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Instagram: Therapy for Millennials?

Exploring mental health through multimodal metaphor creation and appropriation.

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Abstract

Various studies carried out since 2000 have provided evidence to suggest that metaphorical appropriation is related to therapeutic development (Levitt et al., 2000; Gelo and Mergenthaler, 2012; Moschini, 2019). With the rise of social media as a platform for exploring mental health, we must be critical of the effectiveness of metaphor outside of traditional therapy, inside a world of memes and hashtags. This paper will discuss how multimodal metaphors serve as both outlets for creativity and facilitators of community for those trying to better understand and manage their mental health.

1. Introduction

A 2009 NHS-funded survey by McManus et al. found that 'one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year'. Over the past ten years this situation has failed to improve, with the Mental Health Task Force (2016) reporting that 'Mental health problems account for a quarter of all ill health in the UK' (39). However, waiting times for NHS therapists continue to increase and, in efforts to find support elsewhere, people have been turning to easily accessible support networks online (BACP, 2019).

The 13th - 19th May 2019 was the UK's Mental Health Awareness Week (MHAW). Social media outlets have become a major platform for consciousness-raising, with campaigns becoming sensationalised through the use of trending hashtags. Through this heightened visibility, social media networks like Instagram have developed spaces where individuals can express themselves within the comfort of an empathetic online community. The development of these communities means that campaigns such as MHAW make a serious impression across social medias, reshaping newsfeeds and reaching far-spread audiences.

I will begin with a quantitative overview of the metaphorical trends that appear in the top 100 posts (those with the most 'likes') from MHAW 2019 that used the hashtag #mentalhealthawarenessweek. I will then carry out a qualitative, multimodal analysis of the most interesting cases from this selection, following Charteris-Black's (2012) identification, interpretation, explanation framework. I will conclude by considering the importance of such metaphorical usage to those managing mental illness. The aims of this project can be summarised as follows: (1) to identify how multimodal metaphors are created and appropriated on Instagram; (2) to identify prevailing conceptual metaphors in mental health discourses on Instagram; (3) to suggest the therapeutic significance of the metaphors used by people on Instagram.

2. Background

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Since their ground-breaking work *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) has continued to have a pervasive and influential effect in metaphor studies (for example Gibbs, 1994; Radden and Panther, 1999; Croft and Cruse, 2004; Kövecses, 2002, 2006). The theory is a tenant of cognitive linguistics which assumes language to 'reflect patterns of thought' (Evans and Green, 2006:5). This is pertinent because, as Grady (2007) notes, 'if cognitive linguistics is a study of ways in which features of language reflect other aspects of human cognition, then metaphors provide one of the clearest illustrations of this relationship' (188). CMT holds that our metaphorical expressions are linguistic instances of entrenched, conceptual metaphors, used to help us better understand our experiences and realities. For example, 'feeling low' or 'feeling down' are linguistic instantiations of the conceptual metaphor SADNESS IS DOWN (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:18). As CMT is grounded in the idea that 'our conceptual system [É] is fundamentally metaphorical' therefore 'what we experience [...] is very much a matter of metaphor' (3).

The experiential nature and embodiment of metaphor has been thoroughly discussed (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Sweetser, 1990; Denham, 2000; Gibbs et al., 2004; Gerd, 2011). Notably, Denham (2000) claims that 'figurative language sometimes succeeds in representing aspects of experience which resist characterisation in literal terms' (ch.9). This renders metaphors, as Kirmayer (1992) concludes, 'tools for working with experience' (335). The importance of this role is even greater when considering mental health as, as psychologists Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2016) note, 'experiential knowledge [knowledge derived from experience] is involved in multifaceted responses to situations imbued with uncertainty' (7). If metaphors help us understand experiences, and this knowledge in turn helps us navigate uncertain situations, it seems plausible that metaphor is a means of translating the confounding concept of mental health into more tangible terms.

2.2 Approaching Mental Health

As noted, this analysis draws on content tagged #mentalhealthawarenessweek. Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2014) as 'a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'. Despite the WHO's efforts to define mental health as more than just the absence of mental illness, I stand in agreement with Galderisi et al. (2015) who insist that "mental health" must also account for 'a variety of emotional states and for imperfect functioning'. Therefore, in

adopting this inclusive definition, we must not presume that all posts tagged #mentalhealthawarenessweek also refer to mental illness. We should keep in mind that mental health is 'a dynamic state of internal equilibrium' which includes:

> '...basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognise, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathise with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind' (Galderisi et al., 2015:232).

The MHAW campaign aims to draw attention to, what the organisers term, 'mental health problems' (Mental Health Foundation, 2019). This accounts for people with mental disorders as well as those with good mental health. However, this inclusive approach does run the risk of blurring the line between mental health problems and mental illness and people may conclude that their experiences of negative affect are a result of a disorder. With 'emotional regulation' as another criterion for good mental health (Gross and Muñoz, 1995), those expressing and exploring the breadth of emotional granularity may not feel able to 'modulate' or even 'recognise' varying affect. The difference between general 'imperfect functioning' and a mental illness such as bipolar disorder or depression therefore remains obscured. At what point does rapid and extreme emotional variance constitute bipolar disorder? Or does prolonged, intense negative affect become depression? Answering such questions is not within the scope of this study. However, in order to refrain from interpreting content as referring to mental illness, I will focus on the representations of affect, the recognition and management of which Galderisi et al.'s definition presents as a central tenant of mental health.

Affect, as Barrett in her popularised novel explains, is 'the general sense of feeling that you experience throughout each day' (2018) and affective states can therefore encompass 'emotions, stress responses, impulses and moods' (Gross et al., 2019). Barrett, alongside other progressive emotion psychologists, emphasises the importance of subjectivity to emotional experience (Barrett 2006, 2007; Frijda 2005; Sabini and Silver 2005). The centralisation of subjectivity lends itself to a humanist outset, an approach I adopt when considering the data for the present study. In doing so I will refrain from categorising and consequently oversimplifying emotion. I will be approaching the data with the following model of emotion in mind, pioneered by James Russell (2005), where feelings are the coalescence of valence (on a spectrum of positiveness and aversiveness) and arousal.

