

## LONELINESS AS A SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE: PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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### INTRODUCTION

Loneliness is multidimensional in content, a phenomenon inherent in all social systems that has existential, social, and personality determinants. The complexity of the interpretation of loneliness is due to the binary, contradictory (individual and social) essence of man, the diversity of forms and reflection of loneliness. The divergence of views is that at present, phenomenology, social and psychological mechanisms of loneliness have not been studied enough. In the interpretation of the phenomenon of loneliness, two main trends are identified, due to the negative and positive orientation. This allows us to consider loneliness in an antinomic: destructive and creative sense. Loneliness is correlated with the concepts of “*unity*” and “*isolation*”, which have an etymological identity, but differ in semantics and context. Positions of voluntary or forced loneliness have a diametrical social orientation and are antinomic in content. Voluntary loneliness, bearing a positive orientation, correlates with the concept of “*solitude*” and means an individual’s choice of a life strategy due to subjective reasons of an existential and cognitive nature<sup>1</sup>.

Loneliness as a mental phenomenon can occur in all areas of human behavior and life. Loneliness is a mental state of a person, which is accompanied by painful emotional experiences and a depressive mood. Very lonely people have few social contacts, they are very unhappy, communication with other people is limited. Loneliness is not always psychological isolation. Symptoms of mental disorders usually accompany true subjective states of loneliness. They have the form of affects with a bright negative emotional coloring. All people have different affect reactions. Some people complain that they feel fear, anxiety, others complain of sadness, others talk about bitterness, anger.

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<sup>1</sup> Yuldasheva Makhliyo Bakhtiyorovna. Socio-psychological features of feeling loneliness among students. URL: <https://www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Full-Paper-SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL-FEATURES-OF-FEELING-LONELINESS-AMONG-STUDENTS.pdf>.

The ideal representation of relationships has a powerful effect on the state of loneliness. People who are in dire need of communication will feel lonely when contacting a limited number of people, for example, with one or two, while these people wanted to contact many. However, there are people who do not feel the need for communication, they may not feel that they are alone, even if they are completely isolated<sup>2</sup>.

Loneliness isn't a straight forward experience. Like a diamond, loneliness has many faces, aspects, nuances and it shows up in so many ways. From this perspective, loneliness is a profoundly humane experience<sup>3</sup>.

### **1. Theoretical approaches to understanding the category “loneliness” in the history of psychology**

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, Marangoni & Ickes, Peplau & Perlman, Weiss*). 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<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, we should note that many interesting psychological interpretations of the phenomenon of loneliness appeared throughout the 20th century. Some are theory based definitions, while others focus on empirical hypotheses as understandings of loneliness.

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).*

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<sup>2</sup> Yuldasheva Makhliyo B., Samindjonova Zulaykho I. Types of loneliness : concept and essence. URL: <https://zienjournals.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Understanding the experience of loneliness. URL: <https://www.calebadodson.com/writing/understanding-the-experience-of-loneliness>.

<sup>4</sup> Peplau L. A. & Perlman D. Theoretical approaches to loneliness. L. A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.). *Loneliness : a sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy*. New York : Wiley, 1982. P. 130.

The *psychodynamic approach* to loneliness was first described by **Fromm-Reichmann** (1959), who based loneliness on early childhood experiences arising from a separation between parent and child and a lack of physical contact and loving intimacy. Similarly, **John Bowlby** argued that the mechanisms of loneliness were a response pattern for survival of the species and that the bond between mother and infant is based on biological needs.

From the point of view of Neo-Freudianism, the state of loneliness is determined by the external conditions that drive pathological and extreme traits of an individual's character or impede the fulfilment of their needs. In concord with **Sullivan** and **Zilburg**, **Frieda Fromm-Reichmann** traces the roots of loneliness to personal experience gained in childhood, dubbing it disintegrating loneliness. Researchers leaning towards the psychodynamic approach are willing to regard loneliness as the result of early childhood impact on personal development. The representatives of this approach focus their attention on inner personal factors and inner psychological conflicts causing the state of loneliness.

**James Howard's** studies are of particular importance for research in the sphere of loneliness. He believes that human self-awareness is essential for understanding human loneliness. Awareness has a dual power. It can be outward-oriented and extrareflexive or inward-oriented and intrareflexive. The latter may make an individual vulnerable to the feeling of loneliness. Similarly to **J. Howard**, **E. Fromm** studied the causes of loneliness and established the fact that it is subjective self-awareness that led an individual to become aware of oneself as an individual entity different from other people. **E. Fromm** pointed out that existential isolation was a cause of serious anxiety<sup>5</sup>.

Within the *phenomenological theory*, it is **C. Rogers** that addressed the subject of loneliness. His analysis is based on the theory of the Self, where it is believed that society forces the individual to act in compliance with the socially underprivileged restricting the freedom of action. This results in a contradiction between the inner genuine Self of the individual and the manifestation of the Self in the individual's relations with other people. He underscored the feeling of emptiness and loneliness in life when the genuine Self was not manifested and one lived according to his/her social image displaying solely one's façade. He saw loneliness as alienation from oneself. The individual feels lonely when, having removed the protective barriers on

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<sup>5</sup> Alexandrova N.H. Concepts of researching the loneliness of elderly. URL: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc87/67baa7acf0ccb5f567650354bbd5f5a5b08d.pdf>.

the way to the Self, he/she thinks that contacts with others will be denied to him/her<sup>6</sup>.

According to *the evolutionary theory* of loneliness<sup>7</sup>, feelings of loneliness can trigger a hypervigilance toward social threat. This self-protective focus on threat causes cognitive biases that enforce feelings of loneliness. This self-reinforcing loop of loneliness can harm psychological wellbeing and has been associated with psychosocial functioning.

