

BOOK REVIEW

Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking. By Susan Cain. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012). 323pp. Hardcover, ISBN 978-0-307-35214-9; eISBN: 978-0-307-45220-7.

Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking, as the title of the book indicates, presents a penetrating response to a cultural prejudice—the unjustified privilege of extrovert over introvert—in our society, in particular in professional lives today. As Cain indicates, “we live with a value system that I call the Extrovert ideal—the Omni-present belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. ... We like to think that we value individuality, but too often we admire one type of individual—the kind who’s comfortable ‘putting himself out there.’” (p.4) We attribute to such a self the values of competence, confidence, and competitiveness. “Sure, we allow technically gifted loners who launch companies in garages to have any personality they please, but they are the exceptions, not the rule, and our tolerance extends mainly to those who get fabulously wealthy or hold the promise of doing so.” (Ibid). Glory belongs to the extroverts that is our cultural motto! “But we make a grave mistake to embrace the Extrovert Ideal so unthinkingly.” (p.5). “Neither $E=mc^2$ nor Paradise Lost was dashed off by party animal.” (pp.5-6).

The same can be said of those greatest works in art, literature and other fields of humanities studies. To believe that socialization is the best source of creativity and great discovery is a great mistake. A greater error is to believe it to be the only source of creativity and authentic discovery. To identify the strength of the mind with an outgoing personality is a sheer blunder. “Our culture made a virtue of living as extroverts. We discouraged inner journey, the quest for a center. So we lost our center and have to find it again.” (p.264). Think of this: Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, W.B. Yeats, Frédéric Chopin, Marcel Proust, J.M. Barrie, George Orwell, Theodor Geisel, Charles Schulz, Steven Spielberg, Larry Page, and J.K. Rowling are all introverts. How about René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Ludwig van Beethoven, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Jürgen Hagerman and various others who are the the greatest thinkers of Western culture and civilization? They are all introverts. Also, Charles Schab, Bill Gates, Brenda Barnes, Sara Lee, James Copeland, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, these world renown enterprisers are all introverts! (p.53). Therefore, the Extrovert Ideal

in our culture today is seriously flawed and one-sided, if not outright absurd. Needless to say, socialization and communication are important for us today. Still, solitude is a goldmine, rich though quiet and calm. The French writer Victor Hugo said: volcano enlightens, but morning sun enlightens better. Chinese Daoism teaches: water is plain and quiet, but water nurtures life and existence; the supreme good is akin to water. Creativity, discovery, and the strength of mind bring about glory, but themselves come from quiet, but deep source. Therefore, proper solitude is both important and necessary for great thinkers. By this token, Cain's response to the prejudice of Extrovert Ideal in *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* not only raises an important question, but is pregnant with penetrating insights.

"What is so magical about solitude?" First of all, it creates personal space for deliberate practice. Drawing from the psychologist Anders Ericsson, Cain points out: "It is only when you're alone that you can engage in Deliberate Practice."(p.81). "Deliberate Practice is best conduct alone for several reasons. It takes intense concentration, and other people can be distracting. It requires deep motivation, often self-generated. But most important, it involves working on the task that's most challenging to you personally."(Ibid.) "When you practice deliberately, you identify the tasks or knowledge that are just out of your reach, strive to upgrade your performance, monitor your progress, and revise accordingly."(Ibid) Noteworthy, Chinese Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism all teach that only when one is quietest and upmost calm, one's mind is the best and one can use one's mind best and upmost. For example, the Chinese philosophical classics, *Dao DeJing* teaches: "Attain complete vacuity/ maintain steadfast quietude/all things come into being."(*Dao DeJing*, ch.16). That is to say, only when one maintains steadfast quietude, one can discover the profoundest truth of nature or the profoundest truth of nature will reveal itself to one. Thus, *Dao DeJing* asks: Can you concentrate your energy and embracing the One without being distracted? (ibid, ch.10). Moreover, solitude and quietude is important because it is necessary to create not only personal space for Deliberate Practice, but also freedom of thought. And "if personal space is vital for creativity, so is freedom from 'peer pressure.'"(p.86).

