



## Episode 5: How Young Introverts Can Thrive on Social Media

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### Podcast:

SUSAN: This is *Quiet: The power of Introverts*. I'm Susan Cain.

DAVIS: My name is Davis Nguyen. I consider myself an introvert.

SUSAN: You met Davis in our first episode—he was the introverted guy who ran for student body president in middle school and won. Today, Davis works as a consultant and a motivational speaker. So, what's helped him learn to speak up?

DAVIS: Social media is one of the greatest things that's ever come out.

SUSAN: Yes, that's right: social media. We're so used to news about cyber bullying, internet predators, and sexting that it can be hard to

remember that social media can also do a lot of good—especially for introverts.

DAVIS: Unlike face-to-face communications in large groups, you're not blasting a megaphone at everyone. Being able to connect with someone online has made it a lot easier, because unlike being in person, where sometimes it can be rude just to leave the middle of conversation, it's okay to turn off my Twitter. It's okay to just send a couple emails and then come back and then reply later.

SUSAN: As a very shy child of immigrant parents, Davis struggled to fit in.

DAVIS: My parents emigrated from Vietnam, my family wanted me to essentially assimilate myself into American culture, and here I was, this kid, this five or six year old, who even from the beginning of school, I wanted to just spend time alone.

SUSAN: Social media became a sort of lifeline for Davis. It helped him find like-minded friends and eventually, it helped him change his life.

DAVIS: Because here I was, this kid from the south side of Atlanta, a school where people aren't supposed to go to Ivy Leagues, in fact, most people don't go to college. And I'm getting a chance to go to one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

SUSAN: Davis did the work, but social media was the tool that helped him build confidence and form important connections. So, how did he do it? And, how can your quiet children reap the benefits of media while still avoiding its dangers? That's our topic for today, so stay with us as we explore both sides of our most talkative technology, and its impact on our introverted children.

SUSAN: Like many parents, I struggle with how much screen time to allow my kids. And as they grow and the technology evolves, I think a lot about what apps they can use and what sites they can visit.

It's really important stuff. We all know screen time has a powerful effect on developing brains.

GARY: The more time young people spend in front of their screens and with their devices, the worse are their attention symptoms.

SUSAN: That's Dr. Gary Small. He's a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at UCLA where he directs the Memory and Aging Research Center. He's also the author of [\*iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind\*](#).

In a recent study, Dr. Small and his research team looked at a group of 13 year olds who went away to nature camp.

When I was a young kid, I went to sleepaway camp in the mountains of upstate NY. It was weeks and weeks in the woods with friends, strangers, camp directors, and way too much bug spray. Camp meant leaving the comforts of regular life behind for a while. But for today's kids, leaving home for camp can also mean leaving behind technology—which provided Dr. Small with the perfect opportunity.

GARY: The reason we wanted to study them was that they had five days at the camp without their screens, no technology whatsoever.

SUSAN: And their results may surprise you.

GARY: We found that after five days, they had significant improvements in their emotional and social intelligence. That's a concern that we've talked about in our books, in our other writings. Today's young people, the digital natives who spend hours and hours with their technology, they are losing their abilities to communicate face to face. When you have a conversation, there's not a lot of eye contact. They probably don't notice nonverbal cues and it's harder for them to recognize the emotional expressions during the conversation.

SUSAN: So the stakes are high. But that does not mean that technology is inherently dangerous. There are apps and games that have been shown to improve memory and mental function. And, says Dr. Small, social media can actually be a big help for a shy or introverted child.

SMALL: The spontaneous interactions create a lot of anxiety and makes that kind of individual want to retreat from the social interaction. By using texting or instant messaging or e-mail, it takes away some of that anxiety.

There's more time to respond, to compose themselves, and to have those conversations.

SUSAN: And, of course, shy kids often carry those anxieties into the classroom, where they spend most of their days. But, as more schools integrate computers and tablets into daily lessons, teachers are starting to notice something interesting.

ROYAN: I always thought that some of these tools that we were using were going to be extra beneficial for those students who were extroverted, and who had perhaps had more trouble sitting still, and were the classic kids that got in trouble for talking too much, you know, those kinds of kids.

SUSAN: That's Royan Lee. Royan is a teacher in Ontario, Canada and frequently speaks on technology and learning.

ROYAN: Little did I know after using it so much that one of the things that social media space—and online, blended learning environments were providing—was a place for quiet students who weren't as stimulated by constant face to face interaction. It was providing them more time to think, more time to communicate with their classmates and share their ideas in a much more comfortable space.

SUSAN: Royan did not target his quiet students when he introduced social media into his classroom, but an unmistakable pattern began to emerge.

