Northumbria Research Link

www.northumbria.ac.uk/nrl

northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

Visual Methods and Voice in Disabled Childhoods Research: Troubling Narrative Authenticity

Professor Janice McLaughlin (Newcastle University) and Dr Edmund Coleman-Fountain (Northumbria University)

Abstract

Visual methods are a popular way of engaging children and young people in research. Their growth comes out of a desire to make research practice more appropriate and meaningful to them. The auteur approach emphasises the need to explore with young participants why they produce the images they do, so that adult researchers do not impose their own readings. This paper, while recognising the value of such visual techniques, argues that their benefit is not that they are more age appropriate, or that they are more authentic. Instead it lies in their capacity to display the social influences on how participants, of any age, represent themselves. The paper does so through discussion of an Economic and Social Research Council research project, which made use of visual and other creative methods, undertaken in the UK with disabled young people. The research involved narrative and photo elicitation interviews, the production of photo journals, and creative practice workshops aimed at making representational artefacts. Through analysing the photography, the journals and interviews the paper examines what it was research participants sought to represent and also what influenced the types of photographs they gathered and the type of person they wanted to represent. We argue that they aimed to counter negative representations of disability by presenting themselves as happy, active and independent, in doing so they drew from broader visual iconography that values certain kinds of disabled subject, while disvaluing others.

Introduction

Creative methods are a burgeoning area within social science research, this is particularly seen in research involving young people (Harrison, 2002; Sweetman, 2009; Sociological Research Online, 2012; Rich and Chalfen, 1999). The growth in these techniques has been spurred on by calls for research approaches to be more appropriate to how young people engage with the world. One particularly favoured technique is the use of visual methods, whether this be drawing, photography or filmmaking. Work with disabled young people has also followed this path, with various researchers arguing that creative methods help disabled young people express their ideas away from mainstream modes of interaction and communication that leave the adult and often non-disabled researcher in charge. The growth of such approaches is welcome, it has enabled the inclusion of a broader range of tools for working with children and young people (and others). However, it is important to consider how, as with other methods, the insights they generate may be moderated by the presence of the social world in their gathering. Some advocates of creative visual approaches argue that they generate greater authenticity in the accounts produced when working with children and young people. We are not convinced this is the reason to include them; instead their value lies in how they can be used to highlight how children and young people's location within social relations influences their visual accounts of who they are and the lives they lead. In particular, the paper will examine the influence of stigma in the stories they produce through visual techniques. Therefore, the value of using such techniques with children and young people, comes in the particular insight they bring on how social relations and positions influence how they articulate and present their identity, rather than being more appropriate to them due to their age and development.

Thinking about how social dynamics influence participants' engagement with visual methods is particularly important to do when using them in disability research. This is because of the important role visual iconographies around disability have long played in positioning disabled people as outside 'normal' society. A range of visual tropes have emerged over time, for example the visual cataloguing of eugenics that associated particular types of body shape and feature (and colour) with lesser forms of human being: the Victorian freak show that fed voyeuristic curiosity in the 'exotic', the charity image of the passive and tragic child in a wheelchair or callipers (Osten, 2010; Stiker, 2000; Craton, 2009). Some of these images are now recognised as problematic, for example the charity collection boxes of a child in callipers, usually clutching a teddy bear, have now disappeared from outside shop fronts. In their place have developed alternative images of disability, some of which signify a more inclusive and celebratory set of meanings - the Paralympic hero – while others offer challenge and resistance – the disability activist blocking traffic, the disabled dancer. At the same time traces of the problematic iconography of the past remain updated to contemporary contexts, for example the dysmorphic child displayed in medical journals has uneasy associations with the eugenics of the Victorian period (Shaw, 2003), while the reality show fascination with disability, for example Channel 4's The Undateables or Seven Dwarfs, for some offers insight into disabled people's lives, for others risks echoing the public spectacle of the freak show (Backstrom, 2012). In using visual methods in disability research, it is important to consider how the existence of public images of disability – that either stigmatise or celebrate – may influence disabled participants', including children and young people's, engagement with visual representation.

The paper begins by exploring the debates around the benefits of using creative and visual methods when working with disabled and non-disabled children and young people. It makes the case that their value primarily lies in providing distinctive testimony on the role of existing visual tropes that offer value and rejection in influencing how people represent themselves in their social worlds and within research. After a summary of how our project with disabled young people developed, we move on to discuss the findings. We show what participants sought to represent in their rich and carefully curated photographic work, while also considering the social influences on what they produced. In particular, we argue that what the participants aimed to display was an active independent disabled subject, someone who could be recognised by others, and that this focus on being active and independent was influenced by contemporary privileging of such subjects.

