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A COMPARISON OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EPISODES OF SOLITUDE

A Thesis Presented

by

CHRISTOPHER R. LONG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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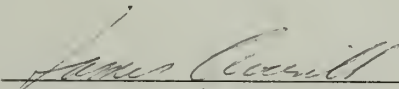
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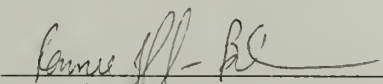
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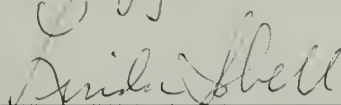
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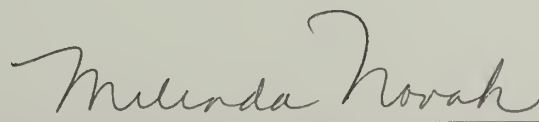

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In his Walden, Henry David Thoreau (1854/1981) wrote, "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (p. 205). Though he wrote these words almost 150 years ago, Walden remains one of Western culture's richest and most influential conceptions of solitude. In constructing an almost wholly positive portrayal, Thoreau personifies solitude as a friend, sometimes as an old man. Thoreau's solitude is a companion who facilitates contemplation and productivity and serves as an antidote to the tedium of social interaction.

Unfortunately, one reason Walden remains such an influential portrait of solitude is that there has been little systematic study of "companionable" solitude. In psychology, when any sort of "being alone" has been studied, aloneness has almost always been understood in terms of loneliness rather than solitude. Because loneliness is generally conceived as an unpleasant deficit state (e.g., Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999), psychological research has focused on alleviating the negative effects of being alone and has nearly neglected many of the possible benefits of being alone. As a rough indication of the relative priorities of

psychological research on solitude and loneliness, a search of the PsychInfo database of articles from 1984 to March 2000 yielded 1,937 articles containing the term loneliness and only 184 articles containing the term solitude.

In contrast to the relative lack of psychological research on solitude, elements of present-day American culture are engaging in a discourse on the benefits of solitude. For example, magazine articles related to solitude are quite numerous. Specifically, the number of articles in popular magazines about solitude is almost equivalent to the number of articles about loneliness, as evidenced by an April 2000 search of the InfoTrac General Reference Center Magazine Index, a search engine containing over 5,000,000 popular magazine and newspaper articles from 1980 to the present. This search yielded 113 articles containing the term solitude as compared with 140 articles containing the term loneliness. Like Thoreau's (1854/1981) Walden, these popular American magazine articles about solitude seem to have almost unanimously adopted a positive view of the construct. For example, Weight Watchers Magazine recently included an article called "Time out from the world: The benefits of being alone" (Warrick, 1999); Health magazine extolled "The Pleasure of Solitude" (Japenga, 1999); Redbook explained "How to Get the Time

Alone You Need" (Maynard, 1998); and Cosmopolitan delineated "Why You (and He) Need Private Time" (Vernick, 1995). Generally, a dominant theme of magazine articles such as these is a lament of the increasing demands of electronic communication and the seemingly fast pace of life in the dominant Western culture, which interferes with its members' fulfillment of their need to find beneficial solitude.

Primary among the benefits of solitude has been its association, both historically and today, with spiritual growth. Many influential religious leaders have spent a significant amount of time in solitude. Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, and Zoroaster, to name a few, all sought solitude and then returned to share with others what they discovered while away. Today, as for the last several thousand years, monks and nuns of various religious persuasions seclude themselves in collective devotional solitude, and solitary meditation is a part of many spiritual regimens. Unfortunately, this association between solitude and spirituality has not yet been widely researched.

Solitude has also been valued for its association with creativity. Many writers, such as Thoreau, Rilke, Kafka, and Kipling, to name only a few, are noted for their

affinity for solitude and the primary role solitude played in their creative processes. Often, writers and artists illustrate their understanding of the association between solitude and creativity by celebrating a personified, inspirational solitude in their works. For example, as noted above, Thoreau (1854/1981) wrote of solitude as his companion, and William Wordsworth (1892) wrote verse considering a "benign" and "gracious" solitude (p. 261). Moreover, this association between solitude and creativity is not limited to artistic domains. Rather, a stereotypic image of scientific creativity is that of the lone scientist making discoveries in a test-tube-filled laboratory. At least in Western culture, the link between creativity and solitude is so ubiquitous that it has become almost a cliché—the scientist alone in a laboratory, the writer in a cabin in the woods, or the painter in a bare studio. However, like the association between solitude and spirituality, the relationship of solitude and creativity has not been widely explored by psychologists.

Perhaps because of its popular association with benefits like spirituality and creativity, solitude was included in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (U.S. Public Law 88-577) as a possible beneficial outcome of wilderness recreation. This Act mandates that congressionally

designated wilderness areas exist "to preserve natural conditions, to provide opportunities for solitude, and to provide a primitive...and unconfined type of recreation" (Hammit and Madden, 1989, p. 266). Although the Wilderness Act, which remains the "principal statutory foundation for wilderness preservation and management in the United States today" (Hendee, Stankey, and Lucas, 1990, p.119), specifically mentioned solitude, it never specified exactly what solitude entails or how it might be experienced (Hammit and Madden, 1989).

Similarly, in psychological literature, solitude has been theoretically associated with many psychological benefits despite its having been the subject of very little research. For example, Burger (1995) theorized that solitude provides opportunities to work through personal problems and decisions, to prepare for future social interaction, and to develop intellectually. Similarly, Larson (1990) hypothesized that solitude could provide a time for improved concentration, self-evaluation, identity formation, emotional renewal, and release from the pressure of social roles. In general, in psychological theoretical literature, the positive effects of solitude are assumed to be associated with a relative freedom that solitude can provide to attend to that to which one needs or wants to

attend (e.g., Hammitt & Madden, 1989; Larson, 1990; Suedfeld, 1982;).

Although in psychological and related literature solitude is often conceived of simply as being alone (e.g., Pedersen & Frances, 1990; Sumerlin & Bundrick, 1996), an emphasis on freedom is a major theme among more complex conceptualizations of solitude. For example, philosopher Koch (1994) defines solitude as an "experiential state in which experience is disengaged from other people" (p. 44) and in which one is free to attend to the self or nature, to engage in reflection, or to engage in creative activity. To Koch, solitude implies heightened freedom to control one's mental activities. Developmental psychologists Marcoen and Goossens (1993) emphasize the freedom that solitude provides to select activities, either physical or mental, in which one would like to engage. To them, "solitude implies a desire to be alone in order to become engaged in an activity that has intrinsic appeal" (p. 198). Indicating that the freedom that solitude provides is freedom from social interference, psychologist Larson (1990) describes solitude as "a situation when a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions are less subject to the matrix of social regulation" (p. 176). Synthesizing these three conceptualizations yields a solitude that facilitates

freedom to choose and control one's activities by providing some degree of freedom from social constraints.

Integrating elements of research on privacy, which generally refers to "the process whereby people regulate the information about themselves that is available to others" (Larson, 1990, p. 157-158), wilderness recreation researchers Hammitt and Madden (1989) have described a more specialized conception of solitude. They call this conception "wilderness privacy," which they describe as a state "in which individuals experience an acceptable and preferred degree of control and choice over the type and amount of information that they must process" (p. 299-300). They investigated wilderness privacy by presenting backpackers (who were not necessarily traveling alone) with a list of privacy-related benefits associated with wilderness recreation and asking them to endorse those values that were most important to them. Hammitt and Madden concluded that the freedom that the backpackers valued was both cognitive and social in nature. Participants wanted freedom to control their actions, their use of time, their attention and thought processes, and their social obligations. According to Hammitt and Madden, wilderness privacy results from perceived cognitive freedom rather than from simply being alone.

If solitude provides a sort of cognitive freedom, then what processes are engaged when one experiences this freedom? Westin (1967) suggested that solitude might facilitate a special opportunity for self-evaluation. Similarly, Suedfeld (1982), who studied the effects of sensory deprivation (which is similar to solitude in that both involve temporary withdrawal from the day-to-day demands of one's usual social environment, though solitude does not require a reduction in sensory stimulation), proposed that time alone can provide an opportunity to listen to the "small internal voices" (p. 61)—facilitating new thoughts and insights, labile affect, and restoration of the self. However, not every experience of solitude seems so useful, and apparently not every person has the capacity to engage these beneficial processes. As Larson (1990) pointed out, solitude places certain demands on a person. According to him, the capacity to enjoy the benefits of being alone requires "integration of the public and private self" (p. 174); that is, it requires the ability to maintain a constant sense of self that can survive in the absence of immediate social reinforcement.

Larson's (1990) conceptualization of the demands of solitude is derived from depth psychologist Winnicott's (1958) influential theoretical paper discussing "The

Capacity to be Alone." Winnicott postulated that the capacity to be alone originates in infancy. If, while an infant, a person is able to explore on his or her own and keep him- or herself occupied in the security of the mother's actual physical presence, Winnicott contended that this person will later be free from neurotic entanglements with an internalized mother image. This freedom, which, as Storr (1988) pointed out, corresponds to secure attachment, allows the person to explore his or her self and keep him- or herself occupied in solitude. In addition, in the conceptualization of solitude put forth by depth psychologist Modell (1993), the securely attached person in solitude is free to surrender his or her self to some passionate commitment outside the self, to a surrogate (maternal) presence—whether it be God, an ideology, a lover, or a creative muse.

Whether or not there exists "a capacity to be alone" of the kind described by Winnicott (1958), solitude is often not experienced as positive. In addition to its association with loneliness, solitude is often associated with other negative feelings. For example, in pilot testing related to the present study, 35 of 130 undergraduate participants indicated in their descriptions of one of their recent solitude episodes that they

experienced two or more of the following: loneliness, boredom, depression, or frustration. (An additional 15 participants indicated that they had experienced only one of these.) Although the pilot questionnaire instructed participants to contrast a lonely experience with a solitude experience and to describe only the latter, 9 of 130 participants indicated that their solitude experience was generally detrimental, as opposed to neutral or generally positive. Conceptualizing solitude simply as a time of freedom that facilitates benefits, such as spirituality or creativity, is inadequate.

The present study was designed to investigate the nature of the differences between positive and negative experiences of solitude. Avoiding the impracticalities involved in inducing artificial solitude experiences in the lab, the present study relied upon participants' retrospective reports of one of their own recent positive or negative solitude experiences. Because we sought to elicit detailed descriptions of their experiences, participants were instructed to describe either a positive or negative experience of solitude. The only criterion we provided for a positive solitude experience was that it must have been one that, although aspects of it may have been painful as well as pleasant, they considered to have

been worthwhile given the circumstances, and the only criterion we provided for a negative solitude experience was that it must have been one that, although every aspect of it may not have been negative, was generally neither beneficial nor pleasant. To facilitate comparisons among episodes, we also asked that these experiences of solitude were ones that lasted at least an hour but no more than three days.

By comparing the descriptions of participants' positive and negative experiences across several dimensions, we hoped to identify those aspects of the episodes that were associated with either positive or negative solitude experiences. The major dimensions along which the experiences were compared included (a) events occurring in participants' lives in the time just before the solitude episode, (b) mood and affect in the time just before the episode, (c) characteristics of the setting in which the episode took place, (d) participants' affect and activities during the episode, and (e) outcomes of the episode.

Because of the relative lack of psychological research on specific aspects of solitude experience, the present study was exploratory in nature. Although pilot testing indicated that positive solitude experiences are

characterized by more positive affect than are negative episodes and that positive episodes are associated with more feelings of control over the situation than are negative episodes, additional hypotheses would have been only tentative.

The present study also included a brief investigation of the utility of Burger's (1995) Preference for Solitude Scale, the only available personality scale specifically designed to assess participant's preference to spend time alone.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

The study included 206 undergraduate psychology students at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. These participants received course credit for their participation. Eighty women and 25 men completed the description of a positive episode of solitude ($\underline{n} = 105$). Seventy-three women and 28 men completed the description of a negative episode of solitude ($\underline{n} = 101$).

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 48 years. However, the median (and modal) age was 20 years, and 179 (or 87%) of participants were 18 to 22 years old. One hundred and fifty-nine of the participants were juniors or seniors at the university, whereas only 47 were freshmen or sophomores.

