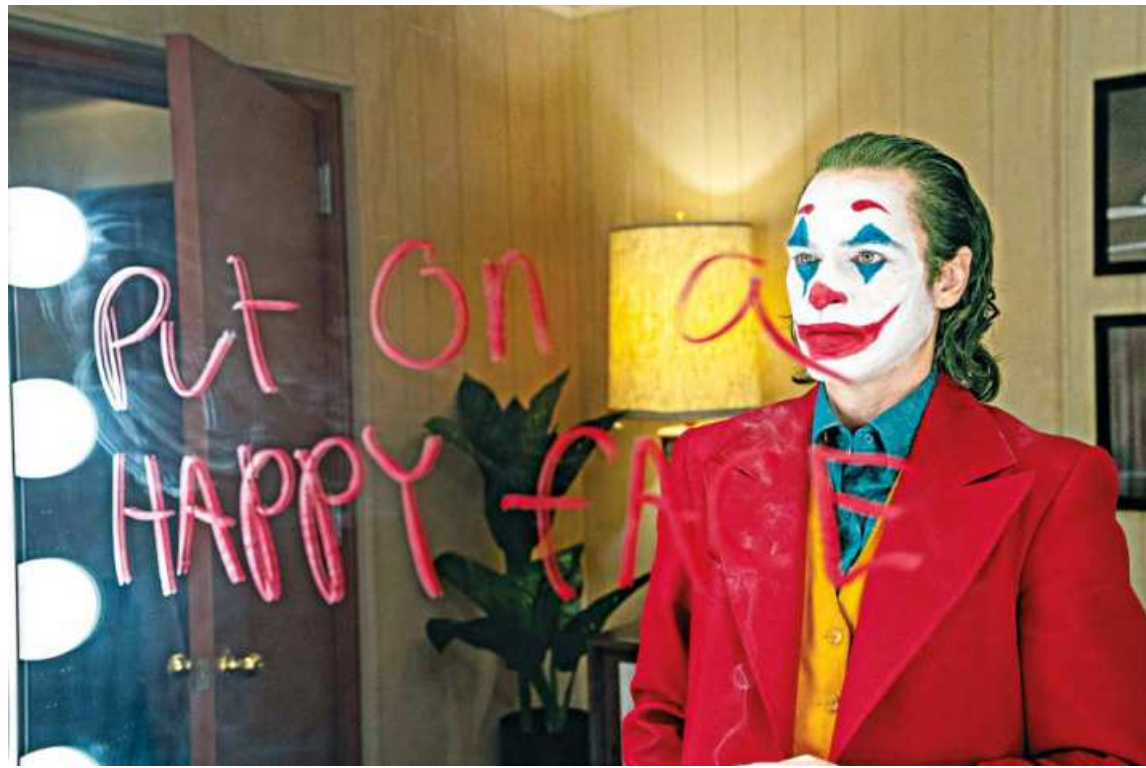


# How Stigmatised Are Mental Health Issues in Fiction?



RASHA JAMEEL

Watching *Gossip Girl* (2007) in middle school was sort of a formative experience for me. The wildly-popular CW series shaped the way I saw high school and affluent teens. Like many oblivious teenagers during that time period, I thought the series

offered me the kind of relatability that my other favourite TV shows couldn't: the emotional baggage that came with being a teen.

One of the series' lead characters, Blair Waldorf suffered from an eating disorder called bulimia nervosa. I thought that was bold and progressive of the show -- until

I began experiencing the disorder myself at age 16, and realised firsthand how problematic *Gossip Girl*'s depiction of the disorder really was.

Mental health issues have been pivotal aspects in books and cinema for a long time, from Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) to John Green's *Turtles All The Way Down* (2017), Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to Brad Anderson's *The Machinist* (2004). The accuracy with which mental health issues are portrayed is a different story.

When they're not being passed off as another trope to further the "sad girl culture", where a woman's depressive episodes make her all the more endearing, mental health disorders are insensitively used as the primary motivation behind an individual's criminal proclivities. Take Jonathan Demmes' *The Silence of The Lambs* (1991) for example, where there are two antagonistic characters presented in the movie, Dr. Hannibal Lecter and Jame Gumb/Buffalo Bill, both of whose violent urges are fueled by their psychologically disturbed minds.

