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LONELINESS: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

What is loneliness and what influence does culture have on it? These questions were investigated by reviewing cultural changes in the industrial western world and research on loneliness in a historical context. This review brought up three approaches towards loneliness: an existential approach focusing on subjective experience, a cognitive approach making use of a cognitive construct and a social needs approach embedded in an affective construct. These approaches where explored through empirical data supporting the different views on loneliness, followed by a discussion of cultural differences in experienced loneliness, and possible degrees and kinds of loneliness. The second part of the paper addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the different findings on loneliness arguing whether or not any of the different approaches or understandings on loneliness offered a full understanding of the phenomenon. It was found that the different approaches were caught in their own methodology and epistemology and therefore unable to offer a full understanding of loneliness. Instead an integrative approach to loneliness is offered that encompasses a number of different factors that come into play when loneliness is experienced. A final section points to a need for more integrative research methods.

Keywords: Loneliness, culture, Individualism, integrative approach, mechanisms of loneliness, western societies.

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INTRODUCTION

I was sitting at my computer glancing over different online newspapers and came across an article about loneliness among students at higher education's in Denmark. This was last semester while I was studying a semester abroad at University of Iowa, USA. This article referred to the Danish Lawyer- & Economist Unions annual report[1] on college life that had found that 18 percent of students on higher educations' feel consistently lonely (Kinnberg, 2011). For the first time in my life I was at a place where I did not know anyone, in a country I had never been in before- in a word, alone. I could relate to this feeling of being lonely, but not because I was lonely at the present situation, rather because I felt lonely before going abroad. I was often surrounded by people, but somehow felt lonely anyways. Now I was in a new country with new people and did not feel lonely at all. This situation got me thinking about what loneliness is and what impact a culture has on the experience of loneliness. Is loneliness a universal experience we all feel or a unique feeling that differs from person to person? Does culture play a role in how loneliness is understood, experienced and do some cultures promote the experience of loneliness? Meaning do some cultural structures and positions create settings that make people feel lonely?

A number of findings on loneliness in Denmark do seem to indicate that loneliness is experienced by many. A report by Center for Youth Research[2] found that 12, 4 percent of young people in the age 15-24 often feel lonely (Nielsen, Sørensen, & Osmec, 2010). A summary of research among teenagers and loneliness, by Mathias Lasgaard, show that between 4 and 14 percent often feel lonely (Lasgaard, 2007). A press release by Lonely Elders Shelter[3], an organization fighting loneliness among elderly, estimate that about 65.000 elderly are lonely (Swane, 2010). I have also contacted Red Cross which has branches around Denmark helping lonely individuals. They have informed me that in their experience especially in Copenhagen the number of younger lonely individuals are increasing.

With these thoughts and findings in mind am I wondering what contemporary psychology can tell about loneliness and whether or not modern western societies promote a state of loneliness that is not present in less industrialized countries. Can it be that loneliness is mainly a western issue, if it is at all an issue, or is it not bound up with cultural settings, but rather a universal feeling that individuals experience to a greater or lesser extent? In this paper, I will explore *what contemporary psychology can teach us about loneliness and the influence of cultural settings on it?*

I do this by first investigating how historical changes in the western world can account for loneliness in modern societies. This is followed by a section examining how loneliness has been researched within the social sciences and how loneliness is understood in the present context. This examination has lead to three main approaches, which are investigated in a historical and empirical context. This is followed by a section

that investigates loneliness in a cultural context and how differences in cultures affect how individuals experience loneliness. This is proceeded with a section discussing what exactly loneliness is and how it should be understood. Finally there is a section suggesting how loneliness ought to be investigated in future research with a focus on how loneliness is culturally embedded.

LONELINESS IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT

> *The transition from preindustrial, rural society to modern, industrial society led to new forms of personal social relationships. In preindustrial society, social networks were determined almost exclusively by primary groups of kin and village-community. In the course of industrialization and urbanization… the traditional production and living unit of the 'houseful… has been dissolved. Economic demands for increased geographic mobility led people to live at growing distance from their kin. Contacts with extended kin were reduced, while emotional bonds within the nuclear family became closer* (Höllinger & Haller, 1990, p. 103).

A number of psychologists, sociologists, historians etc. have throughout the last 60 years reported a fundamental change in how individuals live, work, interact with each other and how it affects peoples' lives (Beck & Beck-Gernshein, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Gordon, 1976; Höllinger & Haller, 1990; Mannin, 1966; Putnam, 2000; Riesman, 1975, org, 1950). Individuals are no longer guided by their immediate family or community, but rather various signals given to them by an urban environment. This has proven to be a change in western society and a move away from close netted villages where ones future was laid in front of one, towards a more individualistic society with new forms of social networks, structures and social relations (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Gordon, 1976; Cushman, 1990; Putnam, 2000; Riesman, 1975). According to a number of writers, among others the sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2000), this has to do with the industrialization in the western world that in a large scale have meant a breakdown of the traditional. The traditional is the way of life ordained by a religion or a tradition of a state and through that a loss of social roles and categories that individuals belonged to (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2000). Individuals belonged to a specific class that guided their life, through who they could marry to what kind of job they could get. People stayed in their category throughout a lifespan and so did the generations after.

The breakdown of the traditions can be seen as the emerging of individualism. Peoples' lives are no longer guided by a belonging to a specific class or category. This development has meant a steady progress towards an individualistic society supported by the welfare state, might even be encouraged by it. Focus is on the individual rights, rather

than the families or the community's rights. This progress, however, has left the individual without a specific path in life that works as a guide (Giddens, 1991; Gordon, 1976; Riesman, 1975). The individual is free to choose how to live life, but also what to believe in and what not to believe in. The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) refers to this as *existential isolation* and according to Giddens this has emerged in our modern society as a reaction to the lack of a moral compass. People are free to believe in what they want, but with this freedom follows the anxiety of not being sure what to believe in. This is what the existential writer Clark E. Moustakas (1961) refers to as *loneliness anxiety* and he describes it as:

> *Loneliness anxiety is a widespread condition in contemporary society. The individual no longer has an intimate sense of relatedness to the food he eats, the clothing he wears, the shelter which houses him. He no longer participates directly in creation and production of the vital needs of his family and community… Modern man does not enjoy the companionship, support and protection of his neighbors* (p. 25).