Materials

The instrument was adapted from an earlier questionnaire used in pilot research contrasting participants' perceptions of personal experiences of solitude and loneliness. The pilot questionnaire consisted of both free-response and objective items (i.e., checklists, rating scales, and multiple-choice items). Rather than comparison of episodes of solitude and

loneliness, the present study's instrument was altered to allow the contrast of positive and negative episodes of solitude. Also, using the extensive free response data from the pilot testing to generate sets of responses, most of the open-ended items from the pilot questionnaire were converted to checklist or rating-scale items to facilitate quantitative analyses.

Two versions of the present questionnaire, one designed to explore a positive episode of solitude and one designed to explore a negative episode of solitude, were constructed, with each version consisting of 52 items divided into six sections. (See Appendix A for the positive version of the solitude questionnaire.) The first section of the questionnaire is almost identical for both versions. In the opening section of the positive questionnaire, participants were asked to take a moment to remember a recent positive experience of solitude and then a recent negative experience of solitude. However, in the first section of the negative questionnaire, the order of these instructions was reversed so that participants were initially asked to remember a recent negative experience of solitude and then a recent positive experience of solitude. Then, in both versions, participants were instructed to write a short description of each episode—one paragraph per

episode—in as much detail as possible. At the conclusion of both versions of this first section, participants were asked to list differences between the two episodes and were asked general questions about how much solitude they like to experience and about the relative proportions of positive and negative episodes among their own recent solitude experiences. The second section, identical for both versions of the instrument, consisted of Burger's (1995) Preference for Solitude Scale. This 12-item scale was designed to measure individual differences in preference for spending time alone.

From the third through the fifth sections of the questionnaire, the instructions for the positive and negative versions diverged, though the items on each version were identical. From the third through the sixth sections of the positive version, participants were instructed to describe how they felt and what was happening in the time just before the positive episode they described in Section 1; to describe where they were, how they felt, and what was happening in the time during this positive episode; and to describe the outcomes of these positive episodes. In contrast, from the third through the sixth sections of the negative version, participants were instructed to respond to the items with respect to the

negative episode they described in Section 1. The items in these sections on both versions were all checklist and rating-scale items based largely on undergraduates' open-ended responses to the pilot questionnaire.

The seventh section, which had identical instructions and items for both versions of the questionnaire, consisted of two items. Participants were asked what advice they might give to someone seeking a positive solitude experience and where they would go if they could go anywhere in the world to seek a positive solitude experience.

Procedure

In three large psychology classes, volunteers were solicited to complete the questionnaires. In each of these classes, participants were invited to take a questionnaire as they left the classroom that day. They were instructed to return the questionnaire at the next meeting of their class. Upon return of the questionnaire, participants were thanked and given course credit and a written explanation of the objectives of the study. To preserve participants' anonymity, all identifying information was detached as the questionnaire was returned.

Those students who volunteered to participate received a questionnaire from a randomly-ordered stack containing

both versions of the questionnaire. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 206 of these questionnaires, or 69%, were returned. From 150 copies of each version of the questionnaire, 105 positive and 101 negative questionnaires were returned, indicating that there was no systematic difference between the response rates to each version of the questionnaire.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some Limitations of the Study

Though the methodology employed in the present study was well-suited to explore the problem at hand and provided many advantages (e.g., participants were free to select episodes that they felt were most representative, a wide variety of experiences were described, and comparisons between the positive and negative groups can be easily made), there are a few limitations of this methodology that should be kept in mind as one considers the results. For example, an obvious limitation is its reliance on participants' recollections of their solitude experiences. (Appendix B presents a sample of five participants' descriptions of their solitude episodes). Though care was taken in the construction of the questionnaire to facilitate recall and to avoid prompting stereotypical responses, participants may have failed to accurately recall aspects of their experiences, or they may have described only the most stereotypical solitude episodes. Moreover, as they focused on particular positive or negative episodes, participants may have been more likely to recall those aspects of their episodes that were consistent with their conception of a positive or a

negative experience, which could lead to the appearance of starker distinctions between the two types of experience than actually exist.

However, the present study was not designed to yield a normative account of solitude. The sample of participants (i.e., undergraduate psychology students) and the post-hoc nature of the questionnaire do not lend themselves to generalizations circumscribing the "average" experience of solitude. Rather, the present study is designed to highlight issues integral to understanding the psychological processes related to solitude experience. The present study explores the relationships among the settings, feelings, thoughts, and actions involved in these participants' solitude experiences, not to conclude that these relationships "explain" solitude, but instead to assess how these relationships are more generally reflected in current theoretical conceptions of solitude and to raise issues that beg further consideration.

How Often Do Students Experience Solitude, and What Proportion of These Experiences Are Positive?

Not surprisingly, when one considers the relative lack of solitude research, few studies have explored the solitude experiences of a particular population (cf., Larson, 1990). To provide some idea of the frequency with

which they experienced solitude and of the degree to which these experiences were generally positive or negative, participants responded to two general questions that focused on their solitude experiences in general, rather than on any particular episodes. (As was expected, there were no differences between the positive and negative groups for these questions, which were presented before the instructions on the two versions of the questionnaire diverged). Here, most participants indicated that they experienced solitude once a week or more, with the median response being "once a week" and the modal response "two or three times a week" on a 10-point scale that ranged from "not at all" to "more than once a day." In this initial section, participants also indicated that just over half of their solitude experiences in the past year were positive, with a mean response of 4.36 to a seven-point scale on which "4" represented "half of my solitude experiences were positive and half were negative" and "7" represented "all of my solitude experiences were positive." The median response to this scale was 4.00 and the modal response was 5.00.

Exploring the Episode

What Feelings and Events Preceded the Solitude Episode?

Because participants' feelings and actions in the time preceding the episode are an important component in determining whether a particular episode will be experienced as positive or negative, a significant portion of the questionnaire was devoted to investigating the circumstances leading up to the episode. Specifically, participants were asked to describe any feelings or events in their lives that may have contributed to the subsequent solitude episode.

Here, once participants began to focus on issues related to a specific positive or negative episode of solitude, significant differences between the two groups began to emerge. For example, participants in the positive group claimed to have been in a better mood in the time leading up to their solitude experience than did those in the negative group, $t(204) = -5.218$, $p < .001$. Here, the positive group's mean mood rating was 4.60 on a seven-point scale on which "4" represented "neutral" mood, "7" represented "completely good," and "1" represented "completely bad." On this same scale, the negative group's mean mood rating was 3.45. In addition, the positive group

was more likely than was the negative group to have been seeking a solitude experience at the time of the episode they were describing, Chi-square(1) = 25.48, $p < .001$.

Specifically, among the positive group 67 participants (or 64% of the positive group) were seeking solitude and 38 (or 36%) were not, whereas among the negative group, only 29 (or 29% of the negative group) were seeking solitude whereas 72 (or 72%) were not.

Consonant with the positive group's more positive mood in the time leading up to the solitude episode, they also reported having more positive feelings in the time just before the solitude episode than did the negative group. Based on a 25-item checklist of feelings, Table 1 lists the most frequently endorsed feelings noted as occurring before the episode and contributing to the episode. Though stress was among the most commonly experienced feelings for both groups (49 positive participants, or 47% of the positive group, vs. 53 negative participants, or 52% of the negative group), the other most-frequently-occurring feelings for the positive group were mostly positive, including happiness (47 positive, or 45%, vs. 13 negative, or 13%), freedom (47, or 45%, vs. 4, or 4%), and independence (46, or 44%, vs. 13, or 13%). In contrast, besides stress, the other most frequently noted feelings among the negative

group were all negative, such as depression (58 negative, or 57%, vs. 24 positive, or 23%), sadness (57, or 56%, vs. 28, or 27%), and uncertainty/confusion (53, or 52%, vs. 39, or 37%).

Despite these differences in mood and feelings, there was only one major difference between the two groups with respect to life events mentioned as both occurring in the time leading up to the episode and contributing to the episode. Table 2 lists the most commonly noted of these events. Difficulties with schoolwork or one's job (noted by 57 positive participants, or 54% of the positive group, vs. 52, or 51% of the negative group), questioning one's goals or priorities (55, or 52%, vs. 50, or 50%), and thinking a lot about the past (51, or 49%, vs. 50, or 50%) were the three most frequently mentioned events for the negative group and the second, third, and fourth most commonly mentioned for the positive group. However, 65 members of the positive-group (or 62%) indicated that they were "extremely busy or felt like [they] had no time alone," making this the most frequently noted situation by the positive group, whereas only 31 members of the negative-group (or 31%) endorsed this descriptor, making it only the seventh most common among the negative group.

In summary, positive episodes of solitude were preceded by a slightly more positive mood than were negative episodes. Also, though each group mentioned feeling stress and various other difficulties, participants who were about to experience a positive episode were more likely to have been feeling busy or needing time alone than were participants who were about to experience a negative episode. Likewise, participants were more likely to have been seeking solitude at the time of a positive episode than at the time of a negative episode. Thus, in the time leading up to a positive episode of solitude, the average participant was a relatively busy person who was in a good mood but seeking a solitude experience.

When and Where Did the Episode Take Place?

There were also differences between the positive and negative groups with respect to the time of day at which the episodes took place as well as the duration of the episodes. For instance, positive solitude episodes were more likely to occur during the day, whereas negative solitude episodes were more likely to occur at night. Among the positive group, 54 participants (or 51% of the positive group) indicated that their episode took place mostly during the day, 39 (or 37%) indicated mostly during the night, and 11 (or 10%) could not decide. However,

among the negative group, 35 participants' episodes (or 35% of the negative group) occurred mostly during the day, 55 (or 54%) were mostly at night, and the remaining 11 (or 11%) participants could not decide. When those participants who could not decide between night and day were momentarily eliminated from analyses, there was a statistically significant association between positive episodes and the day as well as negative episodes and the night, Chi-square(1) = 6.73, $p = .009$. In addition, with respect to the duration of the episodes, the negative episodes were described as lasting slightly longer than were the positive episodes, unequal-variance $t(204) = 2.20$, $p = .029$. Specifically, the negative episodes had a mean duration of 2.64 on a seven-point scale on which "2" represented "four to eight hours" and "3" was "nine to sixteen hours," whereas the positive episodes had a mean duration of 2.04 on the same scale.

As with the time of day and duration, there were differences between the two groups with respect to the episodes' settings. Table 3 presents the frequencies with which various settings were indicated. Though "in my room or at my home" was the setting most often endorsed by each group, a greater proportion of the negative episodes (76 out of 101 participants, or 75%), than of the positive

episodes (41 out of 105 participants, or 39%), took place in this setting. A second notable difference between the settings of the positive and negative episodes was that a greater proportion of positive episodes than negative episodes took place "outdoors in a natural setting." This was the second most commonly mentioned setting among the positive group, with 28 out of 105, or 27%, of positive episodes occurring here, but it was among the least frequently endorsed settings for the negative group, with only 3 out of 101, or 3%, of the negative episodes occurring here.

Mirroring the differences in settings, there were differences between the two groups with respect to the aspects of their surroundings that they mentioned as being important to the episodes. Table 4 presents the aspects of the surroundings most often noted as contributing to the episodes. For example, more of the positive group participants than the negative group participants indicated that their episodes occurred in "a comfortable or relaxing place" (76, or 72%, of the participants in the positive group vs. 36, or 36%, of the participants in the negative group); that they were "free from responsibilities there" (60, or 57%, vs. 18, or 18%); that "music was playing" (43, or 41%, vs. 17, or 17%); that they were "away from the

telephone, email, or television" (40, or 38%, vs. 11, or 11%); and that they were in "a beautiful or awe-inspiring place" (32, or 30%, vs. 6, or 6%). The only commonly-endorsed descriptor that the negative group endorsed more frequently than did the positive group indicated that the episode occurred in "a dull, boring place" (29, or 29%, of participants in the negative group vs. 5, or 5%, of participants in the positive group). That is, despite being more likely to be free from responsibility and away from television and electronic communication than were participants in the negative group, participants in the positive group were less likely to indicate that their experiences of solitude occurred in dull or boring places. This engaging freedom experienced by the positive group echoes Hammitt and Madden's (1989) solitude-like wilderness privacy, mentioned above, which relies upon social and cognitive freedom to facilitates enhanced control over one's actions and thoughts.

