

**The Power
of Introverts in a
World That Can't
Stop Talking**

Quiet

SUSAN CAIN

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[INTRODUCTION: The North and South of Temperament](#)

PART ONE: THE EXTROVERT IDEAL

[1. THE RISE OF THE "MIGHTY LIKEABLE FELLOW": How Extroversion Became the Cultural Ideal](#)

[2. THE MYTH OF CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP: The Culture of Personality, a Hundred Years Later](#)

[3. WHEN COLLABORATION KILLS CREATIVITY: The Rise of the New Groupthink and the Power of Working Alone](#)

PART TWO: YOUR BIOLOGY, YOUR SELF?

[4. IS TEMPERAMENT DESTINY?: Nature, Nurture, and the Orchid Hypothesis](#)

[5. BEYOND TEMPERAMENT: The Role of Free Will \(and the Secret of Public Speaking for Introverts\)](#)

[6. "FRANKLIN WAS A POLITICIAN, BUT ELEANOR SPOKE OUT OF CONSCIENCE": Why Cool Is Overrated](#)

[7. WHY DID WALL STREET CRASH AND WARREN BUFFETT PROSPER?: How Introverts and Extroverts Think \(and Process Dopamine\) Differently](#)

PART THREE: DO ALL CULTURES HAVE AN EXTROVERT IDEAL?

[8. SOFT POWER: Asian-Americans and the Extrovert Ideal](#)

PART FOUR: HOW TO LOVE, HOW TO WORK

9. WHEN SHOULD YOU ACT MORE EXTROVERTED THAN YOU REALLY ARE?

10. THE COMMUNICATION GAP: How to Talk to Members of the Opposite Type

11. ON COBBLERS AND GENERALS: How to Cultivate Quiet Kids in a World That Can't Hear Them

CONCLUSION: Wonderland

A Note on the Dedication

A Note on the Words *Introvert* and *Extrovert*

Acknowledgments

Notes

Author's Note

I have been working on this book officially since 2005, and unofficially for my entire adult life. I have spoken and written to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people about the topics covered inside, and have read as many books, scholarly papers, magazine articles, chat-room discussions, and blog posts. Some of these I mention in the book; others informed almost every sentence I wrote. Quiet stands on many shoulders, especially the scholars and researchers whose work taught me so much. In a perfect world, I would have named every one of my sources, mentors, and interviewees. But for the sake of readability, some names appear only in the Notes or Acknowledgments.

For similar reasons, I did not use ellipses or brackets in certain quotations but made sure that the extra or missing words did not change the speaker's or writer's meaning. If you would like to quote these written sources from the original, the citations directing you to the full quotations appear in the Notes.

I've changed the names and identifying details of some of the people whose stories I tell, and in the stories of my own work as a lawyer and consultant. To protect the privacy of the participants in Charles di Cagno's public speaking workshop, who did not plan to be included in a book when they signed up for the class, the story of my first evening in class is a composite based on several sessions; so is the story of Greg and Emily, which is based on many interviews with similar couples. Subject to the limitations of memory, all other stories are recounted as they happened or were told to me. I did not fact-check the stories people told me about themselves, but only included those I believed to be true.

INTRODUCTION

The North and South of Temperament

Montgomery, Alabama. December 1, 1955. Early evening. A public bus pulls to a stop and a sensibly dressed woman in her forties gets on. She carries herself erectly, despite having spent the day bent over an ironing board in a dingy basement tailor shop at the Montgomery Fair department store. Her feet are swollen, her shoulders ache. She sits in the first row of the Colored section and watches quietly as the bus fills with riders. Until the driver orders her to give her seat to a white passenger.

The woman utters a single word that ignites one of the most important civil rights protests of the twentieth century, one word that helps America find its better self.

The word is “No.”

The driver threatens to have her arrested.

“You may do that,” says **Rosa Parks**.

A police officer arrives. He asks Parks why she won’t move.

“Why do you all push us around?” she answers simply.

“I don’t know,” he says. “But the law is the law, and you’re under arrest.”

