Rude People

and how (not) to be one

Oliver Roberts immerses himself in 'assholity'

Illustration: **Keith Tamkei**

THE truth is the meek shall not inherit the earth. According to Aaron James's book *Assholes: A Theory*, "asshole production seems to be on the rise". That was in 2012. Jump forward four years and you're looking at a whole bunch more assholes walking around who probably weren't accomplished assholes before.

Two reasons for this: (1) you only get to be a proper asshole once you've left school and have actually started to infiltrate society with your general assholeness, and (2) it seems like there's this movement where we're actually being encouraged to be assholes, to be "more assertive", to "go after what you want" because that's how you become rich and powerful and famous and get really hot women to like you. (Of course, women can be assholes too, but I'm not a woman so let's focus on the assholity of men because, biologically, many men have been chemically flooded with whatever intricate compounds and helixes urge them to be total jerks).

But, referring to point (1), this doesn't mean you only start being an asshole when you get your driver's licence. Assholity tends to emerge early in life, basically as soon as the asshole-to-be is forced to mix with human beings other than his doting parents, so, like, pre-school. Aged five, future assholes are the boys who find it easy and natural and expected to tease quieter, smaller, "weaker" boys and say nasty things to girls and generally run around with sticks, shouting and smashing things. They're the ones who ruin games by not playing by the rules and/or hogging the ball and/or pushing over any boy who gets in their way.

Come high school and the consequence of various asshole-chemical pituitary workings tends to be the same, only this time the bullying and entitlement are way more pronounced because the growing asshole has become socially more intelligent (that is, sociopathic) and adept at manipulating people/situations for his sole gain. Plus, most assholes tend to have size on their side so they're the boys who develop early and, because they're assholes, start hitting the heavy weights section of the gym four times a week and drinking toxic amounts of protein shake and in all probability ingesting steroids because they figure it's worth risking the well-documented side-effects of steroids because bulking up only enhances your ability to dominate and say and act any damn way you please because if anyone so much as dares to confront you you'll beat the shit out of them, ha-ha.

I'm pretty sure I'm not an asshole. Sure, I've done some assholey things like hurt girls and wear wraparound sunglasses. Gosh, in my early twenties I even used to drive a wanked-up Opel Corsa with a deafening exhaust and an Ayrton Senna sticker on the back window. But then I stopped doing stuff like that because the confrontations my actions caused became unpleasant and stressful and caused bouts of self-loathing. I don't think I ever made a conscious choice, like, "OK, I'm going to try my best not to be an asshole," I think I just never had the upbringing, the compulsion or indeed the BMI to be a 24/7 asshole.

But then there's this male thing where supposedly being an asshole gets you ahead in life. Studies have shown that being arrogant and socially aggressive tends to garner you more respect peers-wise, and that impertinence and general rudeness are seen as traits of important people, and that the man who considers himself "agreeable" tends to make less money than the man who wears pointy white leather shoes and T-shirts with aggressive slogans on them and still listens to high-energy rave music in his thirties (the studies don't actually specify these traits, obvs, they just say "than less agreeable men", but we all know what this implies so . . .)

Parked anywhere and any way I damn-well pleased

Now I'm 37, and even though I managed to convince a beautiful girl to marry me and even though I own a carbon-fibre bicycle and still weave in and out of the traffic because I'm an impatient driver, apart from these what-could-be-deemed asshole traits, I really don't think I am or have been much of an asshole for any prolonged period of my existence, hence the reason I'm not by any stretch rich or powerful, but maybe why I'm quite content (although I wouldn't say "agreeable").

But what if I acted like a full-on asshole for a week? Would I feel more powerful and therefore more driven to match that sense of power by making plans to pursue absurd future wealth? Once I was over the shame of my behaviour, would the selfishness and impunity become compelling, even addictive?

To find out, here's what I did:

Parked anywhere and any way I damn-well pleased

Double-parking or parking in non-parking spaces or idling outside a shop entrance while my passenger went inside for 10 minutes and I ended up creating a one-way road situation because I refused to move my car — I figured this was the easiest introduction to my week of assholeness because, apart from people driving past and shaking their heads and/or fists at me from behind tempered glass, it's fairly non-confrontational (being a general non-asshole, I don't enjoy confrontation), although I did, on two separate double-parks, receive notes stuffed under my windscreen wipers, one saying "Nice parking :)" and the other "Asshole".

Went to gym and hogged the weight machines while wearing my cap backwards

The fact that I have even have a gym membership and actually use the weight machines probably classifies me as a little bit of an asshole, but what really made it bona fide is when I went during peak hour and, instead of removing myself from, say, the incline bench press machine when I was finished doing my set (asshole term) I sat on it and WhatsApped and watched a car video while a whole bunch of other people stood around waiting to use the machine. I also had my earphones in my ears and when someone approached and politely asked if I was done with the machine I shook my head and didn't even take out the earphones.

Became completely disproportionate, irate-wise, when a waiter took what I perceived as too long to bring the bill

Verbally abusing and humiliating people in subservient positions is classic asshole protocol. They're easy targets because they obviously earn less money than you and basically have no choice but to agree to your demands/criticisms. After a meal at an Indian restaurant — where I decided to speak loudly and put my feet up on the chair opposite me — the waitress took longer than expected to bring the bill so I called the manager and said this was "unacceptable" and that the waitress was clearly "lazy and incompetent". When the bill eventually came I looked at the waitress and said, "Finally," and "Are you deaf or something?" I gave a measly tip and said something like, "Shocking service. Really," while punching my pin code into the machine. (PS: My wife, aware that I was doing this asshole experiment thing, made up the appropriate tip amount by slipping some cash into the bill after I'd stormed out and started revving my car in the parking lot after ignoring the car guard who was standing in the rain.)

