

Emotional Implications of Metaphor: Consequences of Metaphor Framing for Mindsets about Hardship

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Metaphors can shape reasoning about complex phenomena like crime (e.g., Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011; 2013)

Can metaphors shape people's emotional states and mindsets about hardship?

Can they encourage people to reappraise an emotional situation?

Methods

1516 participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk

- 1305 read about cancer (Exps 1 + 2)
- 211 read about depression* (Exp 3)

Exp 1

Joe was just diagnosed with cancer*. He knows that for the foreseeable future, every day will be a **journey with** the disease. The **road** he has to **travel** will not always be an easy one. Many people have written about their experiences on the **path**, and he can turn to those for consolation. His friends and family want him to know that he will not be alone in his **journey**. Even though sometimes he might not feel like talking, other times he may want to share stories of his **journey** with others, and they will be there for those moments.

Joe was just diagnosed with cancer*. He knows that for the foreseeable future, every day will be a **battle against** the disease. The **battle** he has to **fight** will not always be an easy one. Many people have written about their experiences on the **battlefield**, and he can turn to those for consolation. His friends and family want him to know that he will not be alone in his **battle**. Even though sometimes he might not feel like talking, other times he may want to share stories of his **battle** with others, and they will be there for those moments.

Based on the information you read, to what extent does each statement describe Joe's experience with cancer?

1 = not at all; 7 = very much

He will feel guilty that he hasn't done enough if he does not recover.

He can make peace with his experience. ★

★ In Exp 2 (n = 272), half of the participants instead responded to the statement "he can come to terms with his experience"

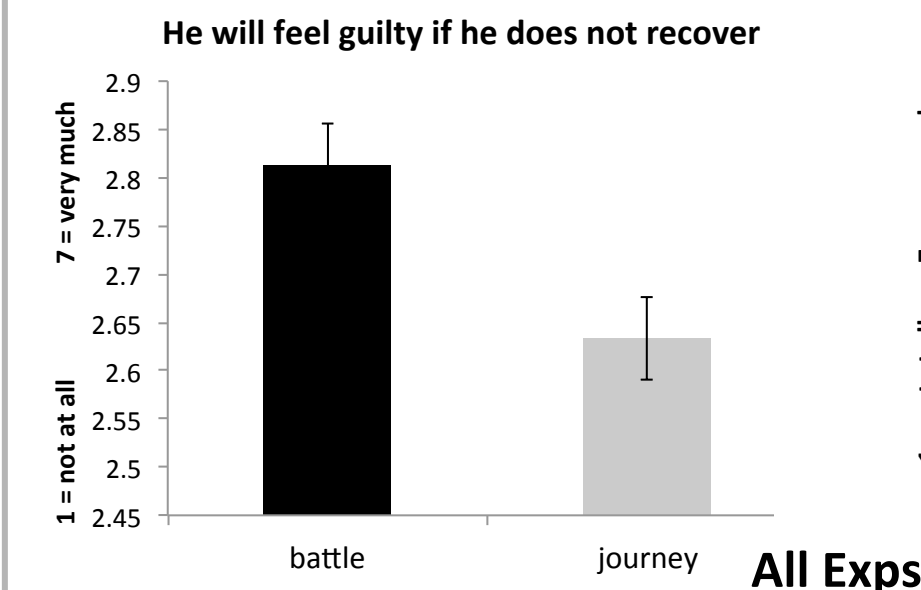
Please fill in the blanks for the statement you read at the beginning: He knows that for the foreseeable future, every day will be a _____ the disease.

How much sense does it make to talk about cancer treatment as a: Battle? [1-5] Journey? [1-5]

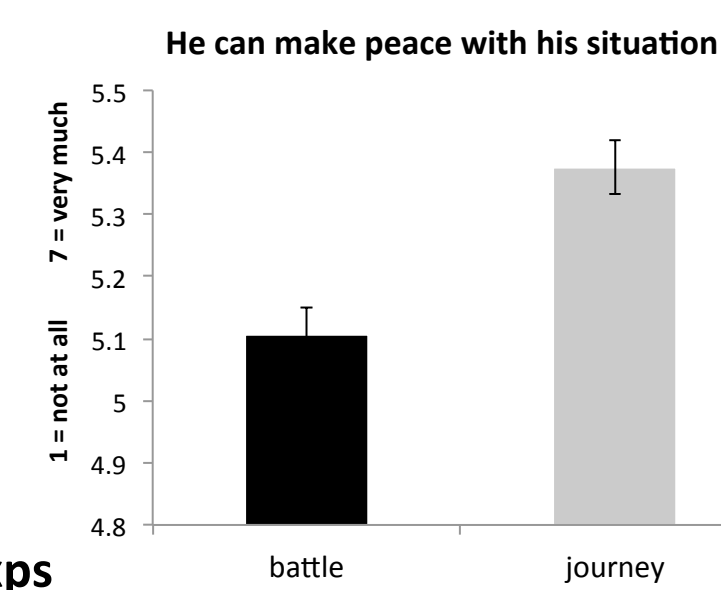
An experience with cancer is more like a: Battle / Journey (choose 1)

Did metaphors shape reasoning about emotions?

