

Covid-19 has made
mental health go
viral.

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1/10/21
Section Q

Art by: Jo Patterson

Photo by: Tommaso Del Croce
www.lensculture.com/articles/lensc

In a world overtaken by a virus causing physical illness, mental illnesses across the globe have skyrocketed, and the conversation about these illnesses has slowly escaped the shelter of shame and fear it has lived beneath for far too long. Most of the world has been “held hostage” in their homes during lockdown, and people are faced with loneliness, depression, and isolation in a magnitude the world has never experienced. With social media being one of the few ways to remain connected to others, conversations about mental health over social media have become more common and accepted than ever before. Since connection and belonging are core human needs and social media will only continue to grow, this “trend” will not only last, but become the status quo for the future.

Even before the worldwide pandemic, mental illness and social media usage were on the rise, and COVID-19 has only increased these numbers. The range of mental illnesses a person could have is endless, but two of the most common and the two that have been shown to have a significant increase in 2020 are anxiety and depression. According to Mental Health America, “in 2017-2018, 9% of adults experienced a mental illness” and in 2020 the number of people seeking out help in regards to anxiety and depression “skyrocketed” (mhanational.org). Since 2019, there has been a 93% increase in the number of anxiety screenings and a 62% increase in the number of depression screenings (mhanational.org). These statistics are largely due to isolation and loneliness brought on by the world-wide stay-at-home-orders. Not only have people been isolated, but everyone and I mean EVERYONE, has had to face some sort of grief and uncertainty as a result of the pandemic, and that process alone can have painful effects on a person’s mental health. With nowhere to go and no one to see, the obvious result for anyone in a technology-driven society, including myself, is to turn to social media for comfort, community, and entertainment.



*ARTIST TAJA SPASSKOVA PORTRAYS
ISOLATION AND LONLINESS DURING
LOCKDOWN.*

I-D. VICE.COM

Over the years, social media has grown into something much bigger than a casual app people have on their phones. It is a hub for connection, expression, inspiration, news/entertainment, and community, what a perfect place to go when government mandates keep you from seeing other people in real life! As if we weren't on our phones enough, 29.7% of people began spending "1-2 additional hours per day" on social media since March 2020 according to Statista.com (Tankovska). The rise of loneliness, anxiety, and depression combined with the rise of social media usage across the world was bound to lead to a shift in what content was being shared over social media.

«Searching for Connection»
aestheticmagazine.com



Culturacolectiva.com

With this collective experience and with social media becoming one of the few ways to interact with others, people have begun to normalize having conversations about their mental health online. It has looked like anything from a vulnerable post, to specific accounts being made to shed light on life with anxiety and depression. In his book "Hit Makers", Derek Thompson describes that, "the architecture of the human mind is ancient, and the most basic human needs- to belong, to escape, to aspire, to understand, to be understood are eternal." (Thompson, 6). It's these types of posts and accounts that have created a space online for people to feel connected, seen, and understood and I believe that it's this positive result that has made this such a hit for people in the past year. I personally experienced the benefits of the normalization of these conversations online when I had to move home from another country in April of last year because of the pandemic. I, like many other people, grieved the loss of my community, my rhythm, and my freedom as I sat in a room by myself day after day and I wrestled with my self-worth, my purpose, and my trauma. I, also like other people, started using social media significantly more and while unhealthy at times, I ended up finding resources that have given me tools to face and heal my anxiety, depression, and childhood wounds. Never before this pandemic was a conversation on social media about struggling with mental illness so common and encouraged; before the pandemic, the conversation about increased social media usage was a much more negative narrative than it is now.

@realdepressionproject on instagram

realdepressionproject Follow

1,073 posts 1.3m followers 251 following

The Depression Project
Mental Health Service

Now on TikTok: @RealDepressionProject

Founders of the Storm To Sun Framework

Depression School Books

thedepressionproject.com/school/books

Followed by joyisabellabrown, wormtown, sarahbcoaching +8 more

Books Lanqua... Free Gi...

