analysing the data from a small story approach will provide new insights into loneliness (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).



2 The toolkit

Through observations and design experiments inspired by co-designing methods such as probing, designing games and facilitating co-design workshops (Sanders & Westerlund, 2011; Sanders, 2000; Sanders & Stappers, 2008) a toolkit which consists of 3 elements have been designed while engaging volunteers organisation and their users. The toolkit consists of 1) a “hacked” uno game which aims to make people know each other, 2) a design game called “The Island” where the participants reflect on themselves and their loneliness due while engaging with materials, and 3) the thin red line, where the participants are looking to their past and imagine a new possible future for themselves. It is important to note that the toolkits only prompt the participants to talk about loneliness, it does not prompt them to speak about sub-themes specifically.

3 Preliminary Findings

To investigate if the toolkit worked as intended – recordings and photos from the workshop have been transcribed and analysed through the small story framework presented initially by Michael Bamberg (2008). The preliminary findings show an interesting new challenge regarding loneliness, which I haven’t seen in other literature. Issues such as primary school bullying and sexual abuse are new themes not previously mentioned in the loneliness literature.

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