

## Caring for Your Introvert (*and related articles...*)

by Jonathan Rauch

The Atlantic Magazine (March, 2003)

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200303/rauch>

Do you know someone who needs hours alone every day? Who loves quiet conversations about feelings or ideas, and can give a dynamite presentation to a big audience, but seems awkward in groups and maladroit at small talk? Who has to be dragged to parties and then needs the rest of the day to recuperate? Who growls or scowls or grunts or winces when accosted with pleasantries by people who are just trying to be nice?

If so, do you tell this person he is “too serious,” or ask if he is okay? Regard him as aloof, arrogant, rude? Redouble your efforts to draw him out?

If you answered yes to these questions, chances are that you have an introvert on your hands — and that you aren’t caring for him properly. Science has learned a good deal in recent years about the habits and requirements of introverts. It has even learned, by means of brain scans, that introverts process information differently from other people (I am not making this up). If you are behind the curve on this important matter, be reassured that you are not alone. Introverts may be common, but they are also among the most misunderstood and aggrieved groups in America, possibly the world.

I know. My name is Jonathan, and I am an introvert.

Oh, for years I denied it. After all, I have good social skills. I am not morose or misanthropic. Usually. I am far from shy. I love long conversations that explore intimate thoughts or passionate interests. But at last I have self-identified and come out to my friends and colleagues. In doing so, I have found myself liberated from any number of damaging misconceptions and stereotypes. Now I am here to tell you what you need to know in order to respond sensitively and supportively to your own introverted family members, friends, and colleagues. Remember, someone you know, respect, and interact with every day is an introvert, and you are probably driving this person nuts. It pays to learn the warning signs.

**What is introversion?** In its modern sense, the concept goes back to the 1920s and the psychologist

Carl Jung. Today it is a mainstay of personality tests, including the widely used Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Introverts are not necessarily shy. Shy people are anxious or frightened or self-excoriating in social settings; introverts generally are not. Introverts are also not misanthropic, though some of us do go along with Sartre as far as to say “Hell is other people at breakfast.” Rather, introverts are people who find other people tiring.

Extroverts are energized by people, and wilt or fade when alone. They often seem bored by themselves, in both senses of the expression. Leave an extrovert alone for two minutes and he will reach for his cell phone. In contrast, after an hour or two of being socially “on,” we introverts need to turn off and recharge. My own formula is roughly two hours alone for every hour of socializing. This isn’t antisocial. It isn’t a sign of depression. It does not call for medication. For introverts, to be alone with our thoughts is as restorative as sleeping, as nourishing as eating. Our motto: “I’m okay, you’re okay — in small doses.”

**How many people are introverts?** I performed exhaustive research on this question, in the form of a quick Google search. The answer: About 25 percent. Or: Just under half. Or — my favorite — “a minority in the regular population but a majority in the gifted population.”

**Are introverts misunderstood?** Wildly. That, it appears, is our lot in life. “It is very difficult for an extrovert to understand an introvert,” write the education experts Jill D. Burruss and Lisa Kaenzig. (They are also the source of the quotation in the previous paragraph.) Extroverts are easy for introverts to understand, because extroverts spend so much of their time working out who they are in voluble, and frequently inescapable, interaction with other people. They are as inscrutable as puppy dogs. But the street does not run both ways. Extroverts have little or no grasp of introversion. They assume that company, especially their own, is always welcome. They cannot imagine why someone would need to be alone; indeed, they often take umbrage at the suggestion. As often as I have tried to explain the matter to extroverts, I have

never sensed that any of them really understood. They listen for a moment and then go back to barking and yipping.

**Are introverts oppressed?** I would have to say so. For one thing, extroverts are overrepresented in politics, a profession in which only the garrulous are really comfortable. Look at George W. Bush. Look at Bill Clinton. They seem to come fully to life only around other people. To think of the few introverts who did rise to the top in politics – Calvin Coolidge, Richard Nixon – is merely to drive home the point. With the possible exception of Ronald Reagan, whose fabled aloofness and privateness were probably signs of a deep introverted streak (many actors, I've read, are introverts, and many introverts, when socializing, feel like actors), introverts are not considered "naturals" in politics.

