Introvert in Wonderland

ADNAN R AMIN

I can't, for the life of me, make small talk. And it hinders my social life, earns me labels of 'socially-awkward', 'culturally-backward' and inundates me in advice about dating, pop-culture and conversation-starters. I take it all in before retiring to my place of Zen with a book. I ponder the futility of comparing analyses of the previous night's *Big Bang Theory* and rue the utility of random, mindless chatter. The truth is that society has passed its judgment on the likes of me and we are the misfits. Likeability, agreeability and popularity may not be bestowed upon those who don't spew psychobabble like a teenage-girl on crack or make public and complete jackasses of themselves at parties. All this drives me to retreat further inside my own haven. Unknowingly, I've stumbled into this Wonderland of a Reality where none of my rules hold true anymore. Welcome to the world of the introvert.



Susan Cain, author of 'Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking'.

"Why aren't you enjoying?" meanwhile, the prying continues at a work party. By this, the boss is asking why I'm not drinking like a fish, prancing around like a mantis and singing along to 'Who let the dogs out' like a tone-deaf caveman who should've long been locked right up with the dogs. But by now, cavemen and dogs are both out, blitzing up the dance-floor in a prehistoric frenzy. I *do* enjoy the occasional rowdiness, but I don't join in. Not because I frown upon such behavior – but because it's not something I like to do: just like some people don't like peanut butter. But society isn't questioning their choice: *what is wrong with you, boy? Why! Haven't you read that peanut butter is what the Free-World runs on?* Unlike hatred-of-peanut-butter, introversion has been made to take the witness-stand and a jury of extrovert peers has deemed it outlandish and plain off-putting; "Off with his head," is the summary verdict.

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Chances are that we think one-third of the people around us are shy, timid or just spineless. There's the child in class who remains uninvited to birthday parties and eats her tiffin alone. There's the gawky teenager who simply cannot be pried out of his shell and who runs away at the mention of the debating club; the girl in braces who's always hurrying back home, especially when friends are getting a bite to eat together. And there's the young executive who insists his manager should present to the CEO. Or the weird cousin who masterfully orchestrates escapes from social chatter at family parties.

"On the surface, introversion looks a lot like shyness. Both limit social interaction, but for differing reasons. The shy want desperately to connect but find socialising difficult," says Bernardo J. Carducci, Professor of Psychology at Indiana University.

Introverts seek time alone because they *want* time alone. They prefer less stimulating environments, tend to enjoy quiet concentration, listen more than they talk and think before they speak. Preferring writing to speaking, avoiding excessive body-contact and nurturing a dislike of conflict may also be signs of introversion.

Margaret Atwood, the Booker Prize winning author writes, "All this talking, this rather liquid confessing, was something I didn't think I could ever bring myself to do. It seemed foolhardy to me, like an uncooked egg deciding to come out of its shell: there would be a risk of spreading out too far, turning into a formless puddle."

Research suggests introversion has a lot to do with 'Dopamine' – an organic neurotransmitter that creates feelings of reward and happiness in our brains. Introverts are very sensitive to, and hence can efficiently use, Dopamine. Too much external stimulation overdoses and exhausts them. Studies claim they will actually salivate more in response to a drop of lemon juice on the tongue. Extroverts, on the other hand, need constant excitement and stimulation to create Dopamine. In short, extroverts have to work harder for their Dopamine.