*Loneliness in existential psychology*. According to this theory, loneliness is innate and is regarded as a necessary aspect of life, whereby even in one's inmost moments in life one is essentially alone. According to this approach, loneliness is a system of protective mechanisms which protect one from dealing with major issues of life and constantly force one to seek joint activity with others. **K. Moustakas** himself singles out two types of loneliness. He calls one of them conceited loneliness and the other genuine loneliness (in this respect his views are close to those of some Eastern religions). He defines conceited loneliness as a set of defence mechanisms that prevent the individual from making a decision on substantial life issues by carrying out "activity for the sake of activity" jointly with other people. Genuine loneliness stems from the awareness of "the actual lonely existence". The main problem with this theory is its failure to distinguish between the objective character of being alone and the subjective feeling of being alone<sup>8</sup>.

In *Existential Psychotherapy*, **I. Yalom** (1980)<sup>9</sup> defines existential isolation (EI) as the "unbridgeable gulf between oneself and any other being... [and as] an isolation even more fundamental – a separation between the individual and the world".

**I. Yalom** (1980) wrote that the boundaries between types of isolation are semipermeable and that one type can lead to another. For example, if someone starts to feel like they have fewer social connections than they desire (i.e., they feel lonely), it could start to manifest in feelings that others do not see the world as they do (i.e., feeling EI). Likewise, if someone is in a situation in life in which they have few social contacts and is socially

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<sup>6</sup> Alexandrova N. H. Concepts of researching the loneliness of elderly. URL: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc87/67baa7acf0ccb5f567650354bbd5f5a5b08d.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Cacioppo J. T., and Cacioppo S. Loneliness in the modern age : an evolutionary theory of loneliness (ETL). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. 2018. Vol. 58. P. 127–197.

<sup>8</sup> Alexandrova N. H. Concepts of researching the loneliness of elderly. URL: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc87/67baa7acf0ccb5f567650354bbd5f5a5b08d.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Yalom I. Existential psychotherapy. URL: [https://e-edu.nbu.bg/pluginfile.php/720169/mod\\_resource/content/2/Existential\\_Psychotherapy.pdf](https://e-edu.nbu.bg/pluginfile.php/720169/mod_resource/content/2/Existential_Psychotherapy.pdf).

isolated, eventually they may begin to feel as if their view of the world is not shared by other people.

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<sup>10</sup>.

One of the few theories of loneliness that has been developed to explain loneliness is that of **Robert Weiss**. It is based on his work with a group of women who had joined a support group for single mothers called Parents without Partners. He found that these women were less lonely overall than before they had joined the support group, but they still were lonely because they lacked a romantic partner. Therefore, he theorized that individuals with specific relationship deficiencies would experience very different types of loneliness and that these could be categorized into two distinct groups: emotional and social loneliness. Social loneliness is considered negative feelings due to an unsatisfactory association with a desired group; emotional loneliness is considered negative feelings due to an unsatisfactory association with an intimate relationship<sup>11</sup>.

**Robert Weiss** identified six social needs that, if unmet, contribute to feelings of loneliness. Those needs are attachment, social integration, nurturance, reassurance of worth, sense of reliable alliance, and guidance in stressful situations. As would be predicted by attachment theory, Weiss maintained that friendships complement but do not substitute for a close, intimate relationship with a partner in staving off loneliness.

Another theoretical perspective, the *behavioral approach*, holds that loneliness is characterized by personality traits that are associated with, and possibly contribute to, harmful patterns of interpersonal interaction. For instance, loneliness is correlated with social anxiety, social inhibition (shyness), sadness, hostility, distrust, and low self-esteem, characteristics that hamper one's ability to interact in skillful and rewarding ways. Indeed, lonely individuals have been shown to have difficulty forming and maintaining meaningful relationships. They are also less likely to share information about themselves with their peers, and that helps to explain why they report a lack of intimacy with close friends<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Sonderby Lars Christian. Loneliness: an integrative approach. URL: [https://www.jiss.org/documents/volume\\_3/issue\\_1/JISS%202013%203%20\(1\)%201-29%20Loneliness.pdf](https://www.jiss.org/documents/volume_3/issue_1/JISS%202013%203%20(1)%201-29%20Loneliness.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Tassin Joy M. Integrating self-concept theory into a model of loneliness. *Honors Projects*. 1999. № 56. [https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/psych\\_honproj/56](https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/psych_honproj/56).

<sup>12</sup> Hawkey L. C. Loneliness. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2018. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/science/loneliness>.

According to the *cognitive discrepancy model* (CDM), which has arguably been the most influential model within loneliness research, loneliness arises because there is a discrepancy between actual and desired relationships. However, it is clear that research within the cognitive psychological domain has revealed that loneliness is more complex than this, arising from largely dysfunctional beliefs about the world, about others, and about the self, which serve to reinforce loneliness and isolation from others by negatively impacting existing and potential relationships<sup>13</sup>.

According to *the cognitive discrepancy model* (CDM), those who are discontent with their interpersonal interactions should experience loneliness. Yet one can easily imagine being in such a state while not manifesting feelings of loneliness but mere dissatisfaction. Moreover, one may be discontent with one aspect of the relationship (e.g., number of friends, social activities), while profoundly content regarding other aspects, (e.g., levels of intimacy, mutual understanding). Such a person would not necessarily experience loneliness. The CDM is primarily a cognitive model designating cognitive appraisals. Thus, it only mildly addresses the affective aspects of the phenomenon<sup>14</sup>.

