

AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting June 3-5, 2007, Orlando, FL USA

Title: Living with Traumatic Brain Injury: A Narrative Analysis of a Survivor's Photographs and Interview

Author: Laura S. Lorenz, MA, MEd, Doctoral Candidate in Social Policy, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, Email: llorenz@brandeis.edu, url: www.lslorenz.com

Introduction: Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a silent epidemic that affects at least 1.4 million people in the U.S. each year. An estimated 5.3 million Americans are living with disabilities resulting from TBI, and another 80,000 to 90,000 people join their numbers annually.¹ Research that provides a deeper understanding of the patient's perspective can provide clinicians and others with valuable insights into the lives of TBI survivors and the facilitators and barriers to recovery and rehabilitation from their point of view.

Methods: In October 2006 the author carried out an exploratory study "Facilitators and Barriers to Recovery from Traumatic Brain Injury: Through the Lens of Photovoice" with approval from the Brandeis Human Subjects Research Committee and recruited one respondent. As specified in the protocol, she had a cognitive level of at least seven on the Ranchos Los Amigos Cognitive Level Scale (one being lowest and ten being highest), and she received her injury no more than five years ago. She took photographs of living with her injury and facilitators and barriers to recovery from her perspective using a disposable camera with 27 exposures. She finished her camera after three weeks and met with the researcher a week later to discuss her pictures.

Discussion: Some photographs were symbolic, others were representational. She told the researcher what each photograph meant for her, why she had taken it, and how she had settled on or created the image. This poster is a narrative analysis of 15 of the respondent's photographs and interview excerpts follows an approach inspired by Elliot Mishler (2004) to see "the basic story parts, in temporal order: an initial problem, action to deal with it, and a resolution."² Grouped into the plot categories problem, action, and resolution, the photographs and interview excerpts show us "the prologue to a more extended story" as the respondent moves on with her life, four years after her injury.³

Conclusion: A major question when considering narrative analysis methods is: What is narrative? For this study, narrative is the series of photographs and interview text generated by the respondent. Grouped into three categories (problem, action, and resolution), the respondent's photographs and interview data tell of her challenges living with TBI, her compensation strategies, her gradual improvement over time, and her sense of inner pride and hope for the future. Rich et al (2002) and others have referred to a series of respondent images (video) and text as a visual illness narrative.^{4,5} For this TBI respondent, four years after her injury, her series of images (photographs) and text could be called a visual healing narrative.

Keywords: Traumatic brain injury, narrative analysis, patient perspective

¹ Langlois, J. A., Rutland-Brown, W., & Thomas, K. E. (2005). The incidence of traumatic brain injury among children in the United States - Differences by race. *Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation, 20*(3), 229-238; Langlois, J. A., Rutland-Brown, W., & Thomas, K. E. (2004). *Traumatic brain injury in the United States: Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths*. Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

² Mishler, E. (2004). Historians of the self: Restorying lives, revising identities. *Research in Human Development, 1*, 101-121, p. 108.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rich, M., Patashnick, J., and Chalfen, R. (2002). Visual illness narratives of asthma: Explanatory models and health-related behaviors. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 26*, 6, p 442-453.

⁵ Rich, M., Lamola, S., and Woods, E. R. (2006). Effects of creating visual illness narratives on quality of life with asthma: A pilot intervention study. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 38*, 6, p 748-752.