

That Look College Opt-Outs Get

There is a phenomenon I've noticed over the nearly 5 years since I decided not to go to college. I'll call it the college opt-out look.

It happens like this:

PERSON: *Are you in school? / Where did you go to school?*

YOU: *Oh, I didn't go to university.*

PERSON: *Oh.*

Accompanying this response is a look that suggests you might be less bright than you appear. If the person is nice, they might half-heartedly add something about how "college isn't for everyone."

Immediately accompanying that, you'll find in yourself a desire to justify yourself.

This is a test: will you seek to soften the blow of being different?

"Yes, but I have an awesome job."

"Oh, I was accepted into X college/got X scholarship. I just wanted something more."

"I didn't need college - I'm already smarter than my peers and know how to teach myself."

You could say all these things. But that would be ego and insecurity talking - the same ego and insecurity that you chose to disregard when you chose your own life path around education.

There are going to be plenty of people who believe that you are ignorant, lazy, or unwise for not going to college. They are going to give you plenty of chances to deal with the awkwardness of having made an unconventional decision. You will want desperately to say something to wipe the look of pity or contempt or condescension from their faces.

Or you could own it. You could decide not to bat a lash. You could acknowledge the fact that you don't have a degree, and move on like it's not a big deal - because it isn't. What **is** a big deal is how you live your life and what you do with it.

You might have to put up with some looks of pity, contempt, and condescension. But you can learn to smile inside in response. You'll be in solidarity with your fellow opt-outs. You'll be respecting your own decision enough to state it unapologetically. And you'll live loudly enough that anyone who knows you knows that any prejudice around college opt-outs is nonsense.

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