Moustakas furthermore describes modern living as an impersonal urban or suburban community without real interaction, but rather interaction based on conduct and prescribed modes of behavior (Moustakas, 1961,). Individuals do not come behind the curtains, what Erving Goffman famously referred to as the *backstage,* where people let down their guards and relate to one another without a front (Goffman, 1959). This lack of relatedness with ones surroundings is the cause of an anxiety due to anonymity of the individual and a lack of genuine values and norms. What are left are superficial encounters without a joint set of values or norms as a way to relate to each other (Moustakas, 1961).

Cross-cultural studies do seem to support a change in western world that is fundamental different from more collectivistic societies (Bochner, 1994; Conway & Wang 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990; Wang, 2001). What these studies, among others have found, is that more importance is put on family and friends in collectivistic societies. When people describe their personality they focus on their social roles. This is opposite more individualistic societies, where people are focusing more on achievements and individual attributes when describing their personality. The question is if these findings indicate that individuals within collectivistic societies are closer connected to friends and family and therefore are less lonely, or if the link between loneliness and cultural differences are more complex?

A number of cross-cultural studies within individualistic societies do also indicate differences in values and norms. According to the researcher Ami Rokach et al. (2002),

North Americans perceive themselves as lonelier than south Europeans. Research by Franz Höllinger and Max Haller (1990) clearly indicate that Italians are closer connected with their friends and family than the Americans, Australians' and British. They also found that Germans, Hungarian and Austrians have fewer friends than Americans, Australians, British and Italians, as well as that Americans and Australian use the word friend in a wider and more casual way than the Germans, Hungarian and Austrian. Another study by Gerdt Sundström, Eleonor Fransson, Bo Malmberg and Adam Davey (2009) found that older people in the southern Europe perceive themselves lonelier than their counterpart in northern Europe. The question is whether or not southern Europeans actually are lonelier or they have higher expectations towards social interaction and therefore perceive themselves as more lonely if these expectations are not meet? This is a general problem when doing these kinds of cross-cultural studies. They cannot entirely validate that the important terms used in the questionnaires are understood in the same way in different cultures.

This leads to the question, what is loneliness and how has it been dealt with within the social sciences? If loneliness is a problem brought upon by western living then how has it been investigated and understood by researchers? Answers to these questions are sought in the next section.

A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

Throughout history loneliness has appeared in writings of philosophers, poets, songwriters and novelists, nevertheless it was not until the seventies that loneliness were seriously considered within the social sciences (Lasgaard, 2010b; Marangoni & Ickes, 1989; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973). In 1982 the first core book on loneliness were published, picking up theories and research focusing on loneliness. In this book, *Loneliness A Sourcebook Of current Theory, Research and Therapy,* the editors Letitia A. Peplau and Daniel Perlman present and categorize eight different theoretical approaches towards loneliness that had emerged since the forties (p. 130).

***Table 1*. Peplau & Perlman's summary of theoretical approaches towards loneliness**

Theoretical Approaches:	**Main writer:**
Cognitive	Peplau & Perlman, 1982
Existential	Moustakas, 1961
Interactionistic	Weiss, 1973
Phenomenological	Rogers, 1961
Privacy	Derlega & Margulis, 1982
Psychodynamic	Fromm-Reichmann, 1959
Sociological	Riesman, 1961
Systems	Flanders, 1982

This was the first sourcebook within loneliness research with well known accumulation of theoretical approaches towards loneliness. These different approaches conceptualize the areas foundation through articles, hypotheses, theory fragments, loneliness- models and understandings, however leaving a scattered field lacking a connected framework to the phenomenon loneliness (Derlega & Margulis, 1982; Lasgaard, 2010b; Rokach, 2004). The different approaches´ understanding of loneliness can be seen in how they define it. The cognitive approach is based on a discrepancy model between desired- and actual social relations:

> *… loneliness is a response to a discrepancy between desired and achieved levels of social contact: and… that cognitive processes, especially attributions, have a moderating influence on loneliness experiences* (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, p. 8)

An Interactionistic approach is based on loneliness being multidimensional, meaning that there are different kinds of loneliness, including emotional- and social loneliness:

> *Loneliness is caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationship or set of relations… In many instances it is a response to the absence of provision of a close, indeed intimate, attachment. It also may be a response to the absence of the provision of a meaningful friendship, collegial relationship, or other linkage to a coherent community* (Weiss, 1973, p. 17).

A psychodynamic understanding of loneliness is based on the infant's attachment to the mother. Through this attachment the child experiences emotional bonds and how to connect with others, but also the feeling of loneliness when significant others are out of sight:

> *Loneliness, which is the exceedingly unpleasant experience connected with inadequate discharge of the need for human intimacy, for interpersonal intimacy … It begins in infancy with an integrating tendency that we only know by inference from pathology material later… a need for contact with the living* (Sullivan, 1955, p. 290).

An existentialistic understanding of loneliness also differentiates between different kinds of loneliness, the main one being existential, meaning there is loneliness that is part of the human condition, but also another one based on anxiety:

> *Existential loneliness is an intrinsic and organic reality of human life in which there is both pain and triumphant creation emerging out of long periods of desolation. In existential loneliness man is fully aware of himself as an isolated and solitary individual while in loneliness anxiety man is separated from himself as a feeling and knowing person* (Moustakas, 1961, 24).

The mentioned definitions of loneliness show some of the different understandings of the phenomenon loneliness. Some are theory based definitions, while others focus on empirical hypotheses as understandings of loneliness (e.g., Derlega & Margulis, 1982). In 1989 the second core book on loneliness was published by Mohammadreza Hojat & Rick Crandall. In this book, the focus had moved away from collecting and differentiates between theories, towards empirical supported theories. More and more researchers were focusing on empirical data collection to support their theories of loneliness. This meant that the main theoretical approaches where being narrowed down to theories that could be supported by data (Jones, 1989; Weiss, 1989). This exercise has left the research field of loneliness with two main constructs; *an affective component*, encompassing the negative emotional experience of loneliness, and *a cognitive component*, encompassing the discrepancy between achieved and desired social relations (Heinrich & Cullone, 2006; Lasgaard, 2010a).