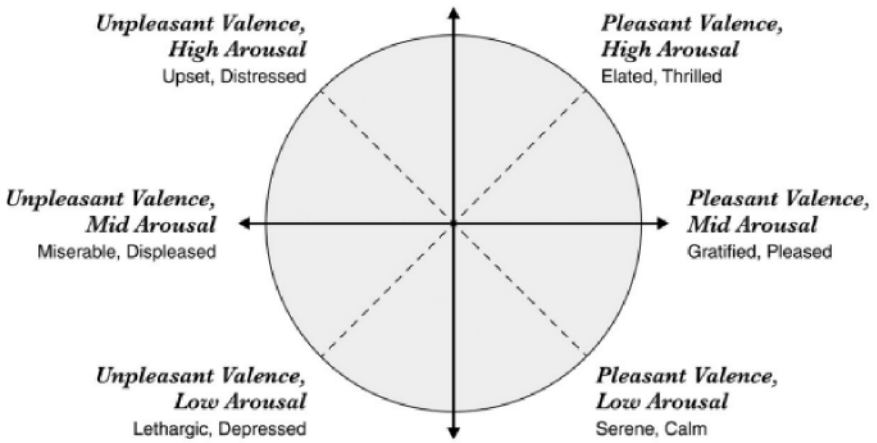

Figure 1. *Russell's affective circumplex (2005) model, as exemplified by Barrett (2018).*

Under this model, depressed or anxious feelings would likely be subsumed under the same label of 'unpleasant valence, low arousal'. Although these are often viewed as two separate conditions, Barrett's earlier work (2006) revealed how participants are often 'unwilling, or unable, to distinguish between feeling anxious and feeling depressed' (2018:2). Instead of imposing the emotion categories from the classical view of emotion, I will be approaching my data with an understanding of *emotional granularity* where, as Barrett reinforces, 'variation is the norm' (2018:11). Accordingly, although the lexis and images from the data may seem disparate, the underlying concepts alluded to via metaphor can be aligned with Russell's circumplex model: where there are no binaries, only spectra.

2.3 Metaphors of Mental Health and Affect

Since the term's popularisation in the 1900s, 'mental health' has been an area deeply steeped with metaphorical thinking. Sontag (1979) claims this is because mental disorders are examples of illnesses which cannot be easily understood and are therefore at risk of metaphoric conceptualisation (23). Charteris-Black (2012) further notes that as metaphors are 'embodied forms of expression' they are a 'source of insight' into a given mental condition (199).

I am astutely aware of the ambitiousness of this project. Addressing this, my aim is to understand how metaphors are used to understand affect, which in turn informs our understanding of mental health. I will not be attempting to decode the relationship between metaphor and a specific mental disorder, as this would stray from a focus on mental health as has been defined by Galderisi et al. This will therefore involve an investigation into the conceptualisation of emotion. Many of the same emotion concepts are used in discourses across a range of mental illnesses. This is likely because, as stated earlier, good mental health includes an 'ability to recognise, express and modulate one's own emotions' (Galderisi et. al, 2015:232). Emotion concepts have long been recognised as a discourse

area heavily reliant on metaphor use (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff 2016; Kövecses, 1986, 1990, 2000; Semino and Demjén, 2017). Although various works suggest that emotions emerge from embodied (that is to say physiological) experiences, emotion remains to the majority a perplexing and incomprehensible phenomenon (Niedenthal, 2007; Niedenthal et al. 2009; Oosterwijk et al., 2009).

Emotions, being internal and intangible, are often hard to define and therefor use metaphor to become linguistically, conceptually and cognitively realised (Kövecses, 2002). As Törneke (2017) concludes, 'we may presume that the fact that emotions are often central to psychotherapeutic practice is why metaphors are used more often in psychotherapeutic conversation than in many other situations in which we communicate with each other' (ch.1). The role of metaphors in psychotherapy has thus been highly investigated (for a summary see McMullen, 2008).

2.4 Therapy and Online Health Communication in the UK

Largely due to governmental budget cuts, communities across the UK are finding the NHS counselling services inadequate. 2012 saw the initiation of the Health and Social Care Act which officially recognised mental health as of equal importance to physical health. Despite this, a 2013 report by MIND, one of the UK's leading mental health organisations, revealed that one in ten people were waiting over a year to be seen by an NHS therapist. Since then waiting times have only worsened, with the British Medical Association (2018) reporting that in 2017 around 1,500 patients waited over a year for therapy to commence, this duration stretching to two years in parts of the Midlands.

Previous research has verified the trend for consumers to seek health-information online (Zhao and Zhang, 2017). Social media helps disseminate patient experiences and testimonials, helping both individuals and health institutions. Patients wishing to 'verbalise' their life conditions may use social media to 'convey authentic narratives of their daily lives, including illness' (Salzmann-Erikson and Hiçdurmaz, 2016: 285). This exposure has in turn been heralded by the NHS who acknowledge the role of social media in promoting the transparency of the public voice (see Local Government Agency, 2014). The potential of e-health, however, goes far beyond the scope of this single, although important, role. In their review of social and health science literature, Ziebland and Wyke (2012) identified seven domains in which patients' experiences of online information may affect their health: finding information, feeling supported, maintaining relationships with others, experiencing health services, learning to relate the story, visualising disease, and affecting behaviour.

If people are using social media therapeutically, we must be critical of the criteria being met in order to consider its use as a substitute for face-to-face communication. In McMullen's (2008) review of metaphor in psychotherapy, she proposes metaphors are used for the following: (1) to *refer* to views and social roles of the self and others; (2) to *represent* emotions and (subconscious) experiences; (3) to *express* that which is difficult to describe; (4) to *facilitate communication* by means of creating a shared language (400). I will be using this framework to help evaluate the effectiveness of Instagram as a therapeutic space.

3. Data

3.1 Data Collection

I will refer to the individual instances of multimodal Instagram content (image icons with supporting captions) as 'posts' and those who upload them as 'posters'. Everyday of MHAW 2019, I searched on Instagram for posts tagged #mentalhealthawarenessweek. In total I screen captured and categorised the top 100 posts with this hashtag. I felt 100 posts to be a manageable amount of data, whilst still representing the diversity of content. Ethical vetting was not needed as data were collected from publicly accessible sources and involved no contact with the posters (Wilkinson and Thelwall, 2010). All data can be found in the appendix, with all names and profile-icons removed for anonymity purposes.

Responding to project aims (1) and (2), I categorised the 100 posts according to firstly, their graphological and visual content and secondly, their metaphorical appropriation. Nearly all posts contained either literal, visual or multimodal metaphor. Even where the #mentalhealthawarenessweek images were text-less portraits and selfies, their accompanying captions used metaphorical language regardless of rhetoric: whether the posts were to advise, explain, divulge, or educate.

To facilitate analysis, I required a multimodal categorisation framework to help me better understand the data and deduce any emergent patterns. There was, however, a lack of such frameworks in the literature and so, therefore, I created my own (see *Table 1)*. Although this framework was designed in response to the study of Instagram posts, it may be adapted and applied to other multimodal contexts.

