



Why are many young people lonely today?

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Data on loneliness among young people

- Office for National Statistics (2018)
- YouGov (2019)

The present study's aim

- A systematic qualitative research study
- Understand the causes and experiences of loneliness among young people (18-24years old)
- No research has studied the ONS' (2018) sample identified as most lonely

Research questions

- What are the root causes of loneliness among young British people (18-24 years old)?
- What are the experiences of loneliness among young British people in (18-24 years old)?
- How does social media use impact upon loneliness among British young people in London?
- How does loneliness impact upon mental health (e.g. depression and anxiety)?

Method: Participants



Participants

- 48 British born males and females
- 18-24 living in London
- Lower SES, working, renters, living in London's deprived areas
- Boroughs: Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Barking & Dagenham (English Indices of Deprivation, 2015)

The boroughs studied

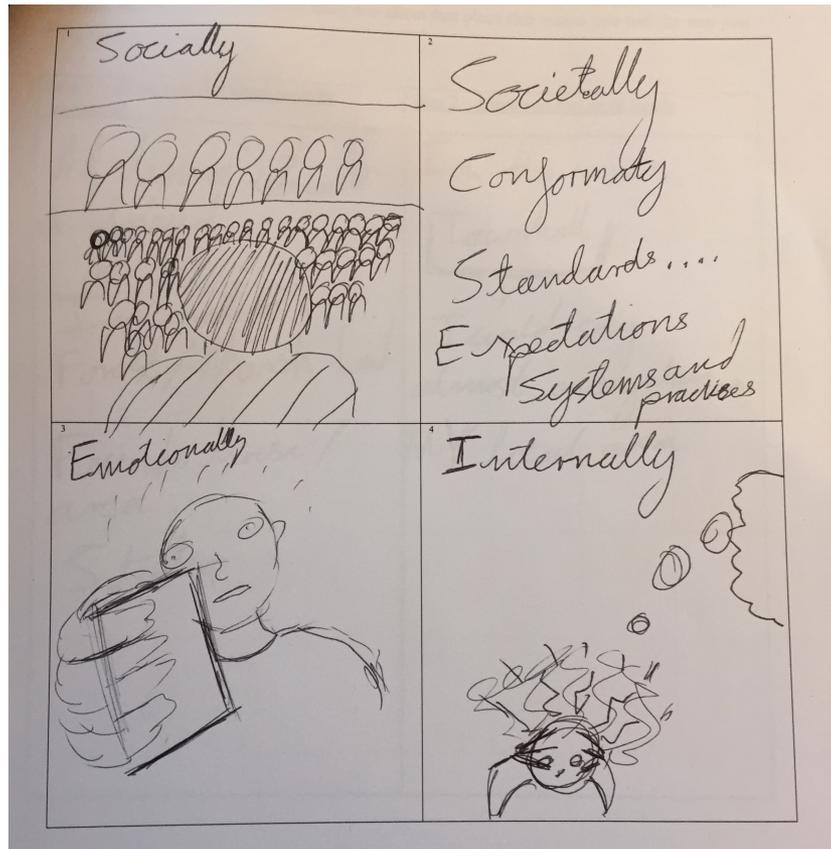


Procedure: Free association - Grid Elaboration Method



- Uncover people's thoughts and feelings about their experiences
- Provide a naturalistic method
- Termed the Grid Elaboration Method (GEM) (Joffe & Elsey, 2014)

Examples of the Grid Elaboration Method



Results

Social media

→ Social comparison



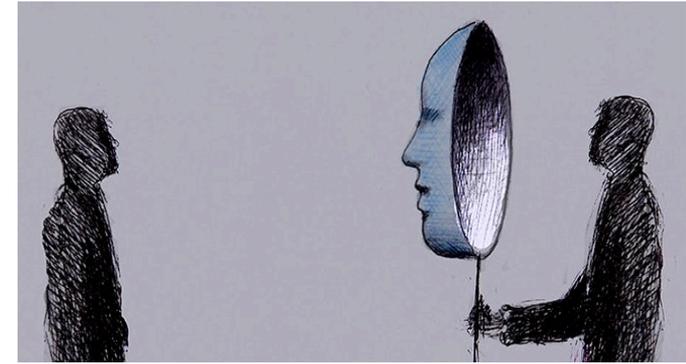
“It’s like it’s sad for my best friend to look at other women and you know think “she is better than me because she has x amount of followers, I have to remove my social”. No, you don’t. like that’s very sad. And she must feel lonely because of that.”