These two components of loneliness are guided by two separate theoretical approaches; *the social needs approach* and *the cognitive approach,* which can be directly related to the conceptual definition of loneliness (Lasgaard, 2010a). The social needs approach is grounded in psychodynamic theory with its focus on the affective component of loneliness (Marangoni & Ickes, 1989). The cognitive approach focuses on perception and evaluation of social relations and emphasizes the discrepancy between actual- and desired social relationships (ibid.,). This does not mean that different understandings within these approaches do not exist, but that research is guided by either how loneliness is experienced emotionally or how loneliness is experienced cognitively (Lasgaard, 2010a). The eight different approaches mentioned by Peplau & Perlman in 1982, have not ceased to exist, but are today, most likely, understood in either a cognitive conceptualization of loneliness or an affective conceptualization of loneliness. In doing so they have succeeded in narrowing down what is understood as loneliness and gotten closer to a unified framework within loneliness research.

There is an agreement within loneliness research, that loneliness is a subjective emotion. This has made it difficult to set up external criteria for measuring the phenomenon. This means that observing or manipulating loneliness in a lab setting is very difficult if not impossible (Lasgaard, 2010b). Because of this research in loneliness

is mostly dependent on interviews and questionnaires. In an effort to quantify the phenomenon of loneliness, create a connected framework and a unified understanding of loneliness, focus has been on loneliness scales where a clear measurement is possible. This, however, has created a singular, unidimensional research area, which has forgotten the phenomenological experience of loneliness (Gierveld, 1998; Jones, 1989; Rokach, 2004). This is seen in the most widely used loneliness scale UCLA. This is a one-dimensional scale created to an individual's degree of experienced loneliness. It consists of 20 statements that the respondent has to confirm or refute by using a four point system – one meaning never and four meaning often. By combining these 20 statements into a total score, one receives a score indicating how lonely the person is compared with other in the sample (Lasgaard, 2010b). There do exist different multidimensional scales that investigate loneliness as a multidimensional phenomenon these, however, are not nearly as widely used as the UCLA scale (Cramer & Barry, 1999, pp. 493-495):

***Table 2*. Outline of different multidimensional scales**

Multidimensional Scales:
Differential Loneliness Scale (Smith & Sermat, 1983)
The Social and Emotional loneliness Scale for Adults (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993)
Loneliness Rating Scale (Scalise et al., 1984)
Wittenberg Emotional Versus Social Loneliness Scale (Wittenberg, 1986)

The critique against the UCLA scale is its lack of differentiating between different kinds of loneliness. It does not differentiate between the loneliness experienced by a widow missing her husband, from the loneliness experienced by a child at summer camp, longing for home (Cramer & Barry, 1999).

This differentiation between one-dimensional and multidimensional scale also fits into the differentiation between the social needs approach versus the cognitive approach. The cognitive approach, as mentioned earlier, focus on loneliness as a discrepancy between desired- and achieved social relationships. Focus is not on how or what kind of loneliness is experienced, but rather how loneliness is perceived (Larose, Guay & Boivin, 2002). The social needs approach focuses on the infants need for contact and how this need continues throughout life. This approach is in line with attachment theory as well as psychodynamic theory (Lasgaard, 2010a). Focus is here on how loneliness is experienced and what kind of loneliness is involved. Because of this there is more focus on loneliness as multidimensional phenomenon (Gierveld, 1998). It is important to emphasize that these approaches have conceptual differences, but that there are important overlaps in how they define loneliness. There is a general agreement that loneliness is a subjective, unpleasant and distressing experience due to deficiencies in individual's social relationships.

The consensus that loneliness is a subjective experience is interesting given the widespread focus on quantifying loneliness. The reason for this is the lack of focus on research that investigates the subjective experience of loneliness, rather than the degree or kind of loneliness. Most research, as mentioned earlier, is based on different loneliness scales like the UCLA scale and does not describe the unique experience of loneliness, but rather the degree or kind of loneliness individual's experiences (Wood, 1989; Rokach, 2004). The reason behind this lack of research could be found in the difficulties in quantifying human experience, but also in regard to what aims and assumptions preexist on the uniqueness of individual experience. The researchers Carin Rubenstein and Philip Shaver (1982), nevertheless, have done extensive phenomenological research on loneliness and have through interview and open-ended questionnaires found a number of compelling discoveries. What they have found is what kind of words people associate with the word loneliness, what people do when feeling lonely and reasons why people feel lonely. They have also asked individuals to imagine solutions for their loneliness and why exactly these solutions were imagined (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). The approaches that mainly focus on the phenomenological experience of loneliness are the *existential*- and *Phenomenological* approach. Focus is how people experience loneliness and research is guided by interviews, descriptions and literature (Perlman & Peplau, 1982). The existential and phenomenological approach are overlapping in most views and will be referred to as the existential approach because of its focus and differentiation between loneliness as a human condition and loneliness brought up in a modern society. The existential approach will appear as the third approach in this papers investigation of loneliness among people living in a modern culture, alongside the social needs approach and the cognitive approach.

THE THREE APPROACHES

The historical conceptualizing of loneliness has brought contemporary psychology to three main constructs of loneliness, an affective component, a cognitive component and a subjective component. These three components are represented by three psychological approaches: psychodynamic, cognitive and existential. In the following sections these three approaches are investigated in a historical and empirical context to get a full understanding of loneliness.

As mentioned earlier, the social needs approach is based on a psychodynamic tradition. One of the first to bring up loneliness as a serious pathological phenomenon was the psychiatrist Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (Lasgaard, 2010b; Perlman & Peplau, 1982). In an article from 1959 she described loneliness as an overlooked phenomenon hardly mentioned in any psychiatric textbooks (Fromm-Reichmann, 1967). Fromm-Reichmann was a trained psychoanalyst who mainly based her theoretically thoughts on loneliness through her therapy with schizophrenic patients. According to Fromm-

Reichmann, loneliness is based on early childhood experience, arising due to a separation from the parents and/or a lack of satisfying physical contact and loving intimacy. This will create a sense of isolation in the child which will follow the child into adulthood and create a fear of love and intimacy leaving the patient lonely. This understanding of loneliness was shared by other psychodynamic writers, such as Harry Stack Sullivan who also emphasized the importance of tenderness from the parents in infancy and childhood (Sullivan, 1955). The psychoanalytic writers, who empathized childhood in understanding later pathological behavior, could be viewed as the forerunners of the social needs approach in theorizing and conceptualizing loneliness (Marongani & Ickes, 1989).

Another important writer who focused on early attachment and adult loneliness was John Bowlby, who in his attachment theory argued that the mechanisms of loneliness must be a response pattern contributing to the survival of the species. The bond between a mother and an infant is a deep seated biological inheritance and a breakdown of bonds will lead to the experience of loneliness (Bowlby, 1973). A more contemporary understanding of the social needs approach is seen in Mohammadreza Hojat's work, among others, that emphasize on loneliness as a pathological state due to a breakdown of social needs in the early childhood and later intrapsychic conflicts. Individuals with a stable and loving childhood, experience, less anxiety, less loneliness, higher self-esteem and better peer relationships (Hojat, 1989; 1998).