There can be no true thought without freedom. But non-freedom of thought can be many kinds. One of them is due in no small measure to the so-called "peer pressure", which itself can be of various forms. As Cain points out, "Psychologists usually offer three explanations for the failure of group

brainstorming. The first is *social loafing*: in a group, some individuals tend to sit back and let others do the work. The second is *production blocking*: only when one person can talk or produce idea at once, while other group members are forced to sit passively. And the third is *evaluation apprehension*, meaning the fear of looking stupid in front of other peers.”(p. 89). Of course, here, it is not that group brainstorming is not important; collective work is not important; peer exchange is not important; one’s ability to articulate and present one’s thought to one’s peers is not important. Instead, it is that having freedom from pressures of one’s peer is also important. It is that there can be no creative thoughts without individual creativity; there can be no individual creativity without individual freedom in creating; there can be no individual freedom in creating without individual space and freedom to think individually. Therefore, proper solitude is important because it provides the necessary individual space and freedom to think individually and therefore freely.

Some comparative studies of the intellectual performance of problem-solving also point to the non-justifiability of privileging extroverts over introverts. “Extroverts get better grades than introverts during elementary school, but introverts outperform extroverts in high school and college. At the university level, introverts predicts academic performance better than cognitive ability. One study tested 141 college students’ knowledge of twenty different subjects, from art to astronomy to statistics, and found that introverts knew more than extroverts about every single one of them. Introverts receive disproportionate numbers of graduate degrees, National Merit Scholarship finalist positions, and Phi Beta Kappa keys. They outperform extroverts on the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal test, an assessment of critical thinking widely used by business for hiring and promotion. They’ve been shown to excel at something psychology call ‘insightful problem solving.’”(pp.168-9). Needless to say, what is said above is not to promote a kind of reverse prejudice—that is, to privilege introverts over extroverts. Rather, it is to lead us to see that introverts and extroverts each have their respective strengths and they think differently. So far as introverts persons are concerned, they at least can have several virtues.

First, they are highly, at least more likely, disciplined in their desires and emotions. Introverts persons are like to be more self-controlled not merely in their speech and how they appear in front of others, but also in how not to let their desires and emotions to drive them in action. Thus, for example, they are less reward sensitive than extrovert persons.

Second, they often think more carefully. “Introvert seem to think more carefully than extroverts, as the psychologist Gerald Matthew described in his work. ...Introverts think before they act, digest information thoroughly, stay on task longer, give up less easily, and work more accurately. Introverts and extroverts also direct their attention differently: if you leave them to their devices, the introverts tend to sit around wondering about things, imagining things, recalling events from their past, and make plans for future. The extroverts are more likely to focus on what’s happening around them.”(Ibid, p.168).

Third, they are often more persistent. Because of their thoughtfulness, introverts persons generally think through their endeavors and as a result, they tend to be more persistent in what they pursuit. Moreover, “Introverts sometimes outperform extroverts even on social tasks that require persistence.”(Ibid, p.169). “‘It is not that I am so smart,’ said Einstein, who was a consummate introvert. ‘It is that I stay with problems longer.’”(Ibid.).

Fourth, in connection with the above, introverts from times to time are more consistent in their endeavors too. This should not be surprised because as indicated above, introverts often think through their endeavors before they act. Therefore, they generally are able to withstand more contingencies than extroverts. Needless to say, the more one is thoughtful in one’s endeavor, the more likely one is consistent in one’s endeavors.

Fifth, contrary to the appearances, introverts are more confident in their endeavors. Again, this is due in no small measure to the fact that introverts are more thoughtful in their endeavors. Introverts persons generally believe in what they are doing, and therefore have strong confidence in what their endeavors.

All the same, we owe Caim gratitude for such an insightful, instructive book. We should not identify strength with outward going, and characters with easy-going in social occasions. Volcano enlightens, but morning sun enlightens better. Fire is glorious, but water nurtures life. The loud awakes the world, the quiet moves the world. That much we know, and that much we ought to know.

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