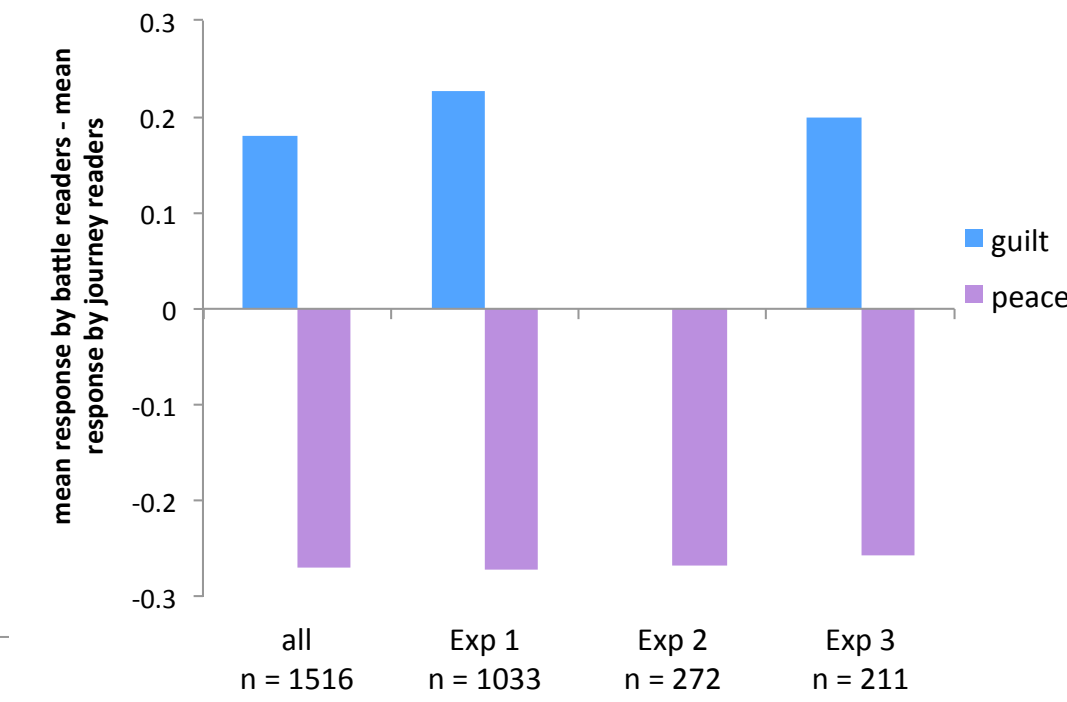
Battle group believed he would feel guiltier if he didn't recover than journey group



Journey group believed he could make peace more than battle group



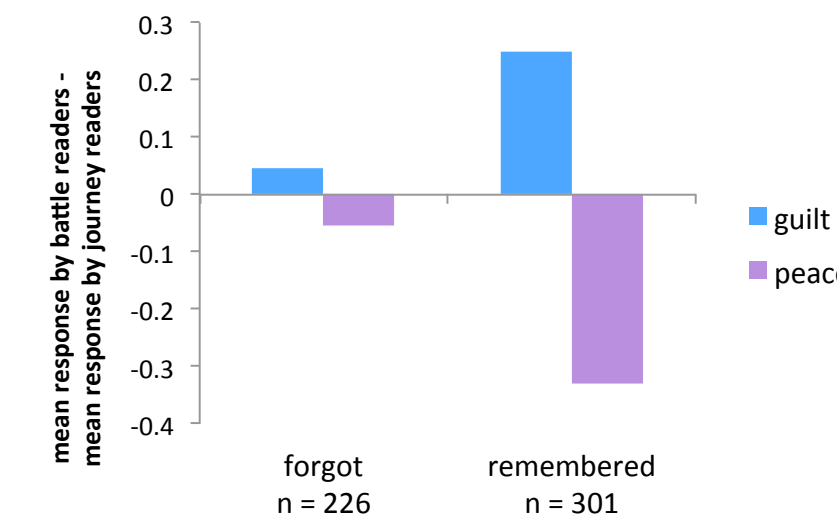
These inferences were true for both cancer and depression contexts



