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**Positive solitude: personality predictors and phenomenological characteristics**

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## OVERALL SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

**«You lead me to the safety of a cave,  
Show me my own self, and reveal  
Your deep, secret wonders in my heart».**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe «Faust» (translated by A.S. Kline)

**Relevance of the research.** The phenomenon of solitude is presented in psychological science to a more modest degree than loneliness. The scientific independence of the term «solitude», as well as its phenomenological characteristics are an undisclosed topic in the research field. A separate scientific issue is still the relationship between solitude and personal development. Theoretical propositions (C. Jung, E. Fromm, A. Maslow, R. May, C. Moustakas, etc.) that personality development involves the creation of specific situations of solitude, and also requires acceptance of the fact of one's own loneliness, continue to need reliable empirical data.

Since the 1990s. there have been many scientific studies on solitude [Larson, 1990; Burger, 1995; Buchholz 1997; Long et al., 2003; Long, Averill, 2003; Chua, Koestner, 2008; The Handbook of Solitude, 2014; Detrixhe et al., 2014; Nguyen, Ryan, Deci, 2018; Nguyen, Weinstein, Ryan, 2021]. In 2014, The Handbook of Solitude [The Handbook of Solitude, 2014] was published, which presents the theoretical, age, clinical, interdisciplinary (sociological, anthropological, biological, religious) aspects of the study of solitude. In 2021, the second edition of The Handbook of Solitude [The Handbook of Solitude, 2021] was published. In Russian, one can note the work of N. Pokrovsky and G. Ivanchenko «The Universe of Loneliness: Sociological and Psychological Essays» [Pokrovsky, Ivanchenko, 2008], which describes a positive view of the concept of solitude and a multifaceted study of problems. Most often, solitude is defined as a situation alone with oneself without interpersonal interaction (real or virtual) with other people. Individual differences in preference for solitude [Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003]; age context of solitude [Larson, 1990; Buchholz, Helbraun, 1999; Buchholz, Catton, 1999]; the positive meaning of the concept of solitude and its benefits for personal development [Long, Averill, 2003; Leontiev, 2019; Ishanov, Osin, Kostenko, 2018]; motivation, self-regulation and the capacity to be in solitude in the

context of Self-Determination Theory [Chua, Koestner, 2008; Nguyen, Ryan, Deci, 2018; Nguyen, Werner, Soenens, 2019]; cross-cultural differences in solitude [Wang, 2006] are studied. At the same time, a discussion continues in the scientific literature regarding the formation of the term «solitude» and its connection with the concept of loneliness [Koch, 1994; Slobodchikov, 2006; Pokrovsky, Ivanchenko, 2008; Coplan et al., 2019; Ishanov, 2020; Nguyen, Weinstein, Ryan, 2021]. In particular, the subjective content of the concept remains undefined, which is paid attention to by a number of scientists [Brechenser, 1983; Suvorov, 2001].

Another understudied aspect of the problem is the relationship between solitude and personal development. A large number of scientific papers on loneliness make it possible to see that for many people it is a great difficulty to have a positive experience of solitude. In the same situation, someone may suffer from loneliness, but for another person it will be an opportunity for productive solitude and personal development. Researchers note that autonomy and authenticity of a person help to cope with loneliness and experience solitude in a positive way [Nguyen, Ryan, Deci, 2018; Nguyen, Weinstein, Ryan, 2018; Pokrovsky, Ivanchenko, 2008]. However, the connection between the ability to be alone with oneself and personal development, which was assumed by many authors (P. Tillich, C. Jung, E. Fromm, A. Maslow, I. Yalom, A. Langle, etc.) has not yet been sufficiently substantiated in empirical research. The study of whether solitude can be a resource for coping with loneliness (and if so, under what conditions) is important from both a theoretical and an applied point of view.

In addition to scientific relevance, we can also talk about the social and practical relevance of the research. Thus, the practices of solitude presented in most religious and philosophical traditions [Batkin, 2000; Barbour, 2004; Caranfa, 2007] have been lost in the modern social context. The concepts of solitude and loneliness often merge in the perception of people; at the same time, solitude is not considered as valuable for the mental health of the individual, spiritual development, coping with negative experiences. The lost culture of solitude can be claimed today due to the practical demand for personal development and psychological well-being.

Thus, we can conclude that at the current scientific stage of research, the questions of defining the concept of solitude, studying its relationship with personal development, as well as the resources of solitude as a means of coping with the experience of loneliness and psychological health remains unresolved. These questions characterize **the problem of our research**, which consists in the study of the personal predictors of positive solitude, the features of experiences and activities in a situation of solitude, which can act as resources for the individual.

**Purpose of the research:** to study the personal and situational conditions of a positive experience of solitude.

**Object of research:** the features of personality, experiences, and activities in situations of solitude.

**Subject of research:** the features of personality, experiences, and activities in situations of solitude with a positive experience of solitude.

The following **research hypotheses** were formulated:

1. Positive solitude is a qualitatively specific phenomenon with both dispositional and situational indicators:

1.1. Positive solitude as a personal disposition is associated with positive emotional experiences in solitary situations;

1.2. Positive solitude as a personal disposition is positively associated with autonomous motivation for solitude and vice versa with controlled motivation for solitude;

1.3. Positive solitude as a personal disposition is associated with the features of activity in a situation of solitude;

2. Positive solitude is associated with a number of indicators of personal development and positive personality functioning:

2.1. with stages of ego development;

2.2. with psychological health (emotional, social, and psychological well-being);

2.3. with existential fulfillment;

2.4. with satisfying the need for relatedness with other people;

3. Qualitative research question: How do individuals describe positive solitude in their experience (phenomenological characteristics, prerequisites, consequences)?

Based on the purpose and the research hypotheses, the following **research aims** were formulated:

1. Determine the main theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the phenomenon of solitude;

2. Describe the personality and situational factors of positive solitude experiences;

3. To study the connection of positive solitude with the characteristics of motivation, activity and emotional experiences in situations of solitude;

4. To study the connection of positive solitude with indicators of personal development and positive personality functioning.

