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Sincerely, The Quiet Girl

Brianna DiPanni
Gettysburg College

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Sincerely, The Quiet Girl

Abstract

When I was younger, I used to think there was something horribly wrong with me, as if I had this mortal flaw. Some nights I used to lie awake in bed and just stare at the flickering red numbers of my bedside clock, wondering to myself when things would change. How long would it take to overcome my quiet phase? When will I finally be normal? [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, introversion, extroversion, anxiety, depression, labels

Disciplines

Communication | Mental and Social Health | Social Psychology and Interaction

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

SINCERELY, THE QUIET GIRL

March 25, 2015

When I was younger, I used to think there was something horribly wrong with me, as if I had this mortal flaw. Some nights I used to lie awake in bed and just stare at the flickering red numbers of my bedside clock, wondering to myself when things would change. How long would it take to overcome my quiet phase? When will I finally be normal?

Overcome.

Normal.

I feel like laughing as I think about it now. Such silly words used to describe one aspect of my personality, especially knowing now that *normal* is a relative term and being quiet is not a phase. For me, it's just naturally how I am. Before this knowledge, all the way up until my senior year in high school, I constantly felt so awful and unsure about myself. In my mind, I was perpetually trapped within this label of "quiet" with no means of escape in sight. Sure, a little self-doubt is experienced by everyone. But what I was feeling was much more than a little self-doubt. To say I felt bad about myself would be an understatement. I felt totally and utterly worthless. After being constantly reminded of my label, I started thinking that was all I was, like I had nothing else to offer.

"You need to talk more."

"You're really quiet, you know that?"

"What are you, mute?"

"Speak up, nobody can hear you."

Did any of these people who pointed out my quietness ever stop to consider how their comments could hurt? For a long time, a part of me didn't understand how people could jump to these conclusions about what I was like despite having had very little interaction with me. But, the other part of me *did* understand where individuals were coming from. As humans, we naturally observe the environments we're in, making interpretations based on what we notice in order to gain an understanding of our surroundings as well as the ability to adapt. In society, we've been socially conditioned to categorically label one another. With



this labeling come certain behavioral expectations, what we consider to be the “norm.” And in a society that deems extroversion as the [superior personality trait](#), it’s easy for those who don’t fit that mold to be stigmatized.

The stigma associated with being quiet doesn’t come without implications that can do some serious damage to a person’s self-image and worth. People seem to believe that if you’re quiet, it’s because you are boring and uninterested in the conversation, or that you’re a nasty person, or most derisively, that you are bitchy. If someone is quiet around you, it does not automatically mean they do not like you or think they are better than you.

As someone who struggles but strives to have an open, friendly face, I can honestly say it’s not a nice feeling to be thought of as snooty and conceited, or worse, to be labeled as having a [“bitchy resting face.”](#) Not smiling does not mean that I am either a) repulsed by you, or b) arrogant. A resting face that is not smiling is NOT bitchy. And please, [don’t tell me to smile.](#)

By making someone feel different from everybody else, you alienate them, putting their self-confidence and worth in jeopardy. Some people may be quiet purely due to social discomfort, while others just prefer to listen. Often they are that way by choice. After all, there’s no rule that you need to be as talkative as the person you’re with.

Unfortunately, the misunderstanding of the introvert personality type can have lasting effects on quiet people, [leading to anxiety and depression.](#) The privilege of extroversion in American society contributes to these mental health issues within the introverted population, because they “feel like outsiders in their own culture.”

Where does this preference for extraversion come from? It is not that extroverts make up a majority of the population, as the ratio of introverts to extroverts is 50-50. And it is not that every country shares the same cultural bias against introverts as America’s verbal culture promotes. In Finland and Asian countries, for example, [those who value quiet and deep thinking are held in high regard.](#)

It’s important for the Gettysburg community to know quiet is a characteristic, not a disease. Now, that doesn’t mean I’m claiming my personality is flawless by any means; in fact, it’s far from it. Especially living in a society that puts a higher value on outgoing personalities, I believe it’s crucial for everyone to learn how to be friendly, open, and assertive and speak their mind when they have something to contribute. But please, next time you think about pointing out someone’s quietness, consider your words carefully. Whether you’re bossy, bubbly, loud or quiet: we are more than just our labels. Even if you mean no harm, your words could do more damage than you’ll ever know. It’s okay to be quiet in a world that doesn’t stop talking.

Brianna DiPanni '18
Editor