

For many adults, the whistle of the espresso machine is the alarm clock that rouses them from half-consciousness, gets them shuffling on their feet and out the door to start another working day. It's a common occurrence to see local coffeehouses packed with suits and briefcases before the mad rush to taxis and trains. This frees up the space for university students, coffee patrons armed with their two-cents' worth of Nietzsche and their few dollars to spend on an Italian brew. A legitimate disciple of cosmopolitan culture is never spotted without a cup of caffeine tucked comfortably in the palm of one hand before a long day at the production line. Coffeehouses have been manufacturing the morning person for decades thanks to regular fixes of warm loving cups of this legal, addictive stimulant which comes in attractive, environment-friendly packaging. Caffeine has always been touted as the secret weapon of the working class and traditionally, the age bracket for frequenters of these coffee establishments ranges from 18 to 80. This is all beginning to change as doors are now swinging open to the new denizens of the cafes – the teenagers.

A few decades back, parents would never condone their children's coffee-drinking habits. That opinion changed just about 180 degrees when despite the restriction, children began to get their caffeine from soft drinks and chocolate. Even the medical profession debates the effects of caffeine on kids. The present recipe calls for more dairy and other sweeteners and much less caffeine than in the past. Forgetting about the downward spiral into diabetes and obesity, parents who would rather have their kids into caffeine than drugs or alcohol choose coffee, the lesser evil relative, as the better substitute. With this approval, teenagers gained the freedom to enjoy the many variations of warm and cold beverages the enlivened coffee industry now offers.

Thanks to advertising, coffee is also marketed as an image rather than a drink, and in an era of heightened self-awareness and self-importance, coffee answers the most vital question of the age, "What's in it for me?" The "image" varies as the vision of coffee personalization is encouraged. After all, when you approach the coffee counter, six or seven decisions must have already been made, all for that unique brew. You could be the intellectual who churns out 10,000-word essays overnight, complete with the trademark java stain on the cover page; the artist who walks down the school corridors smelling of watercolor, acrylic, and spilled Colombian or Costa Rican blend; the thespian, who stretches one hand while delivering a line from Shakespeare, a Venti in the other; the socialite, who talks about last night's parties and gossip to the tune of ice jiggling in your mocha frappuccino. There's always a brew made especially for you.

With the way things are

advertised nowadays,



coffee included, these constantly being pushed into sides. Combine that with the

youngsters are the adult mentality from all hurried pace of teenage life and

you'll find that coffee fits right into teenage culture. Along with these adult practices comes that daily pilgrimage to a place to hang out. The pubs used to be the "in" place during the '80s, the fast food joint in the '90s, but for this generation, it's the cafe.

Hollywood has to be given credit for the sophistication of cafes. Characters in movies and TV are portrayed as being savvy when they dialogue with a cup of coffee in their hands. The coffee industry responded eagerly to this clamor, making it almost impossible not to find a cafe in an area near you. In every once-dark street corner now lurks a brightly lit coffee shop with its cushioned seats, a small library of periodicals, free internet, and a smiling young attendant at the counter. For parents who are already in the full swing of the accelerated life, there will be no accusing finger pointed at children who spend less time at home and more time at the coffee shop.

Coffee is just a part of our rapidly evolving culture. Kids maturing faster than one can say

"Soy Macchiato" doesn't necessarily mean that they are ready for adult responsibilities.

While there is some merit to giving them a driven mindset, perhaps there's

little harm in leaving the early morning bustle to grown-ups and

hitting the snooze button for the kids after all.

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