On the afternoon of her trial and conviction for disorderly conduct, the Montgomery Improvement Association holds a rally for Parks at the Holt Street Baptist Church, in the poorest section of town. Five thousand gather to support Parks’s lonely act of courage. They squeeze inside the church until its pews can hold no more. The rest wait patiently outside, listening through loudspeakers. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. addresses the crowd. “There comes a time that people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression,” he tells them. “There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life’s July and left standing amidst the piercing chill of an Alpine November.”

He praises Parks’s bravery and hugs her. She stands silently, her mere presence enough to galvanize the crowd. The association launches a city-

wide bus boycott that lasts 381 days. The people trudge miles to work. They carpool with strangers. They change the course of American history.

I had always imagined Rosa Parks as a stately woman with a bold temperament, someone who could easily stand up to a busload of glowering passengers. But when she died in 2005 at the age of ninety-two, the flood of obituaries recalled her as soft-spoken, sweet, and small in stature. They said she was “timid and shy” but had “the courage of a lion.” They were full of phrases like “radical humility” and “quiet fortitude.” What does it mean to be quiet *and* have fortitude? these descriptions asked implicitly. How could you be shy *and* courageous?

Parks herself seemed aware of this paradox, calling her autobiography *Quiet Strength*—a title that challenges us to question our assumptions. Why *shouldn't* quiet be strong? And what else can quiet do that we don't give it credit for?



Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race. And the single most important aspect of personality—the “north and south of temperament,” as one scientist puts it—is where we fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Our place on this continuum influences our choice of friends and mates, and how we make conversation, resolve differences, and show love. It affects the careers we choose and whether or not we succeed at them. It governs how likely we are to exercise, commit adultery, function well without sleep, learn from our mistakes, place big bets in the stock market, delay gratification, be a good leader, and ask “what if.”* It's reflected in our brain pathways, neurotransmitters, and remote corners of our nervous systems. Today introversion and extroversion are two of the most exhaustively researched subjects in personality psychology, arousing the curiosity of hundreds of scientists.

These researchers have made exciting discoveries aided by the latest technology, but they're part of a long and storied tradition. Poets and philosophers have been thinking about introverts and extroverts since the dawn of recorded time. Both personality types appear in the Bible and in the writings of Greek and Roman physicians, and some evolutionary

psychologists say that the history of these types reaches back even farther than that: the animal kingdom also boasts “introverts” and “extroverts,” as we’ll see, from fruit flies to pumpkinseed fish to rhesus monkeys. As with other complementary pairings—masculinity and femininity, East and West, liberal and conservative—humanity would be unrecognizable, and vastly diminished, without both personality styles.

Take the partnership of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.: a formidable orator refusing to give up his seat on a segregated bus wouldn’t have had the same effect as a modest woman who’d clearly prefer to keep silent but for the exigencies of the situation. And Parks didn’t have the stuff to thrill a crowd if she’d tried to stand up and announce that she had a dream. But with King’s help, she didn’t have to.

Yet today we make room for a remarkably narrow range of personality styles. We’re told that to be great is to be bold, to be happy is to be sociable. We see ourselves as a nation of extroverts—which means that we’ve lost sight of who we really are. Depending on which study you consult, one third to one half of Americans are introverts—in other words, *one out of every two or three people you know*. (Given that the United States is among the most extroverted of nations, the number must be at least as high in other parts of the world.) If you’re not an introvert yourself, you are surely raising, managing, married to, or coupled with one.

If these statistics surprise you, that’s probably because so many people pretend to be extroverts. Closet introverts pass undetected on playgrounds, in high school locker rooms, and in the corridors of corporate America. Some fool even themselves, until some life event—a layoff, an empty nest, an inheritance that frees them to spend time as they like—jolts them into taking stock of their true natures. You have only to raise the subject of this book with your friends and acquaintances to find that the most unlikely people consider themselves introverts.