Extroverts therefore dominate public life. This is a pity. If we introverts ran the world, it would no doubt be a calmer, saner, more peaceful sort of place. As Coolidge is supposed to have said, "Don't you know that four fifths of all our troubles in this life would disappear if we would just sit down and keep still?" (He is also supposed to have said, "If you don't say anything, you won't be called on to repeat it." The only thing a true introvert dislikes more than talking about himself is repeating himself.)

With their endless appetite for talk and attention, extroverts also dominate social life, so they tend to set expectations. In our extrovertist society, being outgoing is considered normal and therefore desirable, a mark of happiness, confidence, leadership. Extroverts are seen as bighearted, vibrant, warm, empathic. "People person" is a compliment. Introverts are described with words like "guarded," "loner," "reserved," "taciturn," "self-contained," "private" – narrow, ungenerous words, words that suggest emotional parsimony and smallness of personality. Female introverts, I suspect, must suffer especially. In certain circles, particularly in the Midwest, a man can still sometimes get away with being what they used to call a strong and silent type; introverted women, lacking that alternative, are even more likely than men to be perceived as timid, withdrawn, haughty.

**Are introverts arrogant?** Hardly. I suppose this common misconception has to do with our being

more intelligent, more reflective, more independent, more level-headed, more refined, and more sensitive than extroverts. Also, it is probably due to our lack of small talk, a lack that extroverts often mistake for disdain. We tend to think before talking, whereas extroverts tend to think by talking, which is why their meetings never last less than six hours. "Introverts," writes a perceptive fellow named Thomas P. Crouser, in an online review of a recent book called *Why Should Extroverts Make All the Money?* (I'm not making that up, either), "are driven to distraction by the semi-internal dialogue extroverts tend to conduct. Introverts don't outwardly complain, instead roll their eyes and silently curse the darkness." Just so.

The worst of it is that extroverts have no idea of the torment they put us through. Sometimes, as we gasp for air amid the fog of their 98-percent-content-free talk, we wonder if extroverts even bother to listen to themselves. Still, we endure stoically, because the etiquette books – written, no doubt, by extroverts – regard declining to banter as rude and gaps in conversation as awkward. We can only dream that someday, when our condition is more widely understood, when perhaps an Introverts' Rights movement has blossomed and borne fruit, it will not be impolite to say "I'm an introvert. You are a wonderful person and I like you. But now please shush."

**How can I let the introvert in my life know that I support him and respect his choice?** First, recognize that it's not a choice. It's not a lifestyle. It's an orientation.

Second, when you see an introvert lost in thought, don't say "What's the matter?" or "Are you all right?"

Third, don't say anything else, either.

## Introverts of the World, Unite!

by Sage Stossel

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200602u/introverts>.

*A conversation with Jonathan Rauch, the author who – thanks to an astonishingly popular essay in the March 2003 Atlantic – may have unwittingly touched off an Introverts' Rights revolution*

Most magazine articles do not, as a general rule, inspire impassioned responses. But in 2003, when The Atlantic published a short essay by correspondent Jonathan Rauch on the trials of introversion in an extroverts' world, the reaction was overwhelming. Rauch was inundated with more enthusiastic mail about the piece than for anything else he'd ever written. And on The Atlantic's Web site, it drew (and has continued to draw) more traffic than any other piece we've posted.

"I am an introvert," Rauch declared in the piece. And as such, he contended, he is a member of one of the "most misunderstood and aggrieved groups in America, possibly the world." By definition, he explained, introverts are those who find other people's company tiring. Yet the uncomprehending extrovert majority imposes its own gregarious expectations on extroverts and introverts alike – compelling incessant socializing, enthusiastic party-going, and easy shooting of the breeze as norms. Introverts, Rauch pointed out – though an oppressed minority – comprise a significant portion of the population. Their quiet, introspective ways, he argued, should therefore be viewed not as a deviation from standard, but as a different kind of normal.

He addressed extroverts, admonishing them to be more sensitive to their introvert peers: after all, "someone you know, respect, and interact with every day," he explained, "is an introvert, and you are probably driving this person nuts." As for introverts, he wrote, "we can only dream that someday, when our condition is more widely understood, when perhaps an Introverts' Rights movement has blossomed and borne fruit, it will not be impolite to say, 'I'm an introvert.... Now please shush.'"

