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The Quiet Conversation

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The Quiet Conversation

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Honors Project in Studio Art

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Artist Statement

As a student of psychology, I have always been interested in the dynamic between introverts and extroverts. As an introvert I have recently engaged in research and a number of conversations regarding the many contexts in which introverts tend to be misperceived and overlooked in the modern American culture. My current body of work addresses the present and seemingly growing issue of the communication gap between introverts and extroverts that results in biases against and misperceptions about introverts.

Each piece demonstrates an exploration of a variety of printmaking processes including photo lithography, screen printing, and stenciling in combination with oil painting and paper cutting. The work incorporates a lot of physical and visual texture while working with a rather dark and bold color palette. Much of the imagery used involves birds and related symbols including nests, eggs, and feathers as a general metaphor for introverts and extroverts. Carl Jung, the psychologist most known for contributing the concepts of introversion and extroversion, believed that mandalas were symbols for the self. This work also uses that concept both literally in the form of printed, painted, and collaged mandalas and also in more general representation through repetition of shape and color.

With this work I hope to highlight the problems that arise with the increasing emphasis on the extrovert ideal, the true nature of the introvert, and the importance of modifying communication between the two personality types in order to promote understanding and respect among introverts and extroverts alike.

In today's American society, extroversion seems to be praised and regarded as the ideal personality type of the modern individual. Aspects of American culture, mainly social media, idolizes extroverted qualities and behaviors. . In doing so, though, social media has seemed to create a prejudice against the introverted individuals who have just as much to contribute as extroverts and has promoted a bias against introverted behavior. This bias has bled into many areas of American culture including academia and certain work environments. Within academia and modern work environments there are practices that have become popular that facilitate the success of extroverts. Often these practices put introverts at a disadvantage and hinders their success. These practices, which will be discussed further on, frequently highlight and make important extroverted qualities like the ability to think quickly, talk first, and act fast. This results in biases and misconceptions about introverts and are influencing communication between people. Coworkers, family members, students and teachers sometimes have difficulties with communication when interacting with those people of the opposite personality type often because of these biases and a lack of understanding as to the most effective way to work together and talk with one another .This makes mutual growth and learning troublesome. This communication gap needs to be bridged in order to promote effective and beneficial working and learning environments as well as to break stereotypes about introverts and encourage understanding and respect for both personality types in society today.

Introversion and extroversion are some of the most researched and studied topics in personality psychology¹. In order to fully understand them, a clear definition and understanding of personality is imperative. However, there is no one definition for personality.² Each

¹ Cain, Susan. "Introduction". In *Quiet*, 3. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

² Engler, Barbra. "Introduction: Evaluating Personality Theories". In *Personality Theories*, 2. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2014.

psychologist and researcher uses a different definition of personality based off of the theory that they believe to be true and use in their work. For the sake of this discussion, personality will have a working definition referring to someone's public image and will primarily be focused on Carl Jung's theory of psychological types.³

Carl Jung was the father of Analytical Psychology and enhanced and expanded personality psychology research and theory. He contributed his description of the total personality types—a combination of four basic functions and two basic attitudes. The four functions are intuition, sensation, thinking and feeling. The two attitudes are introversion and extraversion. Introversion is the attitude in which one's personality is oriented inward towards the self and is most comfortable with concepts and ideas. It is the more reflective and contemplative of the two. Extroversion is an attitude in which one's personality is oriented outward towards others and tends to be most comfortable with other people and things. It is the more social and active of the two.⁴ While people habitually display characteristics of one attitude or the other, the other attitude is usually present to some degree even if undeveloped or mostly subconscious.⁵ There are no pure introverts or pure extroverts⁶, and while people tend to lean one way or the other, it is a sliding scale. Just because someone is seemingly a strong introvert who needs to spend a lot of time on their own in order to recharge doesn't mean they never display any extroverted traits. Keeping this in mind, the following discussion and analysis of introverts, extroverts, and their interactions with each other and with their environment is general and will not apply to every introvert or extrovert.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Engler, Barbra. "Analytical Psychology". In *Personality Theories*, 73-74. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cain, Susan. "Introduction". In *Quiet*, 14. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

Being an introvert or an extrovert depends on a combination of two things - inherited traits and life experiences. Those two factors make up about an equal amount percentage wise as to why a person is one type or the other.⁷ So from birth, as a child before any social experiences, an individual is already likely to lean one way or the other on the introversion and extroversion scale. As they grow, life experiences settles the other roughly 50 percent of which type an individual will likely present. In essence it is crucial to understand that people do not choose which personality type they want to be but rather are naturally one way or the other. This is an important point to understand for further discussion below.

