

# The Sociology of Leopard Man

By Logan Feys

- 1 He rejects society and all it has to offer in favor of a simple and solitary existence. He calls himself Tom Leppard. But he is more widely known as “Leopard Man,” owing to the fact that he is tattooed from head to toe with leopard spots. He is, according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the world’s most tattooed man. He is, according to society, a freak.
- 2 Normally, I find myself unimpressed with individuals who radically change their appearance through extreme tattooing, piercings, hair mutilations, etc. Such people are desperate for society’s attention. Having failed to attract it in a positive form, they go for shock value. They may call themselves “non-conformists,” but most anti-social freaks, in their obsession with displaying their freakishness, are just as dependent on others’ opinions as approval-seeking socialites.
- 3 Leopard Man, however, is no ordinary freak. He doesn’t live for other people’s reactions. He lives in solitude. Tom Leppard, now in his 60s, spends most of his days in a small cabin in the Scottish wilderness. He ventures into civilization only when he needs food and supplies (he wears clothes to cover up his colorful body).
- 4 Society looks down upon freakish and extraordinary individuals alike and views them with suspicion. Ordinary people fear what they don’t understand. They especially fear loners, those mysterious creatures who pursue their own values without seeking others’ permission or permitting others to hamper them.
- 5 Pop psychologists reassure the masses that abnormal people suffer from psychological disorders. Indeed, plenty of weird people do have serious mental problems. But so do plenty of “normal” people. Who are the con-artists, the spouse-beaters, the child-molesters of the world? They are, overwhelmingly, the priests, the lawyers, the socially upstanding next-door neighbors of the world. Why do so many millions of “normal” people suffer from alcoholism, eating disorders, panic attacks, depression, and other debilitating conditions? Could it be that the desire to “fit in” has led to these self-inflicted diseases?
- 6 Conformity can be seen as the world’s most common but dangerous psychological disorder. To be human is to be an individual human, with individual tastes, talents, values, and dreams that are distinct from those of others. Living in society, we are under constant pressure to surrender our individuality to the will of the majority, the school, the workplace, the family, etc.
- 7 Seceding from society, as Leopard Man has done, would certainly free us from social pressures. Leopard Man – unlike so many millions of people who are slaves to society’s demands – is happy. In a rare television interview, Leppard remarked, “As far as I’m concerned, if there is a paradise on Earth, I’m in it. You’re welcome to what you’ve got. I’ll keep this.”
- 8 How many people in society could sincerely utter such sentiments?

- 9        Nevertheless, being around people and their creations can be worthwhile. I happen to enjoy being around people. One can enjoy the benefits modern society offers without becoming dependent on society. But it takes a strong will. Perhaps Leopard Man lacks the psychological strength to stand on his own within society. Perhaps he simply doesn't find any value in society. I'm in no position to judge his particular choice. I think one can be part of society and attain happiness or shun it completely and attain happiness. Or, like me, one can try to do both.
- 10       Most of the time you should be an active and contributing member of society. But from time to time, get society out of your life and out of your mind – not permanently (necessarily), but from time to time. Escape to non-social environs from time to time. Be like Leopard Man from time to time. He may not be a hero, but he is free. Be psychologically free enough and strong enough to live independently, leaving society and entering society on no one's terms but your own.