

## 6 Things You Thought Wrong About Introverts

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If common stereotypes have anything to say on the matter, it's that introverts are socially awkward loners who abhor large crowds and don't like people very much. An introvert may not be a particularly friendly or happy person, but hey, at least they're smarter and more creative than the average extrovert.

Despite comprising an estimated one-third of the general population, introversion may be one of the most frequently misunderstood personality traits. But the silent revolution of introverts -- catapulted into the spotlight largely by the work of Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* -- is shedding light on the experience of introverts living in a culture that tends to value extroverted qualities like assertiveness and outspokenness over solitude and quiet contemplation.

Much of the problem stems from the lack of a simple distinction between introversion and extroversion -- the difference is far more complex than being shy versus outgoing, according to Sophia Dembling, author of *The Introvert's Way: Living a Quiet Life in a Noisy World*. The introversion/extroversion distinction has its roots in Jungian psychology, which views extroverts as being more naturally oriented towards the outside world, and introverts more focused on their own inner world.

"The description that introverts seem to relate most strongly to is the idea that Jung presented, that introverts are drained of energy by interaction, and gain energy in solitude and quiet, whereas extroverts gain energy in social situations with interaction," Dembling tells The Huffington Post. "It seems to be most strongly an energy thing -- where you get your energy and what takes it out of you."

If you're an introvert, you might be used to feeling misunderstood (many introvert children are criticized for not speaking up at school, and grow up being told to "come out of their shells") and having your actions (or inaction) misinterpreted. And if you're an extrovert, there's a good chance that you have at least a few misconceptions about those mysterious quiet types in your life. Scroll through the list below for six of the most common false assumptions about introverts -- and why they're wrong.

### **1. All introverts are shy -- and all shy people are introverts.**

Shyness is so often confused with introversion that the two words are frequently used interchangeably -- but in fact, they're remarkably different traits. As Susan Cain pointed out in a Psychology Today blog, Bill Gates is introverted but not shy: He's quiet and bookish, but isn't bothered by what other people think of him.

Whereas introversion, as Dembling explains, is commonly defined as recharging and gaining energy through alone time, shyness has more to do with discomfort and anxiety in situations involving social interaction. Many introverts aren't shy; they may feel confident and at ease around people, but simply require more alone time to balance out the energy they expend in social situations. Similarly, an extrovert may seek the company of others but feel insecure or uncomfortable in groups.

"The number-one misconception about introversion is that it's about shyness," says Dembling. "The best distinction I've heard comes from a neuroscientist who studies shyness. He said, 'Shyness is a behavior -- it's

being fearful in a social situation. Whereas introversion is a motivation. It's how much you want and need to be in those interactions."

## **2. Introverts don't like to be around people.**

Although introverts do generally need -- and enjoy -- more solitude than their extroverted counterparts, the idea that introverts are antisocial or don't want the company of others is completely false. They just tend to enjoy social interaction in a different way than extroverts do.

"There are a lot of negative labels placed on introverts -- socially anxious, don't like people, judgmental (because we sit quietly)," says Dembling. "Introverts may prefer one-on-one interaction ... we might enjoy large parties but want to sit and watch the action from the sidelines. Extroverts may interpret this as not wanting to have fun, but this observation *is* fun for an introvert."

Introversion shouldn't be confused with misanthropy -- introverts do like people, but they typically favor quality over quantity in their relationships, choosing to focus on creating a smaller circle of close friends rather than a large network of acquaintances.

"I like to say that we may like people more than extroverts because we take the time to get to know them ... It's just a completely different style," says Dembling.

## **3. Introverts don't make good leaders or public speakers.**

Many introverts enjoy and excel in roles that involve leading others, speaking publicly, and being in the spotlight. Bill Gates, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi and countless other leaders through history have been classified as introverts. These leaders may also foster a better team environment, as research has shown they might work better in groups than extroverts do. And according to USA Today, roughly four in 10 top executives test as introverts.

Research has found that individuals of both personality types can be well-suited to leadership and sales roles.

"The good news ... is that in some sense we are all born to sell and equipped to lead," writes author Daniel Pink in a Washington Post blog. "And that means a hidden but urgent challenge for organizations of every kind is to shatter the stereotype of who's an effective leader."

And when it comes to public speaking, introverts aren't the shrinking violets they're often thought to be, and they might actually have the upper hand over extroverts. Because introverts focus on preparing projects and thinking things through thoroughly before acting, they can be excellent speakers, says Dembling. Susan Cain's charismatically delivered TED talk on the power of introverts, for instance, was one of the fastest TED videos ever to reach one million views -- and it's just one of countless examples.

## **4. Introverts have more negative personalities.**

Because they actually *like* being alone, introverts are sometimes stereotyped as having more depressive or negative-slanting personalities. This misconception likely stems from the fact that extroverts -- who gain their energy from social interaction -- might feel sad when they don't spend enough time with people, Dembling says.

"When extroverts are in an introverted place for too long, spending time alone or being quiet, they can report feeling sad and depressed," says Dembling. "Because they feel sad when they're alone, maybe they therefore think we feel sad when we've been alone. That misconception is coming from a genuine concern, but it's more putting their feelings on us."

Most introverts don't connect solitude with loneliness, unless it becomes excessive. That being said, although introverts do not innately have more depressive personalities, they do tend to spend more time thinking and analyzing -- and if this turns to ruminating, it could potentially lead to depression.

"There's a definite link between rumination and depression," says Dembling. "Because introverts do like thinking and being alone, we need to keep ourselves in check."

### **5. Introverts are more intellectual or creative than extroverts.**

Many of the most celebrated artists and thinkers throughout history -- including Albert Einstein, Marcel Proust and Charles Darwin -- were thought to be quiet types. Introverts are sometimes touted as being "more intelligent, more reflective, more independent, more level-headed, more refined, and more sensitive," as Jonathan Rauch writes in an Atlantic article, "Caring for Your Introvert." But before any quiet types climb atop an intellectual high horse, it's important to note being an introvert doesn't innately make you a loftier, or more innovative, thinker. Extroverts are, of course, often incredibly intelligent and creative; there's just a good chance that their best ideas happen while they're in a more reflective, or introverted, mindset.

"Creativity occurs in an introverted space ... but that doesn't mean we've cornered the market on it," says Dembling. "Without both introverts and extroverts, things wouldn't get done. We've got one person thinking it through and one person going out and slaying the dragon."

### **6. It's easy to tell whether someone is introverted or extroverted.**

Many introverts could easily go out to a cocktail party and talk up everyone in the room -- and they may enjoy themselves doing it. But at the end of the day, they'll look forward to restoring their energy by coming home and reading in bed with a cup of tea. Given our culture's bias towards extroverted personality traits, many introverts have become accustomed to being the wolf in sheep's clothing -- behaving like an extrovert in social situations, and perhaps acting more outspoken and gregarious than they feel on the inside. Or they may enjoy the social interaction and attention, but later crave time alone to recover.

"Most introverts are very good at behaving like extroverts," says Dembling. "A lot of us are out there behaving as extroverts ... but then we have to shut it down. I call it my 'dog and pony show.' But then you have to be quiet and regain your energy for the next time. The long I'm out there putting on the show, the longer I need to recuperate."

"Introverts really do like people and we like socializing," Dembling says. "We just like it in different ways than extroverts."