ROYAN: I often found that the students in my class who preferred to be in the background, who didn't want everyone looking at them when they spoke, those were the ones that would just pop in there and share their most creative and really eye opening ideas. That's when I really started to make the connection that by having a blended learning environment in my class where people could share work, both in person and online, it meant that there were a lot of different opportunities, and different ways that people could talk to one another and share ideas.

SUSAN: I want to return now to Davis Nguyen because I think his story illustrates this point so well. Davis was painfully shy when he was younger, but he had a deep intellectual curiosity.

DAVIS: Because I didn't have many friends, books became my friends, every day I would just dive into reading a new book. In elementary school

and middle school, I was picked on for this, but in high school it became a powerful trait.

SUSAN: He did well academically and began to dream of bigger things.

DAVIS: I remember when I was 13, and my grandma gave me \$20, and I went out and I bought a poster of Harvard University, and I would just place this poster right next to my bed, I would just look at it, I would just dream about it, I would just think, "This is what's going to separate my life from everyone else."

SUSAN: At the time, Davis lived in the south side of Atlanta, an area marked by poverty, unemployment, and high dropout rates.

DAVIS: My school was called the worst school district in the U.S. We became the first school district in forty years to lose our accreditation. That's insane, because it's so hard to lose your accreditation. We broke nine state mandates. That's incredible.

SUSAN: In 2008, Clayton County made national news when they lost accreditation.

NEWS CLIP: This is only the second time in forty years this action has been taken against an entire school district and it means that kids might not be able to qualify for scholarships.

SUSAN: It took them nearly a year to regain it.

NEWS CLIP: 3000 kids got thrown under the bus. Over some adults who didn't do what they were supposed to do. That's all I kept thinking about, "How did you do this to these children?"

SUSAN: Davis realized he was going to need to get creative to achieve his dreams.

DAVIS: I found this website called College Confidential when I was a junior. Here was this site where people would just brag about their perfect scores, all their Science Olympiad medals and so forth. It's so easy to feel intimidated, but instead, I decided, "Wow, what can I learn from these people?" I think my love for books early on taught me that there were so many people smarter than me out there, as in, I can look at them as competition or I can look at them as a way for me to build myself up.

SUSAN: Davis reached out to over 100 students on the site, asking for SAT tips or feedback on his admissions essay—something he would never have done in person.

DAVIS: I would say about roughly 80 of them never replied back or just said no, but the 20 that did, they were able to help me, give me feedback. Slowly, my essays, they improved. My SAT scores improved, because I was able to get help and recommendations about what resources to use.

SUSAN: Davis was accepted to both Yale and Harvard. He ended up attending Yale. And he believes the only reason he got in was because social media gave him the courage to reach out to strangers and ask for help.

DAVIS: One girl from Harvard told me that one of my essays I'd spent 40 hours on was really bad. She said probably one of the worst admissions that she's read. It was one of my first essays I wrote for college admissions, and I thought it was good. I'm so glad she gave me that feedback, because I was able to throw it away, and the next essay I wrote turned out to be the one that I turned in to Yale and Harvard. The fact that I was able to ask for help, I was able to get really good feedback.

SUSAN: Davis admits that it was a risk to put himself out there. And, he acknowledges that not everyone was kind. But, he also felt that he had nothing to lose.

We're going to take a short break. When we return, we'll hear from another quiet teen who took a very different approach to social media. Plus we'll give you concrete tips on how to help your child develop a healthy relationship with technology.

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Podcast:

SUSAN: And we're back. I'm Susan Cain and this is *Quiet: The Power of Introverts*. Today we are talking about Social Media.

In spite of all of the negative things out there about social media, it can help quiet kids find their voice. But, as a recent study confirmed, it's extroverts who dominate social media and shape how it's used. And the pressure to put it all out there—all of the time—has some introverts saying, “no thank you.”

JULIA: I don't rely on social media.

SUSAN: That's Julia Perlmutter, a college freshman from New Jersey and an introvert and intern at Quiet Revolution.

I think that there is a societal pressure to make it appear on social media that we all have a buzzing social life, constantly doing fun things and I think introverts and extroverts alike kind of assume that the picture that people paint of themselves on social media is actually representative of what their day-to-day life is actually like when in reality it's just a biased set of moments of people's day-to-day experiences.

SUSAN: And says Julia, this warped picture is far from benign.

JULIA: I think that the fiction created by social media is extremely dangerous because oftentimes if we assume either consciously or subconsciously that everyone around us is happier more of the time or life is coming more easily to them than ourselves then we'll really start to question whether there's something wrong with us or what do other people have that we don't.

SUSAN: And this sense of being an outsider, of not fitting in, can be even more difficult for quieter kids who are often more sensitive than their more extroverted peers.

JULIA: Adolescents tend to have a lot of insecurities to begin with and are still figuring out what their interests are, who they want to be friends with, what they like, what they want to do in the future. Because they are already in this very vulnerable state, all the negative impacts of social media are kind of magnified.