The cognitive approach emerged in the 80s with Peplau and Perlman, as the most prominent advocates of this approach. Cognitive psychology as an independent psychology first appeared in the 50s as a counteraction towards behaviorism that had been dismissing consciousness for nearly 50 years. Investigators were starting to explore how people interpreted and stored information in various ways. The two most influential figures within this approach was George Miller and Ulric Neisser, who argued that it was possible to investigate human consciousness in a meaningful way and still get reliable and valid results. This was in contrast to reducing all human thoughts, actions and feeling to mere responses to physical stimuli. Researchers where starting to work within the understanding that psychological phenomenon could be investigated without demonstrating it on a rat (Shultz & Schultz, 2008). One could argue that the cognitive approach towards loneliness is trying to do the same as cognitive psychology has done more generally, trying to make research of loneliness into a valid research area with its own terms and theories to support its views. The focus within the cognitive approach has not changed remarkably since Peplau and Perlman came out with their book on loneliness in 1982. Focus still appears to be on cognitive processes concerning people's perception and evaluation of their social networks and is explaining loneliness as a mismatch between actual and desired relations (Heinrich & Cullone, 2006; Lasgaard, 2010a; Marangoni & Ickes, 1989).

The existentialistic approach towards loneliness is mainly build on a phenomenological outlook focusing on the subjective experience of loneliness and is more concerned with describing the feelings of loneliness rather than the degree or kind of loneliness. What makes existentialism different from phenomenology is its focus on life's main questions and how tragedies and negative events impact life. Existential psychology's main focus is the human condition and how individuals come to terms with it (Jacobsen, 2007). It is a very philosophical psychology that focuses on living an authentic life and being aware of one's mortality of life. By facing that people are born alone, will go through life alone and ultimately die alone, people will live a more authentic life and be more aware of their surroundings. The idea is that the subjective experience of being a human can never be truly understood by others, people can sympathize with other people, but never be in the same experience as the person going through the experience. This is seen in major life events, such as having a child or dying. Nobody can truly understand the personal experience of such events, but at most resemble the experience. The existentialistic approach towards loneliness is mainly different from the social needs approach and the cognitive approach in one specific way, it works with loneliness as a starting point. The two other approaches use specific scientific methodologies to understand the phenomenon loneliness, where existentialism as a science is grounded in the phenomenon, meaning it is methodology understood through the phenomenon being alone. However because existentialism is very philosophical it is not very scientific in a positivistic sense of the word and therefore not very concerned with validity and reliability when it comes to research data (Jacobsen, 2007). What it instead offers loneliness research is a way to investigate the subjective experience of loneliness that is not seen in the two other approaches. The main writer within this tradition is Clark Moustakas and his book on loneliness from 1961, but more recent research is appearing, such as Rubenstein and Shaver's (1982) systemizing of words people associate with loneliness.

EMPIRICAL DATA

The three approaches conceptualize different understandings of loneliness and through that, different research methods. According to the social needs approach loneliness is due to a breakdown of social needs in childhood. Support for this view is found in different research that investigates parent-child attachment and level of present loneliness states (Hojat, 1998; Hojat & Lyons, 1998; Hojat, Borenstein & Shapurian, 1990). The cognitive approach argues that feelings of loneliness are due to individual reactions to social situations. Loneliness is a consequence of change in actual social relationships or changes in the desired or expected social relationship. Support for this is found in research that investigates how people evaluate and perceive themselves according to levels of loneliness (Baumeister et al., 2005; Baumeister et al., 2002; Salona, 1989). The existential approach focuses on the experience of loneliness and how people

explain the feeling of the phenomenon. This is found in research that investigates how people individually understand loneliness, but also through fiction, poems, therapy and self-examination (Mannin, 1966; Mijuskovic, 1979; Jacobsen, 2007).

Through research studies with university students, Hojat has investigated the argued link, within the social needs approach, between child-parent attachment and loneliness. Through a number of different scales, such as the UCLA loneliness scale, Hojat and colleagues have studied perceived relationship with parents, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, locus of control etc. They then correlated links between relationship with parents and levels of anxiety, self-esteem etc (Hojat, 1998; Hojat et al., 1990). These studies, among others, have found a correlation between insufficient child-parent attachment and higher levels of anxiety, loneliness, depression, lower self-esteem, and lower sociability etc. than a counterpart of students with sufficient child-parent attachment. Other, more recent studies, which have investigated attachment with levels of loneliness and depression, seem to support the correlation between insufficient child-parent attachment and high levels of loneliness and depression (Besser & Priel, 2005; Wiseman, Mayseless, & Sharabany, 2006).

Roy F. Baumeister, Christopher K. Nuss and Jean M. Twenge have done a number of studies investigating exclusion and its effects on cognitive processes. In one experiment they asked a group of university students to complete personality questionnaires regarding degree of introversion/extraversion. They then divided the students randomly into three groups based on false feedback, either telling the students that they had a personality profile that indicated a future with many rewarding relationships or a personality profile indicating a future alone and finally a third control group telling them that they had a personality profile that was accident-prone (Baumeister et al., 2002). They then asked the participants to rate their mood and do an intelligent test. They found that the participants who were told that they had a future alone did worse at the test than the other two groups. The fact that the future alone group did worse than the accident-prone group indicates that random bad news does not explain the results. Also the rating of mood did not show any indication of emotional distress at the future alone group suggesting their decline in cognitive ability was not a simple matter of being flustered. The same basic method of dividing people into groups was used to investigate other cognitive performance skills, such as logical reasoning task, which also showed impairment in cognitive skills in the future alone group. In another study by Baumeister, Nathan DeWall, Jean M. Twenge and Natalie J. Ciarocco, used the same method, investigated impairment in self-restrain such as cookie eating. This study found that being told that one would have a lonely future impaired ones self-restrain, meaning they ate more cookies (Baumeister et al., 2005).

Other studies have tested the link between cognitive processes and loneliness, such a Cecilia H. Solano. She tested how perceived control of attributions correlated with perceived loneliness through locus of control scales, using university students as participants. What she found was that higher external attributions correlated with higher levels of loneliness. This indicates that lonelier individuals perceive a lack of control over outcomes, assigning social success to luck rather than skills (Solano, 1989).

