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Self-Portraits for Social Change: Audience Response to a Photovoice Exhibition by Women with Disability

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Abstract

Negative attitudes about and behaviours towards women with disability are harmful and exclusionary, contributing to poorer health, income, educational, and employment outcomes. Our study focused on what audiences learnt, felt, and did (what changed) after viewing self-portraits and stories by women with disability. We questioned whether a public exhibition of their artworks, created through photovoice methodology, could be an effective platform to provoke social change and increase inclusion for people with disability. We collected audience response to our exhibition to address a research gap and to provide an example for other photovoice researchers. We employed interpretive thematic analysis through a generic social processes framework to interrogate responses. Our findings indicate that audiences learnt as much about themselves and their views of disability as they did about the women photographers. The audience described feelings of empathic engagement. They also expressed an unsettling between previously held assumptions around disability and new perspectives gained through the exhibition. Audiences changed how they view women with disability by engaging with the underlying messages of equality in the self-portraits and stories. Audiences thought the exhibition would change other people's views, too, indicating a pathway to greater inclusion for people with disability.

Keywords

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Self-Portraits for Social Change: Audience Response to a Photovoice Exhibition by Women with Disability

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Negative attitudes about and behaviours towards women with disability are harmful and exclusionary, contributing to poorer health, income, educational, and employment outcomes. Our study focused on what audiences learnt, felt, and did (what changed) after viewing self-portraits and stories by women with disability. We questioned whether a public exhibition of their artworks, created through photovoice methodology, could be an effective platform to provoke social change and increase inclusion for people with disability. We collected audience response to our exhibition to address a research gap and to provide an example for other photovoice researchers. We employed interpretive thematic analysis through a generic social processes framework to interrogate responses. Our findings indicate that audiences learnt as much about themselves and their views of disability as they did about the women photographers. The audience described feelings of empathic engagement. They also expressed an unsettling between previously held assumptions around disability and new perspectives gained through the exhibition. Audiences changed how they view women with disability by engaging with the underlying messages of equality in the self-portraits and stories. Audiences thought the exhibition would change other people's views, too, indicating a pathway to greater inclusion for people with disability.

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Introduction

If a work of art can instigate a realization or recognition of reality that was not happening otherwise, it follows that a work of art could potentially initiate change. It further follows that the art exchange, because it necessarily happens in a larger context, could be a matter of significant consequence. (Franks, 2006, pp. 79-80)

Franks (2006) reflects upon the potential of art to initiate change, echoing the underlying premise of photovoice projects: to share embodied expertise and knowledge through photography to effect change (Pain, 2012; Wang et al., 1996). Common to all photovoice projects is the possibility of change for the photographers, but not all photovoice projects explore a public presentation of their findings to encourage social discourse and action.

So, how are audiences impacted when photovoice research is shared through a public exhibition?

Objectives

In this paper, we focus on how people responded to a photovoice exhibition, entitled “Through My Eyes: Photographic Stories on Women’s Disability Identity.” After viewing these self-portraits and accompanying stories, audiences offered feedback on their own understanding of women’s disability experience. We sought meaning from their responses to gauge impact around social change and increased inclusion. To accomplish this, we created evaluation tools to record and measure audience engagement and response to the underlying messages delivered through self-portraits and accompanying stories. We documented this process in detail to act as an example that can be adapted and applied across many fields to reveal how opinions, attitudes, feelings, and responses might indicate paths for social change, addressing a gap in the literature. In addition, we assessed impact and potential change through analysing responses collected from people who viewed the “Through My Eyes” photovoice exhibition, either in person or online, or participated in an interactive webinar. We also considered impact through the reflections, opinions, and reactions of key stakeholders and the research team.

Research Questions

We pose the following research questions to enhance clarity around our thought processes and provide structure in this paper:

1. How do viewers describe their experience of a photovoice exhibition and webinar about women and disability?
2. How does this experience change the way viewers think and feel about disability?
3. In what ways does this knowledge change negative assumptions about women with disability, leading to social change?

