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COFFEE IS FLUID:
A DISCUSSION ON COFFEE
AND ITS MODERNITY

by

EMMA ANGELL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Anthropology
in the College of Sciences
and in the Burnett Honors College
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ABSTRACT

Coffee's worldwide popularity, and especially among Americans, has grown significantly over recent decades. This is credited to the rise of corporate coffee shops like Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts, as well as the inescapable presence of coffee marketing on the internet and social media in our everyday lives. This thesis traces coffee's popularity from its early days as a facilitator in increased production rate in factories during the Industrial Revolution up to the popularity it has gained on TikTok and other social media platforms in the 21st century. My research examines the growth of coffee culture in America through participant observation and a synthesis of texts, considering how coffee influences daily life through marketing and addiction, and how it has managed to stay relevant through that time.

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INTRODUCTION

My dad started making cold brew coffee probably around 2014, a little before it became popular in coffee shops. He kept telling me it was better than drip coffee; that it was less acidic and had a better flavor. Coffee became a hobby for my dad, purchasing locally roasted beans, grinding them himself, putting a pitcher of the fresh grounds mixed in water in the fridge to sit for what seemed like forever. I tried his cold brew a few times when he first started making it but I did not really love the taste because I was young and all coffee was too bitter to me. Nevertheless, by my junior year of high school, I began to drink cold brew semi-regularly to stay awake during school, and now it is the only type of coffee I drink.

Leading into this research, I never had a research question, but more curiosity surrounding coffee. I did not know much about it and felt like it was something mundane, a daily routine that I knew nothing about, yet almost every adult I know drinks coffee, and each of them seems to have preferences and specificity in what goes into their coffee. I also was curious about the corporate prevalence of coffee. People drive by different coffee chains every day. These chains are extremely normal in our society, and I felt that I did not know enough about them. With the indication of both consumerism, people choosing to drink coffee and commit to certain brands, and marketing, the prevalence of coffee chains in our daily lives, I wanted to explore how people interact with these brands, and how the brands interact with their consumers, as well as the intent behind some of their marketing.

It is because of the varied experiences and lack of awareness around coffee that I wanted to study it and its effects on society. Its popularity has caused a “coffee culture,” made up of people who care about its various functions, in whatever way it serves them, and encompasses a wide array of chains, independent stores, and homemade coffee. Today, coffee functions in a

variety of ways, and its meaning to each person is interpretational but is ultimately framed by its history, addictive qualities, and corporate marketing.

PURPOSE

Coffee's considerable growth in popularity from its early implementation in factory workers' daily breaks up to the popularity it has gained on social media (mainly TikTok) has urged me to research the popularity and growth of coffee culture in America. I wanted to explore how coffee sellers such as Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts have influenced this fascination with such a naturally bitter-tasting drink (Rogers 2020). Its popularity has seemingly skyrocketed on social media with Starbucks and Dunkin' baristas posting their favorite coffee combinations. Hence, I wanted to understand how it has established its grounds (pun intended) in American culture and how we have become so comfortable with its existence in some of the most dominant food chains.

Originally, I wanted to explore how the modern coffee era has people so deeply intertwined with consumerism that they have established coffee habits and rituals, offering an 'experience' with the coffee. People have become obsessed with one brand or another. Some use their Keurig daily; some people have completely written Keurig as a company off for its unsustainability (Sagasta 2015). Many people go to a shop daily, and some do not on account of its expense.

But during my initial research stages, my study evolved, focusing partially on consumerism, but further incorporating the marketing that encourages consumerism, and how that may be affiliated with caffeine addiction.

BACKGROUND

Beginnings

Throughout history, coffee has retained significance in a number of different cultures and served a wide variety of purposes but can ultimately be classified as a psychoactive drug (Pollan 2021). This adds to the complexity of the coffee culture of today, as daily usage and consistent devotion to it showcases and supports socially acceptable addiction and the notion that people want, or rather, need it to feel normal (Meredith 2013, 114).

