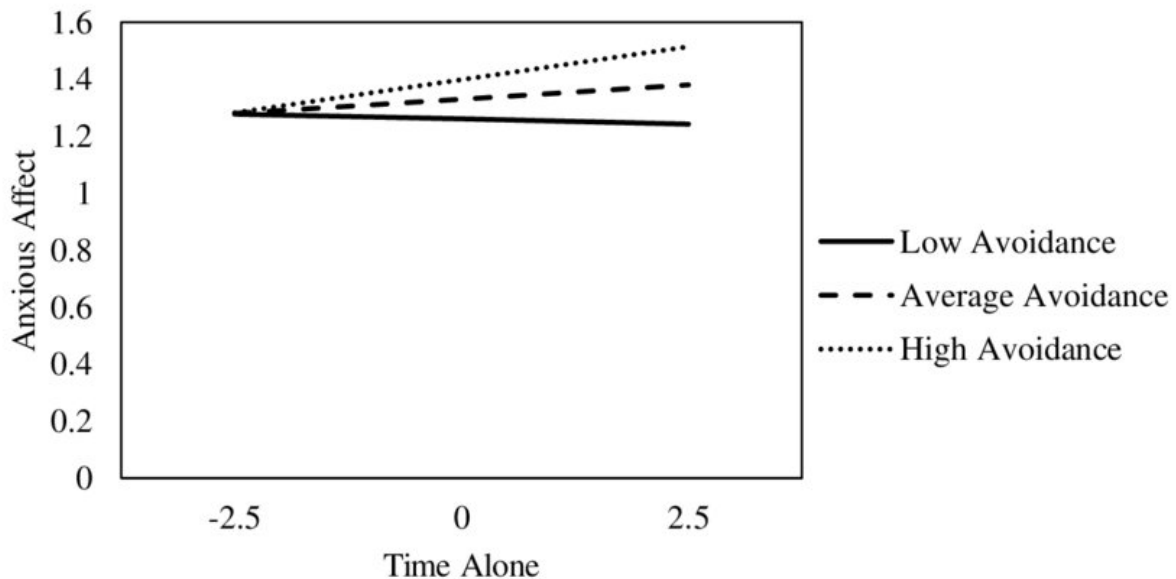


# Study explores how 'me-time' affects social interaction

December 9 2022, by Bert Gambini

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Credit: *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (2022). DOI: 10.1177/01650254221133296

Although many emerging adults find social interactions enjoyable on days with increased time alone, those who seek solitude as an escape from stress or unpleasant social circumstances may not, according to the results of a new study by University at Buffalo researchers.

Previous research suggests that spending too much [time](#) alone is

associated with negative effects, like loneliness and emotional distress. Other studies have linked spending time alone with [positive outcomes](#), such as reduced anger, anxiety and sadness.

But this study uniquely evaluated how spending time alone relates to how people feel about interactions with others on the same day, and whether this link depends on the reasons someone sought solitude in the first place.

"We found that people who seek solitude out of fear of, or a dislike for, social interactions experienced increased anxiety when interacting with others on days when they got more time alone than usual," said Hope White, a graduate student in UB's psychology department and the study's first author. "We think it is because such individuals do not use their solitary time in ways that are restorative.

"Instead, they might spend their alone time ruminating."

The novel research, published in a special issue on solitude in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, provides new knowledge about the potential risks and benefits of solitude during emerging adulthood, a critical stage in the [life course](#) defined, in part, by new freedom to determine how, and with whom, one spends their time.

The study involved a diverse sample of 411 emerging adults between 18-26 years old. Participants completed daily reports on their smartphones about the amount of time they spent alone and how they felt afterwards when [social interaction](#) occurred. This novel design allowed the researchers to examine changes in time spent alone so they could determine the impact of increased time in solitude on social interactions.

"Spending time alone is common across the lifespan, and yet, we still do

not fully understand when, why and for whom it confers risks versus benefits," said Julie Bowker, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology in the UB College of Arts and Sciences, and one of the paper's co-authors. "However, research interest in solitude is growing and additional knowledge like that garnered from this new study could have important potential intervention implications."

That could include the benefits of knowing that increased time alone is not always useful, according to White.

"People might benefit from direction on how to best use extra 'me-time' in ways that help them both individually and in their interactions with others," said White "There is also the possibility for instruction on how to better manage negative feelings during social interactions after an extended period of solitude, especially for people who have anxiety about interacting with others."

Moving forward White sees opportunities for further research that explores why some people experience positive or negative emotions after a period of solitude.

"Is it because they find solitude unpleasant and social interactions feel especially welcome after time alone? Does [solitude](#) affect how we interact with our relationship partners?" asks White. "Our study moves the field forward, but there is still much to be learned about this very common everyday experience."

**More information:** Hope I. White et al, Solitude and affect during emerging adulthood: When, and for whom, spending time alone is related to positive and negative affect during social interactions, *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/01650254221133296](https://doi.org/10.1177/01650254221133296)

Provided by University at Buffalo

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