

Lorenz, L. S. Using visual metaphors to communicate lived experience with an invisible condition

Brain injury affects cognition, emotion, and physical function and poses challenges to understanding consumers' lived experiences. The injury is often invisible, even clinically, causing additional confusion. Forty percent of brain injuries in the US are alcohol-related, and substance abuse is a common issue both prior and subsequent to brain injury. My study used photovoice, a participatory research approach that uses photography and narrative, with eight adults with disabilities from brain injury so they could communicate their lived experiences. Almost half of their study images are visual metaphors for their feelings. One of the greatest challenges of living with an invisible condition such as brain injury is emotional—wrestling with the grief of losing former abilities and finding new meaning and purpose in life. This paper explores how visual metaphors contribute to meaning-making and coping with the realities portrayed, and play a pedagogic role in communicating lived experience and emotional reality.