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**Citation:** Cluley, V., Pilnick, A. & Fyson, R. (2020). Improving the inclusivity and credibility of visual research: interpretive engagement as a route to including the voices of people with learning disabilities in analysis. *Visual Studies*, 36(4-5), pp. 524-536. doi: 10.1080/1472586x.2020.1807402

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**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586x.2020.1807402>

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**Improving the inclusivity and credibility of visual research: interpretive engagement as a route to including the voices of people with learning disabilities in analysis.**

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**Improving the inclusivity and credibility of visual research: interpretive engagement as a route to including the voices of people with learning disabilities in analysis.**

**Abstract**

Visual methods are often used in social science because of the potential for inclusivity and accessibility. In disability studies in particular, inclusive research is widely viewed as best practice and visual methods are often considered more accessible than traditional research methods. However, visual methods can encounter challenges at the stage of analysis: it is at this stage that either rigour or inclusivity are most likely to be compromised. This paper focuses on the use of interpretive engagement to overcome such challenges in the analysis of photovoice findings. Drawing on experience of using this method of analysis with 16 people with learning disabilities in the England, we first briefly outline some of the tensions that can emerge when **attempting to improve inclusion in** research, before going on to describe the analytic process used as way of addressing some of these tensions. The inclusiveness of interpretive engagement contributed to the rigour and meaningfulness of the findings by revealing layers of meaning which gave access to a multi-dimensional understanding of the phenomenon in question.

**Introduction**

The use of visual methods as an accessible, innovative and inclusive approach is gaining in popularity across the social sciences, particularly in research that involves people who are considered to be ‘vulnerable’ and/or ‘marginalised’ (Povee et al 2014). In particular, visual methods are increasingly used in studies with people with learning disabilities (Cluley 2017, Boxhall and Ralph 2012, Jurkowski and Paul-Ward 2007, Booth and Booth 1998) as a way of

conducting 'inclusive research'. Inclusive research has been variously defined (Bigby 2012, Frankena et al 2015), but there is broad agreement that it refers to research which involves people with disabilities as more than research subjects, repositioning research *on* as research *with* people with learning disabilities (Nind 2017). A key aim of inclusive research is empowering marginalised groups (Walmsley and Johnson 2003). Based on a literature review of published inclusive research, Frankena et al (2015) advocate that inclusive research should: be tailored to the research topic and participants involved; accommodate the skills and capacities of those involved; consider the benefits of including people with learning disabilities in the research process; and provide insight into the inclusive processes.

The research process involves a range of activities, including: agreeing an ontological and epistemological approach, identifying a topic; refining a question; data collection; data analysis; writing up and dissemination of findings. The use of visual methodologies in qualitative studies have been widely discussed from a methodological perspective (Mitchell 2011, Rose 2012, Pink 2013, Gubrium and Harper 2013). While the doing of visual research may vary, it is generally agreed that visual research must be credible, transparent, and trustworthy (Mitchell 2011). Indeed, as Butler-Kisber (2018, p.15) tells us, 'authenticity and plausibility are increased when explanations are clearly grounded in the field texts; the voices of the participants are present in the work'. In inclusive research, while project planning and data collection are often conducted using participatory approaches, data analysis is an aspect that is more often undertaken with less – or no – inclusivity (Nind 2011). This is despite the fact that inclusion research practice specifies that, properly inclusive research with people with learning disabilities is research that involves them at all stages of the research process (Strnadova and Walmsley 2018, Nind, 2017, and Frankena 2015). For research that seeks to empower marginalised groups using visual methods, issues of where the analysis begins, who

Using interpretive engagement in visual research

is involved in the analytic process, and how different voices are presented, are questions that must be afforded close consideration.

Running in parallel with this issue, although the use of visual research in general is increasing, publications often provide little, if any, detail regarding the process of analysis (Liebenberg et al, 2012) and in much visual methods research, the images do not undergo any formal process of analysis (Oliffe et al 2008). While intellectually disabled participants are typically involved in various aspects of the research process that results in published work, their contribution to analysis often appears to consist of little more than a collective discussion rather than a specific and rigorous process (Povee et al 2014). In addition, the findings from many photo elicitation projects are presented as themes derived from the images, typically presented in the voice of the academic researcher (Drew and Guillemin 2014).

The lack of specific frameworks for the analysis of visual data goes some way toward explaining why inclusion at this stage is often lacking (Drew and Guillemin 2014). While analysis should not be a tightly bounded process (Nind 2011), if research is aiming to be both inclusive and meaningful then people with learning disabilities, and indeed other groups in participatory projects, should be included when analysing findings. Not only should a specific process of analysis be followed in order to produce credible findings, but also the voices of people with learning disabilities should be apparent in the presentation of the consequent findings (Strnadova and Walmsley 2018).

