TIME ALONE WELL SPENT? A LATENT CLASS ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENTS’ SOLITARY ACTIVITIES

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Background and aims. Adolescents spend a significant portion of waking time alone. Although it has been suggested that solitude in adolescence can afford benefits in the form of increased opportunities for self-discovery and personal growth, research suggests that excessive solitude also carries psychological and health risks. This apparent solitude paradox may stem from a paucity of research on the types of activities that adolescents do while they are alone. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to identify subgroups of adolescents who differed based on what they did (i.e., their predominant activities) while alone. It was hypothesized that these groups would differ systematically in terms of indices of socio-emotional functioning.

Methods. Participants were N=416 grade 11 students (M_age=16.14 years, SD=.50) from high schools in Ontario, Canada. Assessments include self-reports of time alone, activities while alone, preference for solitude, and indices of socio-emotional functioning. The content of solitary activities was coded as hobbies (e.g., reading for pleasure), screen time; music listening; productive (e.g., homework), positive thinking (e.g., daydreaming), negative thinking (e.g., ruminating); or routine (e.g., cooking). Results from latent-class analyses suggested a three-class solution, with groups labelled: Screen Time (64%), Cognitive (15%), and Leisure (21%).

Results. Among the results, significant differences between the three groups were found for time alone, F(2, 413)=41.19, p<.001, with the Screen Time group spending the most time alone, followed by the Leisure and Cognitive groups. The Cognitive groups also reported the lowest preference for solitude, whereas the Leisure group reported (marginally) higher positive affect than the Screen Time group. Subsequent analyses will compare groups on additional outcome variables.

Conclusions. Initial results highlight the heterogeneity of adolescents’ activities while alone. Of note, adolescents who spent the most time alone were engaged in predominantly productive activities and did not evidence signs of substantive maladjustment.