We begin this paper by presenting a brief overview of photovoice as participatory action research, discuss stakeholder involvement and offer some findings from other recent disability photovoice projects (our research area). Following this, we describe our research design and discuss ethical issues associated with audience and viewer engagement. We present our analysis and findings from “Through My Eyes,” theorising and offering implications for broader applicability. This section is organised into three parts, each of which directly addresses the above research questions. Last, we reflect upon the limitations of our process and findings and draw conclusions.

Background

The arts and arts-based research can play a significant role in evoking, provoking, and contributing to greater understanding of important health and social issues. Intimate, emotional, and embodied revelations by artists, shared on a broader scale through exhibitions, can engage audiences to think more deeply about problematic social issues, like systemic exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination (Dodd et al., 2010). Long-held negative attitudes that associate disability with disease and disorder have created a culture of difference that dehumanises people with disability, leading to discriminatory and exclusionary practices

(Frohmader, 2019; World Bank, 2013). Potentially, the arts and arts-based research can play a role in shifting attitudes and perceptions of disability difference to counter prejudice and promote equality (Sandell & Nightingale, 2012). However, to be most effective, people with disability should be involved in the arts-based process (Dodd et al., 2010). It is through this inclusive lens that participatory photographic research projects, like photovoice, continue to hold promise of provoking change.

The potential for impact through photovoice stems not only from the creative, generative process at the individual level, but also from the method's structure that involves engaging stakeholders in the broader community to ignite change (Fairey, 2018). Developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), the photovoice method identified change or social action as a core component of empowerment through the photography process. The process reflects a feminist, collaborative, and inclusive approach to research, based on a "nothing about us without us" ethos to foster empowerment and promote social inclusion (Charlton, 1998; Wang et al., 1996).

In a review of visual research methods, Helen Pain (2012) found that, as a method, photovoice was chosen over other visual approaches because of its capacity to effect change by demonstrating community needs. Surprisingly though, there is little literature around this performative aspect of photovoice: if and how research findings impact audiences, leading to change (Latz, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017). This gap in practice signalled a need for greater documentation evaluating the impact of photovoice on audiences, as well as practical action.

Through the photovoice method, volunteers, or research participants, usually from marginalised communities, take photos to document, share, and discuss a specific issue through the medium of photography as it relates to them to effect change. As a method it is increasing in use as a process of enquiry into social, political, health, and economic issues that impact marginalised communities (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Han & Oliffe, 2016). Participants are co-researchers (our preferred term) as through lived embodied experience, they guide and influence the study (Bergold & Thomas, 2012).

Photovoice is employed in many research fields, including disability, and has been proven to be effective in generating rich, evocative data that identify and convey issues relevant to stakeholders (Dassah et al., 2017; Macdonald et al., 2019). For the founders of photovoice, presenting photographs with narratives to inform policymakers and the broader society remains a key element and action in the photovoice method, although not all photovoice projects include that element (Latz, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1996).

In a review of disability photovoice studies, Macdonald et al. (2019) determined that the field is still emerging with significant gaps in knowledge. Only a handful of studies have examined gender and disability and they focus on sexuality (O'Shea & Frawley, 2020; Payne et al., 2016; Rooney, 2018), sexual violence (Beckwith, 2019), motherhood and learning (Booth & Booth, 2003) and girls' engagement (Nguyen et al., 2015), among others. Indeed, even outside of the research setting, photographic representations of women with disability remain primarily absent in art and everyday life (Frohmader, 2019; Kallio-Tavin, 2020; Lehrer, 2020). In this sense, contemporary photography practice creates a world in which disability barely exists. This study counters this absence with a presence of meaningful self-portraiture by women photographers with disability that engages audiences to reflect upon this absence/presence. The knowledge translation underpinnings of this project consider our desire to explore both knowledge creation of disability self-portraits (Macdonald, Dew et al., 2021; Macdonald, Van Gijn-Grosvenor et al., 2021) and dissemination of this knowledge to audiences.

Subjectivity

Our experiences and subjectivities as researchers and authors inform this work. The genesis of this study began several years ago. Before embarking on her doctoral research, the first author created several large scale and long-term photographic projects to engage audiences on subject matter that are vital to the wellbeing of the community. These experiences enhanced her awareness of the power of photography to enrich public discourse about critical social issues. However, these exhibitions were never assessed for impact beyond anecdotal feedback or rigorously evaluated for their effectiveness as platforms for social change.