This paper will attempt to demonstrate how this gap between inclusivity and credibility can be bridged by reflecting on the analytic process used in a photovoice project to explore the meaning of the term 'learning disability'. The project is not a 'pure' example of inclusive

research, as the participants were not included in the preliminary design phases of the project (and, as other researchers have noted, this can present particular problems in the field of intellectual disability). However, the research was designed to utilise participatory methods of data collection and analysis in order to include people with learning disabilities in these phases, with the aim of foregrounding their voices and producing accessible and relevant research outcomes. To do this, the project used the specific analytic framework of interpretive engagement (Drew and Guillemin 2014), in an attempt to include all voices in a structured analytic process. It is argued that the application of interpretive engagement improved the opportunities for inclusion, ensured a transparent analytic process, and resulted in research findings that were meaningful to both people with learning disability and academic audiences alike.

In order to provide necessary context, an overview of the photovoice method and interpretive engagement framework is provided. This is followed by a description of the project and the demonstration and critical discussion of the analytic process. While specific findings are discussed to illustrate the process, this is not primarily an empirical paper; rather the empirical findings are used to facilitate a discussion concerning inclusive analysis.

### **Photovoice and interpretive engagement**

Photovoice, as developed by Wang and Burris (1997), is a participatory action research method that is based on a flexible nine-step process (Wang 1999). The 9 steps include: 1) selection a of target audience, 2) recruitment of participants, 3) educating participants about the photovoice method, 4) gaining informed consent, 5) brainstorming the project focus with participants, 6) distribution of cameras, 7) time for participants to take photographs 8) talking



about the photographs taken with the participants using the SHOWeD<sup>1</sup> method of questioning, and 9) planning how to share this information with the target audience. As Thuy Nguyen (2015, p.784) states ‘one of the strengths of participatory visual research is that it empowers participant interpretation’. For this reason, participatory visual research methods, such as photovoice, provide a means of conducting inclusive research that can be valued both for its credibility and for giving a voice to those whose perspectives might otherwise be overlooked.

While Wang (1999) outlines a strong theoretical basis for the photovoice approach, very little detail is provided about the analytic process (Olliffe 2008). This lack of detail is not unique to the photovoice method but is common across many visual methods, including photo elicitation and film elicitation (Drew and Guillemin 2014). Frameworks for analysis are rare (but see Drew and Guillemin 2014, Liebenburg et al, 2012, Jenkins et al 2008 and Bohnsack 2008 for examples). Moreover, within the participatory visual research literature it is generally accepted that analysis is an ongoing and collaborative practice that takes place at all stages of the research process. As Gubrium (2013, p.78) points out ‘the process lends itself to positioning participants in a far more analytic mode as far as discussing representations and meanings’.

While the lack of fixed analytic frameworks can be beneficial, in that it allows analytic freedom, it can also result in simplistic approaches to analysis that may only scrape the surface of meaning making and produce findings that are presented in the voice of the researcher only. A typical thematic approach to the analysis of visual images, for example, is conducted by the researcher/s and only includes their voice; the voices of participants are interpreted and

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<sup>1</sup> The SHOWeD framework of questioning as developed by Wang (1999) involves asking the following questions: What do you **See** here? What is really **Happening**? How does this relate to **Our** lives? **Why** does this problem or strength really exist? What can we **Do** about it?

reformulated by the researcher in this voice (Beail and Williams 2014). Such approaches generally do not follow a predetermined structure and this can result in weak research findings (Drew and Guillemin 2014).

While there are few published works detailing systematic methods for interpreting visual images, there are nonetheless, some agreed principles to underpin analysis. Rose (2016) suggests that a critical approach should be taken to interpreting visual images based on three fundamental position statements: that visual images create effects in and of themselves; that images are both shaped by shared social meaning; that images have the capacity to produce such meaning, and that visual images are always dependent on contextual factors. In a similar vein, Drew and Guillemin's (2014) interpretive engagement approach aims to expand the system of analysis in the photovoice method by providing three defined stages of analysis. The stages are: (1) participant interpretation of meaning; (2) academic researcher interpretation of meaning; and (3) contextualisation, including audience voice. At each stage, a different voice is prioritised: the participant, the academic researcher, and the audience. No one step is prioritised or valued over the other, rather all three steps are viewed part of the whole and each step adds a layer of interpretation. Analysis is only complete once all three steps have been completed. The process is predicated on the idea that images have multiple and changeable meanings that are dependent on a range of factors. For Drew and Guillemin (2014) the inclusion of multiple voices in the analytic process provides an opportunity for further interpretations of the images being analysed and offers opportunities for interpretation that might not have been available to the academic researcher alone. As will be demonstrated, when applied to research with people with learning disabilities, interpretive engagement offers an inclusive and boundary free approach to analysis that allows all voices to be included and presented in the dissemination of the findings.