POSTS REELS TAGGED

Lesser Known Things That Can Be So Hard When You Have Anxiety

Reasons Someone May Get Triggered

Consequences Of Gaslighting

When you have a mental illness...

20 Reasons You're Not A Burden

The Most Important Things To Remind Someone In A Depressive Episode

"Little Things" That May Overwhelm A Highly Sensitive Person

Reasons Why Someone May Not Be Good At Asking For Help

Motivation VS Depression

heyttiffanyroe Message

2,455 posts 116k followers 2,150 following

Tiffany Roe • Therapist
OG IG Therapist

Let's change the mental health game

@therapythoughtspodcast

@mindfulcounseling

@troebizschool

FEEL DEAL HEAL™ here

linktr.ee/heyttiffanyroe

Followed by ___melissae, the.holistic.psychologist, christinaswilcox +2 more

DISCL... MEMB... CARD... Validat... COUR... PODCA... MERCH

POSTS GUIDES REELS IGTV TAGGED

Therapy thoughts What's Gaslighting

Learned Helplessness vs Mastery Orientation

3 STEPS TO CONNECT TO YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF:

1. IDENTIFY: your needs, values & boundaries.

2. JOURNAL: who you think you are, then identify the ego stories that make "you" up.

3. MEDITATE: and ask the question, "Who am I?"

Therapy Thoughts: Your inner critic's voice is not a reflection of reality.

FEEL DEAL HEAL MEMBERSHIP

Talking about suicide does not cause suicide.

YOU CAN OPT OUT OF CULTURAL BODY PRESSURES:

1. REJECT DIET CULTURE.

2. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY.

3. BE COOL TO YOURSELF.

I DON'T HAVE TO PARTICIPATE IN CONVERSATIONS THAT MAKE ME FEEL UNSAFE.

Therapist @heyttiffanyroe

M E N T A L . H E A L T H . I N S T A G R A M . A C C O U N T S

Licensed therapist @theanxietyhealer

Anxiety and The Vagus Nerve

15 Warning Signs Someone's Anxiety Is Setting In

Things People With Anxiety Want Other People To Know:

9 TIPS THAT HELP WITH FLYING ANXIETY!

HOW ALCOHOL CAN WORSEN ANXIETY

WHEN IS YOUR ANXIETY AT IT'S WORST?

What is anxious cleaning?

You clean your house when feeling anxious in an unconscious attempt to

sarahbcoaching Message

855 posts 30.2k followers 519 following

Sarah Baldwin
Coach
She/Her
Somatic Practitioner SE trained
Polyvagal Trained
Trauma Informed & Trained
Inner Child & Attachment Support
home.sarahbaldwincoaching.com

Followed by caroburckle, functionalcoach, emilystanwyck +2 more

Somatics Nervou... About ... Testim... Belona... You Ma... Regula...

POSTS IGTV TAGGED

IF YOU FIND IT CHALLENGING TO SET OR MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES...

There was likely a time when:

- You weren't safe to set boundaries.
- Your truth was often seen as being confused about what your truth is.
- You were ashamed for wanting space or a boundary.
- You learned the only safe boundary was to disappear.
- You were given the role of the rescuer in your family system.
- You were made responsible for your caregivers.
- And of course there are many other reasons, too.

Our work is to:

Begin gently exploring our internal landscape, discovering our truth, our needs, our limits and gently beginning to set boundaries based on those things.

ARCHITECTURE OF OUR AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM:

Ventral Vagal Complex location:
Brainstem, face, heart. This is our state of safety. When here we can experience feelings of openness, connection, joy, love, etc.

Sympathetic Nervous System location:
Brainstem, mid back, chest. This is a self-protective state of mobilization. Fight/flight/love here and can be experienced as tightness in back, shoulders, chest, shortness of breath, urgency, increased heart rate, lots of energy, body wants to move, etc.)

Dorsal Vagal Complex location:
Brainstem, abdomen, viscera. Self-protective state of immobility. Think of it as immobilization. Can be experienced as low energy, collapse posture, numbness, not fully here, apathetic, blank, confusion and dissociation live here.)