**The methodological and theoretical basis** of the study is formed by the differential model of the loneliness experience of D. Leontiev and E. Osin, the theory of ego development by J. Loevinger, the theory of existential fundamental motivations by A. Langle, Self-Determination Theory by E. Deci and R. Ryan, the model of the continuum of psychological health by C. Keyes. The qualitative research used the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis according to J. Smith. The comparison of the research results was carried out using a triangulation strategy.

**Methods of the research.** In order to test the hypotheses, the following methodological tools were used.

1. The Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) developed by J. Loevinger [Hy, Loevinger, 1996]. The approbation of the Russian-language version of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test was carried out by D. Leontiev, N. Mikhailova, E. Rasskazova [Leontiev, Mikhailova, Rasskazova, 2010];

2. Differential Test of Aloneness (DTA) (Differential questionnaire of the experience of loneliness in Russian) [Osin, Leontiev, 2013, 2016];

3. Scale of Existence developed by A. Langle, K. Orgler as adapted by S. Krivtsova [Krivtsova et al., 2009].

4. Author's questionnaire aimed at studying situations of solitude;

5. Semi-structured (qualitative) interview [Kvale, 2003];
6. The 14-item Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC–SF) [Keyes, 2009; Keyes, 2002]. Validation in Russian was performed by E. Osin and D. Leontiev [Osin, Leontiev, 2020].
7. The basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration – relatedness scale (BPNSFS) [Chen et al., 2015]. The translation of the items was carried out in this research.
8. Experiences in Activity Questionnaire (EAQ) [Osin, Leontiev, 2017].
9. Motivation for Solitude developed by T. Nguyen [Nguyen, 2018]. The translation of the items in Russian was carried out in this research.
10. Affect after Solitude developed by T. Nguyen [Nguyen, 2018]. The translation of the items in Russian was carried out in this research.

To process the results of the quantitative series of the study, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis (Spearman and Pearson correlation coefficients), one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), linear regression, path and cluster analysis were used. To process the results of the qualitative part of the study, we used conventional content analysis [Hsieh, Shannon, 2005] and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) [Smith, Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009].

**The empirical base of the research** at the first stage of the study (mixed quantitative-qualitative cross-sectional design) consisted of 204 people (41 men and 163 women) aged 16 to 44 years ( $M = 27.3$ ,  $SD = 5.98$ ). Respondents filled out a survey that was compiled in Google Forms and shared via social media.

The second stage of the study (qualitative research) involved 31 respondents (13 men, 18 women) aged 18 to 67 years ( $M = 31$ ,  $SD = 10.3$ ). The sampling strategy is a selection of typical cases. The average interview time is 1 hour 9 minutes.

In the third stage of the research (quantitative research), 210 respondents took part, including: 27 men and 182 women (1 respondent indicated «other»). The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 74 years old ( $M = 38.9$ ;  $SD = 11.6$ ). The survey was compiled on the OneClick survey (1KA) platform. The invitation of respondents to participate was carried out through social networks.

**Reliability of the research results** is ensured by a comprehensive theoretical analysis of researches and approaches to the study of solitude, the use of diagnostic tools appropriate to the purpose and aims of the research, adherence to the principles of empirical research, the use of statistical analysis criteria, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data (mixed study design), as well as the application of a strategy triangulation to discuss research results.

**Scientific novelty and theoretical significance** of the study are in substantiating the independence of the phenomenon of solitude and the specificity of positive solitude, as well as their independence from the phenomenon of loneliness. An analytical review of approaches to the study of solitude and loneliness made it possible to identify objective and subjective criteria for solitude, summarizing the accumulated data. The study reveals the phenomenological characteristics of positive solitude and contributes to understanding its situational and personal conditions. The empirical data obtained on the relationship between positive solitude and personal development serve as a substantiation of the theoretical provisions of C. Moustakas, C. Jung, A. Maslow, R. May and other authors. The study on the Russian sample confirms the provisions of Self-Determination Theory about solitude, and also substantiates the constructive role of positive solitude for the psychological, social and emotional well-being of the individual.

**The practical significance** of the research. The role of solitude as a resource for personal development and integration of relationships with others is shown. Based on an understanding of the conditions of positive solitude, practical recommendations in counseling and psychotherapy can be formulated. Understanding of the features of the subjective experience of positive solitude (contact with oneself; self-reflection and rethinking of negative life experience; feeling of relatedness with others and the rhythms of solitude; experience of freedom; useful activity and creativity), its prerequisites (voluntariness; space and time for solitude; personal readiness; contact with beauty) and a specific results (restoration of resources and positive effects of solitude; personality changes; deep personal experiences) helps to orientate towards constructive living of time alone with oneself.

**Principles for the defense:**

1. Solitude and loneliness are separate, qualitatively specific phenomena of subjective experience. Loneliness is a negative experience that reflects a person's non-involvement in connection with other people. Solitude is a situation of internal dialogue, which is characterized by a separation with other people and an appeal to internal experience. Solitude is associated with both positive and negative emotional experiences and is filled with various activities.
2. Positive solitude is a qualitatively specific phenomenon, which manifests itself both at the level of personal dispositions (as a general positive attitude to situations of solitude, a willingness to find a resource in them for activity and development), and at the level of specific situations. Situational indicators of positive solitude are positive emotions, the experience of meaningfulness or value of what is happening, as well as the presence of an activity in which autocommunication takes place.
3. Positive solitude is associated with personal development (stages of ego development) and positive personality functioning (emotional well-being, eudemonic social well-being, eudemonic psychological well-being, satisfaction of the need for connectedness), as well as with a conscious choice of the individual to remain alone with himself in a particular situation (autonomous motivation for solitude).
4. The phenomenon of positive solitude is characterized by specific features of subjective experience (contact with oneself; self-reflection and rethinking of negative life experience; feeling of relatedness with others and the rhythms of solitude; experience of freedom; useful activity and creativity), results (restoration of resources and positive effects of solitude; personal changes; deep personal experiences) and prerequisites (voluntariness; space and time for solitude; personal readiness; contact with beauty).