Because the differences between the two groups with respect to the important aspects of the surroundings were likely related to differences between the settings in which the two groups' episodes took place, further analyses were performed to examine what aspects were considered important by those participants whose episodes occurred "in [their]

rooms or at [their] homes," the most commonly endorsed setting by each group. Table 5 presents the presents the aspects of the surroundings most often noted as contributing to the episodes by the positive ($\underline{n} = 41$) and negative ($\underline{n} = 76$) subgroups of participants whose episodes occurred in their rooms or homes. As when analyses included all settings, the three most common descriptors endorsed by each subgroup were that they "were all alone" (33, or 80%, of the participants in the positive subgroup vs. 57, or 75%, of the participants in the negative subgroup), that "it was a familiar place" (33, or 80%, of the positive subgroup vs. 46, or 61%, of the negative subgroup), and that "it was a comfortable or relaxing place" (35, or 85%, of the positive subgroup vs. 32, or 42%, of the negative subgroup). However, now the only other commonly-endorsed descriptors noted by a higher proportion of the positive subgroup than of the negative subgroup indicated that "music was playing" (20, or 49%, of the positive subgroup vs. 16, or 21%, of the negative subgroup) and that they "were free from responsibilities there" (17, or 41%, of the positive subgroup vs. 13, or 17%, of the negative subgroup). In contrast, the only commonly-endorsed descriptors that the negative subgroup noted more often than did the positive subgroup indicated

that "it was a dull or boring place" (21, or 28%, of the negative subgroup vs. 2, or 5%, of the positive subgroup) and that they "felt constrained by [their] surroundings (20, or 26%, of the negative subgroup vs. no members of the positive subgroup). That is, though their episodes took place in a similar setting, participants in the positive subgroup were more likely to feel relaxed and free from responsibility, whereas participants in the negative subgroup were more likely to feel bored or constrained by the situation. It appears that some of the same situations that facilitate the freedom that characterizes positive episodes of solitude may just as likely contribute to the boredom and oppression that is often associated with negative episodes of solitude.

Though there were no differences between the two groups in relation to how familiar they were with the place in which the episode took place or how quiet the place was in which the experience occurred, the positive group did feel significantly more in control of the situation than did the negative group, $t(203) = -14.93$, $p < .001$. The positive group had a mean control rating of 5.99 on a seven-point scale on which "7" represented "completely in control of the situation," "4" was "sometimes in control and sometimes out of control of the situation," and "1" was

"completely out of control of the situation," whereas the negative group had a mean of 2.99 on the same scale. As with the pilot study, in which feelings of control were negatively related to feelings of loneliness, and Hammitt and Madden's (1989) wilderness privacy, in which feelings of control provide the mechanism for positive experiences of solitude, the degree to which participants felt in control of their situations differed strongly between positive and negative episodes in the present study. (Here, it is important to note that "control over the situation" could have been interpreted by participants in several different ways. For example, control over the situation may have indicated control over where the episode took place [e.g., choosing to be at home rather than at a restaurant], over aspects of the setting [e.g., choosing to play music or to be alone], over the activities in which one was engaging [e.g., choosing to read or to watch television], or over the topics about which one was thinking [i.e., thinking about a topic of one's own choosing rather than dwelling on some pressing or intrusive concern].)

Despite the differences in settings and feelings of control over the situation, there were no differences between the positive and negative groups with respect to

the number of people around during the episodes. Table 6 presents the frequencies of endorsement for items concerning the number of people around when the episodes took place. An equivalent majority in each group, including 70, or 67%, of the participants in the positive group and 69, or 68%, of the participants in the negative group, indicated that they were alone during the episode. This is compatible with many common sense and theoretical conceptions of solitude that define it simply as being alone (e.g., Pedersen & Frances, 1990; Sumerlin & Bundrick, 1996). Only a small minority in each group (including 18, or 17%, of participants in the positive group and 19, or 19%, of participants in the negative group) was with people they knew or felt close to at the time of their solitude episode.

In summary, there were several differences between the two groups with respect to time of day, duration, and setting. Compared to negative episodes, positive episodes were more likely to occur during the day, were slightly shorter in duration, and were relatively more likely to occur in a natural setting (though the most common setting of each group's episodes was participants' rooms or homes). Likewise, when compared to negative episodes, positive episodes were more often associated with positive aspects

of the setting, such as being in a comfortable place or free from responsibilities. Though there were no differences between the groups with respect to the number of people around or in the degree to which they were familiar with the place in which their episodes took place, positive-group participants felt much more in control of the situation than did negative-group participants.

What Did Participants Do and How Did They Feel During the Episode?

As with the setting, duration, and time of day, differences emerged between the two groups in terms of what they did and how they felt during the episodes. To provide some indication of what they did during their episodes, participants responded to a checklist of activities, made up of activities that had been commonly mentioned during pilot testing. Table 7 presents activities most frequently noted in the present study as occurring during the episodes. Only 15, or 14%, of participants in the positive group and 17, or 17%, of participants in the negative group indicated that they "worked or studied" during their solitude episodes. Rather, across all participants, the most often mentioned activity was the contemplation of personal issues or important decisions, which was endorsed by 64, or 63%, of participants in the negative group,

making it the most common negative-group response, and 61, or 58%, of participants in the positive group, making it the second most popular positive-group response (surpassed only by daydreaming, noted below). Consonant with several theorists' conceptualizations of solitude, participants in both groups seem to have been taking advantage of the special opportunities solitude affords for self-examination (Westin, 1967), a time for listening to one's "small internal voices" (Suedfeld, 1982, p. 61).

The most common response of participants in the positive group was that they "daydreamed, fantasized, or let [their] mind[s] wander," which 80 of them (76%) endorsed, as compared with only 41 members of the negative group (41%). In addition, the positive group was more likely to have "collected or organized [their] thoughts" than was the negative group (59, or 56%, of the positive group vs. 27, or 27% of the negative group). In contrast, when compared to the positive group, the negative group was slightly more likely to have "hoped or wished for things" (59, or 58% of the negative group vs. 51, or 49%, of the positive group). Also, when compared to the positive group, they were more likely to have "watched TV or movies" (34, or 34%, of the negative group vs. 21, or 20% of the positive group).

Similarly, rating scale data indicated that the negative group spent more time using television, books, magazines, and the Internet to try and occupy their time than did the positive group, $t(204) = 4.65, p < .001$. The negative group's mean score was 3.61 on a seven-point scale on which "1" represented spending no time attempting to occupy one's time in this way, "4" represented spending about half of the episode doing this, and "7" represented spending almost all of the episode doing this. On the same scale, the positive group's mean was only 2.32. As might be indicated by their more prevalent attempts to occupy their time, the negative group was more bored during their solitude episodes than was the positive group, $t(204) = 6.53, p < .001$. The negative group had a mean boredom rating of 3.64 on a seven-point scale on which "1" represented "not at all bored," "4" represented "moderately bored," and "7" represented "extremely bored," whereas the positive group had a mean of 2.10 on the same scale.

To provide further indication of how they felt during the episodes, participants responded to a 42-item checklist of emotions. Table 8 presents the emotions most frequently noted as occurring during the solitude episode. As might be expected, the positive episodes were characterized by the experience of positive emotions, whereas the negative

episodes were characterized by the experience of negative emotions. Though participants from each group were free to endorse any emotion on the checklist (and as many emotions as they experienced during their episodes), the 15 emotions most commonly noted by the positive group were all positive emotions, and the 21 emotion most commonly noted by the negative group were all negative emotions. (It is important to remember that this difference in the frequencies of positive and negative feelings may be due, at least in part, to the post-hoc nature of the questionnaire: Participants instructed to describe a positive experience may have been more likely to remember [or to select an episode to describe on the basis of] positive feelings, and participants instructed to describe a negative experience may have been more likely to remember [or to select an episode to describe on the basis of] negative feelings.) The emotions most frequently mentioned by the positive group were happiness/contentment (83 positive participants, or 79%, vs. 1 negative participant, or 1%), relaxation/calmness (77, or 73%, vs. 3, or 3%), freedom (70, or 67%, vs. 5, or 5%), and optimism/hope (60, or 57%, vs. 7, or 7%). The emotions most frequently noted by the negative group included sadness (78 negative participants, or 77%, vs. 21 positive participants, or

20%), loneliness (69, or 68%, vs. 13, or 12%), depression (68, or 67%, vs. 17, or 16%), and emptiness (57, or 56%, vs. 14, or 13%).

On the same checklist, participants were also given the opportunity to indicate which emotions they felt were most central to their experience of solitude. Again, they were free to endorse as many emotions they felt were applicable. Table 9 presents emotions most frequently noted as being central to the solitude episode. Because an emotion must have been experienced in order for it to have been experienced as central, each group's list of central emotions mirrors its list of experienced emotions. As in the lists of frequently experienced emotions, the emotions most commonly selected by the positive group are exclusively positive, and the emotions most commonly selected by the negative group are exclusively negative. For the positive group, the only notable differences with the prior list include the rise of relaxation/calmness to the top position (42 positive participants, or 40%, vs. 0 negative participants) and the fall of joyfulness from the fifth position on the positive group's frequency list, where it was endorsed by 57 positive-group participants, to the sixteenth position on the positive group's list of central emotions (8 positive, or 8%, vs. 1 negative, or

1%). For the negative group, when comparing its list of central emotions with its list of emotions experienced, the most notable change is the rise of loneliness to the top position (35 negative, or 35%, vs. 3 positive, or 3%).

In addition to responding to the emotion checklist, participants also completed a checklist of 13 specific feelings that had been mentioned by participants in the pilot study as occurring during their solitude episodes. (In contrast to the above "emotion" checklist, this "feeling" checklist consisted of sentence-length descriptors, rather than the two- or three-word labels used in the emotion checklist.) Table 10 lists the feelings most frequently noted by participants as being experienced during their solitude episodes. As with the emotions above, the frequencies with which these feelings were experienced systematically diverged between the two groups, with the positive group more likely to experience positive feelings and the negative group more likely to experience negative feelings. For instance, the positive group was more likely to indicate that they "felt free from social pressures" (78 positive participants, or 74%, vs. 20 negative participants, or 20%), "felt an increased ability to concentrate or focus" (60 positive, or 57%, vs. 7 negative, or 7%), and "felt harmony (or unity) with nature

or the world around [them]" (43 positive, or 41%, vs. 1 negative, or 1%). On the other hand, the negative group was more likely to endorse that they "missed having someone with whom [they] could share [their] thoughts and feelings" (63 negative, or 62%, vs. 15 positive, or 14%), "felt oppressed by the aloneness and/or the silence" (44 negative, or 44%, vs. 2 positive, or 2%), "missed the comfort and predictability of their normal routine" (41 negative, or 41%, vs. 2 positive, or 2%), and "felt a decreased ability to concentrate or focus" (34 negative, or 34%, vs. 4 positive, or 4%). According to this checklist, the positive group appears to have felt able to take advantage of the social and cognitive freedoms afforded by solitude, whereas the negative group felt discomfort with solitude's relative lack of structure.

To produce a still clearer record of how they felt during their solitude episodes, participants also completed several emotion-related rating-scale items. In the same pattern as the checklist items, these items also yielded associations between the positive group and positive feelings as well as between the negative group and negative feelings. For example, in describing how they felt during the solitude episodes, the negative group reported being more lonely than did the positive group, $t(204) = 15.09$, p

< .001. Here, the negative group gave themselves a mean loneliness rating of 5.90 on a seven-point scale on which "7" represented "extremely lonely," "4" represented "moderately lonely," and "1" represented "not at all lonely." On the same scale, the positive group gave themselves a mean of 2.64. Likewise, participants in the negative group reported being more anxious during their solitude episodes than did the positive group, $t(204) = 8.84$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the negative group had a mean anxiety rating of 4.49 on a seven-point scale on which "4" represented "moderately anxious," whereas the positive group had a mean of 2.40 on the same scale.

In contrast, though neither group indicated that they were highly creative during their solitude episodes, participants in the positive group rated themselves as more creative during their episodes than did participants in the negative group, $t(204) = -5.52$, $p < .001$. Here, the positive group had a mean creativity rating of 3.40 on a seven-point scale on which "4" represents "moderately creative," whereas the negative group had a mean rating of 2.21 on the same scale. Also, participants in the positive group characterized their experience as more spiritual than did participants in the negative group, $t(204) = -3.95$, $p < .001$. The positive group gave their episodes a mean

spirituality rating of 3.32 on a seven-point scale on which "4" represented "moderately spiritual," whereas the negative gave their episodes a mean rating of 2.86 on the same scale.