Classification of Instagram posts according to their graphological and visual style

Text-based *Media*	Image-based *Media*	*Memes*
Context-unspecified text	Text-enhancing images	Private or Author-owned content
Context-specific text	Verbo-pictorial integration	Public or Media-owned content
		Socio-cultural identity markers

Table 1*. Table to show a categorisation of Instagram posts according to visual content.*

3.2 Data Analysis

Approaching the data, I adopted Charteris-Black's (2012) identification, interpretation, explanation procedure. During the identification stage, I noted down the metaphors present (both visual and linguistic) in each post. In instances where I was unsure if a lexical unit in its given context was metaphorical or not, I referred to Pragglejaz' Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (2007) for clarification. This stipulates that a unit is metaphorical if it has a 'more basic meaning' (e.g. a meaning that is more concrete; related to bodily action; more precise; or historically older) which can be understood in comparison to the contextually bound given meaning (3). The MIP, however, was not designed for multimodal metaphor. In such instances, I used Forceville's (1996) pictorial metaphor model, developed in response to a lack of satisfactory models in the previous literature (64). It bears the following definition:

> An account of pictorial metaphor should show an awareness that a metaphor has two distinctive terms, one the primary subject or tenor, the other the secondary subject or vehicle, which are usually non-reversible. This entails that the transfer or mapping of features is from secondary subject (on) to primary subject, and not vice versa. (Forceville, 1996: 65).

After identification, I interpreted each metaphorical instance by extracting the underlying conceptual metaphor from which it derived, identifying the source and target domains on all occasions. In the name of continuity, across analyses of lexical and pictorial metaphors, I adopt Lakoff and Johnson's terms 'target' and 'source' to refer to the two involved domains (1980). The target is the (more abstract) domain which one wishes to express, such as AFFECT, and the source is the (more basic) domain which is being used as a tool to do so, such as WEATHER (examples of the AFFECT IS WEATHER metaphor extracted from my data are to follow).

Not all of the conceptual metaphors identified had a target domain of AFFECT: other prevalent target domains included THE SELF, THE UNIVERSE, and TIME. To retain focus, this analysis will only explore metaphors where the target domain is AFFECT. The prevailing conceptual metaphors with AFFECT as their target domain are presented in *Table 2.* Note, this accounts for the metaphorical instances of a given conceptual metaphor as, in some cases, there was more than one conceptual metaphor present in a given post.

Summary of most prevalent conceptual metaphors according to number of lexical and multimodal instantiations				
Conceptual Metaphor	**Text-based**	**Image-based**	**Memes**	**Combined Total**
AFFECT IS A DRUG		3		3
AFFECT IS A BATTLE	5			5
AFFECT IS A NARRATIVE		3	1	4
AFFECT IS GOD'S WILL	4			4
AFFECT IS A SECRET	3		1	4
AFFECT IS EQUILIBRIUM	3			3
AFFECT IS ELECTRICAL/MECHANICAL		4	2	6
AFFECT IS THE ELEMENTS	2	9	1	12
AFFECT IS A LIVING ORGANISM	3	40	2	46

Table 2*. Prevailing conceptual metaphors with a source domain of AFFECT*

The rest of the paper will be a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA), exploring instances of metaphor appropriation from each of the graphological categories identified: text-based media, image-based media, and memes. I will also justify my reasoning behind categorising my data in this way. In using MMDA I acknowledge the different textual 'threads' of a post as a unified 'semiotic whole' by looking at how they are cohesive both internally (cohesion between threads) and externally (cohesion between threads and context) (Kress, 2014). This will help me as I progress into the 'interpretation' phase of Charteris-Black's framework.

3.2.1 Text-based Media

This category refers to posts where there is little to no inclusion of images: text takes precedence. Visually, we can classify these posts as either:

1. Context-unspecific: text that is, visually, not bound to a specific context (see *Figure 2*).

2. Context-specific: visually contextualised text, e.g. WhatsApp messages, Tweets, or diary notes (see *Figure 3*).

Semantically, these images usually present either public quotations (from poets, celebrities, or religious texts) or private admissions (expressions of feelings or diary-like confessions and thoughts). Although in *Figure 2* there is little multimodality, in *Figure 3* the composition allows for a series of threads to assemble: the typed affirmations are presented in a book which is backdropped by what appears to be floral bedding. This combination of textual and visual elements works to create a multimodal narrative, connoting femininity and vulnerability.

Figure 2. *Context-unspecific Text*

Figure 3. *Context-specific Text*

Both of these posts evidence the conceptual metaphors AFFECT IS A BATTLE and AFFECT IS A NARRATIVE. The lexical instantiations of these posts are identified below:

	AFFECT IS A BATTLE	AFFECT IS A NARRATIVE
Figure 2	'depression hit them hard' 'push themselves' 'fighting a daily battle' 'coming out on top'	'get back into the swing of things'
Figure 3	'struggles are part of our lives' [struggles] 'strengthen our souls'	'try another way'

Table 3*. Lexical instantiations of AFFECT IS A BATTLE and AFFECT IS A NARRATIVE*

Although this content is multimodal, the metaphors are manifest through purely linguistic means. As such, they are of little relevance to the current study. Both conceptual source domains are well attested means of conceptualising mental health disorders (for

example, for a discussion of ANOREXIA IS A BATTLE see Wilson, 2016; for a discussion of DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY see Fullagar and O'brien, 2012). The battle metaphor is problematic because it assumes there must be a 'looser'. The journey metaphor, on the other hand, frames the management of affect as a continuous, potentially infinite process.

3.2.2 IMAGE-BASED MEDIA

Text-enhancing Images

Bridging the gap between text-based and image-based media lies the category 'text-enhancing images.' Like text-based media these posts are usually quotes or short declarations and sentiments. These are often semantically transparent and as such do not require explanation in the form of a caption. Unlike text-based media, however, these posts often incorporate some additional visual symbols so that there still exists a layering of multimodal semiotic threads. Often the metaphor resides exclusively in the text, rather than in a juxtaposition of visual and verbal imagery. The included graphics therefore help to foreground the metaphor, rather than construct it.

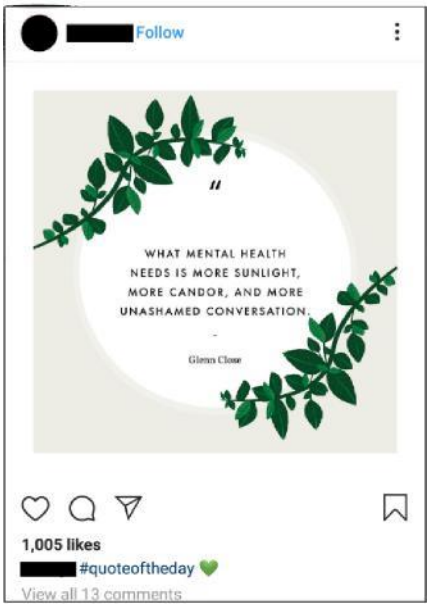

Figure 4*. Text-enhancing Image*

In *Figure 4,* the text 'what mental health needs is more sunlight' establishes a comparison between the source, mental health, and the target, something that needs sunlight. Our world knowledge allows us to conclude that this target is a living organism, likely a plant. The framing foliage reinforces the metaphor, stimulating imagery of a mind which, with the right care, has the ability to grow and prosper organically.

Although the text draws on 'sunlight' as a metaphorical source domain, it is unclear what target domain is being represented. We may conjecture that 'sunlight', with its optimistic connotations, refers to the positive efforts that we must put into addressing mental health.