If the groundswell of support for these sentiments is any indication, Rauch may soon find himself the

unwitting figurehead for an Introverts' Rights Revolution. We decided to have a few words with this author, who has clearly tapped into something important.

Rauch is a correspondent for The Atlantic and a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution. His book, *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America*, was published in 2004.

I spoke with him in early January.

**Did anything in particular inspire you to write an article about this? An especially trying plane ride seated next to an extrovert, for example?**

I don't think it was any specific incident. The idea was rolling around in my head for a while. To some extent, it was the result of being partnered with an extrovert and realizing that this was a daily source of tension. So I started organizing my thoughts on the subject. Another motivation was, basically, that I thought it would be funny.

**It's interesting that you've found it a source of tension to be paired with an extrovert. I've read that introvert-extrovert pairings work well because the person who doesn't like to make small talk can just let the other person do it for them.**

That's true. It does work very well in some situations. But for an introvert it also makes for a constant – I guess you might call it "brain pressure." That's a better phrase than "tension," because tension implies conflict and it's not that. It's just that my partner Michael's default mode of being is to talk and interact all the time, whereas mine is to talk as little as possible. We've been together since 1996 and we've spent much of that time just learning how not to drive each other completely insane. Part of my motivation for writing this piece was to pass along some of what I've learned. I was also hoping Michael would read it, which he did.

**Did it help?**

By the time the piece was published he'd probably heard it all from me before. But it doesn't hurt to go on the record.

**If he were a writer he could do the companion piece—"How to Care for Your Extrovert."**

Exactly. But of course my view, as I say in the article, is that it's much easier for introverts to understand these things than extroverts. Extroverts really have a hard time "getting" it. And even when they do get it, they still have a hard time modifying their behavior.

**You wrote that for a long time you didn't even realize you were an introvert. What caused it to finally dawn on you?**

From about the age of eighteen or nineteen, when I went to college, I realized that it was just not my idea of fun to party. In fact, I couldn't see why anyone would want to—I get so monumentally bored at parties. So I realized that I had this fundamental difference with a lot of other people. I didn't put a name on it until a few years ago when a friend of mine, who reads a lot of Jung, informed me that he's an introvert and that, "by the way, Jonathan, you're an introvert, too." He explained what that means and suddenly a lightbulb went on and things fell into place.

**Now that you're tuned into it, can you usually tell when you meet someone whether or not they're also an introvert?**

No. There's no introvert "gay-dar" that I can tell. One reason is that a lot of introverts are actually very good at being social. It just takes a lot of work for them. I'm like that. I'm not great at small talk, but I can seem quite outgoing for spells of up to an hour or so before I completely run out of gas. So I have to kind of get to know someone before I can figure out whether they're an introvert. Not that it takes all that much getting to know. If you notice that someone's getting tired out by a long conversation, they're probably an introvert. But it's not a first impression kind of thing.

**I was surprised to read in your article that it's not typical for introverts to also be anxious or shy in social settings, because I'm both.**

I was wondering whether you were an introvert. When did you realize that about yourself?

**I'm not sure. I guess it probably hit me in seventh grade when somebody told my older brother,**

**"You know, Sage could be popular if she talked more." Of course, he reported this to me, and I started to brood over it.**

That is so unjust. Isn't it?

**Yeah—chattiness suddenly seemed like the key to social success and happiness.**

That story so sums up the kind of extrovert hegemony that can make life miserable. I think it's particularly hard for girls and women. "You'd be so much more popular if you'd talk more." It seems to me that the world would be a much better place, and that people would be much more rightly popular, if they talked less. Because so little of what most people say is actually worth hearing.

**True. Although sometimes it's interesting to listen to other people talk. It's too bad it's not more acceptable to go to a party and just kind of soak things up.**

Yeah. They should sell skybox seats at parties for people like us.