It makes sense that so many introverts hide even from themselves. We live with a value system that I call the **Extrovert Ideal**—the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. She works well in teams and socializes in groups. We like to think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one

type of individual—the kind who’s comfortable “putting himself out there.” Sure, we allow technologically gifted loners who launch companies in garages to have any personality they please, but they are the exceptions, not the rule, and our tolerance extends mainly to those who get fabulously wealthy or hold the promise of doing so.

Introversion—along with its cousins sensitivity, seriousness, and shyness—is now a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology. Introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal are like women in a man’s world, discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are. Extroversion is an enormously appealing personality style, but we’ve turned it into an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform.

The Extrovert Ideal has been documented in many studies, though this research has never been grouped under a single name. Talkative people, for example, are rated as smarter, better-looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends. Velocity of speech counts as well as volume: we rank fast talkers as more competent and likable than slow ones. The same dynamics apply in groups, where research shows that the voluble are considered smarter than the reticent—even though there’s zero correlation between the gift of gab and good ideas. Even the word *introvert* is stigmatized—one informal study, by psychologist Laurie Helgoe, found that introverts described their own physical appearance in vivid language (“green-blue eyes,” “exotic,” “high cheekbones”), but when asked to describe generic introverts they drew a bland and distasteful picture (“ungainly,” “neutral colors,” “skin problems”).

But we make a grave mistake to embrace the Extrovert Ideal so unthinkingly. Some of our greatest ideas, art, and inventions—from the theory of evolution to van Gogh’s sunflowers to the personal computer—came from quiet and cerebral people who knew how to tune in to their inner worlds and the treasures to be found there. Without introverts, the world would be devoid of:

the theory of gravity
the theory of relativity
W. B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming”
Chopin’s nocturnes

Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*
Peter Pan
Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*
The Cat in the Hat
Charlie Brown
Schindler's List, *E.T.*, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*
Google
Harry Potter*

As the science journalist Winifred Gallagher writes: “The glory of the disposition that stops to consider stimuli rather than rushing to engage with them is its long association with intellectual and artistic achievement. Neither $E=mc^2$ nor *Paradise Lost* was dashed off by a party animal.” Even in less obviously introverted occupations, like finance, politics, and activism, some of the greatest leaps forward were made by introverts. In this book we’ll see how figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Al Gore, Warren Buffett, Gandhi—and Rosa Parks—achieved what they did not in spite of but because of their introversion.

Yet, as *Quiet* will explore, many of the most important institutions of contemporary life are designed for those who enjoy group projects and high levels of stimulation. As children, our classroom desks are increasingly arranged in pods, the better to foster group learning, and research suggests that the vast majority of teachers believe that the ideal student is an extrovert. We watch TV shows whose protagonists are not the “children next door,” like the Cindy Bradys and Beaver Cleavers of yesteryear, but rock stars and webcast hostesses with outsized personalities, like Hannah Montana and Carly Shay of *iCarly*. Even Sid the Science Kid, a PBS-sponsored role model for the preschool set, kicks off each school day by performing dance moves with his pals. (“Check out my moves! I’m a rock star!”)

As adults, many of us work for organizations that insist we work in teams, in offices without walls, for supervisors who value “people skills” above all. To advance our careers, we’re expected to promote ourselves unabashedly. The scientists whose research gets funded often have confident, perhaps overconfident, personalities. The artists whose work adorns the walls of contemporary museums strike impressive poses at

gallery openings. The authors whose books get published—once accepted as a reclusive breed—are now vetted by publicists to make sure they're talk-show ready. (You wouldn't be reading this book if I hadn't convinced my publisher that I was enough of a pseudo-extrovert to promote it.)

If you're an introvert, you also know that the bias against quiet can cause deep psychic pain. As a child you might have overheard your parents apologize for your shyness. ("Why can't you be more like the Kennedy boys?" the Camelot-besotted parents of one man I interviewed repeatedly asked him.) Or at school you might have been prodded to come "out of your shell"—that noxious expression which fails to appreciate that some animals naturally carry shelter everywhere they go, and that some humans are just the same. "All the comments from childhood still ring in my ears, that I was lazy, stupid, slow, boring," writes a member of an e-mail list called Introvert Retreat. "By the time I was old enough to figure out that I was simply introverted, it was a part of my being, the assumption that there is something inherently wrong with me. I wish I could find that little vestige of doubt and remove it."