Coffee beans were originally cultivated in various parts of Africa, most notably in the Kaffa region of Ethiopia around the ninth century (Lawton 2013, 1). The beans were exported to Yemen for Sufi monks to stay awake during nightly prayer (Milos 2010). It was here that roasting and grinding coffee beans became standard. Coffee was then popularized in Yemen while under Ottoman occupation during the fifteenth century, acting as a substitute for wine. Coffee in Yemen then became a morning ritual for men before going out to war and served as an affirmation of their religious identity (Lawton 2013, 2).

The Sufis of Yemen were one of the first cultures outside of Africa to habitually drink coffee. Purportedly, the Sufis saw roasting the coffee bean as an analogy to the process of transcendence of the human soul (Robson 2019). The roasting process symbolized a change in their consciousness after ingesting it and feeling the effects of caffeine, which is similar to various early Central and South American cultures that had ceremonies and rituals associated with hallucinogens and altered consciousness (Pollan 2021, 13).

Social Change

In the 1500s, coffee served as a pre-war ritual for Islamic men fighting against adjacent Christian-led states and territories. Through this practice, coffee became a masculine drink, which created social rules that only allowed males to drink coffee in public, while women were confined to their houses if they wanted to drink it (Lawton 2013, 2). Although men had the freedom to drink coffee where they pleased, women increasingly enjoyed the opportunity to commune and enjoy a cup without public judgment, in their own homes, asserting a new level of dominance in the house and ultimately shifting gendered power dynamics in the home (Lawton 2013, 2) during and after this period of war in Islamic states. This is seen time and again in history internationally, as men were allowed to consume coffee in public, women barred from public socialization but maneuvering within their own spaces to gain an amount of agency in their daily lives (Lawton 2013, 2).

Around the 17th century, merchants from the Middle East brought coffee to Europe. Many were suspicious of the drink for its bitterness, and it was even condemned by the clergy when it arrived in Venice. The controversy continued to rise until Pope Clement VIII had to intervene, and it was then that coffee was certified as an acceptable drink ("History of Coffee"). Coffee at this point became increasingly popular in Europe, replacing the regular breakfast beverages of beer and wine, and was found in newly instituted coffee houses, which were quickly becoming popular as "centers of social activity and communication" ("History of Coffee").

The Market

Coffee was on the rise, becoming highly popular in America after the Boston Tea Party in 1773. It was recognized as patriotic for replacing tea to spite the British. The international availability of coffee was limited at that time and therefore created a high demand for the product over subsequent decades. As more people learned of the purported benefits, including but not limited to increasing energy, reducing hunger, strengthening the heart, and helping with digestion (Robson 2019), prices increased. Its popularity piqued interests and encouraged regular consumption for those who could procure it (Roseberry 1996, 764). Eventually, coffee went from an expensive drink only available to the wealthy to a recognizable product in most middle-class homes and factories as more people sought other or more affordable options for coffee beans.

In the 1950s, coffeehouses were adopted into American social customs (Topik 2009, 99). People liked how social they could be in coffeehouses, which appealed to academics, social and political activists, and a variety of artists for their sociability. As coffeehouses became more of a social habit, "coffee became a necessity. Merchants employed coffee not only as a commodity to sell but also as a lure to pull in customers for other products and services," (Topik 2009, 99) using coffee and its addictive properties for their own commercial gain.

From the mid-1960s and into the early 1970s, coffee-centered chains were increasingly established with the beginnings of Peet's Coffee, and eventually Starbucks. This is titled 'second-wave coffee,' in which there was a growth in the interest of the drink but included more additives like syrups and new flavors of coffee (Scattergood 2006). At this point, the focus was not specifically on the beans but there was increased use of 'gourmet' and 'premium' in coffee beans and grounds to entice those who had not already become heavily invested in the drink.