You asked about shyness versus introversion. My limited reading on the subject suggests that, psychologically speaking, they're regarded as different things. That reflects my own experience; I'm not particularly shy myself. To me, shyness implies a real reluctance to be socially aggressive or assertive. It's very difficult for shy people to put themselves out there if they need to. For introverts, it's never easy to do, but it's more a matter of reluctance to expend the energy, because it tires us out. That's what I feel most strongly. If I have to go to a party and then a dinner afterwards, I'm completely ruined for the evening. But if I'm called upon to run a business meeting or something, I don't feel any reluctance or anxiety about it. So, in my mind there's always been a fairly clear distinction between introversion and shyness.

**You also mention in the article that studies have shown that introverts process information differently from other people.**

Yeah, that's something I read back when I was reporting the piece. I can't remember the details now, but it involved brain scans.

**It sounds right to me that the process is different. When there's a conversation flowing around me and everyone else is so quick with their responses, I almost imagine that other people's brains are endowed with some kind of fast-acting comment-generating engine.**

Yeah, I marvel at Michael who can always somehow turn the conversation right over effortlessly and keep it going even when what he says is not necessarily profound or interesting. What he comes up with is perfectly tuned to the sense and flow of the conversation. But it's not words that are particularly intended to convey ideas or mean things. It's words that socialize – that simply continue the conversation. It's chit-chat. I have no gift for that. I have to think about what to say next, and sometimes I can't think fast enough and end up saying something stupid. Or sometimes I just come up dry and the conversation kind of ends for while until I can think of another topic. This is why it's work for me. It takes positive cognition on my part. I think that's probably a core introvert characteristic that you and I have in common and which can probably be distinguished from shyness per se – that small talk takes conscious effort and is very hard work. There's nothing small about small talk if you're an introvert. But we're good at big talk. Are you good at big talk?

**If I get onto a topic I'm interested in and feel strongly about then it's true that I can get animated and engaged. But I'm not so good at chatting about things like the weather.**

Right. The weather's not interesting. But once an introvert gets on a subject that they know about or care about or that intrigues them intellectually, the opposite often takes hold. They get passionately engaged and turned on by the conversation. But it's not socializing that's going on there. It's learning or teaching or analyzing, which involves, I'm convinced, a whole different part of the brain from the socializing part.

**Do you ever wish you were an extrovert?**

Not really. That may be because my "faking it" skills are pretty good. But I do think a lot of us are tired of being told that there's something wrong with us – of this lazy assumption that if you're not an extrovert, there's something wrong with you. I

think my article may speak to people in part because of its defiant message. It says, "No, I don't wish to be an extrovert. Not everyone has to be one. And why don't you people get it?"

**Your article made me think of that book *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman from the 1950s. He argued that the dominant economic model of each era in a sense "creates" – or privileges – the character type that's best suited to it. So, for example, in the agricultural and industrial eras, what he called the "inner-directed" type was best suited to getting work done and transmitting certain moral and cultural values. And then, with the rise of a more consumer-oriented economy, it became beneficial for people to be gregarious and affable. So teachers started to care more about whether their students were popular and cooperative than if they were interested in the subject matter and doing well academically.**

I've never thought about it in those terms. It's true that in a lot of the social jobs that require leadership – whether in politics or in corporations – being energized by dealing with people all day long is a plus. And it's also probably true that, in an urban corporate economic structure, those skills are more important than in a rural peasant economy. But I wouldn't say that it changes the character of the people particularly. I do think that there's been, in the last ten years or so, a major economic resurgence for introversion – the "geek" economy. The prototypical geek is really good at thinking, has superb powers of concentration (which tends to be an introvert trait), and works very well independently. They're often pretty awesomely brilliant people, and they're fairly defiant about being geeks. They've turned this word "geek" into a term that's almost romantic in some ways, and through the Silicon economy, they've been massively innovative and economically important. A lot of them are running circles around the extroverts who are selling shoes. So I think part of what's happened lately is that the digital economy is giving introverts a new place in the sun.

**You've gotten more reader response to this article than for anything else you've written. What do you think accounts for that?**

Well, I can tell you that I never saw it coming. I thought I wrote this almost for my own fun and so

that I would have something to hand people to get them to understand. Part of the problem with being an introvert is that it's hard to explain yourself. You can't say to your friends, "Hey guys, I'm an introvert," and have them know how to deal with you. So I thought it would be pretty darn handy to have something on paper.