This idea is advanced through the use of the word 'candor' which works as, what Kittay (1987) calls a 'bridge term': a lexical item which can correspond to both source and target domains. 'Candor', meaning the state of being 'open' and honest in expression, can also refer to a metaphorical openness of space, needed for a plant to thrive. Although this is an example of linguistic instantiation, the multimodal layering helps bring the metaphor MENTAL HEALTH IS A PLANT to the fore.

MENTAL HEALTH IS A PLANT bears some relationship to the IDEAS ARE LIVING ORGANISMS metaphor identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who offered lexical instantiations such as 'She has a *fertile* imagination' (39). Kövecses (2000) explored this further, proposing the target domain IDEAS may be extended to account for feelings and emotions as well, for example 'my emotions may wilt and wither, may grow and die, and I may foster and nourish my feelings' (109). However, both of these works lack sufficient empirically collected data that can be used to certify the prominence of the proposed metaphors. The posts collected from Instagram contribute to filling in this data-gap. 37 of the posts I collected, over a third of the data sample, instantiate metaphor relating target domains of affect and mental health to a source domain pertaining to living organisms. 26 of these relate the target domain to a person, nine to a plant, and two to an animal (specifically a bird).

Verbo-pictorial Integration

The majority of the image-based media posts involve what Forceville (2009) would term 'verbo-pictorial metaphors' (24). Refaie (2016) explains these are where 'either the source or the target is not pictured but is implied instead by the verbal message' (151). However, whereas Forceville used this category for primarily visual metaphors that included text, the posts I am deeming verbo-pictorial are primarily textual, using graphics to enhance meaning. Unlike the text-based media, the inclusion of pictorial symbols and imagery is symbolic of a source domain and their distinction from the text foregrounds the juxtaposition of meaning. This is also similar to what Forceville calls 'pictorial similes' where both source and target are presented as two distinct yet whole entities (except this originally referred to the juxtaposition of two images, rather than one pictorial and one textual entity) (24). Their simultaneous presence highlights their similarities, drawing on what Fauconnier and Turner (2002) term the 'blended space'. In a blended space we are presented with a selection of related entities yet are unable to actively choose between them. This process often happens on-line. These are the posts I have sub-classified under 'Verbo-pictorial integration'.

***Figure 5**. Verbo-pictorial Integration (Weather)*

As *Figure 5* shows, the juxtaposition of text and image work together to foreground specific concepts. Although both *Figure 4* and *Figure 5* appropriate both verbal and visual symbols, the relationship between the two semiotic forms is very different. *Figure 4* juxtaposes one metaphorical entity (the text) and one unmetaphorical entity (the foliage). The illustration works harmoniously with the graphics: complementing and accentuating the linguistic metaphorical expression. In this way the metaphor is not reliant or facilitated by multimodal means but rather enlivened by it. In contrast, *Figure 5* juxtaposes two unmetaphorical entities, in order to establish a blended space, where lies the metaphor.

Weather generally connotes ideas of uncontrollability, unpredictability, and changeability. In *Figure 5*, the combination of weather symbols (a rainbow, clouds, and rain droplets) emphasises this randomness. The alliterative nouns ‘disorder’ and ‘decision’ foreground the uncontrollable nature of the weather. Agency results from the randomness and disorder of these entities. The post suggests that, like the weather, we have no control over our mental state. Instead we are rendered as victims to a powerful, albeit natural, force. This post makes no direct reference to the mind or emotion but, via the blended space, we still arrive at a metaphorical interpretation: MENTAL HEALTH IS WEATHER. From this conceptual metaphor we can derive a series of structural mappings. In establishing such mappings, we recognise an ‘analogical structural alignment between two represented situations’ using which we can go on to project inferences (Gentner and Bowdle, 2008).

WEATHER (source domain)	**MENTAL HEALTH** (target domain)
Different types of weather (e.g. thunder, rain, sunshine). Weather types can be further categorised (e.g. rain can be heavy, drizzly, misty, etc). Different types of weather can occur at the same time (e.g. there can be both sun and rain). Some weather types are more likely to occur simultaneously than others (e.g. thunder and lightning vs thunder and snow). Weather can stimulate affect (e.g. sunshine may stimulate positive affect, whereas rain may stimulate negative affect). We may be able to predict the weather, but we are unable to control it. Weather can affect us physically (e.g. unshine will make us warm, and snow will make us cold).	Different types of feelings (e.g. anger, sadness, happiness). Feelings can be further categorised (e.g. sad feelings can be of a depressive, pessimistic, pitiful or melancholy nature). We have multiple, simultaneous thoughts, emotions and perceptions. Some feelings are more likely to occur simultaneously than others (e.g. feeling isolated and apprehensive vs feeling isolated and content). Our feelings stimulate affect: either more positive or more negative. We are not always able to control which feelings are present at a given time. Affect is an embodied experience.

***Table 4**. Metaphorical mappings of MENTAL HEALTH IS THE WEATHER*

Someone suffering with either constant or intermittent unpleasant valence experienced in (but not exclusive to) conditions such as anxiety or depression would likely recognise such conclusions drawn in the blended space and align them with their own experiences. In her study on metaphorical examples taken from the British National Corpus (BNC), 2ołnowska (2011) also writes on the 'pervasiveness of concepts related to WEATHER that indicate the presence or absence of problems in the human mind' (1). Żołnowska identifies the conceptual metaphor THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF PROBLEMS IN THE MIND ARE WEATHER CONDITIONS and then goes on to show how this conceptual domain can be decomposed into more specific problem-weather correspondences such as RAIN IS MISFORTUNE or A STORM IS AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR/REACTION (8).

The BNC does not sample from social media, yet it would appear that the 'pervasiveness of concepts' as described by Żołnowska extends into the realm of online networking. From my image-based media sample I found eight textual and multimodal examples of WEATHER metaphors. The conceptual metaphors these instantiated were as follows:

MENTAL HEALTH IS THE WEATHER

POSITIVE VALENCE IS A RAINBOW POSITIVE VALENCE IS THE SUN/SUNSHINE POSITIVE VALENCE IS A CLEAR SKY	NEGATIVE VALENCE IS A STORM NEGATIVE VALENCE IS RAIN NEGATIVE VALENCE IS CLOUD/A CLOUDY SKY

***Table 5**. Conceptual metaphors relating to MENTAL HEALTH IS THE WEATHER*

Regarding semantic domains, there is some connection between the MENTAL HEALTH IS A LIVING ORGANISM metaphor (*Figure 4*) and the MENTAL HEALTH IS WEATHER metaphor (*Figure 5*). Both source domains refer to organic and natural entities. Amongst the image-based media posts there are also accounts of the sea as a source domain, an entity also semantically related to nature (see *Figure 6*).