Today, in the third-wave coffee culture, coffee is a highly sought-after drink that now comes in a variety of forms, available 24 hours a day from gourmet shops to gas stations. There is an increased focus on the beans and how the coffee itself is made, how it tastes without syrups, sugar, and cream. Though syrups, sugar, and creamers are still popular, coffee can be found in a wide variety of flavors without additives and is part of the daily lives of 62% of the American population (NCA 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Much of my data collection was through online research of various texts and participant observation, with my field site remaining online, as the Coronavirus pandemic has prohibited public safety precautions usually taken in a research setting. I used a number of observational articles that explore the world of coffee in a number of contexts, as well as some historical recordings in the early understanding and making of coffee and the culture surrounding it. I also used several anthropological studies on coffee that provided better insight into their frameworks and methods for data collection, as well as the conclusions that came from them. Not all data was exactly what my thesis required, but taking pieces (within their own contexts of course) facilitated in the forming of new conclusions and will ultimately form a comprehensive analysis of coffee consumption in America.

Frameworks

Neoliberalism is one of the most prominent anthropological frameworks in the discussion of corporations, and in this context, corporate coffee chains. Neoliberalism focuses on both economic and social implications but is most commonly used in anthropology as a frame of reference towards corporations and government, proposing a free market and lack of restrictions on economic endeavors, but can be used in a wide variety of contexts (Ortner 2016). This framework puts more focus on the circumstances that large coffee companies operate within, such as their interactions with growers and their hold on the global coffee trade, exploring their documentation of their movements within the coffee industry.

I also used the concept of third places, developed by Ray Oldenburg, who defines it as "the core settings of informal public life" (1989, 16). This concept was used to focus on how customers use coffee shops as a place between work and home for social or personal purposes. This concept also applies to consumers in how they have constructed personal descriptions and meanings for themselves around the coffee shops, applying it to their own lifestyles and forming their routines around the habit.

Addiction was another framework that became more prominent as my research continued. Addiction frames coffee as a psychoactive drug, and my research covers how that has played into companies selling and marketing coffee, knowing people are more likely to drink it regularly. Oftentimes, once people find a drink they like, they come back to it regularly, and "caffeine can engender a preference for a novel flavored beverage when the drug is repeatedly paired with that flavor" (Meredith 2013, 115), meaning that people can get addicted to coffee, with the combination of its flavor and the caffeine content. This helped in establishing an association between neoliberalism and consumerism within this research.

Altogether, these frameworks offer viable context for addressing my research interests in how companies and people interact with coffee, and its function in today's society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a significant amount of research on coffee and coffee chains that focus on coffee shops being third places, serving as dynamic locations between work and home (Pozos-Brewer 2015, 88). Many sources examine place attachment within communities and how the third place may affect daily life. Others focus on the health effects of coffee (Pozos-Brewer 2015; Robson 2019). Few sources examine the way people engage with their coffee and how American corporations may have shaped that interaction (Lawton 2013; Richelieu & Korai 2014; Roseberry 1996).

One study by Richlieu and Korai examines Tim Hortons' coffee enthusiasts and why they choose to interact with Tim Hortons above all other coffee shops. Although it is a Canadian company, Tim Hortons customers' affection for the brand strongly resembles that of Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts devotees in the United States. Coffee customers have taken to engaging in basic communication over Tim Hortons coffee while regularly affiliating positive experiences with the company. The brand benefits from these associations and has embraced the atmosphere and experience their consumer base has created for them.

Robert Lawton (2013) explains the different ways in which coffee is situated in our society, describing its relevance to gender separation, religion, racism, and consumerism. He describes the history as well as the general aspects of the anthropological contexts that coffee is affiliated with and had an overarching theme in establishing an identity, contributing to the analysis and anthropological perspective of coffee and its historical and contemporary significance in society.

Michael Pollan (2021) contributed to the discussion on coffee in a chapter devoted to caffeine consumption. He identified coffee as a drug, both psychoactive and addictive, though incredibly common and socially acceptable, which may stem from its push in workplaces for

productivity and awakeness. He seems to be both an insider and outsider: an outsider for quitting coffee and seeing the addictive properties for what they are, and an insider for being an addict for its ability to provide a schedule to any given morning, before, during, and after coffee, and its effects.

William Roseberry (1996) wrote a paper called "The Rise of Yuppie Coffees and the Reimagination of Class in the United States," in which he discusses how coffee as a drink exhibits a sense of showmanship, each store trying to present something new and different from any other stores. He examines information regarding the more specific aspects of how coffee developed, both in growing/roasting/brewing terms, and the consumer's taste for it. It explains how coffee has changed over time and why coffee shops are the way they are.