Robert S. Weiss pointed out in 1973 that loneliness was much more often commented on by songwriters than social scientists. Existential writers often turn to fiction when researching loneliness and explaining the phenomenon. This is seen in existential writers such as Ethel Mannin. In her book *Loneliness - A Study of the Human Condition,* among others, she turn to the literature and poems to describe the loneliness experienced in a modern western society (1966). Another thing that is seen in existential writers when investigating loneliness, is descriptions' of loneliness drawn from their own experiences. This is seen in Moustakas' book *Loneliness,* where he draws on own experience, as well as others, when describing the feeling of loneliness (1961). Other research is based on open-ended questionnaires such as research done by Rubenstein and Shaver (1982). In a comprehensive study they designed an 84-item questionnaire, based on former interviews and questionnaires. The survey consisted of three multiple-response items concerned with how loneliness *feel*, *reasons* or *causes* of loneliness and *reactions* to loneliness (p. 210). This was studied by following a question with a list of possible answers. How loneliness feels was prompted as following: *How do you feel when you are lonely? Circle all that apply*. The words individuals could circle consisted of 27 adjectives such as: boredom, self-pity, sadness, empty, isolated, stupid, ashamed. This was also done when listing up reasons for being lonely. They listed up 20 possible reasons for feeling lonely such as: having no spouse, feeling different, coming home to an empty house, moving too often. The reaction was done the same way, by listing up 24 responses when feeling lonely such as: reading, cry, write, listen to music, go shopping, call a friend, and drink. All the listed possible answers were based on earlier research, such as interviews, where people would use certain words to explain feelings, reasons and reactions to loneliness (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). Rubenstein and Shaver then divided the different answers into different categories and measured what percent associated certain words with loneliness, reasons for loneliness and reactions to loneliness. Feelings associated with loneliness were most often sadness, boredom, self-pity and longing to be with somebody special. They categorized the words into four categories indicating four factors when feeling lonely (ibid., p. 212):

***Table 3*. Rubenstein & Shaver's four factors list of feeling lonely**

Desperation:	Depression:	Impatient-Boredom:	Self-deprecation:
Desperation	Sad	Impatient	Unattractive
Panicked	Depressed	Bored	Down on Self
Helpless	Empty	Desire to be elsewhere	Stupid
Afraid	Isolated	Uneasy	Ashamed
Without Hope	Sorry For self	Angry	Insecure
Abandoned	Melancholy	Unable to concentrate	
Vulnerable	Alienated		
	Longing		

They did the same with reasons for being lonely and found that loneliness is most often attributed to: having nothing to do, feeling bored, Being alone, having no spouse or lover. They then divided the answers into five categories (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982, p. 213):

***Table 4*. Rubenstein & Shaver's list of reasons behind loneliness**

Being Unattached:	Alienation:	being Alone:	Forced Isolation:	Dislocation:
Having no Spouse	Feeling Different	Coming Home to an Empty House	Being Housebound	Being Far From Home
Having no Sexual Partner	Being Misunderstood	Being Alone	Being Hospitalized	In a New Job or School
Breaking up with Spouse	Not Being Needed		Having no transportation	Moving Too Often
	Having No close Friends			Traveling Often

Reaction when feeling lonely was most often reading, listening to music and calling a friend. They also divided reactions into four categories (ibid., p. 215):

***Table 5*. Rubenstein & Shaver's list over reactions towards loneliness**

Sad Passivity:	Active Solitude:	Spending Money:	Social Contact:
Cry	Study or work	Spending Money:	Call a Friend
Sleep	Write	Go Shopping	Visit Somebody
Sit and think	Listen to music		
Do nothing	Exercise		
Overeat	Walk		
Take Tranquilizers	Work on a hobby		
Drink or get "stoned"	Go to a movie		
	Read		
	Play		

THE MECHANISMS OF LONELINESS

The above mentioned research shows empirical data supporting the different views on loneliness. The question is, whether or not loneliness is a cognitive response, lack of intimacy or a more confused reaction due to being human in a modern society?

There seems to be a connection between childhood attachment and loneliness experienced later in life, at least to some degree. The question is whether or not all loneliness can be linked to experiences in childhood or if other factors are possible. It is a well known fact that attachment, especially in the infant years, are of great importance for later development (Bowlby, 1973; Gathercole, 1998; Schore, 2001; Spelke, 1998). However, does this explain all later experiences of loneliness or are there other factors in play? Baumeister and colleagues have shown that temporary changes in perception of social relations have an effect on people's cognitive skills (Baumeister et al., 2002; Baumeister et al., 2005). Not to mention Rubenstein and Shavers' research, that showed a number of reasons for feeling lonely such as moving to new place or breaking up with a lover (se section *Empirical Data*). Nevertheless, as Hojat points out, focus is on a type of loneliness due to a breakdown of child-parent relationship. Hojat is not rejecting other reasons for loneliness but is focusing on this specific area as a cause for loneliness (Hojat, 1989). It is, however, problematic that loneliness is defined as a lack of intimacy if this approach is only investigating certain areas of loneliness. This is because it is reducing loneliness to a specific mechanism on the basis of specific areas of research. This makes it questionably that it is offering a full understanding of the phenomenon and this makes its definitions questionable.

The cognitive approach is caught in the same reasoning as the social needs approach because it defines loneliness as a cognitive reaction to fictional or actual changes in present social relations and does not regard childhood experiences as possible reason for loneliness. As Peplau and Perlman argue, loneliness should be understood as a discrepancy between actual and desired levels of loneliness sustained by different cognitive processes (1982). The question is whether or not the cognitive approach, as well as the social needs approach, are defining different areas of experienced loneliness rather than a full understanding of the phenomenon? In a study by Enrico DiTommaso and Barry Spinner from 1997 was Robert. S. Weiss famously division of emotional- and social loneliness tested on college students. By using different scales such as the UCLA scale and the Social and Emotional scale for Adults (SELSA) different kinds of loneliness were investigated (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997). The SELSA scale asks into different parts of individuals' social life, for example: *I feel part of a group of friends* and *I have someone who fulfills my emotional needs* (ibid., p. 420). Through this study DiTommaso and Spinner found that different reasons for loneliness are given and that loneliness can be due to emotional- as well as social reasons. This is supported by Rubenstein and Shavers' findings, which show different reasons behind the experience of

loneliness (See Section *Empirical Data*). In another study by Simon Larose, Frédéric Guay and Michel Boivin two models were tested, a cognitive model and an affective model. Like DiTommaso and Spinner's study, they used a number of different scales to figure out whether a cognitive- or affective understanding of loneliness is more correct (Larose et al., 2002). They found evidence for both cognitive bias and insecure attachment when experiences of loneliness were present and were therefore not able to rule out any of the models.