*Neuroscientists* identify loneliness as a state of hypervigilance whose origins lie among our primate ancestors and in our own hunter-gatherer past. Much of the research in this field was led by **John Cacioppo**, at the *Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience*, at the University of Chicago. **Cacioppo**, who died in 2018, was known as *Dr. Loneliness*. In the new book “*Together: the healing power of human connection in a sometimes lonely world*” (Harper Wave), **Murthy** explains how Cacioppo’s evolutionary theory of loneliness has been tested by anthropologists at the University of Oxford, who have traced its origins back fifty-two million years, to the very first primates. Primates need to belong to an intimate social group, a family or a band, in order to survive; this is especially true for humans (humans you don’t know might very well kill you, which is a problem not shared by most other primates). Separated from the group – either finding yourself alone or finding yourself among a group of people who do not know and understand you – triggers a fight-or-flight response. **Cacioppo** argued that your body understands being alone, or being with strangers, as an emergency. “*Over millennia, this hypervigilance in response to isolation became embedded in*

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<sup>13</sup> Dolezal Luna, McHugh Power Joanna E., Kee Frank, Lawlor Brian A. Conceptualizing loneliness in health research: philosophical and psychological ways forward. URL: [https://www.academia.edu/38155503/Conceptualizing\\_Loneliness\\_in\\_Health\\_Research\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/38155503/Conceptualizing_Loneliness_in_Health_Research_pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Stein Jacob Y. The social construction of loneliness: an integrative conceptualization. URL: [https://www.academia.edu/38972744/The\\_Social\\_Construction\\_of\\_Loneliness\\_An\\_Integrative\\_Conceptualization](https://www.academia.edu/38972744/The_Social_Construction_of_Loneliness_An_Integrative_Conceptualization).

our nervous system to produce the anxiety we associate with loneliness”, **Murthy** writes. We breathe fast, our heart races, our blood pressure rises, we don’t sleep. We act fearful, defensive, and selfinvolved, all of which drive away people who might actually want to help, and tend to stop lonely people from doing what would benefit them most: reaching out to others<sup>15</sup>.

In “*A biography of loneliness: the history of an emotion*” (Oxford), the British historian **Fay Bound Alberti** defines loneliness as “*a conscious, cognitive feeling of estrangement or social separation from meaningful others*”, and she objects to the idea that it’s universal, transhistorical, and the source of all that ails us. She argues that the condition really didn’t exist before the nineteenth century, at least not in a chronic form. It’s not that people – widows and widowers, in particular, and the very poor, the sick, and the outcast – weren’t lonely; it’s that, since it wasn’t possible to survive without living among other people, and without being bonded to other people, by ties of affection and loyalty and obligation, loneliness was a passing experience. Monarchs probably were lonely, chronically... The word “loneliness” very seldom appears in English before about 1800. Robinson Crusoe was alone, but never lonely. Modern loneliness, in **Alberti’s** view, is the child of capitalism and secularism<sup>16</sup>.

**Brewer** and **Gardner’s** self-concept theory is a model for understanding the different ways in which individuals define their sense of self within a social context. This theory distinguishes among the intrapersonal self, the interpersonal self, and the collective self and their roles in determining self-perception. The intrapersonal self can be described as the “*differentiated, individuated selfconcept most characteristic of the studies of self in Western psychology*”<sup>17</sup>. For example, one expression of intrapersonal self-concept is the identification of personal traits. The labeling of oneself as being more studious relative to their peers would be an example of distinguishing the self. The interpersonal self is determined from intimate connections with significant others. For instance, these connections may include close family members, romantic partners, and intimate friends. Saying that someone is in a happy marriage describes an interpersonal relationship. The collective self is described as individuals’ categorization of themselves within a larger social framework. For example, describing oneself as a college student would result in a framework of college student life and the identities that would be associated. In general, this theory predicts that if one of these three

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<sup>15</sup> Loneliness in a connected world. *Background Readings*. 2020. June 24. P. 9. URL: <https://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/documents/RT1.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Brewer Marilyn B. & Gardner Wendi. Who is this “We”? Levels of collective identity and selfrepresentations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 1996. № 71 (1). P. 84.

levels is made salient, an individual will focus on traits that are associated with that level of self-concept.

**Brewer** and **Gardner**<sup>18</sup> used primes that focused on the three different levels of self. The purpose was to make salient the separate levels of self for different individuals. In this case, a prime referred to pronouns used as stimuli designed to elicit a manipulation of salience of a particular social level. The participants do not focus on a personal example of that type of relationship, but rather they focus on the rules of interaction within those relationships. For their primes **Brewer** and **Gardner** used relatively short stories that described social relationships. Primes varied in that different experimental groups had stories that differed in the type of pronoun used. One group received stories with the pronouns “we” or “us”, while another group read “they” or “them”. In so doing, associated sets of traits would also vary in relation to which type of relationship was primed. For example, when they wanted to prime the interpersonal level of self they provided the participants with short stories focusing on an intimate set of friends. Ideally, the participants would then be thinking about their own personal characteristics within an intimate friend setting. They used this method to examine how priming of different social groups alters self-descriptions. They found that participants reported greater percentages of characteristics corresponding to the level of self with which they were primed. For example, participants that received a collective prime reported more collective type characteristics than those participants that received either an interpersonal or an intrapersonal prime. Although this model was used for distinguishing self-perceptions, they argue that the model can be used to describe other aspects of self-concept cognitive perceptions (e.g. they specified loneliness), as well. Since loneliness is the result of dissatisfaction with a perception of social relationships, and it varies with the type of social relationship being considered, it was hypothesized that altering which level of self a person is focusing on would also alter their reports of how they are experiencing loneliness<sup>19</sup>.

Much research has been devoted to the search for particular person characteristics which predispose people to loneliness, but to little avail. Instead, the contemporary conclusion is that loneliness can happen to anyone given the necessary inducing conditions (*Cacioppo*). This understanding is highly relevant to considerations of treatment. It is now well established that

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<sup>18</sup> Brewer Marilynn B. & Gardner Wendi. Who is this “We”? Levels of collective identity and self-representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 1996. № 71 (1).

<sup>19</sup> Tassin Joy M. Integrating self-concept theory into a model of loneliness. *Honors Projects*. 1999. № 56. [https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/psych\\_honproj/56](https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/psych_honproj/56).



the treatment of loneliness by common sense methods (e.g. social skills training, and provisions for social support and social contact), is ineffective. Therefore, instead of treating the condition per se, treatment should target the provision of resources which are causing the condition to become manifest<sup>20</sup>.