The study: 'What does learning disability mean in the real world?'

*What does learning disability mean in the real world?* was a three-year project funded by the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness that explored how different groups of people make sense of the term 'learning disability'. In England and elsewhere, the term 'learning disability' can mean different things to different people and this can have direct consequences for the lives of people given the label. It should be noted that this project was conducted in England, where the term 'learning disability' is most often used to refer to people who in other national contexts would be referred to as people with intellectual disabilities. The language used to talk about learning disability/intellectual disability is often value laden, politically imbued, and socially constructive (Cluley 2018). The aim of the project therefore was to understand how different social actors make sense of and talk about the term 'learning disability'. The project involved four photovoice groups with a total of 16 participants with learning disabilities, combined with 12 focus groups (the 'audience') conducted with people without learning disabilities. Each photovoice group took place over a two-to-three week period, involving two or three sessions (see table one for more detail). **The remainder of the paper will focus on the ways in which data collection and analysis were conducted, in order to illustrate in more detail how participation and inclusion were achieved, and to reflect on the benefits this process brought to the findings.**

(\*\*\*\*\*INSERT TABLE 1 HERE\*\*\*\*\*)

The 16 people with learning disabilities were labelled by service providers as having a variety of needs and abilities that ranged from mild, through moderate and severe, to profound and multiple learning disabilities. The participants were recruited from existing support groups

facilitated by voluntary providers in the East Midlands region of England. The sessions loosely followed Wang and Burris's (1997) guidance for photovoice. All participants were loaned a digital camera for a week and were asked to take photographs of their everyday lives. The aim of this brief was to capture the day to day experiences of people with learning disabilities and to facilitate and aid their talk about this. Where participants were not able to operate a camera or talk about the images, carers were involved and their voices were included in the study (see Cluley 2017 for more details of this). The photographs produced were shared and discussed collectively the following week. At this point, the participants talked about their photographs detailing why they took them, the content of the images and the meaning of their photographs to them. All participant talk was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each participant chose two or three favourite photographs to be shared with the focus group participants. As outlined, the photovoice findings (images and participants talk) were analysed using Drew and Guillemin's (2014) process of interpretive engagement.

The 12 focus groups were carried out with the following groups: social care providers, local authority councillors, clinical psychologists, personal assistants, parent carers, mainstream schoolteachers, student teachers, special educational provision teachers, healthcare professionals, student journalists, student social workers, and social scientists. There were 3-8 participants in each group and 42 participants in total. The photovoice and focus group methods were used collaboratively, so that focus group participants were shown a selection of the photographs taken and chosen for display by the participants with learning disabilities. Photographs were shown at the end of a wider focus group discussion about the meaning of the term 'learning disability' and this was preceded by a brief description of the photovoice element of the project.

Ethical approval for the project was granted by the University of Nottingham. Pseudonyms have been used to conceal identities. Consent was given by the participants and/or their carers to share the photographs with the focus group participants and in published material. Where participants with learning disabilities were not able to provide written or oral consent, proxy and continuous consent were used in that carers provided proxy consent and the researcher was mindful of any cues that might indicate individuals no longer wanted to continue with the research process. However, as Mitchell (2011) points out the responsibility for the ethical practice of conducting participatory visual research extends beyond the researcher to the participants themselves, by way of their role as photographer.

In recognition of this, ethics were discussed in the first session with the participants in order to encourage them to consider the wider impact of their photographs. This discussion covered issues of privacy, identity, and consent. It was agreed that the everyone would ask before taking photographs of people and private spaces. It was also agreed that no close up photographs of people would be taken. Similar to Mitchell's (2016) 'no faces' rule, participants agreed to only take photos of people in ways that would not reveal identity and not to take photographs of identifiable locations/places, unless consent was gained. In addition to this, because all of the participants lived in shared spaces (either with family or in residential homes) letters, information sheets and consent forms detailing the projects and the safeguarding measures put in place, were sent to everyone's homes. In a single case, this resulted in a request from the participant's parents that none of their daughter's photographs were published or shared beyond the research group. While, in line with our ethical protocols, we have not published any of this person's photographs, it does illustrate how, for participants with intellectual disabilities, their decision-making autonomy may be limited not only by

cognitive impairment but also through the control exerted by those who care for and support them.

