

Exhibiting PAIN



Using creativity to express chronic pain

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Background & Aims:

This PhD research project explores the potential for using creative methods to aid communication of the chronic pain experience. It also considers the benefits of sharing such creative works online.

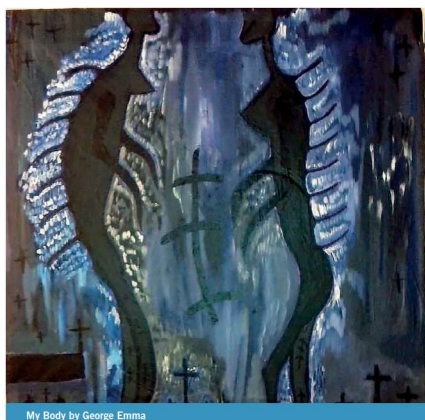


Method:

People with chronic pain, who use creative methods to express it, shared their works in online exhibitions which were hosted using two forms of social media software (WordPress blog and Facebook). A thematic analysis was carried out on the data, which consisted of audience responses to individual works and the exhibitions as a whole, collected via questionnaires and in online group discussions.

Key findings from qualitative data:

Creators of the exhibits	Audience members with pain	Audience members without pain
Hoped to reduce isolation for others with pain by sharing their works	Reduced isolation knowing others empathise	Viewed works through an interest in learning more about the impact of pain in order to support friends/family
Pleased to find others who use creativity to manage and express pain	Resource to explain their pain	Surprise that the works focused less on symptoms than psychosocial effects e.g. pain's invisibility and stigma
Sharing works helped them to feel heard and their pain validated	Inspired to try creative methods to manage and express their pain	



Conclusions:

Using creative techniques as part of a **multi-modal approach to communicating chronic pain** is effective in sharing the subjective experience.

The sharing of creative works, and discussions surrounding these, fosters a sense of **community** and **belonging**; it helps people to feel that their experience is being recognised.

Both exhibition sites continue to be used by visitors, but not for research purposes, as they provide a valuable **resource** and source of **support**.

