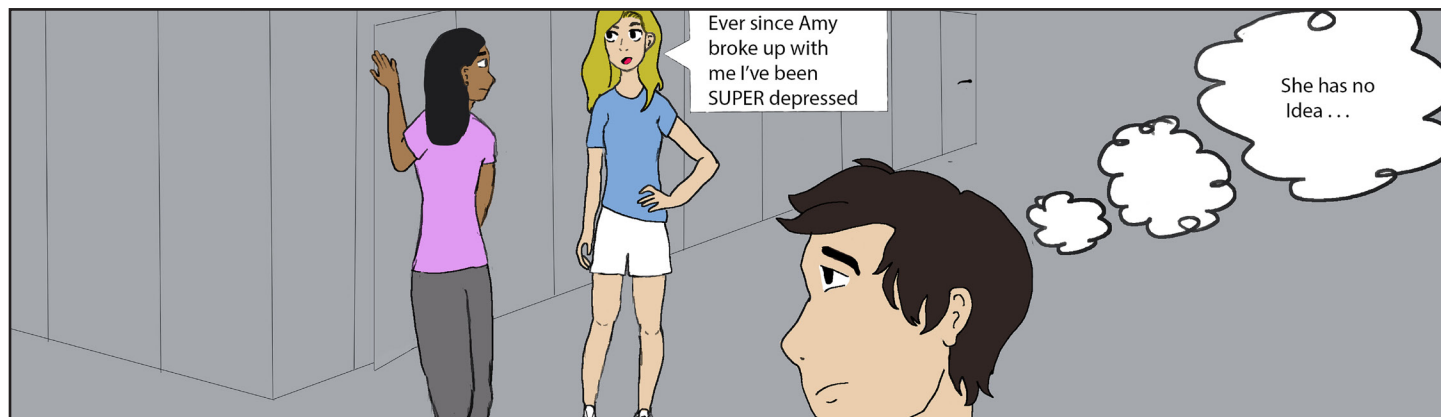


OPINIONS



Damaging, not dramatic

Glamorizing mental illness has become trendy but many people don't know how wildly irresponsible it is

By Layla East

Walking down the hallway the school's social worker, Michael Davidoff, sees students clumped together leaning against their lockers talking about recent drama, homework, and their plans for the weekend. He hears a student jokingly say, "Oh my god! I'm so OCD! I guess that's just what makes me quirky." As a mental health professional, he knows just how serious mental disorders are and has watched in horror at how popular it has become to romanticize them.

In school lunchrooms it's not uncommon to hear teenage girls applauding their friends for skipping lunch calling them strong for abstaining from food, strong for denying their body a basic need, or to hear kids state they have depression because their boyfriend or girlfriend broke up with them last week.

A few decades ago talking about mental health used to be taboo, and now because people are talking about it so openly it's caused a whole new equality as bad issue.

There is an ever-growing group of people who are using severe mental illnesses as a charming characteristic, claiming they have a disorder but having never been diagnosed by a professional. Some people might not view this as an issue, they might even state that this is helping people who are suffering because it's normalizing it. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

"I hear it come out in the hallway like, 'I'm so OCD about this or that,'" Davidoff said. "Well, do you really feel compelled to do something, whenever a thought pops into your mind? Do you have a ritual? Are you stuck in that, or are you just being quirky . . . there's nothing cute or quirky about it. There's suffering."

Glamorizing mental illness makes suffering from an illness seem like a much better experience than it actually is. Because of that twisted view on disorders, it makes people almost want to have a

disorder.

Suzan Simpson, a marriage and family therapist, thinks that viewing mental illness as something good is horrific.

"To maintain that any kind of illness is cute or quirky is to be very naive to the reality of suffering - like a child believing that a broken leg and having to use crutches is 'fun.' They have no idea," Simpson said.

By playing down someone's experience of mental illness, it diminishes the struggle they are going through and when the topic of mental illness comes up they don't even feel a part of the discussion. Glorifying mental illness is causing harm to people suffering and making light of the horrible experiences they go through.

"Romanticizing mental illness is similar to glorifying war - the carnality, the grotesqueness, and especially the loss that is incurred is not beautiful," Simpson said.

Stop viewing mental illnesses as romantic and quirky and instead realize whoever is going through it is suffering. Be by their side, and don't make yourself a victim.

Michael Davidoff said, "I would encourage people to keep it real. There are lots of ways to get somebody's attention, and there are lots of ways to start a conversation. We don't have to be a victim to do that. So I would encourage people to try to tap into their strengths and use that as a vehicle to get recognition. Because, you know, it's hard to address something that is being self-created." Everyone can be a part of the discussion of mental health by sympathizing with people suffering and voicing your own struggles, but romanticizing an illness hurts the people who are actually battling with it. It's an extremely naive and immature way to view something that has ruined so many people's lives.