### **Use of the interpretive engagement framework to include people with learning disabilities**

461 photographs were produced by the participants. Across the individual collections of photographs, the content of the images generally followed similar topics such as: home, self, family, leisure activities, and significant objects. Within these general topics the photographs included a range of subject material including images of the participants engaged in activities such as: drawing, music, craft, shopping, playing snooker, going to the cinema and trampolining; the participants being driven to places such as the gym, a relative's house and a day centre; support environments, such as day centres, group homes, and other care environments; living spaces, such as bedrooms, living rooms, dining rooms, prayer areas, kitchens and gardens; objects such as collections, certificates, trophies, college folders, shoes, televisions, laundry, trains, model aeroplanes, a fish tank and Christmas decorations; holidays; and images of friends and family. It is not possible, nor is it the purpose of this paper to report an overview of the project findings; rather, examples from the analysis and findings are provided to highlight the importance of the inclusion of multiple voices, including those of the participants', and to illustrate the value this adds to the research process and outcomes (Strnadova and Walmsley 2018). To demonstrate this, each stage of analysis is discussed in turn.

### **Stage one: participants' talk about their photographs**

This stage of analysis revealed a particular layer of meaning in terms of how participants understood their photographs, and the significance they attached to objects, settings, people, or

activities. Drew and Guillemin (2014) stress that the aim here is not to interpret or theorise the participants' talk and images but to present them as interpretations in their own right. Foregrounding the participant interpretations in this way, and treating them as an equal and valid layer of meaning aligns visual research with the inclusive aims of disability studies and avoids silencing marginalised voices.

When talking about their photographs, participants often expressed happiness and excitement that complemented the content of the images produced. The two examples below illustrate the participants' enthusiastic talk about their images.

#### Example 1 – Dave's trophies

(\*\*\*\*\*INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE\*\*\*\*\*)

Figure 1: Dave's trophies

Facilitator: Ah, your trophies. Can you explain these to us?

Dave: Erm well, the cup was

Facilitator: This one? (big cup)

Dave: Yeah. The first trophy I won for throwing the javelin when I was throwing the discus and they said 'do you wanna try the javelin?' and I said 'yea'. I wasn't number one but I trained hard and this is just to prove that there was something that I trained hard.

Facilitator: So you threw discus before javelin and then you tried javelin and it turned out you were quite good at it?

Dave: Well, I was quite good at everything I did because my trainer said that 'do you want to try hoop?' and I said 'yea I'll try it' and I tried it and he said 'is there anything in sport that you are not good at?' and I said 'not really', because it came from my Mum being, when she was young she was, she ran for the North East and I think I am the only one in my family who enjoys it.

Facilitator: So you got the sporting genes from your Mum?

Dave: Yeah.

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Facilitator: What's this one? (Shield to the left)

Dave: Erm that's for doing a bit of canoeing and we had a bit of a competition and we still do canoeing now to see how quickly we could go. And they said 'have you got an engine in your canoe? you're quicker than everyone'.

Facilitator: That must make you feel good.

Dave: Erm, well yeah. I'm good at all sports when I give them a try I can just do it. It's why I was the first to play wheelchair basketball with cerebral palsy; we have been all over playing.

This example illustrates Dave's enthusiasm and pleasure in his many sporting successes. In a similar vein, example 2 below shows Kay's happiness at spending time outdoors with her Mum.

### Example 2 – Kay's holiday

(\*\*\*\*\*INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE\*\*\*\*\*)

Figure 2: Kay's Mum walking along a beach

Facilitator: There's your Mum.

Kay: Yeah!

Friend: Was it cold?

Kay: Yeah, it was windy.

Support worker: It's a nice sky.

Kay: Yeah I like colour.

Facilitator: Is it at \_(place name)\_\_\_\_\_?

Kay: Yeah.

Facilitator: I like \_(place name)\_\_\_\_\_.

Kay: It was that windy, I thought if I get ma digital camera I'm alright

Facilitator: So how does this make you feel?

Kay: Happy! Cos it's my Mum.



Both of these examples demonstrate the participants' enthusiasm for the content of their images and what they represented in their lives. Their talk explicitly and implicitly alludes to this; Kay both expresses how she feels about the image and what it represents, telling us 'Happy!' Dave's enthusiasm is seen in his lengthy talk about the image. However, while each photograph presented an image, the participants' explanations and interpretations of these images showed that the personal meaning of each image went beyond that which was immediately visible. When continuing to talk about the photograph of his trophies (shown above), for example, Dave started to discuss how other people perceive his disability. The extract below reveals some of his frustrations.

