

'Therapy, awareness, community and laughter - a case study in art, design  
and chronic illness'

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## **Abstract**

I developed the chronic pain condition Fibromyalgia during my teenage years. I give a personal account of the way this has affected me; how it affects other sufferers, and how this provides a context for my research, both practical and theoretical. I identify education and building sensitivity as key areas for non sufferers, and breaking down isolation as key for those with the condition. I set out to devise ways, rooted in my art and design practice, to address these areas. I examine the role that social media can play in disseminating the material thus created. I give an account of my own art and design practice to date, identifying three common elements: humour, text and profanity, which I believe are particularly suited to my current tasks. I give an extended account of the creation of the works I exhibited, as well as discussing my posting of them on social media, looking at the reactions and discussions they elicit, then analyzing to what degree these works fulfill my initial aims. In passing, I note that in addition to the original scope of my project, the act of putting it into practice has had a markedly therapeutic effect on my own condition, or at the very least my ability to manage it. This last point informs a possible programme of future work; I want to continue researching the relationship between chronic pain and art, both practically and theoretically, and see if findings, which arose initially from personal experience, might be generalized and further developed to benefit others suffering from other chronic pain conditions.

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My best friend of 23 years. Thank you for being part of many series of artworks. The memories making these conceptual photography pieces, involving squishing our faces against glass and 'smoking' crayons, I will cherish forever.

Most importantly, Alice. Your love for art, your strength, and your caring nature, is something that has continuously inspired me throughout my art practice. Thank you for everything, fellow cat stalker.

## **Introduction**

I suffer from the chronic pain condition, fibromyalgia. This creates widespread pain all over the body, chronic fatigue, as well as psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression.

With fibromyalgia affecting around a massive two million people in the United Kingdom (Elvidge, 2018), I believe there needs to be more public attention brought to it. Especially as it has only been since 2017, when musician Lady Gaga used her status to speak out about her experiences with having the condition, that people became familiar with the condition's name.

The main reason for the importance of creating awareness for the condition, and for me researching into it, is that there is a lack of support in society, especially for those who develop the condition young. Feelings of isolation can occur, "Death rates from suicide and injuries are higher among fibromyalgia patients" (Chen-Chia Lan, 2016). This is due to the lack of knowledge the public have, in relation to the effects of fibromyalgia.

So, the first and foremost aim for this research is to create work that effectively educates the public (all ages, genders and cultures) about this condition, in order for them to be more knowledgeable if they know someone with it. The main audience which I am making my work appeal to, is young female adults, or as society calls them the 'millennials'. Doctors and specialists find treating young people with fibromyalgia quite troublesome, as it is a condition that is usually developed later in life. Due to this frustration, they suggest self-management techniques. With this suggestion, support from others is key, as professionals can leave you to your own devices otherwise you can start to feel isolated. As I developed fibromyalgia at sixteen, my peers at school at the time did not understand the condition. Although they were supportive,



they also found it a difficult concept to comprehend. It was initially hard for me too, unable to explain the exact way I was feeling; and I wouldn't want this for anyone, especially other young people who have developed it.

Then the question arose, how would I address this in the most beneficial and powerful way possible?

Although I have had fibromyalgia for many years, it is the first time I have touched upon the condition specifically in my artwork. However, this is not the first time I have made work based on physical and psychological disorders. In my undergraduate course, I tackled serious subjects, such as facial disfigurements (Figure 1) and depression (Figure 2). Throughout the exploration of these disorders, I have consistently used the following techniques to effectively address my thoughts on the subject; humour, text, and profanity. An example of a series, where all three of these elements were used, is the series, *'IT'S BEAUTY BITCH'* (Figure 3). This series is based on the impact of the 'selfie' culture, and the devastating effects it can have on people (sometimes leading to body dysmorphia), especially young adults. I use metaphors to mock the selfie image; metaphors are also something I touch upon in my research and experimentation.

Another technique that I have used a great deal throughout my art practice, is photography, primarily photographing myself. Would this work? This work I have a much deeper personal connection with, unlike the other artworks. So could this change the result?

Would incorporating these techniques into artworks, for the purpose of educating and campaigning, be effective? I begin to explore each of these questions.

To provide evidence of whether these techniques might prove to be effective, I also explore the role social media has in campaigning, and providing support, for people who suffer from chronic pain disorders.

During this process of exploration and creating outcomes based on my findings, I began to see a significant improvement of my physical and psychological symptoms. Was there a link between creativity and chronic pain? If so, why only now have I noticed an improvement in my symptoms? I have been actively making art for many years, especially since the start of my undergraduate art course in 2013, so why, four years later, is creativity suddenly helping? In this study, I look into the reasons why this may be the case.

I begin this research by exploring the role of humour in fine art, and also in the media, to see if it would be appropriate to use in campaign and awareness work.

Following this, I explain how text is the most effective technique to use, for the purpose of my work. Supporting my argument, I look into how text has been used in history to create political statements, as well as the influence text has in popular culture today.

Afterwards, I look into different language styles that are used in popular culture and the media, to then explore which one would be most effective in delivering both an impactful message, and creating conversation on the chronic pain condition.

I then explore the importance social media has on both the viewer and the artist, and the important role that it plays in regards to spreading awareness.

I then discuss how, by conducting this research and creating artwork, it can lead to an improvement of my symptoms. I move on to explore the role that art and creativity can play, and evidence supporting this argument.

All of the points stated and questions asked, will lead me to the exhibition and conclusion chapters, in which I explain the choices behind the chosen artworks in the exhibition, backed up by the conclusions from the above

chapters, and whether I have effectively educated people on the condition fibromyalgia.

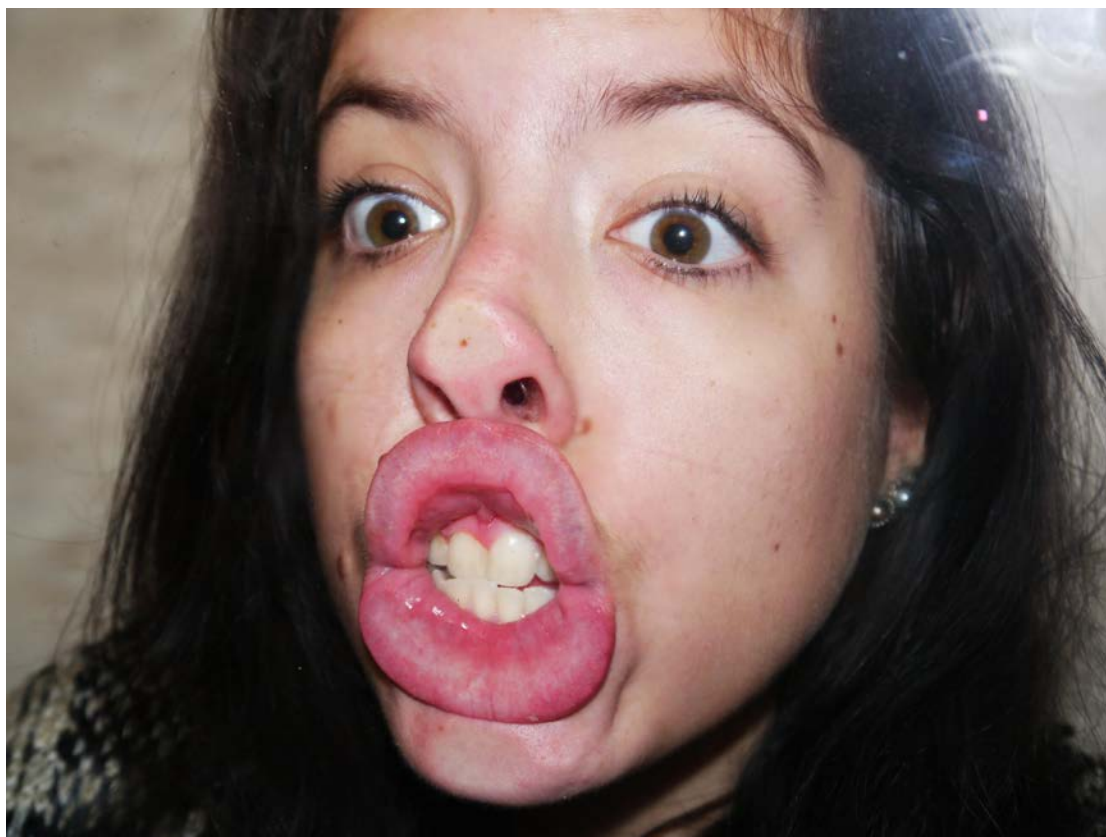


Figure 1  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*DO I LOOK PRETTY?* (2014)  
Photographic series



Figure 2  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*FUCK ADULT LIFE* (2016)  
Photographic series



Figure 3  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*IT'S BEAUTY BITCH* (2016)  
Photograph edited on photoshop

## **Humour**

*'To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it.'*- Charlie Chaplin.

In modern day culture, the use of humour to illustrate serious subjects has risen, and is becoming more a recognized technique. An example includes, a recent (2018) viral video on Facebook, that showed Maysoon Zayid, a comedian who has the condition Cerebral palsy, using self deprecating humour to convey her feelings around her disorders/conditions. "I am a bit like *Muhammad Ali*, a bit like Shakira since I shake constantly" (Zayid, 2014). This could be seen as extremely offensive to someone without the condition, however it perhaps might ease off pressure on the viewer, as using humour as a defense mechanism, is quite common when people don't know how to react in serious situations, or when they are nervous. So the sufferer laughing at themselves, essentially reduces the pressure upon friends and family who don't know how to deal with it. This is supported by Adamle and Turkoski (2006). They suggested that humour in healthcare settings has emotional benefits. They found that patient-initiated humour meant the patients could reduce the stress and embarrassment with how they are feeling with their caregiver. Also, it is a way for them to alleviate their feelings of dehumanization. As well as the patient, a caregiver-initiated humour is also beneficial (Adamle & Turkoski, 2006).

This feature of patient-initiated humour and caregiver-initiated humour, is something that is important to me, and that I bear in mind when creating my work.

In 2018, University of Granada found that self-deprecating humour promotes psychological well-being. Also, they found a correlation between self enhancing humour and happiness (University of Granada, 2018).

I continued to be in awe of the strength which many people have, whilst living with quite horrific conditions. Retaining a sense of humour, and being able to laugh at aspects of their lives, which have a lot of stigma around them, has enabled them to manage those conditions. This is something I admire and wish to learn from. As a result of this, I started experimenting for two purposes; would it benefit me if I adopted this attitude of laughing at myself? Also by using humour, would it educate people accurately and effectively?

As well as a therapeutic technique, which is an effect that I found using humour had on me, it is also an expressive and creative way of portraying feelings and thoughts on issues in society, to educate the public.

Currently in the 2010's, it seems that one of the main sources for information and education about physical and psychological illnesses, is on streaming sites such as Netflix or BBC (Ariely, 2018), platforms that are watched particularly by the younger generation. With this information being made accessible to be watched on the go, such as on phones and tablets, this makes streaming sites one of the main sources the younger generation can access, in regards to learning about mental and physical health conditions.

In 2017, Netflix premiered a new film 'To the Bone' to educate and bring awareness around the disorder, Anorexia Nervosa. The actress playing the main protagonist has personal connections with the eating disorder, and this proved to be beneficial for accurately portraying the character and the effects of the condition.



Aside from this personal attachment to the character that the actress Lily Collins has, Collins also uses her personal approach to dealing with it. That approach is the use of humour. "it delivers painful insights in a relatively fresh way." (Debruge, 2017). This use of humour received many positive comments; as one critic stated 'it humanises' her character, something I believe is also evident in my work.

