

## Pandemic Fatigue: One writer finds herself lost in a fog



Dear C and Dr. B;

When the pandemic began and we were all in lockdown, I had a list of things I wanted to accomplish - cleaning out the front porch, reading, learning Spanish ... everything I couldn't deal with because of general lack of time. But as the pandemic wears on, I find myself less and less motivated. Now I'm just down on myself because I have all this time to do something, and instead, I'm walking around in a semi-coma, unmotivated to do anything at all. I realize I am going to have to re-think how to make a living, but with the sense of constant uncertainty, I'm not even sure what to do. It makes me feel ungrounded, lost and somewhat worthless. I'm sure I'm not the only one feeling this way, but I don't know what to do about it.

Wentworth

Dr. B says: What you are describing are the stages of grief. Grief can happen with any change, good or bad. The first stage is denial - you go on as if nothing has happened, or even become more productive. Next is anger or frustration, the refusal to do anything that might mean that this is something you really have to deal with. Then, bargaining - OK, I will do this, but I won't do that. Next comes depression, when the fatigue and hopelessness sets in: "This will be forever, I cant..." Lastly, acceptance - "This is the new norm." You make a new schedule, your expectations now take into account the catastrophe rather than avoiding it. You begin to realize things like, "At least I have my health, it could be worse, I accomplished something despite the odds stacked against me."

The treatment for all grief is the same - not medication, but establishing a consistent daily routine. Volunteering or helping someone else really helps with perspective and meaning. Grief shouldn't be done alone - support groups work better than 1:1 as it helps normalize the experience. Seeing that everyone is experiencing something similar prevents the feeling of isolation, and the need to smile and put on a happy act for others. There are lots of groups online these days.

C says: I gotta say that I've heard this answer before, Dr. B - you trotted it out during the initial lockdown. At this point, it seems like you are just trying fit our national reaction to the pandemic into a familiar form, so you can recite a standard recommendation. I don't think this is helpful. Why? Because this isn't a matter of typical grief - this is an unprecedented event that has not happened in 100 years, and we will all be trying to figure it out well into the future. Right now, it's another unknown.

Here's what I've seen and heard from people in regard to the question posed by the reader: Everyone is at loose ends and wandering in a daze because they have been accustomed to a certain routine, and now it's gone. It is not grief that they are dealing with - it's disorientation and an inability to form goals due to an uncertain future. As a freelancer who has faced insecurity and uncertainty for most of my adult life, I can honestly say that it's a feeling one never gets used to. Our modern device-centered society seems thrown by it to a far greater extent than my own generation. I grew up in the '50s and '60s, when we all had to use our imagination and figure things out for ourselves. Now every app and every device has a set of specific directions by which it functions, and there is no other way to use it other than the way the programmer intended, unless one is a tech genius. We can only follow directions and follow routines and check our social media apps to get an idea of our own self-worth from what others are posting.

This pandemic has revealed many weaknesses in the way this whole country is run. We couldn't get our shit together to quell the spread of the virus because we asserted our "individual rights" instead of working together. We fought each other instead of uniting to fight a common threat. We divided into teams and all wanted to be "right," and we slammed or attacked everyone who wasn't on our team. The result? The virus is still out of control and we are still wandering around like damned zombies because

we can't trust a word the government says.

This isn't grief. This is what happens when baby birds are thrown out of the nest before they know how to fly. My suggestion? Don't waste too much time whining about how lost you feel - I'd start beating those wings, FAST.

*You can visit Dr. B's blog at [drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com](http://drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com)*

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## **A Helping Hand: When thoughts turn dark**

*Dear C and Dr. B;*

*Since the start of the pandemic, I've been having a hard time keeping it together. Knowing that nearly everyone is suffering hardships makes it easier to get through. But as the situation wears on, my sense of connection to the world feels like it's slipping. With no idea what the future is going to bring, there's no context or meaning to anything. Last week, I found myself wondering why I even should go on ... for an entire dark day, I struggled with thoughts of pills, or just jumping off the damn roof. But the thought of how it would affect my family stopped me. I called a friend and told her how I felt, and she understood so well, I felt a sense of connection return.*

*It made me wonder about the people who don't have anyone to call. And the people who just can't call, because there's no one they trust. If life felt so hopeless to me that I was considering an out, there must be people who have been so beaten down by this pandemic, and who have nothing and no one to turn to, that they HAVE ended it all. I know that talking with a friend made a difference to me, what can we all do to help each other through this?*

*Cal*

Dr. B says: Excellent question - today, teen suicide is through the roof. Social media is like a drug that heightens one's emotional state. In many people, especially adolescent females, this was a trend that existed prior to COVID, with the suicide rate rising due to negative self image and social comparisons, but COVID has markedly increased it.

