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How individuals with **social anxiety** are always misunderstood

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

Living with social anxiety is a two-front war. You're waging a war against yourself every time the need for social interaction arises and you get cold feet. By the time you barely avoid tipping over the edge, you realise your standoffish existence might've already made a negative impression on the person you're interacting with.

Social Anxiety Disorder, known as SAD, stems from a fear of rejection and harsh scrutiny. People who have SAD overthink how they're being perceived by others. They liken other people's perspective to a mirror that's supposed to reflect back their self-worth. Socially anxious people feel a heightened pressure to maintain an unfazed appearance and have intense fear of goofing up. This can cause them to shrink back further into their bubble.

Unfortunately, their inability to smoothly communicate is often misunderstood as antipathy for socialisation. Their reticence at forming distant social relationships can get misinterpreted as a lack of effort and absence of initiative.

In school, my social phobia slowly made me shy away even from familiar settings. I gave up on stage performances and extracurricular activities (ECAs) as a drastic measure to avoid human interaction. When I forced myself into participating, my knee-jerk aloofness and impaired communication skills made my efforts appear half-hearted during performance assessments.

Unlike popular belief, people can be comfortable in the spotlight, crave close-knit relationships and still struggle with crippling social anxiety.

A significant part of our academic achievements and ECAs depend on how well we can communicate and form networks at school. My irrational fear

of speaking up and social awkwardness, however, would devour me whenever I tried public speaking or have in-depth conversations with teachers and institutional authorities. Most discussions would just be me nodding my head and barely managing terse replies. These would inadvertently give off the impression that I'm uptight, disinterested and lack enthusiasm.

The rare times my struggles felt acknowledged were whenever I witnessed my friend, with social anxiety worse than mine, quake in her boots when singled out to answer questions in a packed classroom. Her feeble and cluttered responses earned her the teachers' disapproval and a place in the social phobia club.

It's very apparent that most adults in our country brush off social anxiety as shyness that can be easily triumphed. However, social anxiety is not something that one can overcome with just sheer willpower. The problem lies in the fact that our teachers, families and acquaintances point out what we're doing wrong during social interactions, but they do not attempt to understand our social anxiety and why we require them to be kinder towards us.

Bangladeshi societal culture is very collectivist at heart and therefore people tend to assume the worst of those who cannot integrate seamlessly into a cohesive community ought to fear of socialisation.

French philosopher Sartre once said, "Hell is other people." As long as social anxiety is trivialised and ignored as a phantom issue, the quote shall continue to ring true for every socially anxious person out there.

Nuzha forgives people for pronouncing her name wrong and wallows in books and anxiety. Suggest her fiction at nuzhaoishee1256504@gmail.com

The reason we consume mindless media

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

It is my humble opinion that we, as a society, give far too much importance to intelligent content.

Debunking the figurative imagery in a Robert Eggers movie is sometimes fun. As is trying to untangle the maze of sentences in a Henry James novel or understanding the plot of *Dark*. But the key word here is sometimes.

Most of the time, people don't feel a need to consume such content charged with riddles, underlying themes or complex dynamics. When you have a sixty-minute time window between one class and the next, or between working and sleep, you are most likely not going to choose to read a chapter of *War and Peace*. Instead, you will probably watch an episode of *Say Yes to the Dress*. Why? Because the first option is tiring and the second is mind-numbing.

Most of us have a guilty pleasure show, book, movie genre or podcast that we like to go back to whenever we are in search of some peace and quiet from our hectic lives. That is us falling back on the comfort of mindless media. Mindless media is content that people consume without putting much thought into what it is they're consuming.

As people are moving out of the pandemic haze and settling back into their regular lives, all they want is a little break from utilising their intelligence. They don't want to decipher the cryptic meaning behind a show or book. They just wish to enjoy it because it is easy and funny, preferably easily funny. Even if it isn't funny, they want to consume something that can be digested without criticism or questions, just so that they won't have to put in an effort to understand what's going on.

Another desirable aspect of mindless media is that it is very predictable. As the audience, you already know what is going to happen – how the conversations will progress, where a particular character arc or relationship is headed, and even how it will all wrap up. And you know these things because that is the very reason you chose to consume said content. You don't have to worry about suspense or mystery, and you will definitely not be on the edge of your seat.

This predictability also means that you are aware of the stakes. So, you don't have anything to lose emotionally even if the main character dies. Your emotions remain at a steady level. You don't experience much excitement or joy or sadness. Being emotionally high-strung can lead to anxiety and fatigue so a break from intense feelings is actually beneficial. And we consciously or subconsciously crave this break.

For a period of time, mindless content allows us to essentially suspend reality. It lets us forget about all our troubles, about what we still have left to do on our to-do lists, and about how much more we have to work to achieve our goals. It basically lets us forget who we are for a while and lose ourselves in some absurd or ideal world.

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