As well as television shows and film, companies have used self-deprecating humour in advertising. Like 'To the Bone', where the main protagonist mocks her symptoms, Mars Incorporated, the makers of Malteser, used dark humour in their 2014 advertisement for the sweet treat. A disabled woman jokes around about a romantic moment with her husband, which was ended by a spasm. We see her hand, holding a packet of Maltesers that spill out over on the table and hear that Malteser "believes that life is better when we don't take things too seriously" (Maltesers, 2016). The response that this got was an overall positive one. An example includes; "I think this is a great ad, and move by Maltesers to normalise disability" (Zanderfist, 2017). There is also evidence that suggests using self deprecating humour is good in health messages, as opposed to others. It's been found that this type of humour meant you could establish a relationship between the speaker and the public (Stewart, 2011). So, this emphasizes the positives in using humour in advertising, which is a reason why I continued to use it in my work.

Taking this all into consideration, led me to '*NOBODY LOVES ME*' (Figure 4). Using a British novelty sweet, a Bounty bar, to resemble the paranoia. Bounty bars are known to be the sweet that is left over in the 'Celebration' chocolate tub. Journalist Ryan Sheales describes it as "Take the hint, Bounty.

Nobody asked you to be in the 'Celebrations' chocolate box. And nobody wants you there" (Sheales, 2015).

For me personally, paranoia is one of the worst psychological issues that can occur in chronic pain patients, as you can feel a burden and that 'nobody wants you there'. These dark feelings are represented in my work by a novelty western culture sweet.

This humour may appear dark, but this is nothing new. Examples include the poem by Thomas Hardy, 'Channel Firing'. Hardy used comic imagery and humour to show the stupidity of people who think that war is a good thing, and want it to happen, he does this by creating the comic image of dead people all gathering together "and many a skeleton shook his head...I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer" (Hardy, 1914). This dark humour addresses the issue well, hence why after learning about it all those years ago, during GCSE year (2010), it has still stuck with me. Likewise, I hope my dark humour in tackling Fibromyalgia will stick with others for years to come.

An original concern I had was that because humour is subjective, would people not understand the humour, because they don't understand the link between the objects used and the symptom portrayed? If this arises, a benefit could come from it. People laugh when they feel uncomfortable and don't understand. So even if people have to force a laugh, the body can become healthier, as it releases anti stress and joyful hormones (Ghodsbin. 2014).

An ethical issue I thought that would arise is that my work would offend people due to the sensitive nature of Fibromyalgia. Using humour to portray my feelings of a sensitive subject could backfire. However, research has found that

other types of humour may offend, whereas self-deprecation may not so much (Greengross, 2008).

During the duration of producing work, as previously stated, I found that my symptoms were improving. Could this be because of the use of humour (self deprecation) in my work? So I began to explore this further.

Humor is a technique that is commonly used in therapy, with findings showing that it has beneficial effects to both the patients and the therapist. Martin and Kuiper's study in 1993 shows the positive effects of humour on emotional well-being. They found that daily laughter decreased daily stressors and negative emotions (Martin & Kuiper, 1993). This is an interesting finding. As I was making artworks of humour based art most days, this supports the idea that humour played a part in the improvement of my symptoms.

Humour in art form also has many healing qualities, which is a technique that is commonly used in art therapy. In an early Mango and Richman (1990) study of using humour in art therapy, they encouraged patients to create visual and verbal humour, in which they enjoyed producing. The patients created works on subjects that, usually, they would have kept hidden in previous therapy sessions. Subjects such as isolation, and the pain of having a mental illness. So therefore, Mango and Richman concluded that introducing humour into art therapy sessions is beneficial (Mango & Richman, 1990).

A more recent study in 2013 by Kopytin and Lebedev, shows that using humour helps release tension. In their study, they conducted it in a Russian hospital for war veterans, in which the war veterans were being treated for stress related conditions. They found when the veterans used humour during art

therapy sessions, it increased the veterans self esteem and that humour plays an important role in the treatment for stress disorders (Kopytin & Lebedev, 2013).



Figure 4  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*NOBODY LOVES ME* (2017)  
Bounty bar sweets used to make the  
lettering and edited on photoshop

## **Text and Design**

Text is a technique that has been used by many artists throughout history, from the illuminated Bibles to 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptualists such as Barbara Kruger (Figure 5). Outside the strict area of fine art of course text and image go hand in hand in all sorts of visual/design contexts, one of which, is the slogan tee.

Something that has always intrigued me is the impact that the slogan tee has in today's society. The slogan tee became famous by Katherine Hamnett, the figure who is world known for her political slogan tees (Figure 6). She stated, "That T-shirt gave me a voice" (Sibbles, 2009). This made me think, if I created slogans, with my views of fibromyalgia, print them onto T-shirts and wear them, what impact would that have? Would it receive the same response as other t-shirt slogans have received in history, when worn for political and society view change? After all, the T-shirt has become "The medium for a message" (Taylor, 1973). Would wearing my own designs on a graphic t-shirt, help with the stigma surrounding fibromyalgia by educating others?

So combining the use of humour and wearing items of clothing with statements of my feelings towards the condition on them, this led me onto one of my first experiments.

One of the first pieces of the series 'SOZ' was '*SOZ BOUT THE EYE BAGS*' (Figure 7). A plain white t-shirt with the text spray painted on. Originally the idea of this was for the work to show the sadness of the disorder, but as well as this, provide a piece of humour to the viewer. Focusing on the use of eye bags, the tiredness, both mentally and physically. Using the slang term language that younger generations use to provoke laughter to the viewer. Also with regards to

how, with a chronic pain condition, you tend to apologize a lot, due to what feels like pestering loved ones for help.

The second image of the series is '*SOZ BOUT THE HAIRY ANKLES*' (Figure 8). Using text on another fashion item, which in this case is ankle bracelets. Using beads to make the ankle bracelets, to tone the negative vibe from the piece of work, focusing more on the humour. Hairy ankles, someone who experiences pain in her joints and muscles will understand, this necessity that society expects girls to have smoothly shaven legs etc., which is extremely hard to do with joint or muscle pain.

This was the series of work in which I realised I didn't want to use myself as the subject in the piece. Using myself in the image does not work; I was not developing myself as an artist. It was a technique I had used throughout my undergraduate study, and I found that the text aspect of these two current pieces were the strongest and most powerful, so I concluded to just focus on typography.

Also, I did not want to include myself, in particular in this research, because it narrows down the knowledge that my work is providing. I am a white, British, 24 year old, and I don't want my work to be viewed just by people in the same age, ethnic, gender categories. Fibromyalgia is a condition that can affect men, people of all ages, and is common in all cultures. Despite one of my primary target audiences being young people, so around my age of 24, I still want the work to be relatable to others, if it is another chronic illness they have etc.

Despite text being a huge aspect of contemporary art and political statements, would it be an effective way for the purpose of my awareness and campaigning? Would using the technique help retain the information?

I found that the answer is, yes. Looking from my product research, the current trends in high street stores (places many people of all ages and genders go) show slogans and text on everyday items, are becoming increasingly popular. From tote bags (Figure 9) to phone cases (Figure 10), the use of slogans on items which are worn and used everyday, is the 'millennial' way to put out a statement to the world. Whether it is wearing or using the item out in public (Figure 11), or posting a 'selfie' of the item in use on Instagram, it is a technique I need to focus on.

The use of slogans on products is also used to spread awareness by mental health charities. An example is To Write Love On Her Arms (TWLOHA). A non-profit organisation in America that helps people struggling with mental illness', such as depression and addiction. Thirteen years since it was formed in 2006, it is still widely successful and still selling merchandise (Figure 12) with positive quotes on, such as T-shirts and tote bags. With famous figures, such as Hayley Williams and Miley Cyrus, publicly supporting the organization.

Tote bags are another product that text based designs are printed on commonly by companies to help spread awareness/promotion. An example includes; the British cosmetic company, LUSH. Most famous for their ethical products that are against animal testing brought out a design on a tote bag that supports this (Figure 13).

But one of the most well known text works that has been printed on products, is the '*Keep Calm and Carry On*' poster (Figure 14). Created in 1939, but rediscovered in 2000, the poster was created to raise the morale of the British public during World War One. Similarities to this and my work, is that I wanted to raise the morale of fibromyalgia patients. I also want people who are suffering to find comfort, from my work, particularly in the humour and from my



voice about the way I deal with the condition. The type is clear, capitalized, with the white text on a contrasting background. All of these elements I had in mind when creating my work. Making sure the item used, contrasted with the black background (which is the colour of the background on the majority of my works).

This design has been printed on t-shirts, mugs, notepads, and various other everyday items, this phrase has been widely spread by popular culture to continue to boost the morale of the people, who live in this world of war and hate. This is something to think about in my designs. I want my beneficial view on the sensitive subject of fibromyalgia, to be spread, if that is on a coffee mug, or on a t-shirt. This is something I did touch upon which is discussed in the chapter 'Exhibition'. In which I discuss my work being reprinted onto keyrings and fridge magnets that were handed out at the end of year exhibition (2018).

For many centuries, artists have used art to convey their own personal experiences and feelings on trauma. An example being Francisco Goya '*The Third of May, 1808*' (Figure 15). Where Goya expresses his feelings towards the horror of Spanish civil war, in the form of an oil painting. But why, for the purpose of my work (of educating others on the condition by creating conversation around the topic of fibromyalgia) is using text the most appropriate and effective way?

The way I'm aiming to spread awareness effectively with my work, is by sharing my personal experiences and feelings towards the condition. Personal storytelling is a recognized technique in effectively educating others and spreading awareness. It can promote social change and people's attitudes towards conditions, which is something I aim for my work to do, as due to lack of knowledge, people with invisible illnesses (including fibromyalgia) are simply known as just being 'lazy' and 'faking it'.

An example of positive social and attitude change that was due to personal storytelling is by Jameela Jamil. Jamil is an activist who has been open about her personal struggles with battling an eating disorder. By telling her story, and her views on how social media promotes eating disorders by allowing celebrities to use their status to sell diet shakes, this resulted in Instagram being stricter on these kinds of uploads.

Many artists use visual language to share their personal stories and feelings towards social issues, for example Tracey Emin. In 2018, Tracey Emin installed an artwork '*I Want My Time With You*' in St Pancras station (Figure 16). Using her handwriting as the typeface, Emin displays the phrase, using twenty metre LED lights. This piece is in response to her feelings about Brexit, and how she feels saddened that Britain is leaving Europe, and how she wants to spend time with the continent. I believe what makes this a strong and heartfelt piece, is due to the use of her own handwriting/ a handwritten typeface.

With handwritten typefaces, each piece feels more original and personal. As it is important for awareness to be created from a personal perspective, using a handwritten type adds an extra, personal element to the work. To me, it makes it feel more real and more haunting, as well as humanizing it, such as what is shown in the work of Frank Warren. In 2005 he created a community mail art project, where people would anonymously send in their darkest secrets, with one being a murder confession (Figure 17).

Handwritten typefaces humanize works and products; therefore it can lead to an emotional attachment between the viewer and the artwork. By creating this emotional attachment, the viewer can feel connected to the

artwork, therefore more comfortable in asking questions (thus learning about the condition, and the work is successfully spreading awareness of the condition). These assumptions, of using handwritten typefaces to provoke an emotional response, are supported by the findings of a study conducted by Schroll et al, in 2018. In their study, participants evaluated different typefaces on products. They found written typefaces were more favorable than machine written typefaces, and participants also felt more emotionally attached to the products which used handwritten typefaces (Schroll et al, 2018).

