

BLACK COFFEE

Why on earth do people drink it?

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

I, too, used to consider myself a coffee enjoyer. The rich aroma, the bittersweet taste,

The caffeine rush makes for the perfect morning experience to kickstart the day. At local cafes, my go to drinks are the yummy iced mochas and raspberry lattes.

However, my love for coffee is apparently invalid, at least according to the *real* coffee connoisseurs. As they look upon my inferior palate with disdain, they unflinchingly chug a liquid that's darker than their souls. "What you're drinking is practically dessert," I've been told, and have resigned myself to the accusation since.

I have tried, on several occasions, to drink coffee the way it is "supposed" to be drunk, without the desecration of milk and sugar. And every single time, I was reminded of my own mortality in the form of a gag reflex. As I looked over to my friend dumping spoonfuls of ground coffee straight into the hot water in her cute pink coffee mug, I wanted answers to the fundamental question—why?

Of course, the easiest solution would be to question one of these sadists about their motives. That turned out to be a tried-and-true dead end. They always answer with, "I like the taste." That's about as believable as someone genuinely enjoying the *korolla bhaji* that you gingerly

swallow down to appease your parents. I'm sorry, but here is no way one can actually enjoy bitter gourd.

On the other hand, you have your sleep deprived cogs in the machine who have far too much to do and not enough time to do them in a healthy manner. With their desperate need for caffeine spikes and the jittery illusion of energy, the pungent taste of their seventh tumbler of death potion is probably the least of their problems.

A personal hypothesis of mine is that black coffee drinkers possess, to an

extent, a latent self-loathing that manifests in the form of gustatory masochism. While I have not performed any quantitative analysis to back up my claim, I have received enough affirmative answers to the question "do you hate yourself?" from black coffee drinkers to just know.

While it may be a bitter pill to swallow, it's not as bitter as that abomination that they drink so much of.

There is another plausible explanation that may, in all likelihood, be true. Perhaps there actually is an underlying fruity sweetness to quality coffee grounds that is lost on me. The coffee nerds on social media with their thousands of dollars' worth

of equipment pulling shots of espresso may have a point as they drone on about citrus or spice notes, with their futuristic sci-fi coded gadgets that probably do marginally improve the taste. All of which is lost on the unsophisticated coffee drinker who finds a long black and an americano identically undrinkable.

Or perhaps there's a whole secret universe of a happy high and creative energy sitting at the bottom of the cup. Who knows.

Whatever the reason may be behind choosing to acclimate to such a drink, if it brings you happiness, there's nothing wrong with it. After all, if you want to harness misery with your own time and money, who am I to judge?



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Why we want to stay sad and how to move past it

These portrayals often become staples in internet culture, something to laugh about and bond over. Although they're mostly played off as jokes, they do stem from something deeply wrong in our lives.

ARANYO RISHI CHOWDHURY

We probably live in the best era for mental health discourse. It's never been easier to talk to people about what's plaguing your mind because of how open the conversation around the topic has become. Through the internet, people have access to millions of different perspectives on how to resolve their issues. In spite of that, we're in the midst of a mental health crisis.

From personal problems like overwhelming workloads or parental pressure to fit into certain moulds, to structural problems like gender inequality and systemic oppression, to even social media glorifying certain body types or lifestyles that make you think you're living the "wrong" way, there's no end to things that could drive one to be depressed.

Although there's a lot of issues in our day-to-day lives that only catharsis can help, there's an increasing willingness to romanticise sadness even when someone has the ability to somewhat change their life for the better.

Today, there's a lot of reasons why people feel a lack of motivation towards working through what's persistently bothering us. Much of it stems from certain depictions of mental illness in media. People can relate to characters who are portrayed as wronged, misunderstood, and abandoned by the world. When audiences across the globe view these compelling stories and resonate with them, there's a vicarious feeling of your own struggles finally

being acknowledged by society through these characters.

These portrayals often become staples in internet culture, something to laugh about and bond over. Although they're mostly played off as jokes, they do stem from something deeply wrong in our lives.

Strong depictions of mental illness have existed in art as long as art itself, but only now do we have a massive network where we can talk about and bond over them together, perhaps even sharing our own struggles with each other because parents or authority figures usually can't be talked to about it. In these online communities and forums, and in our personal relationships, we tend to bond over the abuse and neglect that we've faced throughout our lives.

Discussions about mental health in cyberspaces have gone in a dangerous direction of "normalising depression". Sadness is treated as just another part of the human condition. Fighting depression and eventually losing that label of mental illness can feel like severing ties with friends and communities that were formed on the basis of sharing trauma. At worst, it feels like your very sense of self is threatened because getting better feels like removing an integral part of yourself that makes you "you".