**Approbation of the research.** Theoretical and empirical research results are presented at numerous scientific and scientific-practical conferences: XXI International



Scientific Conference of Young Scientists «Psychology of the XXI Century: a Systematic Approach and Interdisciplinary Research» (St. Petersburg, 2017); International Congress of the Professional Psychotherapeutic League «Opportunities for psychotherapy, psychology and counseling in maintaining and developing the health and well-being of a person, family, and society» (Moscow, 2017); XXII International Symposium «Psychological problems of the meaning of life and acme» (Moscow, 2017); International Scientific and Practical Congress of the All-Russian Professional Psychotherapeutic League «Psychology and Psychotherapy of Every Day and All Life» (Moscow, 2018); 10th International Conference on the Dialogical Self (Braga, 2018); 9th European Conference on Positive Psychology (Budapest, 2018); 6th World Congress on Positive Psychology (Melbourne, 2019); International Congress of the Society for Existential Analysis and Logotherapy «The psyche creates dynamics: find freedom in captivity» (Salzbrug, 2019). The content of the PhD thesis is reflected in 3 publications, which are included in the list of HSE journals recommended for defense, as well as in 6 publications in conference proceedings.

**The structure of the PhD thesis.** The general logic of the research determined the structure and scope of the thesis. The PhD thesis includes an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, including 159 titles (77 of them in a foreign language), and eight appendices. The main text of the PhD thesis is presented on 188 pages. The research results are presented in 10 tables and 6 pictures.

### **MAJOR CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH**

**The introduction** section covers the relevance and problem of PhD thesis; defines the purpose, object and subject, hypotheses, aims, methodological and theoretical foundations of the study; describes the scientific novelty, theoretical and practical significance of the study, formulates principles for the defense; contains information on approbation of the research results and characterization of the structure of PhD thesis.

**The first chapter** of the PhD thesis is devoted to the theoretical analysis of the Russian and international studies on the problem of solitude. The chapter discusses the religious, philosophical, and psychological aspects of the topic.

**In paragraph 1.1.** the understanding of solitude in the main religious traditions is presented. The relevance of considering solitude in a religious context is due to the fact that for a long time in the culture, solitude was considered as an important spiritual practice.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is no single point of view on the meaning and value of solitude, but there is an understanding of its benefits and dangers, including those associated with loneliness [Barbour, 2014]. Solitude is an attempt to overcome one's own needs in order to better hear the voice of God. Protestantism expresses contempt for long periods of solitude as a spiritual practice associated with monasticism, but time alone with oneself can be useful if it is used for reading the Bible, prayer, appeal to conscience, and an individual «dialogue» with God [Pokrovsky, 1989]. In Hinduism, solitude is a form of ascetic renunciation and an important stage of spiritual development. Meditation as the central practice of solitude in Buddhism is a state of temporary withdrawal from external interaction, helps to achieve wisdom and gain the ability to compassion. For Taoists, solitude is a contemplative passivity (wu wei) associated with not doing, avoiding the struggle and defending one's rights. Islam has no monastic tradition; family life is typical. The exception is some Sufis who wander around the world or become hermits in the pursuit of tranquility, detachment and submission to the will of Allah. Thus, the phenomenon of solitude has deep religious roots. Many religious teachings carry the idea of the value of solitude for the spiritual development of the individual. Meanwhile, in modern psychology, this aspect of solitude is considered extremely rarely, for a long time the tradition of considering solitude exclusively as a negative phenomenon prevailed [Coplan, Bowker, 2014].

**In Paragraph 1.2.** the philosophical views on the solitude and loneliness of the individual are revealed. In the text of ancient philosophers (Socrates, Aristotle, Epictetus, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, cynics), as well as in the text of M. Montaigne, B. Pascal, J.-J. Rousseau, H.D Thoreau, R.W. Emerson, S. Kierkegaard, J.-P. Sartre, M. Heidegger, K. Jaspers, N. Berdyaev, H. Arendt, an understanding of different positions on the problem of differentiation of the concepts of loneliness and solitude is traced, one defends the independence of the phenomenon of solitude.

F. Koch describes three obstacles to the study of solitude: indiscriminate use of the terms «solitude», «loneliness», «isolation», «privacy», «alienation» and the inconsistency of their author's definitions; unreasonable transition from one concept to another, for example: from «alone» to «lonely» or from «solitude» to «loneliness»; the search for the exact meaning of the concept of solitude [Koch, 1994].

American transcendentalism is considered to be the first philosophical direction that makes a clear distinction between loneliness and solitude [Demidov, 1999; Pokrovsky, Ivanchenko, 2008], which originated in the 1830–1850s. Henry David Thoreau describes solitude as harmony, communication and unity with the universe (space) and nature, the time of the rebirth of the soul, when the spiritual wealth of a person is revealed, powerful forces awaken, the craving for beauty, goodness and perfection. Loneliness is a negative, «painful isolation of man from nature» [Demidov, 1999].

A. Caranfa, summarizing the philosophical views on solitude, notes that it can teach silence in which a person hears himself and can achieve harmonious unity with the transcendental Other [Caranfa, 2007]. Solitude opens up the possibilities of a new understanding, aesthetic and spiritual experience. At the same time, it can be concluded that in philosophical literature the terms «solitude», «loneliness», «aloneness» do not have unambiguous definitions, however, the texts of philosophers reveal the formation of ideas about the different quality of time alone with oneself and give descriptions of solitude as phenomenon different from loneliness.

**In paragraph 1.3.** the understanding of solitude in the framework of the main psychological directions is discussed. It is noted that psychologists are more likely to turn to understanding loneliness than solitude. This is probably due to the historical focus of psychology on the negative phenomena of the human psyche, as well as the difficulty of operationalizing the concept of solitude.

Early psychoanalysts considered solitude as a pathological phenomenon. According to S. Freud, withdrawal into solitude follows the experience of loneliness, which he explains by the influence of early childhood experience. S. Freud and his followers associate loneliness with narcissism, hostility from others, as well as

megalomania as compensation for feelings of social inferiority. G. Zilboorg was the first to publish a psychological analysis of loneliness, in which he distinguished solitude as a normal and transient state of mind and loneliness as a constant and irresistible feeling [Korchagina, 2008]. Positive view of the human desire to be alone with himself offering D. Winnicott and J. Bowlby. So, D. Winnicott, in his text «The capacity to be alone» considers the ability to develop in solitude as an indicator of mental health and maturity of the person [Winnicott, 2000].