In summary, though both groups spent time contemplating personal issues, the positive group was relatively more likely to have daydreamed or organized their thoughts, and the negative group was relatively more likely to have watched television or otherwise tried to distract themselves. Also, despite much similarity between the activities in which the two groups engaged during their solitude episodes, the positive group generally indicated experiencing mostly positive feelings during their episodes, whereas the negative group generally indicated experiencing mostly negative feelings during their episodes. Specifically, positive episodes of solitude were more strongly associated with experiences of happiness, relaxation, and freedom, as well as two of the traditional benefits of solitude: creativity and spirituality. In contrast, negative episodes of solitude were associated with experiences of boredom, sadness, loneliness, depression, and anxiety. On average, the positive episodes were experiences of the "companionable" solitude of Thoreau (1854/1981) or of the securely attached person's generative

solitude of Modell (1993), whereas the negative episodes echoed the neurotic, anxious solitude of a person lacking the capacity to be alone (e.g., Winnicott, 1958).

Was the Episode Beneficial or Detrimental?

Although there were no significant differences between the two groups in how much participants learned about themselves, others, or events in their lives as a result of their solitude experiences, there was a significant difference in the degree to which the positive and negative groups saw their experiences as beneficial or detrimental, $t(202) = -10.36, p < .001$. Specifically, the mean positive group rating of the outcome of their experience was 5.72 on a seven-point scale on which "7" represented "completely beneficial," "4" represented "neutral," and "1" represented "completely detrimental," whereas the mean negative group rating was 3.83 on the same scale. That is, participants in the positive group saw their episodes as more beneficial than detrimental, and participants in the negative group saw their episodes as more slightly more detrimental than beneficial.

To provide information about specific benefits and detriments, participants completed two checklists made up of benefits and detriments drawn from pilot testing. There were several differences between the positive and negative

groups on these items. Table 11 presents the benefits most frequently endorsed as consequences of the solitude episode. The most common benefits indicated by the positive group included clarifying their goals and priorities (73 positive participants, or 70%, vs. 32 negative participants, or 32%), gaining increased understanding of themselves (61 positive, or 58%, vs. 33 negative, or 33%), and gaining a sense of self-renewal (58 positive, or 55%, vs. 13 negative, or 13%). For the negative group, the most frequently endorsed benefits roughly mirrored (albeit in much lower proportion) those indicated by the positive group. However, the most popular benefit among the negative group was gaining insight or a new perspective on a problem (37 negative, or 37%, vs. 47 positive, or 45%). The only entry on the checklist of benefits that was more often endorsed by the negative group than the positive group indicated that "there were no beneficial consequences" of the episode (24 negative, or 24%, vs. 5 positive, or 5%). Nevertheless, only 24 members of the negative group found nothing beneficial among the consequences of their episodes of solitude. Apparently, members of both groups were able to gain from the cognitive freedom and contemplation that solitude is posited to

afford (e.g., Hammitt & Madden, 1989; Koch, 1994; Westin, 1967).

Table 12 presents the detriments most frequently noted as consequences of the solitude episodes. Here, the only entry endorsed by more than 17 members of the positive group indicated that "there were no detrimental consequences" of the episode (70 positive participants, or 67%, vs. 9 negative participants, or 9%). In contrast, the most frequently noted detriments by the negative group were that they "over-analyzed things and/or became uncertain about what to do next" (55 negative participants, or 55%, vs. 17 positive participants, or 16%), "became focused on negative things that [they] could not really change" (52 negative, or 52%, vs. 8 positive, or 8%), and "felt drained or tired" (51 negative, or 51%, vs. 12 positive, or 11%). Consonant with the affect that they were experiencing (e.g., sadness, loneliness, anxiety) and the activities that they were engaging in during the episode (e.g., contemplation of personal issues), these detriments indicate that many members of the negative group were struggling (with limited success) to resolve or come to terms with personal problems or troubling situations.

In summary, though people often claim that they gain more from negative experiences than from positive ones,

positive episodes were generally seen as more beneficial to those experiencing them than were negative episodes. Similarly, negative episodes were generally seen as more detrimental to those experiencing them than were positive episodes. However, it is important to note that the negative group showed a smaller disparity between the number of benefits and detriments they endorsed than did the positive group. For example, only 24, or 24%, of the negative group participants indicated that there were no benefits from their episodes of solitude, whereas 70, or 67%, of participants in the positive group indicated that there were no detriments from their episodes of solitude. Further, when the difference between the number of benefits and detriments endorsed on the two checklists are computed for each participant, the negative group shows a mean difference of only .61 more detriments than benefits endorsed, whereas the positive group shows a mean difference of 3.26 more benefits than detriments endorsed, $t(204) = -12.173$, $p < .001$. (This difference remains significant when the mean number of benefits endorsed is adjusted for the disparity between the number of benefits [i.e., 11] and the number of detriments [i.e., 9] listed on the checklists, $t[204] = -12.59$, $p < .001$.) Likewise on the relevant seven-point rating scale item, the negative

group's mean rating of 3.83 was only .17 scale points below the "neutral" midpoint located at 4.00, whereas the positive group's mean of 5.72 was 1.72 scale points toward the "beneficial" endpoint from the "neutral" endpoint. In general, although the positive group presented their episodes as overwhelmingly beneficial, the negative group presented their episodes as only mildly detrimental.

What Determined Whether the Episode was Beneficial or Detrimental?

As indicated above, the degree to which the outcome of a solitude experience is seen as beneficial or detrimental was strongly related to whether it was classified as a positive or negative solitude episode, $r(202) = .589$, $p < .001$. Also, in the same way that whether an episode was characterized as positive or negative was related to the following variables, the degree to which an experience is seen as beneficial or detrimental is related to (a) mood just before the episode, $r(202) = .147$, $p = .036$; (b) whether or not one was seeking solitude, $r(202) = .272$, $p < .001$; (c) how much in control of the situation one felt, $r(201) = .445$, $p < .001$; (d) how lonely one was, $r(202) = -.551$, $p < .001$; (e) how anxious one felt, $r(202) = -.347$, $p < .001$; to how bored one felt, $r(202) = -.369$, $p < .001$; (f) how much one tried to occupy the time with TV,

Internet, magazines, etc., $r(202) = -.185$, $p = .008$; (g) how creative one was, $r(202) = .368$, $p < .001$; (h) how spiritual the experience was, $r(202) = .317$, $p < .001$.

(Except for how lonely one was, none of these variables' correlations with the degree to which the episode was seen as beneficial or detrimental were significant within both groups. This indicates that these correlations may have been due to differences between the groups and may not be generalizable across all participants.)

However, across all participants, the degree to which the outcome of a solitude episode was seen as beneficial or detrimental was related to several items that the classification of episodes as positive or negative was not. Specifically, the outcome of a solitude episode was also related to how many times the person experienced solitude in the past year, $r(201) = .148$, $p = .035$, and to how much the person learned, as a result of the episode, about events in his or her life, $r(202) = .156$, $p = .026$. The positive relationship between number of solitude experiences and the beneficial nature of the episode may indicate that those who have spent more time in solitude may be able to gain more from solitude than the novice might gain: perhaps, as several theorists have pointed out (e.g., Modell, 1993; Winnicott, 1958), one must develop a

certain capacity to be alone to experience the full benefits of solitude. On the other hand, the positive relationship between learning about events in one's life and the beneficial nature of the episode, when considered in tandem with the lack of a relationship between learning about the self and the beneficial nature of solitude, appears less compatible with certain conceptualizations of solitude. Koch (1993), Suedfeld (1982), and Westin (1967), among others, all emphasize the freedom that solitude affords to explore the self. For the undergraduate participants in the present study, learning about themselves appears not to have been as universally beneficial as was learning about events in their lives.

More on Creativity and Spirituality

Creativity and spirituality have traditionally been the most often discussed benefits of solitude. In the present study, as noted above, these were both associated with positive episodes of solitude, though the average positive episode was neither particularly creative nor spiritual. To more closely examine these two benefits, additional analyses were performed across all participants, disregarding the distinction between positive and negative episodes. Here, several significant relationships emerged.

Though the correlation may have been partially driven by their association with positive episodes, creativity and spirituality were themselves strongly positively related to one another, $r(204) = .310$, $p < .001$. Similarly, creativity and spirituality were related to most of the same variables in the same directions as were positive (versus negative) episodes of solitude. However, in contrast to positive episodes, the degree to which one was creative during the episode was associated with learning about events in one's life and with learning about one's self, $r(204) = .249$, $p < .001$, and $r(204) = .168$, $p = .016$, respectively.

As with creativity, the degree to which one was spiritual during the episode was related to several variables that the positive (versus negative) nature of the episode was not. For example, spirituality was inversely related to difficulty in remembering a positive experience of solitude, $r(204) = -.168$, $p < .016$. That is, those participants who described a spiritual episode had a relatively easier time remembering a positive episode than did those who did not describe a particularly spiritual episode. In addition, with respect to the settings of particular episodes, the degree to which an episode was spiritual was strongly positively related to being outdoors

in a natural setting, $\underline{r}(204) = .326$, $\underline{p} < .001$. Also, spirituality was negatively related to familiarity with the place in which the episode took place, $\underline{r}(204) = -.137$, $\underline{p} = .050$. However, like positive (versus negative) episodes, spirituality was positively related to feelings over control over the situation, $\underline{r}(203) = .211$, $\underline{p} = .002$. On the whole, spiritual solitude seemed to be associated with somewhat unfamiliar, natural settings—but settings in which one continued to feel control.

Like creativity (and in contrast to whether an episode was positive or negative), spirituality was also associated with learning about one's self and learning about events in one's life, $\underline{r}(204) = .215$, $\underline{p} = .002$, and $\underline{r}(204) = .197$, $\underline{p} = .005$, respectively. In contrast to creativity (and to almost every other variable of interest on the questionnaire), though, the degree to which an episode was spiritual was related to gender, $\underline{t}(204) = 2.207$, $\underline{p} = .028$. Here, men had a mean of 3.12 on the seven-point spirituality rating scale item, whereas women had a mean of only 2.49 on the same scale. Though this difference might be a function of the particular sample of men (e.g., men in psychology classes) and neither gender's mean is above the scale's midpoint, this difference implies that the men

considered their solitude episodes to be slightly more spiritual than did the women.

In summary, though creativity was not as differentiated from positive episodes in general as was spirituality, both creativity and spirituality showed differences from the average positive episode. Specifically, both involved learning about one's life and one's self more so than did the average positive episode. As related to solitude, creativity and spirituality, with its natural and unfamiliar settings, seem to be benefits that rely upon the increased freedom afforded by solitude to enhance one's experience by examining one's self and one's life (e.g., Koch, 1994).

The Ideal Place to Seek Solitude

To learn more about the types of settings with which participants associate positive experiences of solitude, they were presented with a checklist of settings and asked to indicate, assuming they were free to go wherever they might choose, which one described their ideal place for seeking solitude. (Fifty, or 24%, of the participants indicated more than one "ideal" place.) Table 14 presents the frequencies with which participants endorsed the descriptors on the checklist of ideal places to seek a positive solitude experience. (For these descriptors,

there were no meaningful differences in frequencies of endorsement between the positive and negative groups of participants.)

Though 117, or 57%, of the participants indicated that their solitude episode occurred in their room or at their home, only 22, or 11%, of the participants endorsed "in their room" as an ideal place to seek solitude. In contrast, though only 31, or 15%, of the participants indicated that their solitude episodes occurred in a natural setting, natural settings were the most commonly endorsed ideal places. Specifically, going to a "beach" was endorsed by 40 participants (19%), "mountaintop" was endorsed by 28 participants (14%), "river or lake" by 27 participants (13%), and "forest or woods" by 10 participants (5%). Whereas most of the episodes of solitude they chose to describe occurred in their rooms or at their homes, participants apparently associated natural settings with positive experiences of solitude. This belief resonates with many positive conceptions of solitude, including Thoreau's (1854/1981) Walden and Hammitt and Madden's (1989) wilderness privacy, which contend that the relative social and cognitive freedom afforded by nature promotes personal growth, self-repair,

and many of the other benefits with which solitude has been traditionally associated.

Burger's (1995) Preference for Solitude Scale

After excluding 20 participants' scores due to missing data on one or more of the 12 scale items (19 people failed to answer the tenth item on the scale—second most were only three people failing to answer the third scale item), the mean Preference for Solitude score for the remaining 186 participants was 5.23. Scale reliability was adequate, Cronbach's alpha = .712.