Alcoholism and drug use is way up, also drunk driving and car accidents due to substance abuse. This isn't unusual during any widespread catastrophe - the sensitive among us are very vulnerable when things aren't going well. Their characteristic "black or white" thinking paints the world as all good or all bad. There's not much good right now.

What can be done about it? If we as a culture are really serious about changing this trend we need to understand how internet and social media, like drugs, can exacerbate emotional problems. Suicide and substance abuse education is necessary - we need campaigns that emphasize that what you read and hear isn't necessarily true. People need to learn how to question and research information and we need to provide professional support groups. The people you hang with affect the quality of your life, so weeding out negative people, and sites, is important. People are attracted to negatives, and as a culture we are not skilled at discerning truth from lies. We need to make choices that feed a more positive intent. It is great you reached out and connected, but to help systemically is difficult; I think it's a cultural policy issue.

C says: What I find most sad are the teens who were never taught life skills at home for coping, and haven't had time to acquire common sense through experience. They give up, feeling worthless, helpless, with no sense of a future. We can all have moments of weakness, but the not-yet-developed adolescence brain lacks the ability to fully understand consequence. If teens live, they generally learn, but some will never have the chance to do that. We need to pay careful attention and look out for those around us. This website details the warning signs we should be aware of:  
<https://texassuicideprevention.org/how-you-can-help/how-to-help-know-the-signs/>

Unfortunately, some people give no warning. Two years ago, a friend's husband committed suicide after starting an antidepressant that can cause suicidal thoughts. He'd had NO previous history of such impulses; his death was an utter shock to his family. If you, or someone you know, has been prescribed an antidepressant and are experiencing suicidal thoughts, report it RIGHT AWAY, and seek professional help getting off the drug. Doctors say that research shows antidepressants prevent suicides, but if suicidal thoughts are such a common side effect that there are warnings on the prescription labels, I would not take those warnings lightly.

If you hear ANYONE express thoughts of ending their life, please take it to heart - do whatever you can to get them help. An ER is best for serious emergencies, but you can call The National Suicide Hotline at 800-273-8255, 24 hrs a day. The RI website for state assistance numbers and other resources is [sprc.org/states/rhode-island](http://sprc.org/states/rhode-island). If you suspect there is a problem, contact someone NOW. Tomorrow is too late.

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## **Medicate to the Fast Track?: A reader wonders if that high-powered job is right for her**

*Dear C and Dr. B;*

*I used to work in a corporate position that involved managing many people. The job left me stressed out and I had a hard time keeping up. I got depressed, anxious and sought professional help on the urging of my parents and family. I was placed on Adderall and everything changed. I aced the job and my family was overjoyed - they thought I was a new, better person and were proud because they are all high profile professionals.*

*My husband, on the other hand, said I wasn't the same person he married. He claimed I'd become irritable and hyper-focused, I'd lost my spontaneity and was no longer fun. So I stopped taking the medication, quit that job and now work a small, low paid front desk job, greeting people and processing their information. I love it! I talk to people all day long and meet new people every day.*

*The problem? My family thinks I am nuts working this low paying job. They see no value in it. They say I am wasting my life and could be doing so much better. They want me to go back on my medications and if my husband doesn't like me that way, it's his problem not mine! Are they right? I like my life now, but am I just giving into pressure from my husband?*

*LayLo*

Dr. B says: Just because you can function on medication in the corporate job doesn't mean you should. That role wasn't suited to you and being a square peg in a round hole really sucks, even with a pharmacological lube job.

What I've seen over time is that when a person gets trapped in an ill-suited role, they might succeed at it, but it can always feel fake - like it's an act being played for others. That can be stressful and depressing. When the medication loses its effect due to building tolerance, more and more is necessary, which causes more side effects. With stimulants you can expect irritability, anxiety, insomnia, short temper and headaches. It's similar to caffeine withdrawal but much worse; it's a

scenario that I do not recommend.

