#Mentalhealth: Promoting public mental health outside the classroom through student-created social- media messages

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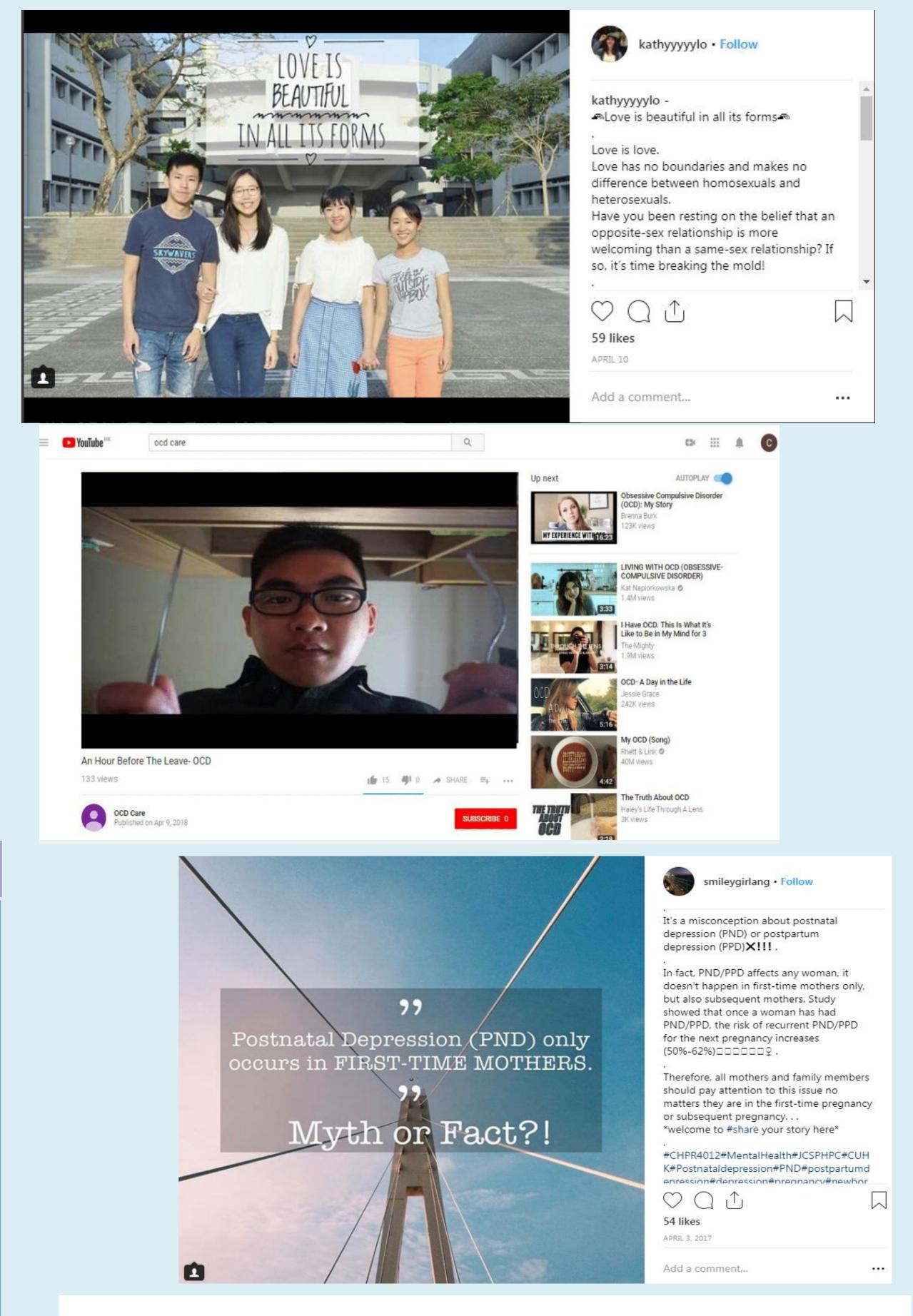The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Background

Concerns for mental health issues have been growing locally and globally. Healthcare professionals are exploring novel ways to promote mental health through the communities, including virtual community.

Social media provides opportunities to disseminate health promotion messages for raising awareness about mental health issues in the public.

To provide hands-on experience in using social media to promote mental health message, as a group project component, public health and community health practice students enrolled in the class CHPR4012 (Mental Health as a Public Health Issue) were asked to:

- Choose an important topic regarding public mental health
- Design and create three promotional messages on their topic of interest
- Post and share the messages through social media publicly for at least two weeks

Learning Outside the Classroom

Specifically, students were asked to:

1. Apply the theories, empirical evidence, and health communication techniques learned from the class to create the messages
2. Elaborate the rationale of designing those messages to promote mental health

3. Create a short video clip that delivers their mental health message (post the video to Facebook and/or Instagram)
4. Design two text- or graphic-based promotional messages (could be photos, quotes) with a catchy slogan that delivers the mental health message

5. Post the video clip and the promotional messages to Facebook, Instagram, plus other social media platform (for at least two weeks).
6. Use hashtags to attract target audiences. Also hashtag the course code (#CHPR4012) and other relevant phrases (#mentalhealth) in their messages for easier identifications
7. Get the messages exposed: get as many likes, shares, and comments as possible!

8. Present on the rationales behind their created messages, the skills they used in creating the messages, the feedback they received from people on social media, and reflected on their project experience

Learning Outcomes and Evaluations

Students felt rewarded when their efforts/ideas were recognized by other people (even strangers) on the social media. They also had the opportunities to interact with the public to discuss their mental health topic of interest.

They found that videos received more feedbacks and comments than text-based or photo-based messages on social media.

Learning was also enriched as students could choose a topic that was not fully discussed in the lectures (e.g., Postnatal depression among mothers, stigmatization towards homosexuality, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Anorexia Nervosa, Gaming Disorder, etc.)

Evaluation: Excellent feedbacks were received from the students, with a significant increment in course evaluation in the second year running the course.

Discussions and Thoughts

Adding a social media-based learning component can:
- provide students opportunities to reflect on strategies to promote health using more cost-effective means
- increase students' sensitivities over the points to note when designing mental health promotional messages for the public (especially beneficial for students pursuing a career in health care practices)

Future directions:
- Facilitate collaboration with other community organizations to co-design social media-based health promotion materials
- Explore how to enhance sustainability of efforts among other interested students
- Disseminate students' great work through other networks and social media platforms