Among participants who responded to all 12 scale items, Preference for Solitude scores were correlated with several items on the questionnaire. For example, across all participants, Preference for Solitude scores were positively related to how many times during the last year participants experienced solitude, $r(184) = .335$, $p < .001$, and to a higher proportion of positive than negative solitude experiences in the past year, $r(184) = .342$, $p < .001$. However, across all participants, preference for solitude scale score was negatively correlated with the degree to which it was difficult to remember a positive solitude experience, $r(184) = -.362$, $p < .001$. That is, for participants with high Preference for Solitude scores, it was easier to remember positive solitude experiences,

whereas for participants with lower Preference for Solitude scores, it was more difficult to remember positive solitude experiences. Apparently, participants with higher scores had a greater number of salient positive experiences, though it is impossible to determine the direction of cause in this relationship. In summary, despite some apparently systematic nonresponsiveness to one of its items, Burger's (1995) Preference for Solitude Scale seems to be related to several interesting criterion variables and may be of utility in future solitude research.

Solitude: "Psychological Space" or Emotion?

At the end of the questionnaire, participants read a few sentences explaining that "some people think of solitude as a type of 'psychological space' in which a variety of different events occur, including various emotions...," whereas "other people think of solitude as a kind of emotional experience." Immediately following this explanation, participants were asked which of these views of solitude they most agreed with, keeping in mind the episode that they had been describing. Across all participants, 113 agreed that solitude was a sort of psychological space, 55 contended that it was an emotion, and 36 could not decide between the two. (This contrasts with the general conception of the related construct of

loneliness, which is usually considered as an emotion.) However, when those who could not decide were momentarily excluded from analyses, a trend toward difference emerged between those who had described a positive episode and those who had described a negative episode, $t(166) = 1.92$, $p = .056$. Among the positive group, 67 thought that solitude was a psychological space, 24 felt that it was an emotion, and 12 could not decide. However, among the negative group, only 46 thought that solitude was a psychological space, 31 felt it was an emotion, and 24 could not decide.

This increased reluctance on behalf of the negative group to describe solitude as "psychological space" may be related to the type of experience that participants in the negative group described. That is, many of the negative solitude episodes they selected may be just as easily described as episodes of loneliness. The anxiety, depression, sadness, feelings of lacking control over the (social) situation, and self-focus during their time alone are compatible with many theorists' conceptualizations of loneliness (e.g., Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999), which, as noted above, is most generally considered as an emotion.

Despite the strong minority among negative participants who felt that solitude was an emotion or who

could not decide, the most common belief in the positive and negative groups was that solitude is a type of "psychological space." This is consonant with many of the more developed theoretical approaches to solitude (e.g., Hammitt & Madden, 1989; Koch, 1994; Suedfeld, 1982), which conceive of solitude as a less structured environment in which people experience increased freedom to choose what they do or what they think about.

General Discussion

What Differentiated Positive and Negative Episodes?

Across most of the results of the present study, positive experiences of solitude were characterized by positive affect, feelings of control over the situation, and feelings of freedom to choose what to think about or do. In the time leading up to a positive episode, participants were in a relatively better mood and were more likely to have been seeking solitude. With respect to the setting of the episodes, which was most commonly their rooms or homes, the participants who described positive episodes were relatively more relaxed and felt more freedom from responsibility and more in control of the situation. During a positive episode, participants were contemplative, but this contemplation was accompanied by positive affect, such as feelings of happiness, relaxation, and freedom.

Positive episodes were also more likely to have been characterized by creativity and spirituality than were negative episodes. Though people in general often point to negative experiences as those which have been most beneficial to them, positive episodes were described as more beneficial (and much less detrimental) than were negative episodes.

Negative episodes, on the other hand, were characterized by negative affect and relatively lower feelings of control than were positive episodes. Though many of the same life events preceded both types of episode, the time leading up to a negative episode was relatively more likely to have been characterized by negative affect, and participants who were on the verge of a negative episode (versus a positive episode) were much less likely to have been seeking solitude. The setting of a negative episode, 75% of which occurred in participants' rooms or homes, was often described as contributing to feelings of boredom or oppression. As with positive episodes, the time during a negative episode was often spent in contemplation. However, in contrast to a positive episode, a negative episode was characterized by strong negative affect, especially including feelings of loneliness, sadness, depression, boredom, and anxiety.

Though many participants who experienced a negative episode were able to point to at least one benefit of the experience, negative episodes were not surprisingly described as more detrimental than beneficial.

Though there were many differences between the positive and negative episodes, the results of the study indicated that both types of episode typically afforded opportunities to explore one's self and one's life. Whether a particular experience was positive or negative, most participants spent their time of solitude in contemplation of personal issues or important decisions, and the degree to which one learned about one's self or one's life was not related to an experience being positive or negative. Rather, even when the experience was a negative one, characterized by strongly negative emotions, participants generally noted some benefit from their time in solitude. However, the fluidity of the relationships among learning about one's self and one's life and the degree to which one considers the experience to have been beneficial or detrimental is a reminder that solitude does not lend itself to neat reduction to a discrete, stable category of emotional experience. Rather, taken as a whole, the results of this study suggest that solitude might be better conceptualized as a particular type of

psychological environment, or "psychological space," in which many different emotions might occur, than as any uniform type of affective experience.

The results of the present study consistently indicate that the degree to which one feels control over the situation, as well as the other affect that precedes and pervades the experience, are strongly associated with whether this solitude environment is experienced as positive or negative. In this study, positive solitude experiences were ones in which participants used the freedom afforded by solitude to daydream or to contemplate personal issues and eventually reach some favorable resolution, often clarifying their priorities or gaining a sense of self-renewal. Despite the relatively less structured environment of solitude, they felt in control of the situation, felt positive emotions, and used their time in solitude to their benefit.

In contrast, negative solitude experiences were ones in which participants generally experienced negative affect, often including loneliness, uncertainty, or boredom, when faced with the relative lack of structure of the solitude environment. Their contemplation often resulted in confusion or focus on negative things that they could not change. To these participants, who were not

seeking solitude and did not feel control over their situation, the temporary social withdrawal of solitude was not experienced as freedom but as oppression. Their solitude was an involuntary experience in which they may have felt relatively powerless over where they were, how they felt, what they thought about, or what they did. For them, perhaps, the routine social and cognitive demands of their usual psychological environment could provide freedom from this negative affect and the feelings of being out of control that their experience of solitude highlighted. Along with the degree to which the episodes were described as beneficial or detrimental, the valence of the affective experience as well as the degree to which one felt in control of the situation strongly differentiated these negative episodes from positive episodes of solitude.

How Do These Results Relate to Previous Explorations of Solitude?

As noted in the introduction, when psychologists study any type of time spent alone, they generally focus on loneliness rather than solitude. When solitude is discussed, it is most often conceptualized either as simply being alone or as a positive, beneficial state that occurs while alone. To date, psychology has had little to say about negative episodes of solitude per se, except as

related to experiences of loneliness. Therefore, in relating the present study's findings to the extant literature on solitude, the results pertaining to positive episodes will be emphasized at the expense of those pertaining to negative episodes (which could be profitably explored in the context of the vast literature on loneliness, though the present discussion, focusing on the solitude literature, will not address this further).

In the relation of the present study to the extant literature on solitude, it is important to recognize the specific characteristics of the positive solitude experiences described in the present study. For example, though participants were instructed to select a positive experience that may have had painful as well as pleasant aspects, their positive episodes seem to have been almost exclusively pleasant, at least in retrospect. These positive episodes were preceded by positive affect, were characterized by uniformly positive affect during the episode, and were almost completely bereft of detrimental effects. Though these participants contemplated personal issues and decisions (when they were not simply daydreaming or fantasizing), they reported almost exclusively positive emotions and generally described the experience as beneficial. On average, these were experiences of the

"companionable" solitude of Thoreau (1854/1981), not the challenging, disciplined solitude of secluded monks and nuns or the neurotic solitude of those lacking the capacity to be alone (Winnicott, 1958). In addition, it is important to remember that the positive episodes in the present study were quite short in duration, lasting on average only four to eight hours, and they occurred mostly in participants' rooms or homes. In contrast to Thoreau's time at Walden or Byrd's (1938) stay at Antarctica, these solitude experiences represented brief withdrawals from participants' usual social environment.

Because of the pleasant, brief character of the positive episodes, they have more in common with those theoretical approaches that treat solitude as a beneficial, short-term state than those that treat it as a more turbulent, challenging experience. For example, participants' positive episodes are quite compatible with the conception of solitude in those popular magazine articles mentioned in the introduction that advocate taking "time out from the world" (Warrick, 1999), in order to experience "the pleasure of solitude" (Japenga, 1999). These episodes are of the type of solitude described by developmental psychologists Marcoen and Goossens (1993), who emphasized the freedom that solitude affords to select

activities, either physical or mental, that one finds appealing: Even when participants were contemplating personal issues and decisions, they reported almost uniformly positive affect. Though many of the episodes described in the present study took place indoors, these experiences were similar to Hammitt and Madden's (1989) "wilderness privacy," in which their participants were relatively free from their social responsibilities and were relatively free to control what they thought about and what they did. Characterized by positive affect and freedom, the type of solitude experienced by participants in the present study is probably similar to what was meant by the "solitude" that was included in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (U.S. Public Law 88-577) as a value that should be promoted by the United States government's wilderness managers.

As indicated above, there are some conceptions of "positive" solitude that do not fit as neatly with the positive episodes described in the present study. For example, participants' positive episodes generally were not experiences of challenging self-examination, as when Byrd (1938) went to Antarctica or when Thoreau (1854/1981) went into the woods "to live deep and suck out the marrow of life" (p. 172). Based on the duration of the episodes and the degree to which they reported uniformly positive affect

and felt in control of the situation, these participants were not rigorously challenging themselves or testing their own capabilities. These positive episodes did not seem to consist of the type of turbulent positive solitude that especially relies upon any "capacity to be alone" (Winnicott, 1958). In addition, though participants' positive episodes were more creative and spiritual than were the negative episodes, these were not especially spiritual or creative experiences. Moreover, to the extent that these experiences were positive in this way, they were experiences only of harmony, unity, and peace. Among the positive group of participants, there was little report of the fear, anxiety, and humility that often characterizes experiences of solitary creativity or spirituality (e.g., Modell, 1993).

Solitude as implicated by participants in the present study represents only a certain segment of the solitude experiences included in the extant literature. However, the present study has highlighted some relationships among constructs that may be central to brief solitude experiences similar to those described by participants. For example, the positive and negative episodes in the present study were differentiated by the type of affect experienced throughout the episode and by the degree to

which one felt in control of the situation. In addition, the degree to which the positive and negative solitude episodes were different, and the ease with which participants were able to think of both positive and negative solitude experiences, implies that solitude is not easily reduced to a discrete emotional category. In contrast to loneliness, across all episodes, solitude appears to be a particular type of less structured environment, in which many different types of emotions and activities can occur. However, the similarities between negative solitude and loneliness, the willingness of a strong minority of participants to describe solitude as an emotion, and the limited nature of the type of solitude experience described in the present study make the generalizability of these relationships and conclusions to the wider range of solitude experiences a matter for further research.

Two Final Caveats

As one considers this discussion, it is important to keep in mind a pair of caveats. First, because no adequate definition has been formulated, the questionnaire included no definition of solitude. Therefore, each participant may have formulated his or her responses based on a slightly different conception of solitude. However, though these

differing conceptions may have been helpful in circumscribing the breadth of experiences that people would describe as solitude, there seemed to be a remarkable homogeneity (e.g., in terms of affect experienced) among the experiences described within each of the two groups of participants, creating stark differences between the positive and negative groups.

A second important caveat involves the present study's inability to specify any causality or model of how various factors contribute to solitude. For instance, no matter what the results, one cannot conclude from this study that particular feelings (e.g., feelings of control or positive affect) or situational factors caused or contributed to the solitude experience. Like any descriptive study, the present study can only describe (and cannot explain) the relationships among constructs. However, this study has indicated some dimensions along which positive and negative episodes of solitude differ and raised engaging issues related to the benefits, detriments, and characteristics of solitude experience.