Visual Methodologies and Valuing Young People's Voices

The growth of visual and other creative methods in research involving children and young people is closely associated with the call for young people to have a more active presence in research about their lives (James, 2007). It is proposed that visual techniques provide a creative way to escape the adult power dynamics of interviewing (Capello, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2005). That they can make research participation more interesting for children and young people (Bagnoli, 2011; Darbyshire et al., 2005) and that they are a rich way to explore issues of identity (Gibson et al., 2013) and illuminate 'childhood landscapes' (Faulstich Orellana, 1999: 73). Few advocate that such techniques should or could replace existing approaches such as interviewing and observation, but they are now important to consider when designing work with children and young people.

This spread of visual methods has also increased within research with disabled children and young people – although it is acknowledged that they are not appropriate for all disabled children and young people, particularly those with sight impairments (although other creative methods such as storytelling can be). Disabled childhoods researchers argue that established social science research techniques - in particular the dominance of the interview - can be problematic for disabled children and young people who may face limitations in traditional or mainstream forms of cognition and communication (Sutherland and Young, 2014). In contrast, creative and visual approaches can reach beyond to enable disabled children and young people to express perspectives that could not be captured otherwise.

One important development within the pursuit of visual methods with young people is the call for techniques that enable them to be 'auteurs,' fully shaping the account of their lives. To do so, researchers argue it is not enough to ask participants to take photographs, what is also required is that the researcher explores the intent of the photographer in producing the images they have. Drew and Guillemin detail practical steps that can ensure 'interpretive engagement between the researcher, the image, the participant and the anticipated (and unanticipated) audience/s' (2014: 55). In particular, they advocate the use of Photo-Elicitation (Belin, 2005) or Photovoice (Darbyshire et al., 2005) techniques that can provide a platform within which the photographer's actual aims and vision are central to analyses. Through discussing with the photographer why they took particular photographs, the aim is to avoid an adult mis-interpretation of what the young person is aiming to represent (Luttrell, 2010). Mannay (2010) uses this approach, spending time with young research participants to explore what they are trying to display about their lives via their photographs (an approach she refers to as 'participant-directed visual data production' (2010: 107)). She

argues that 'Auteur theory is required on a practical level because the interpretation of the audience is not necessarily the same as the narrative the image-maker wanted to communicate' (2010: 100). Luttrell (2010) advocates this kind of approach to ensure researchers privilege children and young people's voices, rather than their own.

The shift to visual and other creative approaches has generated some criticism, particularly around the idea that they: (a) produce a more authentic account of the 'child' perspective, and, (b) are better suited than other qualitative methods such as interviews for working with children and young people. In relation to the first critique, there is a concern that the legitimate political desire to advocate for children and young people as experts in their own lives, risks stripping them from the contexts that inform their understandings of their lives (Gallagher, 2009). Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) have argued that the critique of developmental approaches, which framed children and young people as actors in a process of *becoming* subjects sometime in their abstract adult future, has led to an over fixation on claiming they are *beings* already fully formed. Instead, children and young people's agency, like that of adults, is situated and contingent within social power relations and recognised values and norms. If research concentrates on advocating that children and young people can produce, with the right tools, an authentic and individually formed account of their lives, it may miss engaging also with the social conditions, or what Komulainen (2007) refers to as 'socialness', of their participation and how their social agency is situated and constrained (Spyrou 2011).

The second critique proposes that advocating for particular 'child centred techniques' runs counter to the sociology of childhood argument that the boundaries between childhood, adolescence and adulthood are socially produced and varied (Hunleth 2011). If children and

young people are not essentially distinct to adults, why should they automatically and universally be more interested in creative approaches? It is better instead, argues Punch (2002), to suggest that such techniques offer value to a range of research participant and research issue. This is what we want to argue, that visual techniques, such as those associated with 'auteur theory', offer a particular insight, rather than one that is more authentic for working with children and young people.

What visual approaches provide is an opportunity to produce a rich and vivid account of how broader social imagery influences people's social position and identity. It is important to retain an appreciation of the 'socialness' of anyone's ability to visually capture *their* interpretation of *their* life. Such individual acts are located within the broader visual and social imaginaries already present in the world. Therefore, what images a participant produces is not linked to their actual age (child/adolescent/adult) in terms of what this implies for their cognitive development, but to how their age may influence the types of social lives they lead. How we take and look at pictures is shaped by the images that already exist around us, images already associated with social meanings and values. Metz's (1977) still influential idea of scopic regimes is a helpful way of understanding how existing iconography for representing particular social subjects influence how new images are produced and read, shaping how we take photographs to fit particular conventions and then how we read images against such conventions. The regime is more than a question of format and style on three levels. First, scopic regimes influence meaning, for example how particular images are read as symbols of beauty/ugliness, power/weakness, normativity/deviance, good/evil and so on. Second, those meanings do not just influence

how images are read, but also how people are compared against such existing imagery as they are socially judged and located. Third, photographic norms are informed by and inform broader social values, replicating, but also encouraging the privileging of some ways of being and living over others. This means that while we can explore someone's intent, rather than simply interpret it for ourselves, that intent will itself be a product of the photographer's ongoing location within a broader set of photographic and societal norms, styles, meanings and values that will influence what they aim to capture and why.