Cognitive-behavioral psychologists are more likely to view loneliness as an unambiguously negative phenomenon. One can come across the idea of active solitude (work, listening to music, exercise) as a way of coping with loneliness [Perlman, Peplau, 1984].

The topics of loneliness and solitude are actively discussed in the texts of humanistic and existential psychologists. E. Fromm considers aloneness as the main challenge that a person faces and connects personal development with gaining freedom from society, the ability to feel more independent, and the ability to be alone with oneself [Fromm, 2001]. A. Maslow describes solitude as a need and ability of self-actualizing individuals, for whom this is a positive and intimate experience [Maslow, 2008]. C. Rogers does not distinguish between the concepts of solitude, loneliness and aloneness. The psychologist identifies two elements of a feeling of loneliness, which can affect experiences in solitude: the alienation of a person from himself and from organismic experiences; lack of relationships with other people [Rogers, 1980]. The difference between the concepts of being alone and being lonely draws the attention of N. Rogers. In solitude, a person does not lose his identity, retains his inner center, which is absent when experiencing loneliness [Rogers, 2013]. V. Frankl understands solitude as an opportunity to turn to one's values, to have an intimate conversation with oneself, and also as a need [Frankl, 2019]. In A. Langle's existential analysis, «the ability to be alone» is a sign of a mature, authentic personality [Langle, 2013].

**Paragraph 1.4.** is devoted to the analysis of scientific texts on solitude over the past 30–40 years. Three main approaches to understanding loneliness are considered: loneliness is a negative state; loneliness is an existential givens; loneliness is a complex

experience, both negative and positive, the positive side of loneliness is often associated with solitude.

**In subparagraph 1.4.1.** differentiation of the terms «loneliness» and «solitude» is made. Loneliness is a negative experience in which internal dialogue is absent or does not bring the desired result. Solitude is a situation of internal dialogue and self-reflection, open to positive and negative experiences and carrying the potential for awareness and transformation of the person's connections with the world [Ishanov, Osin, 2019].

The analysis of modern research is carried out through the description of two approaches to the definition of the concept of solitude: as an objective situation of separation [Larson, 1990; Burger, 1995; Buchholz 1997; Long, Averill, 2003; Detrixhe et al., 2014]; as a phenomenon of a person's inner world, which is characterized not only and not so much by an external lack of interaction, but presupposes certain personal processes [Brechenser, 1983; Buchholz 1997; Long, Seburn, Averill, More, 2003; Petrovskaya, 2007; Hermans, 2018].

**In subparagraph 1.4.2.** solitude is described as an objective situation [Larson, 1990; Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Chua, Koestner, 2008; The Handbook of Solitude, 2014; Nguyen, Ryan, Deci, 2018]. Thus, according to R.W. Larson [Larson, 1990], solitude is an objective situation, when a person's thoughts, feelings and actions are less subject to the matrix of social regulation. In the studies of C. Long and J. Averill [Long, Averill, 2003; Long, Seburn, Averill, More, 2003] solitude is a state of detachment from the immediate demands of other people (reduced social pressure). In the Self-Determination Theory [Nguyen, Ryan, Deci, 2018; Nguyen, Werner, Soenens, 2019] solitude is considered as a situation alone with oneself for a certain period of time without interpersonal interaction, electronic devices, external stimuli, or other activity.

**Subparagraph 1.4.3.** describes another approach to the definition of solitude, which is based on personal conditions. For example, the quality of the internal dialogue or form of communication [Petrovskaya, 2007; Hermans, 2018], the concept of Self [Long, Seburn, Averill, More, 2003; Brechenser, 1983], an awareness of the need for solitude [Buchholz, 1997]. According to D.M. Brechenser solitude is «a positive mental

state, which involves the turning inward of attention to form an encounter with the self» [Brechtens, 1983, p. 19]. Similar definitions: «dimension of mental life found in inwardly directed consciousness – the self while considering itself in isolation, in contrast to consciousness explicitly directed outwardly to others» (H.T. Engelhardt), «the state of the self in relation to itself» (P.L. Wisne), «the presence of oneself for oneself» (T.H. Adamowski) [Brechtens, 1983, p. 17].

Thus, solitude, firstly, does not always entail loneliness and, secondly, it looks important not as an objective situation of the absence of other people, but as an internal experience of contact with oneself and one's life world. The situation of solitude (absence of other people) contributes to, but is not a necessary and sufficient condition for this inner experience: even being alone, a person can devote himself to a superficial occupation in order to avoid the experience of meeting with oneself and with the fundamental fact of one's separation, dissimilarity to others.

**In paragraph 1.5.** formulated the main provisions and criteria necessary to define the concept of «positive solitude». 1. Behind the terms «loneliness», «solitude» and «aleness» are different qualitatively specific phenomena. Loneliness is a negative subjective experience that reflects a lack of intimacy or connection with others. Aleness is an objective situation of non-involvement in social contacts. Solitude is a special form of subjective experience characterized by autocommunication. 2. Loneliness, solitude and aleness do not necessarily accompany each other: situations are possible in which they occur individually or in various combinations. Creative adaptation to the fundamental fact of separation from other people allows the individual to overcome the painful experience of loneliness and release the developmental potential of solitude. 3. Solitude can take place in different situations and be filled with different types of action, it is associated with both positive and negative experiences and has various consequences for the individual, acting as a resource or, conversely, an obstacle to personal development. 4. Three criteria of positive solitude can be distinguished: positive emotional experiences (well-being, positive affective balance), the experience of meaningfulness, as well as the presence of activities in which autocommunication takes place and the consequence of which is the personal

development. 5. Positive solitude is based on external and internal prerequisites. An external prerequisite is the non-involvement of a person in activities that can occupy the resources of attention and thereby hinder the time-deployed autocommunication. Internal prerequisites include autonomous motivation for solitude, when time alone with oneself is viewed by a person as a free choice, and not as a forced necessity. 6. Positive solitude is more characteristic of the mature person. This idea was put forward by many authors, including C. Jung, A. Maslow, C. Moustakas, but did not receive empirical verification.