Female, 23, Hackney

Results

Social media

→ fake portrayal of reality



“When you go on Instagram and stuff like that, there can be a lot of like fake portrayals of reality and that can kind of distort the way you see yourself, your goal and things like that.”

Female, 20, Newham

Results

Social media

→ low self-worth



“I was like 'wow, these people are really supposed to be like my really good friends, they're supposed to be there for me, but they can't even ask me out for a drink when I'm like in a really bad place', so seeing it online of like, of that, just made me feel really unwanted, like really unwanted, maybe question if I was like too much for them.”

Female, 20, B&D

Results

Social media

→ Fear of exclusion or isolation



“it's the kind of fear that if you're not looking a certain way, you're not having your muscles a certain way, you'll be excluded, you'll be isolated and then end up lonely and I think that's what, um, the kind of feeling of fear and loneliness it stems from.”

Male, 18, Newham

Results

Pressure

→ Money and career

“Okay do I need to get any sort of graduate scheme ‘cause I need to get a good job. Y- it just felt like okay, everything was up to me. So if I mess up on one little thing, that’s it. I’m over.”

Male, 23, Tower Hamlets



Results

Pressure

→ To fit in



“I might feel um stressed under the sense that um... ‘Am I not wearing the latest shoes?’ Shoes are a big thing in today's society, ‘Are my shoes not clean’ and there's just loads of pressures and expectations in today's society that um if not, if not in line with, you can be what we feel to, seem as lonely.”

Male, 20, Newham

Results



Feeling disjointed

→ The feeling that others don't understand me

“Being misunderstood was the first thing that I thought I associate with loneliness. I think, um, sometimes you could have, someone could be, maybe surrounded, you could still have people around you, if they don't quite understand you, you could still feel quite lonely”

Male, 22, Newham

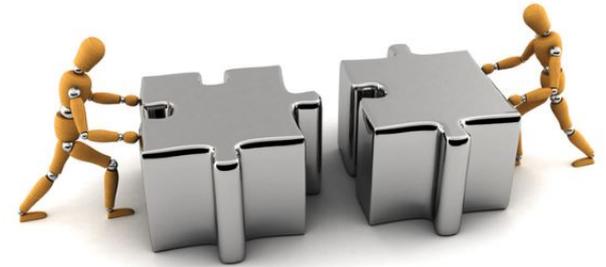
Results – Symbols associated with the experience of loneliness

- *“It’s like the waves, the tide and the ocean like you see the waves coming and they go out, it’s just a natural process of life, that feeling is gonna come and even when you’re in a relationship, you can feel lonely.”*
- *“Looking at the circle, the circle reminds you of a black hole as well, ‘cause in loneliness you may feel like you’re in a black hole, you’re by yourself, this can also represent a vacuum, um like the end of a Hoover, you know the feeling that sucks you in and it may be hard to get out at the time because you feel alone.”*

Symbols continued...

- *“You're the lion in the cage and you've got a crowd of people around you. You're fighting to get out, but everyone's like “oh! Entertainment in the cage.”, like they don't understand what your fight is. They just see it as, it's like two views of the same thing. The lion is trying to get out and in the lion's mind he is trapped.”*
- *“It's like being, like being a puzzle piece that doesn't fit, so everyone is a puzzle piece, you're just from a different package.”*

Discussion



- **Theoretical implications**
 - First systematic study
 - heavily symbolised

- **Practical implications**
 - Social media companies
 - Schools and mentoring

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