The contemporary notion of loneliness stems from cultural and economic transformations that have taken place in the modern West. Industrialisation, the growth of the consumer economy, the declining influence of religion and the popularity of evolutionary biology all served to emphasise that the individual was what mattered – not traditional, paternalistic visions of a society in which everyone had a place.

Here are two relatively recent definitions of loneliness in widely cited psychological research papers:

1) Loneliness is “the unpleasant experience that occurs when there is a subjective discrepancy between desired and perceived availability and quality of social interactions”<sup>21</sup>.

2) Loneliness is “a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one’s social needs are not being met by the quantity or especially the quality of one’s social relationships”<sup>22</sup>.

Variants of these two definitions are popular in the academic and popular literature on loneliness (consider, e.g., the definition of loneliness in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as the “distressing experience that occurs when a person’s social relationships are perceived by that person to be less in quantity, and especially in quality, than desired”)<sup>23</sup>.

**D. Perlman** and **L. Peplau** classified the attempts at studying loneliness, dividing them into eight groups: psychodynamic, phenomenological, existential-humanistic, sociological, interactionist, cognitive, intimate and theoretical and systemic ones (**Peplau, Perlman**, 1998). The behaviourist approach explains loneliness as a response to a lack, an absence of social protection and support, cognitive theories underscore the perception of disparity between the social contacts that are sought for and achieved, and the psychodynamic theory addresses (**Weiss**, 1973) and is focused on

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<sup>20</sup> Cummins Robert A. Loneliness through the lens of psychology, neurology and philosophy. URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42413-020-00072-9>.

<sup>21</sup> Ma R., Mann F., Wang J.-L., Lloyd-Evans B., Terhune J., Al-Shihabi A., Johnson S. The effectiveness of interventions for reducing subjective and objective social isolation among people with mental health problems: a systematic review. *Soc. Psychiatry Psychiatr. Epidemiol.* 2020. № 55. P. 839.

<sup>22</sup> Hawkey L. C., Cacioppo J. T. Loneliness matters : a theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Ann. Behav. Med.* 2010. № 40. P. 218–227.

<sup>23</sup> Hawkey L. C. Loneliness. *Encyclopedia Britannica.* 2018. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/science/loneliness>.

unsatisfied needs (*Bar-Tur, Prager*, 1996). The social psychology of loneliness includes *K. Bowman, J. Reisman* and *F. Slater* among others (*Fromm-Reichman*, 1959).

*K. Bowman* sets forth the hypothesis of the three social forces leading to increased loneliness in the modern society: (1) reduced contact with the primary group; (2) increased family mobility; (3) increased social mobility. Individuals oriented towards the others not only wish to be liked, but have to continuously adapt to the circumstances and control their interpersonal environment, to determine and structure their course of behaviour<sup>24</sup>.

*Kim*<sup>25</sup> summarized the opinions of scholars about loneliness, and found that they can find the following common features.

First, loneliness occurs when an individual lacks social relations. In other words, loneliness occurs when there is a discrepancy between the actual social relationship of an individual and the social relationship that the individual needs or desires.

Second, because loneliness is a subjective experience different from objective social isolation, humans can be alone and lonely, and lonely even in the crowd.

Third, loneliness is an unpleasant experience. Loneliness is present when the achievement level is lower than the required level, because the difference between the demand level and the actual level of social relations is solitary, whether loneliness is temporary or long term.

*Derlega* and *Margulis*<sup>26</sup> define three stages in the development of the concept of loneliness. The first stage underscores the importance of the concept. The second stage studies the concept and attempt to study the similarities and differences between this concept and other phenomena. The theory of loneliness emerges at the third stage.

Loneliness could also be regarded as a complex phenomenon which may be defined from the point of view of the bio-psycho-social model. Some people may be biologically predisposed to feel lonely, which is probably related to inherited personal traits, while others may experience loneliness related to other causes of psychological nature, such as grief or depression. From the social point of view, an individual may experience loneliness as a result of social isolation. The advantage of explaining loneliness in this way

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<sup>24</sup> Alexandrova N. H. Concepts of researching the loneliness of elderly. URL: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc87/67baa7acf0ccb5f567650354bbd5f5a5b08d.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Kim O. S. Loneliness : concept analysis. *Nursing Science*. 1997. № 9 (2). P. 29–38.

<sup>26</sup> Derlega V. J. Why loneliness occurs : the interrelationship of social-psychological and privacy concepts. V. J. Derlega, S. T. Margulis. *A Wiley-Interscience Publication*. John Wiley & Sons, 1982. P. 152–166.

is that the factors causing the experience of loneliness are clearly defined, which helps to choose optimal therapeutic interventions<sup>27</sup>.

## **2. Socio-psychological characteristics of loneliness as a subjective experience**

The experience of loneliness is highly subjective; an individual can be alone without feeling lonely and can feel lonely even when with other people. Psychologists generally consider loneliness to be a stable trait, meaning that individuals have different set-points for feeling loneliness, and they fluctuate around these set-points depending on the circumstances in their lives. Individuals' levels of loneliness typically remain more or less constant during adulthood until 75 to 80 years of age, when they increase somewhat. Prolonged loneliness is associated with depression, poor social support, neuroticism, and introversion. Studies have shown that loneliness puts people at risk for physical disease and that it may contribute to a shortened life span<sup>28</sup>.

Psychologists distinguish between loneliness as an “objective” and a “subjective” condition (e.g.). Some people are objectively socially isolated: they have little social contact with others. Some people are subjectively lonely: they report feeling alone, in the sense of not having as much social contact as they would want. As is now well-known, the two kinds are not reliably correlated. Not every hermit is lonely but some socialites are.

The subjective and evaluative characteristics of loneliness make it distinct from more objective concepts related to an individual's social relations such as social isolation. This is also supported by research that shows how similar social arrangements can lead to different perceptions of loneliness in different people, indicating that loneliness seems to be highly dependent on the individual interpretation and perception of one's social life<sup>29</sup>.