Then I got this overwhelming reaction in the mail. It's been a bigger reaction than to anything else I've written. I think it suggests that a lot of people have the same experiences you and I do, and that they haven't had a name for it or a way of understanding it. Having that is very valuable. It tells you how to understand yourself and – maybe even more importantly – it tells you that you're fine and that, in fact, a lot of the problem is with the rest of the world.

People really do seem to be having a real "eureka" reaction to this. At some level, it reminds me of what it's like to discover that you're gay. Obviously there's no structural similarity between introversion and homosexuality, but there is this sense of realizing that you're different in a way that's very meaningful. Understanding introversion as a concept kind of makes the pieces fit together. A number of people have told me that they've Xeroxed the article and given it to their friends, their families, their significant others, and so on, as a communication device.

**You jokingly talk about an Introverts' Rights Movement. It seems as though, given the dramatic response to this article, there must be a lot of people out there who are just now realizing that they're introverts and that the dominant culture doesn't really take their characteristics into account in terms of what it expects of them.**

Well, that's exactly right. Part of the thrill of this article is that it seems to be helping introverts discover each other. It never occurred to me when I wrote it that there would be so many other people out there with whom this would resonate so strongly. But one of the main points I see over and over again in the mail I've been getting is, "I'm not alone! There are others like me." This sense of empowerment because of not being alone is very important to people. That in itself, to the extent that that takes hold, would be a very important part of correcting the introvert/extrovert imbalance.

**Your article has also been one of the most popular pages on our Web site. We posted it three years ago, and it still gets more hits than practically anything else on the site.**

Yes. The Internet is the perfect medium for introverts. You could almost call it the Intronet. You know the old New Yorker cartoon with a dog sitting at a computer saying to another dog, "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog." Well, on the Internet, no one knows you're an introvert. So it's kind of a natural that when The Atlantic put this piece online, introverts beat a path to it; it's the ideal distribution mechanism by which introverts can reach other introverts and spread the word.

**Are you aware of anybody else writing about these things today?**

I'm not. Some people who wrote in sent me some of their own writings on the subject. But if there are other articles I haven't seen them. We'll see over time.

**So if you were to spearhead an Introverts' Rights movement what would be some of the things you'd advocate?**

Massive subsidies. I think people like us should have twice as much Social Security.

**I like that.**

Yeah that's pretty good.

**Maybe Greta Garbo could be the mascot.**

Good idea. Though she may have just been shy. Did she really say, "I want to be alone"?

**That's what I've heard.**

I think that was a line from her movie The Grand Hotel, though, in which case it was just her character who said that. But she could still be the patron saint. Actually, my favorite line is from Waiting for Godot. I can quote it to you exactly: "Don't talk to me. Don't speak to me. Stay with me."

**That's perfect.**

To me those words sum up the introvert impulse. We love people—we're not misanthropic for the most part. We just can't socialize with them all the time. We want to hold their hand or hug them or just sit quietly and read a book with them.

I was tongue-in-cheek about the introverts' rights movement, but the main principle would just be that it should be as respectable for introverts to be who they are socially as it is for extroverts. We ought to be trying to make extroverts conscious and not uncomfortable about the fact that we're here. Extroverts should understand that if someone is being quiet it doesn't mean they're having a bad time; it doesn't mean they're depressed; it doesn't mean they're lonely or need psychiatric help or medication. A lot of the battle is making the extrovert world more aware. The onus is on us to do that. Maybe this article is a start. One thing you'll notice about the article, by the way, is that it addresses extroverts. I think that's very much the strategy; we need to tell the world who we are. The first step is to understand who we are ourselves, but the second step is to educate extroverts. This is stuff extroverts need to know. They're driving us crazy. We need to tell them.