- Dave: Yea and I, my family are fed up of people in general talking to my Mum or sister and they say, 'he has got a head on his shoulders and he can speak'. Because they'll ask my Mum how I am.
- Facilitator: Even though you are there with her?
- Dave: Yeah. They're talking over me head. You want to say 'well I am here! I have a mind too!' I think a lot of the negative people and parents, they haven't told their children about disability, that you could wake up with a disability.

In this extract, Dave is telling the group that despite his achievements and personal perception of success, he also experiences frustration because of other people's reactions to his learning disability. Other people, people who Dave refers to as 'negative people' and 'people in general', fail to include Dave in conversations when he is present. The 'negative people' and the 'people in general' have made assumptions about Dave based on their lack of knowledge of his disability. Dave talks about the dehumanising effect of this by telling the group that he feels like saying 'I am here! I have a mind too!'

Similarly, Haasani talked about her collection of photographs that included images of her sister, mother, her bedroom, and day to day activities (an example cannot be reproduced for ethical reasons<sup>2</sup>). When talking about her photographs, Haasani said:

- Haasani: Sometime, I hope to work a carer at home. I also can't job home. I am family. Too disabily I work.
- Facilitator: Some day you hope to be a carer, Haasani?
- Haasani: Yea, erm I love to help somebody else because er it's not fair that I can see Bhavika [sister]. Sister and is she an is Bhavika a she's college, she's at work. It's not fair she work.
- Support Worker: It's not fair?
- Haasani: Nooo she is working and is help somebody.
- Support Worker: Are you saying you have done nothing wrong so why do people treat you differently, why can your sister work and you can't?
- Haasani: Yeah Hhhhh.
- Facilitator: You would like to go to work like your sister does?
- Haasani: Yeah.

In this extract, Haasani is sharing her frustration at not feeling able to achieve her hopes to be a carer. Haasani requires a lot of support in her everyday life. She is not able to prepare her own meals and cannot use public transport on her own. Consequently, the option of being a carer would not be possible for Haasani. Haasani knows this; she tells the group that she is 'too disabily I work'. She also tells the group that 'it's not fair', revealing the frustration she feels about this.

The examples shown above demonstrate how, at this stage of analysis, the content of the photographs alone show the lives of people with learning disabilities to be full of happy experiences and achievements. Their talk about the photographs, however, added an extra

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<sup>2</sup> Referred to in the discussion of ethics above.

layer of meaning that would not have been possible without the elicitation process that is key to photovoice and interpretive engagement. While the participants did express happy emotions that corresponded to the content of the images, their talk also revealed frustrations and challenges, presenting a more nuanced picture overall. The inclusion of participant voices in the analytic process allows these voices to be included in their own right as an equal layer of interpretation, which adds a depth and inclusivity to the findings. (Nind 2011).

### **Stage two – academic researcher analysis**

Here, the focus of analysis shifts from the participants' interpretations to the academic researcher's. This shift in focus is designed to facilitate the development of themes and relationships within the data corpus, since the researcher has access to the entire corpus. Stage 2 of the interpretive engagement process involved the systematic detailing of the content of the photographs and participants' talk about them. To do this, the images were organised into 28 codes in relation to what they showed. Relationships between the content of the images and the social context in which they were produced and also the participants' talk about them were noted. As Drew and Guillemin (2014) suggest, generative questions relevant to the photographs were asked in order to do this. These questions included: what is being shown? What are the components of the image? What do the different components of an image signify? Is there more than one possible interpretation of the image? and How does the image reflect or depart from dominant cultural values? In addition to this, the researcher also asked the question 'what is missing from the images?' as it is just as important to be cognisant of what images do not show and why this might be (Drew &Guillemin , 2014). This was an iterative process that involved working between the three data sets: the photographs, the codes, and the participants' talk, until patterns and themes emerged.

Following this process, the following four themes became apparent:

- The dominance of support settings
- Reflecting on what is not present
- The portrayal of multiple ways of being
- Bodily difference

In general, the content of the photographs and the participants' talk about them revealed a complexity beyond the images (stage 1). This stage of analysis allowed the academic researcher to bring expertise to the analysis. In this case, the academic researcher (first author) had a professional and academic background in learning disability theory and practice. The examples provided below highlight the extra layer of meaning this expertise added to the analytic process and the interpretations generated as a consequence.

Example 3 – Jewellery sale

(\*\*\*\*\*INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE\*\*\*\*\*)

Figure 3: A jewellery sale

Example 4 – Car park

(\*\*\*\*\*INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE\*\*\*\*\*)

Figure 4: Car park

Photographs 3 and 4 both show images related to shopping, something that most people experience as part of their everyday lives. From this perspective, it could be said that the lives of the participants who took the photographs are no different to the lives of people without learning disabilities. As will be seen, this was the conclusion of several focus group participants. However, alternative interpretations were also possible.