As we mentioned at the beginning, disabilities, particularly forms of mind-body difference that are visually apparent, have been marked, both in the past and the present, by visual tropes that produce otherness. One way in which that has been explored in sociology is via the notion of stigma (an area we have explored in more detail in other publications (McLaughlin 2017; McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain 2014)). The concept of stigma is used to explore how disability, when identified by others as a problematic social presence, leads those labelled as disabled to mediate their behaviour and embodied performances to appear more 'normal' (Goffman 1968; Davis 1961). Contemporary work in sociology, cultural studies and critical disability studies takes these ideas forward by focusing in on the interaction between existing visual narratives around disability as monstrous or exotic, and dynamics of everyday social relations (Scully 2010; Shildrick 2012). In particular Garland-Thomson's (2006) work on 'ways of staring' is very valuable here. Her argument is that non-disabled people feel a freedom to stare at those outside the norm; in the process legitimating and securing the social separation between the 'normate' and 'non-normate' and positioning the person stared at as 'not one of us'. Therefore, some forms of disability

that mark the body – either in appearance or interaction with the world – as visually different, are associated with visual tropes that define such difference as problematic.

Nevertheless, as we also highlighted earlier, the range of images now visible in the public realm imply a more open and expansive scopic regime, where alternatives exist to visualise the disabled subject as active, valued and 'one of us'. It is therefore interesting to explore how disabled young people choose to represent themselves and to examine with them the relationship between their selected images and broader available representations of disability. For example, as they move through adolescence, what are the images around them, and how do they influence how they represent their identity and position in the world? A study we undertook with some disabled young people exploring embodiment provides an opportunity to engage with this question.

The Study

Our study[i] involved working with disabled young people on the theme of the disabled body. Recruitment to the study was from a cohort of young people (aged 14 to 20) with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy and who were resident in the North East of England, some of whom had been part of the qualitative phase of an earlier study on childhood cerebral palsy and pain[ii] (recruitment from the cohort gave us access to qualitative data derived from interviews carried out with them five years previously). Thirteen young people were recruited from this group, with another four recruited from a local school for disabled children and young people to enhance recruitment. Seven young women and ten young men were involved. The diagnosis of cerebral palsy that each had affected them in varied ways relating to speech, mobility, dexterity, body shape and other issues such as epilepsy

and learning disabilities. The primary access route to recruitment was via a NHS held patient database, this meant that ethics approval for the project was sought and granted via the NHS.

We wanted to work with the disabled young people through a variety of routes that could provide both choice in what they wanted to engage with and opportunities for them to reflect on their lives (Bagnoli 2011). The specifics of what we did was also influenced by the input of a research panel of disabled young people. The work began with an open-ended interview to introduce the project's themes, including what disability meant to participants, and how their body was changing as they were aging. This interview also included discussion of the childhood interviews that had been undertaken. They were then invited to create a photo journal that captured their identities as disabled young people. This was done using the young people's existing photographic practices, including letting them use cameras they already owned (often their phones) and allowing them to source old images of themselves or images found elsewhere (like stock-images found on the internet). They were given a paper journal to display the photographs and invited to put any thoughts they had about the photos and why they had chosen alongside. Cameras and printers were provided for those who did not have them.

The images and journals were then discussed with the participants in a second interview so that we did not jump to our interpretation without exploring what they sought to capture via the images they took. Once the journals were completed they were digitally scanned and returned to each participant to keep. Finally, two creative workshops were held in the final stages of the fieldwork, during which jewellery making was used as an alternative way of eliciting stories and generating representative artefacts. Seventeen took part in the first

interviews; eight engaged in visual work, six of whom participated in the second interview; and three of those took part in the workshops. After the journals and photographs had been discussed, the research team selected the images we intended to use in public dissemination (for example, conferences and papers such as this one). Images of, or including, other people or places that were easily identifiable were excluded. Each participant was sent copies of the pictures we hoped to use, with the likely contexts they would be used in also set out in an attached letter. We asked each participant to select and give consent for each picture they were happy for us to use. The majority of images we selected were given approval by their creators, some did not get back to us and those images are not used and we received a small number of requests not to use particular images.

Using images of research participants generates a variety of issues, in particular the potential reduction in anonymity and issues of being unable to control how others may 'mis-read' images via their existing cultural values (Moreno Figueroa, 2008). While acknowledging these issues, after reflection we decided to include images we had participant consent to use in public domains such as this. Our decision was based on a wish to recognise the choices the young people made in producing the photographs, sharing them with us and agreeing for their dissemination. At the point when participants were asked about each image we wished to use, they had been working with us for close to 2 years. The working relationship that had developed over that time through regular contact, we hope, gave them the space within which they could say no to anything they did not feel comfortable with – and indeed some did say no to particular images at this stage. Given we recognise that agency is possible for young people, to refute their choices around sharing

the images seems problematic. At the same time we do appreciate that sharing such images is not without issue and that giving young people choice does not absolve us of our responsibility as researchers to both provide an expansive space for them to make their decisions, but also for us to reflect on the broader political landscape of both research production and its consumption by others (Wiles et al., 2012).

