



Introverts in Love: The Quiet Way to Happily Ever After

By Sophia Dembling

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From the author of *The Introvert's Way*, a friendly and accessible guide to dating and relationships for introverts.

Love is tricky for everyone--and different personality types can face their own unique problems. Now the author of *The Introvert's Way* offers a guide to romance that takes you through the frequently outgoing world of dating, courting, and relationships, helping you navigate issues that are particular to introverts, from making conversation at parties to the challenges of dating an extrovert.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This book is for anyone who has ever wrestled with the conflict between the wish to stay home and the desire to go out and find a partner... a book about the human capacity for love.”

—**Susan Cain**, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Quiet*

“A terrific, affirming treatise on the many gifts an introvert brings to a relationship and how best to let them glow.”

—**Library Journal**

“Dembling (*The Introvert’s Way*) tackles the pitfalls of dating and relationships for the introspective and sometimes socially awkward. With introversion reaching buzzword status, this book may attract an audience.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

Praise for *The Introvert's Way*

“In this thought-provoking treatise on the quieter types, Dembling, the blogger behind *Psychology Today*’s “The Introvert’s Corner,” proposes a wholesale rethinking of what it means to be an introvert.... Dembling’s account is refreshingly candid and straightforward—“I am an introvert,” she writes, “And there’s not a damn thing wrong with me.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

“Unlike *Quiet*, it not only provides scientific and cultural background but also practical tips and a thorough-note of complete understanding of the introvert’s nature. An introvert myself, I have never read a book that I have so truly felt myself in.”

—**Psych Central**

“Dembling urges introverts to embrace their need for solitude, reflection, and regeneration with no apologies. It’s what makes us who we are.”

—**Cleveland Plain Dealer**

About the Author

Sophia Dembling is the author of *The Introvert’s Way* and is a prolific blogger at *Psychology Today* (The Introvert’s Corner) and *PsychCentral.com* (Real World Research), among others. She has won two Lowell Thomas gold medals for her travel writing. She lives in Dallas, Texas.

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Introduction

Love is complicated. It is both universal and highly individual. In a way, nobody is an expert on love, and in

a way, everybody is. Love is the same for all of us; it must be, or songs about love wouldn't twang such universal chords. But it's also different—how often have you looked at a couple and wondered how they could possibly stay together?

Introversion and extroversion are only two small facets of all that makes us who we are. Each of us is a rich and complex slumgullion of traits and quirks, nature and nurture, hopes and dreams and irritating habits. And, of course, the most basic rules for relationship success are the same for introverts, extroverts, and everyone in between: Communication, compromise, respect. Same with things that lead to relationship failure. The details may change but the general principles are the same for everyone.

So if we know that, why a book just for and about introverts and love?

Well, for one thing, being an introvert can seem at odds with seeking and finding love. We just don't put ourselves out there as much as extroverts; and even when we do, we aren't as quick to make friends of strangers.

"I don't meet as many people as my friends because I generally prefer to stay home and delve into something really stimulating, like reading or video games," says Taylor, a 27-year-old single writer and an introvert. "I also don't tend to mingle too well with people at parties. I do better with friends there with me, and I can 'turn it on' and talk to just about anyone without awkwardness, but I often don't."

Not only that, but when introverts meet someone who sparks their interest, they often are uncomfortable making the first move of any kind. Ray-Mel, a 60-year-old artist and an introvert, says that he was so crushed the times he stepped out of his comfort zone and pursued someone only to be turned down, he decided it wasn't worth the risk. "After a while I just sat back and waited to be approached rather than do the approaching," he says. "That resulted in long inactive periods." (Fortunately, Ray-Mel met the perfect extrovert for him; you'll hear more about that later.)

On top of that, with our limited energy for interaction, where do we even find the juice for the search? How do we meet potential partners when mingling is such a chore for us? How do we stand out when we prefer to hold back?

And are introverts more likely to find love with an extrovert, who will bring sparkle and energy to our lives? Or an introvert, who will cozy up in quiet comfort with us?

You might never have asked yourself these questions explicitly, but they have affected your quest for love all the same.

And it doesn't end there. After we have found someone, our introversion comes into play in other ways. How do we let another person into our hearts while still honoring the introversion that makes us private people? How do we balance the togetherness we want and the solitude we need without hurt feelings and misunderstandings? How many phone calls and text messages every day are too many?

For a lot of people, a new love interest is all consuming, but even a new love interest can't trump a need for solitude for some introverts. John, a 59-year-old divorced engineer, wonders about the challenge of "maintaining confidence in his introversion and independence in a society that pushes the concept of relationship dependence." Drew, a 34-year-old single attorney, says that inevitably any woman he dates will eventually complain that she is not getting enough time from him. "How much time do you need?" he wonders. "Daily? I can't do that." Is it possible some people aren't cut out for full-time relationships? I'll talk about that, too.