LINKS BETWEEN ATTACHMENT THEORY AND POLYVAGAL THEORY

AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT:
HOME AWAY FROM HOME IS OFTEN BORRAL (COLLAPSE/IMMOBILITY/SHUT DOWN)

ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT:
HOME AWAY FROM HOME IS OFTEN SYMPATHETIC (IMMOBILIZATION/FIGHT/FLIGHT)

DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT:
HOME AWAY FROM HOME IS OFTEN FREEZE (LOTS OF ENERGY INSIDE/FROZEN OUTSIDE)

SECURE ATTACHMENT:
HOME AWAY FROM HOME IS OFTEN VENTRAL (SAFETY/PRESENCE/CONNECTION)

HOW RELATIONAL RUPTURES ARE EXPERIENCED BASED ON OUR STATE:

VENTRAL (VVC):
Viewed with curiosity & having empathy for our experience and theirs. Feeling safe within, knowing the relationship isn't over and able to step towards repair.

SYMPATHETIC (SNS):
Experiencing others as the enemy or rival. Feeling unsafe and experiencing an urgency to repair in order to gain safety again. Often disregarding our own truth or trying to "fix."

OUR STATE CREATES OUR STORY

VVC STATE OF SAFETY
"I CAN, I AM ABLE, I AM PRESENT" EXPERIENCE
In this "just right" energy experience we feel safe in the world and safe within and our thoughts will match. We will have a more positive & connected experience of ourselves & others.

SNS MOBILIZATION
"I MUST DO SOMETHING NOW!" EXPERIENCE
In this high energy state the thoughts will match. They can be racing, loud, about how people are against us, how they may leave us & how we must have control or things won't be ok.

Somatic Practitioner @sarahbcoaching

Before 2020, studies were being shown about how social media may be linked to depression in young adults and teens because of the social comparison on the apps; there was this unspoken pressure of always seeming happy, thriving, and put together (Time.com). With this in mind, you may be questioning how increased use of social media with almost no in-person interactions over the course of a year could possibly aid in the decrease of anxiety and depression caused by social media. With the pandemic mandates, there is no longer space for the comparison of your low days to someone else's "highlight reel" on Instagram or Facebook because no one is out having fun. Everyone in the world is stuck at home, running out of things to keep them entertained and distracted, facing their inner demons, and doing all of it (for the most part) alone. Whether someone experienced some sort of mental illness before the pandemic or not, everyone at this point has had to wrestle with anxiety and uncertainty. As Jessica Gold puts it in her article for Time Magazine, the pandemic has been an "equalizer" of sorts, meaning no one has been excluded from the effects; students, mothers, business owners, even celebrities- everyone has been impacted by COVID-19 and has been forced to be vulnerable by not posting "the perfectly curated images, in part because they have to" but also because "this moment calls for people to just be more real" (Time.com). It's this trend of "realness" over social media that has provided a special way to heal, connect, and be supported by people that are physically distant. The pandemic has transformed social media from a comparison battleground into a community of uplifting support and resources in a time of collective isolation and grief.



*Photographer Haruka Sakaguchi :
"This is me in multiple exposures
trying to stay busy and productive
throughout the day, so my mind
doesn't wander off to dark places."
thisiscolossal.com*