These texts each contributed a unique perspective on coffee's purpose in today's society, and were integral in the structuring of this paper. These sources also helped in determining the various anthropological frameworks in which coffee is considered, and each of these frameworks placed within this paper.

DISCUSSION

Beginnings: Coffee for the Result

Coffee and caffeine were historically used in the United States military regimen. During the Civil War, one Union general was said to plan his attacks around when his men were at their most alert state in their wave of caffeine (Pollan 2021, 168). The way coffee and caffeine were implemented into the military gives evidence to the argument that coffee was corporatized as a result of larger institutions taking advantage of the productivity and energy it produces in employees.

Coffee, in a similar light to its military use, was strictly utilitarian in its initial introduction to America, given to factory workers to improve productivity, and grew as more Americans found that its effects made life more tolerable with increased demand in multitasking (Topik 2009, 100). It gets people through their workdays and creates the energy they sometimes require in order to complete daily tasks. Coffee breaks were implemented into the American workforce around the early 1950s, (Pollan 2021, 168) when factories were grappling with tired workers and slow speed of production. Although there were more mistakes from working faster, coffee was still encouraged by upper management for increased productivity. Coffee's primary purpose at this time was to benefit the rate of production (Pollan 2021).

By drinking coffee specifically to speed up factory production, people were no longer working for themselves, but for the profitability of the factory. Michael Pollan describes how Michel Foucault's concept of biopower "could profitably be used to describe the effects of caffeine, since it helped bend humans to the wheel of the Machine and the requirements of a new economic and mental order" (Pollan 2021, 166). This coincides with the "imposing [of] unrealistic targets and pressure to overwork" (Telford and Briggs 2021, 2) elements that stem

from neoliberalism. With the early implementation of coffee in the workplace, as Pollan explains, coffee holds a very powerful place in society, giving people the boost they need to complete daily tasks, pushing people to conform to some of the unattainable tasks pushed onto them in a daily work setting.

Although "it was not until the 1950s that the modern concept of the coffee break—free coffee plus paid time in which to enjoy it—was fully established as a legally recognized institution in the American workplace, " (Pollan 2021, 169) this concept explains how coffee and its incorporation into a generic workday preyed on the working class, as coffee's implementation was strictly for its purposes in making employees more productive and had much less of a fluid meaning to people at this time.

Corporate Branding

The branding of a product is to put the product under a certain label, a company name, or the logo of a company. To quote Dr. Ian Malcolm from *Jurassic Park*, "you patented it and packaged it and slapped it on a plastic lunchbox, and now you're selling it." Marketing a product is more the promotion, advertisement, and sale of the product, after it has been branded by a company.

A product becomes symbolic with the "purchase and consumption of products for the purposes of social and self-expression" (Ravasi & Rindova 2008, 271). Once consumers find a product that fits into their narrative, whether that be their lifestyle or just their schedule for the day, that product holds symbolic meaning to them ("Consumers and Identity" 2015). The original intention behind the product dissipates, and how the product functions for that person becomes its meaning to them. Retailers like Starbucks construct their stores to "imbue their

products with meanings that become part of the overall subsequent consumption experience, including subsequent product use," (Ravasi & Rindova 2008, 272) and as long as the product or atmosphere has a chance of fitting into any potential customer's needs, the branding speaks for itself.

There are no better examples of this type of branding and marketing than Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts. These two brands have formed loyal customer bases, creating recognizable marketing that lures people into their stores, and keeps the regulars coming back (Rogers 2020). For example, Munchkins, the small, sugar-coated donut holes that are regularly found at Dunkin Donuts, were not widely sold until one Dunkin' Donuts shop began selling them to children around Halloween, and expanded to the other Dunkin' stores in 1972 (Rosenberg 2020, 130). Shops would occasionally sell donut holes, but before the branding, they did not sell all too well, until the donut holes were treated as their own entity: given their own name, covered in sugar and sprinkles, and filled with jams and frostings, making them a fan favorite.