*Jonathan Rauch comments on reader feedback about introvert dating and poses a new question*

## The Introversy Continues

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200604u/introversy>

*In 2003, The Atlantic published a short essay by correspondent Jonathan Rauch on the trials of introversion in an extroverts' world. The reaction was overwhelming. Rauch was inundated with more enthusiastic mail about the piece than for anything else he'd ever written. Given the number of heartfelt and articulate responses he had already been receiving, Rauch decided to ask readers a follow-up question: "In looking for a mate," he asked, "are introverts better off pairing up with extroverts or with fellow introverts?" We posted the question in January, alongside an interview with him about the piece, and the responses poured in.*

*We've posted some excerpts here, along with a brief introduction by Rauch and an invitation for responses to his next introverts-related question.*

Here at The Atlantic Online, we're out to start an introversy. That's a controversy among introverts. So we asked Atlantic Online readers whether introverts are better off pairing up with extroverts or with fellow introverts.

We didn't quite get a consensus. At least one introvert married an extrovert and went almost nuts. That marriage didn't last. A gay introvert writes wondering how to find introverted same-sex singles, since dating extroverts hasn't worked out.

More often, though, the "yin-yang," introvert-extrovert pairing seems to work surprisingly well—if both partners understand the other's needs. So the answer, perhaps, is: It depends ... but with some effort, an intro-extro relationship can attain an extra richness.

One reader writes, "One of the greatest compliments I have ever given anyone I dated is that being with him was like being alone." That reminds me of something an introverted friend once told me, when I asked him how he kept his sanity living in close quarters with his extroverted wife. His reply: "We've learned to be alone together."

### And now, another introversy:

What, if anything, should parents and friends do to help introverted teenagers?

—Jonathan Rauch

***In looking for a mate, are introverts better off pairing up with extroverts or with fellow introverts?***

**Read below for excerpts from reader responses...**

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I believe introverts and extroverts can pair well—though only when both have extremely tolerant and generous personalities. If either party is the least bit selfish or self-absorbed you have a severe problem brewing.

The sex of the introvert is highly important.... As your article states — male introverts are more readily tolerated. Those of us female introverts (being naturally more reflective and intelligent than average) are more threatening to 90% of the American male population. A female introvert, if paired with an extroverted male, must find herself in love with an extremely caring and generous man who is overwhelmingly pleased to see her openly happy. This extroverted man will be one in about 250,000 (from my estimates) and will do whatever it takes to accomplish accommodating his wife/girlfriend's introversion. In my own situation, this exquisite man tries his damndest to understand and modify his actions when they cause me grave discomfort. I of course understand that he does not usually understand me and I am sure to openly communicate my feelings with him.

I think, as an introvert, that the companionship of an extrovert can be very beneficial. The extroverted partner is like a shield for the introvert in social settings. I caution, however, that the "social" needs of the introvert can become burdensome for the extrovert. The burden is borne by requiring the extroverted partner to carry the load, provide the motivation and energy to engage in the social scene. The intro-extrovert relationship can be a palliative for the introvert, but an absolute chore for the extrovert who must often carry the full load of managing social arrangements and engagements. In the end, as a result of the effort required, the introvert may deprive the extrovert of the oft-needed joy of the social life the extrovert needs to thrive.

Been there done that.

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My husband and I are perhaps the most vivid examples of the introvert-extrovert yin/yang pairing. I am, thankfully, an extrovert to the extreme. Not only do I enjoy socializing with people, I am energized by such interaction, and thrive on it. I look forward to meetings with potential clients at which I am to market myself and my law firm like a child awaiting Christmas. I've always attributed the energy boost I receive from meeting new people to the satisfaction of my desperate desire to be liked, by everyone, no matter how short our acquaintance. I've thought of this trait as a personality defect that I use to my

professional advantage. Now, I know better. It is just my extroversion at work.

On the other hand, my poor husband is a classic, closet introvert. Jonathan Rauch's article highlighted the most important phenomenon associated with introverts — it is not that they cannot socialize in groups, it is just that it exhausts them to their core to do so. This is why they are so misunderstood, and, usually, grumpy. People meeting my husband in a social setting at first do not realize he is such an introvert — he can be witty, extremely bright and engaging in short bursts. However, we have never, ever, in eleven years of dating and two years of marriage, attended a party or event in which he did not want to leave before I was ready to go. He just cannot sustain that level of interaction for more than a couple hours, even then needing several breaks to recharge. Our close friends used to just consider him a grump, writing him off with a "well, that's just Jim," but in truth, he is merely an undiagnosed introvert. (Not to worry, I've already sent them the guidebook on "Caring for Your Introvert.")

