

# A Different Kind of Discrimination

Anabelle Meyers



Western social structure values extroverts above introverts, making introverts feel worthless and stunting progress only made possible by an introverted way of thinking.

On my first day of freshman year at my inner-city public high school, I lost faith in the public education system.

All 750 freshmen were packed into the gymnasium when a speaker came out. She introduced a hellish game where volunteers would be called out to try and pop balloons in front of everyone by pressing them between two people. I strategically looked at my shoes and wished I could disappear.

When the game finished, the speaker came back out to the middle of the gym. "There are two kinds of people at East High School," she said in the condescending tone reserved for freshmen and people late to class. "There are the people who make things happen and the people who watch things happen. When I asked for volunteers, some people put their

hands up high and tried to be picked. These are the people who make things happen. These are our star athletes and performers. Some of you immediately put your heads down and tried to not be seen. These are the people who watch things happen. But that's ok. We need people to fill the seats in our stadiums and theaters."

I was shocked and honestly offended. Because standing in front of the entire freshman class with a balloon made me nauseous, I was destined for mediocrity? But the thing is, this isn't abnormal. This ritual which, from what I've heard from my friends, is standard in all high schools makes clear, from the beginning of our high school careers, that if you are introverted, then you aren't wanted.

Most people have the misconception that introverts are just shy. But that is an oversimplification of the reality. Although introversion and shyness commonly go hand in hand, introversion and extroversion are more or less how people respond to social stimulation. Extroverts thrive on social stimulation; they are at their best when they are surrounded by people. Introverts are at their best when they are alone or with a few good friends.

Our social structure, especially in the west, values extroverts above introverts, making introverts feel worthless and stunting progress only made possible by an introverted way of thinking. Even though [introverts make up at least one-third of the total population](#), their personality is seen as inferior to that of their more outgoing peers.

Recent articles about introversion, such as "An Introvert's Guide to Friendship" in the *New York Times* and "The Networking Advice Every Introvert Needs to Hear" in *The Huffington Post*, have been focused on tips for being an introvert in an extrovert's world. Yet even people who claim to be helping introverts solely give them advice to change themselves to appear more extroverted. We should instead change the path to and definition of success to fit both introverts and extroverts.

Discrimination against introverts is relatively new, beginning in the 20th century when the industrial revolution put a greater emphasis on personality in order to get jobs. Now, our entire society is formulated around this idea and in the technological era, it is only more prevalent. Teachers, college admissions officials, bosses, etc. all value extroverted traits such as leadership, networking, and obvious friendliness.

Our society has been structured in such a way that it favors extroverts. Your typical classroom will have desks in pods (public school jargon for introvert torture device) where students work on countless group projects— even in subjects like math and creative writing, which you would think would be more individual tasks. Even our offices are typically an open floor plan with little room for individual time or work. This is a

hard place for introverts to work since they typically need independent time and space to formulate and articulate ideas.

According to Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, most teachers say that the ideal student is an extrovert, even though, statistically, introverts get better grades. According to research done by Adam Grant at the Wharton School, introverted leaders tend to produce better results than extroverted leaders. They are leading not because they enjoy being in the spotlight, but because they believe that something must be done and that they must be the ones to do it.

In fact, some of the most influential people in history were introverts: Gandhi, Rosa Parks, and Eleanor Roosevelt are all examples of leaders who had introverted qualities. Steve Wozniak, said that he would have never come up with the ideas he had if he hadn't been too afraid to leave his house.

A society that asks introverts to change themselves to have more extroverted qualities is destructive and discriminatory. People who tell introverts to push themselves to fit in the mold of an extroverted society are creating an oppressive culture which hurts introverts and limits success from everyone.

However, this form of discrimination is rarely visible to most people. This is the way our contemporary culture has always been, and introverts rarely express their experiences for fear of ridicule. Being uncomfortable talking in front of the class or unable to introduce yourself to strangers is seen as something to "get over." Introversion is seen as a weakness that must be overcome, and those who don't or can't are told that they just won't be successful.

It is time for us to stop valuing extroversion and networking above all else and to begin to see the value of being quiet and spending time alone. To see that the loudest person doesn't always have the best ideas. That the person who looked at their shoes during the freshman assembly deserves a spot on the stage, too.

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