

# Medicine's Metaphors

## Preparing for the Metaphor Essay

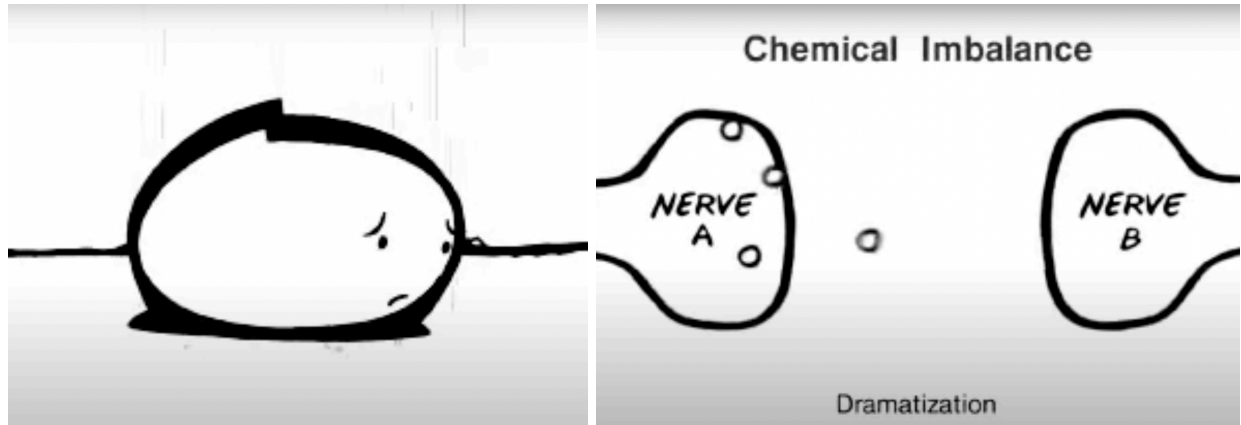
### 1. Dhruv Kullar's "The Trouble with Medicine's Metaphors"

Two things being compared	Qualities transferred from the first thing to the second	What does this metaphor do, rhetorically? How might it be helpful or harmful?
"Destroy rogue cells": destroying pathogens equivocate to beating the virus	Unfunctional cells, crazy, have a mind of their own, Not behaving like the rest Spontaneous Unexplainable behavior	Important function to helping the patient/ how it might backfire and be useless/unhelpful <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- It might be helpful to some people to make it easier to understand pathogens as a rogue cell</li><li>- -" rebel cells"</li><li>- Harmful; humanizes your cells and makes it feel like your body is going against you.</li><li>- Might make the patient more anxious (the less you know, the better)</li><li>- Helpful; might make the patient less anxious by telling them exactly what's going on using scientific terms (more informative)</li></ul>
"Battling cancer"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- War, militarism, fight, win or lose situation, guilt, failure or winner, aggression, frustration, courage, resilience</li></ul>	Prompts patients to think about the outcomes of their treatments: loser vs. winner mentality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Harmful because, in some cases, winning/losing is a matter of life/death.</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helpful: Causes patients to feel encouraged and relieved. There is a possibility to fight against this battle and a sense of hope to keep pushing on.</li> <li>- May lead to the repression of emotions, which may be an obstacle to recovery in itself.</li> </ul>
"all weapons at our disposal"	The qualities of power and precision are transferred from weapons to treatments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This metaphor can be helpful because it conveys the urgency that can be harmful as it frames the patient's body as a battlefield and sort of dehumanizes the patient in a way.</li> <li>- The treatment may feel more like an assault on the disease rather than a healing process for the patient. This may cause the doctors to downplay the side effects.</li> </ul>

## 2. Identifying and Analyzing Metaphors in the Wild

An example: [the original Zoloft commercial from the early 2000s](#), an early commercial for a prescription antidepressant.



Keep in mind that this blob was many people's introduction to the idea that depression was a biological condition that could be treated with a prescription drug!

**Who is the audience? What is it trying to communicate to this audience, or convince it of?**

- 20 million Americans suffering; drug that can help them exists.
- General public; stigma around mental illness at the time, helps them think of depression as a biological illness/even though it is not physically visible, it is a serious illness.
- People in the media/press.
- Psychiatrists; possible incentives for them and building a general name for Zoloft.

**Is the commercial using metaphors to teach its viewers about depression? If so, what are they?**

- Comparing depression to a cloudy, rainy day
- Depressed blob, became a happy blob
  - Blob is a metaphor for depressed people
- Zoloft is bird? Messenger dove?
  - Zoloft is blue bird
- Flowers is happiness
- Black and white background relates to depression and bird add colors and flowers
- Cartoonish drawing which is hopeful and playful
  - Feels like the cartoon is more simply explaining things to people
- Simplified version of what happens in the brain when someone is depressed and what happens when the medicine is added, by showing it as a physical thing reinforced the idea that depression is a physical disease that's able to be treated with medicine
  - Says dramatization so its simplifying a scientific theory of how depression works
  - Enjoyable for viewers
- Simpler language is used which helps explains things to people
- Harmful metaphors: over simplifying things, lots of projection can happen
- Chemical Imbalance may be a harmful metaphor because it compares and simplifies depression down to an imbalance of medicine and doesnt have a scientific grounding

**What do these metaphors do? How might they be helpful or harmful to a patient? How do they shape the narrative of depression and mental illness?**

**Is “chemical imbalance” a metaphor for explaining depression to patients? Why or why not? How might the chemical imbalance story be useful or counterproductive to someone suffering from mental illness?**

### **Further Reading**

Aviv, Rachel. *Strangers to Ourselves: Unsettled Minds and the Stories That Make Us*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022.

Garson, Justin. “How the ‘Chemical Imbalance’ Metaphor Harms Patients: How We Talk About Depression Affects Our Ability to Heal.” *Psychology Today* (blog), June 1, 2023, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-biology-of-human-nature/202306/how-the-chemical-imbalance-metaphor-harms-patients>.

Lacasse JR, Leo J. “Serotonin and Depression: A Disconnect Between the Advertisements and the Scientific Literature.” *PLoS Med*. 2005; 2:101-106.2.

Sadowsky, Jonathan. *The Empire of Depression: A New History*. Polity, 2020.

Scull, Andrew. *Desperate Remedies: Psychiatry's Turbulent Quest to Cure Mental Illness*. Harvard University Press, 2022.

Zeavin, Hannah. “Bad Moods: The Half-Life of the Serotonin Hypothesis.” *Parapraxis*. <https://www.parapraxismagazine.com/articles/bad-moods>.