Visualising the Disabled Subject

One aspect of the participants' lives they did want to capture in words, images and discussions with us was how others did not treat them as 'one of us'. Stories of bullying, abuse, being stared at and isolation from childhood into the present day were shared:

> 'Cos I fall over and these lads laughed at me and said something horrible and I will not repeat it, about my disability and one of my mates heard what they said, and my mate went 'What did you just say to my mate' and I had to grab hold of my mate and go 'No you don't' and pull them in the opposite direction. (Hannah, 18, Interview 1)

> **P:** ….you don't get all the people staring at you as much [referring to the able bodied interviewer]. It's kind of really irritating, I find if I just walk sometimes people will just stare and really irritates us sometimes.
>
> ---
>
> **I:** So they stare when you walk, why would they do that?
>
> **P:** I don't know it's just with, 'cos like when I go for me dinner [at college] I'll go into [the] town centre and people that don't know you, haven't seen you before and they

just have a little glare at you. I just think it's kind of rude, just irritates me

sometimes.

I: So do you use the wheelchair less for that reason?

P: Yeah.

I: So do you take your stick to college?

P: Well I don't, I just don't think, [pause] in a way I would like to take it with us. 'Cos

like a lot of people there are more likely just to stare cos I've got a stick. Just think

it'll be easier to just go without a stick. (Paul, 16, Interview 1)
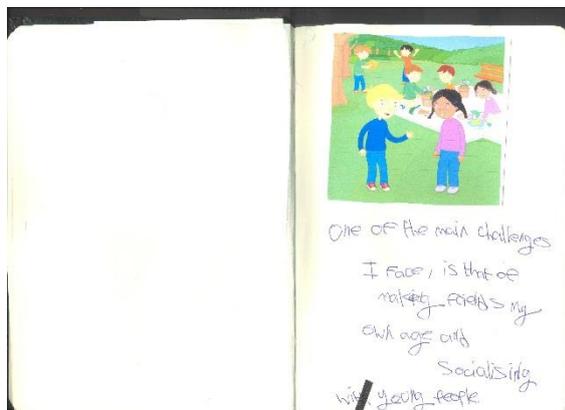
(Figure 1. Sean, 14, Photo Journal. Text reads: One of the main challenges I face, is that of

making friends my own age and socialising with young people)

The participants' visual cataloguing of these everyday experiences imply both their

awareness of how recognition of visible difference within social space leads to dynamics of

stigma and othering and also, their desire to capture and represent the problems this

creates for them (Garland-Thomson, 2006; Shildrick, 1999). However, across the journals, in

the images the participants curated in them and the subsequent discussions of them in the

photo elicitation interview, the representations of them as outsiders were of a significantly

smaller number than positive images about their lives and living with disability. While in the

first interviews the majority acknowledged past and present social difficulties created by

stigma, the photo journals were not a space where that was their focus. Instead, one of the

strongest commonalities across the photography work was that what they took and

selected were pictures that captured their active and relational presence in the world. There

was very much an emphasis in their images of them doing things, often with others:

participating in sport, in social activities, on holiday, in school, amongst friends and family.

- If it wasn't for the love, support, understanding and acceptance of my parents that I have received/ receive now and in the past I would not be the person I am and I wouldn't lead such a great life. My parents take me to physio and hospital appointments etc.

 (Figure 2. Sean, 14, powerpoint slides he produced as one version of the photo journals he

made)

In our discussions with them about why these photos were chosen it was clear they wanted

to represent aspects of themselves, their embodiment and their relationships with their

social and intimate worlds that were evidence of their active and valued subjectivity. Here

were ways they were involved in the world, making plans for the future that would enable

them to be in work, to have relationships, to be independent and to be happy. In addition,

their shared aim was to challenge a prevalent representation of disability: that of the

passive, dependent figure. Within their visual accounts of the active subject, their narratives

varied, indicating there are different ways to frame and enact what being such a subject

involves. What we want to do here is discuss two different active subjects that emerged in

the accounts of Kate (15) and Mark (17): 1) the attractive female teenager, 2) the aggressive

disabled sportsman. In doing so what we want to do, as well as capture their vivid accounts

of their active and valued lives, is to explore the importance of existing visual

representations and associated social values in how they did so.