Now that you're an adult, you might still feel a pang of guilt when you decline a dinner invitation in favor of a good book. Or maybe you like to eat alone in restaurants and could do without the pitying looks from fellow diners. Or you're told that you're "in your head too much," a phrase that's often deployed against the quiet and cerebral.

Of course, there's another word for such people: thinkers.



I have seen firsthand how difficult it is for introverts to take stock of their own talents, and how powerful it is when finally they do. For more than ten years I trained people of all stripes—corporate lawyers and college students, hedge-fund managers and married couples—in negotiation skills. Of course, we covered the basics: how to prepare for a negotiation, when to make the first offer, and what to do when the other person says "take it or leave it." But I also helped clients figure out their natural personalities and how to make the most of them.

My very first client was a young woman named Laura. She was a Wall Street lawyer, but a quiet and daydreamy one who dreaded the spotlight and disliked aggression. She had managed somehow to make it through the crucible of Harvard Law School—a place where classes are conducted in huge, gladiatorial amphitheaters, and where she once got so nervous that she threw up on the way to class. Now that she was in the real world, she wasn't sure she could represent her clients as forcefully as they expected.

For the first three years on the job, Laura was so junior that she never had to test this premise. But one day the senior lawyer she'd been working with went on vacation, leaving her in charge of an important negotiation. The client was a South American manufacturing company that was about to default on a bank loan and hoped to renegotiate its terms; a syndicate of bankers that owned the endangered loan sat on the other side of the negotiating table.

Laura would have preferred to hide under said table, but she was accustomed to fighting such impulses. Gamely but nervously, she took her spot in the lead chair, flanked by her clients: general counsel on one side and senior financial officer on the other. These happened to be Laura's favorite clients: gracious and soft-spoken, very different from the master-of-the-universe types her firm usually represented. In the past, Laura had taken the general counsel to a Yankees game and the financial officer shopping for a handbag for her sister. But now these cozy outings—just the kind of socializing Laura enjoyed—seemed a world away. Across the table sat nine disgruntled investment bankers in tailored suits and expensive shoes, accompanied by their lawyer, a square-jawed woman with a hearty manner. Clearly not the self-doubting type, this woman launched into an impressive speech on how Laura's clients would be lucky simply to accept the bankers' terms. It was, she said, a very magnanimous offer.

Everyone waited for Laura to reply, but she couldn't think of anything to say. **So she just sat there. Blinking. All eyes on her.** Her clients shifting uneasily in their seats. Her thoughts running in a familiar loop: *I'm too quiet for this kind of thing, too unassuming, too cerebral.* She imagined the person who would be better equipped to save the day: someone bold, smooth, ready to pound the table. In middle school this person, unlike Laura, would have been called “outgoing,” the highest accolade her seventh-grade classmates knew, higher even than “pretty,” for a girl, or

“athletic,” for a guy. Laura promised herself that she only had to make it through the day. Tomorrow she would go look for another career.

Then she remembered what I’d told her again and again: she was an introvert, and as such she had unique powers in negotiation—perhaps less obvious but no less formidable. She’d probably prepared more than everyone else. She had a quiet but firm speaking style. She rarely spoke without thinking. Being mild-mannered, she could take strong, even aggressive, positions while coming across as perfectly reasonable. And she tended to ask questions—lots of them—and actually listen to the answers, which, no matter what your personality, is crucial to strong negotiation.

So Laura finally started doing what came naturally.

“Let’s go back a step. What are your numbers based on?” she asked.

“What if we structured the loan this way, do you think it might work?”

“That way?”

“Some other way?”

At first her questions were tentative. She picked up steam as she went along, posing them more forcefully and making it clear that she’d done her homework and wouldn’t concede the facts. But she also stayed true to her own style, never raising her voice or losing her decorum. Every time the bankers made an assertion that seemed unbudgeable, Laura tried to be constructive. “Are you saying that’s the only way to go? What if we took a different approach?”