Recognizing our introvert/extrovert dichotomy, my husband has identified the introvert/extrovert anthem, a song by bluegrass artist Jesse Winchester, called "Every Word You Say." It is truly the introvert's ode to his extrovert partner, and we could not resist dancing to this song at our wedding in May 2004. It was us! The version we played at our wedding was performed by Jerry Garcia, in one of his side bands, Legion of Mary. There can be no better expression of the dynamic shared by the introvert/extrovert couple, and I urge everyone reading this to track down Jerry Garcia's exquisite version. For now, the lyrics must suffice:

I'm no good company, I guess that's true  
I like my silence, like I love you  
But if you feel like talking, talk away  
I'm gonna hang on every word you say

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The odd thing is that I'm an extrovert with lots of introvert friends. There seem to be two kinds of introverts — ones who are made jittery by the presence of other human beings, and ones who are petulant about the existence of other human beings. The first are easy to deal with, the second are not.



The second don't tend to understand extroverts or anyone else that well because they do not value or want connection with other people. The first type value it very much, but only when they feel relaxed enough to open up.

Some extrovert-introvert pairs can make beautiful music together because what one wants to give or receive in any social interaction matches up perfectly with the other person's wishes. But for a pushy extrovert who wants to turn everyone into the life of the party, and for a petulant, impatient introvert who just wishes the rest of humanity didn't exist, things can get much dicier.

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I have a whole website dedicated to these issues.  
(<http://www.theintrovertzcoach.com/>)

The customary thing is to pair extro and intro according to traditional Myers-Briggs, but there are some pretty odd combinations from a superficial glance. John and Jacqueline Kennedy are the perfect example. She was very introverted. He, very extroverted.

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Why do all the "men are from mars" type books assume that women are extroverts and men introverts? I have two X chromosomes and still need a "cave" to retreat to now and again. And why is it assumed that misunderstandings between heterosexual couples are caused by gender-related differences? Maybe, just maybe, it's more to do with variances in personality. With the difficulties that crop up when two people have a relationship. Maybe you can back me up on this, but I haven't noticed that same-sex couples are in accord with each other all the time.

Perhaps we should write a book called "Introverts are from Saturn, Extroverts are from Jupiter".

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I just married an extrovert a few months ago. I have always treasured any alone time that I can get, and it takes a all of my energy to "act" like an extrovert for more than a few hours. He has to have people in the house every waking moment, and I get my fill after about two hours and want to just hide in

another room and accomplish things other than visiting. I guess it comes down to finding balance in all things, because he does bring more living and memories and relationships to my life, but it also wears me out. I don't think it's healthy for him to have zero alone time to reflect on his life and thoughts, so I'm still working on the compromise part of our social life. If both of us were introverts, maybe we would be really miserable and depressed and have no enjoyment out of life whatsoever, so as long as we both can balance things out, its a great combination.

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I was painfully shy and introverted as a youngster and as a young woman. I married an extrovert who was always student body president or spokesman for a singing group or whatever – the consummate politician and schmoozer. But after we had been married a few years, I became the extrovert and he became the introvert. Go figure. We were married for forty years. He died a year ago, and I am finding myself reverting to something in between extrovert and introvert but leaning to introvert.

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I'm a female introvert. One problem with an extroverted spouse (I should know, I had one!) is that this person is always wanting to go to parties, to social events, out to dinner with other couples, to family get-togethers. Either the introverted spouse has to go too and be miserable (hearing: "What's the matter, why aren't you having a good time?"), or the introverted spouse stays home, making the extroverted spouse irritated ("Can't you at least come to one of these things?"), and leading other attendees to assume something is wrong with your marriage.

One of the greatest compliments I have ever given anyone I dated is that being with him was like being alone. Being an introvert himself, he took this as the huge compliment it was. Can you imagine saying this to an extrovert?