I want to provoke an emotional response in the viewers of my work, in order to create conversation, and by using a handwritten typeface, I believe I can achieve this conversation and spread awareness of fibromyalgia.



Figure 5  
**Barbara Kruger**  
*Untitled (Your body is a battleground)* (1989)  
Photographic silkscreen on vinyl  
284.48 x 284.48 cm



Figure 6  
**Katharine Hamnett**  
*58 per cent Don't Want Pershing* (1984)  
Slogan T-shirt



Figure 7  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*SOZ BOUT THE EYEBAGS* (2017)  
Photographic series, wearing a handmade and spray-painted t-shirt.



Figure 8  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*SOZ BOUT THE HAIRY ANKLES* (2017)  
Photographic series



Figure 9  
**Whistles**  
*Whistles You Got This Tote Bag, Neutral* (2019)  
Cotton tote bag





Figure 10  
**Skinnydip**  
*BOSSIN' IT CASE* (2018)  
Plastic phone case



Figure 11  
**Getty Image**  
*Paparazzi photograph of Gigi Hadid holding  
mobile phone  
(2018)*  
Photograph



Figure 12  
**To Write Love On Her Arms**  
*Roses Shirt (2019)*  
Cotton Tee



Figure 13  
**LUSH**  
*Fighting Animal Testing Bag* (2018)  
Cotton Bag



Figure 14  
**Ministry of Information**  
*Keep Calm and Carry On* (1939)  
Lithograph  
75 x 50 cm



Figure 15  
**Francisco Goya**  
*The third of may, 1808* (1814)  
Oil on Canvas  
2.68 m x 3.47 m



Figure 16  
**Tracey Emin**  
*I want my time with you* (2018)  
Neon light installation  
20 m

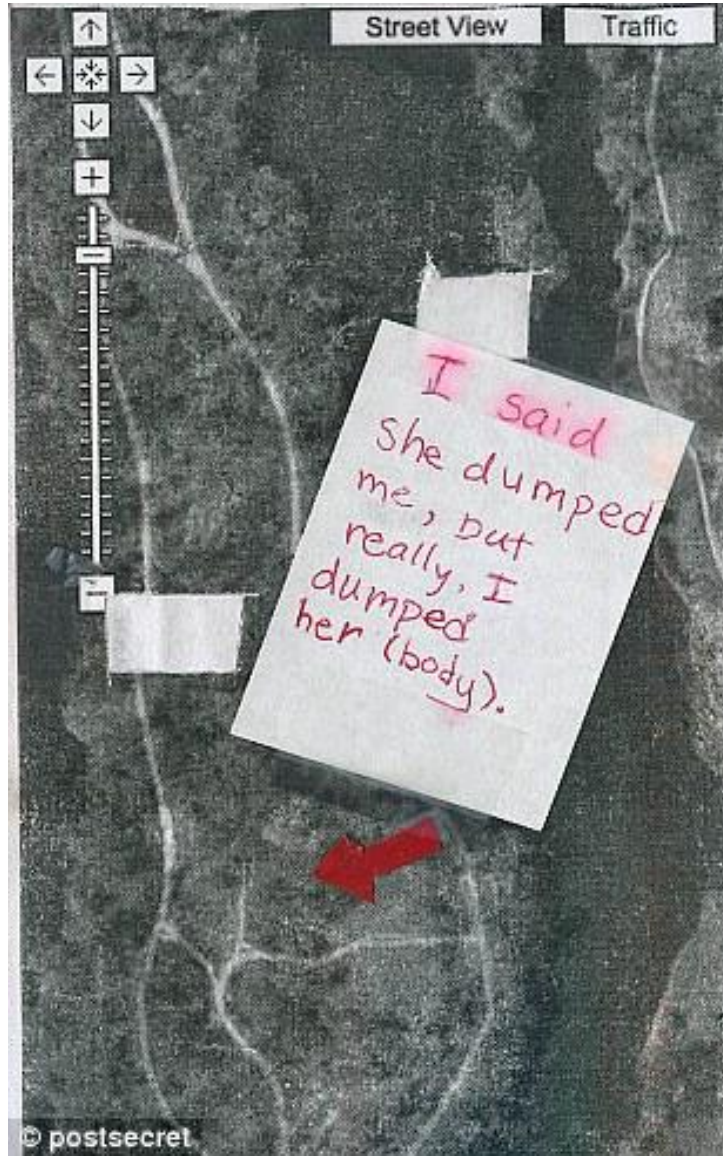


Figure 17  
**Frank Warren**  
*Post secret* (2018)  
Collage of paper and ink.



## **Profanity**

"...swearing is a really important part of dealing with the shitty consequences of pain and illness" (Byrne, 2017).

Foul language has been a consistent element of my work over the years, with it becoming more frequently used in my artworks in the third year of my undergraduate course. Examples include '*IT'S BEAUTY BITCH*' (Figure 3) and '*BRAIN SHIT*' (Figure 18). This is something I wanted to research and possibly bring into my final pieces of work. With it being therapeutic to me, swearing can engage with the audience and potentially bring them in and help them retain the information.

Profanity has become more socially acceptable over the years and it is evolving into our everyday language. So for example, 'damn' was said in 'Gone With The Wind', in 1939. The producer was fined £5000 (Watson-Smyth, 1999). However, now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it's a lot more acceptable. In 2016, 18-year-old reality television star Kylie Jenner, brought out a lipstick range with one of them named 'Damn Gina'. So by the fact her products are available to buy globally by the public, shows that 'Damn' is now a more acceptable to use. Also, nowadays excretory taboo is basically non-existent, hence the friendly 'poo' emojis on smartphones and social media.

In the United Kingdom, even the word 'cunt' is becoming a lot more socially acceptable and used. For example LoveKayla, an online store which creates offensive greetings cards and stationary. The word 'cunt' is used on some of their products (Figure 19). It is also promoted on social media sites, such as Facebook. Therefore it can be seen by the young users of Facebook, the minimum age of which is thirteen.

In regards to my confidence in using profanity in my artwork, artists such as Tracey Emin have influenced it majorly. Emin stated " I don't have a family life *like* other people do, all I have is my art" (Brown, 2017). Although I have a wonderful family life, the fact she relies on her art, to help and support her, is somewhat what I started doing. Creating my work has essentially saved me from horrible past times, and something that I could always rely on to help me, especially when using profanity, as shown in her piece, '*I wish I was fucking in Hyde park*' (Figure 20). Art is an outlet where you can express the emotions that you are feeling, without any rules.

Whilst conducting this research and creating the work with profanity, I felt again, such as with humour, that it helped me. Intrigued, I decided to look into this, to see if it was the same with other chronic illness patients. There is a lot of support that does suggest that swearing does help with pain, while also being contextual, as well as more acceptable when it is a response to pain. Richard Steven's finds, in a 2009 study, that swearing increases pain tolerance. "Swearing increased pain tolerance, increased heart rate and decreased perceived pain compared with not swearing" (Stevens, 2009).

Allan and Buridge in 2011 examined social media websites and identified four different types of swearing. These are social swearing, annoyance swearing, abusive swearing, and stylistic swearing (Stevens, 2015). I believe that the type of swearing that I am using is social swearing, a trait of which is that it causes no offense, therefore it's more acceptable to be said in public.

"I feel it adds a little to the novelty and interest of the topic to introduce a smattering of bad language" (Stephens, 2015). So the use of the swear word

'shit', is just more of a novelty aspect, referring back to the idea that there is very little taboo around it now.

Looking at The Committees of Advertising Practice, and their guidelines, there are words that are considered taboo, but are allowed to be used for advertisement purposes. These include 'bloody', 'shag', 'slag', 'piss' and 'balls'. This is something to consider for future artworks, especially if I want them to be shown in public.

Again, showing swearing (so my work that includes profanity) in public, would that be an issue? Possibly, but profanity is being normalized more in society now, than in previous times. For example, this is shown at music festivals.

Download 2018 (a heavy rock and metal genre music festival), parents and their children scream as Guns N' Roses' play their first hit of the show 'its so easy'. Parents, seeing the band they grew up listening to perform, the excitement, the happiness. This can also be seen on the children's faces. Although not in the crowd, but standing near the back, Axl Rose's face appears on the big screen, seen clearly by a crowd of almost 100,000. When watching this performance, I noticed that Rose performs the lyrics 'fuck you' a famous line from the song, as well as using the middle finger gesture (Figure 21). Some parents and people in general would find this offensive and be of the opinion that this should not be heard by children, but clearly now it is less of an issue as before. Why is this?

This is just one example of the use of curse words in the lyrics sung, and performed, by rock and heavy metal artists; A genre which is notably known for its profanity. Download is a rock and heavy music festival that attracts people of a variety of ages, starting from the age of five, so from that information, they

will be exposed to a lot of profanity but as Eric Alpher, a father of one has stated;

“Today’s music is like the music of my generation, and the one before it: it’s about love, pain, redemption and exploring the human psyche. It doesn’t matter if she [his daughter] doesn’t understand what she’s singing – I’m just happy that she’s singing” (Howard, 2012). It is part of language, it is part of life. The music makes the children happy, even if they do not know what it means. The musicians clearly show a clear love and passion for the music, when they perform, so the words are not used in a violent manner.

The passion and love of music is also shown by pop singer Demi Lovato, who performs a completely different music genre. During her show in Birmingham in June 2018 (Figure 22), the singer performs the lyrics “... you fuckin' with a savage” (00:01:34). Again, with the audience including parents with their young children, singing along to a singer who is clearly showing love, passion and confidence. Not using the words in an aggressive way, merely expressing her confidence about herself and life, and using profanity as a way of expressing that. Something that I see as harmless.

Both of these examples show the use of society exposing children, teenagers and young adults to profanity, and all for positive reasons. Creatively expressing their emotions, through the outlet of music, so a form of art. Something that I need to keep in mind when creating work.

Despite there being a lot of benefits to using profanity to create awareness, a lot of places, including the public and online, restrict swearing. So I decided to look into abbreviations of swear words. This is used quite frequently, especially since profanity has become more socially acceptable, especially ‘social swearing’.

An example of this in popular culture, is when the term 'AF' is used, especially on products sold in popular online fashion stores (Figure 23). AF, everyone knows what it stands for, '*as fuck*', but the young, innocent minds would not know this. So abbreviating these words, it can cut out any offense they may cause for some people. Also, 'WTF' (*what the fuck*) is a commonly used abbreviation (Figure 24). 'WTF WHERE'S THE FOOD'. The phrase used on a lunchbox, sold in Paperchase. Which is a stationary store, widely popular with children. A play on the word fuck, innocent minds would think, where's the food?, others, would see 'what the fuck'.

So my first artwork, using abbreviations, was '*FRAGILE AF*' (Figure 25). Sufferers tend to be extremely fragile emotionally, especially in regards to relationships. Their hearts have been broken due to previous partners not being able to handle the pressures of a loved one with Fibromyalgia. Physically, they are also fragile, for example, a small knock could potentially cause a flare up. It was this piece of work when I noticed I was not having as many 'flare ups'.



Figure 18  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*BRAIN SHIT* (2015)  
A rant printed onto photocopier paper.



Figure 19  
**Love Lala Designs**  
*Birthday Cunt Balloon (2019)*  
Latex metallic balloon.