Eventually her simple queries shifted the mood in the room, just as the negotiation textbooks say they will. The bankers stopped speechifying and dominance-posing, activities for which Laura felt hopelessly ill-equipped, and they started having an actual conversation.

More discussion. Still no agreement. One of the bankers revved up again, throwing his papers down and storming out of the room. Laura ignored this display, mostly because she didn’t know what else to do. Later on someone told her that at that pivotal moment she’d played a good game of something called “negotiation jujitsu”; but she knew that she was just doing what you learn to do naturally as a quiet person in a loudmouth world.

Finally the two sides struck a deal. The bankers left the building, Laura’s favorite clients headed for the airport, and Laura went home, curled up with a book, and tried to forget the day’s tensions.

But the next morning, the lead lawyer for the bankers—the vigorous woman with the strong jaw—called to offer her a job. “I’ve never seen anyone so nice and so tough at the same time,” she said. And the day after that, the lead banker called Laura, asking if *her* law firm would represent *his* company in the future. “We need someone who can help us put deals together without letting ego get in the way,” he said.

By sticking to her own gentle way of doing things, Laura had reeled in new business for her firm and a job offer for herself. Raising her voice and pounding the table was unnecessary.

Today Laura understands that her introversion is an essential part of who she is, and she embraces her reflective nature. The loop inside her head that accused her of being too quiet and unassuming plays much less often. Laura knows that she can hold her own when she needs to.



What exactly do I mean when I say that Laura is an *introvert*? When I started writing this book, the first thing I wanted to find out was precisely how researchers define introversion and extroversion. I knew that in 1921 the influential psychologist Carl Jung had published a bombshell of a book, *Psychological Types*, popularizing the terms *introvert* and *extrovert* as the central building blocks of personality. Introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, said Jung, extroverts to the external life of people and activities. Introverts focus on the meaning they make of the events swirling around them; extroverts plunge into the events themselves. Introverts recharge their batteries by being alone; extroverts need to recharge when they don’t socialize enough. If you’ve ever taken a Myers-Briggs personality test, which is based on Jung’s thinking and used by the majority of universities and Fortune 100 companies, then you may already be familiar with these ideas.

But what do contemporary researchers have to say? I soon discovered that there is no all-purpose definition of introversion or extroversion; these are not unitary categories, like “curly-haired” or “sixteen-year-old,” in which everyone can agree on who qualifies for inclusion. For example, adherents of the Big Five school of personality psychology (which argues

that human personality can be boiled down to five primary traits) define introversion not in terms of a rich inner life but as a lack of qualities such as assertiveness and sociability. There are almost as many definitions of *introvert* and *extrovert* as there are personality psychologists, who spend a great deal of time arguing over which meaning is most accurate. Some think that Jung's ideas are outdated; others swear that he's the only one who got it right.

Still, today's psychologists tend to agree on several important points: for example, that introverts and extroverts differ in the level of outside stimulation that they need to function well. Introverts feel "just right" with less stimulation, as when they sip wine with a close friend, solve a crossword puzzle, or read a book. Extroverts enjoy the extra bang that comes from activities like meeting new people, skiing slippery slopes, and cranking up the stereo. "Other people are very arousing," says the personality psychologist David Winter, explaining why your typical introvert would rather spend her vacation reading on the beach than partying on a cruise ship. "They arouse threat, fear, flight, and love. A hundred people are very stimulating compared to a hundred books or a hundred grains of sand."

Many psychologists would also agree that introverts and extroverts work differently. Extroverts tend to tackle assignments quickly. They make fast (sometimes rash) decisions, and are comfortable multitasking and risk-taking. They enjoy "the thrill of the chase" for rewards like money and status.

Introverts often work more slowly and deliberately. They like to focus on one task at a time and can have mighty powers of concentration. They're relatively immune to the lures of wealth and fame.