***Figure 6**. Verbo-pictorial Integration (The Sea)*

From this multimodal metaphor the following mappings can be deduced:

SEA (source domain)	**AFFECT** (target domain)
Staying afloat	Positive affect
Drowning	Negative affect
Balancing	Managing affect
Waves	Life challenges

***Table 5.** Metaphorical mappings of AFFECT IS THE SEA*

What is not clear is whether a loss of balance has been caused by the turbulent seas or the inabilities of the surfer. However, the illustration does suggest that the surfer was unable to remain in control when faced with larger waves. From the blended space created we therefore interpret that some days we may be faced with more and/or greater challenges and we will not always be able to tackle them, although the caption normalises this, reassuring us that 'that's okay'.

To conceptualise the relationships between the semantically related image-based metaphors discussed so far, I created the following model, presenting a network of conceptual metaphors in a hierarchy (*Figure 7*). Branches between the higher tier metaphors are instantiation links, highlighting semantic resemblances. These higher tier metaphors are what Charteris-Black (2004) would call higher level 'conceptual keys' (16). Each of these is comprised of several subordinate yet related 'lower level' conceptual metaphors.

By deconstructing the data into a series of conceptual metaphors and conceptual keys, we can try to resolve the tension that exists between source and target domains. This can be done through what Charteris-Black terms 'articulat[ing] an underlying assumption' as we use conceptual metaphors to expose the relationship 'between otherwise irreconcilable domains' (2004: 17). Cognitive linguists may therefore argue that such networks resemble the internal mental lexicons of individual speakers (Brugman and Lakoff, 1988).

In total, there were 37 posts from the image-based media category which appropriated metaphors where ORGANIC ENTITIES were used as the source domain. This ubiquity is testament to the prevalence of AFFECT IS AN ORGANIC ENTITY as a conceptual key. Although this metaphor promotes a sense of personal growth and development, it can also be highly problematic as, being organic, notions of wilderness and uncontrollability also come to the fore. We must be wary of such notions as they are in danger of pacifying the individual, in subjugation of a greater natural force.

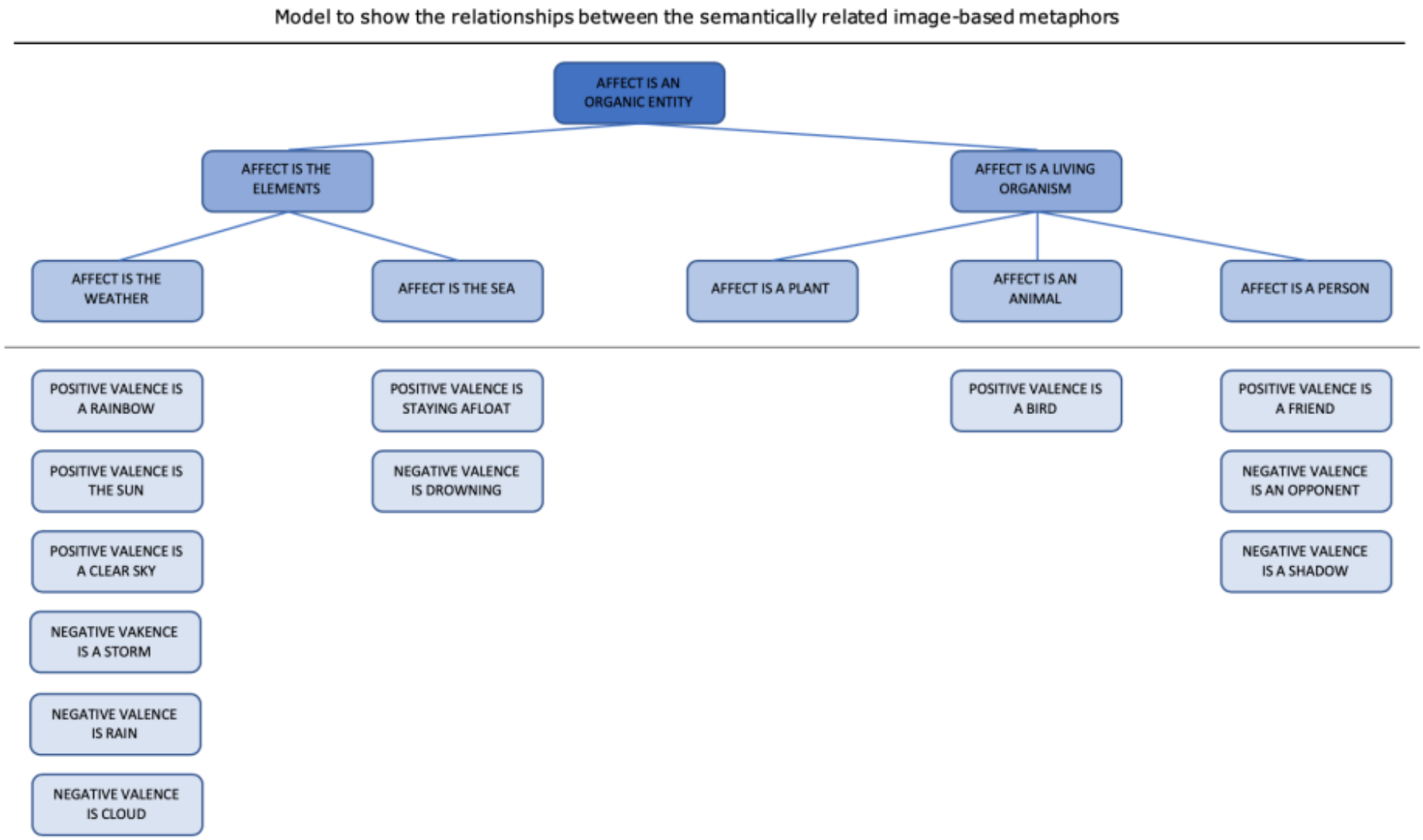

Figure 7. *Network of image-based metaphors*

3.2.3 MEMES

The final grouping I have identified is Memes. The past twenty years has seen a huge growth in the prevalence of memes in internet culture. I argue that this mode of representation has the potential to be the most effective medium by which to explore mental health on Instagram. Like Instagram, memes have evolved so that semiotics flourish as a result of the interplay between image and text. Moreover, as Denisover (2019) writes, 'Internet memes are intrinsically linked to the logic and rhythms of networks and social media, as well as to the ways a society expresses and thinks of itself' (2). Denisover critically draws on the relationship between memes and social media. Memes become established and gain agency through being re-appropriated and shared by internet users. Social media platforms such as Instagram provide a space where users can validate a sentiment and therefore align themselves with certain ideologies, through the reposting of content. As a result, Denisover explains, 'nowadays, millions of users communicate information, opinion and emotions through this peculiar vehicle of self-expression' (2). I will first discuss how to identify a meme, and then go on to analyse a selection of memes from my data that I think are particularly pertinent constructions of e-health, in accordance with Ziebland and Wyke's (2012) findings.

