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When Innies Love Outies: How Odd Couples Cope

By Elizabeth Bernstein

Patricia and Marty Weber were in their walk-in closet one evening, getting dressed for a party, chitchatting about their day, when Ms. Weber made a casual request: "Honey, I really don't want to be there all night. Can we leave after an hour or so?"

Life as the Odd Couple

Need some help improving your introvert-extravert relations? Try these methods:

- **Figure out your type** by taking an online personality test or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Understanding how you communicate—and your partner does it—will help you both do it better.
- **Cut each other some slack.** Introverts and extraverts simply process information differently. Extraverts really do need to be with other people. Introverts need 'down time.'
- **Negotiate introvert-extravert needs.** Do you like to go out while your partner prefers to stay in? Does one of you talk more than the other? Come to an agreement about how you can be together but still meet your individual needs.
- **Introverts, check in before you disappear.** 'Practice cuing the people in your life with a simple, "I'd like a little time to myself," and let them know where you're going, even if it's just the other end of the house,' says psychologist Laurie Helgoe.
- **Before a party or other social event, agree to a game plan.** Take separate cars, so the introvert can leave early. Agree to check in at a specific time to see how the other is doing. Work an introvert activity into the evening, such as a walk together afterward.
- **Decide upon a signal** the introvert can use to tell the extravert to stop talking so much, and the extravert can use to say he needs to know what the introvert is thinking.
- **Let the introvert speak first.** Ask introverts specific questions to help draw them out: 'What is the best thing that happened today? Was work what you expected?'

Her husband's response? He took off his tie, threw it on the ground and shouted, "Just forget the whole thing! We won't go at all!"

Here's an observation: The most complicated marriages may be those between Innies and Outies—those who like to stay in and those who like to go out. Ask the Webers. He is an extravert. He loves to talk, gather groups of people around him and attend endless brunches, happy hours and networking events. His wife, an introvert, enjoys parties in short doses but prefers to be home reading or spending time with her dog.

Many people believe that introverts, by definition, are shy and extraverts are outgoing. This is incorrect. Introverts and extraverts differ in how they process information. Introverts get their energy internally. Extraverts—spelled that way in psychology circles—gain energy from being with other people, often the more the merrier.

There are shy extraverts and outgoing introverts. Most of us have a little of both in us, but lean one way or the other.

Introverts often prefer to spend time alone or in small groups of people, and they tend to carefully gather their thoughts before they speak. Extraverts love to talk and typically "think out loud," processing information by talking.



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You don't need a degree in psychology to see how this could cause serious problems in a relationship. Introverts and extraverts approach the world in fundamentally different ways. Introverts think extraverts talk too fast, too loud and too much. Extraverts often believe introverts are awkward, withholding or cold.

Facebook, Twitter and other sites that help us stay connected 24/7 are heightening the differences. In today's social-media driven world, it's getting easier for introverts to speak on their own terms, yet it's also getting harder to turn the extraverts off.

The population is split pretty much evenly between introverts and extraverts, according to psychologist Laurie Helgoe, assistant clinical professor at the West Virginia School of Medicine and author of "Introvert Power: Why Your Inner Life Is Your Hidden Strength." In a 1998 study conducted by the Center for Applications of Psychological Type (the folks who run the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test), 51% of some 3,000 subjects who were randomly sampled and tested were introverts. In a smaller study in 2001, 57% were introverts. Introverts were pretty evenly split between males and females, too.

The Webers wrestled with their different introversion-extraversion styles. Earlier in their marriage, Ms. Weber, a 62-year-old business coach from Williamsburg, Va., would often become irritated that her husband went out almost every night of the week, sometimes failing to make it home for dinner. (He was an early cellphone user, and she would call on his big, clunky model to berate him.)

Mr. Weber often invited other couples to join them on their weekly "date night." His boss once told him his wife needed to socialize more with other executives' wives if he was going to continue to climb the corporate ladder. "This has been the biggest conflict in our relationship," says Mr. Weber, 61, an employee-benefits consultant and broker.

The night of the argument, Ms. Weber felt her husband had misunderstood. "I wasn't saying I didn't want to go to the event," she says. "I was just trying to prepare him that I didn't want to stay all night." They went to the party but on the way there she said, "Don't be alarmed if I disappear to the bathroom for 20 minutes. I will need to recharge."

In brain-imaging studies, brains of introverts show more activity in response to external stimuli. This could explain why introverts feel the need to regulate the amount of stimulation coming in. In contrast, extravert brains show more activity in areas related to pleasure-seeking. They find social interactions fun and are driven to create them.

When someone speaks to an introvert, her brain responds with a high level of activity. "It is as if several lights start flashing on a control panel," says Dr. Helgoe. The introvert needs to turn inward. If the other person keeps talking, the introvert can become distracted from her mental process and feel overwhelmed.

When introverts and extraverts converse, "what looks like communication can actually be a problem," says Dr. Helgoe. The introvert is quiet and appears to be listening; the extravert takes this as a cue to keep talking. "The introvert may shut out the extravert, perhaps while silently nodding, or stop trying to contribute," she says. The extravert needs to learn to slow down, but the introvert needs to learn to speak up.



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Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist whose work was the inspiration for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, believed we are drawn to people different from us so that we can learn from them. But Dr. Helgoe says this theory has been largely debunked. Recent research shows marital satisfaction is related to personality similarity. "Opposites might initially attract," she says, "but they can start to repel, if not identified and worked with, over time."

Tuesday is the Webers' 41st wedding anniversary. It took two decades, they say, but they finally learned to cope with their vastly different styles. Sometimes, they will drive to social events in different cars, so Ms. Weber can leave early if she wants. Mr. Weber goes to a happy hour after work one night a week without his wife.

They also spend every Saturday apart. He meets pals early at Starbucks, stops in at another coffee shop mid-morning to say hi to more friends and gathers a crowd at a local pub for lunch. She stays home and reads, calls her parents, catches up on email and walks the dog.

"Both of you have to mellow out and find what works for you," say Ms. Weber.



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