Figure 20  
**Tracey Emin**  
*I wish I was fucking in Hyde park* (Date Unknown)  
Ink on paper





Figure 21  
**Guns N Roses**  
*It's So Easy Live* (2018)  
Still from YouTube video



Figure 22  
**Demi Lovato**  
*Sorry Not Sorry Live* (2018)  
Still from YouTube video



Figure 23  
**PRETTY LITTLE THING**  
*BLACK FESTIVE AF CHRISTMAS JUMPER (2018)*  
Acrylic Jumper



Figure 24  
**Paperchase**  
*WTF lunch bag* (2018)  
Plastic lunchbox



Figure 25  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*FRAGILE AF* (2018)  
Hand made lettering using love heart sweets, photographed  
and then constructed on Photoshop.  
Digital Image

## **Language**

“soz”

One of the many shortened words that millennials use. When the ability to send text messages first started, as in when sending a single text message, you were limited to the amount of characters you could use. Then came the smartphones and unlimited text plans, text language was no longer needed. With predictive text being installed on most people’s mobile phones, people were now focusing on having perfect spelling and grammar.

But now, as shown in popular culture, people are also speaking this way in real life, with words being missed out?

By getting the information across in an appealing manner to ‘millennials’, this is the bigger generation to use social media, could potentially mean my work and views are spread across the internet more, which then means more promotional awareness. “If you want to attract millennials, speak their language” (Morton, 2018). So this common mockery and the way millennials speak, are the techniques I am using for my work.

“Text-speak: language evolution or just laziness?” (Merritt, 2013). The lazy aspect. People with little knowledge around this topic of language evolution think that the SMS language is a lazy way of speaking, this adds to the common factor for us fibromyalgia patients being called lazy. Adding this humour, the humour of adults using this ‘hip text’ speak, and the laughter of the lack of understanding of fibromyalgia, and simply passing them off as ‘lazy’, and not with chronic fatigue 24/7. So this being a factor influencing my work and language used. However, only now through research in this area of language

evolution, do I now know that SMS has a lot of findings that support the idea that it is not a 'lazy' way of speaking, instead it is purely language evolution.

When you type into a search engine, 'Fibromyalgia Awareness', and click on images, it is full of artworks. Using formal fonts (Figure 26) combined with the colour purple, it all looks relatively bland. I am not saying that these designs are bad, but it is not something that the younger generation would generally be attracted to. The language used is very standard, simple English, with a lot of text in each image. No creativity, no links to popular culture. Very feminine, that's why my work is unique, as it moves away from the current techniques used for fibromyalgia awareness, and gains a new number of audiences.

As well as 'text language', I wanted to research into other language styles used in society, to make the work less dull. A common language style that is used in society is slang. Lexicographer Jonathon Green describes slang as, "What I love most about it is that it is ourselves at our most human – not at our best, but at our most real" (Ash, 2012). This is what therapists/mental health professionals encourage patients to be. So if slang is used for a formal purpose, it could possibly encourage being 'at our most real'.

"All success in advertising is predicated in being alive and retained in the memory" (Doyle, 2011). The brain can only hold a finite number of slogans, so it needs to be short. That's why I believe my longer text pieces did not work, people not understanding the humour as much. '*I WISH YOU WOULD LOOK AT ME*' (Figure 27). Using chicken nuggets as a metaphor, to describe how people worship and are obsessed with the chicken nuggets, which is also a social media trend, and wishing your partner could look and treat you in the same way. Despite receiving a high number of likes, near enough the same as other pieces, there were no comments about this piece, or anything in regards to people's

reactions and opinions on the humour, unlike my other pieces, where laughing face emojis were used as a response. So because of the no comments, I did not have any, or enough, evidence of using more than three or four words being successful.

So this is when I decided to look into puns, a common technique used in advertising. "The word form of the slogan enables memorability. All ads direct towards some form of understanding and tangible action, mostly the purchasing of a product or service, or, in the area of public information, changing behavior, changing a way of acting, or attempting to make people well-disposed to a cause or an idea" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). I am essentially creating slogans for the symptoms of fibromyalgia in order to educate and inform people in the public about the condition.

Puns can be cheesy and not a lot of people like them, and so they receive a lot of negativity. "They're tacky, they debase the product or service, and they should be avoided at all costs" (Suggett, 2019). So this is something I was aware of when creating these pieces, I didn't want to make people groan like they do after hearing the answer on a Christmas cracker joke. This is another reason I wanted to get a broad range of people's opinions, which is why I uploaded my works to Instagram.

But, I believe my work and my views are unique in regards to awareness for fibromyalgia, because from what I can see, there is a gap in research and current awareness, word puns can be used.

However, in order to make them not have the 'Christmas cracker joke' response, I have learnt about the things to include and not include. For example, using short phrases.



“Puns and clichés can often elicit cheap laughs but when used cleverly can also challenge the audience. Double meanings can be presented by matching imagery with words but adding a creatively skillful or ingenious twist” (Gross, 2019).

The language and humour in my work strongly reminds me of David Shrigleys ‘*Fucking Ace*’ artwork (Figure 28). A term that is used, usually sarcastically in a situation where something has gone wrong, he has presented the work, handwritten font, inside an ‘ace’ symbol.

Aside from word puns, profanity based word play has been used in the media. Online travel agent, booking.com, played around with the word ‘booking’ in their adverts. ‘You booking did it’, and ‘you got it booking right’ (Press Association, 2015).

I initially wanted the work to promote awareness of the condition, and for it to be shown in public, therefore I decided to create work that removes swear words but is clever with words, to make it memorable. Although swearing is becoming a lot more socially acceptable, as discussed, and is frequently shown on social media sites, it is still not suitable to be present in advertisements and campaigns, as it could be exposed to younger children, and receive complaints and negative publicity. So I decided to explore the topic of innuendos as another way of displaying humour.

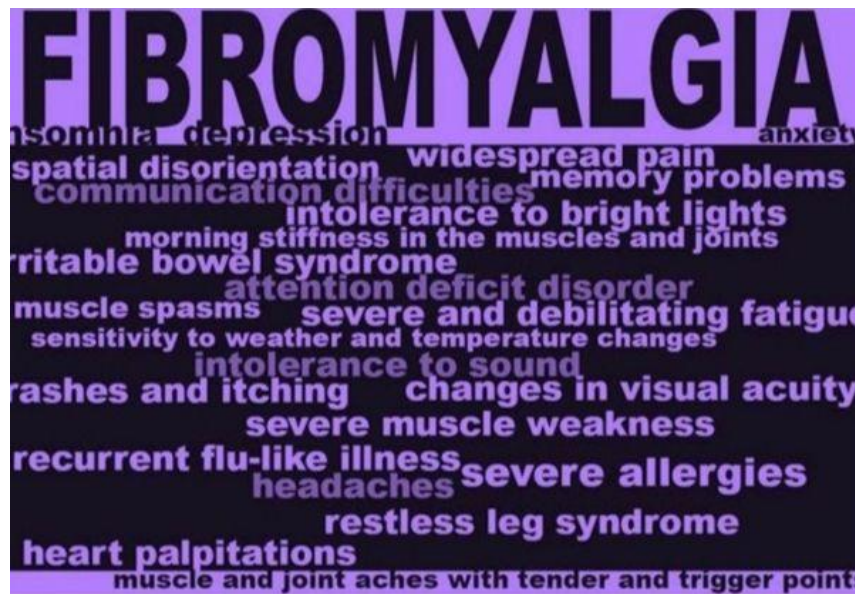
This is a technique that many companies have used. An example being the clothing retailer French Connection, ‘F.C.U.K’ (French Connection, United Kingdom), with the intention of creating a shock value (to make it memorable), as it resembles the word *fuck*.

Innuendos in advertising and campaigning can be used almost everywhere, in which case all ages can see it. For example, in 2018, the famous Ice Blast, a popular cinema drink, brought out a campaign with the slogan ‘do it

in the dark' (Figure 29). Initially when I saw it, I had the same response as others, it was an innuendo, referring to 'doing it' (sex). This advertisement was shown before the children's film 'Ralph Breaks the Internet' however this is not just a new thing.

Using innuendos in advertising has been around for many decades. An example includes Sega, who advertised their new console for families, in 1989 (Figure 30) with the caption "THE MORE YOU PLAY WITH IT, THE HARDER IT GETS". Also, an advert from 1942, advertising new skinless sausages as 'skinless wieners'. 'Wieners' being a slang term for 'penis'. This adds that comical element to it, as the word 'penis' can be seen as comical.

This led me to the pieces '*WHY IS IT SO HARD*' (Figure 31) and '*I'M SO STIFF TODAY*' (Figure 32). Combining handwritten text and innuendos to create these images.



## Fibromyalgia Awareness Day – May 12<sup>th</sup>

**Millions of people (2-4% of the population) are suffering  
EVERY DAY with this debilitating syndrome...**

**...they just don't know what to call it!**

## Fibro-My-WHAT?

**Fibromyalgia is a collection of signs, symptoms & medical problems that occur together but are not related to a specific, identifiable cause...**

**...which makes this disorder so incomprehensible to many, and so frustratingly cruel to those who have it.**

**On May 12th, take the mystery out of fibromyalgia,  
and help spread something more powerful: hope!**

## WEAR PURPLE

Figure 26  
Pinterest  
*Fibromyalgia Awareness Poster (2018)*  
Digital Image



Figure 27  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*I WISH YOU WOULD LOOK AT ME (2018)*  
Digital Image



Figure 28  
**David Shrigley**  
*Fucking Ace* (2018)  
Screenprint in colours  
76 x 56 cm



Figure 29  
**Slush Puppie**  
*Tango Ice Blast* Advertisement (2018)  
Digital image

<p><b>THE MORE YOU PLAY WITH IT, THE HARDER IT GETS.</b></p>		
<p>You sit there, eyes glued to the writhing, arcade-quality graphics, pulling and squeezing your knob. Now you're breathing heavily over the digital stereo sound. Now you're shooting all over the place, but it's no use... "GAME OVER."</p> <p>JOYSTICK £34.99</p> <p>14 BIT MEGADRIVE WITH ALTERED BEAST GAME £149.99</p>		<p><b>TO BE THIS GOOD TAKES AGES</b></p> <p><b>TO BE THIS GOOD TAKES</b></p> <p><b>SEGA</b></p>

Figure 30  
**Sega ©**  
*Sega Genesis console advertisement (1989)*  
Newspaper print