Robert S. Weiss pointed out in 1989 that many of the definitions of loneliness were more likely mini-theories explaining the mechanical reasons behind loneliness rather than actual definitions explaining the experience itself (Weiss, 1989). Whether or not it is cognitive- or affective mechanism it appears that this mechanism is influenced by a number of factors such as different reasons for the experience of loneliness, feelings it generates and reactions it induces. This is illustrated by the existential approach that does not reduce loneliness to a specific mechanism, but rather investigates the feelings, responses and reactions it forms (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). It offers a window into how loneliness differs and remains the same between people and maybe also the way culture effects how loneliness is experienced? Moustakas distinction between an existential loneliness and a cultural loneliness brought up by living in a modern society (Moustakas, 1961). A handful of studies have demonstrated that higher levels of loneliness are associated with more Western cultural orientations which emphasize individualism, supporting Moustakas distinction (Rokach, 2001, 2004, 2007; Rokach & Bauer, 2004; Rokach, Orzeck, Moya and Exosito 2002).

THE CULTURAL ASPECT OF LONELINESS

In the section *Loneliness in a cultural context* it was questioned whether or not individualistic countries promote a state of loneliness that is not present in more collectivistic societies. The argument for this is that individualistic countries focus more on the individual and individual attributes. This is supposedly different from collectivistic countries that focus more on family, friends and belonging to a group, which means less lonely individuals.

In a study by Ami Rokach and Natasha Bauer they asked 194 Canadians and 209 Czechs from three different age groups, young adults ranging from 18-30 years, adults 31-59 years and seniors 60-85 years, to fill out 82 items on a questionnaire (2004). The questionnaire was combined by five factors, much like Rubenstein and Shavers' research (1982): emotional distress, social alienation and inadequacy, growth and discovery, interpersonal isolation and self-alienation (Rokach & Bauer, 2004, pp. 20-21). The study showed that the Canadians had a higher mean score than their Czech counterpart in all categories of experienced loneliness. This means that the Canadians in any age reported higher states of loneliness than the Czech participants. The young adults had especially

high scores in all categories, particularly in the categories social inadequacy, alienation and interpersonal isolation. This means that the young adults connected loneliness with a feeling of being a boring and uninteresting person for others to be with and a feeling of having no one to confide in (Rokach & Bauer, p. 20). This differed from the Canadian adults whom to a higher degree associated loneliness with emotional distress, meaning a sense of hurt (Ibid., p. 13; 20). Rokach and Bauer argue that the reason why young adults experience higher degrees of loneliness, is because this particular period in life is marked by a number of uncertainties and that specific demands from society, such as taking an education and getting a job causes a rise in anxiety. Also the reason why it is especially the Canadian young adults that experience loneliness should be found in a cultural difference between the Canadians and the Czechs. According to the researchers, Canadian society is more focused on individual attributes and through that promotes a focus on inner experiences which is not seen in more collectivistic cultures such as the Czech Republic. This focus on inner experiences then creates more focus on ones own feelings and an awareness of ones own experienced loneliness to a higher extent. Other studies by Rokach and various colleagues appears to support that individualistic countries, such as North American countries, have higher rates of experienced loneliness, than more collectivistic societies such as Eastern- and southern European countries (Rokach, 2007; Rokach et al., 2001; Rokach et al., 2002).

The question then is how individualism is linked to loneliness? A cross-cultural study by Ed Diener and Marissa Diner with approximately 13.000 college students from 31 nations, found that the relation between family satisfaction and life satisfaction was no stronger in collectivistic societies (Diener & Diener, 1995). A cross-cultural study with American college students and visiting Chinese students did not find higher levels of experienced loneliness among the supposedly more individualistic Americans students (DiTommaso, Brannen, & Burgess, 2005). A Cross-cultural study by Jenny D. J. Gierveld and Theo V. Tilburg found that Eastern European countries experience higher scores of loneliness than west European countries, but also more than the collectivistic country Japan (2010). It seems that directly connecting loneliness with individualism is problematic given the before mentioned studies. If loneliness is linked with individualism should countries that are regarded as individualistic not score higher on different loneliness scales than their counterpart in the Eastern world? What instead appears to be the case is that various cultural structures that can be connected with individualism influence the experience of loneliness and not individualism directly. This distinction is important to make because results offered, by Ami Rokach and colleagues, do not seem to make this distinction and do link loneliness directly with individualism.

A number of discoveries by Höllinger and Haller show the complexity in how loneliness and cultural structures and positions can interact. In a cross-cultural study with Australia, Austria, Britain, Germany, Hungary, Italy and USA, mentioned earlier, Höllinger and Haller asked who people would turn to in specific situations such as

needing help with garden work, wanting to borrow a large amount of money or problems with a sexual partner. From this questionnaire the participants had to choose from lists of persons, such as, father, mother, friends, neighbor, partner etc. (Höllinger & Haller, 1990). What they found was that the family was of importance in all countries, especially the mother, but more interestingly they found that distance to family meant a lot when asked whom to turn to in need of various help. This can explain why people in countries like America and Australia, that often is referred to as very individualistic societies, more often turn to friends than family when in need of help, simply because of greater distances to family. To argue that collectivistic societies experience less loneliness because they are more bound to family and specific groups would be to reduce all cultural differences to the degree of connection to various groups. It is important to acknowledge that cultural differences can account for a number of differences in how people experience loneliness and that cross-cultural studies often rely on a certain amount of interpretation when analyzing results. As pointed by the researcher Craig A. Anderson, measurement instruments, such as the UCLA Loneliness Scale, are often designed to capture common experiences of Americans and/or Europeans (Anderson, 1999). When these instruments are used on other nationalities than what they are designed to, there will always be amount of uncertainty whether or not terms and questions are understood in the same way across nationalities.

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

The three approaches have offered three different understandings of loneliness either guided by cognitive, affective or subjective mechanisms. Beside this a cultural outlook on loneliness has been investigated and how it is connected with loneliness. Nevertheless is the question still: what is loneliness?