Each author contributed substantially to this body of work in a myriad of ways. The first author is a professional photographer and doctoral candidate, the second author is a scholar of disability and knowledge translation, the third author is an expert in disability policy and inclusive research and the fourth author is a mental health researcher and an expert in arts-based knowledge translation. All authors took part in the data collection process, analysis, and the writing of this paper.

Stakeholder/Audience Engagement and Impact

In *The Photovoice Manual*, Blackman and Fairey (n.d.) defined stakeholders as people, organisations, and groups who have a vested interest in the project (research team, staff, co-researchers, the public, politicians, project funders, and media). After creating, discussing, and analysing photographs, co-researchers identify ideal stakeholder(s) or audience(s) for their photographs and accompanying narratives. This dissemination of knowledge can take place through presentations, academic papers, books, exhibitions, newspaper interviews, videos comprised of photos and narratives, and other media (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Given photovoice's key component of change/action, dissemination, in this context, should be viewed not as an endpoint or as one-way communication event, but as a further site of enquiry to determine impact (Latz, 2017). Our chosen dissemination methods to engage audiences were through exhibitions (both online and in a community space) and a webinar ensuring that our evaluation tools were accessible and contactless, because of the current COVID-19 global pandemic. In addition, we used these opportunities to survey and analyse audience response to the exhibition/webinar.

Responses to Other Disability Photovoice Exhibitions

In 2018, we undertook a review of the use of photovoice in disability research and found 30 studies that met our criteria: people with disability were the photographers and co-researchers (Macdonald et al., 2019). Of these studies, about two-thirds (19/30) performed some type of outreach event with their photovoice findings, of which 12 hosted an exhibition. Among these 12 studies, only two assessed and documented audience response: one through verbal comments from attendees (Maratos et al., 2016) and the other more formally through an exit survey at their exhibition (Schleien et al., 2013). The latter concluded that attendees said they had a greater awareness of the issues raised, believed the community could address these issues, but sensed a disconnect with their own capacity to tackle these issues. The authors noted that most respondents to the survey were family and friends of the co-researchers, thus limiting impact findings. Overall, this relatively rare practice of evaluating the impact of the exhibition (2 out of 12 studies) signalled a critical gap and became a driving factor in this step of our research project.

Outreach and engagement through the arts, like a photovoice exhibition, might not in itself be considered impact, but it is a pathway to influence, in that it can provide opportunities

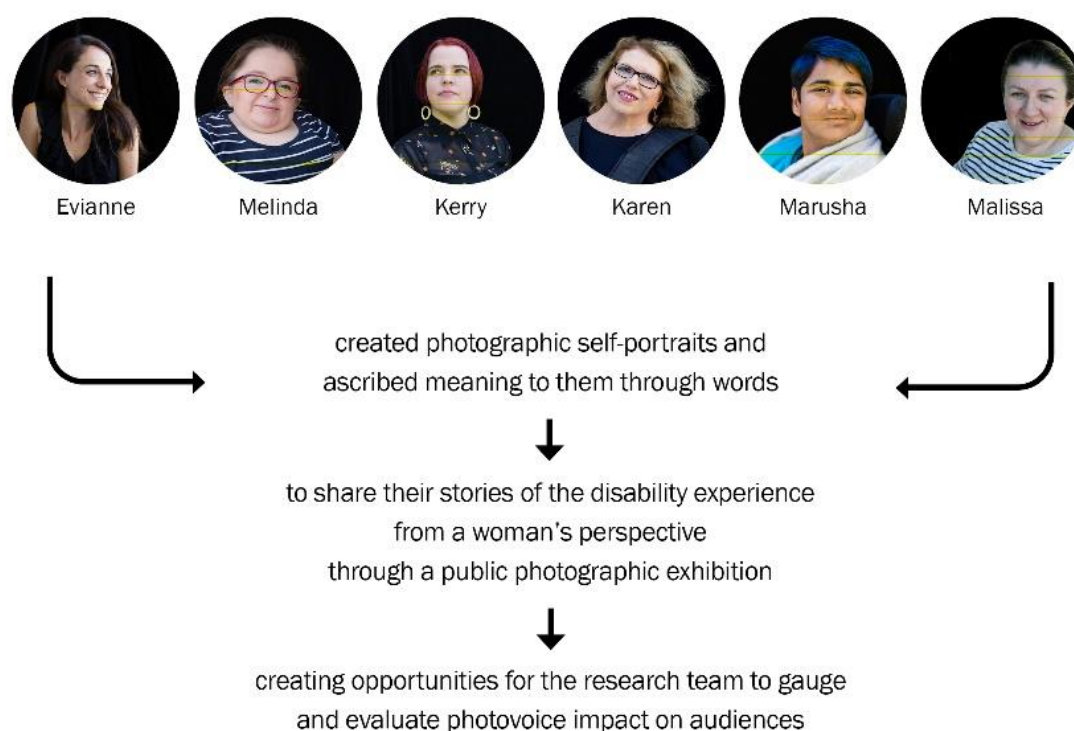
to use research to evoke and measure response. Evaluating any response photovoice may have on the broader community plays an important role in research. A diversity of access needs of potential evaluation participants should be considered when crafting evaluation tools. Indeed, the underlying premise of photovoice focuses on marginalised voices and evaluation techniques should take this principle into consideration too (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Overview of our Photovoice Research