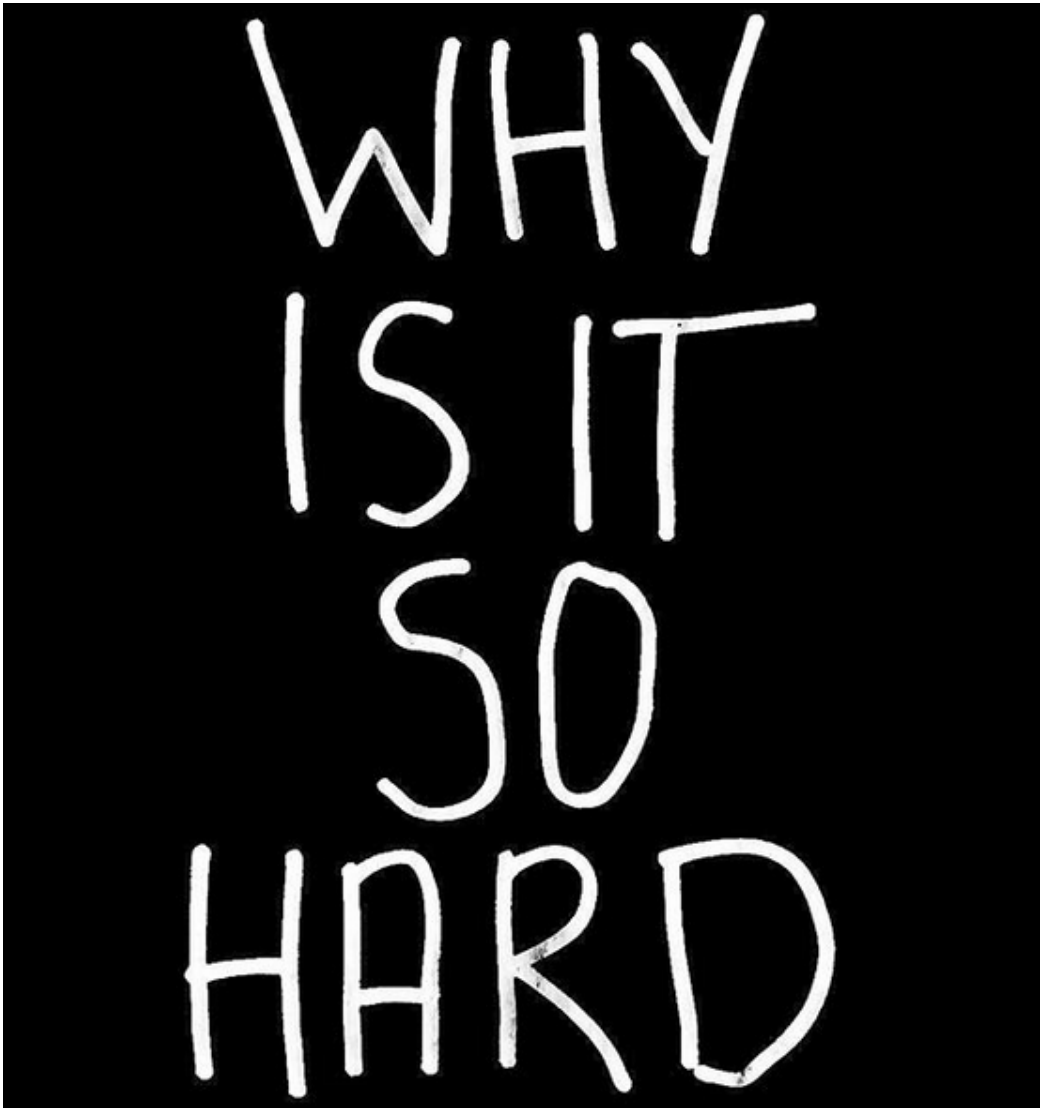


Figure 31  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*WHY IS IT SO HARD* (2017)  
Digital drawing on Photoshop





Figure 32  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*I'M SO STIFF TODAY* (2017)  
Digital drawing on Photoshop

## **Social Media**

With all of these different text and design techniques, I did not know which direction to go. So I decided to create an Instagram account, post my work, see what the responses were, and evaluate the findings and go from there. Instagram is a social media platform on which I can post images that include swearing, without it violating any rules (within reason). A platform in which all people over the age of thirteen are able to reach and use.

I want people to look at my work, and learn about the symptoms. This is the case for family and friends of the person with the condition, and if people have just been diagnosed and need the emotional support. When I was diagnosed back in 2012, the use of Instagram was not as common, and it was not until recently I spoke to other people around the same age as me with the condition on Instagram, I felt a massive weight taken off, knowing I wasn't the only one. Due to this, I want to heavily focus on the importance of social media in connecting people as well. In the United Kingdom, many GPs and specialists do suggest going onto online forums as a self-management tool to help with conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

Connecting with others with the same conditions, through the use of hashtags for example, relieves many symptoms, as it is an easy way to find relatable topics.

With fibromyalgia, and the combination of physical and mental symptoms, it is sometimes hard to get out of the house. To doctors appointments, and to family gatherings for example. Many doctors and therapists suggest for people to go to support groups, however this is sometimes not possible. This is why the use of social media is ideal and rewarding. If you're having a bad flare up of pain, and cannot get out of bed, just reach over to your phone. So the practicality issue of connecting with people with the same condition is resolved.

With all the research above in mind, I created my Instagram account and uploaded my first piece of typography artwork '*I'M A FUCKING LEAKING JAM JAR*' (Figure 33).

The responses I got were extremely interesting. The comment is shown in Figure 34. From this statement, I can possibly gather the user felt isolated, and alone. These are feelings that I once had, and were resolved when I found someone with the same symptoms. She seemed to have found comfort in my work. That was my goal, after all "the purpose of my work is to help myself or others" (Dolling, 2014).

The comments I was receiving seemed to be positive. Nothing negative about my work, or my view on a sensitive topic, was mentioned. This was an initial worry of mine, for my own personal reasons, would I be able to cope with negative opinions? Would it impact my ways of dealing with the condition? But on a more practical level, if there were negative comments, would it affect the way viewers would read into my work? And consequently impact the purpose of my work. A study by University of Duisburg-Essen found, "Negative comments make articles less persuasive" (University of Duisburg-Essen, 2016). Disabling comments is an option, but for now I need the comments to know whether my work is being portrayed correctly, and if not, why?

"... exposure to online negativity makes our own thinking negative – reading uncivil comments can immediately increase readers' own hostile cognitions." (University of Duisburg-Essen, 2016). The worry would be, if another sufferer who was still sensitive to the topic, read negative comments, would it affect them?

These were all factors I needed to have in mind, but for now, it was helping me, and helping others. It was motivating me to create more work. This

therefore meant that my symptoms were improving, because I was being more creative and people were finding comfort in my work - which has always been an aim.

In regards to putting my awareness work out there, at the moment social media is my main way. My intention is for my work to appeal to all ages, whether it educates people or they find comfort in it. I originally thought that elderly people wouldn't see my work, but I have found that older generations do also use the same social networking site. So there is potential of it helping elderly people, who also are not as mobile and cannot go to support groups.

An issue that I have had with fibromyalgia, as well as many others (which I found this out when reading blogs and viewing peoples Instagram posts), that doctors are somewhat stuck in helping the young patient, and by using social media to connect with others with the same disorder, this decreases the feeling of isolation and loneliness.

The NHS states that CBT/and or other talking therapies is a main treatment option for the psychological symptoms of the disorder (anxiety and depression are the most common two). Due to recent cuts, the waiting list times are a lot longer, with some patients waiting for 18 months (NHS, 2019). So the use of social media, such as Instagram, needs to be put forward and advertised as a self-help technique.

As previously mentioned, I do not want my work to be viewed just by people in the same age, ethnic, gender, and sexuality categories as me. Fibromyalgia is a condition that can affect men, people of all ages, and is common in all cultures. With Instagram, it is used by all the mentioned categories above. Despite wanting my work to appeal to young female adults, as that is the main age and sex that need support for the condition; I would like others who are not these, to also find comfort in my work.

After researching online, and reading people's experiences of using social media to help themselves, the responses have been fairly positive. For example, Laurie Edwards, diagnosed with Primary Ciliary Dyskinesia (P.C.D) in her early twenties, described the experience of using social media as a therapeutic technique as " The opportunity to hear from other patients and get advice on treatment and therapies and share common experiences is invaluable" (Edwards, 2013). This is when I knew I was going to be heavily using social media as part of my research, to get my work and opinions across to people suffering from similar conditions.

As stated previously, "Death rates from suicide and injuries are higher among fibromyalgia patients" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). One reason for this is due to the lack of understanding and knowledge people having surrounding the condition. Now with the support ever-growing on Instagram and other social networking sites (such as Facebook), hopefully this percentage will fall in time. When reading these facts, there was a definite realization of knowing I wanted to continue utilising social media within my work.

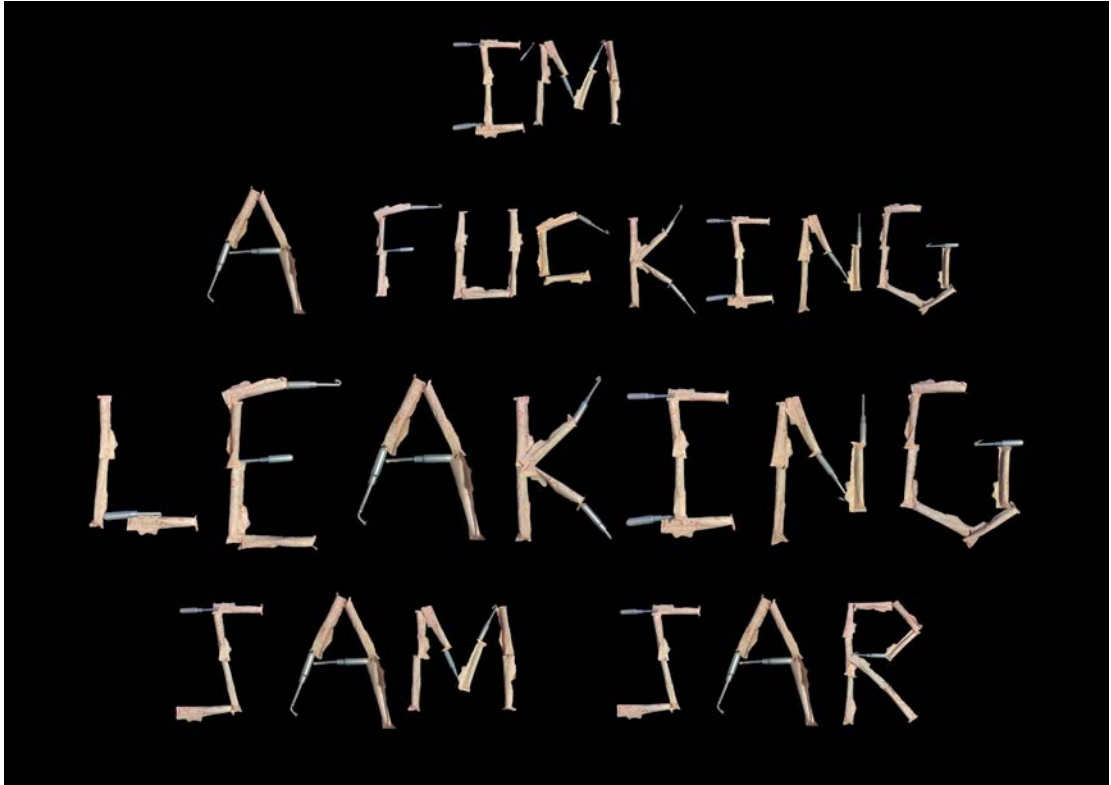


Figure 33  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*I'M A FUCKING LEAKING JAM JAR* (2017)  
Digital image



**botapikin** So this isn't just me i have someone else



63w 1 like Reply

Figure 34  
**botapikin**  
*Instagram comment (2017)*  
Online text

## **Art as Therapy**

After the first few months of this research, I noticed a change in my physical and psychological symptoms, everything was improving. For the first time in years, I had felt the healthiest I had been since before the diagnosis. I found the improvement had started a few months after the start of this research. A year and a half after my undergraduate course was completed, I was being creative again. Was there a link between the creativity and pain (physical and psychological)?

I began to question this and look into this question more. So I posted on Instagram (Figure 35) and Facebook (Figure 36), asking people if being creative helps or has helped them, whether it was a physical or psychological disorder. It was extremely interesting to see the responses. Receiving over one hundred of them, I found out that I definitely was not the only one. People from all age groups answered, whether it was people in their twenties, and the use of photography helping them with their anxiety and depression, or knitting helping the older generation. By having a creative outlet it helped them bring a bit of normality back into their lives.