A common current in American behavior is suggestive of a shift from focusing on people's character or how they act with honor, respect, etc. to how people are perceived by others. American culture is now a culture of personality, one where only the extrovert is highly valued and often valued over the introvert. Society has become enthralled and captivated by those who are entertaining, outgoing, and bold.⁸ Consider one of the criticisms and concerns regarding President Barack Obama, especially in comparison. Disregarding any sort of politics, President Obama has been criticized for not being a 'people person' and even regarded as disliking people in general because of his tendency to socialize with a smaller groups of people, often in more intimate settings rather than in public with large crowds.⁹ This criticism is relevant because it shows how important it is to American media that leaders and any public figures, whether political or celebrities, are bold and outwardly social. It also highlights the lack of appreciation the media holds for not only President Obama's measured demeanor but for, by

⁷ Cain, Susan. "Is Temperament Destiny?". In *Quiet*, 105. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

⁸ Cain, Susan. "The Rise of the 'Mighty Likeable Fellow'". In *Quiet*, 21. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

⁹ Cain, Susan. "Must Great Leaders Be Gregarious?" *New York Times*, September 15, 2012. Accessed December 3, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/opinion/sunday/introverts-make-great-leaders-too.html?_r=0.

extension, most quiet and contemplative types whether or not they are political leaders or public figures.

A premium is often placed upon those who are go getters, active, and aggressive.¹⁰ The ideal person prefers quick decisions and immediate action. In schools there are trends in classroom participation expectations as well as in test taking practices that reinforce this ideal. One of these practices that is problematic is timed questions on tests. By timing questions, testing seems to penalize introverts who need time to process information and consider all solutions while this method of testing seems to focus on and emphasize answering the question as quickly as possible. Also, teachers sometimes have requirements for how often a student needs to speak up and say something in class. Often times in a room full of students it is easy for introverts to be overlooked when discussions and answers to questions are dominated by extroverts who are comfortable in the spotlight. This practice puts importance on how many times a person speaks in class versus the quality of what is being said. This is not to say that extroverts who are comfortable with talking out loud and through problems do not have anything important to say, simply that introverts have equally compelling thoughts and ideas that are overlooked because they were not the first to speak. It is in instances and trends like these that it is evident that the medias views on being outgoing and extroversion are seeping into other areas of society like academia that are beginning to isolate those who are quieter and more contemplative and praises those who are comfortable in the spotlight.¹¹

In my personal experience as a student and an introvert, I have encountered some of the previously mentioned situations in regards to testing and mandatory oral participation. As an art student in studio classes, many of these situations are avoided simply because the work is so

¹⁰ Ibid. 26

¹¹ Cain, Susan. "Introduction". In *Quiet*, 4. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

individually based. However, in the studio there are still practices that can be difficult to navigate as an introvert, usually in the form of critiques and the occasionally required collaborative pieces. Collaboration can be fun and result in beautiful pieces and collections but only if all participants are willing, enthused, and comfortable working together. When collaboration is forced, it seems to result in the loudest, brashest person determining what the piece consists of and hinders the creative capacity of the more introverted participants. Also, critiques can be problematic occasionally as well. For example, it is often hard in critiques to give quality criticism when there are so many people contributing and often the extroverts contribute first and most often. It becomes a problem too when suggestions and praises are already given about a piece by those who speak first and the introverts are left at the end with no further insight to give, at least at that moment. One of the ways this can and has been changed in some studio classes is with students being instructed to write down their comments before critique. This allows time for everyone to say what they thought about a piece without the pressure of speaking on the spot and provides evidence that everyone had thought about the piece where that isn't always possible or evident when introverts don't get a chance to speak.

Introverts are the thinkers, the contemplators, and the planners who are not usually comfortable in the spotlight, who prefer and are more effective working alone, and who deliberate concepts before they speak rather than use talking as a means to think through an idea. The extroversion that is valued so highly is a standard that puts those who simply do not function the same way at a disadvantage in terms of success and are in turn pressured to conform to this ideal.¹² It also hurts those who could benefit from the depth and quality of an introverts ideas and work. Bosses, members in a team project, and fellow students may find solutions to projects or

¹² Ibid.

further thought on a subjects if communication was adjusted to allow room for the introverts to comfortably contribute.

The reason students are trained to speak out and speak quickly and on their feet is because talkers are perceived as smarter than the quiet type even though SAT scores and scores on intelligent tests as well as GPAs prove this perception to be incorrect.¹³ Students are also pressured to work in groups and to join as many social clubs as they can. Working civilians are expected to promote and sell themselves unabashedly, to network.¹⁴ This generally does not come naturally to an introvert but it in today's society these are qualities that are not only popular and highly regarded but are necessary when it comes to things like meeting requirements, succeeding in a class, or getting a job.

The pressure of having to conform to these highly regarded personality traits and newly established norms can cause a multitude of ill effects for introverts. The first being personal ones. The focus, intense curiosity, and need for quiet and time alone makes introverts come across as odd and unsettling to their peers which sometimes results in rejection of the quiet type.¹⁵ This rejection and societal bias can cause stress, anxiety, and depression. Also, this bias causes a gap in individuals' ability to communicate with one another. Often introverts are expected to communicate in a way that is well received by an extravert but are often not granted the same courtesy. In order to strengthen personal relationships and enhance professional ones, this gap must be bridged.

