Picture this: you are lying in bed feeling like complete crap, and not for the first time. It has been too long since you showered, your bedroom is probably a mess, and you have all but memorized the bumps and cracks in the ceiling above you. You can’t see any real reason to get up. Happiness — or even contentedness, for that matter — is less than a distant memory: it doesn’t exist anymore. Your energy has disappeared as if... yes... as if it has been slowly sucked from your body.

Sound familiar?

And when I say “familiar,” I don’t mean it in the usual, ‘Oh, hey, look, I have depression again,’ sort of way, which I’m sure many of us can relate to. I mean it in the sense that we have seen the disappearance of happiness and the sucking of energy from one’s
body before, in a pop-culture context. In a popular fantasy book-series, these feelings of wretchedness are represented by drifting, hooded figures with scarred skin and dark, gaping mouths — figures reminiscent of death itself.

Of course I’m talking about *Harry Potter*, and of course I’m talking about Dementors.

Dementors first appear in the third book in the *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. They are dark, disturbing manifestations that aren’t likely to be forgotten by any reader who stumbles across them. They attached themselves to my memory specifically because they stuck out as an obvious symbol of depression. After first encountering Dementors on the train to Hogwarts, Ron declares that he “felt weird, … like [he’d] never be cheerful again” (J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*).

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the first thing Ron feels after coming into close proximity with a Dementor is a lack of emotion, which he describes as being “weird.” It’s strange and uncomfortable to feel nothing, especially when this “nothing” seems as though it won’t be going away any time soon. What the influence of the Dementor has most in common with depression is its ability to appear lasting. If you can’t remember feeling happy, then it’s difficult to imagine being happy in the future; both Dementors and depression create this illusion.

Muggles beware: Dementors affect you, too!

While speaking to Harry in his office, Professor Lupin outlines perhaps the most lucid description of Dementors as being the living embodiment of depression:

https://ambertypewriter.wordpress.com/2016/01/02/if-only-we-were-wizards-banishing-depression-with-the-flick-of-a-wand/
“Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places. They glory in decay and despair. They drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. Even muggles feel their presence, though they can’t see them. Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself: soulless and evil. You’ll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life” (J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*).

Besides the fact that people suffering from depression do not, in fact, become “soulless and evil” over time, this passage is basically perfect when comparing Dementors to this particular mental illness. Assuming we are all muggles, Dementors become an invisible yet palpable force, sucking happiness and hope from the world around us.

Once they have gained control over us, they also keep us prisoner. It’s not by chance that Dementors are the guards of the most prominent wizard jail around, Azkaban. Lupin explains to Harry almost offhandedly that Azkaban doesn’t need “walls or water to keep the prisoners in, not when they’re all trapped inside their own heads, incapable of a single cheerful thought.” It’s also not a coincidence that most of the prisoners “go mad within weeks” (Rowling).

Just like Azkaban, depression is a psychological jail. Contrary to popular belief, depression is not an excuse to laze about and relax in bed, staring at the ceiling. It is emotional and mental torture. Think about it! Depression is essentially what the wizarding world uses to punish the most atrocious witches and wizards around. It’s not only immobilizing, but terrible enough to be an adequate fate for murderers and the followers of Lord Voldemort, the epitome of pure evil in the *Harry Potter* book-series.

And on that note, let me clarify: those suffering from depression are not evil. In this world, because we don’t have a prison in which the punishment is eternal depression, no one can do anything to deserve it. It’s not their fault, and it is most definitely not their choice, either.

The key to understanding this point is that Dementors, being creatures whose sole purpose is to suck the life out of living things, do not discriminate. If you happen to wander anywhere near Dementors, they will immediately begin to drain all joy from you. They don’t care what you’ve done, how old you are, what color your skin is, or what gender you are. The only people who are more susceptible, claims Lupin, are those who have “horrors in [their] past that the others don’t have” (Rowling).
Recall that the Dementors affect Harry, one of the most powerful wizards of all time, more than others. This is because Harry’s parents were murdered when he was a small child, and he still has this memory lodged somewhere deep inside of him. He obviously had no control over his parents being murdered, and therefore the strong effect of the Dementors on him has “nothing to do with weakness” and is “nothing to feel ashamed of,” as Lupin reiterates again and again (Rowling).

The Patronus Charm, our one defense against Dementors (aka depression); oh, wait…

The one major flaw in the ‘Dementors as depression’ analogy is that the Dementors can be cast away by a single charm. Sure, this charm has to be performed by a talented wizard, and it can only be conjured by thinking of the happiest moment of one’s life, but it all just seems too simple.

Us mere muggles don’t have it so easy. Without magical powers, depression hangs threatening and deadly before us, as difficult to understand and battle as the wind. We must try a plethora of defenses, from exercise and meditation, to medication and therapy. We hope these tactics will work, but we never really know.

If only we were wizards. If only it were as simple as Expecto Patronum.
2 thoughts on “If Only We Were Wizards: Banishing Depression with the Flick of a Wand”

1. white27david
   JANUARY 14, 2016 AT 12:49 AM
   <3, I love how you confront these mental illnesses through your writing. It is very moving.

   REPLY
   ○ Erica McKeen
   JANUARY 14, 2016 AT 3:59 PM
   Thank you! This was my attempt at a less depressing view of, well, depression. We need to remember it’s in the world all around us, even pop-culture.

   REPLY

BLOG AT WORDPRESS.COM.