Memes are, as Denisover concludes, 'artefacts of remix culture' (9). Milner (2013) also emphasises this quality of adaptability, stating that memes are essentially 'remix, play and commentary' (1). This is essentially a community of practice. By engaging in this process of adoption and appropriation, speakers affiliate themselves with social groupings that can relate either to macro-level institutions of social media culture, or to local-level social groupings, concerned with the specific content of a meme (such as mental health). What is missing, however, from Denisova's book which claims to provide a 'solid, encompassing definition of Internet memes' is an explicit meme-identification checklist. Fellow millennials also failed to offer any definitions when prompted. They agreed that *Figure 6* was not a meme, despite it having the essential interplay of text and image, but they could not say why. In lieu of this, I propose the following criteria should be met in order for multimodal content to achieve meme-status.

Aesthetics:

- **Amusing or unusual juxtaposition of text and image**. The image holds its own status and meaning, as distinct from the text. New meaning is generated depending on the text associated with the image. Text is kept to a minimum.
- **Typed, plain text**. The type font is very generic, such as Arial.

Use of handwriting styles is rare.

- **Like the text, the image used is often removed from the individual.**

Personal illustrations are rare. Personal photographs are more common, as, on social media, this type of content is more prevalent. Most memes use culturally recognised images, such as stills from films and TV shows, or images of celebrities. These differences are systematised in *Table 1.*

Thematic Content:

- **Relatability.** Memes should summarise a particular feeling, usually bound to a specific context.
- **Transferability.** The images used should be reusable in conjunction with other texts and contexts. Images that are highly valued will be re-appropriated, often in juxtaposition with a different text. They thus become more widely recognised and achieve prestige.
- **Humour.** Memes are generally humorous, often achieved through the combination of two different schemas working in opposition (see Raskin's 1985 Semantic Script Theory of Humour).

Now that we have set out what a meme is and how to identify one, I will carry out a MMDA of three memes, one from each category identified in *Table 1.*

Private, Person or Author-Owned Content

These posts contain images that originated from a private domain. They are not owned, created or published by an established media institution. However, as a lot of images get appropriated on social media, such content has not necessarily been uploaded by the original creator. Salzmann-Erikson and Hicdurmaz (2016) refer to a similar phenomenon manifest in the YouTube videos posted by people who suffer from post-traumatic stress. They describe the quality of this content as 'homemade' which 'strengthened the sense of authentic narratives and conveyed that the posters wanted to tell their "naked story," the purpose of which is informing others' (288). *Figure 8* is an example of a meme which uses a personal, private (not media-owned) image as a vehicle for storytelling.

Figure 8. *A privately-owned meme.*

We draw on our world knowledge to infer that the man in the image is throwing petrol at the fire, and that this is causing the flames to grow. The onomatopoeic caption, 'Boom', foregrounds the explosive nature of this action. In the blended space, we therefore come to the conclusion that engaging with sad music (either listening or playing) instantly and drastically disrupts our mental stability. This meme is therefore a visual representation of the metaphorical expression 'adding fuel to the fire'. Whereas in a different context a large fire may connote warmth, comfort, and community, the verbo-pictorial metaphor created in this post foregrounds the more negative aspects of fire: dangerous, incontrollable, insatiable.

The importance of context is paramount for online processing. Fauconnier (2004) stresses that 'language does not "represent" meaning: language prompts the construction of meaning in particular contexts with particular cultural models and cognitive resources' (658). In memes, the images used provide a contextual platform from which the language can be decoded. In binding language to context, users quickly arrive at the blended space. From here, we can deduct the following series of mappings:

FIRE (source domain)	AFFECT (target domain)
Petrol	Sad music
Aggrandising a fire	Engaging with sad music
Explosion of fire	Rapid and drastic disruption of mental stability (e.g. a panic attack or mental breakdown)

Table 6. *Metaphorical mappings of AFFECT IS FIRE*

Notions of uncontrollability were also foregrounded in MENTAL HEALTH IS WEATHER as previously discussed. However, in this metaphor the agency of the individual is largely non-existent, whereas in the verbo-pictorial instantiation of AFFECT IS FIRE, the individual attempts to maintain agency by controlling the size of the fire. Their efforts, however, only appear to worsen the problem. In this instance the fire does not grow by itself, but as a result of the individual's deliberate actions. This metaphorically suggests that the individual is aware of their 'problems' and wishes to address them, although it remains ambiguous whether this is done in the hope for positive or negative repercussion (e.g. masochistic gratification). Several instances and manifestations of conceptual metaphors related to AFFECT IS FIRE have been researched and discussed (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses 1990, 2000). *Figure 8* is therefore an example of novel and authentic narrative told through conventional and universal (Maalej, 2004; Akmaliyah, 2013) metaphor appropriation.

Commercial, Public, or Media-Owned Content

These posts are examples of content originally created for the public domain. They are often images of public figures or iconic cartoon characters. As such they lack the authenticity of non-media owned images. This may render them less relatable, but arguably more humorous, as the masses take pleasure in collaboratively mocking the minority elite. *Figure 9* is an example of such a meme.

Figure 9. *A media-owned meme.*

This image is an example of verbo-pictorial metaphor that presents 1) emotions as embodied and 2) the self as constituted by a plurality of identities. This post not only personifies negative and positive affect but, moreover, correlates mental states with physical ones. The following mappings can therefore be drawn:

PERSON (source domain)	**AFFECT** (target domain)
Looking confident, attractive, smart	Prolonged positive affect
Looking scruffy	Prolonged negative affect
Standing unawares	Momentary positive affect
Lingering in background	Momentary negative affect

Table 7*. Metaphorical mappings of AFFECT IS A PERSON*

These mappings show a distinction between the holistic self and the behavioural qualities of the self that result from changes in affect. The metaphor suggests an embodiment of different selves which are typical of different behaviours: if we are experiencing positive affect, we are not only likely to look more presentable and attractive (note the suit) but we are also more likely to behave in a more confident, controlled manner. It further suggests that negative affect is quick to 'creep up' and surprise you, whilst you are distracted or unawares. This positions the self as defenceless, unprepared and vulnerable in dealing with negative affect.

It is only through the blending of different spaces (corresponding to the four mappings identified for AFFECT IS A PERSON) that such a complex view of embodied emotion is manifest. Such a conceptualisation would run the risk of being too convoluted if expressed in writing alone. In presenting different mental states as different people with different behavioural qualities, the metaphor also suggests a view of identity whereby the self is an aggregation of multiple conflicting, contextually specific states and performances. Such metaphorical views of identity have also been found in the speech of girls with eating disorders who resist interpretations of a 'single bounded self' (Hoskins and Mathieson, 2005: 266). Although this view of identity is problematic in that it may cast the individual as relinquishing control and submitting to their environment, it also bears the advantage of permitting and normalising emotional granularity.

Socio-Cultural Identity Markers

This final category concerns socio-cultural iconography that will have been most likely produced by a prominent institution and has become an icon of its time. This could be, for example, an iconic advert or a company's cartoon mascot, as in *Figure 14*.