Our personalities also shape our social styles. Extroverts are the people who will add life to your dinner party and laugh generously at your jokes. They tend to be assertive, dominant, and in great need of company. Extroverts think out loud and on their feet; they prefer talking to listening, rarely find themselves at a loss for words, and occasionally blurt out things they never meant to say. They're comfortable with conflict, but not with solitude.

Introverts, in contrast, may have strong social skills and enjoy parties and business meetings, but after a while wish they were home in their pajamas.

They prefer to devote their social energies to close friends, colleagues, and family. They listen more than they talk, think before they speak, and often feel as if they express themselves better in writing than in conversation. They tend to dislike conflict. Many have a horror of small talk, but enjoy deep discussions.

A few things introverts are not: The word *introvert* is not a synonym for hermit or misanthrope. Introverts *can* be these things, but most are perfectly friendly. One of the most humane phrases in the English language—“Only connect!”—was written by the distinctly introverted E. M. Forster in a novel exploring the question of how to achieve “human love at its height.”

Nor are introverts necessarily shy. Shyness is the fear of social disapproval or humiliation, while introversion is a preference for environments that are not overstimulating. Shyness is inherently painful; introversion is not. One reason that people confuse the two concepts is that they sometimes overlap (though psychologists debate to what degree). Some psychologists map the two tendencies on vertical and horizontal axes, with the introvert-extrovert spectrum on the horizontal axis, and the anxious-stable spectrum on the vertical. With this model, you end up with four quadrants of personality types: calm extroverts, anxious (or impulsive) extroverts, calm introverts, and anxious introverts. In other words, you can be a shy extrovert, like Barbra Streisand, who has a larger-than-life personality and paralyzing stage fright; or a non-shy introvert, like Bill Gates, who by all accounts keeps to himself but is unfazed by the opinions of others.

You can also, of course, be both shy *and* an introvert: T. S. Eliot was a famously private soul who wrote in “The Waste Land” that he could “show you fear in a handful of dust.” Many shy people turn inward, partly as a refuge from the socializing that causes them such anxiety. And many introverts are shy, partly as a result of receiving the message that there’s something wrong with their preference for reflection, and partly because their physiologies, as we’ll see, compel them to withdraw from high-stimulation environments.

But for all their differences, shyness and introversion have in common something profound. The mental state of a shy extrovert sitting quietly in a business meeting may be very different from that of a calm introvert—the shy person is afraid to speak up, while the introvert is simply

overstimulated—but to the outside world, the two appear to be the same. This can give both types insight into how our reverence for alpha status blinds us to things that are good and smart and wise. For very different reasons, shy and introverted people might choose to spend their days in behind-the-scenes pursuits like inventing, or researching, or holding the hands of the gravely ill—or in leadership positions they execute with quiet competence. These are not alpha roles, but the people who play them are role models all the same.



If you're still not sure where you fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum, you can assess yourself here. Answer each question “true” or “false,” choosing the answer that applies to you more often than not.*

1. _____ I prefer one-on-one conversations to group activities.
2. _____ I often prefer to express myself in writing.
3. _____ I enjoy solitude.
4. _____ I seem to care less than my peers about wealth, fame, and status.
5. _____ I dislike small talk, but I enjoy talking in depth about topics that matter to me.
6. _____ People tell me that I'm a good listener.
7. _____ I'm not a big risk-taker.
8. _____ I enjoy work that allows me to “dive in” with few interruptions.
9. _____ I like to celebrate birthdays on a small scale, with only one or two close friends or family members.
10. _____ People describe me as “soft-spoken” or “mellow.”
11. _____ I prefer not to show or discuss my work with others until it's finished.
12. _____ I dislike conflict.
13. _____ I do my best work on my own.
14. _____ I tend to think before I speak.
15. _____ I feel drained after being out and about, even if I've enjoyed myself.
16. _____ I often let calls go through to voice mail.
17. _____ If I had to choose, I'd prefer a weekend with absolutely nothing to do to one with too many things scheduled.
18. _____ I don't enjoy multitasking.
19. _____ I can concentrate easily.
20. _____ In classroom situations, I prefer lectures to seminars.