Ami Rokach (2004) has pointed out: "*It is possible to be lonely without being alone, and alone without being lonely"* (p. 29). But then what is loneliness if it is not being alone? Is it a set of combined feelings that together creates the feeling of loneliness or something universal and specific? The data presented in this paper points in both directions. Not to mention the different approaches centered on understanding loneliness as a mechanism regardless of evidence pointing to something more comprehensive. Research does simply not support that loneliness is simply an affective, existential or cognitive mechanism, but rather a more comprehensive phenomenon.

As a phenomenon loneliness is only mentioned in passing references to other mental disorders in the DSM-IV-TR (Heinrich & Cullone, 2006). This is despite that it has been linked to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal behavior, not to mention poorer self-regulation behavior, for example in alcohol abuse and eating disorders. It has also been linked to physical health issues such as poorer

immune functioning, sleep deficiencies and cardiovascular disease (Heinrich & Cullone, 2006). Furthermore is it linked to increased risk of Alzheimer and a general cognitive decline (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2003). Is loneliness only a "side effect" that appears in connection with other mental disorders, such as depression or is it a valid state with its own set of causes, responses and reactions? When does loneliness go from an unpleasant, but passing experience, to a more permanent one with mental and physiological consequences? As mentioned previously, is there an agreement among researchers, that loneliness is a subjective emotion which makes it different from isolation, being alone or solitude, that are objective conditions. The question then is how is a subjective experience best measured and is it possible to create certain criteria that would tell when loneliness is a pathological state like depression or anxiety? A number of scales that measure a degree of loneliness do already exist, with the UCLA loneliness scale being the most common. There are, nevertheless, a number of concerns to how it is best measured, should it be measured like a unidimensional phenomenon that gives one number indicating how lonely an individual is, or should it be a multidimensional scale measuring different kinds of loneliness giving a broader picture of why an individual is at this present state of loneliness? This also raises the broader discussion of loneliness being a uni- or multidimensional experience and how it should be understood. Other concerns are how loneliness is connected with pathological similar disorders such as depression? One could imagine that states that first started out as loneliness could turn into depression and the other way around, which raises another question: could it be that individuals who are diagnosed with depression or similar disorders are actually experiencing loneliness rather than depression? The fact is that loneliness has been linked with a number of mental diagnoses and is associated with Avoidant Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder and Dependent Personality Style (Heinrich & Cullone, 2006). Another matter is concerning age and loneliness, could it be that loneliness is more prevalent at some age-groups which would account for more pathological states, but given the age, is passing? Research do indicate that youth is an age more prone to experience loneliness, but that the reasons behind indicate a passing state rather than a permanent one (Dykstra, 2009; Heinrich & Cullone, 2006; Rokach, 2007).

The different approaches point to different understandings of loneliness and to whether or not it is uni- or multidimensional phenomenon. The cognitive- and social needs approach may only investigate certain parts of loneliness, but still finds specific mechanisms that are connected to the experience of loneliness. Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) observed that when people are lonely, they most often report feeling sad, self-pity, depressed and longing to be with somebody special. Interview-based research by Moustakas (1961) also points to a specific experience different from others in the sense that loneliness can evoke specific feelings such as emptiness and a sense of aloneness in the world. Findings like these indicate a unique experience that everybody can relate to.

The question is if it is always the same unique experience or if it can vary? This is a difficult question to answer, because on the one hand it can be argued that the loneliness experienced by a widow longing for her late husband is different from the young man sitting alone on a Friday night longing for some social interaction, and on the other hand it can be argued that the core feeling that the widow and the young man are experiencing is ultimately the same. Cross-cultural research does indicate that both age- and cultural differences account for different kinds- and degrees of loneliness (Höllinger & Haller, 1990; Rokach, 2007; Rokach & Bauer, 2004; Scharf & Gierveld, 2008; Sundström et al., 2009). The question is how cultural differences influence how loneliness is experienced and if this can explain differences in supposed kinds of experienced loneliness?

The fact is that cross-cultural research suggests different cultural influences on loneliness, and that certain cultural structures could promote loneliness. The problem, nonetheless, is what cultural structures and how? Different research by Ami Rokach and various researchers indicate, that especially, the North Americans are lonelier than Eastern and Southern Europeans and that it is different kind of loneliness (see section *The cultural aspect on loneliness*). It is argued that the higher scores of loneliness among the North Americans are due to individualism in the North American culture. The research is based on questionnaires asking into different kinds of factors associated with loneliness and not directly possible links between loneliness and cultural items (Rokach, 2007; Rokach et al., 2001; Rokach et al., 2002; Rokach & Bauer, 2004). The argued link between individualism and loneliness is therefore based on the interpretation of general cultural differences seen between the researched countries and not directly illustrated by the research that only asks into kinds of loneliness. This does not mean that the argued link is wrong. It could be the case that observed differences between countries can account for the differences in loneliness scores. Other research, however, does not seem to support the supposed link between individualism and loneliness that is suggested by Rokach and therefore questions whether or not loneliness correlates with individualism (*see "The cultural aspect of loneliness" above*). It would therefore be interesting to see questionnaires that asked into loneliness combined with questionnaires asking into everyday life, such as do people go to church, if so how much and what do people due in their free time. This way one might figure out what specific cultural settings for example make Spanish individuals less lonely than Canadians. Could it be that Spanish individuals for example belong to different clubs, such as a soccer club or a knitting club that makes them more in contact with other people and therefore score lower on different loneliness scales than Canadians? By figuring out what specific cultural differences are present it might be possible to explain the different scores on different kinds of loneliness and explain why North Americans have especially high mean scores on emotional based loneliness. The fact is that this is not investigated and the question is whether or not other kinds of research approaches would tell more about the nature of loneliness and cross-cultural differences? Could it be that open-ended questionnaires or interviews would tell

more about why loneliness is more present in one country than another one and if specific cultural institutions prevent or create more loneliness? Maybe this could make the distinction between different kinds of experiences more clear and if loneliness has a core that is universal? Either way it is difficult to answer these questions on the basis of the present cross-cultural research

It, nevertheless, would appear that loneliness as a phenomenon has a core experience separate from others, but at the same time is combined by a set of reactions, causes and feelings. These reactions, causes and feelings are then guided by cultural structures and positions that point experienced loneliness towards specific individual understandings of the phenomenon. Loneliness can then be understood as a gestalt with a set of factors that separately tell little about loneliness, but together create an understanding of the phenomenon as exemplified in the following figure:

