

How to Become an Outcast

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The first and most important step is to remove all possible common interests with the vast majority of people. This in turn will vastly decrease your chances of meaningful social interaction and hence the number of your friends, as desired. With an inability to talk to the average person you will become averse to social situations and successfully appear boring or inept. It's simple! If you can just train yourself naturally to think of topics about which the average person has no interest — or even better, to which they have a visceral reaction of disgust or repulsion — then you will be sure not to overburden yourself with the demands of others such as friends, colleagues, and workmates.

You must therefore forget all the interest you once had in common conversation topics like sport, shopping, cooking or gardening. You may follow them casually, but if you were interested, now you must come to regard them as chore and duty, rather than passion. The sports pages of the newspaper are to be avoided — as to which, if subsequent suggestions are followed, you should not find too difficult, you should never be able to read all the way to the back page. Shopping should be regarded minimally as annoying, and any enthusiasm must be restricted to particular objects or particular bargains — certainly time-consuming shopping merely for its own sake should become taboo, for it lends itself to overly acceptable social outings. It is best if you are inept at cooking or gardening from the start, but otherwise you can limit yourself to bland and uninspired activity — you should find better ways to spend your evenings than in the kitchen, and better ways to spend your weekends than in the garden, even though these are ostensibly pleasantly anti-social activities!

If you must take up a hobby, it should be anti-social, intrinsically individual or prohibitively rare. That way you will avoid the threat of meeting or joining groups of like-minded people. Music is a good option; practice usually occurs without the hindrance of others. A non-orchestral instrument such as the piano is ideal. Other individual hobbies such as the various crafts are probably preferable; knitting does, however, raise the problem of knitting circles.

The point of any interest you follow is that it should be vanishingly infrequent, odd, and thoroughly offensive — for there remains the problem that an unusual interest may otherwise become a talking point. Politics is a perfect example for this purpose, as it involves the requisite moral obloquy, and with some

work you can become sufficiently offensive. You should become knowledgeable about history and politics; you should develop strong opinions and be prepared to argue about them. Being knowledgeable, you will not be able to abide by reading any mainstream media — this saves you from reading the sports pages of the newspaper. Left-wing beliefs are better than right-wing ones for this purpose; strong right-wing views will find you plenty of friends and allies among traditionally conservative sectors of society, including the media. Sufficiently radical left-wing beliefs which involve an aversion to consumerism will also save you from the potential sociability of shopping. If you can become sufficiently radical, you will automatically offend most people without even thinking about it, for most jobs are indefensible and most opinions are thoroughly reactionary. The apolitical will stare at you in stupor; the moderates will raise their eyebrows in disbelief at your forthrightness; the conservatives will grant you their undying enmity. Even if a conversation stays away from controversy, with sufficient attention to detail you will find you have nothing to say about them. Thus, you will automatically find yourself on the one hand either a bore or socially inept, when you say nothing, and on the other a self-righteous missionary or a shocking menace to good morals and manners, when you do. You will incite at least one of boredom, derision, outrage, scorn or indignation, accordingly. If you have taken it all up properly, you should feel that you are doing something perfectly reasonable as you invite such loathing, and your own humiliation or indignation should make the feeling mutual. It is the perfect method.

But interests and hobbies and politics are not all there is to life. Indeed, for most of your waking life you will probably be engaged in gainful employment. Much hinges, therefore, on your occupation.

Professions involving large salaries, or power of some sort — political, economic or otherwise — should be avoided, for these attract well-wishers like the plague. Even if you achieve your power by cunning, sycophancy and skulduggery — indeed, especially if you do — you will find all manner of hangers-on, all manner of attractions and temptations and easy friendships. They garner no prospects for your goal. Trades and service occupations may not involve such respectability but bring with them the danger that goes with human contact. A large number of clients or customers or people with whom you have random interactions portends the danger of it going too far — you may well find yourself with more connections than you can manage. Even lower-paying less stressful jobs which allow you time to develop stronger relationships with your workmates and colleagues at work, and your pre-existing friends outside, are a danger.

What you must find is an occupation which takes up much of your time; which is not well understood or which is reviled by the general population (else, again, there is the threat of your work becoming a talking point); which involves you sufficiently deeply that it absorbs much of your life; and which is taken on more or less individually. Parking inspectors, or ticket inspectors on the train, or police officers, evoke the requisite antipathy; but they have an unfortunate amount of power. A much better option is academia.