On the "is it harder for a woman to be introverted," I suspect yes. Women are expected to be warm, nurturing, "people" persons, willing to talk and listen to others for hours. As a female in management, I have been criticized for not being like this at work. As Mr. Rauch said, one becomes

very good at putting on the social act, but it takes energy. I need hours and hours alone to recover.

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I was married to an extrovert. His social acumen was enticing because he was so charming. Everybody liked him, he had no enemies, he always said the perfect thing at the perfect time. It didn't work out. Remarrying another introvert last August is the best thing that ever happened to me. I don't have to apologize or figure out some way to get out of going to social gatherings because he gets it. We can be together happily, just reading next to each other. Life is good.

As a female, I've always felt pressured to be more socially adept and I resented it. In large part, I married my first husband thinking that some of his extroversion would rub off on me. It took me too long to figure out that what I was was good enough.

## The Introvert Letters

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200602u/introvert-letters>

*Jonathan Rauch comments on some of the feedback he's received for "Caring for Your Introvert"...*

I've had more email and snail mail on "Caring for Your Introvert," over a longer period, than for anything else I've written. Probably more mail on this than everything else put together.

People wrote to say they Xeroxed it by the bushel, laminated it, or printed it on cards for distribution to friends and family:

"I have shrunk and laminated one hundred copies of the article and carry a few in my shirt pocket. Now when someone perplexed by over fifteen seconds of silence asks 'What are you thinking about?' I simply hand him or her a copy and retire to the basement."

"I immediately Xeroxed it and highlighted the especially relevant passages for my husband."

"I immediately emailed it to all of my friends, including introverts and extroverts. I even posted the link to the article on all of my web pages."

Looking through it all, I found several recurring themes and points of interest:

1) **"Hallelujah!"** Joy and gratitude at seeing themselves described and understood. They account for most of the mail:

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!"  
(That was the whole letter.)

"Thank you, thank you. You have put into words exactly what a hurtful road it is at times when people misconstrue my need to be alone."

"The first paragraph was like a mirror in my face."

2) **Introvert "Eureka!"** Shock and relief at discovering they're an introvert and there's nothing wrong with them:

"I know the literal meaning of 'introvert,' of course, but never have I seen it explained so well. Nor understood how aptly the word explains me... For the first time I feel empowered, like a short man who's discovered cleverly disguised elevator shoes."

"Thanks for letting me know I'm not alone!"

A poignant one from a 17-year-old high school senior (female), who describes her difficulty socializing with gabby teen friends and says: "You introduced me to my own kind, and just in time too! I was almost positive that I was going to need Prozac or Zoloft to cure my 'social disorder.'"

3) **Extrovert "Eureka!"** Reports of enlightenment and gratitude from spouses/significant others, usually extroverts:

"The man that is dearest to my heart came across this article and found himself."

The joy and wonderment in his voice as he declared this brought tears to my eyes and swelled my chest."

"For almost 20 years I have been trying to figure out why I couldn't understand my husband, never dreaming that he was an introvert... Your introvert article...has simply made me fall in love all over again!"

4) **Tips and tricks.** Some people volunteer methods for coping with introversion in an uncomprehending world, or reform suggestions:

"My party trick has always been to come alone, hide my purse somewhere near the door, and sneak out when I have had enough. Usually under two hours time there. The next day, my friends will always say, 'You disappeared last night!' Ah, another successful get-away, I think to myself."

"As an oft-agonized member of the tribe, I offer two suggestions for improving our social environment: group airline passengers by attitudinal type (Jung's term), thereby protecting us from the double claustrophobia of being seated next to one of Them; where name badges are de rigeur, provide a few (presumably 25%) which read HELLO, I'M \_\_\_\_\_; NOW SOD OFF."

5) **Female problems.** Interestingly, one or two female writers confirmed my hunch that women have an especially hard time being introverted:

"...absolutely correct about how tricky being an introvert is for a woman; after all, we are presumed to be the keepers of the social order and the mistresses of the inane conventions that extroverts have created to keep their world intact."

6) **Online salvation:** Perhaps no surprise that the article resonates online? Above writer sez:

"I do, however, thank the Powers That Be for the internet, where I can delete at will, converse silently, and no one can see me roll my eyes. Maybe there is a God."

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