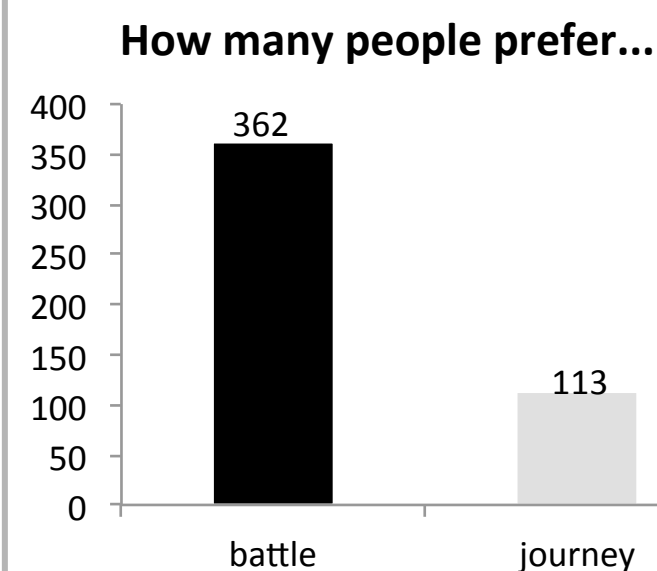
People do not make different inferences about "making peace" and "coming to terms" with the hardship



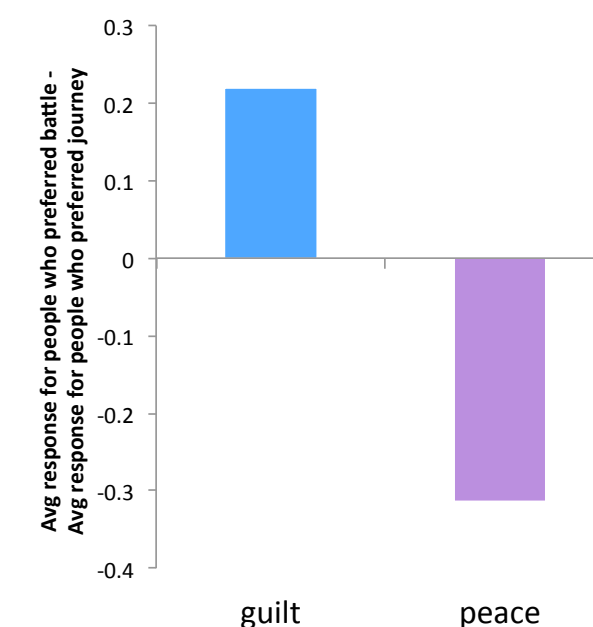
Metaphors have a stronger effect when people remember them than when they do not



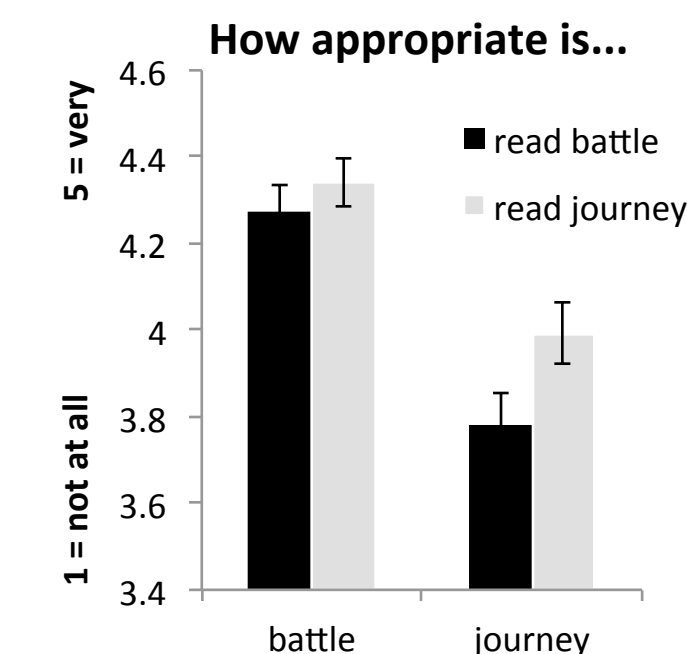
People find battles more appropriate than journeys for talking about a cancer experience



People who prefer battles believe he'll feel guiltier than those who prefer journeys. People who prefer journeys think he can make more peace.