Distinguishing between objective and subjective forms of loneliness thus tracks an intuitively obvious point. But it is important to think carefully about the exact difference that is being tracked. Begin with the consideration that on the standard view, thinking about loneliness always requires thinking about a person's subjective life – their experience, the felt quality of their

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<sup>27</sup> Alexandrova N. H. Concepts of researching the loneliness of elderly. URL: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc87/67baa7acf0ccb5f567650354bbd5f5a5b08d.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Hawkey L. C. Loneliness. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2018. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/science/loneliness>.

<sup>29</sup> Kerz Johannes D. More meaning, less loneliness? A scoping literature review on the relation between meaning in life and loneliness. MSc positive clinical psychology and technology faculty of behavioral, management and social sciences. 26.02.2023. P. 4.

existence (this consideration is explicitly acknowledged in *Hawley* and *Cacioppo*). If so, it is not promising to distinguish between a purely objective kind of loneliness that is measurable in terms of the number and quality of a person's social contacts and a subjective kind that tracks the sufferer's experience. A better way to draw the distinction is to take it that the subjective dimension establishes a necessary condition of loneliness: a person can be lonely only if she feels lonely. This necessary condition does not require that the sufferer be cognitively aware of her loneliness: her experience need not give rise to the knowledge that she is lonely. But it does rule out the possibility that the sufferer is (objectively) lonely without experiencing herself as lonely. On this picture, a person cannot be lonely without this fact being reflected in her mental life. By contrast, the absence of social connection is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of loneliness: loneliness begins and ends with experience<sup>30</sup>.

*Ami Rokach* has pointed out: "It is possible to be lonely without being alone, and alone without being lonely"<sup>31</sup>. 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?

Loneliness is as tied to the quality of one's relationships as it is to the number of connections one has. And it doesn't only stem from heartache or isolation. A lack of authenticity in relationships can result in feelings of loneliness. For some, not having a coveted animal companion, or the absence of a quiet presence in the home (even if one has plenty of social contacts in the wider world), can trigger loneliness.

A person may feel lonely, but they might not necessarily be alone. As *Hawley* and *Cacioppo* explain, "loneliness is synonymous with perceived social isolation, but not objective social isolation. People can live relatively solitary lives and not feel lonely, and conversely, they can live ostensibly rich social lives and feel lonely nevertheless"<sup>32</sup>.

Social isolation lacks engagement and contact with others, but loneliness is a feeling that one's social life is not what it should be. Given evidence showing that loneliness and social isolation are linked to increased rates of mortality, potential remedies are important to find. Based on a number of reasons elaborated upon below, the researchers propose that two specific

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<sup>30</sup> Seemann Axel. The psychological structure of loneliness. URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/3/1061>.

<sup>31</sup> Rokach A. Loneliness then and now : reflections on social and emotional alienation in everyday life. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues*. 2004, № 23 (1). P. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Hawley L. C., Cacioppo J. T. Loneliness matters : a theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Ann. Behav. Med.* 2010. № 40. P. 218.

qualities of social interaction, affection, and gratitude, are cost-effective and helpful solutions to this problem<sup>33</sup>.

Loneliness is a condition of human life, an experience to be a person that allows a person to support, expand and deepen their humanity. It is obvious that it is necessary to recognize each person one's loneliness, to intensively realize that, after all, to every fiber of his being, man is alone – horribly, absolutely alone. An effort to overcome or avoid an existential experience loneliness can only lead to self-alienation. When a person is distant from the fundamental truth of her life, loneliness individual existence, it is fenced off from separate signifiers moments of own self-growth<sup>34</sup>.

**Robert Weiss**<sup>35</sup> affirms that loneliness is a natural phenomenon, a (personal) feeling that may arise at certain moments in life and affect anyone, regardless of gender, age or other socio-demographic characteristics. He also explains that loneliness is often seen as rooted in weakness or self-pity, as something that – supposedly – the individual should be able to eliminate, since it is not a physical ailment. Furthermore, he makes the distinction between emotional loneliness and social loneliness. However, evolutionary time and evolutionary forces operate at such a different scale of organization from what we experience in everyday life that personal experience is not sufficient to understand the role of loneliness in human existence.

Other authors have defined loneliness from different perspectives: as a negative psychological response to a discrepancy between the social relationships one desires (expectations) and the relationships one actually has (objective, real ones); as an individual feeling characterized by an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of quality in certain social relationships that can occur either because one has fewer social contacts than one wishes to have, or because the level of intimacy hoped for in relationships is not there; as the subjective component of the objective measure of social isolation, in other words, loneliness would be the inverse of a situation of social support; as a social pain, something comparable to physical pain, because if physical pain arises to protect us from physical dangers, loneliness would manifest

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<sup>33</sup> Sholey Elizabeth. Social isolation and loneliness and the experience of gratitude and affection. 2019. URL: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1261&context=utpp>.

<sup>34</sup> Mijuskovic Ben Lazare. Loneliness in philosophy, psychology, and literature. iUniverse, Inc. Bloomington, 2013. P. 151. URL: <https://simplicityargument.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/loneliness-by-benjamin-mijuskovic.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Weiss R. S. The experience of emotional and social isolation. *Loneliness*. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press; 1973. 236 p.

itself as a way to protect us from the danger of remaining isolated (related to the importance of social connections) etc.<sup>36</sup>.

Loneliness can be defined as a feeling of uneasiness or discomfort from either being alone or perceiving oneself to be alone. It is associated with perceived social isolation, rather than objective isolation.

Symptoms of loneliness range from psychological to physical. Adjectives such as boredom, self-pity, sadness, empty, and ashamed have been used to describe the feeling of loneliness.

Loneliness influences, either directly or through other mechanisms, biological markers of health, resulting in a dysregulation of the neuroendocrine system and systemic inflammation, which increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and brain damage. Furthermore, some of the health conditions associated with loneliness can, in turn, cause other health problems. This includes depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disease, which can in turn influence neuroendocrinal dysregulation and cognitive function<sup>37</sup>.