The photograph of the jewellery sale was taken by a support worker on behalf of Mark, one of the participants with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Mark's support worker reported taking the photograph because Mark had enjoyed the event and it had been part of his week. The support worker provided the following detail about the photograph: 'this is a jewellery sale at [group home where the participant lives]. We get people to come in and have stalls with gifts that the residents can buy for Christmas presents for people'. This detail gives a different meaning to the content of the photograph. The photograph is now re-contextualised in a support setting, the participant's group home. The shopping experience has been brought to him in his own home and this experience has been organised by someone else because the residents cannot easily access shops. The participant's Christmas shopping choices are provided and limited in a way that would be unusual for someone without a learning disability. Mark's Christmas shopping experience is entirely organised by someone else; someone else has decided that Mark will want to buy jewellery as gifts, they have organised a time and space for this to happen, and the participant has been positioned in this space by a carer pushing his wheelchair.

The photograph of the supermarket car park was taken by Tom, a man with a mild learning disability, who lives independently and who drives his own car. Tom told the group that he

took the photograph 'because I do my shopping every week with my key worker'. He also told the group that his car is parked in the car park and that he drives with his keyworker to the supermarket each week. Again, Tom's explanation of the photograph provides an extra layer of meaning to its content. While shopping weekly at a large supermarket is a common experience for many people, doing your weekly shop with someone who is paid to support you is not.

For each of these photographs, the participants' talk and the academic researchers' interpretations transforms an initial presentation of a more or less everyday shopping experience into a shopping experience that is circumscribed by learning disability. Both photographs present positive images that could be interpreted to show choice and relative independence in the lives of the participants: Tom is able to do his weekly shop with the support of a key worker and Mark can choose Christmas presents he likes the look of. The everyday experience of shopping, however, is significantly different for these participants. This level of difference is not apparent in the photographs alone, but the combination of the participants' interpretations/explanations and the academic researcher's expertise builds this understanding.

As can be seen, the addition of the academic researcher perspective at stage two of the interpretive engagement process adds an additional and at times contrasting layer of meaning to the analytic process. Interpretive engagement is premised on the idea that images can mean different things to different people and that these meanings are context dependent. Stage three adds a further layer of meaning to the interpretation of the images.

### **Stage three - contextualisation**

This stage allowed the interpretations of the audience (the focus group participants) to be included in the analysis in their own right. In doing this, the academic researcher asked the questions suggested by Drew and Guillemin (2014), outlined above; who was the intended audience? How does the audience interpret the image? and how are these audiences different from one another? In addition to this, after collecting and analysing the focus group interpretations, the academic researcher asked a further question: ‘how do the interpretations of the audience differ from those of the photographers (the participants) and the academic researcher?’

The audience interpretations of the images differed widely from the interpretations discussed in stages 1 and 2. Differing interpretations are to be expected within the interpretive engagement process given that the process hinges on the philosophical starting point that images have multiple meanings that are dependent upon dynamic combinations of social factors. Indeed, the differing interpretations found are evidence of this assertion. Two of the chosen images and the focus group interpretations of them are discussed below to illustrate the added layer of meaning that audience perspectives bring to the analytic process. The two photographs chosen were those which generated the most talk among focus group participants.

(\*\*\*\*\*INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE\*\*\*\*\*)

Figure 5: Lorna’s collection of teddy bears.

This photograph generated varying interpretations with some focus group participants identifying personally with the content and others not. For some focus group participants the significance of the image was that it was a ‘collection’ and they considered what this said about the photographer. The focus group participants focused on the specific arrangement of the

teddy bears and suggested they would organise them in the same way. For example the Student Journalists, who were all a similar age to Lorna, said:

Student Journalist 2: the teddy bear one, the person who has taken it has obviously selected these teddy bears and then arranged them as opposed to just taking pictures of the teddy bears on the bed and erm he or she has like arranged them with the biggest bears at the back and the smallest bears at the front. Obviously, it shows that these bears mean a lot to the person, if they have a gone to the effort of organising them like that and then taking a photo of them.

Student Journalist 1: It's the only photo that has obviously been set up as well, they have put the picture together, they have thought about what they wanted to take a picture of and how they wanted to do it.

Student Journalist 2: But then again as someone who doesn't have a learning disability, I might then find an object or something that means something to me like those teddy bears and take a picture of them.

Student Journalist 1: I think what is interesting for me, if I was given those same bears and asked to take a picture of them, I don't think I would arrange them very differently to that, I think that is probably how I would put them together, it's not like they are sort of all over the place, I mean it has been put together quite nicely.

