

On average, from the first day we step foot into year seven until the last day in year eleven we will have taken seventy exams. That's seventy late nights of studying, seventy moments of sheer panic when we can't remember the answer to a question and seventy times we have received the results and felt either like a genius; or a failure.

Our identities have been replaced by a single letter. We have become our predicted results. The boy with straight A's can't possibly get a C in his GCSE's and the girl with D's in English is obviously not going to get a B. In science, we are forced to redo our papers if we don't achieve our target grades- target grades set by our naïve eleven year old selves. We barely even did science in primary school! My only recollections of primary school science involve cress seeds in cupboards and mouldy bread down the back of radiators.

Low self-esteem is perhaps one of the biggest issues that we face as teenagers. When you receive an E on a test that you were predicted a B in you automatically feel like you're useless- especially when the teacher then projects the entire class's results onto the board. You strain your eyes searching and hoping that everyone will have done badly because then you can blame the test, the mark scheme, and the teacher: anything or anyone but yourself.

The crestfallen feeling in your chest when you see those shiny A's and A*'s against your E burn holes in your confidence. We get told to try harder; to revise for longer and put more effort in. We try and explain that we are trying, we are doing all that we can do but the work is hard and it's only getting harder and we can't keep up. This is just met with a sympathetic look, a red line put under your name and a revision guide being thrust under your chin as if that it all you need to succeed.

So, sometimes we cheat on the exams. We look up past papers and study them as if they hold all the answers we will ever need. After all, we don't ever want to see that E on our papers again. We learn to take the easy way out. We become fixated on the grades we have, not the ones we want.

Our GCSE's are just over three weeks away and I couldn't be less prepared. In three weeks, we will be forced to sit in that freezing exam hall and recall everything we have ever been taught. 3 years of knowledge crammed into a month of exam papers and stress with only our coursework to cushion our fall. The stress is unreal. The stress to be the best, to do your best, to remember every lesson and learn the revision guides in their entirety.

It would be easy to say that I hate exams because of the late nights and the boring topics and the worry but I hate exams because they do not reflect who we are in any way. Memory is all that matters when it comes to exams. Who cares if you can sing, dance or paint when you can't even remember how to solve a simultaneous equation? A good memory does not automatically make you intelligent. You can remember the exam topics without even understanding them.

Furthermore, our exam papers are marked by people who might be in a bad mood or struggling to read our rushed handwriting. They may have already marked 200 papers by the time they get to yours. Do you really think that the first exam paper is going to be marked in the same way that the last one is? Because I don't.

We are too young for this type of stress. We are too young, too reckless to vote in an election which will affect us- but old enough and mature enough to set the foundation for our futures. Do we go to college, or get an apprenticeship? What if my grades aren't good enough to get into sixth form? What do I do if I change my mind? They are expecting us to decide our future careers when we can't even use the bathroom without asking first.

What a joke.

Amelia Hollands, Year 11