Table 1
Feelings Most Frequently Noted as Occurring Before the Solitude Episode and Contributing to the Episode

Feeling	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
Stressed/Overwhelmed	49 (1)	53 (4)	102 (1)
Happy	47 (2)	13 (15)	60 (7)
Free	47 (2)	4 (24)	51 (13)
Independent	46 (4)	13 (15)	59 (8)
Content/Satisfied	43 (5)	10 (21)	53 (12)
In control	41 (6)	8 (22)	49 (15)
Uncertain/Confused	40 (7)	54 (3)	94 (2)
Worried/Anxious	39 (8)	53 (4)	92 (3)
At peace/Calm	37 (9)	6 (23)	43 (19)
Frustrated	36 (10)	48 (6)	84 (5)
	Negative Group		
Depressed	24 (15)	58 (1)	82 (6)
Sad	28 (13)	57 (2)	85 (4)
Uncertain/Confused	40 (7)	54 (3)	94 (2)
Stressed/Overwhelmed	49 (1)	53 (4)	102 (1)
Worried/Anxious	39 (8)	53 (4)	92 (3)
Frustrated	36 (10)	48 (6)	84 (5)
Angry	14 (21)	40 (7)	54 (10)
Scared	17 (19)	34 (8)	51 (13)

Note. Of the 25 feelings listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-third of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many feelings as were applicable.

Table 2

Events Most Frequently Noted as Occurring Before the Solitude Episode and Contributing to the Episode

Event	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
I was extremely busy or felt like I had no time alone.	65 (1)	31 (7)	96 (4)
I was having difficulties with my schoolwork or job.	57 (2)	52 (1)	109 (1)
I was questioning my goals or trying to make a difficult decision.	55 (3)	50 (2)	105 (2)
I was thinking a lot about the past.	51 (4)	50 (2)	101 (3)
I was having a good relationship with my significant other.	43 (5)	15 (14)	58 (9)
I was doing well in my schoolwork or job.	41 (6)	19 (13)	60 (6)
	Negative Group		
I was having difficulties with my schoolwork or job.	57 (2)	52 (1)	109 (1)
I was questioning my goals or trying to make a difficult decision.	55 (3)	50 (2)	105 (2)
I was thinking a lot about the past.	51 (4)	50 (2)	101 (3)
I was having difficulties with a significant other.	25 (7)	39 (4)	64 (5)
Everyone happened to leave and I found myself alone.	20 (9)	39 (4)	59 (8)
I was having conflict with a friend, co-worker, or family member.	24 (8)	36 (6)	60 (6)

Note. Of the 17 events listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-third of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many events as were applicable.

Table 3

Settings in which the Solitude Episode Took Place

Setting	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
I was in my room or at my home.	41 (1)	76 (1)	117 (1)
I was outdoors in a natural setting (e.g., forest, beach, mountain, etc.)	28 (2)	3 (5)	31 (2)
OTHER	20 (3)	8 (3)	28 (3)
I was outdoors in an urban setting (e.g., a town or city).	8 (4)	7 (4)	15 (4)
I was indoors in a place that was not personally meaningful (e.g., library, classroom, office building, etc.).	5 (5)	10 (2)	15 (4)
I was outdoors in a landscaped setting.	5 (5)	1 (6)	6 (6)
I was at a place with spiritual significance (e.g., cemetery, Holocaust memorial, church, etc.).	1 (7)	0 (7)	1 (7)

Note. Each participant was instructed to endorse only one setting.

Table 4
Aspects of the Surroundings Most Frequently Noted as
Contributing to the Solitude Episode

Aspect	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
It was a comfortable or relaxing place.	78 (1)	36 (3)	114 (3)
I was all alone.	70 (2)	67 (1)	137 (1)
It was a familiar place.	69 (3)	56 (2)	125 (2)
I was free from responsibilities there.	60 (4)	18 (7)	78 (4)
Music was playing.	43 (5)	17 (9)	60 (5)
I was away from the telephone, email, or television.	40 (6)	11(11)	51 (6)
There were wind, water, trees, or animals around.	37 (7)	14(10)	51 (6)
It was a beautiful or awe-inspiring place.	32 (8)	6(14)	38 (8)
	Negative Group		
I was all alone.	70 (2)	67 (1)	137 (1)
It was a familiar place.	69 (3)	56 (2)	125 (2)
It was a comfortable or relaxing place.	78 (1)	36 (3)	114 (3)
It was a dull, boring place.	5(14)	29 (4)	34(10)

Note. Of the 15 aspects listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-fourth of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many aspects as were applicable.

Table 5

Aspects of the Surroundings Most Frequently Noted as Contributing to the Solitude Episode by Participants Whose Episodes Occurred in Their Rooms or Homes

Aspect	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)				
	Positive Group		Negative Group		Overall Group
	Positive Group				
It was a comfortable or relaxing place.	35	(1)	32	(3)	67 (3)
I was all alone.	33	(2.5)	57	(1)	90 (1)
It was a familiar place.	33	(2.5)	46	(2)	79 (2)
Music was playing.	20	(4)	16	(6.5)	36 (5)
I was free from responsibilities there.	17	(5)	13	(8)	40 (4)
	Negative Group				
I was all alone.	33	(2.5)	57	(1)	90 (1)
It was a familiar place.	33	(2.5)	46	(2)	79 (2)
It was a comfortable or relaxing place.	35	(1)	32	(3)	67 (3)
It was a dull, boring place.	2	(11)	21	(4)	23 (6)
I felt constrained by my Surroundings.	0	(14.5)	20	(5)	20 (8)

Note. Of the 15 aspects listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-fourth of either the positive ($\underline{n} = 41$) or negative ($\underline{n} = 76$) subgroup of participants whose episodes occurred in their rooms or homes were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many aspects as were applicable.

Table 6

Description of the People Around when the Solitude Episode Took Place

Description	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
I was all by myself.	70 (1)	69 (1)	139 (1)
I was with people (or a person) I felt close to.	14 (2)	13 (2)	27 (2)
I was among strangers.	8 (4)	9 (3)	17 (3)
OTHER	10 (3)	5 (5)	15 (4)
I was with people (or a person) I knew, but no one I felt close to.	4 (5)	6 (4)	10 (5)

Note. Each participant was instructed to endorse only one description.

Table 7
Activities Most Frequently Noted as Occurring During the Solitude Episode

Activity	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall Group
	Positive Group		
I daydreamed, fantasized, or let my mind wander.	80 (1)	41 (4)	121 (2)
I contemplated personal issues or important decisions.	61 (2)	64 (1)	125 (1)
I collected or organized my thoughts.	59 (3)	27 (8)	86 (6)
I thought about people or events from my past.	57 (4)	54 (3)	111 (3)
I listened to music.	55 (5)	35 (6)	90 (5)
I hoped or wished for things.	51 (6)	59 (2)	110 (4)
	Negative Group		
I contemplated personal issues or important decisions.	61 (2)	64 (1)	125 (1)
I hoped or wished for things.	51 (6)	59 (2)	110 (4)
I thought about people or events from my past.	57 (4)	54 (3)	111 (3)
I daydreamed, fantasized, or let my mind wander.	80 (1)	41 (4)	121 (2)
I spent time coping with a loss or coming to terms with change.	20 (8)	41 (4)	61 (7)
I listened to music.	55 (5)	35 (6)	90 (5)
I watched TV or movies.	21 (7)	34 (7)	55 (8)

Note. Of the 12 activities listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-third of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many activities as were applicable.

Table 8

Emotions Most Frequently Noted as Occurring During the Solitude Episode

Emotion	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
Happy/Content	83 (1)	1 (36)	84 (3)
Relaxed/Calm	77 (2)	3 (27)	80 (5)
Free	70 (3)	5 (25)	75 (7)
Optimistic/Hopeful	60 (4)	7 (23)	67 (11)
Joyful	57 (5)	1 (36)	58 (16)
Self-confident	53 (6)	3 (27)	56 (18)
At peace with myself	52 (7)	2 (32)	54 (19)
Strong/Independent	51 (8)	3 (27)	54 (19)
Whole/Complete	45 (9)	1 (36)	46 (23)
Excited	42 (10)	4 (26)	46 (23)
At peace with nature	35 (11)	3 (27)	38 (30)
Renewed/Energized	35 (11)	1 (36)	36 (31)
	Negative Group		
Sad	27 (16)	78 (1)	105 (1)
Lonely	13 (29)	69 (2)	82 (4)
Depressed	17 (23)	68 (3)	85 (2)
Empty	14 (27)	57 (4)	71 (10)
Confused	22 (19)	56 (5)	78 (6)
Anxious/Worried	17 (23)	56 (5)	73 (8)
Isolated	10 (31)	55 (7)	65 (13)
Stressed/Tense	20 (20)	53 (8)	73 (8)
Afraid	15 (25)	52 (9)	67 (11)
Angry at myself	10 (31)	50 (10)	60 (14)
Weak/Dependent	10 (31)	47 (11)	57 (17)
Dissatisfied/Restless	6 (38)	47 (11)	53 (21)
Exhausted/Tired	18 (22)	42 (13)	60 (14)
Angry at Others	11 (30)	42 (13)	53 (21)
Rejected/Alienated	5 (39)	39 (15)	44 (26)
Hopeless	8 (35)	37 (16)	45 (25)
Unmotivated	9 (34)	35 (17)	44 (26)

Note. Of the 42 emotions listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-third of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many emotions as were applicable.

Table 9

Emotions Most Frequently Noted as Being Central to the Solitude Episode

Emotion	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
Relaxed/Calm	42 (1)	0 (31)	42 (1)
Happy/Content	33 (2)	1 (26)	34 (5)
At peace with myself	28 (3)	0 (31)	28 (7)
Free	27 (4)	0 (31)	27 (8)
Optimistic/Hopeful	24 (5)	2 (24)	26 (10)
Self-confident	21 (6)	1 (26)	22 (15)
Whole/Complete	16 (7)	0 (31)	19 (16)
Strong/Independent	15 (8)	1 (26)	16 (19)
At peace with nature	15 (8)	0 (31)	15 (22)
Loved/Affirmed	12 (10)	3 (22)	15 (22)
Connected to others	12 (10)	3 (22)	15 (22)
Excited	12 (10)	1 (26)	13 (26)
	Negative Group		
Lonely	3 (29)	35 (1)	38 (2)
Depressed	5 (23)	32 (2)	37 (4)
Sad	8 (16)	30 (3)	38 (2)
Empty	6 (20)	23 (4)	29 (6)
Angry at myself	2 (30)	22 (5)	24 (13)
Anxious/Worried	6 (20)	21 (6)	27 (8)
Isolated	5 (23)	19 (7)	24 (13)
Rejected/Alienated	2 (30)	19 (7)	21 (16)
Confused	7 (18)	18 (9)	25 (11)
Afraid	0 (42)	17 (10)	17 (18)
Angry at Others	4 (25)	17 (10)	21 (16)

Note. Of the 42 emotions listed on the questionnaire, only the ten most frequently endorsed by each group were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many emotions as were applicable.

Table 10
Feelings Most Frequently Noted as Occurring During the Solitude Episode

Feeling	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall Group
	Positive Group		
I felt free from social pressures.	78 (1)	20 (7)	98 (1)
I felt an increased ability to concentrate or focus.	60 (2)	7 (10)	67 (3)
I felt harmony (or unity) with nature or the world around me.	43 (3)	1 (13)	44 (6)
I felt a heightened sense of awareness or experienced particularly vivid imagery.	42 (4)	10 (9)	52 (4)
I felt a sense of adventure, like I was meeting a challenge.	38 (5)	6 (12)	44 (6)
I felt increased intimacy or connection with another (whether or not that person was actually present).	27 (6)	13 (8)	40 (10)
	Negative Group		
I missed having someone with whom I could share my thoughts and feelings.	15 (8)	63 (1)	78 (2)
I felt oppressed by the aloneness and/or the silence.	2 (12)	44 (2)	46 (5)
I missed the comfort and predictability of my normal routine.	2 (12)	41 (3)	43 (9)
I felt a decreased ability to concentrate or focus.	4 (11)	34 (4)	38 (11)
I felt small (or humble) within the grand scheme of things.	17 (7)	27 (5)	44 (6)
I felt like I was wasting time.	5 (9)	26 (6)	31 (12)

Note. Of the 13 feelings listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-fourth of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many feelings as were applicable.

Table 11

Benefits Most Frequently Noted as Consequences of the Solitude Episode

Benefit	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
I clarified my goals and priorities and/or organized my thoughts.	73 (1)	32 (3)	105 (1)
I gained increased understanding of myself.	61 (2)	33 (2)	94 (2)
I gained a sense of self-renewal.	58 (3)	13 (8)	71 (5)
I gained insight or a new perspective on a problem.	47 (4)	37 (1)	84 (3)
I became a stronger, more resilient person.	42 (5)	30 (4)	72 (4)
I gained increased ability to concentrate on my work or studies.	31 (6)	6(11)	37 (7)
I felt spiritually renewed or uplifted.	30 (7)	3(12)	33 (8)
I became more effective in my relationships with others.	26 (8)	19 (6)	45 (6)
My creativity was enhanced.	23 (9)	9(10)	32 (9)
	Negative Group		
I gained insight or a new perspective on a problem.	47 (4)	37 (1)	84 (3)
I gained increased understanding of myself.	61 (2)	33 (2)	94 (2)
I clarified my goals and priorities and/or organized my thoughts.	73 (1)	32 (3)	105 (1)
I became a stronger, more resilient person.	42 (5)	30 (4)	72 (4)
There were no beneficial consequences.	5(11)	24 (5)	29(10)

Note. Of the 12 benefits listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-fifth of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many benefits as were applicable.