In addition to this, some of the focus group participants spoke of their own collections; some also had teddy bear collections and some collected other things such as American football shirts. The focus group participants made statements such as 'I feel like some of the pictures, for example the teddy bears, because that's something that I collect as well, it's a real kind of personal like intimate thing. It's like someone is letting me into their life and they're, you know they are kind of showing you who they are' (Student Social Worker 1) and 'I've got my collection of American Football college shirts that would relate to that' (Local Authority Councillor 1).

Here the focus group participants have interpreted the photograph as an image that reveals something personal about the participant who took the photograph. They have deduced that her careful arrangement of the bears shows a level of sophistication regarding the things that



are important to her and they are able to relate to this through the things that they collect themselves.

However, for some of the other focus group participants, this same photograph was interpreted to show a childish person, as when Student Social Worker 3 said: ‘erm this [teddies] reminds me of like my six year old niece, she loves to like arrange and re-arrange her teddies, the big ones at the back and the smaller ones at the front and just loads of different variations’. Similarly, when talking about their experiences of working with people with learning disabilities, the student teachers said:

Student Teacher 2: so the top one is really interesting with the teddy bears because erm one of the women from one of the clubs I worked at, I saw her a couple of years later doing a bag pack to raise money for the club and she was wearing this bright pink t-shirt that said ‘I love cats’ or something like ‘my cat is my best friend’ or ‘with cats who needs friends’ or something and then I was like it’s really interesting because it’s more like along the lines of like little girl interests or something.

Student Teacher 1: yea, it is interesting and it’s something I have noticed as well before you know with people with learning disabilities and having kind of er erm, I don’t know, still having Barbie dolls or still having an obsession with Hello Kitty or that kind of thing.

When talking about this photograph, Lorna, the photographer, had explained that she had taken the photograph because collecting teddy bears is one of her hobbies. She spoke about the bears she is saving up for and told the group about each of the bears in the photograph. Some had been bought as presents by her boyfriend and so they had a special personal meaning while others were expensive Stieff bears that she had saved up for. She had arranged the bears for the purpose of the project because she wanted to show one of her interests. In the absence of this context, as seen, the focus groups speculated about this. Often these speculations were based on their own experiences and perceptions of people with learning disabilities, which were not always accurate.

Tom's photograph of the car park, shown above in figure 4, also generated differing interpretations to his own explanation. Tom took this photograph to show his relative independence and something that is a normal part of his week: he goes food shopping once a week with his key worker and he drives them in his car. The car park Tom uses is undercover which made the photograph dark but Tom had not attached any particular significance to this. In contrast to this, participants across several different focus groups talked a lot about the composition and contrast of the image and shared numerous interpretations about this and what it said about Tom as a person, such as:

'Very artistic, really beautiful. It could win the Turner [prize] you know! Beautiful geometric shapes' (Student Teacher).

'It's like an alien landscape. It's quite arty and they have seen something that we haven't which is kind of cool in a dark way.' (Student Social Worker).

'It looks very artistic that one doesn't it?' (Social Care Provider).

Social Scientist 4: It's weird because my initial reaction to that photo was wow, quite dark, you don't, all you see is kind of the darkness

Social Scientist 2: I was like 'look at the lights!'

Social Scientist 3: Yeah, I also saw the darkness, some mystery.

The focus group participants interpreted Tom's photograph as an insight into his mind set, one that they describe as 'arty', 'dark' and a 'mystery'. The photograph was assumed to have been taken for an artistic rather than documentary purpose. All of the focus groups spent a significant amount of time discussing this photograph, talking about the type of person Tom might be and wishing that they could be such proficient photographers. In contrast to this, Tom spent very little time discussing the image itself relative to the activity it represented. What he did say highlighted his relative independence and also his love of crisps.

Drew and Guillemin (2014) suggest, at this stage, that the academic researcher asks: what knowledges are being deployed and whose knowledges are being excluded from these representations? The final element of stage three, re-contextualisation, allowed these questions to be answered. The re-contextualisation element of this step allows the interpretations found at all stages to be positioned within current theoretical debates. The analytical findings from stages one and two, and also the audience interpretations, were re-contextualised by the academic researcher in relation to current theory addressing learning disability. The application of theory to the content of all three voices allowed the exploration of one of the project research questions: *what is the relationship between the constructions of 'learning disability' produced by participants with and without 'learning disabilities' and how can this contribute to a re-evaluation of sociological perspectives on 'learning disability'?* This added a further layer of meaning to the overall photovoice findings.

