

Time alone — problem or pleasure?

This article may look trivial. It's not. It's important. It's a must-read article. Why? Because a lot of us must spend a great deal of time working: working at work, working at making money, working at home, working until we collapse in front of the TV with our beer. In between, to socialize, we twitter and tweet, facebook, and play with our gadgets, then drag ourselves out of bed in the morning for another go round. Do we even know ourselves apart from the crowd? When we find ourselves alone, do we judge ourselves with horror as social rejects or social isolates?

A part of the problem these days is the cult of personality. From an early life we are encouraged to be social and popular. We look outside ourselves for acceptance and approval. The media tells us what to do, what to wear, what to eat, what trends to follow and encourages us to always do the latest. The latest what? The latest "everything" apparently. Just spend a little time looking around for these influences and you will see how they permeate your lives, invade and judge your personality. Notice how your friends constantly chat about what they're doing, asking you what you're doing, and making negative comments about people who seem to be "out of it." When we do things alone we are judged as being unpopular and disliked. Your Facebook page must be filled with so-called "friends", apparently the more the better, and populated with pictures of happy you, happy family, happy friends, happy happy.

So what happens when you find yourself with time alone? Do you quickly look to fill up your thoughts and days with the so-called "social" activities mentioned above? Or when your time is not filled with these activities, do you feel anxious about being unpopular or even rejected by others? Do you worry that your children may be unpopular? Do you worry that other people are judging you unfavorably whenever you have a lapse in your social activities? Would you ever be able to choose solitary activities without anxiety and fear of being judged by others?

I really don't want you to think that I am judging you in the way that you fear others may be! In fact, most mental health experts feel like the pendulum has swung too far away from the individual values that have created healthy personalities and in fact have made our country strong. Traditionally, America has not lived by the crowd mentality. We valued individual accomplishments and strength of character. A solitary person was not immediately judged as weak, lacking friends or lacking positive social characteristics.

So why don't you decide to be an individual! A valuable and valued individual, proud and strong, able to make your own decisions! Let's start with knowing yourself. When you know yourself, you are able to make your own judgments about yourself without worrying about the crowd of "others." Of course there is nothing wrong with having friends and enjoying social activities. The question is whether you can enjoy solitary activities and whether you judge yourself negatively when you are solitary.

Let's start by looking at the social activities which make you feel unhappy or uncomfortable. Do you actually find yourself bored at times with others? Are you making friends who aren't worth having? Is your time so filled with that you don't ever have time alone? At this point you should have an "aha!" experience. So let's resolve to change some of these experiences and open up options for self exploration and accomplishments.

Now let's spend time with the most important person in our life: ourselves! No that's not selfish at all. Each of us is a valuable human being, living an important life on this earth and preparing for an eternal afterlife. As our bodies consist of energy, and energy never disappears, our energy will live for ever. So let's make life-long as well as eternal decisions for ourselves. Why don't we get to know ourselves as unique individuals? Don't think of solitary time as alone time. Time alone is actually time spent with this important person: you, your new best friend! Anxiety and fear about being alone actually predispose you to more problems, whereas time spent with yourself can build a new self-concept as a valued and capable individual. All you have to do is decrease and then eliminate the irrational fear of being judged negatively by others just because we make choices for ourselves.

I'll just list a few benefits of spending time alone: you can have more time for creativity; getting a better understanding of yourself and

exploring new activities you enjoy; relaxing but also having time to try new activities or complete unfinished tasks; having quiet time; being creative; imagining new possibilities; understanding yourself; simplifying your life; developing self-reliance and independence; finding fun time; ignoring social chatter; developing new skills; relieving worries about impressing others; developing independence and relieving over-dependence on others; becoming comfortable with silence; and many, many more! You can spend time outside without having to walk with others or indulge in team sports. Do you even know the pleasure of a walk in nature, looking at the patterns of the trees, the flowers, listening to the birds, feeling a breeze on your face, blue skies overhead, feeling of thrill of wind gusts as they ruffle your hair, feeling warm raindrops with the gentle mist swirling around you. With others, you are usually too distracted by the social situation to really experience the full benefits of Mother Nature.