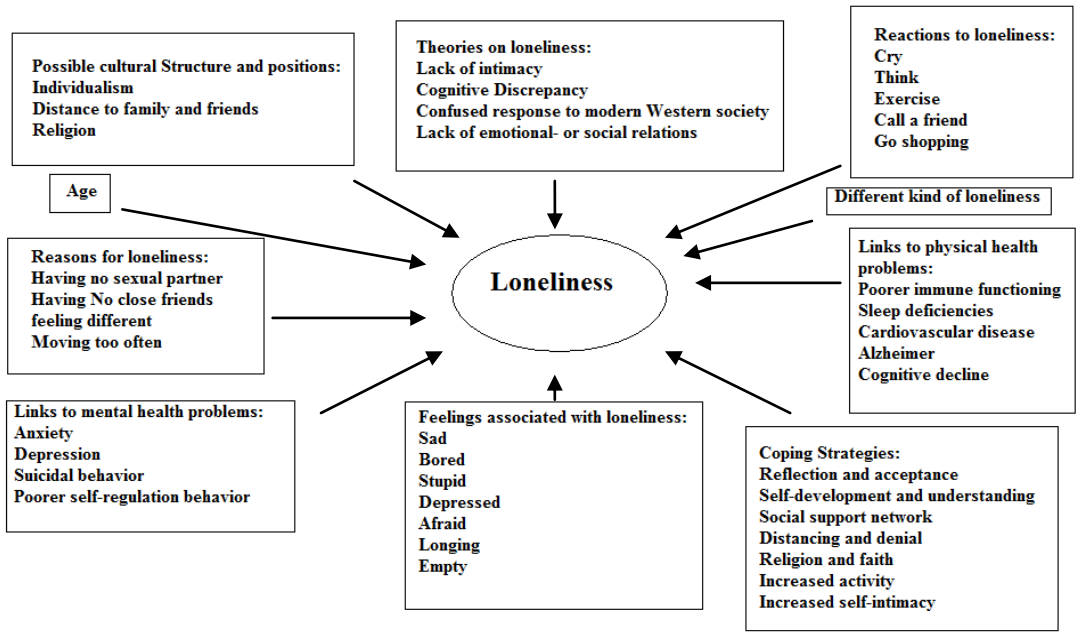

***Figure 1*.** Illustration of various aspects of experiencing loneliness

However, it is not entirely clear how these factors work together. For example it is unclear what and how cultural structures and positions influence loneliness or what degrees of loneliness would account as pathological. Another issue is how age is combined with loneliness, given the fact that certain age-groups seem more prone towards loneliness than others? This is not to mention the different definitions of loneliness offered by the different approaches that generate an even more blurred picture of what loneliness is. Because of these kinds of uncertainties the finale section of the paper argues how loneliness in the future could be investigated and understood in a cultural setting.

THE FUTURE OF LONELINESS

It is apparent that loneliness should be researched with a broad methodological and epistemological understanding that can embrace the many factors of loneliness. It is not desirable to get locked into one understanding that is not able to connect the different aspects of the loneliness experience. It is therefore found important to recognize the different features of loneliness research and try to connect the different approaches to loneliness. Another aspect is the connection between loneliness and cultural structures. It is not entirely clear how this is connected and research should focus on making this link more transparent. The reason for this is the notable link between how people experience loneliness and culture, but at the same time is it unclear what specific cultural items make up the differences in experienced loneliness.

The question then is how is loneliness best researched? How all these aspects of loneliness are researched in such a way that loneliness as a phenomenon is fully understood? First of all, if loneliness is a set of reactions, causes and feelings that together in various ways combine into a specific feeling, as is argued, then would an approach have to investigate it as such. It cannot be reduced to a mechanism or a scale measuring a degree of experienced loneliness, if loneliness is more than a number on a scale or a mechanism. Loneliness should instead be approached as the multidimensional phenomenon and researched as such. The question, is whether it is possible to create one measurement instrument that can embrace all the factors of loneliness? The different scales and questionnaires, either one- or multidimensional, all have their strengths and weaknesses, but also different tasks. Some of them are trying to measure a degree of experienced loneliness, while others are trying to measure different kinds of loneliness. Instead of disregarding all these different and valid measurement instruments focus will now turn to a neglected area of the loneliness research, the subjective experience.

The following is part of an essay written by a young boy, describing the feeling of loneliness.

> *Empty, that's how it feels to be lonely. A sense of being in a deep dark pit, with nothing in sight, and no way out. It feels like a dark rainy day, just there, just sitting there lonely. It's like a blue, a dark blue, almost black, but then it's also a light blue, washed out and dingy. It's a deep empty pit in your stomach* (Moustakas, 1961, p. 40).

So much research is focused on quantifying loneliness into a number or mechanism that fits neatly into a research paper. This is despite much agreement that loneliness is a subjective experience that will differ from person to person. The argument is that loneliness should be approached more as a subjective experience in the sense of research. More research should be a combination of interviews and open-ended

questionnaires, where the different reasons, causes and reactions could be investigated. Ask individuals when they feel lonely, why they feel lonely, how they would describe the feeling of loneliness, what words they would associate with loneliness, how they have come out of the loneliness etc. much like Rubenstein and Shaver have done. Another part is researching how loneliness is specifically linked to a given culture to see if certain cultural settings can be connected with loneliness. It could for example be interesting to see if some cultures promote certain behaviors that would account for a more broad experience of loneliness in a specific society. The idea is to figure out if specific behavior in some societies can be linked to more loneliness and if such behavior can be prevented so more people feel less lonely? By asking into people's day to day life in different cultural settings in combination with loneliness measurements, could it then be that specific behavior can be linked to less loneliness and other behavior to more loneliness connecting cultural behavior to loneliness? What is essentially sought is more research focused on cultural items linked to loneliness and more "free-based" measurement instruments that can figure out how all the different factors interplay with each other to create the feeling of loneliness. It is important to point out that loneliness is a comprehensive phenomenon and that it cannot simply be "figured out" by one simple questionnaire, one type of scale or one set of interviews. Loneliness is a complex state combined by a number of factors that still need to be investigated if a full understanding of the phenomenon is to be found. The argument here is that some of these factors can be positively researched through interviews, and open-ended questionnaires in combination with the already exiting scales and questionnaires.

Footnotes:

1. Translation: Danmarks Jurist- og Økonomiforbund

2. Translation from: Center for Ungdomsforskning

3. Translation from: Ensomme Gamles Værn

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