Table 12

Detriments Most Frequently Noted as Consequences of the Solitude Episode

Detriment	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
	Positive Group		
There were no detrimental consequences.	70 (1)	9 (9)	79 (1)
	Negative Group		
I over-analyzed things and/or became uncertain about what to do next.	17 (2)	55 (1)	72 (2)
I became focused on negative things that I could not really change.	8 (5)	52 (2)	60 (4)
I felt drained or tired.	12 (3)	51 (3)	63 (3)
I felt unmotivated.	2 (9)	31 (4)	33 (6)
I missed out on new or exciting things going on somewhere else.	7 (7)	30 (5)	37 (5)

Note. Of the 10 detriments listed on the questionnaire, only those which were endorsed by at least one-fifth of either the positive or negative group participants were included in this table. Participants could endorse as many detriments as were applicable.

Table 13

Advice Offered to Someone Seeking a Positive Solitude Experience

Advice	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
Do something that makes you feel relaxed.	83 (1)	77 (1)	160 (1)
Let your mind wander.	80 (2)	58 (3)	138 (2)
Go out into nature.	54 (5)	64 (2)	118 (3)
Listen to music.	55 (4)	56 (4)	111 (4)
Go where you can be completely alone.	58 (3)	47 (7)	105 (5)
Go for a drive.	47 (7)	55 (5)	102 (6)
Go jogging or exercise.	42 (8)	51 (6)	93 (7)
Get away from the influence of friends and family.	54 (5)	38 (2)	92 (8)
Try to pay attention to the small things you do not usually notice.	33 (9)	39 (8)	72 (9)
Do some activity that requires creativity or imagination.	32(10)	37(10)	69(10)
Meditate, pray, go to a spiritually meaningful place, or do some other spiritual (but not necessarily religious) activity.	31(11)	33(11)	64(11)
Read a book.	23(13)	31(12)	54(12)
Go back to your room (or house or apartment).	25(12)	20(13)	45(13)
Spend time deep in concentration.	22(14)	18(14)	40(14)
Go somewhere where no one knows you.	20(15)	16(15)	36(15)
Watch television.	10(16)	16(15)	26(16)

Note. Participants could endorse as many pieces of advice as were applicable.

Table 14

Ideal Place to Seek a Positive Solitude Experience

Place	Frequency (and Frequency Rank)		
	Positive Group	Negative Group	Overall
A beach	26 (1)	14 (2)	40 (1)
A moutaintop	13 (3)	15 (1)	28 (2)
A river or lake	14 (2)	13 (3)	27 (3)
My room or apartment	11 (4)	11 (4)	22 (4)
OTHER	3 (6)	9 (5)	12 (5)
A forest or woods	4 (5)	6 (6)	10 (6)
Shops or a mall	3 (6)	2 (8)	5 (7)
A city park or garden	1 (9)	3 (7)	4 (8)
A gym/exercise club	2 (8)	2 (8)	4 (8)
Nowhere: I would never seek solitude	1 (9)	1(10)	2(10)
A place of spiritual or religious significance	1 (9)	0(12)	1(11)
A city (but not a city park)	0(12)	1(10)	1(11)

Note. Each participant was instructed to endorse only one place. However, 50 participants endorsed more than one place, so their data were excluded from the table.

APPENDIX A

POSITIVE VERSION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

General Instructions

Solitude has been a topic of concern for thousands of years. Many religious leaders, philosophers, monks, and nuns have sought long periods of solitude. Poets and writers, such as Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf, have often either celebrated or complained about solitude in their writings. For example, the French writer Colette wrote, "There are days when solitude is heady wine that intoxicates you, others when it is a bitter tonic, and still others when it is a poison that makes you beat your head against the wall."

As the quote above indicates, solitude can be a positive experience, a negative experience, or somewhere in between. Most of us can think of times when we had a generally positive experience of solitude—an experience that, given similar circumstances, we would like to repeat. Likewise, most of us can think of times when we had a generally negative experience of solitude—an experience that, given similar circumstances, we would not like to repeat.

The study in which you are participating is one in a series designed to investigate some of the ways that solitude is experienced. Your participation involves the completion of a detailed questionnaire about some of your solitude experiences.

There are no right or wrong answers to any of the items on this questionnaire. Therefore, let your own experiences determine how you answer the questions.

Please be sure to answer all of the items as completely as possible, even if this means repeating some information you provided on previous items. Otherwise, your questionnaire may be of little use. Your answers will be completely anonymous. At no point will you be asked to identify yourself personally on the questionnaire.

Most people have found the questionnaire interesting to complete, and we believe you will, too. Thank you for your assistance.

Instructions for Items #1 and #2

On the next page, you will be asked to describe two experiences of solitude, one positive and the other negative. Before proceeding, please read the following instructions carefully.

First, think of a time, preferably within the last year, in which you had a positive experience of solitude. At the time, aspects of this experience may have been painful as well as pleasant; the important thing is that you consider the experience worthwhile given the circumstances. Select a specific episode of near continuous solitude that lasted at least one hour and no more than three days. Please think carefully because you are going to be asked detailed questions about the episode you select. If you can think of several episodes, choose one that seems most typical to you.

Next, think of a time, also within the last year, when you had a negative experience of solitude. Not every aspect of the experience need have been negative at the time; however, choose an experience that was generally neither beneficial nor pleasant. Select a specific episode of near continuous solitude that lasted at least one hour and no more than three days. Please think carefully because you are going to be asked detailed questions about the episode you select. If you can think of several such times, please choose one that seems most typical to you.

After you have selected two episodes that fit the above descriptions, please proceed to the next page.

Section One

1. Now take a few moments to relive the **positive** solitude experience that you selected. Remember where you were, how you felt, what emotions you experienced, and what happened. When you have a pretty good sense of the experience, please describe it as fully and clearly as possible.
[If you feel that you have never had a generally positive solitude experience, please describe an experience that you feel comes closest to being a positive solitude experience.]

2. Now take a few moments to relive the **negative** experience that you selected. Remember where you were, how you felt, what emotions you experienced, and what happened. When you have a pretty good sense of the experience, please describe it as fully and clearly as possible.
[If you feel that you have never had a generally negative solitude experience, please describe an experience that you feel comes closest to being a negative solitude experience.]

3. Please describe what you see as the major factors (both personal and situational) that helped make one of the experiences you just described positive and the other negative.

4. How difficult was it for you to remember a **positive** solitude experience? (circle one number)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very
difficult difficult difficult

5. How difficult was it for you to remember a **negative** solitude experience? (circle one number)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very
difficult difficult difficult

6. How many times during the last year would you say that you had a solitude experience (including both positive and negative episodes) lasting at least an hour and no more than three days? (**check one**)

- not at all during the year
- 1 to 2 times during the year
- 3 to 5 times during the year
- 6 to 9 times during the year
- about once a month
- about two or three times a month
- about once a week
- about two or three times a week
- about once a day
- more than once a day

7. What proportion of the solitude experiences you had in the last year would you say were positive and what proportion would you say were negative?

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| all my solitude experiences in the past year were negative | | | half my solitude experiences were positive and half were negative | | | all my solitude experiences in the past year were positive |

Section Two

For each of the following twelve pairs of statements (Items #8-#19), select the one that best describes you. In some cases neither statement may describe you well or both may describe you somewhat. In those cases, please check the statement that best describes or that describes you more often.

8. I enjoy being around people.
 I enjoy being by myself.
9. I try to structure my day so that I always have some time to myself.
 I try to structure my day so that I always am doing something with someone.
10. One feature I look for in a job is the opportunity to interact with interesting people.
 One feature I look for in a job is the opportunity to spend time by myself.
11. After spending a few hours surrounded by a lot of people, I usually find myself stimulated and energetic.
 After spending a few hours surrounded by a lot of people, I am usually eager to get away by myself.
12. Time spent alone is often productive for me.
 Time spent alone is often wasted for me.
13. I often have a strong desire to get away by myself.
 I rarely have a strong desire to get away by myself.
14. I like to vacation in places where there are a lot of people around and a lot of activities going on.
 I like to vacation in places where there are few people around and a lot of serenity and quiet.

15. ___ When I have to spend several hours alone, I find the time boring and unpleasant.
___ When I have to spend several hours alone, I find the time productive and pleasant.
16. ___ If I were to take a several hour plane trip, I would like to sit next to someone who was pleasant to talk with.
___ If I were to take a several hour plane trip, I would like to spend the time quietly.
17. ___ Time spent with other people is often boring and uninteresting.
___ Time spent alone is often boring and uninteresting.
18. ___ I have a strong need to be around other people.
___ I do not have a strong need to be around other people.
19. ___ There are many times when I just have to get away and be by myself.
___ There are rarely times when I just have to get away and be by myself.

Most of the remainder of this questionnaire has to do with the positive solitude episode you described in response to item #1 on page 4. Please review your description there, taking a few moments to call the experience clearly to mind before continuing.

Section Three: Just Before Your Positive Solitude Experience

20. Thinking back to **the days or weeks just before your positive solitude experience**, which of the following statements describe events in your life that may have contributed to the episode? (**please read through the entire list and then check all that apply**)

I was having difficulties (e.g., I just ended a romantic relationship) with a significant other

I was having a good relationship with my significant other

I was having difficulties and/or stress with my schoolwork or job

I was doing well in my schoolwork or job

I was dealing with a physical or psychological health problem

I was extremely busy and/or felt like I had no time alone

I was spending lots of time alone

I was having conflict with a friend, co-worker or family member

I was moving to a new place and/or changing jobs or schools

I was thinking a lot about spiritual or religious issues (**note: as used in this questionnaire, "spiritual" is a broad category that may, but need not, include religious beliefs and practices**)

I was thinking a lot about the past

I was questioning my goals or priorities and/or trying to make a difficult decision

I was waiting for the results of an important test, job/school application, or other uncertain event

I had recently experienced the death of a loved one

I was spending time among strangers or was in a strange place alone

Everyone happened to leave and I found myself alone

OTHER (please explain) _____

21. Thinking back to **the hours or minutes immediately BEFORE your positive solitude experience**, which of the following describes your moods or feelings that may have contributed to the episode? (**please read through the entire list and then check all that apply**)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worried/Anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> Homesick | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Content/Satisfied | <input type="checkbox"/> Depressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stressed/overwhelmed | <input type="checkbox"/> Free | <input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Bored | <input type="checkbox"/> At peace/Calm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happy | <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehensive/Reluctant | <input type="checkbox"/> Annoyed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertain/Confused | <input type="checkbox"/> In control | <input type="checkbox"/> Scared |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Unmotivated | <input type="checkbox"/> Excited |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependent | <input type="checkbox"/> Nostalgic for the past |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | | |

22. **In the hours or minutes immediately BEFORE your positive solitude experience**, was your dominant mood bad, neutral, or good?

- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| completely
bad | | | neutral
or mixed | | | completely
good |

Section Four: During Your Positive Experience

These next 18 items (items #23 to #40) refer to what went on during the positive solitude experience you described in response to item #1.

23. At the time of your positive episode, did you intentionally place yourself in a situation where you might experience solitude? That is, were you seeking solitude?

