

Age and Gender Differences in Positive Solitude Preferences

Authors : Sharon Ost Mor, Yuval Palgi, Ddikla Segel-Karpas

Abstract : Solitude and positive solitude (PS) are used in literature interchangeably, yet they have different attributes and effects. While solitude might have devastating outcomes such as depression or health deterioration, PS has beneficial outcomes. Yet, both solitude and PS have no clear unanimous definition. Most researches focus on solitude, while the phenomenon of PS is somewhat neglected. Most research deals with young people and adults, while the current research is interested in PS concepts especially in old age. A qualitative study, with 124 participants was performed in order to understand the essence of PS in different age groups. The findings revealed seven categories related to PS, including: Quietness, religious and spiritual experience, escapism, experience in nature or abroad, controlling stress or thoughts, facilitation achievements and recreation-hobbies-routines. Moreover, three meta-themes emerged: PS is a matter of choice, it is meaningful and enjoyable. One stand alone category was found: PS preconditions. Differences between younger and older adults were found in several categories and in PS preconditions, while the meta-themes were equally mentioned by all participants. Based on the participant's reflections and descriptions a new PS paradigm was built and will be presented as well as a new definition of PS. PS was renamed as 'Soulitude' in order to emphasize its' positive nature. Conclusions: PS serves well most people, yet it has different attributes in different ages. By giving PS a unanimous definition and by understanding its' contribution for the elderly, PS might be addressed as a legitimate, stand alone phenomenon. The paradigm might serve theory as well as clinicians for further PS research.

Keywords : old-old, positive solitude, solitude, soulitude

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