A Harvard study showed that there are 11 different types of learning styles. Our schools and culture gear toward only two of them. Everyone else is seen as a misfit and is not valued; I see this as a mistake. I am very happy you found a niche that suits you, and that you have a husband who appreciates you for who you are. If you were to leave him, marry a “successful” partner, and rise up the cooperate ladder on medication that increases your efficiency but diminishes your other qualities, I fear that one day we would read about you in the paper: “She had everything, why did she commit suicide?”

Be happy.

C says: I couldn't agree more. We need to better understand the difference between mental illness and “different” personalities.

The DSM5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) defines mental illness as “A behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual which reflects an underlying psychobiological dysfunction, the consequences of which are clinically significant distress (eg, a painful symptom) or disability (ie, impairment in one or more important areas of functioning). Translation: If your “symptoms” are interfering with your life in a negative way, then you may be suffering from a mental illness. I'd say, additionally, that if you are pleased with your behavior, but it's destructive and dangerous to those around you, you are also very likely afflicted with a mental illness. The flip side of that coin is this - if you CAN live with your symptoms, and they don't interfere with your life, or with those of innocent bystanders, you may not be mentally ill at all, just different from the national standard.

What isn't suitable for one person can be just the thing for another. A perfect example of this is a Rescue & Search Dog. These heroic animals are most often first discovered at the local pound, where they were abandoned by their owners. Why? Because the very behavior and personality that makes for an ideal Search Dog makes for the Family Pet From Hell. Same animal, wrong job.

Are you happy? Good for you. It would be nice if your family was happy for you too.

*You can visit Dr. B's blog at [drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com](http://drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com)*

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## Antidepressant Anxiety: One reader wonders if medications are prescribed properly

Dear C and Dr. B,

*Twenty-five years ago my marriage crashed and burned, leaving me in a deep state of depression. A therapist put me in contact with a psychiatrist who, after trying a few medications and tweaking dosages, prescribed 50mg a day of Zoloft. My PCP (primary care doctor) continued to prescribe Zoloft over the next two decades with very little inquiry into how effective it was or how it was affecting my general health.*

*The anti-depressant did help to lessen depressive moods and decrease anxiety during emotional or health crises. But during day-to-day living, it left me emotionally flat, with both less gloom and less joy. Because of this, I'd tried on several occasions to stop taking Zoloft. The advice given by my PCP was little more than "don't stop abruptly, go slow." I tried many withdrawal strategies - all were unsuccessful. It was only after reading about the technique of micro-dosing that I almost got myself off Zoloft. But months of COVID isolation left me with extreme anxiety - so, back to the magic blue pills.*

*After all this, I believe that 1) doctors are overeager to prescribe anti-depressants rather than suggesting alternative therapies, 2) patients receive little, if any, instruction on their physiological function, dosage and side effects, and 3) there is a lack of useful followup with patients who have been taking these medications for extended periods of time. PCPs are not equipped to offer information, and often the information gleaned online is pure quackery. Thoughts?*

Randall

Dr. B says: If you go by the DSM5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), then most people who would meet the criteria for major depression in fact never get diagnosed or treated for Major Depression. Current scientific studies actually show vast under diagnosis and under treatment for depression in the USA.

Our current psychopharmacologic model of treatment for mental illness doesn't differentiate between a

nurse practitioner, PCP or psychiatrist. All are licensed to diagnose and treat depression. As for medical follow-up and education, providers should be giving out this information if they are prescribing medications. I see this as a failure of your specific treatment providers, not the system in general. The current recommendation is that if you have had more than three episodes of major depression then you should stay on the medication that helped you forever, at the dose that keeps you at baseline functioning. This is because if you have had three previous episodes, there is a 90% chance of another. Medical depression "Major Depression" isn't just sadness; it's a severe decrease in functionality along with a list of other "symptoms" that makes the threshold for "the disease," according to the DSM5.

Antidepressants decrease emotional stimuli, and they increase your brain's ability to be flexible. They also seem to decrease toxic empathy, which is related to depression. Medications do not reformat your brain. The moment you stop them, in about 2 weeks your brain will function exactly the same as before - thus often symptoms return as you yourself experienced. It is the current recommendation that counseling should accompany psychiatric medications. Feeling better and being better are not the same thing; medications do not create skills. If skills are not acquired, any feeling better you might have achieved from medication will be temporary. Studies show that if you just take medications alone and acquire no skills to address your life's issues, then in 10 years your life quality will be worse than before you ever took the medications in the first place.

