



WHO AM I?

Our world is made up of introverts and extroverts and a whole range of personalities in between. But why does it matter where you fall on the spectrum? MIRANDA LUBY reveals what it means to be a wall-flower or a party-goer



PICTURE this: you're at home on a Saturday afternoon, relaxing on the couch with a cuppa, and your mobile rings. It's a friend you're not very close with and you're not too sure why she's calling.

Maybe she's in the neighbourhood and wants to pop over to catch up. Maybe she's going to invite you to a dinner party.

Most of you are probably thinking, "that's great". You'd click the answer key and start a conversation, excited and energised by the fact that she's thought to call you.

A few of you, though, would stare at the phone and debate in your mind whether to pick it up or not.

It's nothing against the person. It's not that you don't like spending time with people. It's just that, sometimes, you prefer to be alone.

By the time you try to think of a believable excuse for why you can't catch up with her, the phone has gone to message bank and you can't help but feel a little relieved.

If this is your reaction, don't worry, because you're not alone.

You belong to the 30 per cent of people deemed to be introverts. But contrary to what most people think, you're not shy or socially awkward. You can actually be very outgoing when it suits you.

In a world of reality TV and social media, where extroverts thrive, it can take some explaining to understand what introverts means.

Amber Denehey, clinical psychologist at Geelong's Chris Mackey & Associates, says the simplest way to explain introverts is that they get their energy from being alone.

"Introverts find it very draining to be around lots of people all the time and often feel tired after social interactions, even if they enjoyed themselves," she says.

Extroverts are the opposite. They are energised by crowds and stimulation, and drained by being alone.

So, Dr Denehey says, it's easy to see how one can misunderstand the other.

"People often see introverts as shy or socially awkward because they don't have a lot of close friends. But that's because they often value quality of friendship over quantity," Dr Denehey says.

"On the other hand, extroverts can be seen to collect acquaintances, but that's just what energises them."

Interestingly, Dr Denehey says, one would not survive without the other.

"Extroverts tend to be more talkative, assertive and gregarious, meaning they are good at communicating messages and drawing others around them," Dr Denehey says. "Introverts tend to pay attention to detail, making them good at listening and receiving messages from others around them."

"So introverts and extroverts actually complement each other. We need both to make the world go around."

But don't be too quick to label yourself as one or the other, Dr Denehey says; it might not be as black and white as you think.

"Introversion and extroversion are two ends of a spectrum," she says. "Depending on the situation, people can switch from one to another. So an introvert may actually be very extroverted around their close friends and family."

"This is why we are often surprised when some actors identify themselves as introverts because we only see a very extroverted side of them. They are able to adapt their behaviour to suit the situation."

So then, why does it matter where you fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum?

According to Dr Denehey, knowing our strengths allows us to play to them, as well as challenge ourselves, getting us much further in our careers and relationships.

"If you spend too much time battling your own nature you will deplete your energy. But you also have to challenge yourself in order to grow," she says.

"You never know when you might surprise yourself."

QUIZ

Take this quiz to find out where you fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Answer each question True or False, choosing the answer that applies to you more often than not.

(Source: psychologytoday.com)

- I prefer one-on-one conversations to group activities.
- I often prefer to express myself in writing.
- I enjoy solitude.
- I seem to care about wealth, fame, and status less than my peers.
- I dislike small talk, but I enjoy talking in-depth about topics that matter to me.
- People tell me that I'm a good listener.
- I'm not a big risk-taker.
- I enjoy work that allows me to "dive in" with few interruptions.
- I like to celebrate birthdays on a small scale, with only one or two close friends or family members.
- People describe me as "soft-spoken" or "mellow."
- I prefer not to show or discuss my work with others until it's finished.
- I dislike conflict.
- I do my best work on my own.
- I tend to think before I speak.
- I feel drained after being out and about, even if I've enjoyed myself.
- I often let calls go through to voice-mail.
- If I had to choose, I'd prefer a weekend with absolutely nothing to do to one with too many things scheduled.
- I don't enjoy multi-tasking.
- I can concentrate easily.
- In classroom situations, I prefer lectures to seminars.

Results:

1-4 true: extremely extroverted

5-8 true: mildly extroverted

9-11 true: ambivert (can switch between introvert and extrovert)

12-15 true: mildly introverted

16-20 true: extremely introverted

GT READERS TAKE THE QUIZ

Vanessa Jennings, 39-year-old business owner from Leopold

Before the quiz:

I have always been quieter and more contemplative than most other people, although when you meet me you'd think the opposite as I love to laugh and am very confident. Being as an only child I learned at a young age to enjoy my own company - and I still prefer it. But I also love to spend my time with my loved ones and closest friends. I prefer nights in to nights out and quiet country weekends rather than restaurants or a full social calendar.

Results: 18 true; 2 false. Extremely introverted

After the quiz:

I am not surprised that I am an introvert but I am a little surprised how many true answers I got. Some of my dearest friends call me a hermit crab and I am very much in my own happy world. I adore life and what it has to offer but I don't feel any drive to embrace new people or new situations. I am very lucky to have found the love of my life, have two kids, be surrounded by loving family and have friends I've known since high school or uni. It's almost like my cup is full. I think it's good for people to understand introversion doesn't mean unhappiness or a life unfulfilled.

Sara Taylor, 35-year-old photographer from Highton

Before the quiz:

I would probably say I am an extrovert as I love to chat with everyone all of the time. Put me in a room full of strangers and it may take me a little to



warm up but then I am set to socialise with everyone.

In saying that, though, I do love to have some quiet time at home with the family on my days off. I don't think I can keep up the energy that I do 100 per cent of the time. I have also always worked with people through teaching and photography.

Results: 6 true; 14 false. Mildly extroverted

After the quiz:

So it's true; I am an extrovert. People who know me could have probably told you that straight off. I just love people. There's nothing better than a good cup of tea with my girlfriends or a day out photographing a wedding and meeting so many lovely new faces.

Christian Shaw, 37-year-old transport manager from Highton

Before the quiz:

If we only had the two choices of being one or the other then I'm leaning towards myself being an extrovert, but only just. More like a hyperactive introvert or a part time extrovert.

I do look forward to a good social event, would more than likely be the first up on karaoke or the dance floor and probably the one being told to tone it down a bit. But on the other hand I very much appreciate the quiet times on the couch watching a good movie or a non-fuss BBQ with close friends and family.

I'm not a big fan of crowds where I have to fight for a view or wait in line for anything where patience is needed.

I guess I enjoy the characteristics of both the extrovert and the introvert.

Results: 11 true; 9 false. Ambivert

After the quiz:

After the quiz I'm not surprised with myself being classed as an ambivert. I enjoy the best of both worlds equally balanced.



Ava & Christian Shaw. Photo: Tremayne Photography