**In paragraph 1.6.** the general research program is described. A theoretical model of the study is presented, containing the level of solitude as a personal disposition (positive attitude to solitude, willingness and ability to find a resource in it), as well as the level of solitude as a specific situation (lack of involvement in communication with others, positive emotions, autocommunication, meaningfulness). For each level, diagnostic tools are given that measure them, and the predictors and results (or correlates) of positive solitude studied in the empirical study are described. It is indicated that Studies 1 and 3 were devoted to the study of dispositional predictors and correlates of positive solitude, and Studies 1 and 2 were devoted to its situational characteristics and their connections with dispositional ones.

The paragraph notes that given the complexity and diversity of manifestations of the phenomenon of positive solitude, the strategy of mixed type of research was chosen for its empirical study [Creswell, 2014; Greene, Caracelli, 1993; Greene, Caracelli, Graham, 1989]. This paragraph indicates how the integration of mixed data in empirical work took place, and provides a research formula. Within the typology of mixed methods application [Greene, Caracelli, Graham, 1989], the logic of the research program was based on the data expansion strategy (the transition from quantitative-qualitative Study 1 to qualitative Study 2, the data of which help to better understand the results of Study 1) and the triangulation strategy (verification of the results of qualitative Study 2 in quantitative Study 3). Given the various advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative methods, qualitative research can be planned after quantitative research to better understand and describe new aspects of the

phenomenon under study. In our case, such a sequence was chosen to describe the characteristics of a person's positive solitude that go beyond its theoretically defined criteria, as well as its predictors and consequences.

**The second chapter** presents the program of Study 1, reveals the characteristics of the methodology and the sample of Study 1. The chapter contains a description and discussion of the results of Study 1.

**Paragraph 2.1.** the purpose, object, subject and hypotheses of the Study 1 are described.

**In paragraph 2.2.** the characteristics of the sample and the methodology of the Study 1 is provided. There are presented 4 methods that were filled in by the respondents at this stage of the study. Study sample: 204 respondents (41 men and 163 women) aged 16 to 44 years ( $M = 27.3$ ,  $SD = 5.98$ ). There were no ethical barriers to including one respondent under the age of 18 in the sample.

**Paragraph 2.3.** contains a description of the Study 1 procedure. The paragraph indicates that the analysis of the data obtained was both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative analysis procedure was associated with test J. Loewinger (WUSCT) and a questionnaire aimed at studying situations of solitude. In the matter of the quantitative analysis of the results, the statistical criteria that were used at this stage of the study are indicated.

**In paragraph 2.4.** the description of the research results is given.

**In subparagraph 2.4.1.** the results of a Study 1 on the connection between the indices of the DTA with the stages of ego development (WUSCT) and the indices of the Scale of Existence are analyzed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations between the indicators of the WUSCT, DTA, and the Scale of Existence (N = 204)

	<b>SED</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>G</b>
<b>General Loneliness</b>	-0.06	-0.39***	-0.61***	-0.51***	-0.45***	-0.56***	-0.51***	-0.58***
Feelings of being socially isolated	-0.09	-0.24***	-0.56***	-0.42***	-0.37***	-0.45***	-0.42***	-0.47***
Feelings of being abandoned	-0.06	-0.41***	-0.47***	-0.44***	-0.42***	-0.50***	-0.46***	-0.52***
Feelings of being alienated	-0.02	-0.34***	-0.56***	-0.46***	-0.38***	-0.51***	-0.44***	-0.52***



<b>Solitude Intolerance</b>	-0.15*	-0.17*	-0.07	-0.20**	-0.15*	-0.13	-0.19**	-0.18*
Dysphoria during solitude	-0.11	-0.29***	-0.25***	-0.31***	-0.26***	-0.30***	-0.30***	-0.33***
Loneliness beliefs	-0.14*	-0.08	-0.04	-0.15*	-0.10	-0.07	-0.13	-0.11
the need for company	-0.10	-0.07	0.10	-0.07	-0.04	0.02	-0.06	-0.03
<b>Solitude Appreciation</b>	0.15*	0.02	-0.06	0.05	-0.01	-0.02	0.02	0.00
The joy of solitude	0.13	-0.07	-0.13	-0.08	-0.13	-0.11	-0.11	-0.12
Solitude as a resource	0.13	0.09	0.02	0.14*	0.09	0.06	0.12	0.10
Stages of ego development (SED)		0.05	0.21**	0.13	0.05	0.14*	0.10	0.12

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ . Spearman's correlations are given for the WUSCT connections, in other cases - Pearson's correlations. The indicators of the Scale of Existence: SD – self-detachment; ST – self-transcendence; F – freedom; V – responsibility; P – personality; E – existentiality; G – existential fulfillment.

The study found weak but significant correlations between the stages of ego development and both indicators of attitudes towards solitude: the stages of ego development were negatively associated with Solitude Intolerance and the Loneliness Beliefs and positively associated with positive solitude (Solitude Appreciation).

The indicators of the Scale of Existence were negatively associated with the General Loneliness and all its indicators and found weaker negative correlations only with the negative aspect of attitudes towards solitude – feelings of Dysphoria during solitude and Loneliness Beliefs. It turned out that respondents who believe that they spend more time in solitude on weekends are more inclined to experience General Loneliness according to the DTA ( $\rho = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and feel less free, according to the Scale of Existence ( $\rho = -0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**In subparagraph 2.4.2.** the connections of activities and experiences in solitude are discussed. Based on the respondents' answers, the activities in the situations of solitude were grouped into 12 categories using the method of conventional content analysis. Frequency analysis of responses by category showed that the most common activities in solitude are: reading, media consumption, reflection, creativity, and Internet surfing. The stages of ego development were associated with a preference for activities such as reflection, physical activity, creativity, work and study (as tendency). The answers of the respondents with higher stages of ego development included a larger number of different categories, while among them there were more often those who demonstrated refusal from the answer.

The correlations of activities in solitude with the indicators of the DTA were found to be weaker. However, positive solitude was found to be associated with reading ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), creativity ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), the number of categories used ( $r = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), as well as with categories «Internet» and «Physiological processes» (as tendency). This result allows us to confirm our hypothesis that positive solitude is associated with the features of activity in solitary situations.