C says: Doctors love to trot out these ideal scenarios whereas the prescribed course of medicine is faithfully followed and additional therapy is maintained over time. What they seem to ignore is that this rarely happens with psychiatric meds. Americans tend to use their own judgement when it comes to mood altering drugs, which antidepressants most definitely are. They want the quick fix - if a pill makes people feel better, most of them see no need to work any further at it. We all just want to get back to whatever we were doing before.

The fact is that more than 50% of antidepressants are prescribed by doctors who aren't trained in psychiatric medicine and who will NOT follow up. This is most definitely a flaw in the system, because the system allows non-specialized doctors to dispense psychiatric medications. Those studies Dr. B mentioned, which show that taking medications alone will result in a life quality that is worse than before, are the ones that portray the reality of antidepressant use in America today.

Life IS pretty depressing right now, what with the constant political and racial conflict, economic stress and COVID out of control. What people really need is to learn better coping skills and develop stronger community ties to help deal with life's problems - but there's a fortune to be made off of those magic pills that send people immediately back to work to keep earning and consuming. Until the profits drop off, I doubt if any doctor who wants to keep their job will dare point out the unpleasant truth.

*To hear Dr. B's second perspective on this issue, visit [drbrilliantclique.wordpress.com](http://drbrilliantclique.wordpress.com)*

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## Conspiracy Curt: One writer's husband is following QAnon – what should she do?

Dear C and Dr. B;

*I am becoming concerned. My husband, who is an otherwise sane man, is beginning to follow QAnon and spend a lot of time on the internet following their posts on social media. How does an internet-driven conspiracy theory like that get attention and followers? It is seriously crazy stuff. For instance, they claim there is a coming conflagration between President Trump and "a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophile Democrats who seek to dominate America and the world." I can't believe my husband is buying into this! But he is out of work and fearful about the future - the sitting POTUS is re-tweeting some of their stuff, so he won't believe that the FBI has listed this group as domestic terrorists! Quite honestly, I think he's gone over the edge. Is there anything I can do to get him to snap out of it? This is NOT the man I married.*

Dr. B says: We are at a very crazy time in the course of America. The pandemic is creating fear and confusion at the same time as economic uncertainty and hardship. Media misinformation and political agendas are fanning the fear and anxiety. Discord that has been brewing for a long time is coming to fruition.

Here's how I see it: In America, religion and politics strongly influence each other, and factions are taking sides as they would with sports teams. For many Americans, there is simply the view that God is the Good Team and The Bad Team must be the Devil. So, let's say I am a person who believes I am on the Good Team. The quandary here is If I am on the Good Team, why does my life contain so much hardship, illness and fear? The confusion over this quandary is easily cleared with the thought: It must be the fault of the Devil's Bad Team. This is the basis for much of QAnon's conspiracy theories.

A recent NPR special discussed how even the evangelical preachers are having a hard time dissuading their flock from jumping onto the QAnon wagon. Conspiracy theorists believe that anyone who doesn't agree with them must have been corrupted by the Bad Team on mainstream media. Unfortunately, these evangelical preachers used the Bible to amass their flocks the same way QAnon does, selecting biblical passages to prove their points. People tend to not defer to objective truth, but rather to what they already believe to be true, and they will believe any crazy lie if they hear the Good Team say it. So, for supporters who see Trump as the Good Team, if he re-tweets and follows QAnon, then these crazy extremists must be right.

If your husband is a religious man, QAnon's theories explain why, after following his Good Team beliefs, he isn't reaping the rewards. Of course "it's their fault!" This is one way people are recruited to terrorist extremist organizations - blame and scapegoating can work like a drug and can be just as addictive. The ideas can spread from person to person like a virus in a pandemic, and it's hard to reverse belief once it is obtained. It probably takes the same reprogramming as does being un-brainwashed by a cult. Too much of our media caters to emotions more than facts. You may need to resort to an intervention from professionals.