Yes _____ No _____

24. Which of the following best describes the duration of your positive solitude episode? **(check one)**

- _____ less than one hour
- _____ one to three hours
- _____ four to eight hours
- _____ nine to sixteen hours
- _____ one day
- _____ two days
- _____ three days
- _____ more than three days

25. Which of the following comes closest to describing the primary setting (e.g., the **physical** surroundings) in which your positive solitude episode took place? **(please check only one—that which contributed most significantly to your experience)**

- _____ I was in my room or at my home
- _____ I was outdoors in an urban setting (e.g., a town or city)
- _____ I was outdoors in a landscaped setting (e.g., a park or garden)
- _____ I was outdoors in a natural setting (e.g., a forest, beach, mountain, etc.)
- _____ I was at a place with spiritual significance or great personal meaning (e.g., the Holocaust memorial, a church, a cemetery, etc.)
- _____ I was indoors in a place that was not personally meaningful (e.g., a library, office building, classroom.)
- _____ OTHER (please explain) _____

26. How familiar were you with the place in which your positive solitude experience occurred?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
completely neither familiar completely
unfamiliar nor unfamiliar familiar

27. Which of the following comes closest to describing the people around you during your positive solitude episode? (**check only one**)

- I was all by myself.
- I was with people (or a person) I felt close to.
- I was with people (or a person) I knew, but no one I felt close to.
- I was among strangers.
- OTHER (please explain) _____

28. Which of the following describe aspects of your surroundings that **especially contributed to your solitude experience**? (**please check all that apply**)

- It was a new or foreign place.
- It was a familiar place.
- It was a comfortable or relaxing place.
- I was free from responsibilities there.
- I felt constrained by my surroundings.
- It was a beautiful or awe-inspiring place.
- There were wind, water, trees, or animals around.
- It was a dull, boring place
- It was a spiritual atmosphere (whether religious or non-religious)
- I was away from the telephone, email, and/or television.
- I was all alone.
- I was with people (or a person) who cared for me.
- There were only strangers (or a stranger) around.
- Music was playing.
- OTHER (please explain) _____

29. **During the episode**, how quiet and still was the place in which your solitude experience occurred?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely noisy and distracting			sometimes noisy and sometimes quiet			completely quiet and still

30. **During the episode**, how much in control of the situation did you feel?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely out of control of the situation			sometimes in control and sometimes out of control of the situation			completely in control of the situation

31. **During the episode**, you may have experienced a variety of different feelings and emotions. **Please read through the entire list and then put a check by all those feelings and emotions that describe your particular experience.**

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joyful | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed/Calm | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confused | <input type="checkbox"/> Awe | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loved/Affirmed | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious/Worried | <input type="checkbox"/> At peace with myself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Dissatisfied/Restless | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhausted/Tired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Afraid | <input type="checkbox"/> Depressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong/Independent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Free | <input type="checkbox"/> Excited | <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happy/Content | <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity/Certainty | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewed/Energized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry at myself | <input type="checkbox"/> Proud | <input type="checkbox"/> Hopeless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unmotivated | <input type="checkbox"/> At peace with nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry at others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weak/Dependent | <input type="checkbox"/> Isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Regretful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Connected to others | <input type="checkbox"/> Inspired | <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected/Alienated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bored | <input type="checkbox"/> Stressed/Tense | <input type="checkbox"/> Grateful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empty | <input type="checkbox"/> Hostile | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic/Hopeful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Whole/Complete | <input type="checkbox"/> Connected spiritually | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (please explain) _____ | | |

32. Now, look at the feelings and emotions you have just checked in Item #31 (and any others you listed) and circle the ones you consider to be most central to your experience.

33. The following items provide more examples of how you might have felt during your episode of solitude. **Please read through the entire list and then put a check beside any and all items that describe your particular experience.**

- I felt free from social pressures (e.g., like I could act however I wanted, didn't have to worry about offending others, or didn't have to answer to anyone)
 - I missed the comfort or predictability of my normal routine
 - I felt increased intimacy or connection with another (whether or not that person was actually present)
 - I felt like I was wasting time
 - I felt harmony (or unity) with nature or the world around me
 - I missed having someone with whom I could share my thoughts and feelings
 - I felt oppressed by the aloneness and/or the silence
 - I felt an increased ability to concentrate or focus
 - I felt a decreased ability to concentrate or focus
 - I felt a sense of adventure, like I was meeting a challenge
 - I felt a heightened sense of awareness, or experienced particularly vivid imagery
 - I felt small (or humble) within the grand scheme of things
 - OTHER (please explain) _____
-

34. What did you **do** during your period of solitude? **Please read through the entire list and then put a check beside any and all items that describe your particular experience.**

- I spent time in spiritual-like practices (e.g., meditation, prayer, yoga)
- I contemplated personal issues or important decisions
- I spent time coping with a loss or coming to terms with change
- I daydreamed, fantasized, or let my mind wander
- I thought about people or events from my past
- I hoped or wished for things
- I collected or organized my thoughts
- I listened to music
- I watched TV or movies
- I worked or studied
- I expressed myself creatively (by writing in a journal, drawing, playing music, etc.)
- OTHER (please explain) _____

35. Some people find solitude to be a time of anxiety. How anxious were you during your solitude experience?

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|-----------------------|---|---|----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not at all
anxious | | | Moderately
anxious | | | Extremely
anxious |

36. Some people find solitude to be a time of boredom. How bored were you during your solitude experience?

- | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not at all
bored | | | Moderately
bored | | | Extremely
bored |

37. Some people find solitude to be a time of creativity. How creative were you during your solitude experience?

- | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Not at all
creative | | | Moderately
creative | | | Extremely
creative |

38. Some people find solitude to be a time of loneliness. How lonely were you during your solitude experience?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all lonely			Moderately lonely			Extremely lonely

39. Some people find solitude to be a time of spirituality (remember, spiritual need not mean religious). How spiritual was your solitude experience?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all spiritual			Moderately spiritual			Extremely spiritual

40. During the solitude episode, to what extent did you try to occupy your time by watching television, reading magazines or books, using the internet, etc.?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I didn't spend any time doing that			I spent about half my time doing that			I spent almost all my time doing that

40a. Did your episode of solitude take place mostly during the day or during the night?

Or, if it was an

extended episode, during which period did you experience solitude most strongly?

___ during the day

___ during the night

___ can't decide

Section Five: Outcomes of Your Positive Solitude Experience

These next 9 items (items #41 to #49) refer to possible beneficial and detrimental consequences of the positive experience you described in response to item #1.

41. First, what were the **beneficial consequences**, if any, of your positive period of solitude? **Please read through the entire list and then put a check beside any and all items that describe your particular experience.**

- There were no beneficial consequences
 - I gained increased understanding of myself
 - I became a stronger, more resilient person
 - I gained a sense of self-renewal
 - I felt spiritually renewed or uplifted
 - My creativity was enhanced (e.g., I was able to do something creative or experience new ideas, thoughts, or emotions)
 - I clarified my goals and priorities and/or organized my thoughts
 - I gained insight or a new perspective on a problem
 - I gained increased ability to concentrate on my work or studies
 - I became more intimate with or more in love with another person
 - I became more effective in my relationships with others
 - OTHER (please explain) _____
-

42. What were the **detrimental consequences**, if any, of your positive period of solitude?
Please read the entire list and then put a check beside any and all items that describe your particular experience.

- There were no detrimental consequences
 - I failed to accomplish an assigned task, such as my job duties or homework
 - I became focused on negative things that I couldn't really change
 - I became too focused on myself
 - I over-analyzed things and/or became uncertain about what to do next
 - I felt drained or tired
 - I felt unmotivated
 - I missed out on new or exciting things going on somewhere else
 - I had new difficulties or conflicts in my relationships with others
 - OTHER (please explain) _____
-

43. As a result of your solitude episode, did you become aware of anything that you had not noticed before about **yourself**?

- | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I learned nothing about myself | | | I learned a moderate amount about myself | | | I learned a lot about myself |

44. As a result of your solitude episode, did you become aware of anything that you had not noticed before about **others**?

- | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I learned nothing about others | | | I learned a moderate amount about others | | | I learned a lot about others |

45. As a result of your solitude episode, did you become aware of anything that you had not noticed before about **events in your life**, such as your successes or failures?

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I learned nothing about events in my life | | | I learned a moderate amount about events in my life | | | I learned a lot about events in my life |

46. Although some experiences are completely positive or completely negative, many experiences have some beneficial and some detrimental effects. Everything considered, to what degree was this experience detrimental (worse than useless), neutral, or beneficial to you? (circle one number)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
completely neutral completely
detrimental beneficial

Please explain your rating. That is, give the reasons (including specific detrimental or beneficial effects) for your rating.

47. Everything considered, do you think this experience was very typical _____, somewhat typical _____, or not at all typical _____, of what people in general would call solitude. (check one)

48. "Solitude" is one term that describes the positive episode you have been writing about. Can you think of another term or phrase that might be better or more accurate?

The following item may be difficult to answer. Please try to think about it carefully, keeping in mind the experience you have just been describing, and then give your response.

49. Some people think of solitude as a type of "psychological space" in which a variety of different events occur, including various emotions. (This is similar to how people think of time: A variety of different events occur *in* time, but we don't experience "time" separately). Other people think of solitude as a kind of emotional experience (similar to how love, grief, and anger are emotional experiences). **Keeping in mind the experience you have just been describing**, with which of these views of solitude do you most agree? (please check one)

_____ Solitude is a type of psychological space.

_____ Solitude is a type of emotion.

_____ I can't decide.

Section Six: Positive Solitude In General

The following two items concern **positive solitude in general**—NOT THE SPECIFIC POSITIVE EPISODE YOU HAVE BEEN DESCRIBING.

50. Which of the following pieces of advice would you give to someone who asked you what they should do to have a **positive** solitude experience? (Please check off only those pieces of advice that you mostly agree with.)

- Get away from the influence of friends and family.
 - Go where you can be completely alone.
 - Go somewhere where no one knows you.
 - Go out into nature.
 - Go back to your room (or apartment or house)
 - Go jogging or exercise.
 - Go for a drive.
 - Do some activity that requires creativity or imagination.
 - Spend time deep in concentration.
 - Let your mind wander.
 - Do something that makes you feel relaxed.
 - Listen to music.
 - Try to pay attention to small things that you don't usually notice.
 - Meditate, pray, go to a spiritually meaningful place, or do some other spiritual (but not necessarily religious) activity.
 - Watch television.
 - Read a book.
 - OTHER (please explain) _____
-

51. **Assuming you were free to go anywhere you wished**, which of the following best describes your ideal place for seeking a **positive** solitude experience? (please read through the list and then check only one)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My room or apartment | <input type="checkbox"/> A forest or woods | <input type="checkbox"/> A beach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A city (but not a city park) | <input type="checkbox"/> A river or lake | <input type="checkbox"/> A museum or library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shops or a mall | <input type="checkbox"/> A mountaintop | <input type="checkbox"/> A gym/exercise club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A city park or garden | <input type="checkbox"/> A place of spiritual or religious significance | <input type="checkbox"/> Nowhere: I would never seek solitude |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER(please describe) _____ | | |
-

Background Information

Your age _____

Sex (circle one) Male Female

Class (circle one) Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Ethnicity (circle one) Asian Black Hispanic White other _____
(please write)

If English is not your native language, how long have you spoken English?

In the space provided below, please write any comments or suggestions that you might have regarding this questionnaire. (Did you find any of the items or instructions unclear? Do you have ideas for other questions that we should have included?)

Thank you very much for participating in this study.

APPENDIX B

A SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF SOLITUDE EPISODES

Two Negative Episodes of Solitude

"I was sitting home alone. I had skipped class and was laying in bed feeling guilty and depressed. I sat around, watched television, and generally felt depressed and sad for no real reason. I wanted to be with my friends but everyone was at class. I felt lonely."

"I had been rejected, shot down, all done. She told me she wanted to be friends and that she would stay and talk to me if I wanted to. I said no, she should leave. I became a little ball on my bed and began to cry, a lot. It was almost cleansing, but it was fully miserable. At some point some knocked at my door. I did not answer. Eventually, after a couple of hours of thinking I gave up and fell asleep."

Three Positive Episodes of Solitude

"...Due to my negative feelings about myself, I have led a lonely life. After a few good social experiences I was in my dorm room for a while, just thinking about them. I came to realize that I am not such a bad person after all. That intense period of uninterrupted thought actually did change

my life. I now have a general good outlook on life which I never had before. It took a while to realize all this and when I did it took me by shock, a good shock."

"I had gone out shopping and bought posters. When I got home I went in my room put on music and put them up. I also decorated my room with pictures of my friends... I was happy trying to make the space reflect me and my interests and look appealing to me. I felt like I was being creative and felt strong in my sense of self."

"I drove to Florida by myself to pick up a friend of mine, so I had two days of being completely alone... The sun was shining and I had good music playing, I was happy. The only word that I can really think of to describe my experience is freedom. I definitely had quite a few moments of deep reflection on my life. I made some decisions about school, work, love. But mostly I just enjoyed the feeling of being away from life for a short time... It was really nice to be able to just dwell on myself, the landscape, or just nothing at all without having to verbally share it with anyone."

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