Specialty Coffee

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021, Dunkin' Donuts paired with Charli D'Amelio, a TikTok star, to produce a cold brew drink that she was known to frequently order. The company reported a rise in their app downloads, and hundreds of thousands of 'Charli' drink orders. I would like to think that the TikTok collaboration reminded people of the experience of something that was mundane but is once again a treat for people in their chaotic lives as the world begins to emerge from their homes, out of quarantine from the COVID-19 pandemic (Rogers 2020), all while promoting a specialty item.

Coffee companies have had to change the coffee itself through their beans and grounds, as well as specialty drinks since no one wants a really nice ambiance and a bad or even mediocre cup of coffee. Coffee brands have relied on promoting a new flavor or unique brew to lure in those still apprehensive over the look of the coffee shop. Many shops have even turned to tea and various other blended drinks to appeal to a wider audience, such as younger generations.

Starbucks has a reputation for its monthly and specialty drinks. As a middle schooler, I always wanted to get some kind of Frappuccino, a blended drink that is essentially a coffee slushie with various flavorings and syrups. Even now, I occasionally check their monthly or seasonal offerings. The new or seasonal Starbucks drinks usually contain caffeine, which might be part of the lure, as caffeine can produce addiction, but they taste good, probably from the sugar, and have effectively created a fanbase with these monthly releases, for example, the ever-so-popular pumpkin spice latte. A few years ago, Starbucks started offering "nitro cold brew." The coffee is put through what looks like a beer tap in order to pump nitrogen through it for a smoother flavor. I have been told by many that the nitro cold brew seems to hit a little harder and makes people jittery, but takes away any of the acidic taste usually associated with coffee.

Over the country's quarantine, the CEO and upper management of Dunkin' Donuts worked to produce new drinks to lure people back to Dunkin' in an attempt to give a level of comfort for the consumer and a level of stability for the company during the country's quarantine (Rogers 2020). This summer they came out with "strawberry popping bubbles," which are little 'pearls' filled with juice that pop when you bite them. This is no new concept but is very new to American coffee chains. You can add them to basically any drink at Dunkin' but were a specialty item that was brought in with a few new fruit tea flavors.

Other independent shops have started to offer things like CBD oil, which calms the nervous system, as add-ins for your coffee. More recognizable add-ins for specialty coffee include different types of milk, which came with the rise in veganism but has situated itself into many people's diets, making the experience more unique. William Roseberry (1996) describes how coffee shops changed to allow for an experience in the second wave of coffee, during the rise of Starbucks, giving the customer more options while also catering to specific needs that have developed around the coffee market entirely. His 1996 essay "The Rise of Yuppie Coffees and the Reimagination of Class in the United States," still rings true in his analysis of consumerism and the promotion of new and exciting drinks to lure the customer, creating a flavor experience that is unique to that shop, and engages in competition with other stores.

A report on Dunkin' Donuts by Kate Rogers explains that they have incorporated oat milk at all of their U.S. locations, as well as 'Refreshers', or green tea with fruit. Both of these menu additions are said to bring a younger female demographic (Rogers 2020). This is similar to the general functioning of the fashion industry: how fashion begins in one place, and fast fashion brands like Old Navy will mass-produce whatever is trendy, giving options to choose from, but only options that are marketable and have already gained success elsewhere. Like fashion, coffee is a carefully coded experience that has been years in the making and will continue to grow as long as it remains marketable and relevant (Roseberry 1996).

Specialty coffee has developed in the third-wave coffee, in which there is more focus on the quality of the beans, how they are ground, the quality of any additives, and in general, the drink itself. Many stores already created a welcoming atmosphere in which to work or meet people during second-wave coffee, where there was more emphasis on the coffee 'environment' (Roseberry 1996). It now serves the public in providing taste-driven drinks outside of the basics

on (almost) every menu. Specialty coffee has contributed to creating an experience for the consumer while providing a basis for them to create their own meanings and affiliations with the brand.