Throughout this book you'll find interviews with introverts—single, coupled, divorced, straight and gay, and even one who identifies as polyamorous—who told me about looking for and finding romantic partners, about their relationships, good and strained, about what they have and what they want, why they are happy and how they could be happier. I talked to introverts in relationships with extroverts and introverts in relationships with other introverts. I talked to newlyweds and to people who had been married for many years.

Why didn't I talk to extroverts, too? Well, I think we've already heard a lot from extroverts, whether from the extroverts we know or the extroverts who have, until recently, tended to dominate public conversation. After all, speaking up is one of the things extroverts do best.

Besides, one thing I've learned since I started writing about introversion in 2009 is that a lot of introverts out there didn't know they were introverts until they started reading about it and hearing what other introverts have to say. All they knew was that they felt like weirdos, and that people were always telling them they were doing life wrong and should be different.

In the years since, introversion has become a hot topic; introverts have been gleefully surfing a learning curve, figuring out who they are and how they function in the world. My first book, *The Introvert's Way: Living a Quiet Life in a Noisy World*, was a general guide to life as an introvert, and I heard from many, many introverts that it helped them recognize, accept, and articulate their own needs. Now I hope to do the same with introverts and relationships. While I will discuss mistakes introverts can make in their relationships with extroverts, this book is for introverts and about introverts. Extroverts are invited to read it, of course, but you won't hear their voices in these pages.

Some of what we discuss here may have you nodding in agreement, some may shed new light on an aspect of yourself or your relationship, some may leave you with question marks floating around your head. That's OK. As with any advice, you take what fits and forget the rest. The purpose of this book is not to provide a no-fail formula for happy relationships (if only I could, I would be so rich!) but to suggest some things to consider in your own pursuit of happily ever after.

If you're in the process of looking for love, I hope this book will help you identify qualities that sound compatible with your particular style of introversion. I also hope this book will help you open up explicit discussions about what you need as an introvert, and will make this discussion easier by showing you that others share your feelings and how they handle them. Here is a road map for talking about needing solitude even in the context of intimate relationships; about socializing versus staying home; about how we handle conflict. Knowing that your feelings about these things are 100 percent A-OK and shared by others will, I hope, give you confidence in weeding out of your life those people who try to change or shame you.

If you are in a relationship, you might have already worked through many of the issues discussed here—or maybe not. If not, perhaps something here will give you a different perspective on a recurring problem or discomfort, be it morning chatter or guilt trips over your need for occasional time away.

My goal here is not to present definitive answers as much as shed light on various relevant issues that may arise. And the wonderful thing is that if you are in a relationship with open communication and mutual respect, issues once identified can be worked out. And that's how you get on, and stay on, the road to happily ever after.

PART I

To Get There, You Have to Know Where You're Going

What Do You Want from a Relationship?

Birds of a Feather, or Opposites Attract?

Should You Seek an Introvert or an Extrovert?

The question I'm asked more than any other when it comes to relationships is: Are introvert-introvert unions best because they understand each other's ways? Or are introvert-extrovert couples happier because they balance each other out?

The unsatisfying answer is yes.

Yes, birds of a feather flock together, and yes, opposites attract. It just depends.

"It was stressful being married to an extrovert," says Tone, a 43-year-old pensioner. "We never had the same needs for a social life and I had to push myself every day trying to meet my ex's need for being around people and doing the things that he thought the both of us should do."

Now Tone is married to an introvert and says it's a big relief. "He understands my needs and how I think because he feels the same. I feel peaceful inside for the first time in my life."

However, Tyler, a 28-year-old church technical director, found dating an introverted woman difficult. "When I'm in a crowd or social situation, it's pretty much everything I can do to maintain what I'm doing. I couldn't really babysit someone who wasn't able to handle the situation. I can do one or the other, that's it."

The woman he ultimately married about five years ago "can make friends with a rock," he says, and that's part of what attracted him to her. "I was really surprised at how many friends she had and how much energy she put into spending time with those friends," he says. "I guess I kind of admired it."

The introverts I talked to who were in relationships are almost evenly divided between introvert-introvert couples and introvert-extrovert couples. And the few divorced introverts I spoke to are also equally divided—some divorced from introverts, some from extroverts.

So, where does this leave us? In the fuzzy gray "it depends" area between birds of a feather and opposites attract. Because, as it turns out, introversion and extroversion may not even come into play when it comes to the kind of people who attract us. Research by psychologist Glenn Geher suggests that we choose partners who resemble our opposite-sex parent, although the personality trait of extroversion (which is what psychologists measure—by their definition, introverts are people who are low on extroversion) is not a big player in either our choice of mates or our marital happiness. The traits of agreeableness and neuroticism appear to be more important.

