

shame—a real taboo that people do not like to talk about. There is a stigma associated with loneliness: you are a loser when you are lonely, which makes the feeling and the situation all the more painful.

5 THEME ANALYSIS

The YD/ artists and designers confronted this problem head-on by going out on the streets with sandwich boards, on which they had painted statements of their own deep personal questions about loneliness. This disarming approach led to many good conversations on the subject. A small documentary was made that showed how these people, interviewed at random on the street on a rainy day, were actually very thoughtful, open, and quite subtle in their approach to the issue. They saw loneliness as a normal part of human existence, and accepted it as such. Perhaps surprisingly, loneliness was even considered a situation that can be embraced and valued—a woman explained how the utter loneliness of a walk in nature had led to a change in her perception and a feeling of blissful connectedness. The idea that loneliness is a positive, that it can be a portal to reflection and insight, came up several times. Apparently there is more to loneliness than meets the eye. Together with a research institute and a philanthropic organization, the Young Designers foundation set out to explore this theme through artistic and designerly interventions. These interventions took place over a period of several years, and took many forms. Four examples: (1) an interaction designer created workshops in which people were drawn out to explicate the different types of loneliness they had experienced at various moments in their life. The trigger for this idea was the designer's use of the twenty-two Inuit adjectives for "snow" to create a typology of loneliness. By replacing the word "snow" with the word "loneliness" in these Inuit phrases, you get "gritty loneliness," "drifting loneliness," "melting loneliness," "light loneliness that is firm enough to walk on," etc.—beautifully poetic frames that really create an image of a type of loneliness that is possibly recognizable. These phrases helped people to get beyond the stigma that is associated with the notion of loneliness, and they were a rich basis for the subtle discussion in workshops. (2) In another intervention, an artist created an intricate form in which the interviewee is led through a series of questions on loneliness, through which people could both define their own experience in a sophisticated manner and wonder at the broad array of possible types of loneliness. (3) A photographer focused on a different side of loneliness as a lived experience. In her intervention, the "beauty of loneliness," the deep feeling of being utterly