People describe thoughts and feelings of loneliness with words like anxiety, fear, shame and helplessness. These powerful emotions can influence how we act. They can create a downward spiral where loneliness causes someone to withdraw further from family and friends and so become lonelier. Loneliness can affect how we anticipate and interpret our social experiences. This can mean we are more apprehensive or fearful of social situations or pick up on social rejection cues too readily. Another way that loneliness can worsen is if we see the cause of our loneliness as something that will not change: that it is just part of who we are or of becoming older. Events in earlier life, personality types and styles of coping all affect our risk of loneliness in later life<sup>38</sup>.

Psychological impairment reactions experienced by people with loneliness consist of physiological and behavioral pain, self-deprecation, voluntary social separation and fixation. Physiological and behavioral distress is accompanied by physical complaints such as headache, nausea, or abdominal pain, or behavioral stress such as crying or sleeping usually. Self-deprecation refers to a generalized negative attitude toward oneself. Voluntary social separation reflects the lack of intimacy with others whom

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<sup>36</sup> Yanguas Javier, Pinazo-Henandis Sacramento, Tarazona-Santabalbina Francisco José. The complexity of loneliness. URL: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6179015>.

<sup>37</sup> Baarck Julia, Kovacic Matija. The relationship between loneliness and health. 2022. *EU Science Hub*. URL: <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu>.

<sup>38</sup> The Psychology of loneliness. Why it matters and what we can do. P. 7. URL: [https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Psychology\\_of\\_Loneliness\\_FINAL\\_REPORT.pdf](https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Psychology_of_Loneliness_FINAL_REPORT.pdf).

they meet. It has two elements. Forbidden and active separation. Forbidden reflects the need to be indifferent to “gentle attitudes”, and aggressive separation refers to more aggressive separation or “refusing to open the mind”<sup>39</sup>.

The feeling of loneliness or the fear of being alone lead to feelings of meaninglessness and emptiness, since loneliness is not only about the feeling of being alone, rather the individual can also feel lonely in a social environment. This situation is mostly related to the lack of meaning in life and the sad feeling brought about by loneliness is due to the individuals not being in a social environment that will satisfy them<sup>40</sup>.

Loneliness is usually considered to be the psychological manifestation of social isolation, a reflection of the dissatisfaction the individual experiences regarding the frequency and closeness of his or her social contacts or the discrepancy between the relationships they have and the relationships they would like to have. Loneliness is linked to greater access to negative social information, with solitary people being more sensitive to pained facial expressions. A study involving functional magnetic resonance also indicated that loneliness is associated with greater activation of the visual cortex in response to negative social images. Loneliness was also associated with higher levels of cortisol and impaired immune activity linked to the genesis of frailty. In this way, there is an increase in vascular resistance, sleep that is more fragmented, and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality<sup>41</sup>.

Cognitive processes determine the way people evaluate the situation they are in. *Perlman* and *Peplau* took this as their starting point, in combination with attributional facets of the perceived personal control over the situation in which people are involved, when developing their definition of loneliness: “*Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relationships is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively*”. This definition treats loneliness as a unidimensional concept that varies primarily in its experienced intensity.

Loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships. This includes situations in which the number of existing relationships is

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<sup>39</sup> Jung Yun-kung, Lee Jeong-hwa. A study on concept analysis of loneliness. URL: <http://www.koreascience.or.kr/article/JAKO201810866003919.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Özdoğan Ahmet Çağlar. Subjective well-being and social-emotional loneliness of university students : The mediating effect of the meaning of life. URL: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1289002.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Yanguas Javier, Pinazo-Henandis Sacramento, Tarazona-Santabalbina Francisco José. The complexity of loneliness. URL: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6179015>.

smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realized. Thus loneliness is seen to involve the manner in which the person perceives, experiences, and evaluates his or her isolation and lack of communication with other people<sup>42</sup>.

One is the objective state of being alone or in solitude, which may well be a desired and non-lonely situation, akin to an outcome of satisfied privacy. The other is the subjective state of feeling lonely, which may occur in personal isolation, or may be felt among others, even among countless others, as perhaps in a modern city. Aloneness, solitude and loneliness are clearly not the same. There are, however, two main points to make in this connection. First, research indicates situational aloneness and subjective self-rated loneliness frequently (though not necessarily) occurring together, suggesting a need for linked analysis, which will be advanced below in discussion of solitaries. In most regression-type studies of loneliness, the most significant explanatory variable is living alone, with attendant variables such as widowhood and bereavement. The fact that living alone has undergone such extraordinary growth over the past half century in advanced economies therefore raises ancillary questions about loneliness, notably in Western cultures. (This of course is not to prioritise loneliness of solitaries, nor to suggest that they are necessarily lonely. Acute loneliness is suffered by many who do not live alone). Second, the modern “problem” of loneliness is one that has, whether correctly or otherwise, often come to be associated with or even shaped by the growing incidence of living alone<sup>43</sup>.

Since loneliness is intrinsically a personal and subjective feeling, its measurement is not straightforward. It can be measured directly, by asking people about their subjective feelings of loneliness usually over a specified period of time (e.g. the past week or two weeks). Alternatively, indirect indicators, which explore specific determinants of loneliness, may be preferred. Surveys for indirect indicators do not employ the words “lonely” or “loneliness” but instead ask about feelings or facts related to loneliness.

Several scales of loneliness based on indirect indicators have been developed in recent decades, with the best known being the *UCLA Loneliness Scale* (Russell, 1996) and the *De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale* (De Jong Gierveld and Kamphuis, 1985). The *UCLA Loneliness Scale* is based on 20 questions on aspects such as the frequency of feeling a lack of companionship, or whether respondents feel left out or isolated from others.

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<sup>42</sup> De Jong-Gierveld J. A review of loneliness : concepts and definitions, determinants and consequences. *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology*. 1998. № 8. P. 73–74.