Being creative to help someone psychologically is something that popular culture has touched on briefly, for example by the increased popularity of the adult colouring books (Figure 37). In the last decade, adult colouring books have become increasingly popular amongst adults of all ages. Being able to buy them from petrol stations, bookstores, and other high street stores, they were becoming the new 'in thing'. The aim for these books was to use colouring as a way to relieve stress.

A study conducted by Jayne Flett in 2017 suggested "anxiety and depression may be reduced by colouring in for as little as 10 minutes a day"



(Ainge Roy, 2017). So there is research supporting the use of colouring and creativity.

This research was done on people between the ages of eighteen to thirty-six. In regards to my research, this is one of my target groups, as when I refer to young people, I am describing people under the age of fifty, as this is the age most doctors say the majority of people develop fibromyalgia. This is showing yet more evidence around the idea that creativity helps with pain, both physical and mental. "my epilepsy got to the point where anytime I would try to focus on doing things like that, my hands would start to jerk" (Schwedel, 2015), but because of these colouring books, she is drawing again for the first time, something that she used to love to do before the symptoms started. Also, people with fibromyalgia, on a more severe level, tend to not be able to work, therefore, they will not have a lot of money in comparison to those who suffer less or do not have the condition. Colouring books and their beneficial effects "Affordable, being bed ridden or fully able, has zero impact on one's ability to enjoy colouring" (Gregory, 2016) is something Wendy Piersall (a professional colouring book designer) stated.

This affordable aspect is the same with my work. Although I use a high quality camera and Photoshop, which is quite expensive, it is not essential. Most smartphones have a camera, and the editing I use is extremely basic, as well as this, there are free programmes that can be downloaded to do these simple editing tasks.

Also, another aspect of this creativity that is beneficial is the idea of completing it, like a jigsaw puzzle. According to research and findings, I found that there are therapeutic effects to completing a puzzle, which again emphasizes that the techniques I use on my work have beneficial effects to them. "Puzzles are a great way to keep your mind engaged" (Mind, 2018) stated

a mental health charity in the United Kingdom. The construction of the pieces and letters of my work were somewhat like completing a puzzle, so perhaps this engagement, in the making of the pieces, added to the mental health benefits that I was receiving from these artworks. Like the adult colouring books, and colouring in general, jigsaw puzzles are an inexpensive investment. Available at charity shops for next to nothing and in Poundland they are available everywhere. If you cannot leave the house, downloadable puzzles are available for smartphones and tablets, but yet again, I believe the physical engagement with the hand and the pieces would prove to be more positive. "Piecing together a jigsaw is a great way to combat stress, but it is also beneficial for your physical health too. By refocusing the mind away from negative and stressful thoughts decreases your cortisol and blood pressure levels, making both your body and mind healthy" (Gibsons, 2017).

I have just spoken about the physical making of art in general being beneficial, but why has specifically my use of text and writing helped me? "Writing therapy is a low-cost, easily accessible, and versatile form of therapy. It can be done individually, with just a person and his pen, or it can be guided by a mental health professional." (Positivepsychology, 2017). Fibromyalgia patients, or anyone experiencing chronic pain, are suggested to keep a diary of their pain. With depression, a common symptom that can develop with fibromyalgia, the first step is usually to see a professional to discuss thoughts and feelings, they then suggest a diary/writing.

When looking at other people's experiences, with writing as therapy, this was an interesting outcome I observed from one experience; "participants in a study who wrote about their most traumatic experiences for 15 minutes, four days in a row, experienced better health outcomes up to four months later"

(Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005). Comparing these figures to my research and artwork, I began creating work again in September 2017, making art for about an hour each day, and found that by December of 2017, my symptoms had improved.

When you are writing, it can distract you from the mental pain. Your focus is on the pen touching the paper and the information that you are writing down. But when the physical pain is having a flare up, writing with a pen is not always possible. So people tend to type, whether it is in bed lying down on their phone, or sitting up on a laptop. '*BRAIN SHIT*', a piece I made in late 2015 (Figure 18), a cut out of my face, with a rant I typed, about my views on popular culture.

Comparing all this to my work, there was something satisfying with constructing the text physically as before, I only had created handwritten text art pieces, I found there was something extremely beneficial and comforting in creating the fonts. Creating each letter and putting it together felt like a puzzle. So again, research of my own and others does suggest the therapeutic effects of jigsaws.

"Having something you can control" (Myers, 2019). This term has been used to describe how completing the task of finishing a puzzle has on someone. This is what myself and many other fibromyalgia patients want, control. This pain initially is beyond their control, and control is a massive aspect of what patients want.

With fibromyalgia, it can be painful to write. Difficulties can arise with gripping the pen, or pencil, and the movements required by the hands. So for example, during my years at sixth form, I used to use my laptop in lessons to type out my work, as there was less pressure on my hands. By using this technique, of constructing letters, again involves less pressure on your arms/muscles/joints, than physical writing.

A question had arisen though. Why now have my symptoms improved? Since the beginning of my undergraduate course in 2013, I have been using humour and text. So if creativity, swearing and humour are beneficial, why has the beneficial effect only now taken effect on my wellbeing?

I believe the reason for this is that after eight years, subconsciously I have accepted the condition, and being in the acceptance phase of the grieving process has been a catalyst to these effects.



Figure 35  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*Instagram Post (2018)*  
 Online text

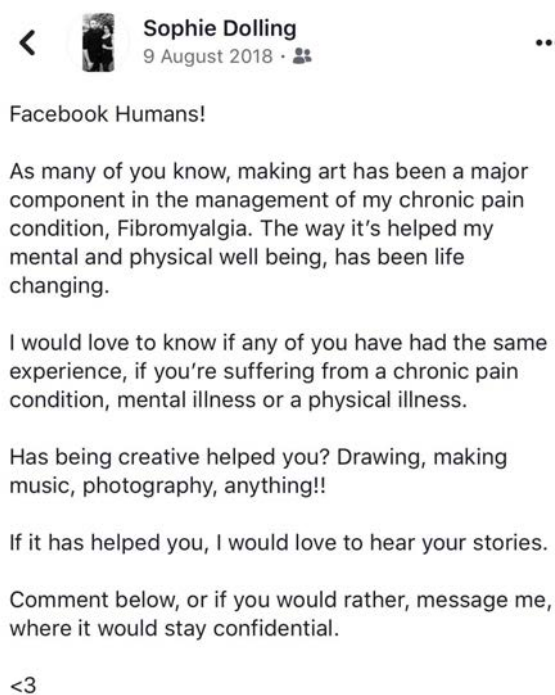


Figure 36  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*Facebook Post (2018)*  
 Online text

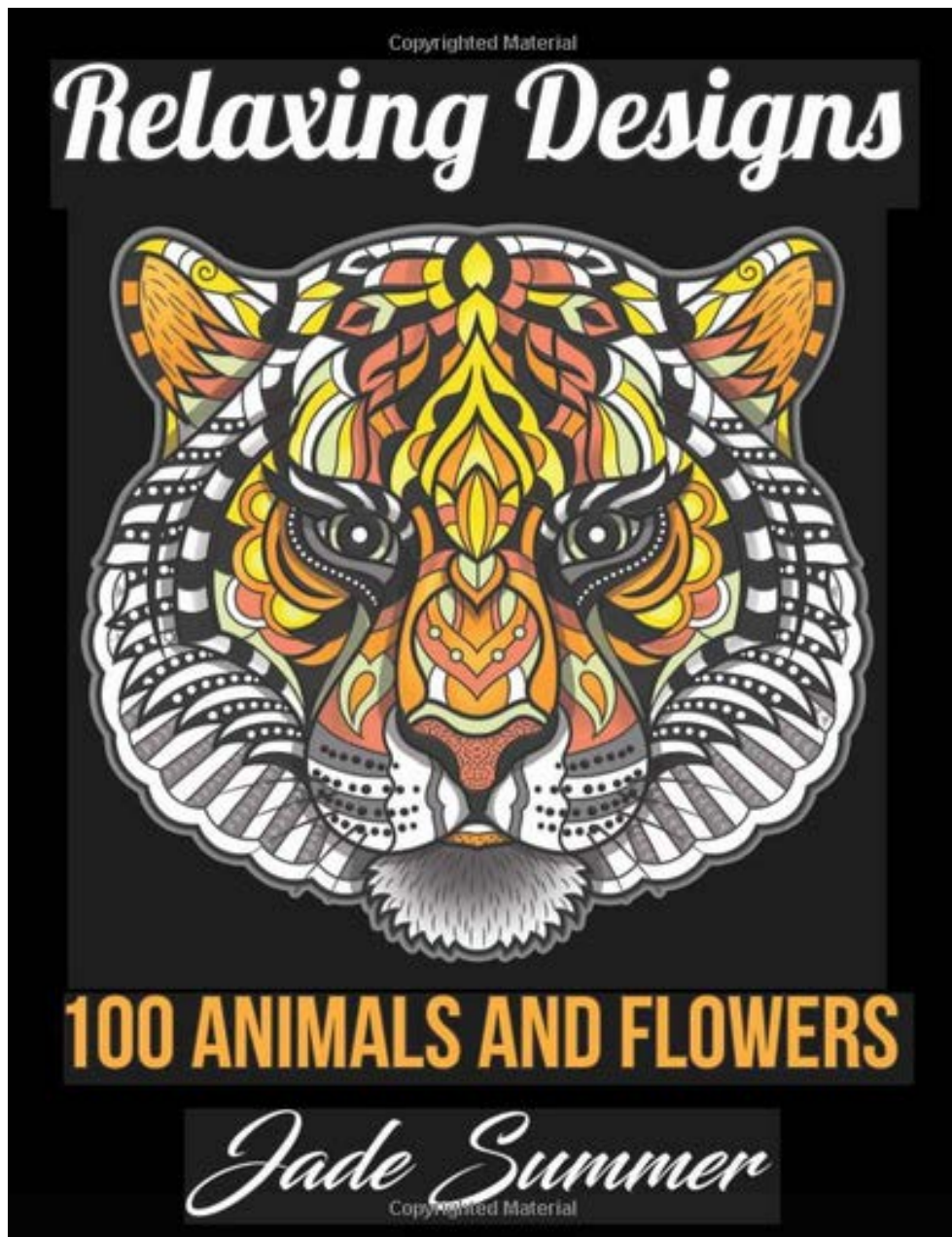


Figure 37

**Jade Summer**

*Relaxing Designs: An Adult Coloring Book with 100 Coloring Pages of Animals, Flowers, and Patterns for Stress Relief* (2019)

Paperback book

21.6 x 1.2 x 27.9 cm

## **Acceptance**

“Pain is intensified from trying to control the uncontrollable. Acceptance and resilience have made me stronger” (Duffy, 2017).

Acceptance is a crucial part of the management of chronic illnesses and is the ultimate realistic goal. For me, it has changed my life as it has helped my mental and physical wellbeing, being at the acceptance stage.

I think it is important to state throughout this research, the factors that have influenced it. So loss as an example, this is a factor that has largely impacted my work, and I believe that this is what has made me into the artist I am today. Each and every journey of a fibromyalgia sufferer is different.

As an artist and a person, throughout the last five years, I believe I have gone through each of the five stages of grief. ‘Kubler Ross model of change management’, created in 1969 by Elisabeth Kubler Ross, is a five-stage model of grief that she believes people go through when grieving, and how people cope when they are terminally ill. When being diagnosed with a chronic illness, many patients start the grieving process. As essentially you have to grieve the pain free life you had before, in order to accept and move on in the healthiest way possible.