An undergraduate student may be pardoned for his or her profession, al-

though not if they have chosen their subject matter sufficiently well. As for postgraduate students, lecturers, professors and academics in general, their position is solidly inexcusable. A professor who is too brilliant may evoke awe as well as loathing, and power and respect as well as fear. Therefore too much brilliance is not encouraged, although to some extent it can aid with alienation and disconnection from ordinary people.

The choice of subject matter is important, though most options will do the trick to some extent. Some subjects are closer to reality than others, and some are better understood by the general public than others: your prospects may therefore vary.

For instance, computer science or software engineering brings with it the danger of a common interest in computer games, a dangerously prevalent interest among the general public; however the potential friend in such a case will usually be nerdish, and the threat will therefore be minimal. Engineering brings with it the prospect of actually engineering something physical, such as bridges or traffic intersections, of which an average person may have experience and about which, in certain extreme social situations, they may converse. The average person may have read some books, and this is the ever-present threat in literature; one had better be esoteric, then. The law is sufficiently esoteric but the connotation with a branch of government connotes far too much power. Commerce and finance indicate wealth and power also. No, we must find something abstract, esoteric and far removed from power; preferably, far removed from the real world. Philosophy fits the bill, and as a bonus may overlap with equally repulsive politics; but for some people it still retains the awe of mysticism. It may also apply to one's outlook on life, and hence to everyday conversation. History is also a promising option, but alas it is usually a history of human beings, and lacks the requisite otherworldliness. The historian may, if they are careless, know something interesting to the average person, and may have even learned something about human nature by following it through the ages. Art is also potentially a good choice, but too many people have opinions about art; even though the student is not, their subject is worldlier than it seems.

Abstract, esoteric, powerless, unworldly, and preferably repulsive: this leads us immediately to the most socially persecuted academics of all, the scientists. Things do not change so much from high school. To the average person, the academic scientist possesses all the correct attributes: geeky, freakish, nerdy, absorbed, too hard-working, meticulous, impenetrable, alien, unworldly, inaccessible. But not all the sciences are to be treated equally. Medicine is too highly paid and respected: it may, after all, save lives. Biology carries the same risk, without the pay or respect. Psychology deals with subject matter that is far too common, and everyone sees a shrink these days anyway. Chemistry is acceptable, although it has applications and hence risks connection to the everyday: obscure or purely theoretical topics nevertheless reduce this problem. Physics is a better option, although it too has its share of applications, and popularised accounts are far too numerous — Einstein has far too strong a grip on the public imagination. Mathematics, on the other hand, is perfect.

Nearly all of research mathematics is completely removed from any application, thereby avoiding the danger of meaningful conversation on any everyday topic. It has no connection at all, usually, to the real world: its protagonist, therefore, may be looked upon as other-worldly also, as alien. The subject matter is all-encompassing, difficult, and engrossing: so it will tend to mute other interests in more everyday matters, and hopefully produce in the student a healthy eccentricity. Provided one stays away from the applied and financial parts of the subject, and remains in the realm of pure mathematics, it has no redeeming features of potential power or wealth. It is dry and impenetrable: even the mathematicians do not understand what their colleagues are doing. And it is beautiful to its adherents, they follow its truth with a passion: they may therefore be viewed as deviant, esoteric, warped, bizarre, like zealous adherents of a lunatic religious sect. It is entirely unattractive: it is absolutely perfect.

The final step is to establish yourself in an appropriate geographic location. It is here that the academic lifestyle comes into its own. For one can find oneself in a university department comprised of similarly repulsive and inept individuals — however, still sufficiently inept and self-absorbed to avoid too close an interaction even among the like-minded. One can live in a campus bubble in a larger city, insulated from the rest of the world. One need have no contact outside their work; there is certainly no reason why it should happen. One need, in fact, not have any contact within their work, though a purely intellectual discussion now and then might be useful for academic purposes. An extra advantage of academia in the sciences is the gender distribution, so that one is spared the machinations of physical attraction to spur friendships and social relations.

With these tips, you will be engaged in productive, creative work performed at your own behest and under your own control; you will be free of various social superstitions and dogmas such as consumerism and conformism; you will be knowledgeable about the world and about humanity; you will understand your place in the universe; you will have a sense of yourself and be comfortable with it; you will control your own life. You will, therefore, guarantee your status as an outcast.