Kate's photo journal explored the emergence of a young attractive, happy teenager looking

forward to university, a career in medicine and raising a family. It detailed how she looked

after herself, the various medical interventions - in particular recent surgery on her legs -

that had reshaped her body, and her relationships with important friends and family. Her

interview around the photographs brought out aspects the photographs did not

immediately convey to others – the hurt when her boyfriend stopped seeing her during the

long recovery from the recent surgery, the significant pain that surgery had led to, but also

the friendships she made in hospital, which had sustained her during that time and are

ongoing. For her it was less important that the images conveyed those experiences to

others, rather, what she had enjoyed about the process was the memories they generated

for her. For example, when discussing the picture below of her legs before and after surgery

she noted:

...like this is a picture of my knees, I thought well it reminded me of all the people

that I met and what kind of experience it was... So it wasn't just the literal meaning

of what was in the picture, it obviously evoked other memories from that. (Kate

Interview 2)

(Figure 3. Kate's legs before and after surgery, included in her photo journal)

What Kate discussed about the picture was how she had grown as a person during that

time, how she had reshaped her body to be ready for the adulthood that lay ahead and how

now she was on the cusp of the future she was actively making.

I really do think that it was a defining moment in my life, like it was definitely [sighs],

I don't know if it's changed who I am, but it definitely made me think about things,

and about what I've got and about how much more I've got now than I had then.

And obviously, it's helped me to decide what I want to do as a career, and it's just

made such an impact on my life I think that I couldn't really ignore it. (Kate,

Interview 2)

Several of her photographs were of her standing, looking to camera, smiling and confident, while leaning on something. The image below, taken at her sixteenth birthday is an indicative example:

(Figure 4. Kate on her 16th birthday, included in her photo journal)

Several aspects of the picture conform to the gendered iconography of what a young attractive teenage girl looks like: the pink dress, the red nail varnish and the shaping of her hair. What is interesting is her disability (which meant at this stage prior to surgery she could not stand unaided) is not immediately obvious to the viewer. This is because leaning on the sink (and other ways she held herself up in other pictures) could be read as a way of holding the body common to portraiture. In discussion around this picture Kate was conscious that a possible act of concealment was taking place:

> Well I mean obviously I'm leaning on the sink because I can't stand. Well I can now
> [after surgery] but I don't think, at that point I was just kind of leaning. I don't think
> that necessarily looks like I'm disabled because you could just lean against something
> and that people generally lean against stuff all the time on photos. But not that that

would be a problem if it did look like I was disabled, because that's me you know.

(Kate Interview 2)

The photographs and Kate's account of them indicate that she is a knowing photographic subject. She replicates particular poses and visual styles to display a visual subject others would recognise – through its echoing of symbols of attractive femininity – and in the process disguises disability by ensuring the lean is something that is not immediately read as something to do with it.

Mark's pictures similarly draw from gendered visual templates to present himself as a positive figure, this time drawing on masculine images of aggression that did not require the erasure of disability to be readable to others. His pictures, taken for him by his father (which he sent directly to us rather than including them in a photo journal), are primarily of him playing wheelchair rugby. As with others, in his first interview he talked in detail about the frustration he felt when people treated him differently, in particular when he felt he was being treated with charity:

> ...like in sport I think people are a bit "Whoa ... like give him a chance to play", if
> we're in a race they slow down and then make him think it's him that's still in the
> race if that makes sense, rather than sprinting full pelt and getting there and looking
> back and watching him finish the race… like take a penalty, this has happened to me
> quite a lot… obviously you know I wouldn't be able to hit the ball like a hundred mile
> an hour, but take the shot and it's an easy save and people like dive over the ball and
> let it go in. It's like a bit of cringing sort of thing. Just save the ball, man; stop, stop
> taking the mick. (Mark Interview 1)

In contrast when Mark spoke of what attracted him to wheelchair rugby in the second interview exploring his photographs, it was evident this was related to the opportunity it provided for a very different visual presence of the disabled body and the wheelchair. This was a body and technology that displayed – for him – strong masculinity, physicality, aggression and significant ability.
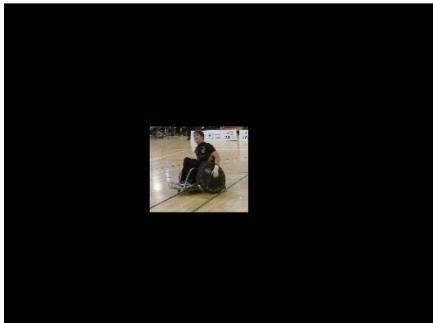
(Figure 5. Mark during a wheelchair rugby match, photograph shared with us)

 (Figure 6. Mark preparing for a match with his teammates, photograph shared with us)

Mark's discussion of the photograph produced a very different figure to the disabled figure to be charitable towards:

> For me it would be the big hits, you know it's pretty much illegal anywhere else to bray someone out their wheelchair... I really do like rugby I think it's just, basketball [meaning wheelchair basketball] does not hit people and you know I really just do like rugby a lot more better than basketball, ... it sounds stupid but you don't really

get anywhere else to hit people out of their wheelchair, you don't as well, the team

and I think it's the ethic, the team ethic we all like talk together, which I know that

happens in every sport but. I like the big hits and the way team go on together and

just cos we're disabled we still have the fire in our bellies to get the big hits in to win.

