

Originally my plan was to write about my lack of motivation, but ironically, I wasn't really motivated to do that! Instead, I thought I'd share how the quarantine has affected me, specifically as an introvert.

I've seen a lot of people joking about how the quarantine must be an introvert's dream come true. After all, not only is it perfectly socially acceptable to stay cooped up in our houses, it's highly encouraged by anyone who understands the current state of the world. Similarly, social distancing mandates that we don't gather in large groups or stand within six feet of other people, and electronic communication is preferred to any face-to-face interactions. That definitely sounds like something introverts would love, but unfortunately, the reality is that introverts are struggling with the quarantine just as much as our more extroverted companions.

One of the biggest issues for me has been the lack of solitude. After I left campus for spring break, I never went back to Tallahassee (I actually still have to go back and move the rest of my belongings out of my dorm once my move-out day arrives). For the past two and a half months, I've been stuck at home with my parents, my eleven-year-old brother, and my dog. And I'm sure I'm not the only one who's suddenly been forced into close quarters with their family for an extended period of time and without a clear end in sight. After a whole semester and a half of living roughly 260 miles away from home, I definitely wasn't prepared to spend this much "quality time" with my family. I don't think I ever realized just how important having the ability to go out was during my years in grade school, or even having the house to myself for a little while when everyone else was busy. Hindsight is definitely 20/20 and I can safely say that I've never experienced this level of suffocation in my own house.

For introverts, having personal downtime to recharge our social batteries is incredibly important. Constant interaction takes up a lot of our energy and, at least in my case, it's particularly challenging when those interactions are with the same handful of people. Nowadays, "family mode" is always on and to me, it feels disingenuous to only be expressing that specific facet of myself 24/7 (especially when that isn't exactly the most honest "me" anyway, but I digress). The fact of the matter is that it's difficult, if not impossible, to get the level of solitude that we need when we're basically trapped in one confined space with other people.

Another problem that I've encountered is the lack of social interaction. I know that sounds contradictory since I just spent two paragraphs raving about how I need me-time, but I promise I'm going somewhere with this. Normally, we have school, work, extracurricular activities, friends, and even societal pressures to help us get out and be social, but that's no longer the case. If you're an introvert, or if you know an introvert, you probably know that we don't often plan social events on our own or reach out first without a specific reason to do so. We tend to rely on those outside forces to help us get the socialization that we need.

For me, contacting someone first has always been hard because electronic interactions typically don't have a specified "end" to them. When you're having a conversation with someone in person, there's usually the understanding that one of you will eventually have something else to do or somewhere else to be, and it's easier to know and respect your limits for social interaction when you're able to literally walk away from the conversation. This doesn't exactly apply to electronic communication, especially when we're expected to be constantly plugged-in to our devices in this day and age.

I certainly don't mean to say that I don't like talking to my friends and peers—regardless of format—because I definitely do! Still, not a day goes by that I don't have a prolonged internal

argument with myself about whether or not to send a simple “Hey, what’s up?” over text. Even when I genuinely want to talk to someone, I worry about my own ability to keep responding and contributing to the conversation. This, combined with the aforementioned issue of insufficient personal time, makes gauging what level my social battery is at pretty stressful. As a result, I haven’t messaged or spoken to some of my friends in quite a while, and I’ve gone for days at a time with barely any social interaction outside of my family. Although I’m perfectly aware of the detrimental effect this is having on my mental health, I often can’t get past that initial anxiety to start a conversation, and it almost feels like I’m caught in a negative feedback loop due to these two conflicting problems. The quarantine has locked me in a paradoxical prison and as introverted as I may be, I’d give just about anything for society to go back to its normal socializing self.

If my personal struggles with the quarantine resonated with you at all, I just want to say that your feelings are completely valid and it’s okay to be struggling with these sorts of problems! This is uncharted territory for everybody and we’re all navigating it together, even though each of us is affected by the quarantine in our own unique way. My advice to anyone with introverted friends, especially if you haven’t spoken to them in a little while, is to reach out to them and ask how they’re doing! Sometimes we need a nudge, but we really do love and appreciate all of the people in our lives, and we don’t want to lose those immeasurably valuable relationships just because of a little hesitance and self-doubt on our end. Thank you for taking the time to read my vent-y ramblings, and I hope you’re all staying safe and doing well!