I started my undergraduate course in 2013, and was officially diagnosed with the condition in 2012, and looking back over the last five/six years, I can see how I went through these five stages in my artwork. By going through these stages, and expressing the emotions creatively, I believe that this is the reason I am now at the acceptance stage and being the strongest I have been since before the diagnosis.

The first stage of the Kubler Ross model is denial. I think it is interesting, as looking back at my first years work in my undergraduate course you can see I was in denial. My go to technique was portraying a character in a series of photo-shoots. Dressing up as a character? Getting inside another character's head. Was this a way of escaping? A way of escaping who I was, and able to be someone else, who did not have this pain.

"In the denial stage, you are not living in 'actual reality,' rather, you are living in a 'preferable' reality" (Gregory, 2018). I feel like this could have heavily been the case for me.

The persona I was playing was loud, bold, and used profanity confidently. The opposite of what I was, which was quiet and reserved. This is crucial to go through this denial stage. I was focusing on other people's and society's issues, rather than my own. The series I created, '*The Dark Side Of Disney*' (Figure 38), shows me dressed up as the Disney character Snow White, wearing a short dress, and 'drinking' and 'smoking', something even though I was eighteen and was legally able to do, I would be too shy to do in public and in front of my parents. I was still early on in my diagnosis, and pretending to be this rebellious character, helped me.

"He is energized by the thought that he can persuade an audience to believe that he is somebody entirely other than himself" (Michaels, 2018). This is what John Michaels stated in response to interviewing actor Liam Casey Sullivan. Being comfortable with yourself, is the end goal. And after many years I have accepted this. But for many years I did just this. To persuade people I did not know personally, that I am somebody entirely different.

The next stage of the Kubler Ross model is anger. This is when profanity came into my work. Never in my life had I found this voice. The quiet, calm, shy artist, who was always afraid of offending, who created very innocent and sad



portraits, became harsh and aggressive. Using offensive language creatively to produce a piece of art. This is shown in my '*WHERE THE FUCK IS MY IPAD*' (Figure 39). I suddenly felt this anger, and believe I used profanity to creatively express how I was feeling towards this horrible feeling. This was the first time I had made a piece with this type of language included.

The third stage of the model is Bargaining. "The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control through a series of "If only" statements" (Axelrod, 2019). However I believe I skipped this stage (from looking at the pattern of my work) and went straight to step four. "Some Stages of Grief may overlap one another or people may skip a number of stages altogether" (Mulder, 2017).

The fourth stage of the Kubler Ross model is Depression. During this stage, people tend to have issues with relationships and friendships. Each and every chronic illnesses sufferer has a different back story, but some people mourn their childhood. Simple care and pain free childhood friendships.

Although the original thoughts behind these pieces were surrounding the idea of loss of childhood innocence, consciously it was not intended for the meaning to be so deep, however now analyzing years later, it was a lot more intense subconsciously. I was mourning something that at the time, I never thought I could get back. Happiness, like I had as a child. In which my biggest concern was getting the latest Barbie doll rather than making sure I had enough medication.

*"Cigarettes and Crayons"* (Figure 40)– A series of photographs I created with my childhood best friend. Friends since the age of two, we grew up and continued to stay friends throughout our childhood and young adult years. Portraits together and then separately, the work focuses on items we had as a child that have now been replaced with more dangerous ones. People have

different interpretations of artwork, however with the two contrasting items, my interpretation is that they symbolize the innocence of no pain to the now physical and psychological pain I then began having.

Me dressed as I did when I was a pain free child, in a Disney character costume. Eyes not looking at the camera (Figure 41). Resembling the fact I could not focus on the present and the future. Always dwelling on the past. These are traits a lot of people who develop chronic illnesses have. Especially if they are having a flare up mentally. They (and me) sometimes wish that if they could go back, and do a certain aspect of their life differently, would they be living like this now?

In order to go through the five stages of grieving as healthily as possible, I had to control everything. Unlike in my life. I had no control in pain, mental and physical. Then suddenly, I had the control of the camera, lighting, and most importantly, how I looked on camera. Control I did not have in life at the time. These were my thoughts at that particular time, and now I realise how important this was for the overall recovery of the grieving process, and why being creative helps; you have that control.

This is not something new. Looking at the people who inspired my work back then, who also dressed up to be another persona, also were suffering from underlying issues. An example of this is, Cosplayers. Cosplaying is creating costumes based on characters from comic books and films, and most people then wear them to a convention. "There's a freedom in cosplaying that means you can be whoever you want to be. For a few hours, you can leave behind the stress of a normal day and focus on enjoying a different side to life." (thecomiccvault, 2017). This is in reference to their mental health issues.

Others who use other forms of art; actors and musicians for example, who use this as a way to escape for a short time from their mental and physical pain.

Another persona. "... especially to have the opportunity to escape into a fantasy world was bliss" (Stewart, 2009).

With fibromyalgia, what triggers a flare up is a sudden life event. For me, during the start of the academic year of 2015, it was the loss of a loved one. Grieving and Fibromyalgia can be a cruel combination. This stalled me in my original grieving process I believe. Looking at my artworks, I do believe this was the case. I was in the grieving stage during the third year of my undergraduate studies. My work, and my mind, were still in the depression phase (phase 4 of the Kubler Ross model). I lost my sense of humour, and was focusing a lot on the negative aspects of life, and producing extremely bland outcomes. There was no development in my work at all.

But then slowly, you can see towards the end of my undergraduate studies (so around six months after a close friend passed), I began to enter the acceptance stage again. The humour I had about my insecurities came about again. '*DO I LOOK PRETTY NOW?*' (Figure 42). The childhood friend, who accepted my illness before I did, I presented in the exhibition pieces that made me look 'abnormal'. This helped me enormously in regards to the anxiety and paranoia I had, that people were thinking that I was the odd and weird one. Disfiguring images of me with my childhood friend, allowed me to be 100% in control of what I wanted the public to see. '*DO I LOOK PRETTY NOW?*' (Figure 42) is a series reflecting on the original series created in 2014, but with development and added humour.

The ability to look somewhat disfigured, or abnormal, was always a fear of mine. Having a panic attack when my muscles twitched and people noticing the symptoms. But now allowing myself to look like this, and being presented to the public (this series was shown in my end of year exhibition in my third year of my undergraduate course in 2016), I was the one in control of what I looked like to

the public. As control is something that fibromyalgia patients thoroughly struggle with, which can then cause further problems.

Again, my childhood friend who was present in my 'Cigarettes and Crayons' works was part of this series. One of the reasons being, throughout that last year I was progressing as a artist, as a friend, and most importantly, progressing in my grieving phase. With her being featured, perhaps gives the idea of how the grieving process is long, and it is crucial, to have the on-going support from friends, and how they would do anything for you, which includes squishing their faces against a sheet of glass.

This is similar to when people have chemotherapy. Ashamed, embarrassed because of their hair loss, loved ones will also shave their hair. This idea is shown in the 2009 film adaption of the book by Jodi Picoult, 'My Sister's Keeper', where Cameron Diaz portrays the mother of a girl undergoing chemotherapy. She shaved her hair when she saw how her daughter's hair loss was negatively affecting how her daughter felt.

So because of this support from loved ones, realizing they accepted me for my 'fibro flaws', I was entering the acceptance phase of having fibromyalgia. After many years, I began to feel happy and in control. As this is due to educating loved ones and others about the condition I was able to feel like this. So emphasizing the importance of this conclusion, I was determined more than ever in the planning of my exhibition.



Figure 38  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*The Dark Side of Disney* (2013)  
Photographic Series.

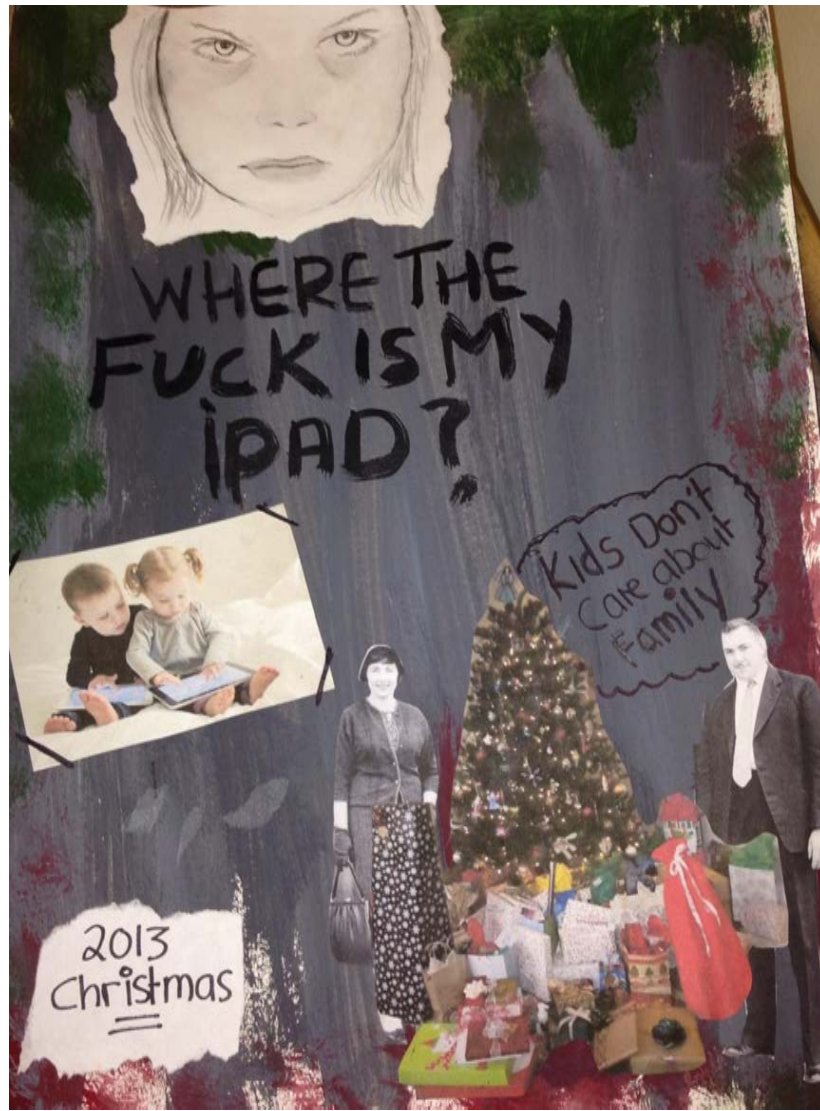


Figure 39  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*WHERE THE FUCK IS MY IPAD?* (2014)  
Collage on paper



Figure 40  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*Cigarettes and Crayons* (2015)  
Photographic series.



Figure 41  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*Cigarettes and Crayons* (2015)  
Photographic series.





Figure 42  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*DO I LOOK PRETTY NOW?* (2016)  
Photographic series.

## **Exhibition**

My aims for the exhibition were to share with the viewer my personal insights into the condition, and that people with similar conditions will find the work helpful and comforting. Also to help those fortunate enough not to suffer to understand something of what it means.

I displayed the following four pieces '*I NEED NO SHIT TODAY*' (Figure 43), '*MAN THE FUCK UP*' (Figure 44), '*SHE'S FUCKING NUTS*' (Figure 45) and '*NOBODY LOVES ME*' (Figure 4).