Watched the US Open men's tennis final (10pm-nearly 2am) with all available windows/sliding doors open

I'm generally not an asshole and therefore don't live in a massive house that my callous greed and creepy social-greasing has earned me. I live in a complex with multiple neighbours and, apart from one who is actually a legitimate relapsing asshole, we all understand that sound travels and that we need to be mindful of each other in order to live in harmony.

The US Open men's final on a Sunday night was the perfect opportunity to be a total dick and just assume that everyone else was watching the match too and therefore I not only watched the entire match with the volume at an unreasonably high level, but I also had both sliding doors and pretty much every window wide open, from 10pm until nearly 2am, not caring at all that people have to get up early for work the next morning, because I didn't (have to get up early for work) and so who cares?

Went on the internet and started verbally attacking and belittling people

Internet forums and comment sections are classic hunting grounds for the asshole. Not only can you hide behind a username, you can cause trouble en masse and, with enough data and open pages, abuse, like, hundreds of people at any given time. I did it all — accused people of racism and sexism, dismissed perfectly innocent comments as "lame" or "ignorant", called people "asshole" and any other number of ****-type words and basically caused a whole lot of anger and confrontation and bitterness where there wasn't any to begin with, just because I could.

So, after a week of this I felt the following: exhausted, angry, stressed, self-disgusted, guilty, ashamed, apologetic, reflective, and then very pleased at the realisation that I'm not really very capable of being an asshole and that it's actually much easier to be polite and kind and understanding and patient.

Not that this is some moral piece — be an asshole if you want (if you're already one you probably can't help it), I'm just saying I don't know where you get the reserves of energy and unpleasantness to keep it going your whole life. I also learnt that it's oddly disappointing when someone doesn't react to your acts of assholeness. So, good citizens, leave assholes alone and you're the winner. **LS**

Became completely irate when a waiter took too long

Watched the US Open final with all the windows/sliding doors open

JERK WITH HEART

A SHORT film called *The World's Biggest Asshole* has become a runaway hit on YouTube (it had 60 million views in the fortnight after its launch) and is being praised by even members of the anti-swearing league for its success in encouraging millennials to become organ donors.

Financed by Donate Life America, the film stars indie actor Thomas Jane (*The Thin Red Line*; *Stander*) as Coleman Sweeney, who has a postgraduate degree in assholity.

Sweeney is a sleazy lowlife who throws small change at strippers and tosses urine-filled beer bottles out of his truck on the highway. He is a creepy bully who verbally abuses animals, children, old people and the disabled.

When he dies, however, Sweeney's organs save the lives of good people who gather to pay tribute to him, with the payoff line: "Even an asshole can save a life."

Two weeks after the film was released, organ donor registrations had increased by 700%, said Joe Alexander, chief creative director of The Martin Agency, the ad company that convinced Donate Life to approve the "asshole" concept.

Alexander told Forbes: "We drew on stories about donor families being surprised that a family member had registered to be a donor because they were an 'asshole' in life. We liked the juxtaposition of the incredible gift against the reality that in life the person could have done better, but in death, they were selfless. And boom — now we have *The World's Biggest Asshole*."

Watch it on YouTube. — *Sue de Groot*

Are you an asshole?

Take our handy quiz and find out!

1) The only books I read are sports biographies: Yes/No
2) I drive with the window down and my arm resting on the window frame: Yes/No
3) I have at some point worn a Bluetooth earpiece: Yes/No
4) I have a subscription to Men's Health magazine: Yes/No
5) I wax my chest hair/scrotum: Yes/No
6) I have a scrotum: Yes/No
7) I have a personalised number plate: Yes/No
8) I'm the first to put my airplane seat in the recline position: Yes/No
9) I have no affiliation to the EFF and yet I have publicly worn a beret at some point: Yes/No
10) I have an actual list of all the people I've slept with: Yes/No
11) I follow Dan Bilzerian (pictured) on Instagram and consider him my idol: Yes/No
12) I often end my sentences with "bud": Yes/No
13) I have used the term "110 percent" at least once: Yes/No
14) I have written "#squadgoals" and/or "#relationshipgoals" on social media: Yes/No
15) If I lived in the United States I would vote for Donald Trump: Yes/No
16) I enjoy any occasion to "network": Yes/No
17) I have stood/sat/slept in a queue for hours/overnight for the opening of a Starbucks/Krispy Kreme/Burger King and/or the launch of the new iPhone and then gone on social media and boasted about being one of the first to consume/purchase one of these products: Yes/No
18) I have said the word "lol" instead of actually laughing: Yes/No
19) Michael Bay is my favourite director: Yes/No
20) I wore/am planning to wear shorts on my wedding day: Yes/No

Asshole-meter:
3-5 yesses: Some asshole traits but not an actual asshole
6-9 yesses: Part-time asshole with the potential to become bonerfide
10-14 yesses: Actual proper asshole with few, if any, redeeming qualities
15-20 yesses: Catastrophic assholeness/borderline sociopath/Donald Trump