

Research suggests the happiest introverts may be extroverts

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If you are an introvert, force yourself to be an extrovert. You'll be happier.

That's the suggestion of the first-ever study asking people to act like extroverts for a prolonged period. For one week, the 123 participants were asked to—in some cases—push the boundaries of their willingness to engage, by acting as extroverts. For another week, the same group was asked to act like introverts.

The benefits of extroversion have been reported before, including those of "forced extroversion," but usually only for brief intervals. In one study, train-riders were asked to talk to strangers; a [control group](#) was directed to remain silent. The talkers reported a more positive experience.

UC Riverside researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky wanted to extend the faux extroversion to see if it would result in better well-being.

"The findings suggest that changing one's [social behavior](#) is a realizable goal for many people, and that behaving in an extroverted way improves well-being," said Lyubomirsky, a UCR psychologist and co-author of the study, published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*. Psychologists favor "extrovert" to the more commonly used "extrovert," due to its historic use in academia, and the Latin origins of "extra," meaning "outside."

An initial challenge for this study was the presumption that extroversion—as a trait rewarded in U.S. culture—is best. Many of the adjectives associated with extroversion are more flattering than those tied to introversion. Most people would rather be associated with words like "dynamic" than with words like "withdrawn."

So Lyubomirsky's team went for words agreed upon as most neutral. The adjectives for extroversion were "talkative," "assertive," and "spontaneous"; for introversion, "deliberate," "quiet," and "reserved."

Researchers next told participants—both the Act Introvert group and the Act extrovert group—that previous research found each set of behaviors are beneficial for college students.

Finally, the participants were told to go forth, and to be as talkative, assertive, and spontaneous as they could stand. Later, the same group was told to be deliberate, quiet, and reserved, or vice versa. Three times a week, participants were reminded of the behavioral change via emails.

According to all measures of well-being, participants reported greater well-being after the extroversion week, and decreases in well-being after the introversion week. Interestingly, faux extroverts reported no discomfort or ill effects.

"It showed that a manipulation to increase extroverted behavior substantially improved well-being," Lyubomirsky said. "Manipulating personality-relevant [behavior](#) over as long as a week may be easier than previously thought, and the effects can be surprisingly powerful."

The researchers suggest that future experiments addressing this question may switch up some variables. The participants were [college students](#), generally more malleable in terms of changing habits. Also, Lyubomirsky said, effects of "faking" extroversion could surface after a longer study period.

The paper, "Experimental Manipulation of extroverted and Introverted Behavior and Its Effects on Well-Being," was co-authored by Lyubomirsky, with Seth Margolis as first author. Margolis is a [graduate student](#) in Lyubomirsky's Positive Activities and Well-Being Laboratory.

More information: Seth Margolis et al. Experimental manipulation of extraverted and introverted behavior and its effects on well-being., *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* (2019). [DOI:](#)

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