'*I NEED NO SHIT TODAY*' (Figure 43), was one of the first pieces of 'food typographic' works I created. A play on the word 'shit'. The word 'shit' as concluded from my research, is a very tame swear word, and is now a lot more socially acceptable, and heard a lot more, as well as used without any harm intended. With my own experiences of fibromyalgia in mind, I wake up in the morning, needing no more extra hassle. No more hassle added to the daily struggles. This term I have used is frequently used to describe this feeling. But that's a more metaphorical way of speaking. Physically, I literally do not need any shit. This is in reference to digestive problems you can have with fibromyalgia, but as well as food intolerances. Food intolerances are the one I mainly focus on in this piece of work. Gluten and dairy are two very common food groups that people with fibromyalgia and/or other chronic illnesses remove from their diet. With gluten, the main food you remove is bread. So that is why I used toast as the item for the lettering. So with that in mind, I feel like it would be understood with a lot of people. It has been suggested by Dr. Alessio Fasano that gluten sensitivity may affect approximately 6-7% of the United States population, which is around 20 million people (Anderson, 2019). Those with food

intolerances, especially gluten, a chronic illness sufferer, knowing they don't need any more struggles in the day, and or just a normal person who is having a stressful time at that moment and quite frankly does not want to deal with it anymore.

The second piece I chose was '*MAN THE FUCK UP*' (Figure 44). This is more surrounding the stigma around the condition. For the exhibition I wanted a variety of feelings, not just physical or psychological, a combination. The use of four words and positioning of the lettering. Reading it as one word at a time, emphasizes each word, making the piece more powerful. The food item I chose for this piece was the childhood sweet, Jelly Babies. I find that because it is an extremely well known sweet, and there is a clear connection with it and the meaning of the artwork, it will make it memorable. With fibromyalgia, again due to lack of understanding, which is one of the aims I am addressing in my work, people think it is easy to deal with the symptoms. The crying, the anger, due to the physical and mental pain of the condition, can come across as childish, therefore being a 'baby'. So this plays on the word baby, hence the use of jelly babies.

The lack of understanding. This I believe is one of the main problems associated with the condition (and other chronic pain conditions) that needs to be addressed as soon as possible. When you have people that are surrounding you, if that is at home, at work (if you are able to work, as again many of the sufferers are unfit to work), understanding by those people is key to a more manageable approach to the condition. My artwork here is using self-deprecating humour to address this issue, by using a phrase that can shock people when heard. Also the capitalization of the words, makes it more in your face and demanding to be heard.

The third chosen piece was "*SHE'S FUCKING NUTS*" (Figure 45). Emphasis on the word "nuts", which is an insulting term some people may use to describe people exhibiting psychological issues, such as bipolar disorder. Due to lack of understanding people can be called crazy. As the majority of the symptoms are invisible.

The main inspiration behind this piece is from my experience of having chronic pain in the workplace. Co-workers in the past have not understood. Turning awkwardly, or just a slight jolt, can trigger a pain response; therefore can trigger a panic attack. As with fibromyalgia, it is a vicious circle of anxiety and pain, when one sets off, the other sets off. This may seem like nothing to someone with lack of understanding, therefore resulting in them calling you 'crazy' or 'nuts', but the reality is more than that. Unfortunately due to my past experiences of working in the retail sector, and these phrases being said to me, is one of the main influences of this piece. Now I have the ability to laugh at people's immaturity and lack of compassion, at the time it used to affect me, therefore making my symptoms worse. So this emphasizes the importance of laughing at comments, to protect yourself psychologically, so the physical pain does not worsen.

The fourth piece that I chose to exhibit was '*NOBODY LOVES ME*' (Figure 4). Based on a psychological symptom that has a large impact on my experiences with chronic pain and others, is paranoia. Becoming paranoid that people are talking about you and treating you differently because of your issues, due to again, lack of understanding. To construct this piece I used Bounty bars. Bounty bars are known to be the last sweet left in the chocolate tin during Christmas, as many dislike them. This is what it feels like to have chronic pain

sometimes. That you are paranoid that you will be unloved, just like a bounty bar.

Each of these pieces were centered and placed on a white wall (Figure 46). The use of the wooden box frame, made them physically stand out, so again more in your face, and helps bring attention to the piece. The reason for placing only one image per wall, with a lot of white space surrounding it, was that I wanted the pieces to be viewed individually rather than altogether. This is to resemble the idea that treatment for the condition involves managing each symptom individually, rather than as a whole.



Figure 43  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*I NEED NO SHIT TODAY* (2017)  
Hand made lettering using toast, photographed and then  
constructed on Photoshop.  
Digital image.



Figure 44  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*MAN THE FUCK UP* (2018)  
Hand made lettering using sweets, photographed and then  
constructed on Photoshop.  
Digital image.



Figure 45  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*SHE'S FUCKING NUTS* (2018)  
Hand made lettering using peanuts, photographed and then  
constructed on Photoshop.  
Digital image.





Figure 46  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*Exhibition (2018)*  
Matte finish on thick Fujifilm paper (250 gsm), wooden frame.  
60 x 80 x 5 cm

## **Promotional Items**

The first and foremost aim of my final exhibition was to create awareness for fibromyalgia. Questions arose on how I could get people to interact? How would I make it memorable and stand out?

I then thought about creating merchandise that visitors could take with them. So I then started looking back into ways of spreading awareness at the beginning of my research, there was information about Samaritans on the back of a train ticket. Something that was small enough to carry around in your purse. This was something I wanted, something small enough to be able to stick in a handbag, but a constant reminder of the beneficial aspects of my artwork, which I have found through my research. That is why I chose the magnets and the key rings (Figure 47). With fridge magnets, you put them on the front of the fridge. Potentially seen every day in the morning when opening the fridge to grab the milk for the morning cup of tea, and in the evening when getting food out to prepare for dinner.

Another everyday item is a key ring. They are a small novelty item suitable for everyone to use. If it is put on a set of keys, or on a handbag, it is likely to be seen everyday. I believe that this should be seen everyday, as my research does suggest that humour, profanity, and a possible conversation starter, all helps you in the ability to accept the condition and learn to start leading a normal life again.



Figure 47  
**Sophie Dolling**  
*Promotional items (2018)*  
 Keyrings and magnets, with images of my work printed on paper, inside.

## **Conclusions**

In this research I set out to explore a number of creative techniques that could be used in artwork that would educate the public on the chronic pain condition, fibromyalgia. The millennials being the main target group, as there is a higher percentage of younger people being diagnosed, as opposed to it being a condition that people between the ages of 30-50 get.

The techniques explored are ones in which I have previously used in my undergraduate studies. Techniques that I am confident in using, and that have produced effective outcomes before. These are humour, text, and profanity.

The findings I gathered from the 'Humour' chapter were that my use of humour to educate people on fibromyalgia, proved to be successful. After uploading onto Instagram (in which I had a following of 1000+) I received many comments that expressed enjoyment and laughter from my work. With humour being a current technique used in the media and online to educate people in a memorable way, I can conclude, based on product research and personal research, that it is an effective way to educate others on fibromyalgia.

With profanity, I found the results were varied, in terms of the effectiveness of using it to educate. Despite the use of profanity being more socially acceptable than it has ever been, there are still policies and guidelines surrounding it. With it being acceptable to use it in a 'social swearing' (Buridge, 2011) way online, I would not be allowed to use it, for example, in schools. However there are ways around this, by using abbreviations in places where profanity is forbidden. From my product research I found that abbreviations were a commonly used technique. From the exhibition and the response from '*NOBODY LOVES ME*', and not using profanity, people still understood it, and

people laughed. From this I can conclude that it is not vital to have swearing. This brings hope that if my work was shown in a more public area (e.g. in schools, for educational purposes), it does not necessarily always need profanity in it, to ensure it has a strong impact.

By conducting this research, aside from the campaigning, I found that I have grown as an artist, by coming out of my comfort zone of producing performative photography outcomes, focusing on just using text (which was concluded as my strongest aspect of my practice). Something which I have not done before.

I have also taken risks. I have taken dark humour and addressed fibromyalgia, something that I have not come across. With fear of negative responses from the public, due to it possibly being taken as insensitive, this was not the case. The dark humour worked.

Another conclusion I can make from the research, is how beneficial social media is to someone with chronic pain. How by uploading the work onto Instagram, became beneficial to me and others. Whether they have the condition or not.

The research sources I used were mainly social media websites (Instagram to name one), the comedians are known from their BBC appearances, so each have a high number of audiences/users from western cultures, as well as the comedians themselves being from western cultures. Although I purposely chose people who were British (as stated previously, a lot of research that is currently done on fibromyalgia is based in the USA), so more needs to be based on the British culture, it means my findings cannot be generalized to other cultures, such as eastern cultures (China and India). With fibromyalgia, "People from every culture and socioeconomic level have fibromyalgia" (Dellwo, 2019). There are also gender issues. The research I have

done on fibromyalgia and other disorders have been concluded from females. Despite only a small percentage of people diagnosed with fibromyalgia being males, males can still develop it. So therefore I cannot generalize my findings to males.

However, despite these limitations of not being able to generalize to other genders and cultures, my research has filled a gap. As well as creating awareness to appeal to young adults (which there had appeared to be a lack of), I have created research that shows the impact of art as therapy to a young adult with fibromyalgia. A lot of the research in regards to treatment and management have been done with people in higher age brackets.

Although originally it was not my intention for my research to go down a personal route, it did. I learned how therapeutic and important being creative is, and how humour is the key to happiness. Without having had this opportunity to research into fibromyalgia, and producing awareness, I would not have found this out. More importantly, without this, I would not currently be at the strongest, mentally and physically, than I have been since before my diagnosis.

## **Future directions**

As concluded, one of the results I found from my research was the therapeutic effects of art making. Due to the art making, my physical and psychological symptoms of the chronic pain disorder improved. So this makes me think; is there a relationship and correlation between chronic illness and creativity?

Also, another conclusion I found was how humour had a positive impact on my health, so was there a correlation between chronic illness and humour? This is something that I wish to investigate further. A study conducted in 2010 (Mimi, K. et al), "Humor Therapy: Relieving Chronic Pain and Enhancing Happiness for Older Adults", found that by using humour "significant increases in happiness and life satisfaction" were found. So it would be interesting to see if humour therapy would help relieve chronic pain and enhance happiness in young adults.

So, would my findings of art making and learning to laugh at myself benefit people with other chronic pain disorders? Such as endometriosis and hypermobility syndrome? It would be interesting to do longitudinal studies on people with other chronic pain disorders, with them engaging in art making and take note to see if their symptoms improve/wellbeing has improved over a certain period of time. I started to notice an improvement within 3 months, so this is a possible amount of time I could use.

As a starting point, I created a new Instagram account, '\_chronicallycreative' (as concluded, Instagram is the social media site that is most commonly used by younger people, this being a target audience of mine, as the support for young people with other chronic pain conditions is still relatively small in comparison to people in higher age categories).

This account will be a more refined and organized account, in which I will encourage creativity and laughter, in the hope it brings support and comfort to those who are suffering from the same condition as me and/or other chronic pain conditions. Working with people with conditions such as the ones mentioned above, I will be uploading works that I have created based on my experiences with fibromyalgia and artworks that use humour and text about other chronic pain conditions. So it will be a more generalized support page for chronic illness, so not specialising just in fibromyalgia.

As well as connecting others, helping others through my work and social media presence with this Instagram account, it also keeps me actively engaged in art making. Which I believe is essential to having a healthy management of fibromyalgia. As after all, 'art is an exercise to help myself or others' (Dolling, 2014).



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