Waiting for the Wisdom to Drop: A Photovoice Exploration of Menopause

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to create a women's menopause discussion group based on the PhotoVoice method, to use a narrative approach to learn what is currently relevant in the experience of menopausal women, to reveal insights about menopause as a phase of psychological development, and to bring a visual representation together with narratives to tell a story about the collective psychological themes. Participants were asked to meet and reflect on what has changed in their values, attitudes, aspirations, goals, and outlook on life. Then participants were asked to take pictures over the course of a week, and bring them back to the group to share their stories of the meaning of these photos. Photos and recorded narratives were then sorted into themes, and categories were created with photos and narrative to represent the phases of the inner experience of the menopausal transition that the participants had expressed. The categories were found to reveal the arc of a journey representing a rapid change of self-identity with themes: initiation, self-consciousness, effort, perspective, deconstruction, surrender, reorganization, integration and growth. Participants found value in community connection, with the opportunity to validate and normalize their internal experiences through communication.

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**Methods**

**Study Design**

- **Participants:** 6 women, aged 40-60 years.
- **Data Collection:** Women were instructed to bring photos to the second group session, with the request to meet and reflect on what has changed in their values, attitudes, aspirations, goals, and outlook on life over the course of a week.
- **Analysis:** Photographs were sorted into categories, either related by common theme or by participants' description of a photograph, creating categories of photographs that reflected the theme, and each category was summed up with a theme.

**PhotoVoice Method**

- **Community-based Participatory Action Method:** Based on feminist theory and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Frère, the method is grounded in the study of women's health in China.
- **Participants:** Women's experiences with biomedical discourses resulted in the creation of a group to facilitate a discussion for participants to reveal insights into their own world that a researcher might have been unable to access.

**Qualitative analysis**

1. **Theme analysis:** A special thank you to the participants who generously donated their time and creative expression.

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**References**


Hyde, A., & Gilmour, C. (2016). Menopause: The inner experience of the menopausal transition that the participants had expressed. The categories were found to reveal the arc of a journey representing a rapid change of self-identity with 9 phases: initiation, self-consciousness, effort, perspective, deconstruction, surrender, reorganization, integration and growth. Participants found value in community connection, with the opportunity to validate and normalize their internal experiences through communication.

**Conclusions**

- **What Was Gained by the Group?**
  - Normalizing an important life event - Community, connection, validation
  - A safe space to connect, share resources, and share stories about this phase of life

- **What Was Learned?**
  - Acknowledging internal ageism - The importance of menopause was overlooked until it became relevant and important
  - Acknowledging tension between the biomedical and feminist "natural" perspectives.

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**Recommendations for Future Study**

Putting aside the tension between the medical model and the "natural" voice will mitigate the restricting effect it has on women's self-efficacy and self-esteem. Designing research that looks beyond symptom management, sheds outdated expectations of women's role, and inquires into what is important to older women currently, will better inform social workers in developing psychosocial interventions from a strengths perspective.