C says: I see QAnon as being the current opiate of the masses, and here's the thing about opiates - the people who are most susceptible to addiction are those who already have addictive tendencies. However, there is another factor at play here - the reason that opiates became such a problem in the US is NOT because addicts sought them out, but because they were pushed on patients in a very misleading way - opiates were prescribed as a harmless solution to pain by trusted doctors, and this was a huge factor in luring people to try them who otherwise would have just taken aspirin. Of course, the "harmless" part was a big lie, perpetrated by pharmaceutical companies whose goal was big profits. I think that QAnon is being pushed the same way, and for the same reason - there are huge profits to be had in terms of re-election for the POTUS if people actually swallow those crazy pills.

The current conflict and disparity in our country has not created monsters as much as it has fanned the flames of problems that have been there all along. This current craze of your husband's may just be a symptom of the times, or a deeper problem may have been triggered that won't go away. I'd wait until after the election, but if he doesn't let go of the conspiracy theories, you may want to reconsider your choice of partners. You can't change anyone's core beliefs by calling in professional intervention, any more than you could if they were gay.

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## **[Feeling Guilty: She had a bad relationship with her mom; how should she move on?](#)**

Dear C and Dr. B;

I lost my mom as a teen and it's still bothering me. But it's not because I miss her so much, or because we had such a good relationship - it's more because we didn't. I was really awful when I was a teenager

and I feel really crappy about that. Maybe things would have gotten better when I wised up, but I was only 17 when she died. I was even badly behaved at her funeral.

All I can feel when I think of my mom is guilt and remorse. It feels like some kind of shroud I can't shake off. I'm pretty sure it ruined my last relationship, because I just don't feel lovable. I feel like I'm a terrible person. I don't want some doctor to give me pills. Any other suggestions?

Sadie

Dr. B says: You never got to have an adult-to-adult relationship with your mom. It's okay to mourn the loss, but you shouldn't feel guilt for being human. Life is unfair - when parents are the most available and have the most energy, resources and time for their teenaged children, the kids want nothing to do with them. Teens are wired to want only their peers at that stage. Your mom may have been exasperated - all parents are with their teens. But she still loved you and probably understood you were a normal adolescent. I suspect she was the same way with her parents as a teen.

In the movie *The Devil's Arithmetic*, an apathetic teenaged girl gets to switch places in time with her grandmother as a teen - in a concentration camp. The experience gives her deep perspective and teaches her to appreciate the life she has ... but this is movie fantasy. In real life, we seldom gain perspective until we have our own kids. It's time for you to put your relationship with your mom into an adult perspective, wherein you can share your life and successes with her as an equal. Otherwise you are maintaining the same child-to-adult relationship you had with her as a teen. Acting out guilt and self loathing as you are now is really no different than acting out through anger and self righteousness.

C says: I really understand how you feel, Sadie - our last experiences with people seem to become etched indelibly in our brains. But I don't think your problem has to do with guilt or remorse over your teen behavior anymore ... I think you feel unlovable because you are acting out in a very self-centered and unlovable manner in your current life. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. You are blaming it on the past. but you are looking in the wrong direction.

I hate to say it, but you need to get over yourself. We all act like idiots as teens. It has been proven through extensive research that the adolescent brain has not yet developed sufficiently to understand the impact of consequences. I confess that I myself, among other insane acts, ran away from home in the middle of winter when I was 16, with no thought in my head other than the adventure of it all. I'm surprised that my mother, who later succumbed to a heart attack at age 59, didn't have a fatal episode right then.

You can't change the past, but if your mom were alive now, and saw you being kind and understanding to the people in your life, and sharing love with family and friends, she would be happy. I believe that if you do those things, you will make peace with your mom. If you are walking around feeling guilty, having low self esteem and beating yourself up for being a jerk so long ago, your mom wouldn't like it at all - so cut it out! Honor your mom and her memory by being the person you wished you'd been back then. You'll both be happier.

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## [How to Make Real Change: Advice givers square off](#)



Dear C and Dr. B;

I went to a therapist because I had longstanding problems in my marriage. My therapist and I could agree that there were conflicts that might never be resolved. My husband was emotionally abusive - he refused to come to therapy with me and would just get up and walk out when I tried to talk to him. The therapy convinced me that my husband eroded my self-confidence and the marriage was holding me back from a better life, so I decided to move ahead. Unfortunately, things didn't work out as planned. Now I am alone and broke and I have to work two jobs to make ends meet so I have no time to make new friends. I'm too tired to even think about a better life. My husband isn't messing with me, but my life is NO better than before in any other way. I thought the "new" me would meet someone I could have a healthy relationship with, but I haven't met that person in four years. Now I wish I'd stayed where I was, ignored my asshole husband, and just developed my own life and friends more outside the marriage. I joined a support group thinking it would help, but no one in it has a good relationship - they

just bitch about how dysfunctional every potential partner turns out to be.