More people preferred journey after reading journey than after reading battle

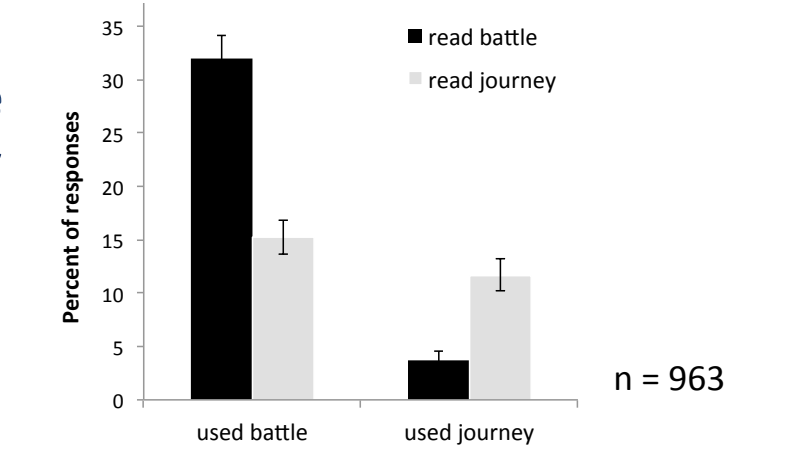


Did people perpetuate the metaphors?

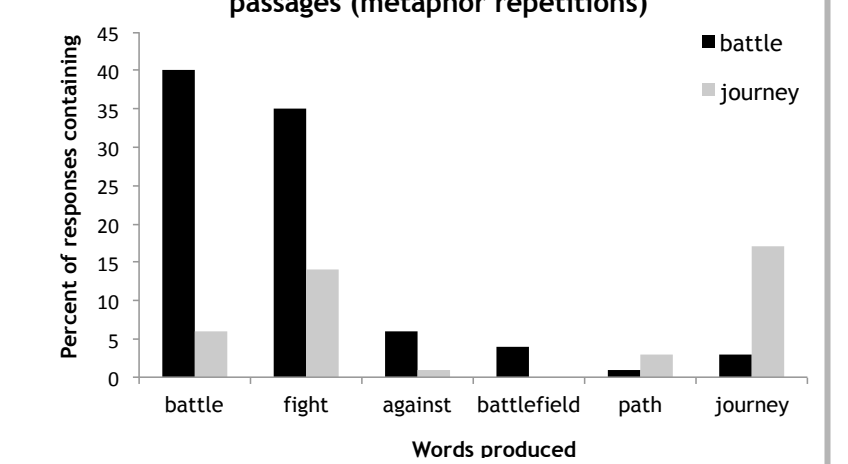
Participants responded to a subset of the following open-ended questions:

- Please give any additional information you imagine about Joe's experience.
- What do you imagine about Joe's day-to-day experience?
- Why does Joe have cancer*?
- How will this experience affect Joe's relationships?
- Please describe the mindset that you imagine Joe has.
- Biologically, what is going on in Joe's body?
- What are Joe's prospects for recovery?

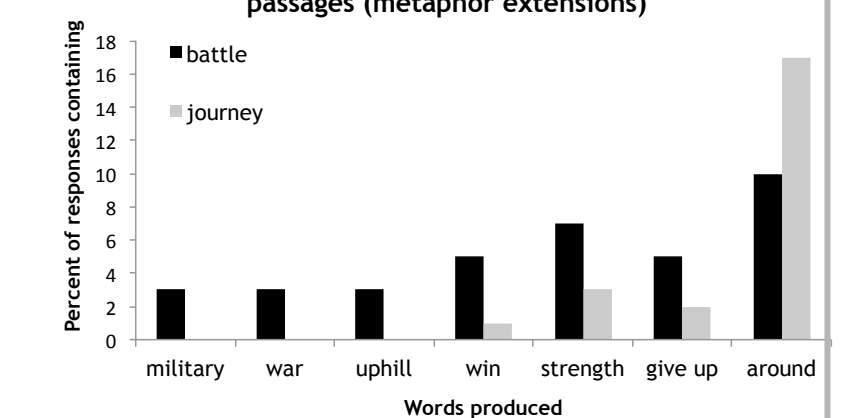
People perpetuate the metaphor they encountered



People repeat metaphors they read



People extend metaphors they read



Conclusions

Common metaphors for discussing hardship shape reasoning about emotions

Journey associated with less guilt for not recovering and a better chance of making peace than battle

BUT people found battle to be more appropriate than journey for describing a cancer experience

Thank you To Elena Semino, Zsófia Demjén, & Ben Bergen for fruitful conversations on this work.