Netflix's *Bulbbul* (2020) received criticism for its out-of-place and unnecessary portrayal of an autistic man as a predator, with seemingly no proper explanation behind the mentally handicapped man being capable of the horrifying act. The *Batman* franchise's supervillains Two-Face and Joker upped the ante on mentally unstable people being violent. Psychological disturbance forms the crux of both the fictional individuals' character arcs and backstories through countless issues and adaptations of one of the most beloved comic book franchises of all time. Two-Face is either sane and good, or mentally unsound and evil. The Joker's sadistic behaviour mimics his chaotic state of mind in the most destructive ways possible. Director Todd Phillips' take on the character in *Joker* (2019), sealed in the stereotype that all mentally unstable people want to watch the world burn.

Another problematic stereotype that's seemingly on the rise is the one where depressed individuals chose to take their own lives, caught up in some delusion of heroism. Netflix original *13 Reasons Why* (2017) was heavily criticised for exploiting the aforementioned stereotype by popularising this trope through its female lead Hannah Baker. Similar sentiments were found to be

echoed in Iain Reid's *I'm Thinking Of Ending Things* (2016), where the protagonist meets his tragic demise in a very graphic plot twist.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) is a rare exception from the "mentally unsound = homicidal" stereotype. Gilman's literary work was probably one of the earliest ones with a sensitive and feminist tone that drew attention to the mental health difficulties that can arise in women, particularly in 19th century America. The figures that moved in her wallpaper represented the plight of women suffering in a patriarchal society and therefore her "mental illness" was a means of exploring what society really does to a woman. Susanna Kaysen's memoir, *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), gave its readers a deeply insightful look into the lives of women receiving treatment in psychiatric hospitals in the 1960s, with real people instead of a monochromatic world consisting only of heroes and villains.

Following in suit with a more realistic and heartfelt portrayal of mental health issues in the 20th century are the films *Adam* (2009) and *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012), and the Netflix original *Atypical* (2017). In Gavin O'Connor's *The Accountant* (2016), actor Ben Affleck played an autistic vigilante of sorts in an attempt to break out of the "bad guy" mold usually reserved for mentally handicapped people.

Fictional characters like Blair Waldorf showcase how an eating disorder such as bulimia nervosa can be part of a delusional "fitness" ideal. What they don't tell you is how the disease is neither -- how it's all about a constant state of fatigue, damaged teeth, aching joints, and extreme hair fall. Not everyone struggling with bipolar disorder is a maniacal killer, they can also be an erratic person discovering love with another erratic person. Evil people don't necessarily have to fail their psychiatric evaluation to be proven evil, they just are.

Mental health disorders aren't meant to be treated as anything outside of what they really are: an impairment of the mind. Please handle these subjects with care, and with utmost caution.

*The author accidentally poured Savlon on her head instead of her favourite essential oil. Teach her to properly differentiate between the two at rasha.jameel@outlook.com*

# YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

## Starting a business during the pandemic

AYSHA ZAHEEN & TASNIM ODRIKA

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the closure of multiple small businesses all over the country, along with a significant drop in profits for the existing ones. Keeping this dreadful scenario in the backdrop, some youths have dared to embark into the land of entrepreneurship in the midst of all this chaos. Today, we delve into what led these people to start their first venture in the middle of a pandemic and how they are managing to hold their own.

For Syeda Afrin Tarannum, a student of North South University, her love for baking led her to open her business Whiskers (@whiskersinc), an Instagram-based bakery which sells cakes, cupcakes and doughnuts.

"I have always wanted to have a small Parisian café where I serve all sorts of desserts and cakes along with some good coffee," she recounts. Whiskers stands as

the stepping stone towards her dream. For others, a lack of quality products in the markets led them to make their own.

Sanjida Rahman, a soon to be graduate and one of the co-founders of Eliza Ayurved, started her own brand after using a particular overpriced and overhyped hair oil. Her store now sells hair oils made with various types of natural ingredients that promote healthy hair and they are all manufactured at home.