(Mark Interview 2)

Mark's intent is to present himself as active, in control, a member of a successful team, to

do so he makes use of gendered associations of masculinity with aggression to produce a

figure that others should be able to recognise. He works with existing scopic regimes and

social norms around youthful masculinity to associate himself – and his teammates - with

value. In doing so he produces a challenge to stereotypical stigmatising representations of

disability, both those that construct disability as passive, but also - as importantly - those

that associate a positive disabled subject as one who overcomes their disability. Mark's

images aim to present the active self through disability and through what other disability

representations frame as assistive technology – the wheelchair. In his interviews – mirroring

Paul earlier – he spoke about avoiding using his wheelchair or stick, particularly when out

with his non-disabled mates and in social locations such as the pub. In contrast in his images

of wheelchair rugby, the wheelchair is central to visually producing the valued subject. In

doing so the technology and the disabled body are visibly positioned in a very specific way.

The reading Mark aims to produce of himself is supported by the wider presence disability

sport now has in the public sphere. Events such as the Paralympics (the London 2012

Paralympics took place during our fieldwork) offers him the promise that others will get

what he is trying to do.

The photographic work of Katie and Mark capture the kinds of agency associated with auteur theory; they make use of existing cultural imaginaries associated with adolescence – aggressive masculinity and attractive femininity – to tell the story they want to tell, one which aims to position themselves as valuable subjects. An intent is there and is visible to others; however, fully engaging with what their pictures and accounts produce needs to also reflect on what influences the way in which they develop their photography. This is important to do in order to bear testimony to the limitations or conditions to individual agency they may also display.

Framing the Active Subject

While the stories Kate and Mark wish to tell appear to break the scopic regime that positions disability as a barrier to positive recognition, there are a couple of important reasons to still retain concern with the restrictions that remain on the stories they can tell, which speak to the capacity for any of us to be the sole authors of the visual or textual stories we produce. First, the success of their visual and oral counter-narratives requires that others see the figure they are aiming to represent. The available visual markers for disability in the social realm need to have expanded enough that others can see the subject they are creating. Mark, when reflecting on why he had prioritised photographs of his participation in sport, acknowledged that he wanted to be recognised as accomplished. However, he thought that people could look at his images and see someone else, in particular the stigmatised disabled figure to feel charitable towards:

> …it depends on who is looking… if you got someone off the street… they'd say
>
> "That's good that they've got into a sport" and "Bless their cotton socks" rather than

"We beat them, maybe be knocked out the chair, put twenty goals on them and all the play offs. That's quite strong to do that, how does he continue to do what he does with less functions?" If you're seeing Mo Farah win gold, everybody's "Yeah get in there", that's represented in the sport. In images [of disabled sport] obviously this is [the same] for me. (Mark Interview 2)

Whilst Mark pursues a different visual frame to be seen within, what he cannot guarantee is that it will displace the visual framing he wants to escape. As Lomax et al. argue children and young people (or we would argue anyone) cannot 'control the ways in which adults respond to them' (2011: 238). Kate had included the London 2012 Paralympics logo in her photo journal, alongside text (see later in this section) about the positive image of disability it produced. However, when we discussed the image in her second interview she acknowledged she now felt 'naïve' that it had really changed how people felt:

if I'm honest it was kind of naïve to think everybody's mind had been changed, because on the TV coverage people been sending me messages to say how great it was and how much of a boost it is for disabled sport and that kind of thing. And now recently there's been a few cases when I've thought well it hasn't actually really changed people's minds. (Kate, Interview 2)

The Paralympics offers a vision of active, heroic disability, but it sits alongside other images of disability, past and present, that still emphasise a reading that positions the disabled person as a charity figure, who can be admired, but only in a way that erases their agency and keeps them within the category of other. Mark and Kate's recognition that they cannot

completely control how others will read them, points to the way in which their intent remains dependent on the presence of other images and narratives to support their imaginary. While the charitable vision of the dependent disabled figure remains in public circulation their intent can be undermined.

Both Kate and Mark's concern that others may not see who they are trying to portray is a result of their sense that stigma and pity remain what people associate with disability. In a way the valued subjects they are aiming to portray is an attempt to manage stigma, via the presentation of a different self. To do so they draw on broader public iconography to produce the valued subject, highlighting the contingent nature of the individual agency on display both in the images and the choices they make. The counter Kate and Mark create draws from norms of acceptable adolescence. What using visual methods with them helps identify is their need to replicate hierarchies of value, in order to position themselves as valuable.

