

Introverts, Extroverts, and Social Stimulation

“After an hour or two of being socially on, we introverts need to turn off and recharge ... This isn't antisocial. It isn't a sign of depression.” - Jonathan Rauch

Introverts find social interaction exhausting and get anxious when continuous socializing does not allow them time alone. Introverts need solitude to recharge after social interaction.

Extroverts get anxious when left alone and find solitude mentally exhausting. Extroverts need social interaction to recharge and re-center themselves.

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The difference between introverts and extroverts
is where we get our energy from, and what makes
us feel anxious.
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It's important to note that nowhere in these definitions is it written that an introvert cannot benefit from the enjoyment of socialization, or that an extrovert cannot be introspective. Many introverts are not shy, love talking with others, are skilled communicators, adept networkers, and public speakers. They simply find social interaction exhausting, and need to take time to themselves to re-energize.

Now that we have a clearer understanding of how we define introvert and extrovert, we can see that the limiting beliefs about introverts and extroverts are unsubstantiated. This is one of the key elements of this book, and it is important that you understand that being an introvert or an extrovert does not limit your aptitude in any way. Introverts are fully capable of enjoying social interactions, and thriving in social environments, they just respond to social interaction differently than extroverts.

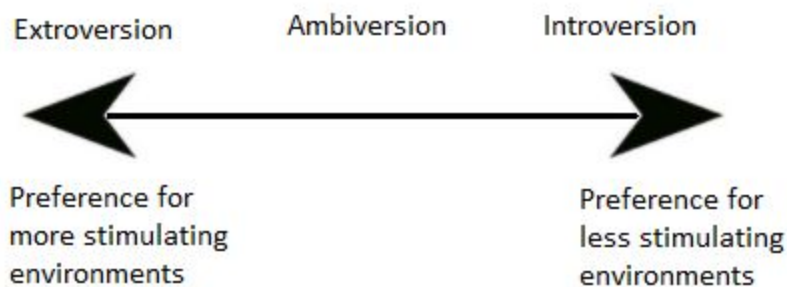
Hans Eysenck developed a theory in the 1960s about why he believes introverts and extroverts respond to social interaction and solitude differently. According to Eysenck's theory, introverts and extroverts have different levels of arousal. What this means is that there is a difference in the responsiveness to social stimulus for introverts when compared to extroverts. Simply put, introverts are more likely to feel socially overstimulated and desire less social stimulation. Conversely, extroverts are more likely to feel socially under-stimulated and crave more social stimulation.

I really like Eysenck's theory, not only because it is grounded in scientific theory, but also because it is empowering. While the more commonly understood definitions of introvert and extrovert are based upon limiting beliefs, Eysenck's theory suggests that introversion and extroversion are at least in part, learned behaviours. While we all have a certain natural inclination to respond to stimulus in a given way, we know that we are capable of learning different responses. The way in which we respond to external

stimulus is based upon our internal narrative, also called our inner monologue. Our inner monologue is the story we tell ourselves about who we are, and what the world is really like. Drafted and redrafted throughout one's lifetime, the current revision derives from what we choose to focus on. By taking control of our inner monologue, we can take control of our response to social stimulus. With considerable effort and hours of practice, we can add new responses to our repertoire of familiar responses. Eventually the new responses become familiar responses and your sense of self, the belief you have about who you are and what you have to offer the world expands.

The Introversion/Extroversion Spectrum

Introversion and extroversion are not two opposite sides of the same coin. Rather, introversion and extroversion exist on a single continuum, or a spectrum, as do most traits. On this spectrum, extreme extroversion exists at one end and extreme introversion at the other end. Almost no one is at the extreme ends of this spectrum, and indeed, when Carl Jung coined the terms, he said as much. The introversion/extroversion spectrum, shown below, with introversion, extroversion, and ambiversion all identified based on their place on the spectrum. What really defines our places on this spectrum is our preference for more or less socially stimulating environments.



Ambiversion

“I'm neither extrovert nor introvert. I'm just an imperfect example of an ambivert.”
— Irfa Rahat

Ambivert is certainly a less commonly used word than introvert and extrovert, but understanding what it means to be an ambivert is important in order to understand the material in this book, and be successful on your journey to creating a hybrid self. The more common definition is the one shown on the spectrum above. According to this definition, an ambivert is any person whose personality is a balance of extroverted and introverted traits; equal parts of introvert and extrovert. Similar to the pop psychology definitions of introvert and extrovert, I find the above definition of ambivert to be overly simplified and unhelpful.

A better definition of ambiversion, the one that will be used for the remainder of this book, is as follows:

Ambiversion is being equally comfortable with exhibiting introverted and extroverted characteristics, and developing the situational awareness to know what combination of introverted and extroverted traits is the most well suited for the circumstances.

An ambivert is a person who has expanded their sense of self to include both extroverted and introverted traits. They are equally comfortable responding to social stimulus in either a typically introverted way, or a typically extroverted way, and they change their behaviour based upon the situation that they find themselves in. An ambivert isn't simply a person with a natural inclination that places them in the middle of the introvert/extrovert spectrum. An ambivert is someone who can move around the spectrum.

Very few of us are naturally inclined to ambiversion, but there are many reasons why we would all benefit from becoming ambiverts. The ability to balance introverted and extroverted traits, and dynamically move around on the introversion/extroversion spectrum can create a winning combination of behavioural characteristics. Ask anybody who studies evolution and they'll tell you: "It isn't the strongest of the species that survives but the most adaptable." If you want to thrive in any environment, you have to learn to be adaptable.

Below is are just a few of the benefits to being an ambivert:

- Ambiverts are very flexible;
- Ambiverts are emotionally stable;
- Ambiverts are more influential;
- Ambiverts thrive in team environments;
- Ambiverts make excellent leaders;
- Ambiverts are great at speaking and listening; and,
- Ambiverts live in harmony, which promotes happiness.

We'll go into the benefits of ambiversion in further detail in the next chapter, suitably titled "The Ambivert Advantage".