Dr. Helen Fisher has also found no connection between introversion/extroversion and relationship success. A biological anthropologist who has made a career studying the chemistry of romantic attachment, Fisher is the brain behind the questionnaire used by online dating site Chemistry.com. In her book, *Why Him? Why Her?: How to Find and Keep Lasting Love*, she explains her research into behavior, attraction, and brain chemistry—specifically the amounts and activity of dopamine, serotonin, testosterone, and estrogen.

Fisher says various cocktails of these chemicals create four personality types that are the basis of attraction.

To oversimplify her findings, the laws of attraction, she says, boil down to four broad, biologically triggered personality types: the Explorer (impulsive and adventurous, among other things); the Builder (traditional and family oriented); the Director (logical and analytical); and the Negotiator (imaginative and intuitive).

Introversion and extroversion aren't mentioned in the descriptions of these four types. "This aspect of personality doesn't play a decisive role in our romantic attractions," Fisher writes. (Note that she says *decisive* role; it may play some role, and you get to choose whether it's a bit part or a major player.) It seems possible that introverts whose dominant trait is Explorer will be drawn to extroverts, who will drag them out of their comfort zone, while Builder introverts are likely to be attracted to other Builders, who will be happy to hunker down at home with them.

Both types of relationships have their risks and benefits. Introverts can find themselves constantly fighting for the space they need if they connect with an extrovert who doesn't get it. That's the sort of thing that contributed to the breakdown of John's marriage. "There was never an understanding from my wife about why I was the way I was, why I would find a quiet corner and isolate myself during a party, or why sometimes I would withdraw from her when she was in her 'pay attention to me!' moods," he says. Though John tried to explain, and even recommended books, she continued to feel hurt and unloved, he continued to feel stressed, and the whole thing fell apart.

Introvert-introvert couples have their challenges, too. Many of the introverts I spoke to admitted to being nonconfrontational, which has drawbacks. If two introverts are particularly passive or overthinkers, as introverts often are, they might get stuck in a weird state of suspended animation. Paul, a 46-year-old architectural designer, and his girlfriend of twenty years both find making decisions stressful and so, he says, "So much is left undone. Twenty years together and still not married. I think our introversion has a lot to do with it."

And there's always the risk of two introverts indulging in isolation more than is good for one or both of them. My husband and I are both introverts, though he less so than I. He deals with people all day at work while I work alone. At the end of the day, he's ready for quiet home time, and although I might crave some socializing, it's so much easier for me to just hit the couch with him. Staying home is always my default and sometimes I wish one of us were a little more extroverted, to help motivate us both.

Not that there's anything wrong with being homebodies if that's what feels right. Ed, a 45-year-old student in environmental biology, and Rebecca, a 46-year-old graphic and fine artist, are introverts and have been married since 2012. They're perfectly happy hermits. "We enjoy living out in the country where it would take effort for friends and family to come, discouraging unannounced visits," Ed says. "I get most of my social needs met at school, she at work, and both of us via social networking."

So the bottom line is that there is no right or wrong, no magic formula when it comes to introverts and love. We all have different needs, and the best thing we can do is recognize and respect our own personal needs, strengths, and weaknesses, and find the partner who clicks with those.

In his book *Personal Intelligence: The Power of Personality and How It Shapes Our Lives*, John D. Mayer writes, "Whether we are trying to fit ourselves into a relationship or a career, it's not like fitting a plug into a socket—we are more multifaceted than that. It's more like fitting a tuba into a duffel bag." Our personalities have all kinds of shapes and angles and fiddly bits, but with a little effort and finesse, the bag can accommodate all of it.

Cupid's arrow goes where it goes and nobody can predict with certainty whose heart it will pierce. But as an introvert, if you're not already in a relationship, it can't hurt to give a little thought to whether you would prefer someone to draw you out or come into your cave with you. And if you're already in a relationship, this

book might help you notice and appreciate (or adjust if necessary) the intersection of your introversion with your partner's personality. While your introversion isn't the be-all and end-all of who you are, it is an important trait and, for many of us, one that is only just finding a voice.

Five Reasons Why Introverts Are Where It's At

Why would you want to spend your life with an introvert? Here are a few reasons to consider:

1. They get it. More than anything, many introverts are tremendously relieved to find another soul who understands the pleasure of quiet, a restrained social life, home, and tranquility. "We like the same things and love to spend time at home, living the quiet life," says Tone. "I appreciate that she understands the benefits and the need for having this quiet space in the day," says Doug M., a 32-year-old writer and newlywed.

It can be a tremendous relief to be with someone who doesn't lay on guilt trips when you need a little bit of space to be with your own thoughts. Another introvert gets introversion fully and completely without any complicated or awkward explanations.