Figure 14. *A socio-cultural identity marker.*

The discourse metaphor manifest in the above meme is ANXIETY IS CLIPPY. This corresponds to more dominant conceptual keys such as THE MIND IS A COMPUTER (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). 'Clippy' (officially 'Clippit') was a Microsoft (MS) animation, introduced in 1997. Clippy quickly became an iconic feature of MS and received much backlash for being unhelpful and, despite the attempts of the software developers, impersonal. In 2007 Clippy was fully removed from the system yet thirteen years later he is still the object of mockery.

Because of his international presence in the early 2000s, Clippy has become a nostalgic icon of the era. What's more, Clippy's persistent 'popping up' caused renowned annoyance and as such has allowed for communitive criticism. As with the mockery of celebrities, such sites of mass ridicule stimulate communities of users who may unabashedly derive pleasure in faulting elitists. Such identity markers naturally rely on contextual knowledge in order to be appreciated. Applying this knowledge, the following mappings can be established:

Clippy (source domain)	Affect (target domain)
Randomly 'pops up'; difficult to control Morphs into different shapes Offers (unsolicited) advice Annoys the program user	Types of affect appear to come and go randomly; difficult to control Can be manifest in many different forms (e.g. changes in feelings, emotions, thoughts) Can be unwelcome and may lead to unwanted inner-voice thoughts Annoys the sufferer

Table 8*. Metaphorical mappings of AFFECT IS CLIPPY*

As has been a common theme across the metaphors discussed in this essay, the mappings show this metaphor to be problematic as it invalidates the agency of the individual. Mental illness is once again conceptualised as an uncontrollable, unpredictable entity. Mental health is presented as a lack of mental illness which, as discussed in the background, is problematic. Despite this, because of their inherently humorous quality, memes, unlike the other forms of Instagram posts discussed, allow for additional methods for coping with enervating affect. Moreover, due to their transferable properties, memes enable the coalescence of communities based on macro-level shared knowledge, and individual-level appropriation.

4. Conclusion

This project has been immensely ambitious and given this I was unable to do it full justice within the confines of this paper. Discourses of social media, specifically Instagram, have had little previous inquiry, which meant that approaching the data was an overwhelming prospect.

This investigation has provided various frameworks, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, to categorise the data into both post-type and metaphor-type. Out of the graphologically organised data categories, memes were the richest and most interesting source of multimodal metaphor. This is largely due to the simultaneous uniqueness and relatability of layered multimodal threads, the juxtaposition of which, in meme culture, is used to deliver a humorous, unified blended space.

Within my analysis of each group I used MMDA to decode prevailing discourse and conceptual metaphors. These I deconstructed through a series of explicatory mappings. These mappings then allowed me to evaluate the effectiveness of the metaphors at work in relation to mental health discourses. In the text-based and image-based categories I found many multimodal instances of conventional conceptual metaphors such as AFFECT IS WEATHER. Amongst the memes, although we can see instances of more novel discourse metaphors, such as ANXIETY IS CLIPPY, these are generally semantically consistent with other well-noted conceptual metaphors such as THE MIND IS A MACHINE. This suggests that, while the multimodal nature of Instagram content does allow for creative metaphor expression, little deviance is made from the prevailing dominant conceptual metaphors used in western cultures to talk about mental health. In meme culture, where a meme achieves status through its relatability and transferability, conforming to pre-conceptions of mental health is an assured way of maintaining accessibility.

Memes also require a more active engagement with social media than other post types. Referring back to McMullen's (2008) criteria for metaphor use in psychotherapy, memes are most easily used 'to refer to views and social roles of the self and others' (criterium 1). In creating and sharing memes the individual actively participates in the evolution of meme culture and in choosing to appropriate another's content, you are referring to their role as social media user.

All of the posts evaluated, ranging from more linguistic to more graphological, were effectively used to 'represent emotions and (subconscious) experiences' (criterium 2) and 'express that which is difficult to describe' (criterium 3). In the memes especially, we see instances where multiple spaces are drawn on in order to convey a complex experience. Such complexity may prove difficult or too convoluted to express and understand in spoken discourse. The presentation of verbo-pictorial metaphors allows those who come across it to be able to instantly decipher it.

Finally, memes often draw on social-cultural markers (contemporary celebrities, iconic television/network shows and cartoons, advertising and marketing characters etc.), recognising and validating the (millennial) online-community. The manipulation of such iconography therefore creates a type of 'shared language' which is used to 'facilitate conversation' (criterium 4).

The Instagram content analysed can therefore be said to adhere to therapeutic requirements and may be used as an additional platform with which to engage in therapeutic discourses. However, I am cautious in hailing it therapy's substitute as, despite its community value, it remains somewhat impersonal and does not account for the needs of an individual to receive one-on-one attention from a specialist. Neither does Instagram offer continuity for those seeking stability in this way. What it does offer, however, is a space where users may freely express themselves, anonymously or not, and in doing so find validation in contributing to a community. Moreover, in removing the clinician from the therapeutic process, the individual is permitted full agency to create their own narrative. This, as Probst (2015) notes, is ultimately 'more positive and empowering' (236).

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Appendix

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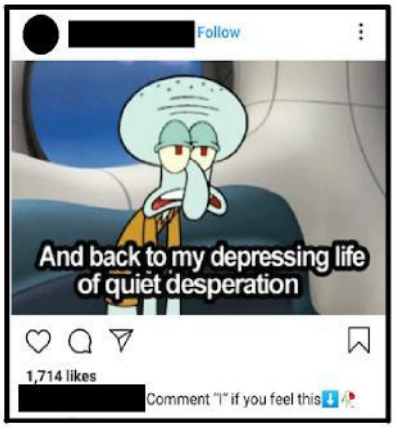

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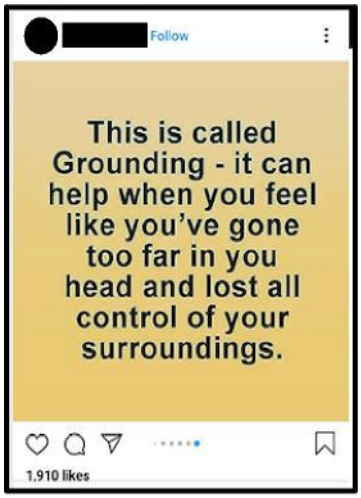

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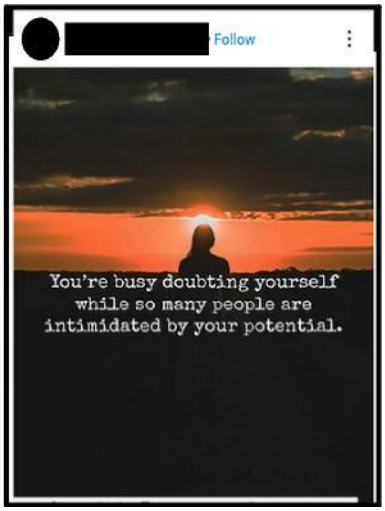

