

The Agoraphobic's Anti-Guide To Dating

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Advice is everywhere. Like a cat who knows you despise it, it's in your lap. Similar to those compact sewing kits, useless despite its good intentions. And like your cube mate's cold, unsolicited but you get it anyway.

Common advice to a single person is how easy it is to meet someone—providing you're in the right place. "Ride the bus!" "Take a cooking class!" "Dunk yourself in Velveeta cheese and visit your neighborhood sports bar during the Super Bowl!"

My thought is if you can't get away from it, try it. Debunking a theory is always better with hard facts. So I decided to take heed of the top places to meet someone and see how good this advice really is.

1. Home Improvement Store

Boy paradise! Everyone knows a home improvement store is the male equivalent of Nordstrom. And how can a guy not approach a damsel in drill-bit distress in a warehouse full of testosterone? I put on my best sweats and went in search of "thingies" and "little (hand gesture) that make the (hand gesture) go like (hand gesture)."

Perhaps it was a mistake searching in the gardening department but I needed potting soil. Saw some prospects but honestly I wasn't sure I *wanted* to meet a man in the gardening section. It does show a nurturing side, an ability to lay down roots, and a taste for pleasing aesthetics but still—pansies are so...pansy. (*Success Average: 0 for 1*)

2. Church

Okay, well I never made it to church cause I couldn't find any services that started after 11:00 a.m. Look, if God wanted me to be a guest in His house, church would be on a Saturday night and communion would be taken with cold Corona Lights. So this is a no-go. (*Success Average: 0 for 2*)

3. Airplane

Granted you can't take in an airplane ride same as you would a Sunday matinee, but if you find yourself flying the friendly skies, definitely take advantage. On a recent trip cross-country, I decided to forego the Benadryl and keep my eyes open to my fellow frequent flyers. Scanning Gate 21, my prospects seem about as appetizing as the beef ravioli being loaded into the fuselage. Unfortunately the goods on board aren't much

more appealing. Or even legal. In addition to every little leaguer in the Cincinnati area, I was sharing recycled air with several honeymooners, 13 nuns, 88 runny nostrils, 9,637 kicking babies with ear infections, and an annoyingly romantic movie about a down-on-her-luck teenager who runs into Julie Andrews at Price Chopper and finds out she's not an acne ridden, sexually promiscuous sixteen year old but a princess who must fly to her very own third world country to marry a hot twenty-something who loves her for who she is.

I draw the sad conclusion that chances of meeting someone on an airplane are about as likely as complimentary headsets, and I could not have had less opportunity in my own row. Seat D stunk like cigars and had a cough so violent it caused turbulence, and Seat F suffered a strain of rigor mortis and proceeded to punch me in the boob every time he was about to fall asleep. I guess I should take what I can get—in my case, that ended up being a cold. (*Success Average: 0 for 3*)

4. Grocery Store

Dinner party tonight. Because I'm always late, I'm in charge of bringing dessert, and because fondue pots were on sale at Target, that's what we're having. I'm also having a go and checking out what is tasty at the supermarket. Hunting for pound cake, a well-dressed man carrying produce solicits my opinion on determining the freshness of his selected cantaloupes. He questions the ripeness of his cantaloupes. "What is this?" I ask. "I feel your melons then ask you to feel mine? No thanks, Bud." He laughs and admits he has no interest in my agricultural prowess; he *just wanted to talk to me*. Looking into my basket filled with chocolate chips, Cool Whip, Nilla Wafers, marshmallows, and Butterfingers, I determine this guy is either into kinky sex or a bulimic. I give him my number. (*Success Average: 1 for 4*)

5. Laundromat

I hate it here. It's dirty, it's expensive, and it makes me feel domestically challenged because I have no idea how to work these stupid machines. I land myself in a pissy mood upon realizing this isn't *Friends* and laundromats are not cool. If you live somewhere without laundry facilities, you're either staying in a youth hostel or your wife just kicked you out. The smell of other people's BO and Snuggle is too much to bear and I decide I cannot wait for my clothes to finish drying, so I go buy new ones. (*Success Average: 1 for 5*)

6. Men's Clothing Store

I realize two things within my first five minutes of shopping for my fake gay best friend: men have very limited clothing options, and men don't shop for their own clothes. There's nothing but estrogen and perfume in this store, and that goes double for the sales staff. Could they all be shopping for fake gay best friends or is my theory correct that everyone is part of a couple? One girl compliments my highlights so I give her the

name of my stylist. At least someone will get busy from this. (*Success Average: 1 for 6*)

7. Gym

I couldn't possibly feel less desirable as I do right now with yoga pants careening up my butt. There are definitely some prospects here, but no one wears a ring while weight lifting so determining availability proves difficult. And I'm not sure if men think the heaving grunt they emit after every curl is some sort of verbal pheromone, but it's about as pleasant as a wet sneeze spraying onto another's hand.

Thirty-four seconds on the treadmill leaves me feeling breathless and more flushed than the advice in the article I was reading on how to improve my chances of reaching the "Big O." A guy walks by and asks if I like bacon. "I don't eat meat," I tell him. He walks away giving me a dirty look and asks a girl climbing the Stairmaster if "*this bike was taken.*" Oh well. Time to hit the showers. (*Success Average: 1 for 7*)

8. Public Park

I borrow Maddie, a friend's dog, which is supposed to be a major park perk. We visit a city favorite with a nice trail and lovely scenery both natural and man-and-wife made. Undoubtedly there are prospects galore here on roller blades, bikes, and skateboards, and they do take notice of me—thankfully so, or I'd still be picking blacktop out of my pores. Why do men have such attitude on wheels? They're either going too fast or are more interested in their iPods to strike up a conversation. And the only people who stop to pet my rent-a-dog are little kids and women. Maddie manages to snag quite a few butt-sniffs, which is equal to phone numbers in the canine world. She's a looker, that dog. (*Success Average: 1 for 8 for humans, 1 for 1 for dogs*)

In Conclusion...

The bulimic fetishist hasn't called, but my fake gay best friend got some new threads and the daisies in my window box are flourishing. Looks like you'll have as much a chance meeting someone in any of these places as you do in a crosswalk, a gas station, or the dentist. Basically, they're everywhere and nowhere. The final average of these popular spots is an anemic .125. (Maybe I should have tried a baseball game?)

So, keep your eyes open, lookers, but not too wide. Sometimes you find the best things when you aren't looking.

Shelly Mazzanoble has never gotten so much fresh air in her life and has become agoraphobic since writing this article. She lives in Seattle with a window box full of dead daisies and enjoys chatting on the phone with her fake gay best friend.