The correlations of the DTA with the indicators of experiences in solitude are consistent with the meaning of the scales: respondents suffering from loneliness and having a negative attitude to solitude (Solitude Intolerance) more often report negative experiences in solitude and less often about positive ones; the scale of Solitude Appreciation shows the opposite picture. The indicators of the Scale of Existence were found to be negatively associated with the frequency of negative emotions in solitude, and the indicator of the stages of ego development was positively associated with the frequency of positive emotions in solitude. It turned out that among respondents with the stages of ego development E3 Self-Protective and E4 Conformism, the indicators of positive and negative emotions do not practically differ, while among respondents with medium and high stages of ego development, positive emotions more often prevail over negative emotions.

**In subparagraph 2.4.3.** an empirical typology of individual profiles of the experience of loneliness and solitude is analyzed. On the basis of cluster analysis, we were able to identify a model consisting of four clusters that correspond to four combinations of types of feelings of loneliness and solitude. We saw the similarity of the found four types of experience of loneliness and solitude with the previously described typology based on the DTA in the study of E. Osin and D. Leontiev [Osin, Leontiev, 2013]. The first type (24% of the sample) is *the actual suffering of a person from loneliness*. Respondents experience a lack of emotional closeness and interaction with other people, experience isolation, and recognize themselves as lonely people. The second type (15% of the sample) is *the «escape» of a person from situations of solitude*. This group is characterized by a negative perception of the situations of solitude and the respondents at all costs try to avoid the situation on their own. Perhaps the respondents

succeed in this, and they do not experience loneliness and do not consider themselves lonely. The third type (19% of the sample) is *a person experiencing acceptance of loneliness*. This group is characterized by a lack of emotional closeness and contact with other people. However, along with a feeling of loneliness, positive emotions are also characteristic of respondents, which is also confirmed by a high indicator of the number of positive emotions. The fourth type (42% of the sample) is *a person who creatively experiences solitude*. This group is characterized by the creative use of solitude for self-experience and self-development. The respondents experience positive emotions in solitude, value it, and tend to take time for themselves.

**Paragraph 2.5** provides a discussion of the results of Study 1. It is noted that the study found a connection between positive solitude and the stages of ego development, which allows us to confirm the hypothesis about the connection between positive solitude and personal development. The hypothesis about the connection between positive solitude and existential fulfillment was not confirmed in the study, which is discussed on the basis of A. Langle's approach of existential analysis. In the paragraph one discusses the confirmed hypotheses about the connection of positive solitude with the specifics of activities and positive experiences in solitary situations. Other results of Study 1 are also discussed and its limitations are indicated.

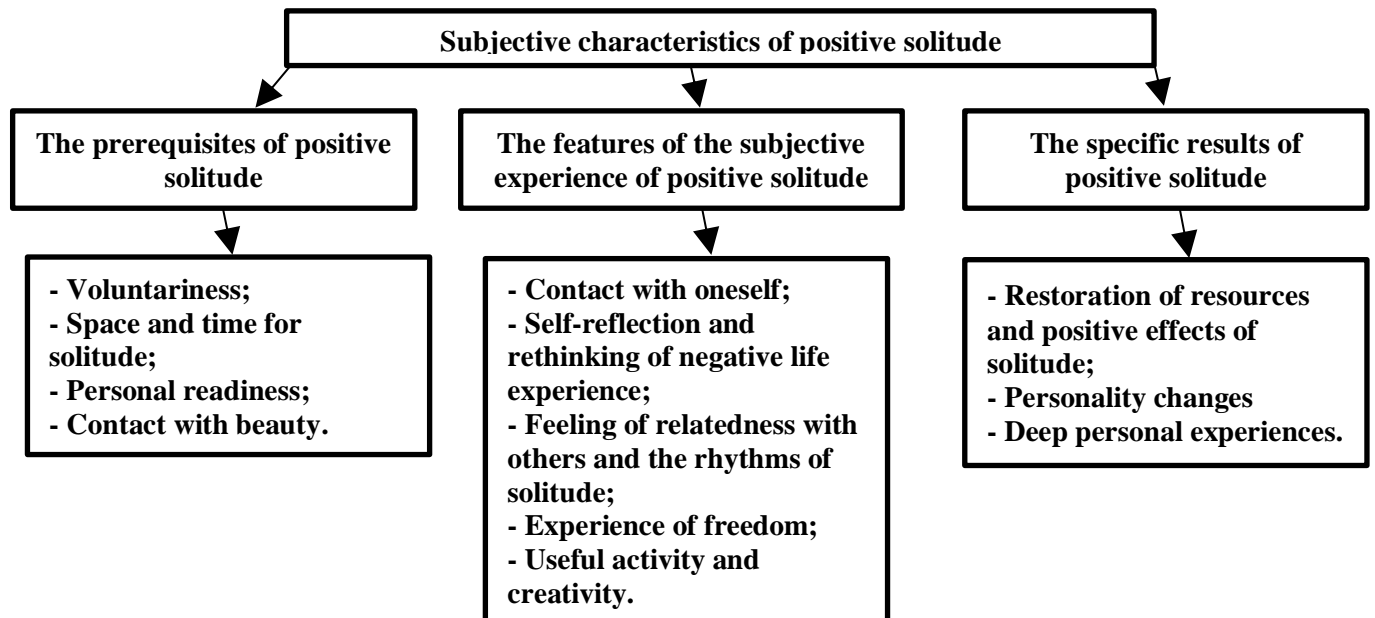
**The third chapter** is devoted to the qualitative research of positive solitude. The research program, the characteristics of the methodology and the sample, the results and their discussion are described.

**In paragraph 3.1.** the qualitative research program is being discussed. The purpose, object and research question of qualitative study, an operational definition of positive solitude, and a list of interview questions are presented.

**Paragraph 3.2.** contains a description of the methodology and a sample of qualitative research. The data collection method is a semi-structured interview. The data analysis method is an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The description of the data analysis procedure in accordance with the interpretative phenomenological analysis is presented. The qualitative research involved 31 respondents (13 men, 18 women).

Age: 18 to 67 years old (M=31, SD=10.3). During the analysis, 2 respondents were rejected due to the lack of consideration of the internal criterion for solitude.

**In paragraph 3.3.** the results of a qualitative research are described. Based on the analysis of the interviews, 3 main themes and 13 subthemes were identified. The results are shown in Picture 1.



