

'Quiet' suggests introverts are undervalued by society

"A species in which everyone was General Patton, would not succeed, any more than would a race in which everyone was Vincent van Gogh. Indeed the presence of outstanding strengths presupposes that energy needed in other areas has been channeled away from them."

This quote by Allen Shawn appropriately foreshadows what is about to unfold in "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking," the book by Susan Cain.

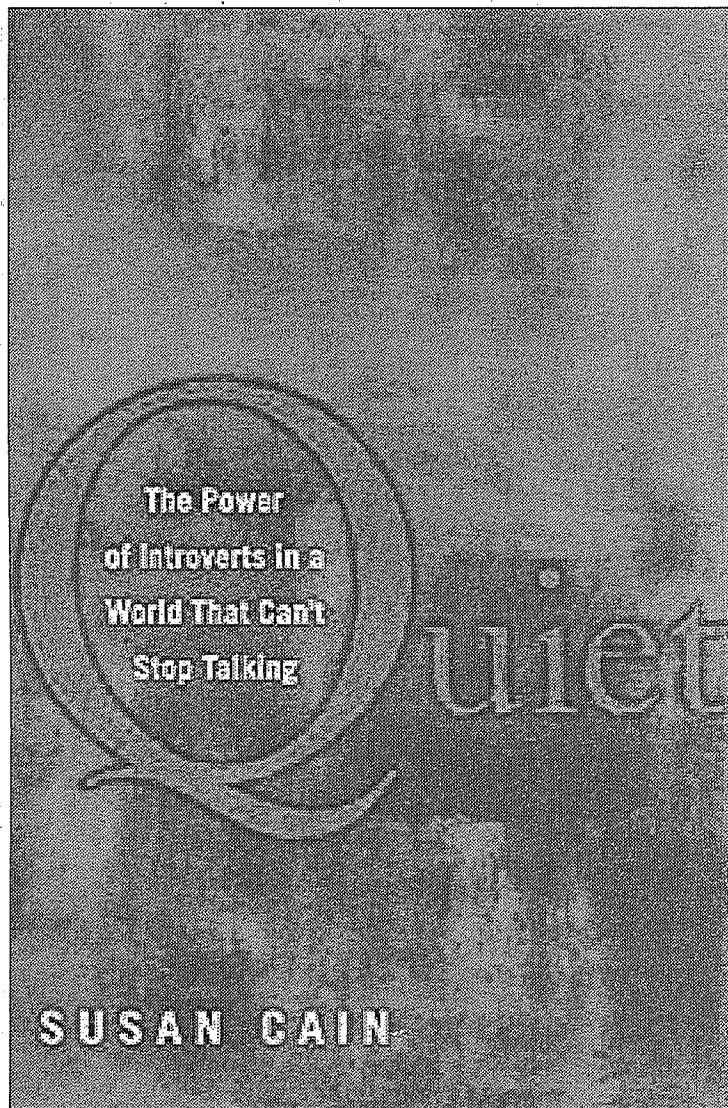
"Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race," Cain explains. "And the single most important aspect of personality is where we fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Our place on this continuum influences our choice of friends and mates, and how we make conversation, resolve differences, and show love."

It should be noted that the terms "introvert" and "extrovert" were first popularized by the psychologist Carl Jung in the seminal book he published in 1921, "Psychological Types."

Cain writes: "Introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, said Jung, extroverts to the external life of people and activities." At the heart of Cain's thesis is the notion that our culture tends to discount and undervalue the contributions of introverts. In fact, most of the book revolves around the author's dissection of our fascination with the "Extrovert Ideal" and how this obsession serves to bias us in detrimental and counterproductive ways. She makes it clear, however, that the marginalization of those who share these personality characteristics comes at a steep cost to society.

This is Cain's first book, although her articles on introversion and shyness have appeared in O Magazine, the New York Times, Psychology Today and Time. She is an honors graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School who practiced corporate law for seven years (her clients included Goldman Sachs and General Electric). She currently runs a negotiation consultancy; her clients include Merrill Lynch and Shearman & Sterling. Cain works extensively with a wide variety of individuals and companies ranging from hedge-fund managers to TV producers to college students negotiating their first salaries.

"Talkative people are rated as smarter, better-looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends," the author observes. "Velocity of speech counts as well as volume: we rank fast talkers as more competent and likable than slow ones." But looks can be deceiving — as Cain points out in considerable detail throughout the book. Take education, for instance: "At the university level, introversion predicts academic performance better than cognitive ability," Cain explains. "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



"Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking," by Susan Cain. New York: Crown Publishers, a Division of Random House, 2012. 333 pages, \$26.

Appraisal test, an assessment of critical thinking widely used by business for hiring and promotion."

"They've been shown to excel at something psychologists call 'insightful problem solving,'" she adds.

Cain goes to significant lengths to describe why extroverts continue to be favored even though introverts are arguably smarter and better able to adapt to changing circumstances. She makes an excellent case that part of the reason has a lot to do with the lack of attention our fast-paced, entertainment-oriented culture increasingly gives to looking beyond the surface.

Chapter Seven, "Why Did Wall Street Crash and Warren Buffet Prosper?", is perhaps my favorite. It is here where Cain makes her strongest case that when we pay too much attention to the loudest among us we are treading on thin ice. In addition to being one of the world's foremost financial thinkers and money managers, he is unquestionably an introvert: "Buffet used to dread public speaking until he took a Dale Carnegie course."

The story that really captured my attention involved a keynote speech Buffet gave at the conclusion of an investment conference in Sun Valley, Idaho, in 1999. Fueled in large measure by extroverts and their enthusiastic yet ultimately unrealistic view of the capacity of the market to sustain the technology boom, most everyone at the conference was convinced that the good times would

last forever.

Everyone, that is, except Buffet.

"He told the crowd, in painstaking, brilliantly analyzed detail, why the tech-fueled bull market wouldn't last," Cain writes. "Buffet had studied the data, noted the danger signals, and then paused and reflected on what they meant. It was the first public forecast he had made in 30 years."

And as Paul Harvey used to say, "Now you know the rest of the story."

"Quiet" is one of the most meticulously researched books I have read recently, with no less than 46 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the main text. Every point Cain makes in this remarkably thorough and engaging treatise is grounded in empirical evidence and accompanied by thoughtful and discerning commentary from some of the world's leading experts on personality theory.

"Persistence isn't very glamorous," Cain concludes. "If genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration, then as a culture we tend to lionize the 1 percent. We love its flash and dazzle. But great power lies in the other 99 percent."

I highly recommend this book; it will be especially reassuring to anyone who has ever wondered if there was something wrong with them — or their kids — if they seemed to have a natural aversion to being the center of attention.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.