We have already highlighted how their images conform to gendered norms of feminine beauty and masculine aggression, but here we want to concentrate on the importance they give to the display of actively reshaping the body to enable success and independence. When Kate and Mark spoke of their pictures and how they wanted to be seen they both returned at various points to the need to be seen as independent and getting on with life. Kate spoke of liking her pictures of her legs before and after surgery, because this was a turning point in her working towards her adult future. Mark privileged wheelchair rugby because here was when he felt others most easily recognised his capacity for independence. Such displays echo much of the contemporary ideal of individual self-hood as a core goal of valued young people working towards their transition to adulthood. Independent adulthood

has become something, in an era of a shrinking welfare state, which is increasingly becoming the responsibility of the individual to pursue (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Hall et al., 1999; Bynner, 2005). Prout (2000) argues that contemporary young people are working through a context that requires practices of 'self-realisation' in order that they can find a secure position in society. Such practices include an emphasis on self-care and self-discipline of the body to minimise the need for help from others, particularly the state (Gill et al., 2005; Anderson, 2009). Kate and Mark draw from this account of the good emerging adult citizen through their gendered emphasis on working on a body that can be displayed as acceptable to others. They display their efforts to produce an independent body capable of enabling the futures that are working towards. Kate captured some of this in the explanation she gave in her photo journal of why she included the London 2012 Paralympics logo:

my task 10 (I think. It's the disability one)

Something that represents disability.

The Paralympic logo. It's about movement and being spirited to do things and not to give up and not be bothered. I don't think that your disability should be an excuse, and the Paralympics is a prime example of not letting anything stop you doing sport.

(Figure 7. Kate, photo journal. Text reads: 'It's about movement and being spirited to do things and not to give up and not be bothered. I don't think that your disability is an excuse and the Paralympics is a prime example of not letting anything stop you do sport.)

The point in highlighting the similarity between Kate and Mark's visual and oral narrative and that found in contemporary approaches to youth transitions, is not to criticise them, or present them as dupes to this broader imaginary. Instead it is to acknowledge that because they draw from wider circulating narratives of what kinds of body can be valued, they remain, as we all do, within disciplinary dynamics. Kate and Mark display what Gill et al. call the contemporary *'grammar of individualism'* (original emphasis 2005: 57) young people must respond to. This is understandable, it opens up the possibility that their hard work will be recognised by others, that they will be seen as good citizens. As such the way they choose to display their bodies says as much about the remaining restrictions within our imaginaries for what bodies can be and still be celebrated, as it points to their individual capacity as young people to purposively speak to their lives. The visual and textual scripts we all work with to present ourselves to others, in society and in a research project, work with existing narratives of intelligibility. Exploring how such narratives influence what people say of themselves and others, is an important rationale for drawing creative visual approaches in to the research toolkit.

Concluding Remarks

Even if the visual narratives the participants created can be thought of as compromised by being embedded in contemporary celebrations of individual independence, there is still a political expansion in the imaginaries they opened up. Disability was present in their

26

displays and how they wanted to be seen (Kate did not mind if people saw past leaning as a photographic pose to instead recognise her as disabled: 'because that's me you know').

They looked to the future and thought a life of successful participation in society was possible as a disabled person. The young people's visual testimony of their lives asks for recognition. In doing so they are able to draw from narratives of disability that are present in the social realm, which offer possibilities of recognition without having to either overcome disability or place it in the background. That such narratives exist implies some expansion of the scopic regimes associated with both disability and a normal/valued life.

The young people are knowledgeable subjects, aware that various aspects of their subject position and broader dynamics of what and how people see, mean that what they request is not something they can control. The regimes of seeing they are embedded within remain significant barriers to the counter narratives they produce for others to recognise them through. They also do not fully escape dominant visual regimes that produce hierarchies of acceptable and unacceptable bodies in the echoes of such regimes found in their narratives. They are not full 'auteurs' capable of constructing a vision of themselves that through discussion with them we can appreciate they are the authors of. However, this is OK, it does not reflect a questioning of their capacities as disabled young people. Instead it reflects an appreciation of the social dynamics embedded in any articulation of the self and its broader social location. A social reality of image production and consumption disabled and other young people are all too aware of.

Creative methods such as photography therefore have a place in the approaches people use to work with children and young people. This is not because they are 'child friendly', or because they produce more authentic accounts. It is because they can tap into how visual

representations are part of social dynamics of valuing, pitying, othering, celebrating and stigmatising. They both open up such dynamics to consideration, as well as replicating them in the materials they produce. The relationship to age such methods have, is not a developmental one. Instead it is about how they can provide testimony to the particular visual imagery children and young people, whether labelled as disabled or not, live within at different stages in their transition from childhood, into adolescence and through to adulthood.

Anderson D (2009) Adolescent girls' involvement in disability sport: implications for identity development. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 33: 427-449.

Backstrom L (2012) From the freak show to the living room: cultural representations of dwarfism and obesity. *Sociological Forum* 27: 682-707.

Bagnoli A (2011) Making sense of mixed method narratives: young people's identities, life-plans and orientations. In: Heath S and Walker C (eds) *Innovations in youth research.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 77-100.

Beck U and Beck-Gernsheim E (2001) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences,* London: Sage.

Belin R (2005) Photo-eliciation and the agricultural landscape: "seeing" and "telling" about farming, community and place. *Visual Studies* 20: 56-68.

Bynner JM (2005) Rethinking the youth phase of the life-course: The case for emerging adulthood? *Journal of Youth Studies* 8: 367-384.

Capello M (2005) Photo interviews: eliciting data through conversations with children. *Field Methods* 17: 170-182.