Similar to these stories, a lot of these youth-led ventures started mainly due to their love for a particular craft and their willingness to share it with the world. The pandemic just provided them with the missing piece of the puzzle. With the educational institutes closed, they finally had the time to sit down and actually make a detailed plan for business operations. These ventures also provided them with an extra income as the lockdown had hampered



Sanjida recounts, "All well-known delivery companies refused to deliver our products as they are packaged in glass vials." However, they all managed to strike balance, some by hiring their own delivery men and others by finding their own friend's company coming to their aid.

There also remained the struggle of delivering products with the circulation of misinformation that Covid-19 can spread through packages. Entrepreneurs like Jafna Chowdhury from Sweet Theory, an online-based dessert shop, took it upon themselves to educate their customers, "There's no evidence of the disease being transmitted via food or packaging to date. Plus, we have fully trained our staff to properly acknowledge basic hygiene protocols."

Another problem that the entrepreneurs mentioned was the lack of mobility due to the pandemic and how it did not allow them to buy the required ingredients and products on their own. Such entrepreneurs, apart from pertaining quality in their products, were also wary of not availing goods to their customers that they could easily find elsewhere. Whilst clothing businesses struggled with not being able to first-hand witness the quality of their raw materials and fabrics, many other ventures struggled with buying ingredients at competitive prices.

Afrin tells us, "Since this is a solo venture, I have to collect all the ingredients myself while ensuring proper pricing. To add to that, going outside during a pandemic is not preferable." Although she struggled with this in the beginning, soon she was able to find a way to do what needed to be done.

Whilst one of the main targets of conducting businesses is extracting profit, these young entrepreneurs are more concerned with building their own clientele first. Some of these businesses are only a few months old and are yet to break even. There are also ventures that made profit in a few weeks. Despite all this, their main concern now is to give the best possible service with minimum profit, since the market is growing and is very competitive.

"I did not expect my venture to be profitable in just two months. I will allow myself more time to make profit. For now

satisfying clients with honest business is the goal," acknowledges Ramisa Farhana, who runs Artsy Closet (@artsy\_closet.by\_ramisa), an Instagram-based service selling handcrafted niche jewellery.

With decisions like these, oftentimes the outcome may lead to regret, given it can be rather taxing and time-consuming. However, these young entrepreneurs have a very positive outlook. Even though they recognise the struggles and initial mishaps, they very much look forward to conducting their businesses post-pandemic, despite the changes that will come about. Whilst some plan to put up fliers when their university reopens, others plan to expand their product line and stock quantity. Events and pop-up shops to ensure better reach amongst the mass are being considered by the apparel brands. Some of them even expressed their desire to open their own outlet in the future, however, others relayed that they would rather maintain their businesses online and prioritise their education first, willing to go as far as putting things on hold during semester finals.

Farhan Farabi, 22-year old sophomore from Brac University and one of the owners of Sable, an online-based clothing brand, exclaims, "We are actually feeling quite ecstatic. We got to interact with a lot of people and learned about how to market our products, how to engage with customers, and also how to make and close deals."

With increases in unemployment rates, disruptions in education, and fears of not having enough skilled graduates in the country after the pandemic is over, watching the youths conquer their ventures with vigour and optimism for the future provides the rest of us with hope too. We can be certain that these young individuals will be able to adapt to any changes in the future and hold their own well.

*Aysha thinks good things take time, at least a year and a half. Tell her all about how your good things took time, too, at zaheenaysha10@gmail.com*

*Tasnim Odrika has only one personality trait and that is cats. Share ideas for new personality traits with her at odrika\_02@yahoo.com*

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE

SHOUT



their tutoring jobs, which is the major source of income for most of the youths of our country.

However, even with time on their side, running a business in the middle of a pandemic has its multitudes of challenges.

"I cried my lungs out that day, for the issue in delivery led to a very negative review on a public group and our business was just starting out," Shababa Suzana Hossain, a 21-year old business student and the owner of Womplings, mentioned when asked to recount that one time the delivery man remorselessly spilled all the sauces and let the box slip off the bag.

Shababa was not the only one who faced problems with their products getting delivered. Finding a reliable delivery company has proven to be one of the biggest challenges these young entrepreneurs had to face. Starting from their hesitance regarding the companies and their precautionary measures during the pandemic, they all faced multifarious issues when it came to securing a delivery service that would not only deliver their products in proper conditions but also refrain from scamming them.