Does ANYONE actually get therapy, take the advice and find a better life? I have yet to meet a single person who has. A depressing number of them just wish they'd stayed where they are.

Constance

Dr. B says: Italo Calvino, a children's author and philosopher, said that we are all born into a story but at some point you have to decide to accept that story or instead write your own. You don't know "everyone." It seems you know mostly people within the same culture you already were familiar with who have similar sets of skills and circumstances as your own.

Just like a diet doesn't work unless its a total life change and years of consistency are devoted to work these changes, life doesn't change simply because you remove one asshole from your total story. You have to identify your goals and make friends with positive people who reflect the type of life you would want to have. You need to focus on the positive strengths that you would bring into a relationship and you need to have good boundaries, avoiding life-sucking and energy-sucking people. At the same time, you need to meet a lot of people. Relationships are just a statistics game. Everyone I grew up with met their partners on match.com or the newspaper, and none of these matches are divorced. So does ANYONE actually get therapy, take advice, and find a better life? Yes. If they actually internalize change and growth, develop relationship skills, have good boundaries, and live a total healthy package, ie, embrace a completely different culture than that which they knew - and write their own story.

C says: I believe that Constance has a valid point. Yes, Dr. B, that was great advice, but what exactly is this woman supposed to do with it? She writes that she is working two jobs to make ends meet and is too exhausted to find new friends, yet you tell her to "meet lots of new people." She is also given a list of tasks that must be keep up on a constant basis for years before she can expect changes - what is she supposed to do in the meantime? And by what means is Constance supposed to "embrace a completely different culture" than the one she knew? People who work two jobs spend most of their time with people at work, and I suspect she is stuck in minimum wage position — hardly a way to broaden her horizons. Establishing a new group of healthy friends in her few off hours is an optimistic, but unlikely, stretch.

Advice has to be doable in order to work. Dr B's suggestion is like telling a diabetic who has been on a junk diet since birth that if she'd just change their entire lifestyle and keep it up for five years straight, she'd be much healthier. Duh! Who doesn't know that? But knowing it and doing it are entirely different things. That's probably why recovery rates are so low and psychiatric drug use is so high. Making changes in real life is easier said than done.

There's a serious gap between the advice given here and the average person's ability to follow it. Why? Consider this: The annual salary for a psychiatrist is about 100K to 200K. Even a lowly therapist makes about 60K a year. Their advice is tailored for their own socioeconomic group. Unfortunately, the people who face the greatest mental health challenges are those who live in poverty - and the reality is that those who seek psychiatric help at the poverty level seldom get real therapy at all. They get pills to keep them quiet and that's about all. It's the great divide between the Haves and the Have-Nots.

Making long-term, consistent changes requires economic stability and sufficient leisure time for contemplation. If some patients had that, they wouldn't need therapy to begin with. For many, better job training may be the most doable, and most important, first step toward being able to write their own story.

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**[Hooked on Hannah: She's bad, but so good!](#)**



Dear C and Dr B;

My girlfriend Hannah is smart and beautiful, but very distracting. She drinks a lot and probably smokes too much weed; she's kind of crazy in a way. She has no interest in school. I realize she is not a good influence on me - I'm a top student, and my grades dropped last semester when we started dating. Everyone I know says I should break up with her. Here's the problem: The sex is just too good. I've been with a few other women who were obviously more suited to me, both intellectually and interest wise, and the sex was okay with them, but with Maggie... WOW. She's kind of kinky; with her, sex always feels sort of forbidden, like when I was first starting out. Compared to her, other women are just boring. I would try to stay interested, but honestly, they just didn't do it for me.

So, here's my question. Why is it that those crazy people who aren't good for us are so much hotter? They just seem to be so much more uninhibited and imaginative in bed. Just not sure about the future of the relationship.

