

## “Being an outcast in a class...”

Eminem “Cleaning out my closet”

It does not matter who you are, where you work or where you live. Each of us must have felt strange being among other people at least once in a lifetime. Strange because of our behaviour, problems, thoughts or generally because of ourselves. In such situations, we do not really want to talk to anyone, we think that no one will understand us. We want to isolate ourselves from others.

When I was in a primary school there was one girl in my class who was not talking to anyone from the class. She was sitting by the wall during every break. Only sometimes she used to move from the floor and go somewhere. Up till this day I do not know where she was going. She had only one person with whom she was talking. It was a really uncomfortable situation for the rest of us and I think also for her. Our teacher tried to help her and encouraged us to be friendly to her. What was the outcome? The majority of the class exchanged possibly a few words with her during the next three years. We lost contact with her after grammar school for good.

I remember that this situation was bothering me and I was trying to understand the answer why she was alienated. I talked to my mum about that girl. She said it was partially our fault (I mean my class’s fault) and that we should have done something to help the girl to integrate with us. But it was not as easy as my mum imagined... We could not understand why the girl acted like that, it was so hard and artificial to come up to her and start talking about some unimportant things, like marks or teachers etc. On the other hand, we felt awkward to ask her straight out why she stood far away from the class. So we never solved that problem.

Where did her alienation come from? How many people with problem like hers we have to meet in our life until we start talking about alienation problem without feeling that we are entering another person’s life? Of course not everyone who is alienated from the group needs help. Maybe she has already chosen a group of mates to belong to, or simply likes solitude? There is a very thin line between being alone by choice or being alone because of other people and it is too easy to cross.

Here I have related the story of the teenager I met, but I realize that the problem of alienation is omnipresent in every social group. There are adults who feel rejected, socially excluded, unaccepted at home or at work. Many of them live their life among people with whom they exchange casual “Good morning” everyday. And unfortunately their whole conversation ends with these two words, very often. Frightening? Who knows if my generation won’t end up like them some day?

We, young people, imagine our future to be better than the world created by our parents. The question is: how can we change it? First of all – by talking to each other! But with true intentions. We don't want anymore this small talk, cute smiles, feeling 'fine' all the time and playing friendly to all the surrounding world. We believe that everyone deserves honesty, sheer emotions and openness in contacts with another person. Here I see a great role of our teachers and school as such to teach us how to communicate effectively, make real friends or break the ice during the first contact. Children should be educated about the problem of the social alienation so as when they meet someone like that, they will know how to behave. I have read a lot about this issue and I strongly believe that simple ideas are the best. Why not start from giving a smile to someone who stays aside from the group. You can think that smile is too simple thing to change people's attitudes, but it really works. It breaks the glass of invisibility around the person and encourages some contact. We can try drawing this person into conversations, or games, for example after school. We have to show that it doesn't matter that we do not usually talk, we can always play together and grab an opportunity to talk during this game or any activity.

We cannot just pass by. For too many people, being alone is still a life problem which is impossible to solve by themselves. In my closing comment I would like to quote my friend who said that "It is people's obligation to try to help each other in this already cruel life".

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Stranger – in class, school, city

Having read the topics of the essays I paid attention the key word 'stranger' which appeared in most of them. This problem of the increasing human indifference in society is close to me as I have experienced it myself.

*Stranger in a city*

All my life I have spent in a small town environment. For almost 10 years I attended classes with the same people year by year.

I got on well with my peers, we had a lot in common and I felt great in their company for these years. Everything started to change when I joined the high school in Warsaw. Except for new obligations I had to face adapting to the different environment, people and city culture. I moved out from a small town to a bigger, glamorous, noisy capital city. I've been trying to adjust to a big city life. The most depressing thing I observed, which bothers me a lot, is the human alienation in the area where they live. I have read some research which showed

that the city inhabitants feel more alienated and excluded than the small towns inhabitants. I have a similar feeling when I am out in the city I feel anonymous for the people I am passing. For other passers-by we are only just a part of a street crowd. Recently I saw on the news a shocking situation where only 3 highschool girls came with help to a suffering man lying on the street. They performed first aid and called an ambulance. It appeared the he had heart attack. If these 3 teenagers hadn't reacted the man would be dead today. Unfortunately we are interested much less in people who surround us. We see a man and we think. 'Eee... he isn't from my family, probably he is drunk'. Even if he is drunk is it right to let him lie on the street? We cannot forget that we are all humans and we should live in harmony and help when a weaker person needs our help.

### *Stranger in a class*

I have always thought that the elementary goal of school is not only to teach but to unite students, teach them teamwork rules and fair play and also develop their open minds to avoid prejudice and intolerance. Unfortunately the contemporary school system fails in this matter. An average teenager of my age struggles to find acceptance in a peer group. The problem of peer exclusion is more and more omnipresent. In school environment we have to face with so called peer pressure to have the best mobile phone, wear designer labels, listen to a commonly recognized music and generally do what your group is doing. Those who cannot meet these requirements are regarded as being worse, and consequently get excluded from the peer group. Another common problem is "the rat race" among teenagers. My friends compare their marks with the other students and they tend to boast about their successes. All others' failures are a great reason to gossip and make fun of others. If the person is popular in their class or school they get more help and attention, an isolated student is alone in his needs. The feeling of being alienated is even bigger. However, I strongly believe that there is much that can be done to improve the present situation of many outcasts living among us, simply by talking about this problem on a public forum.

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