One of the first steps in bridging this gap is to cease constantly forcing introverts into extraverted habits. Allow students, employees, and people in general, time to work without

¹³ Cain, Susan. "The Myth of Charismatic Leadership". In *Quiet*, 51. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

¹⁴ Cain, Susan. "Introduction". In *Quiet*, 6. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

¹⁵ Cain, Susan. "When Collaboration Kills Creativity". In *Quiet*, 82. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

interruption and give them their own personal space to do so. Forcing people to work in groups isn't always beneficial. Some people may work better in groups when they have opportunity to bounce ideas off each other but others, especially introverts, would benefit greatly in terms of quality of product and ideas when given the chance to work alone. One study actually shows that college students who tend to study by themselves learn more over time than those who consistently study in groups.¹⁶ It is important to allow those who need time and space to work alone to do so. Also, when group work is necessary, there should be an active seeking out of harmonious and symbiotic extravert-introvert relationships, where tasks, goals, and leadership are divided amongst members according to individual's natural temperaments and strengths.¹⁷ By doing this, collaboration and communication can be effective and efficient while still respecting and satisfying the needs of all types of people involved.

A great way to achieve positive communication between introverts and extraverts is online with email, social networking sites, and chat rooms. One study shows that Facebook users tend to be split 50/50 in regards to how many are introverts and how many are extraverts. Of the half that are extraverted, they tend to stay online longer most likely because they are attracted to the interaction with others that Facebook and other social networking sites allow and the ability it gives them to maintain relationships and create new ones. Of the other fifty percent who are introverts, they tend to stay on for less time, probably because they view social interactions as draining. However, they log on just as much.¹⁸ What this shows is that even though they stay on for varying amounts of time, both introverts and extraverts are pleased and comfortable with

¹⁶ Ibid. 81

¹⁷ Ibid. 93

¹⁸ Harbaugh, Erin Ryan. "The Effect of Personality Styles (Level of Introversion-Extroversion) on Social Media Use." *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 1, no. 2, 80-81.

using these sites. For introverts this might be due to the screen acting as a buffer and a barrier between them and the world, seeming to lessen the anxiety of potential judgment that many are wary of with face to face interaction.¹⁹ It also allows the introvert time to think about what they want to say or how they want to respond before doing so, which is much shorter in face to face interactions. Online interactions give introverts more control over the amount of social interaction and the pace of a conversation. Online brainstorming²⁰ and communication is therefore a great way to bridge the communication gap between introverts and extroverts and allow for effective passive collaboration²¹ because it still allows the extrovert social interaction and in no way hinders their ability to work through ideas while allowing introverts time to work alone and respond in a more comfortable setting.

Also, to better communication takes understanding about both types of personalities and the willingness to communicate in such a way that an individual's audience is prepared and comfortable working with. Introverts, when communicating with extroverts, should first take the time to think about exactly what they want to say before approaching an extroverted audience. Then, consider verbal communication as the most effective way to converse with and engage an extrovert. When approaching an idea or concern, focus on actions to be taken rather than deliberation and preferred results or outcomes.²² This verbal communication is generally preferred and well received by extroverts and emphasizing actions and results speaks to the 'go-getter' within them.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cain, Susan. "When Collaboration Kills Creativity". In *Quiet*, 88-89. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012

²¹ Ibid. 85-86

²² Berney, Liz. "Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to Enhance Workplace Communication." *The Stepping Stone*, July 1, 2010. Accessed October 6, 2014. <https://www.soa.org/news-and-publications/newsletters/management-and-personal-development/pub-management-and-personal-development-details.aspx>.

Extroverts communicating with introverts should consider communicating in writing, perhaps through email or social network messaging, rather than orally. This gives an introvert time to consider an idea or concern without the pressure of a face to face conversation. Then, an extrovert should communicate a well thought out plan with built in time for introverts to reflect and deliberate before making a decision.²³ If people took the time to consider who their audience is, and which personality type they are, as well as respected the fact that people respond to different modes and aspects of communication, then communication and collaboration would become much smoother and much more effective.

It is essential that this communication gap is bridged and it is important that we not only cease isolating and attempting to convert introverts into extroverts but value the skills that they bring to the table. Where would we be without Sir Isaac Newton, Rosa Parks, Steven Spielberg, and Steve Wozniak?²⁴ These people were all introverts who had a significant impact on our society and way of life today and it would be a shame to hinder the future Rosa Parks or the future Steve Wozniak from making even more important societal advances simply because American culture is too focused on the extrovert ideal.

It is imperative now that society changes the way it views personality. By devaluing the introvert, society isn't simply hurting the individual and his or her ability to succeed but is also hindering the positive influence introverts could have if they were given the time and opportunity to be heard. By allowing each individual a chance to work within the environments they find comfortable and conducive to forming ideas, plans, products, etc. everyone can benefit from the plethora of views and ideas that originate from a more diverse set of approaches. This way, no one loses out on information that otherwise could be overlooked if the bias against introverted

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cain, Susan. "Introduction". In *Quiet*, 5. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

traits and methods continued. The potential of ideas and advancements that can be made with proper communication between people of all personality types should be the focus for these aspects of American culture in the future.

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