Hooked on Hannah

Dr. B says: I don't see a future here, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy it for now, just use a condom. Everyone is good for something. A uninhibited person is fun but inconsistent, and that is no basis for a relationship. Beware: It can be addicting and all drugs are the same - great for a while, then not so. Life has to entirely revolve around the person or drug and there is no room for anyone else. You will get swallowed alive, and you as an individual will cease to exist. Your "boring other woman who you relate to" will require a give and take relationship. You won't be able to entirely lose yourself in them, as you do with Hannah; that would just turn them off. A real relationship takes work. Drugs are just self indulgent fantasy. You need to develop the skills to be in a relationship. This is not likely to happen with your current girlfriend.

C says: Your name says it all, Hooked. Hannah is your drug, and the effect that she has on your life will be remarkably similar. I'm guessing you're still in the honeymoon phase of something that could get ugly. People like Hannah are not better at sex because they're crazy. They're better at sex because they put the same energy and concentration into it that you put into your education and career, probably because it's the best they'll ever have to offer. It's their primary talent, their art if you will. They use it like rich people use money - to manipulate and get what they want.

I used to be a self defense instructor who worked with battered women. Most of them came from relationships that featured a male partner who, like Hannah, was incredibly exciting in bed; they all said that no one had ever made them feel that way before. Alas, the same men were also controlling and would become abusive if their demands and needs weren't met. The women all knew they should leave, but their partners were never just abusive ... the men would follow the beatings with caresses and apologies and a bunch of "why did you make me hit you, you know I worship you," crap. Then, of course, the sex would be better than ever. But here's something you should NEVER forget - if someone can make you feel pleasure, that is a control that they have over you. In the hands of a loving partner, this pleasure can be part of your bond with each other. In the hands of a selfish abuser, it has the potential to destroy your life. You will return to the pleasure over and over, no matter how much it hurts you in other ways. The fact that you are considering holding on to Hannah even as your grades, and your future, go downhill, shows that you are already addicted. And what is she offering in return? Just herself - a lush with no sense of responsibility who is going to need you to pay her bills while she parties.

Honestly? I'd dump her.

*You can visit Dr. B's blog at [drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com](http://drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com)*

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**Mask Shaming: Some people have valid excuses not to mask up, don't they?**



Dear C and Dr. B;

This happened to someone in my family, so I think this is something the mask shamers need to know. Hey, remember that woman you shamed in the grocery store today because she wasn't wearing a mask? That was my sister. She already feels enough shame because she was raped. Having something over her nose and mouth triggers her PTSD and causes her to relive that trauma. She cried for an hour after she came home. And that man at the Quickie Mart who you called selfish? He's a volunteer firefighter and just came from the ER after being treated for smoke inhalation. He needs to breathe. Non-compliance isn't always a simple black or white issue.

That little boy you lectured about removing his mask is autistic. He doesn't understand. He simply wants it off of his face. That little girl who screams when somebody tries to mask her could be from an abusive home where she was locked in a closet. How would you know?

There are all sorts of reasons for not wearing a mask. Not all are lung or immune system related. How many of you are shaming, name calling and berating complete strangers? There may be a sensitive personal reason why they cannot wear one. If someone is NOT wearing a mask, mind your own business.

Mad at the Maskers

B says: We had this very conversation at work today. A client with anxiety wanted a medical note to be excused from wearing a mask. I refused, as there is no valid excuse not to. None of us, no matter what our emotional state or situation, lives in a world where our actions do NOT affect others. In the case of a rising pandemic, it would be unethical to write that note. Sometimes an individual's personal story just doesn't matter. What if this were an Ebola pandemic?

Should those with personal reasons also be excused from wearing seatbelts, or smoking in public, or driving 95 miles an hour under the influence? The mask is the same thing.

C says: I understand what you are saying, Mad - it is really traumatic for some people to follow these mandates, so we should try to be more understanding. Here's the problem with your reasoning: The threat that lives inside of these people's heads is real only to them. The virus is real to everybody, and can be spread by anybody, whether they are traumatized or not. The virus has no consideration whatsoever for individuals.

On April 15, 2020, there were only 2 million cases in the entire world. As of July 24, 2020, there are over four million known coronavirus cases in the US alone. Over the past two weeks, case counts have risen in 37 states - and the reason is that people are putting their "individual rights" over that of public health. Our economy is stalled, people are out of jobs, kids can't go to school, parents are exhausted, and we could be facing an even worse crisis in November and December. This is the wrong time to make it all about you.

