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## Hearing from the Silenced: an Investigation on Introverts' Anxiety

### **Introduction**

What is introversion? There's a common misconception that some people may relate introversion to shyness and eccentricity. However, in general, introverts are those who have low need for external stimulation and thrive in a solitary environment. Due to a preference for solitude and self-reflection, people with this personality style have long been considered "flawed" that needs to be fixed (Dossey, 2016). Under the pressure of not being preferred, many introverts live with diffidence and even anxiety.

As an introvert, sometimes I think to myself, is being an extrovert more preferred in our life? "Talk to your friends and family", "Don't think too much."--- these are the words I have always been told when I feel hesitant or frustrated, which confused me greatly as a child. I started to think that probably I was a freak, because everyone seemed to benefit from these suggestions, except me. I dread going out, avoid social engagement as much as possible, and feel awkward even when ordering food at restaurants. Under the pressure from my parents, I tried to become outgoing for years, but I failed.

As I grew older and met more people, I came to realize that I wasn't the only one struggling with social engagement. Scholars indicated that many introverts, just like me, continue to live with anxiety because their personalities are not ideal for their cultural backgrounds, or they are negatively impacted by their unsociable behaviors (Laney & Marston, 2013). Having long been

considered as a flaw, however, introverted personalities may be associated with certain strengths and talents. Studies have shown that introversion is correlated with the ability to focus deeply, to observe, and to make unpopular decisions (Laney & Marston, 2013). In this study, I am going to explore the difficulty that introverted people may have to face in their daily life, especially focusing on the anxiety when they come to social engagement. By investigating students at University of California, Davis (UC Davis), I also intend to look for ways to help introverted people aware of their unique strength, and, as Laney and Marston (2013) said, to “navigate the extroverted water”.

### **Research Questions**

The study aims to understand the following research questions:

1. How do extroversion and introversion personalities impact the daily lives of UC Davis students?
2. How high is the level of social anxiety that introverted students at UC Davis go through?

### **Literature Review**

A number of prior studies have affirmed the unique strengths that introverted people possess. Dennis et al. (2022) reported that the average extroversion of team members using computer-assisted communication (CMC) was negatively related to team performance, indicating the strength of introverts in certain work environments. Besides, Dossey (2016) talked about the sensitivity of introverts' inner world. They show less interest in the theoretical worship in religion, and often find these vivid experiences incredibly distressing. He also mentioned an introverted man called John Muir (1838–1914), who was an environmental activist. While popularizing the knowledge about wilderness by writing, Muir also contributed greatly to political circles and

influenced a few important environmental actions. Muir's experience shows that introverted people can also become leaders though preferring solitude.

While also challenging the readers to recognize and celebrate the unique insights of introverts, Cain (2012) aims to raise the voices of introverts, whose voices, as she pointed out in her book, have long been ignored in North American culture. Her main goal is for extroverts, and thus society, to appreciate the characteristics of introverts, and ultimately create a world where introverts and extroverts are in balance. Similarly, Laney and Marston (2013) also claimed that the American cultural atmosphere encourages actions and socialization over thinking and solitude. However, she emphasizes that there is value in both extroversion and introversion.

While Laney and Marston mentioned the anxiety that introverts may suffer from, mainly because of their shyness, Kearney (2005) points out that shyness is not limited to introverts. However, Kearney agrees that introverted people commonly suffer from anxiety. He notes, to be more specific, that these introverted characteristics would combine with neuroticism, a combination which is closely related to social phobia. He also pointed out that social withdrawal, a common behavior of introverted kids when they actively reject their peers, leads to later anxiety and depression as well as other negative consequences.

Although the correlation between introversion and anxiety has long been noted, the intensity of social anxiety currently experienced by introverted young people is unclear. Meanwhile, in existing articles, I see examples of introverted geniuses, but the everyday life of the introverts remains veiled. In my research, I will further investigate the current situation of introverts in their daily lives by collecting data on their level of anxiety, as well as more detailed experiences of their introverted lives.

## **Method**

The research was conducted through a questionnaire on Google Forms, following an inductive approach. It contained 7 closed-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions to understand the impact of extraversion and level of social anxiety. The participants of the study are all UC Davis students. Ten of them are from the UWP1 class, and the other seven are my friends at UC Davis. I also distributed the questionnaire as a link through social media such as WeChat and Instagram to increase the diversity of participants.

Among the 7 closed ended questions, 2 of them are demographic and 5 are Likert Scale questions. The demographic questions asking about the gender identity and cultural background of the participants provide me with an insight of the composition of the participants. The five Likert scale questions generally consisted of two parts. The first part was a self report of personality and state of daily life. For example, “If 1 is very introverted and 5 is very extroverted, which personality do you think best describes you?” “On a scale of 1 to 5 [where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree], I feel anxious when taking part in social activities.” These questions enabled me to know about the composition of their personalities and the level of anxiety they go through in their everyday life. The second part is about their perceptions of their personality, asking questions such as “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My cultural background has played a significant role in shaping my introverted/extroverted personality” and “Overall, my introverted/extroverted personality has been beneficial to my life”. Pie charts will be used to represent the composition of the participants, and the results of Likert Scales and open questions will be divided into three categories: introverts (1-2), extroverts (4-5), and neutral (3) for later analysis. The average

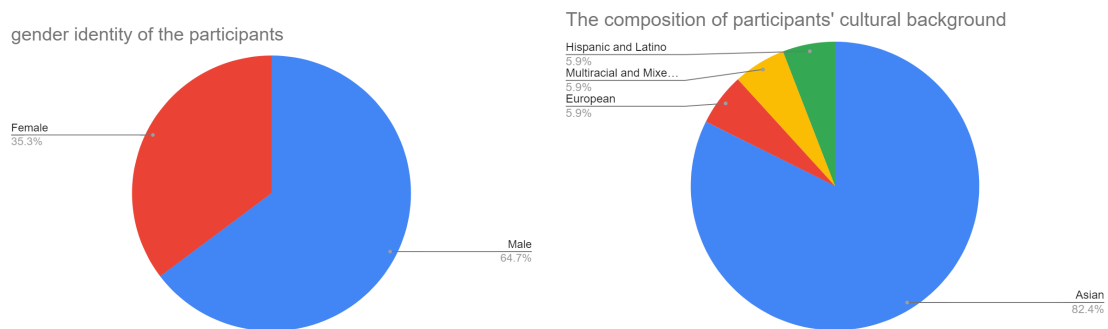
agreement scores of each close-ended question is calculated and analyzed in order to determine any difference or tendency.