Coffee Shops as Third Places

Marketing does not just apply to individual products. Companies have to sell themselves, too, to encourage customers to spend time and money there. Starbucks, for example, has branded itself as a "sanitized" version of other more artistic and independent coffee shops, labeling itself as an "everybody" shop (Thompson 2004). It seems that Starbucks has intentionally created a neutral, modern atmosphere through its monochromatic color palette, industrial lighting, wall art, and comfortable seating to lure those who use coffee shops as third places (Oldenburg 1989). This gave them a running start in avoiding the "big corporation" stereotype. Starbucks is a dominant brand in terms of its placing on the coffee-chain market (Bennett 2021), but maintains a passive, seemingly independent facade in its individual stores, though more watered-down in comparison to independent shops that tend to have a bit more charisma or flair (Thompson 2004). In creating a neutral and welcoming atmosphere, Starbucks has branded itself as a third place and contributes to the dynamic associations attributed to it.

McDonald's has done something similar, sinking $6 million in "modernizing" their stores ("McDonald's" 2018), which made them more monochromatic and simplistic, modeled after the success of Starbucks and other coffee chains. This redesign incorporated "barista-style cafes" in an attempt to encourage longevity in the company and its stores, leaning into the third-place concept that coffee shops have already embraced. In this sense, McDonald's has done the same thing as Starbucks in order to get people in the door and make them feel more comfortable, while

endorsing new or specialty products, which, in McDonald's case, falls at the hands of McCafé, a branch of the McDonald's franchise that focuses on their coffee and pastry options on the menu.

This concept of third places has introduced the idea of the consumer having an 'experience' in each store as coffee establishes itself deeper into daily routines. Many consumers want more than your basic coffee shop; they want to feel a welcoming space that is designed to be a third place, in between work and home, a place that is comfortable in aesthetics and function. Coffee's "utilitarian and functional elements… are gradually being replaced by more sensual aspects that illustrate an individual's desire for a more vivid and diverse life" (Richelieu & Korai 2014). People seemingly want the experience of having an outside option to socialize or work, or a place in-between work and home that gives them a break between the two, rather than just the coffee.

Because of the growing consumer base looking for a 'unique' and sensory-based coffee experience, consumers have begun attributing meanings and associations more closely related to their own lifestyle as a means of creating more comfort and recognition towards brands. This is what John F. Sherry defines as "brandscapes," or "consumers' active constructions of personal meanings and lifestyle orientations from the symbolic resources provided by an array of brands" (Sherry 1998, 112).

People have formed their coffee habits and rituals around their own lifestyles within these places. It does not necessarily matter which shop or chain I am talking about, but the various associations that customers have created because of them. It is because of these mental constructions of new meanings and associations for these brands that coffee shops have become more flexible. Their meanings to each person vary and will function to how the customer sees fit. "Coffee shop patrons can create the place that they want out of the flexible space that arises from

the intersection of the public and the private realms of urban life," (Pozos-Brewer 2015) and no longer hold the single definition of "a place to buy coffee," but a place to sit down to do work, meet up with someone, or just people-watch: a third place.

Coffee as a Drug

The reason people go to get coffee stems from its flavor, the sociability and third-place aspect, and the lure of marketing, but also its addictive qualities. Coffee is a psychoactive and addictive drug for its caffeine content, containing about 95 grams of caffeine (Meredith 2013, 114). Caffeine affects both our mental and physical state, but is socially acceptable, as it does not completely alter our consciousness. Companies can use this as a hook, relying on a portion of their customers to come in as regulars, and allows companies to engage with others that may not engage with coffee as frequently.

As previously stated, coffee is occasionally used purely as an energy source. It seems that for many, "working life would feel impossible without it" (Robson 2019); they need it to get through the day. Even in my high school, kids relied on it to keep them awake at night to write papers, and in the morning after a night of little to no sleep. Coffee was not sold in my high school because it was and is still considered a drug, but we were allowed to bring it in with us. One of my friends frequently brought a 32oz water bottle full of black coffee.

Caffeine is an addictive substance that makes coffee relatively easy to get into the habit of. It gives that boost of energy while hooking you on it. Over time, caffeine has less of an effect with consistent consumption, and "an increasing number of clinical studies are showing that some caffeine users become dependent on the drug and are unable to reduce consumption despite knowledge of recurrent health problems associated with continued use" (Meredith 2013, 114).