This stage in the project added further weight to the findings by highlighting links between the participants' and the audiences' talk, and social theory. In this case, understandings of 'learning disability' were found to be heavily influenced by two contrasting but linked models of disability that have penetrated both lay and professional understandings of disability through social policy and the media: the social model and the medical model. Overall, the interpretive engagement process gave insight into the lives of people with learning disabilities and how their lives are (mis)interpreted by others. Taken together, these multiple perspectives provide a more holistic understanding than could be achieved from any one perspective.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

It is important to be mindful of the difficulties associated with inclusive and participatory research. While generally seen as best practice within research addressing learning disability, inclusive research is not without criticism and researchers using this approach need to be aware of its challenges. For example, when combined with some research methods and research objectives, inclusive research can quickly become exclusive research; that is to say, research from which those with the highest support needs are excluded (Cluley 2017). In their recent article Strnadova and Walmsley (2018) highlight the particular challenge of presenting participant or co-researcher voices in a way that is both accessible and of use to people with learning disability *and* reflective of rigorous research practice, therefore acceptable to publishers and funding organisations. They conclude that ‘more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which the voices of co-researchers with learning disabilities are heard in formal academic contexts’ (ibid p.132). This echoes Walmsley’s earlier fear that, inclusive and emancipatory research potentially risks the loss of theory, where ‘inclusive researchers are so fearful of saying things which people with learning disabilities cannot follow that they say very little, leaving the field of theorising to others, including disabled scholars, with little or no commitment to inclusion’. However, as the study used as an example here has shown, visual research including people with learning disabilities does not have to be simple or atheoretical. Such research can and should be high quality research and participatory visual research approaches can help to advance this aim.

As evidenced above, the use of interpretive engagement to include participant voices allowed for inclusivity in the analytic process without jeopardising credibility or theoretical contribution. As we stated at the outset of this paper, to produce credible or trustworthy results, visual research must be based on a ‘coherent and transparent’ research process that includes participant voices/texts (Butler-Kisber 2018, p.14). The three-stage process allowed for the

inclusion of all voices and foundations of knowledge without prioritisation. All voices were afforded equal value, allowing the research findings to be grounded in the participant's interpretations. In addition to this, all three stages presented here are interdependent. Without one stage, other stages would not be possible. Consequently, the overall findings generated from this staged approach to analysis are based on a holistic appreciation of the visual data. In this way the critical approach to visual images, advocated by Rose (2016) can be fully incorporated in the practice of analysis.

Within the photovoice method, analysis can be a fluid process that does not have to begin or end at a particular time; as Nind (2011) points out, it need not follow strict rules. This allows the inclusion of different voices in the analytic process in different ways, accommodating what different people can do. This is an important consideration for inclusive research with people with learning disabilities. When choosing research methods and modes of analysis researchers conducting inclusive research need to be cognisant of the fact that people with learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group with varying levels of need and ability. An academic researcher will have research expertise and theoretical knowledge because that is their job; however, this does not mean interpretation of data should be the sole preserve of the academic (Gubrium 2013). As has been shown here, the inclusion of multiple voices in the analytic process adds a breadth and depth of understanding that could not be achieved through traditional, researcher-only approaches to analysis. Multiple voices add layers of interpretation to findings and support the exploration of alternative understandings that account for all voices. The analysis shown here has highlighted and embraced the dynamic relationship between participant, academic researcher, and audience, and in doing so reveals multiple interpretations of apparently simple images. These interpretations could only be achieved by giving equal weight to the views of all involved. This does not, of course, overcome all of the unequal

power dynamics that exist in research – for example, this paper was written by academics, for academics. However, ensuring greater equality and inclusivity of voices within the analytic process does go some way towards both recognising and reducing key elements of inequality.

In addition to improving inclusivity, interpretative engagement also ensures that the findings produced are a consequence of a transparent and replicable process. Following the steps outlined allows for an approach to the research process that can be followed in the same way by other researchers conducting similar projects. In this way, research using visual elicitation can be made both more inclusive *and* more meaningful. As outlined in the introduction, research that seeks to empower marginalised groups through the use of visual methods must consider the following: where the analysis begins, who is involved in the analytic process, and how different voices are presented. Interpretive engagement allows each of these issues to be considered.

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Table 1.

<b>Session</b>	<b>Content</b>
One	Introduction of the project Getting to know you – ice breaker activities Group discussion about photography – including ethical considerations Distribution of cameras Practice time for using the cameras Consent
Two	Cameras returned and photographs viewed on a laptop computer and discussed as a group - discussion loosely followed the SHOWeD framework Feedback on the photovoice process
Three	Distribution of printed photographs and more discussion of the images Feedback on the photovoice process