The more often you answered “true,” the more introverted you probably are. If you found yourself with a roughly equal number of “true” and “false” answers, then you may be an ambivert—yes, there really is such a word.

But even if you answered every single question as an introvert or extrovert, that doesn’t mean that your behavior is predictable across all circumstances. We can’t say that every introvert is a bookworm or every extrovert wears lampshades at parties any more than we can say that every woman is a natural consensus-builder and every man loves contact sports. As Jung felicitously put it, “There is no such thing as a pure extrovert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be in the lunatic asylum.”

This is partly because we are all gloriously complex individuals, but also because there are so many different *kinds* of introverts and extroverts. Introversion and extroversion interact with our other personality traits and personal histories, producing wildly different kinds of people. So if you’re an artistic American guy whose father wished you’d try out for the football team like your rough-and-tumble brothers, you’ll be a very different kind of introvert from, say, a Finnish businesswoman whose parents were lighthouse keepers. (Finland is a famously introverted nation. Finnish joke: How can you tell if a Finn likes you? He’s staring at your shoes instead of his own.)

Many introverts are also “highly sensitive,” which sounds poetic, but is actually a technical term in psychology. If you are a sensitive sort, then you’re more apt than the average person to feel pleasantly overwhelmed by Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” or a well-turned phrase or an act of extraordinary kindness. You may be quicker than others to feel sickened by violence and ugliness, and you likely have a very strong conscience. When you were a child you were probably called “shy,” and to this day feel nervous when you’re being evaluated, for example when giving a speech or on a first date. Later we’ll examine why this seemingly unrelated collection of attributes tends to belong to the same person and why this person is often introverted. (No one knows exactly how many introverts are highly sensitive, but we know that 70 percent of sensitives are introverts, and the other 30 percent tend to report needing a lot of “down time.”)

All of this complexity means that not everything you read in *Quiet* will apply to you, even if you consider yourself a true-blue introvert. For one

thing, we'll spend some time talking about shyness and sensitivity, while you might have neither of these traits. That's OK. Take what applies to you, and use the rest to improve your relationships with others.

Having said all this, in *Quiet* we'll try not to get too hung up on definitions. Strictly defining terms is vital for researchers whose studies depend on pinpointing exactly where introversion stops and other traits, like shyness, start. But in *Quiet* we'll concern ourselves more with the *fruit* of that research. Today's psychologists, joined by neuroscientists with their brain-scanning machines, have unearthed illuminating insights that are changing the way we see the world—and ourselves. They are answering questions such as: Why are some people talkative while others measure their words? Why do some people burrow into their work and others organize office birthday parties? Why are some people comfortable wielding authority while others prefer neither to lead nor to be led? *Can* introverts be leaders? Is our cultural preference for extroversion in the natural order of things, or is it socially determined? From an evolutionary perspective, introversion must have survived as a personality trait for a reason—so what might the reason be? If you're an introvert, should you devote your energies to activities that come naturally, or should you stretch yourself, as Laura did that day at the negotiation table?

The answers might surprise you.

If there is only one insight you take away from this book, though, I hope it's a newfound sense of entitlement to be yourself. I can vouch personally for the life-transforming effects of this outlook. Remember that first client I told you about, the one I called Laura in order to protect her identity?

That was a story about me. I was my own first client.

* Answer key: exercise: extroverts; commit adultery: extroverts; function well without sleep: introverts; learn from our mistakes: introverts; place big bets: extroverts; delay gratification: introverts; be a good leader: in some cases introverts, in other cases extroverts, depending on the type of leadership called for; ask "what if": introverts.

* Sir Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, W. B. Yeats, Frédéric Chopin, Marcel Proust, J. M. Barrie, George Orwell, Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss), Charles Schulz, Steven Spielberg, Larry Page, J. K. Rowling.

* This is an informal quiz, not a scientifically validated personality test. The questions were formulated based on characteristics of introversion often accepted by contemporary researchers.