Even if it feels uncomfortable, a conscious effort towards moving out of these dark places is absolutely crucial. They limit what we can make of our lives, and lead us to denying

ourselves opportunities that could lead to happiness. Relationships built on the foundation of shared trauma are not sustainable for anyone involved, because if it relies on a constant exchange of emotional baggage, how does either person ever move past their struggles without compromising the quality of the relationship?

De-stigmatisation and talking about mental illness are crucial. Equally crucial, however, is to not confuse talking about mental health with romanticising sadness. The memes are great, and they help us cope. But we need to move forward. Reaching out to actively work on yourself means you're more emotionally available to help the people you care about. For the sake of our happiness, we shouldn't let our mental illnesses define us.

Aranyo Rishi Chowdhury is an A level Student at S. F. X. Greenherald International School.

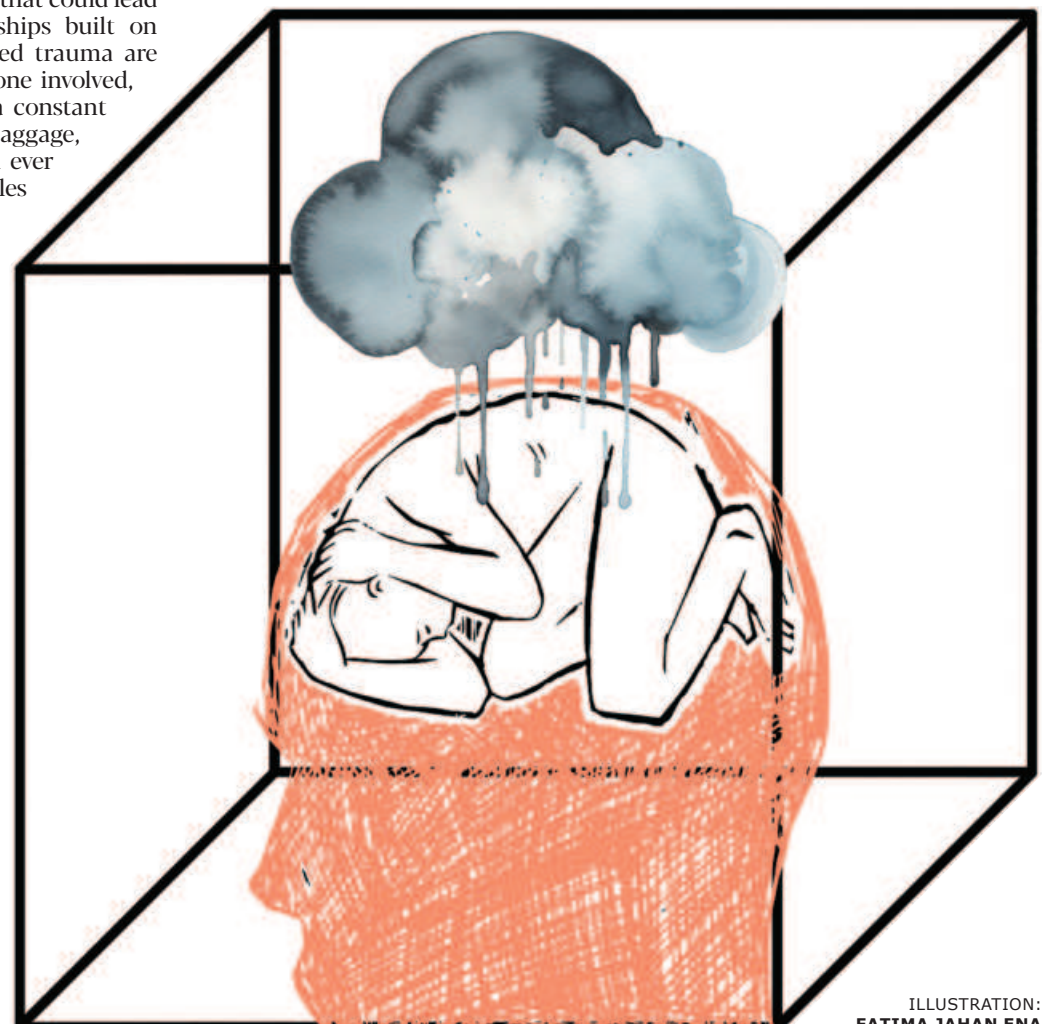


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