Picture 1. Results of a qualitative research

**Subparagraph 3.3.1.** reveals the prerequisites of positive solitude. Thus, the voluntariness of solitude manifests itself in all analyzed interviews in the form of a clear desire and / or need for solitude. This topic is related to the ability to notice and implement internal signals («impulses») when the respondents would like to be alone with themselves.

Another prerequisite is the availability of space and time for solitary activity. For positive solitude, it is important to have a certain physical space that respondents will experience as safe. Deep, intimate experiences of solitude require a sense of security. In addition to a specific physical space, it is important for respondents to experience the inner space for solitude: the feeling that at the moment of solitude, the respondents will not be distracted and they can allow themselves to be alone.

The respondents paid attention to the personal readiness for solitude. For example, the ability to understand the inner world, taking responsibility for personal development, a certain personal attitude, which helps to make solitude as effective as possible in the current circumstances.

Respondents noted the importance of beautiful, awe-inspiring and quiet places for solitude. Such places were most often associated with nature or an attractive urban setting for the respondents. These places provided an opportunity to get positive emotions from the environment and tune in to contemplation.

**In subparagraph 3.3.2.** discovered features of the subjective experience of positive solitude are described. One of these features is the theme «Contact with oneself». The respondents noted that in solitude they experience contact with their inner world (with inner self). At the same time, just as contact with oneself helps to be in solitude and have a positive experience for oneself, so solitude itself directs one to turn to the inner world and understand oneself more.

The next specific characteristic is titled: «Self-reflection and rethinking of negative life experience». The respondents noted that in solitude they manage to set priorities for themselves, choose the right direction in life, or understand significant life topics. Solitude provides an opportunity for reflection and integration of life experience. The respondents said that in solitude, they have a new outlook on their life and an understanding of how to solve their problems. Plus, positive solitude is an opportunity to rethink negative life experiences. Participants in the study named the following ways of rethinking: asking themselves what difficult feelings are experienced in solitude and what now would help to cope with them; find a way to express hard feelings; the ability to switch from negative feelings and engage in valuable activities.

Feelings of relatedness with others and the rhythms of solitude are another significant characteristic of positive solitude. This theme manifests itself both through the memories of loved ones in solitude itself, and with a warning before solitude that it is necessary to be alone for some time. Solitude is related to the context of the relationship. Positive solitude has been found to be a time-limited situation. The time in solitude varies individually, but, in any case, at some point, the respondents indicate their desire to stop solitude and find communication with other people.

The subjective experience of positive solitude is characterized by the experience of freedom. The respondents noted the expansion of opportunities for self-expression in solitude and freedom from social restrictions. A noticeable marker of freedom is the

ability to devote time to activities that are desirable for the respondents. Along with freedom, the respondents' need for autonomy is manifested.

The theme «Useful activity and creativity» also belongs to the features of the subjective experience of positive solitude. The respondents noted that in solitude they manage to engage in activities that bring positive emotions and, in their opinion, are useful for them. For some respondents, the activity is of a pronounced creative nature: writing poetry, play music, solving a task, etc.

**Subparagraph 3.3.3.** contains a description of the specific results of positive solitude. It turned out that one of the themes is restoration of resources and positive effects of solitude. In positive solitude, the respondents felt that it helped them restore psychological resources. Most often, the respondents described restoration through relaxation in solitude, as well as experiences of silence and tranquility. Calmness in the solitude associated with a relaxed body position.

Discovered the theme «Personal change» as a result of positive solitude. The respondents noted the internal changes that happened to them in situations of solitude. For example, they talked about new knowledge about themselves and the world. Experiencing openness to other people and to the world for respondents is one of the notable changes after solitude.

Positive solitude can result in deep personal experiences, described in a sense of oneness with the world and others, as well as spiritual experiences. The extent of these experiences is individual, but we can say that solitude provides an opportunity to have a deep personal experience.

**In paragraph 3.4.** a discussion of the results of the Study 2 is presented. The described characteristics of positive solitude confirm many theoretical ideas (H. Arendt, P. Tillich, R. May, K. Jaspers, C. Jung, A. Maslow, C. Moustakas, V. Frankl, A. Langle, etc.). In addition, the results of the study are consistent with the data of V. Thomas [Thomas, 2017], D.M. Brechenser [Brechenser, 1983], C.R. Long and J.R. Averill [Long, Averill, 2003; Long, Seburn, Averill, More, 2003], as well as with the results obtained in the Self-Determination Theory [Chua, Koestner, 2008; Nguyen, Weinstein, Ryan, 2018; Nguyen, Ryan, Deci, 2018; Nguyen, Weinstein, Ryan, 2021]. The

limitations of the study are indicated, one of them: the categories are strongly related to each other and may require additional discussion, more differentiation and regrouping of themes.

**The fourth chapter** reveals the program, the characteristics of the methodology and the sample of the Study 3, as well as a description and discussion of the results of the Study 3.

**Paragraph 4.1.** contains information about the purpose, object, subject and hypotheses of the Study 3.

**In paragraph 4.2.** the methodology and the sample of the Study 3 are considered. Information on six methods, which were filled in by the respondents, is presented. One of the tests (DTA) was previously used in Study 1. The statistical criteria for the quantitative processing of the results are described. The study involved 210 respondents, including 27 men and 182 women (1 respondent indicated “other”). The average age of the respondents is 39 years old ( $M = 38.9$ ;  $SD = 11.6$ ).

**In paragraph 4.3.** the Study 3 results are analyzed. The Study 3 found a significant positive correlation between positive solitude and autonomous motivation for solitude ( $r = 0.40$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). We can say that solitude is a positive human experience when experienced as one’s own choice (autonomous motivation). In addition, positive correlations were found between positive solitude with both high-arousal ( $r = 0.37$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and low-arousal ( $r = 0.45$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) type of positive affect after solitude, as well as negative correlations with both high-arousal ( $r = -0.20$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and low-arousal ( $r = -0.25$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) type of negative affect after solitude.