The purpose of the two open-ended questions is to encourage the participants to share their own experiences and thoughts. Questions like “Do you have any experiences you would like to share about how introversion/extroversion personality affects your daily life?” provide me with more detailed information to understand the current situation of UCDavis students with various personality types. The responses are analyzed through open coding in order to find recurring themes. Based on research ethics and also to avoid bias, the survey is completely anonymous and the data will only be used for research purposes.

## Results

In the composition of the participants, 64.7% were male and 35.3% were female. It happened that the majority of participants (82.4%) were Asian, but there were also people from other cultural backgrounds (Figure 1).

Chart1, composition of the participants.



As displayed in Table1, the results demonstrated that extroverts find their personality to be more beneficial. While extroverts had a mean agreement score of 4.25 that their personality is beneficial, introverts only had an average of 2.8. In addition, introverts had relatively high levels

of anxiety when encountering socializing (mean 3.2), whereas extroverts had lower levels(3.0). The Likert Scale questions also showed that extroverts were very eager to become even more extroverted (3.75 out of 5), which is somewhat counterintuitive, while neutral personalities had the lowest willingness to increase their extroversion (2.125). Introverts fall somewhere in the middle (3 points).

Results, Table1, Likert Scale Questions.

Measure	Average(Likert Scale:1-5)		
	introverts (1-2)	neutral(3)	extroverts(4-5)
influenced by cultural background	3	3	3
feel anxious socializing	3.2	3.125	3
hope to become more extroverted	3	2.125	3.75
consider their personality beneficial	2.8	3.375	4.25

For the open-ended questions, an open coding method was applied, and main themes were identified from the responses. I utilized these themes to calculate the percentage of respondents supporting a particular theme. For the first questions(seen in Table2), six themes were summarized, and 28.6% of the participants reported that, as introverts, they are somewhat negatively affected by their personality(feeling stressed when talking to people, more private space needed, exhausted after social activities), and 21.4% showed that they are severely impacted(isolation, difficulty in seeking help and social phobia). Only 14.3% of respondents expressed that introversion benefits them, primarily by making them more focused on themselves. In contrast, all extroverted respondents reported that they had strengths in making

friends and getting help from others, which is the exact opposite of some of the introverted respondents who experienced serious barriers to socialization.

Table2: How introversion/extraversion affects daily life

<b>Theme found in data</b>	<b>Percent of Participants</b>
Introverts are somewhat negatively impacted (feeling stressed when talking to people, more private space needed, exhausted after social activities)	28.60%
Introverts are severely impacted (isolation, difficulty in seeking help and social phobia).	21.40%
Introverts feel uncomfortable/anxious around extroverts	7.10%
Introversion benefits people by making them more focused on themselves	14.30%
Being an extrovert helps make more friends and get more help	all extroverts
There's no significant effect	7.10%

The second open-ended question asked about participants' suggestions on people with extreme introversion and social phobia. As displayed in Table3, half of the participants recommended ice-breaking games and other social activities that may help introverted people relieve their anxiety. 35.7% mentioned understanding, supporting and respecting people with such struggles.

Table3: Suggestions from participants on people with social anxiety

<b>Theme found in data</b>	<b>Percent of Participants</b>
be understanding, supportive, and respectful	35.70%
ice-breaking game and other social events	50.00%
Don't care about what others think, just live your life the way you like it.	14.30%
Equipment support such as ordering machines	7.10%

### **Discussion**

This study indicated that extroverts typically have greater confidence in their extroverted strengths. In contrast, introverts have a lower level of identification with their personality. They live under a relatively higher level of anxiety than extroverts and neutrals. Most introverted participants reported negative effects of their personality, some of which were really serious. It supports the findings from previous studies that introversion correlates with social anxiety (Kearney, 2005). By providing more personal experiences, the results also reinforce the claims made by Cain (2012) and Laney and Marston (2013) that introverted people commonly live under stress due to shyness and social withdrawal. A limitation of this study is that the survey was collected primarily from my UWP1 class and included a relatively small sample of participants. Most of the participants were Asian, so perhaps more data from different cultural backgrounds are needed to make the results more generalizable.



## **Conclusion**

To sum up, the study provides a unique window into the everyday experiences of introverts and extroverts from students at UC Davis. The results indicate that introverts tend to consider their personalities less advantageous, and over half of them reported that their life has been negatively impacted by their introversion at different levels. The sample size and diversity of participants created limitations in this study, and the lack of participants with more diverse backgrounds prevented conclusions from being drawn about the influence of cultural background on shaping personality styles. However, despite these limitations, the social samples are significant as they provide a realistic picture of the lives and networking of college students at a crucial time in their life. By collecting their anxiety levels in social interactions as well as more detailed experiences of living as introverts, we can take a closer look at the introverted students in our midst and help raise their voices. Future research could focus on the influence of cultural background on extraversion, and research could also be conducted to find the most useful and feasible ways to help introverted students overcome shyness and social anxiety.

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