Consistent caffeine consumption causes both a reliance to keep withdrawal symptoms at bay and a reliance to give yourself the energy that it usually creates for you. Coffee, in "its sociability, its tendency to addict consumers, the medicinal effect of its caffeine, and the small number of substitutes… [has become] more a necessity than almost any other food or beverage" (Topik 2009, 99).

Coffee also holds higher significance for its ability to change one's mindset or general temperament. This is partially why it is not made available in high schools. It also is something people use to get their day started, almost as a means of self-care or just to begin the day with some amount of structured time around one thing. It has situated itself as an easy way to begin your day, or even as a midday pick-me-up. Coffee has made itself "a benevolent drug" (Sherry 1998, 359) by giving energy, a putative necessity to function in daily life, without altering consciousness.

Consumerism

Though the consumer is targeted by marketing and coffee companies' keen awareness of its addictive properties, it is still a two-sided relationship. It seems that "the commodification of reality and the manufacture of demand have had serious implications for the construction of human beings in the present day, where, to quote philosopher Herbert Marcuse, 'people recognise themselves in their commodities'" (Higgs 2021). The consumer has come to accept their position in the neoliberal ladder, and has reached general consensus that putting an emotional value on products is beneficial to them. It is the epitome of the "commodification of relationships" (Sherry 1998, 357), the consumer valuing the product because of the associations

they've developed for it, and plays directly into the neoliberal idea of allowing companies to do as they please in an open market to gain economic and social traction.

Coffee has also become a vehicle of self-expression for Millennials and Generation Z. As people come to identify or see themselves in their drinks, that drink becomes a part of them as a means of expressing their interests, whether that coffee is sustainable or has an interesting flavor combination (Falkner 2020, 3). This consumption behavior has helped companies understand the individuality that people sometimes seek in their coffee, and has contributed to the third wave of coffee, encompassing the various sourcing of beans, syrups, and the ambiance of stores, catering to a wider consumer base.

Though coffee functions as a form of self-expression for a few generations, it does not for all. Studies have shown that Baby Boomers pay closer attention to the taste of coffee and are known to show brand loyalty, rather than experimentation (Falkner 2020, 4). This shows that there is generational consumer behavior (Falkner 2020, 1), and proves that coffee functions differently for different people, and even different generations.

CONCLUSION

Coffee serves a variety of functions. The way people interact with it is unique to them and is part of a wide array of meanings and conceptions around it. Through this study, I wanted to better understand the motives behind coffee in the corporate world, and find how coffee functions in society today.

Through time, coffee has given rise to an entire culture, with its small beginnings with ritual consumption within the Islamic faith, moving into its relevance within the upper class in Europe and its exclusivity as an exotic product, and its various meanings to all classes of people once spreading to the U.S. In its initial stages in America, it was a utilitarian product but has spread to now have meanings ranging from a ritual, a treat, or even a place to socialize. The history of coffee has made coffee what it is today, while marketing, consumerism, and its addictive properties drive it forward.

Final Thoughts

Everyone has their own thoughts, opinions, and associations. But in reference to coffee, people have their own associations, opinions, and even brandscapes (Thompson 2004) surrounding the drink itself. Each brand may function differently in each person's mind, like how Dunkin', for many, is a stopping point during long drives in the northeast. Even without brands, coffee serves each person differently, whether it is a way to start your day quietly, or to treat yourself on a day out.

Recently, my yoga teacher had the class respond to a quote that resulted from a conversation with one of her colleagues: "The goal [of yoga and meditation] is simply to see yoga and meditation from multiple perspectives, to work with the practices from multiple

perspectives, and allow all of the information to coexist so that each person can integrate what works into his or her life, most effectively for his or her self." (Stone 2021) I feel that this applies to just about everything, but in the context of this paper, it applies to coffee. Similar to yoga, coffee is something that can be taken piece by piece, and applied to one's life on their own terms.

Today, it seems that coffee consumers look for something functional within the context of their own lifestyle that still brings them joy and benefits them in some way that validates their frequent consumption habits and the financial endeavor that is coffee culture (Richelieu & Korai 2014).

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