Corsaro WA (2005) *The Sociology of Childhood,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Craton L (2009) *The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th Century Fiction,* Amherst, NY: Cambria Press.

Darbyshire P, MacDougall C and Schiller W (2005) Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more? *Qualitative Research* 5: 417-436.

Davis F (1961) Deviance disavowal: The management of strained interaction by the visually handicapped. *Social Problems* 19:120-32

Drew S and Guillemin M (2014) From photographs to findings: visual meaning-making and interpretive engagement in the analysis of participant-generated images. *Visual Studies* 29: 54-67.

Einarsdottir J (2005) Playschool in pictures: children's photographs as a research method. *Early Child Development and Care* 175: 523-541.

Faulstich Orellana M (1999) Space and place in an urban landscape: learning from children's views of their social worlds. *Visual Sociology* 14: 73-89.

Gallacher L-A and Gallagher M (2008) Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through 'participatory methods'. *Childhood* 15: 499-516.

Gallagher M (2009) Rethinking participatory methods in children's geographies. In: van Blerk L and Kesby M (eds) *Doing Children's Geographies: Methodological Issues in Research with Young People.* London: Routledge, 84-97.

Garland-Thomson R (2006) Ways of staring. *Journal of Visual Culture* 5: 173-192.

Gibson BE, Bhavnita M, Smith B, et al (2013) The integrated use of audio diaries, photography, and interviews with research with disabled young men. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 12: 383-402.

Gill R, Henwood K and McLean C (2005) Body projects and the regulation of normative masculinity. *Body & Society* 11: 37-62.

Goffman E (1968) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, London: Penguin Books.

Hall T, Coffey A and Williamson H (1999) Self, space and place: youth identities and citizenship. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 20: 501-513.

Harrison B (2002) Photographic visions and narrative inquiry. *Narrative Inquiry* 12: 87-111.

Hunleth J (2011) Beyond on or with: questioning power dynamics and knowledge production in 'child-oriented' research methodology. *Childhood-a Global Journal of Child Research* 18: 81-93.

James A (2007) Giving voice to children's voices: Practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *American Anthropologist* 109: 261-272

Komulainen S (2007) The ambiguity of the child's 'voice' in social research. *Chidhood* 14(1): 11-28.

Lomax H, Fink J, Singh N, et al (2011) The politics of performance: methodological challenges of researching children's experiences of childhood through the lens of participatory photography. *The International Journal of Social Research Methdology* 14: 231-243.

Luttrell W (2010) 'A camera is a big responibility': a lens analysing children's visual voices. *Visual Studies* 25: 224-237.

Mannay D (2010) Making the familiar strange: can visual research methods render the familiar setting more perceptible? *Qualitative Research* 10: 91-111.

McLaughlin J (2017) The medical reshaping of disabled bodies as a response to stigma and a route to normality. *Medical Humanities* 43:244–250.

McLaughlin J and Coleman-Fountain E (2014) The unfinished body: The medical and social reshaping of disabled young bodies. *Social Science and Medicine* 120 (November) 76–84**.**

Metz C (1977) *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema,* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Moreno Figueroa MG (2008) Looking emotionally: photography, racism and intimacy in research. *History of the Human Sciences* 21: 68-85.

Osten P (2010) Photographing disabled chidlren in Imperial and Weimar Germany *Cultural & Social History* 7: 511-531.

Prout A (2000) Children's participation: control and self-realisation in British late modernity. *Children & Society* 14: 304-315.

Punch S (2002) Research with children: the same or different from research with adults? *Childhood* 9: 321-341.

Rich M and Chalfen R (1999) Showing and telling asthma: children teaching physicians with visual narrative. *Visual Sociology* 14: 51-71.

Scully J L (2010) Hidden Labor: Disabled/Nondisabled Encounters, Agency and Autonomy. *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 3: 25-42.

Shaw A (2003) Interpreting images: diagnostic skill in the genetics clinic. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 9: 39-55.

Shildrick M (1999) The body which is not one: dealing with differences. *Body & Society* 5: 77-92.

Shildrick M (2012) Critical Disability Studies: Rethinking the conventions for the age of postmodernity. in Watson N, Roulstone A and Thomas C (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, London: Routledge, 30-41

Sociological Research Online (2012) Special Issue 'Use of Visual Methods in Social Research'. *Sociological Research Online* 17:

http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/11/contents.html

Spyrou S. (2011) The limits of Children's Voices: from authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood* 18(2): 151-165.

Stiker H-J (2000) *A History of Disability,* Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Sutherland H and Young A (2014) Research with deaf Ccildren and not on them: a study of

method and process. *Children & Society* 28: 366-379.

Sweetman P (2009) Revealing habitus, illuminating practice Bourdieu, photography and

visual methods. *Sociological Review* 57: 491-511.

Wiles R, Coffey A, Robinson J, et al (2012) Anonymisation and visual images: issues of

respect, 'voice' and protection. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*

15: 41-53.