2. The sweet sound of silence. Introverts don't chatter. "We spend a lot of time just sitting with each other not talking," says Julie, a 22-year-old marketing professional who lives with her introverted boyfriend.

An introvert is a lot less likely than an extrovert to fuss if you're being quiet or if you need some time inside your own head, with your computer, video games, books, or whatever you like to lose yourself in. Introverts don't keep a running commentary going about life (except in their heads, but you don't have to listen to that) and understand that you can feel close and connected with another person even in silence. And introverts get that morning is not the time for nattering, and that after a hard day at work, some time to unwind is mighty nice. An extra plus: Getting away, physically, from your partner isn't nearly as pressing when you can be in close proximity without having to actually interact. It's the next best thing to being alone.

3. No party pressure. "We like to go out and do things together, but don't really enjoy large crowds or having to interact with a lot of people," says Rebecca. "So if one of us says they would rather not go to a particular event, the other rarely minds."

Introverts are often relieved when plans cancel, so with another introvert, you can usually back out of social obligations with no repercussions. Knowing that you both enjoy, or dislike, the same sorts of things means that deciding which invitations to accept and which to decline requires minimal negotiation, and even when you decide to show up, chances are good you'll be ready to leave at about the same time. (Unless you happen to be married to someone even more introverted than you, like Arden, a 51-year-old business etiquette consultant. "He would prefer to stay home and putz around the house," she says. "I want to go out to dinner, see a movie or play, travel, see friends, et cetera.")

4. They won't try to drag you onto the dance floor. And I mean that both literally and figuratively. Another introvert is not likely to lay the whole "try it, you'll like it" trip on you if you already know you won't like it, whatever it is: Karaoke, the bunny hop, skinny-dipping with the gang. Another introvert will find it a lot easier to take no for an answer and you won't have to justify your preferences.

Of course, the chances of any introvert trying to drag you into that kind of thing are slim, but should it happen, another introvert is much more likely to understand and accept your reluctance than an extrovert, who might try to persuade you that it will be good for you or it's healthy to step out of your comfort zone. Yes, it's healthy to step out of your comfort zone, but less so to be dragged out of it kicking and screaming.

5. A companion for introvert fun. What's your idea of a really good time? Curling up on the couch with a book? Hiking a quiet trail? An art museum and a sidewalk café? A long road trip? While of course you can enjoy these things alone, wouldn't it be nice to have an equally happy, warm body next to you on the couch? To have someone's hand to hold when you reach a beautiful view? Someone who will let you view art in silence but talk about it after? Someone who is OK letting the road unspool in companionable silence, but also enjoys discussing the kinds of deep thoughts that bubble up on a road trip?

I don't suggest extroverts don't enjoy these things, because I know they do, but their appetite for them will be more quickly sated and then they're ready to get social. They need to get social. "As much as we do enjoy being with other people, we definitely enjoy just the two of us the most," says Nancy, a 59-year-old graphic artist married to an extrovert. "But two or three days of just the two of us is enough for Susan."

Five Reasons Why Extroverts Are Great to Date

Introverts and extroverts can be wonderfully compatible. Here are a few reasons why:

1. Fun on the extrovert ride. "I absolutely love, love, love being around people who are very fun and gregarious and say 'let's go here, let's go there,'" says Laura, a 50-ish nutritionist and media professional whose main squeeze is an extrovert.

Many introverts have the spirit of adventure but not a lot of *oomph* when it comes to making stuff happen. Extroverts have ideas, they have energy, and they have a strong desire to get out and do stuff, preferably around people.

Obviously, this won't sound good to all introverts; there are some who can't imagine why anyone would want to go to a party. But other introverts do want to join the fun, in their own way, and having an extrovert around to get the party going is the best of both worlds: All the fun with almost none of the effort. Just hang on and enjoy.

2. You won't want for friends. I hear it from introverts often and have felt it myself: Making friends is difficult, especially for those of us who don't do casual conversation easily, prefer not to be around large groups, and tend to get quiet in a crowd. And it's not that we don't want friends, it's just not easy to make new ones.

Extroverts, however, are experts at meeting and connecting with new people, and if your partner has that gift, you can benefit, too. "Even before I was married, one of my best friends was a *huge* extrovert," says Chris, a 45-year-old Web services director. "I seem to like having an extrovert in my life to help pull me out of my shell and help me make friends."

3. No guessing games. Extroverts enjoy articulating the thoughts that cross their minds. Possibly every thought that crosses their minds, which can be wearing at some times and a huge relief at others. If an extrovert wants something or is upset or angry about something, out it comes, *boom*, right there to deal with. They don't let things build up like many introverts will (you know who you are).

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daria Gertz:

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Maria Forshee:

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