<sup>43</sup> Peplau L. A. & Perlman D. Theoretical approaches to loneliness. L. A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.). *Loneliness : a sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy*. New York : Wiley, 1982. P. 123–134.



The *De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale* is composed of 11 questions linked to feelings such as whether respondents miss having close friends or people around them. This scale also covers questions aimed at measuring more objective circumstances, such as whether respondents have people they can trust completely or rely on in case of hardship. A specific feature of this scale is that it encompasses the concepts of emotional and social loneliness (as defined by *Weiss*, 1973) which are measured separately by two distinct subscales<sup>44</sup>.

In many countries, such as North America and Japan, and across age groups, loneliness is a foremost cause of suicide, also sharing its contexts and seasonality. Loneliness has biochemical effects, decreasing immune response, increasing blood pressure, conducing to atherosclerosis, accelerating ageing processes. American loneliness has been said to be “*one of the nation’s most serious public health challenges*”. While it is often hard to analyse cause and effect, loneliness precedes and results from illness. It links to widowhood, divorce, low education and pay, unhappiness and limited resources. It even connects to domestic violence. There appears to be clustering and familial transmission, inviting input from attachment and other psychological theory. In a downward spiral, loneliness often induces diminishing ability to create relationships<sup>45</sup>.

Loneliness is now diagnosed as an “epidemic”, or according to the *British Office for National Statistics* a “loneliness time bomb”. Doctors report patients asking: “*Can you give me a cure for loneliness?*» They humanely discuss in the British journal *The Lancet* the role of antidepressants, and patients “for whom time now stands empty as they wait in homes full of silence...It brings home to me the truth of this epidemic – an epidemic of loneliness...I don’t know how to solve this, although I wish I could”. Its extent is widely appreciated. North American and British studies show that 30–50 per cent of those surveyed feel lonely. Around 10–25 per cent report severe loneliness. The statistics may be worsening. The *UK Mental Health Foundation* (2010) found that only 22 per cent of people surveyed never felt lonely, and 42 per cent have felt depressed through loneliness. Loneliness especially afflicts very young adults and the elderly, much like suicide. It is evident or even growing among children. A long line of studies has shown that loneliness is “*a well-known calamity of old age*”.

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<sup>44</sup> Loneliness and social isolation : an unequally shared burden in Europe. April 2021. URL: <https://docs.iza.org/dp14245.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Snell K. D. M. Agendas for the historical study of loneliness and lone living. URL: <https://openpsychologyjournal.com/contents/volumes/V8/TOPSYJ-8-61/TOPSYJ-8-61.pdf>.

Rising life expectancy in a frequent context of divorce, separation, or mortality-broken marriages exacerbates this.

According to data from the *European Quality of Life Survey*, around 12 % of EU citizens felt lonely more than half of the time in 2016. There is inconclusive evidence on the distribution of loneliness across age groups. Some studies find an elevated incidence of loneliness in adolescence and at the oldest age. Others find that loneliness is monotonically increasing or decreasing with age. Recent evidence suggests three peaks in the occurrence of loneliness across the life course: one in adolescence or young adulthood, one at old age, and an additional peak at around 50–60 years of age. The higher incidence of loneliness among older individuals may thus become a larger concern in the context of rapid population ageing in many countries.

Recently, the prevalence of loneliness has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated contact restrictions, such that the number of EU citizens feeling lonely more than half of the time has doubled to 25 %. Overall, the evolution of loneliness in industrialized countries over the last decades is not clear, with studies finding conflicting evidence. Among young adults, newer evidence indicates increasing levels of loneliness. Among older European individuals, loneliness levels are generally found to be constant<sup>46</sup>.

**Marcus Mund** and **Franz Neyer**<sup>47</sup> at the *Institute of Psychology at Friedrich Schiller University*, Jena in Germany have explored two factors – loneliness and feelings of health – that influence the way people’s personality shifts in early to mid-life, and in turn how their personality affects those very same factors. In short, it appears our personality affects the likelihood that we’ll become more lonely (and feel less well) as we get older, but also that being lonely (and feeling less healthy) shapes our personality, potentially setting up a vicious circle of isolation.

The researchers measured the personality traits, loneliness and subjective health of 661 healthy young adults (average age 24) in 1995 and then tracked down 271 of them in 2010 and asked them the same questions (by which time the average age of the sample was 40). To measure subjective health, participants simply responded to the question “*How is your health in general?*» on a 5-point scale from “very good” to “bad”.

Over the fifteen-year span of the study, the participants on average grew more lonely and felt less healthy. Meanwhile, their scores on the personality

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<sup>46</sup> Baarck Julia, Kovacic Matija. The relationship between loneliness and health. 2022. *EU Science Hub*. <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu>.

<sup>47</sup> Mund M. & Neyer F. The winding paths of the lonesome cowboy: evidence for mutual influences between personality, subjective health, and loneliness. *Journal of Personality*. 2015. URL: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jopy.12188>.

traits of neuroticism and extraversion decreased over time, while their scores on agreeableness and conscientiousness increased.

How might loneliness, or feeling less well, shape the way a person's personality develops? *Mund* and *Neyer* speculate that perhaps it is through physical and social inactivity. Who we are is based partly on who we mix with and the part we play in our social relationships. People who lack this connection (and those with an initial anxious and introvert personality are more vulnerable to this state of affairs) are likely to miss out on these experiences, further shaping their personality in directions that lead to more isolation<sup>48</sup>.

The experience of loneliness is considered as a complex, integral multi-level personality trait, covering a totality of emotional, cognitive, behavioral and volitional formations associated with awareness of responsibility for one's actions and life in general. It is characterized by one's attitude to loneliness, subjective expectation of "lonely people" situations, and a willingness to respond to any emotional situations (primarily in the experience of loneliness), which manifests itself in emotional, cognitive and behavioral forms.