I will say the same thing to those who refuse to wear masks that I would say to someone who smokes: What you do to your own body is your business. But when what you do is damaging others, we aren't talking about your personal rights anymore. We are talking about public endangerment. If the danger is great enough, there are laws against your "rights." This is one of those times, kiddo. It's not your decision. This virus is traumatizing millions of people all over the globe. Your sister is going to have to deal with her personal trauma in a different way.

If people can't comply with our current safety mandates, they should stay inside. It's for everyone's protection. And btw - that firefighter who needs to breathe should do it away from other people. He's especially vulnerable to infection if his lungs are damaged. PLEASE people - read something about the science behind what is going on. Educate yourselves. It's important.

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## **[Advice from the Trenches: Do the discriminated against discriminate?](#)**

Dear C and Dr. B;

Issues of racism and discrimination are all over the news. Right now, Black Lives Matter is at the top of the list and people are getting fired and called out for anything that implies a personal racist attitude. Before that, the #MeToo movement went after men for discrimination and abuse against women.

I think that all of this is important; no one should ever be oppressed or disadvantaged due solely to skin color or gender. But something bugs me - any time a movement gains prominence and national

sympathy, it seems like they start doing a lot of discriminating of their own. White America has become a generalization that implies privilege, even when those white Americans are being abused and oppressed themselves. If you point this out to a member of BLM, they dismiss it because they have been oppressed on a much greater scale, and okay, that may be true, but it doesn't mean the other stuff doesn't matter. I've also seen #MeToo supporters who are hostile to men in general because they've taken so much crap from men in the past. A lot of people who have been discriminated against end up making blanket assumptions and discriminate against others in just the same way. So, how is that any different? Is it okay because they are historically "justified"?

C says: We all discriminate - it's a natural tendency and not inherently a bad one. One must discriminate in order to make any choices at all. But discrimination can become a very destructive tool in the hands of those who seek personal gain and power over others.

It's not really surprising that any group that has been long oppressed is going to take a dim view of those who oppose them. Conflicts between large factions tend to turn both sides' attitude into one of Us versus Them. So, yeah - people who are discriminated against can make blanket assumptions the same as anyone else. Having a just cause doesn't make the oppressed saints; they make assumptions like everyone else. An example - I'm a white American, and to many people of color, that makes me "one of them": an entitled person who makes more money and is given more opportunities and preferential treatment by the law. In a sense they are right - I am unlikely to be beaten to death by the cops on a routine traffic stop. But I am pretty much the opposite of privileged and entitled. I'm from a poor family with no connections, and I grew up in a town where the only Black family was extremely wealthy, the father was a famous doctor, and the daughter was very popular in school. I very much felt at the bottom of the social pecking order. But how is a total stranger supposed to know that? It's not a logical assumption to make. And therein lies the crux of the problem - most of the members of opposing factions don't know each other. Few of them have ever spoken with the people they are screaming at. My opinion? If you want to make a difference, being kinder and less judgmental toward the people you encounter in your own life will go a lot further than jumping on a bandwagon at a rally and pointing fingers.

Dr. B says: Humans learn by the role modeling they are exposed to. What we experience is what we know and it predicts what we shall do, even if our goal is to do something else. Creating new behavior patterns takes learning new skills and practicing them constantly with attention and active intent.

Humans are territorial by nature and we create pecking orders. Fractionation within any group is inevitable, it just depends on the size of the group. There are 200 words in the BLM charter that have been called out as anti-Semitic. But despite some antisemitism within BLM, I do know that those who identify as Jews can still support it. The threat that comes from widespread general racism within the culture is more dangerous than that from a small faction within a larger group. If we all band together now, given the current momentum of BLM, we can make a difference toward racism in the larger population. The racism within smaller groups can be dealt with later.

There is no homogeneity to the term/label of Judaism, nor with the terms Black or Asian. I heard an "Asian" girl who spoke about how angry the term Asian made her because "Asian" represents 3/4 of the human race and spans multiple continents, over a billion people, and hundreds of languages and cultures. This made it a completely meaningless term. Judaism is similar because it represents nearly every European and Middle Eastern community that has ever existed. The entire religion uses the same book but the cultures within the religion are all different and each interpret that book uniquely. If examined, all labels are this way.

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