SUSAN: Educator Royan Lee agrees, but he says the answer is not to shield your kids from social media.



ROYAN: One thing that I learned as a teacher, in particular was, the strange sort of paradox where I'd often find that parents who took a very positive approach to the use of their children's technology, often had children who used the technology positively. Any time I noticed parents trying to control things that are very difficult to control about the use of technology or taking a real hard line stance with it, I often found that it inevitably created a situation where their children would rebel, and inevitably end up doing the kinds of behaviors and tasks that we don't desire. Whether it's cyber bullying or taking in inappropriate images and so on.

SUSAN: The key, says Royan is to help your kids develop social media literacy as early as possible, preferably in elementary school.

ROYAN: In my experience, it's always easier to start younger and develop habits, because when you develop positive habits, then you start a trend in the way that your children approach the devices.

SUSAN: Royan is the father of three and his middle child Jackson, is an introvert.

ROYAN: I definitely noticed that he's drawn to digital spaces a lot more for communication and for learning as well, and for interacting with people. I've seen a lot of positive there. But then as a parent too, I'm always wary about making sure that it's always balanced out. Just because that you're drawn to those spaces, doesn't mean that's the only spaces in which you should reside.

SUSAN: It's important to monitor your child's use of social media to make sure it doesn't become a substitute for real relationships. The good news is that quiet kids often use online exchanges as a kind of dress rehearsal for interactions with their peers offline.

Platforms like Facebook and Snapchat make it easier to learn about each other in less threatening ways—without the fear of sweaty palms and flushed cheeks. And as they gain confidence through those virtual interactions, they're more inclined to try them in the real world.

That's what happened with Davis Nguyen. After graduating Yale with honors, he took the ideas that got him into school up a notch.

DAVIS: For example, Rolf Potts, who wrote this book called [\*Vagabonding\*](#), has always been a hero of mine, because he gave me a love for my travel. He's a big introvert, and I found out that he wanted to address a group of students. So, I just shot him an email and I said, "I would love to help you put on this event." We were able to get an audience of about 250 people to come out for his talk, and he was just blown away.

SUSAN: It worked so well that Davis launched a blog called "click with anyone".

DAVIS: Every week, I would do my research on one person who I look up to, and I would find a way to be helpful for them. Instead of trying to sell myself and being extroverted, I used what I naturally know. I'm an introvert. I love caring about people. I'm better at listening than I am at speaking. I would use that to my advantage and do my best to connect with them and help them in some way that I can. So with "click with everyone" every week, it is scary sending that email to someone I don't know. I always think someone's going to say, "You're annoying, please stop emailing people." I always think that's going to happen but it's never happened. In fact, I've been able to just travel so many places to meet so many different people who only a year or two ago were just names on a book that I was reading, or a subtitle on a TED Talk. Here I am having lunch with these people, here I am hosting events for them, here I am running with them, and all these outcomes came from the fact that it's just a little bit stretching myself every day. It's not jumping completely out of my comfort zone, but just extending it just a few inches every week.

SUSAN: And that's the key. To help quiet kids to use social media as a tool for development but not as a crutch to avoid face to face encounters. And I know it works. It was just this kind of incremental approach that I used to get comfortable with public speaking. It's also what brought Davis Nguyen into my life. I was one of the people Davis reached out to after he saw my TED Talk.

And now it's time to give you some concrete tips on how to help your quiet child navigate social media.

SUSAN: But first, if you're the parent of a quiet child ages 3 to 9, I'm excited to tell you about a new online course we've created that I

really think can change the way you parent your child. It includes interactive features like a tool to help you decide when and when not to press your child out of her comfort zone. And scripts to help you advocate for your child with those who say he's too shy. You'll also have the chance to interact with other parents of quiet kids. To check out the course visit [learn.quietrev.com](http://learn.quietrev.com).

Ok, and now for our tips!

Number one: Sit down with your child and analyze what's really happening behind all those smiles and likes he sees on social media. Give him the tools to realize that his friends' profiles are not necessarily reality but often an artificially curated version of their lives.

Number two: Screen time interferes with sleep—period. It just does. The screens need to vanish at least an hour before bedtime if you want to guarantee your child a good night of shut-eye.

Number three: Encourage your child to use social media not only as a refuge but also as a bridge from the online world to real-life connections. And remember, the time to forge these habits if you can is while your child is still young. Preferable during elementary school years.

That's it for our show today.

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favorite podcast app. And don't forget to leave us a rating or comment wherever you subscribe. I know it seems like a small thing, but it's one of the best ways to help other people find our show.

Next week on *Quiet*: the link between gifted and introverted children.

I'm Susan Cain. Thanks for listening!