What about thinking positive thoughts! How often do we even consider the need or have the time to think positive thoughts? Music! Music is such a wonderful pleasure in life, opening our minds and hearts to a greater reality of tone and rhythm. While you can listen to music by yourself or surrounded by others, listening really is a solitary activity. If you are preoccupied by looking around the room or at a partner, your mind will be taken away from actually paying attention to the music. Beautiful music is certainly a wonderful mood elevator! Do you know that stories about eternal life in the positive spheres all describe extraordinary music which constantly surrounds you and uplifts everyone there.

When you consider that time alone can be your time for your priorities or your own valued activities, then time alone can be a major pleasure in your life. You can look forward to your special activities and your special time with yourself.

A major fear in this area is the concern about spending time alone when you can be observed by others. I don't want to make fun of this concern because it is natural and normal in this world. What do others think when they see us alone, especially in situations where people are often accompanied by other people? In fact, it is common these days to wonder about people seeming to be alone or isolated in social situations. Knowing this, a number of people worry about themselves and in fact take major steps to avoid these situations. The bold approach is to think "So What!" or "Who Cares Anyway?" If you're not there yet, consider this a goal. As long as your behavior is appropriate and considerate of others, there's no need to cater to busybodies or judgmental people. (I'm not recommending outlandish, disrespectful, or judgmental behavior for you in these situations. There is no need to have an "f-you" attitude toward the conforming world when you decide to become an individual.)

All right, but most of us still aren't ready to adopt a "so what" attitude, because we do worry about our appearance in public. There are several good ways to begin to increase your comfort in these areas. You can begin by participating alongside others in situations where people often spend time in individual seats or pursuits. Activities such as a class or movie or concert where people sit independently and do not engage with others as couples or groups is a good place to start practicing and developing feelings of self-confidence and decreasing self-consciousness and social anxieties. You can seek out solitary participation in areas usually peopled by others such as stores and libraries and museums, strolling around, smiling, developing feelings of comfort with yourself and your independent individual activities. Sometimes people use props such as pets or children with them in activities around and observed by other people. Newspapers or books can accompany you to restaurants where you sit independently. If you arrive early or late to a restaurant, you can position yourself sitting at a table where you can look out and around the area without being surrounded by people all looking at you. Beginning with these types of activities and observing how your anxiety quiets and disappears, you can begin to branch out and make decisions about your activities without concern for whether you function as an individual or arrive with others.

Someday I'll be tempted to write an in-depth

Advice Line

By Dr. Betty Phillips



article about the problems of our over-dependence and excessive time spent with our electronic and mechanical gadgets. People avoid real social activities by over-reliance on gadgets and technology, these days sitting around gazing at handheld gadgets, texting away, scrolling and trolling for something to engage their minds, ignoring their surroundings, trying to find something to take their mind away from the natural and social environment around them. Overexposure to unnatural electromagnetic energies is also a major and misunderstood problem. So let's be clear that I am not recommending avoiding social activities just to overindulge in this kind of unnatural pursuit!

One of our greatest skill and character building activities is that old stand-by: reading. Seek and you will find articles or books to strengthen your understanding and strength of character in this area. Let me mention a book to consult over and over, a book for all times. You can look up the book *Spiritual Light* or read some of the articles on my website about this book often considered the "New Bible". Sections 606 and 607 are among those that speak to some of these issues. The book addresses the fact that one's "individuality is the real self" and "Nothing better reflects our individuality than our character" whether it is "sound and substantial, or a seedy, dilapidated shell, is up to us." The shell we are discussing in this article is the cult of personality and the need to live in the crowd rather than being free to be an individual!

Now that you've read this article, it's action time. We must take this information to heart to develop and actually exercise a new determination to be on individual, to decrease unnatural or excessive social dependence and find a new

life balance with less anxiety, greater self-confidence and greater happiness!

Need Advice? Send questions to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you! Visit bettyphillipspsychology.com.

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