Persons with an adaptive type of loneliness experience are characterized by: control of interpersonal distance, problems establishing optimal interpersonal contacts, reduced ability to rationally use available forces, resources and time, difficulties in setting and upholding personally significant goals, insufficient coordination of emotional experience, and instability of self-relationship. They demonstrate indifference to assessing the possible consequences of risky acts, emotional depreciation of important events and significant relationships, blocking activity, and the appearance of feelings of fatigue, boredom and emotional emptiness. Persons of a self-destructive type of loneliness experience are characterized by: avoiding contacts, inability to compromise, conflict, intolerance to criticism, hyper control of manifestations of their feelings and feelings, rejection of other people's problems and unwillingness to "let" them into their problems, a feeling of emotional emptiness and a general decrease in activity, difficulties in self-realization, and uncontrolled manifestations of aggression. The acquired experience is associated with specific situations and the emotions that they generate<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Your personality can invite loneliness, and loneliness can shape your personality. URL: <https://www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/your-personality-can-invite-loneliness-and-loneliness-can-shape-your-personality>.

<sup>49</sup> Bedan V. Psychological characteristics of the types of the experience of loneliness functional orientation. URL: <http://ehs.eeipsy.org/index.php/ehs/article/view/207>.

Results show that loneliness is associated with a strong motivation to engage in prosocial behaviors, such as helping and supporting others, as well as less favorable expectations about social partners, such as their fairness and trustworthiness. Such relationships could significantly predict subjective levels of loneliness in out-of-sample individuals and remained significant after controlling for individual social network quality (e.g., frequency of contact with close others), and individual health conditions (e.g., depression and helplessness). These findings indicate that loneliness is characterized by both positive prosocial tendencies, likely reflecting a motivation to seek out social connections, and negative expectations about social interactions, likely reflecting a social evaluation bias that foster social withdrawal.

On the one hand, loneliness has a healthy effect on individuals by promoting the search for social contact and bonds (reflected by more positive social tendencies). On the other, it promotes a systematic evaluation bias that makes an individual consistently perceive her need to belong as left unsatisfied (due to more negative expectations about social interactions), thereby likely fostering social withdrawal and paving the way for depression-like feelings. Importantly, these two mechanisms do not have to work in parallel and might (and likely do) interact in quite complicated ways. For instance, lonely individuals might seek out social connections to satisfy their unmet social needs but their evaluation of the resulting social interactions might be so negatively biased that their attempts to connect end up confirming and strengthening their negative expectations. On the long run, this vicious circle might drift lonely individuals to increasingly withdraw themselves from the social sphere<sup>50</sup>.

In our opinion, the main manifestations of the destructive dimension of loneliness in modern conditions are: 1) the breakdown of social ties at the micro- and macro-level; 2) depersonalization of the individual and his loss of interest in social and cultural life; 3) predominance of negative social and mental attitudes; 4) escaping into the virtual world and constructing one's more or less comfortable reality; 5) decrease in the level of trust in other people and social and political institutions; 6) reducing the level of responsibility for one's life and the lives of other people; 7) various forms of deviant behavior, etc.

Loneliness of a modern man becomes not only a feeling, but also a conscious strategy of life, full of inner meaning. This conscious choice can

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<sup>50</sup> Bellucci Gabriele. Positive attitudes and negative expectations in lonely individuals. URL: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-75712-3>.

be associated with the formation of a comfortable space of life, avoiding unwanted social contacts, spiritual quest and values<sup>51</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

A brief analysis of the scientific interpretation of loneliness as a subjective experience proves that loneliness should be studied systematically, taking into account many factors of loneliness. It is not desirable to be locked in one understanding, which is not capable of combining different things aspects of the experience of loneliness. Therefore, it is considered important to recognize explore different signs of loneliness and try to combine different approaches of understanding loneliness as a psychological phenomenon.

According to researchers studying this phenomenon in all age groups, loneliness is a potential source of stress and the cause of numerous personal and individual challenges. Loneliness, which emerges as an unpleasant affect as a result of the insufficiency of social relations, creates an obstacle for people to live a meaningful life, and negatively affects their subjective wellbeing.

Loneliness is a state that causes a complex and acute experience that expresses special forms of self-knowledge, attitude towards oneself and the world. Lonely people feel abandoned, useless, lost, experience serious suffering, which often leads to the destruction of their roles in society.

Researchers use individual instruments, unidimensional scales, and multidimensional approaches to measure loneliness. Much attention is paid to the identification of loneliness factors, typologies, and the development of specific techniques and methods.

The contemporary conclusion is that loneliness can happen to anyone given the necessary inducing conditions (*Cacioppo*). This understanding is highly relevant to considerations of treatment.

Decades of empirical research on loneliness have been rewarded, and the available evidence suggests that psychologists and psychotherapists have developed many recommendations that help people overcome loneliness. However, despite these advances in the field, many important questions remain no answer.

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<sup>51</sup> Malimon V. I. Phenomenon of loneliness : from feeling to life strategy. *Вісник Львівського національного університету : філос.-політолог. студії*. 2019. № 24. С. 59. URL: [http://fps-visnyk.lnu.lviv.ua/archive/24\\_2019/9.pdf](http://fps-visnyk.lnu.lviv.ua/archive/24_2019/9.pdf).

## SUMMARY

This chapter analyzes conceptual approaches to the actual psychological understanding of the phenomenon of loneliness. Attention is drawn to psychodynamic, evolutionary, existential, behavioral and other approaches to the interpretation of the nature of loneliness. The main findings are that loneliness is understood as a complex dimension in our lives and it can be experienced at many levels. Loneliness can generally be defined as a subjective, emotional state of dissatisfaction with one's social relations in terms of quality or quantity. Feeling lonely is a common human experience that comes and goes. Loneliness affects people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Through an overview of the theoretical material, loneliness can be understood as a structural dimension of existence, as an objective reflection of a unique subjective experience. Loneliness of a modern person becomes not only a subjective feeling, but also a conscious life strategy, filled with different meanings and orientations.

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