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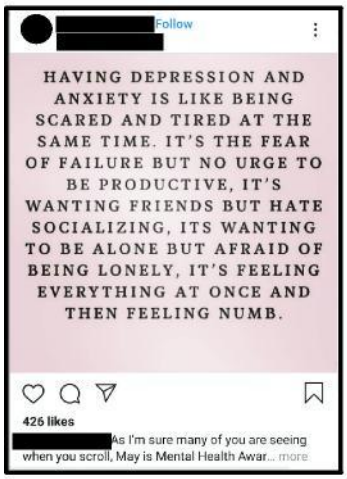

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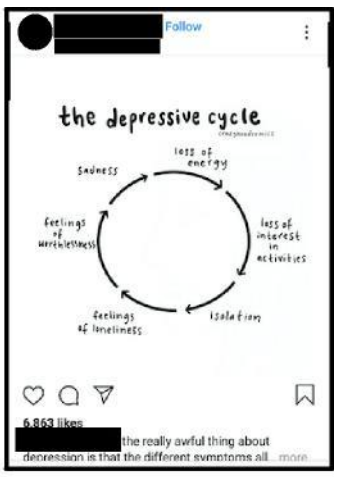

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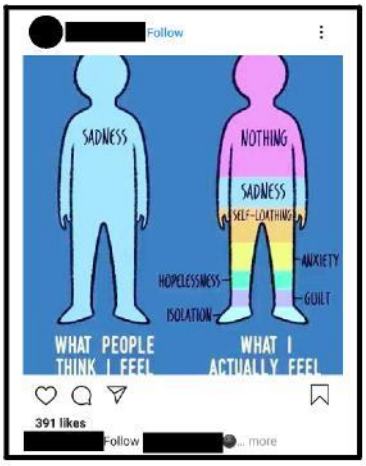

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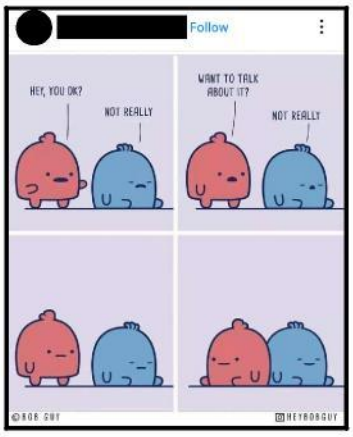

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1,945 likes

[redacted] Another Amazing B+W photo created by the Wonderful photographer [redacted] I was excited to collaborate with Manon to help us together share images & words of our journey struggling & celebrating our body image. This week celebrates Mental Health Awareness Week #BeBodyKind and each of us women have gone through negative and positive times in our life, each dealing with anxiety, depression, low confidence. This week our picture has been shared with Healthy London so we can show others that you can get through this and come

56

443 likes

[redacted] So i wanted to post something daily abount mental health for #mentalhealthawarenessweek with a little bit of info,

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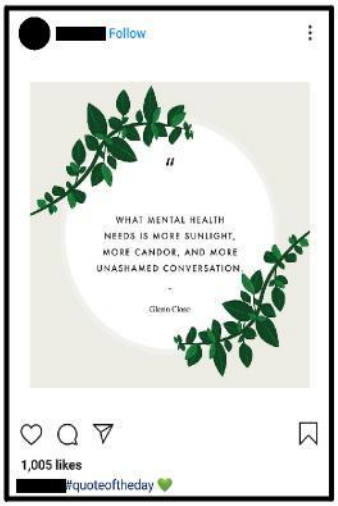

1,005 likes

[redacted] #quoteoftheday 💚

58

710 likes

[redacted] #sorrynotsorry but spoiler alert, Body Acceptance starts with you. For many, years c... more

59

109 likes

[redacted] It's #mentalhealthawareness week this week and I got to start it with these two. They're pretty good friends now that Joy understands it's ok to feel sad too 💙💛

60

Liked by [redacted] and **960 others**

[redacted] Sharing this from [redacted]

61

988 views

[redacted] We are super proud to have produced Every Mind Matters a film for the NHS, encouraging people to take care of their mental health. Directed by Chris Curtis [redacted] 🤍We really hope that this film will help people to feel more comfortable about talking to someone if they're suffering. The sun will shine again. 🤍

62

420 likes

[redacted] Today marks the first day of Mental Health Awareness Week. With this year's theme focusing on body image - aka how we think and feel about our physique - we figured showing a diverse range of awesome guys would be a perfect way to kick things off.

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The mounting pressure to have the perfect body isn't something that just affects women. Men are

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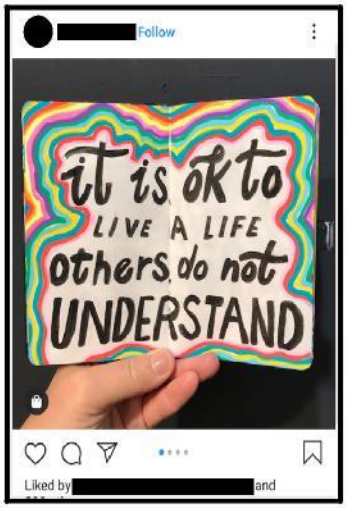

Liked by [redacted] and

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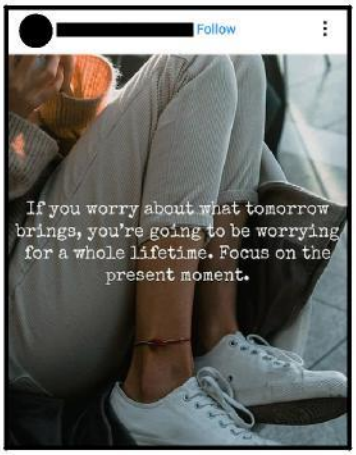

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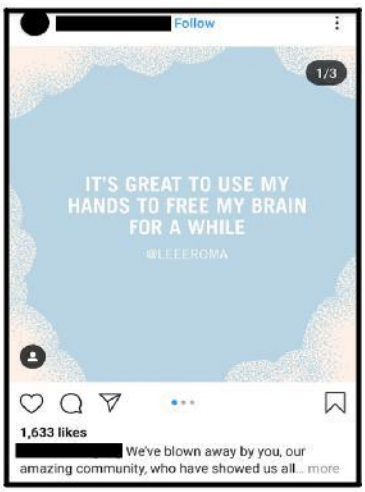

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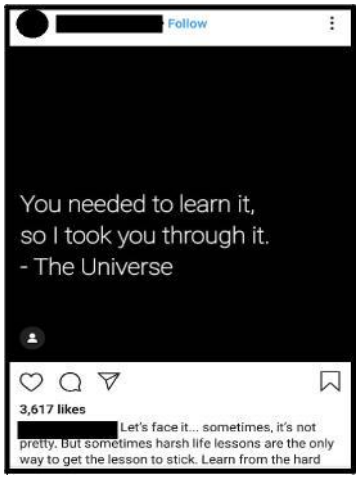
[redacted] Follow
You needed to learn it,
so I took you through it.
- The Universe
3,617 likes
[redacted] Let's face it... sometimes, it's not pretty. But sometimes harsh life lessons are the only way to get the lesson to stick. Learn from the hard