*«Words at the Window»
Wahingtonpost.com*

Since social media isn't going anywhere any time soon and people have experienced the positive effects of this type of vulnerability online, this "trend" will long outlast the pandemic. Humans have a natural fight or flight response and there is a receptor in our brains that is constantly analyzing if something is safe or not, this process is called neuroception (elitecme.com). If someone has had a negative experience with vulnerability- a negative response on social media for example- their brains signal to them that vulnerability over social media is dangerous and a threat... so they (we) avoid it to stay "safe"! In his book "Hit Makers", Derek Thompson describes how psychologists have said, "if you've seen it before, it hasn't killed you yet", meaning that familiarity creates a sense of safety (Thompson, 69). People have needed to familiarize themselves with these types of posts before feeling safe enough to partake in them. Since conversations about mental health were not common until recent years, not many people were brave enough to engage in this act of vulnerability, that receptor in their brain was going off yelling, "DANGER. DANGER. DO NOT PROCEED". After a few brave souls with big followings made the leap and were followed by an astounding positive response, it seems as though there has been a collective switch of that response, which is now signaling "it is safe to proceed". Now the beautiful fruits of community and connection, grown from the risk of being vulnerable, are being experienced. Since people typically continue engaging with things and people that their neuroreceptors have identified as "safe" and beneficial, and since social media will only continue to grow and change over time, these conversations about mental health will continue growing along with it.



«Hugs during Covid-19 Pandemic»
www.abello.com/portraits

Humans are wired for connection, so when we are forced into isolation, our natural response is to find and create community in whatever ways possible. Just like Tom Hanks created a community with a volleyball he named Wilson in the movie "Cast Away", we have made social media our "Wilson" on with whom we can share our highs and the now more frequent lows. Belonging and being understood and loved by others are vital human needs, being vulnerable is at the core of getting these needs met, and vulnerability about mental illnesses on social media is just the beginning of true connection. Like having a volleyball as a best friend, there are some limitations to living a life that's online, but it works- and during a time where an in-person social life is practically impossible and mental illness struggles are on the rise, it has become a very positive outlet for many. Through this trend, the stigmatization of talking about mental health has diminished and people are learning that they are not alone in their struggles, it's this healthy outcome that leads me to believe that well after the pandemic, this won't just be a trend of the past, but a beautiful norm for the future.

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Thompson, Derek. *Hit Makers: How to Succeed in an Age of Distraction*. Penguin USA, 2018.

(Author/Credentials) Thompson is senior editor with Atlantic magazine after studying at Northwestern University. He is a regular contributor to NPR's "Here and Now," writing about economics and media. He is also one of Forbes' 30 under 30.

(Audience/type) This book was written for the general public, maybe specifically attracting people interested in how things become popular. It is a 344 page book with mainly text along with some images.

(Purpose/Bias/POV) He plays a role in American Pop culture and has an expertise analysing the nature of hits. His writing objectively explores the history and nature of hits.

(Currency) This was published in 2018. It is relevant because it talks about examples from the present (up to 2018) and also examples from the past.

(Coverage/scope/content) The scope of this book is broad, using diverse examples and case studies to examine why certain things get popular and become hits.

(Relevance) This is extremely relevant to this paper because it breaks down the psychology and science behind why things become popular and in this paper I am exploring why I think my hit has gained popularity over the past year.

Gold, Jessica. "Could COVID-19 Finally Destigmatize Mental Illness?" *Time*, Time, 13 May 2020, time.com/5835960/coronavirus-mental-illness-stigma/.

(Author/Credentials) Gold is an assistant professor of psychology at Washington University. She is also a practicing psychologist who has treated many cases of anxiety and depression before the pandemic.

(Audience/type) This article is found in the ideas section of Time Magazine, meaning the audience is likely very broad. There is no specifically addressed audience in the article so it seems the audience is anyone interested in mental health effects of COVID-19. There are statistics and scientific explanations for what seems to be an opinion piece.

(Purpose/Bias/POV) The author has a compassionate and hopeful view of COVID-19's negative impacts on mental health. She presents an argument that states, although COVID has increased mental health struggles, it has aided in the destigmatization of conversations about mental health. She addresses the common perception of mental health and how more awareness and compassion toward these struggles should be the trend for the future. As a psychiatrist, these are issues more clearly on her radar than the average person in society.

(Currency) This was posted in May 2020, so it has the context of COVID-19's impact on these issues which makes it relevant to the thesis of my paper.

(Coverage/scope/content) This article, although narrow in its scope, thoroughly covers the topic with many statistics and specific examples.

(Relevance) This paper was incredibly helpful for my paper, I wanted to know how COVID-19 had impacted mental health and the amount of social media usage and it talked about both of these things.