There was a positive correlation between positive solitude and the need for relatedness with other people ( $r = 0.17$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Positive solitude was positively correlated with all indicators of the Mental Health Continuum: emotional ( $r = 0.34$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), social ( $r = 0.20$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and psychological well-being ( $r = 0.34$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as general indicator of well-being ( $r = 0.34$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Correlations with the Experiences in Activity (EAQ) indicate that for respondents inclined to positive solitude, time alone with themselves is pleasant ( $r = 0.46$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), meaningful ( $r = 0.46$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and associated with effort ( $r = 0.21$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

We used linear regression to study in more detail the connections between personality dispositions, reflecting the experience of loneliness and attitudes towards it, with the Experiences in Activity (EAQ) in solitude and in communication. For each component of the optimal experience, a regression model was constructed, in which three main scales of DTA acted as predictors. It turned out that positive solitude (Solitude Appreciation) is a predictor of experiencing pleasure, meaning, effort, and emptiness (negative correlation) in a situation alone with oneself. In addition, positive solitude (Solitude Appreciation) predicts meaningfulness and effort in communication with other people, but is not a predictor of pleasure or emptiness.

We explored the correlations between motivation for solitude and emotions after solitude also using path analysis in Mplus 8.4. It turned out that positive solitude is a predictor of positive emotions after solitude and autonomous motivation for solitude, which, in turn, also predicts both high-arousal and low-arousal type of positive affect after solitude.

**In paragraph 4.4.** a discussion of the Study 3 results is presented. It is noted that a person experiences positive solitude as his own choice, and after it one experiences positive emotions both high-arousal and low-arousal type of positive affect. This result is consistent with the data of the Self-Determination Theory [Nguyen, Weinstein, Ryan, 2021; Chua, Koestner, 2008; Thomas, Azmitia, 2019], and also confirms numerous philosophical descriptions and biographical facts, for example, in the texts of H.D Thoreau and R.W. Emerson [André, 2000] that positive solitude requires a person's decision. Based on the theoretical review, other results of the Study 3 are discussed.

**The fifth chapter** of the PhD thesis contains general discussions based on the results of three empirical studies using the triangulation strategy as a way to validate the data obtained. The correspondence of the data of the three studies to each other is noted, and also that the results are consistent with the theoretical and empirical data on solitude and complement them. Possible further directions of research are presented at the end of the chapter.

In the **conclusion** the entire research of PhD thesis is briefly summarized.



## **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

**1. Positive solitude is a qualitatively specific phenomenon that has both dispositional and situational indicators:**

**1.1. Positive solitude as a personal disposition is associated with positive emotional experiences in solitary situations.**

The hypothesis was confirmed. Positive solitude is associated with both positive emotions in and after solitude situations.

**1.2. Positive solitude as a personal disposition is positively associated with autonomous motivation for solitude and vice versa with controlled motivation for solitude.**

The hypothesis was partially confirmed. Positive solitude was found to be associated with autonomous motivation; however, the research did not find a negative correlation between positive solitude and controlled motivation.

**1.3. Positive solitude as a personal disposition is associated with the features of activity in solitary situations.**

The hypothesis was confirmed. Indeed, positive solitude is associated with such categories of activity as «Creativity» and «Reading», and is also associated with the total number of categories of activity used and with the component of effort, which can serve as a criterion for the effectiveness of activities in a situation of solitude.

**2. Positive solitude is associated with a number of indicators of personal development and positive personality functioning:**

**2.1. with stages of ego development;**

The hypothesis was confirmed. Personal development is associated with the recognition of the value of solitary situations and the ability to find a resource in them.

**2.2. with psychological health (emotional, social, and psychological well-being);**

The hypothesis was confirmed. Positive solitude is associated with emotional, social and psychological well-being in the model of the continuum of psychological health by C. Keyes.

**2.3. with existential fulfillment;**

The hypothesis was not confirmed. It turned out that positive solitude is not associated with existential fulfillment; however, there are negative correlation between existential fulfillment and General Loneliness.

#### **2.4. with satisfying the need for relatedness with other people;**

The hypothesis was confirmed. The experience of being satisfied with the need for relatedness with other people correlates with the positive solitude of the individual.

### **3. Qualitative research question: How do individuals describe positive solitude in their experience (phenomenological characteristics, prerequisites, consequences)?**

The following main themes and subthemes were found: the prerequisites of positive solitude (voluntariness; space and time for solitude; personal readiness; contact with beauty) the features of the subjective experience of positive solitude (contact with oneself; self-reflection and rethinking of negative life experience; feeling of relatedness with others and the rhythms of solitude; experience of freedom; useful activity and creativity), the specific results of positive solitude (restoration of resources and positive effects of solitude; personal changes; deep personal experiences).

The research was carried out in the International Laboratory of Positive Psychology of Personality and Motivation of the National Research University Higher School of Economics.

### **List of publications**

1. Ishanov S.A. Phenomenon of solitude in psychological research: actual approaches and prospects // World of psychology. Scientific and methodical journal. 2020. №1. P. 176–187 (in Russian).
2. Ishanov S.A., Osin E.N. Alone with oneself: Solitude and Loneliness // Human being. 2019. №30(3). P. 165–183 (in Russian).
3. Ishanov S.A., Osin E.N., Kostenko V.Yu. Personal development and quality of solitude // Cultural-Historical Psychology. 2018. №14(1). P. 30–40 (in Russian).

### **Other publications**

1. Ishanov S.A. Solitude: criteria of productivity and meaning for the meaning of life / In materials of the XXII symposium of psychological problems of the meaning of life and acme (pp. 83–86). Moscow, Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, 2017. (In Russian)
2. Ishanov S.A., Osin E.N. Loneliness as an existential challenge: an empirical typology of individual reactions. In D.A. Leontiev, A.Kh. Fam (eds.) Sixth All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference on Existential Psychology: materials of the conference (pp. 74–77). Moscow, Smysl, 2016. (In Russian).
3. Ishanov S.A. From loneliness to solitude: the search for transition opportunities / In Materials of the XXIII International Scientific Conference of students, postgraduates and young scientists «Lomonosov-2016». Moscow, Max Press, 2016. (In Russian).
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5. Ishanov S.A. Personal predictors for experiencing solitude / In Materials of the V International scientific conference «Psychology of individuality» (pp. 512-513). Moscow, Literary agency «University Book», 2015. (In Russian).

6. Ishanov S.A. Positive and negative aspects of the experience of loneliness / In Materials of the XXI International Scientific Conference of students, postgraduates and young scientists «Lomonosov-2014». Moscow, Max Press, 2014. (In Russian).

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