In our study, six women with physical disability (co-researchers) photographed aspects of their identity through the photovoice method to challenge attitudes and barriers that may contribute to isolating women with physical impairment (see Figure 1). The co-researchers chose to be identified and agreed to the publication of their images.

Figure 1

Overview of Co-Researchers and Research Objectives



Three co-researchers created their self-portraits using tripods, timers, and mirrors, while the other three required the assistance of a professional photographer (the first author) or family member to take their photos using a digital camera. For the latter, the co-researchers specified how they wanted to be portrayed so that artistic expression, intellectual property, moral rights, and copyright remained with them, regardless of who pressed the shutter button. Co-researchers discussed and agreed to:

- use digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras to document their identity through a feminist perspective.
- investigate four topics: the body and appearance, inclusion/exclusion, sexuality, and power imbalances.

- share and discuss their photographs at five meetings over three months.
- participate in video interviews that could be shared publicly if they consented.
- write text to accompany their photographs, ascribing meaning (potentially affecting interpretation), to be displayed at a group exhibition.
- identify a target exhibition audience—who they wanted the findings to reach.

A full description of this stage of the research is beyond the scope of this paper and is documented in our methods protocol paper (Macdonald et al., 2020) and analysis papers (Macdonald, Dew et al., 2021; Macdonald, Van Gijn-Grosvenor et al., 2021). The project began with the intention of hosting a public exhibition of the results, promoting our findings outside the research setting and collecting evaluation data through an exhibition. The co-researchers said that the exclusionary barriers they continue to encounter stem from misperceptions and assumptions about women with disability. They agreed on a target audience for their artworks, deciding that a public community exhibition would be the most effective to bring about the social change they were seeking. Therefore, we partnered with a local council and library to host and promote the exhibition to attract a range of visitors. The library exhibition space created an opportunity to gather audience responses to the exhibition in one setting. This plan, however, was developed before the current global pandemic and therefore needed to be altered to accommodate social distancing safety measures. We simplified our collection methods and moved them from in person to online or over the phone. We also changed the launch (and our main data collection point) to an online interactive webinar featuring two co-researchers presenting and discussing their artwork.

Figure 2

Co-researchers and Guests at a Private Viewing of “Through My Eyes” Photographic Exhibition. Photo credit: Diane Macdonald 2020.



The exhibition was displayed in two ways. It was held at a community library that implemented a strict COVID-19 pandemic safety plan (October 2020 to January 2021, see

Figure 2). We also created an online exhibition (www.throughmyeyes.photography) to accommodate viewers who could not or chose not to attend the physical exhibition. The online exhibition is also an accompanying piece to this paper.

Research Design and Methodology

It is useful to understand the underlying conceptual frameworks that helped us shape and organise this study to meet our aim of research impact through greater inclusion for women with disability. This study focuses on an in-depth examination of individual responses to “Through my eyes,” a photovoice exhibition. Grounded theory provides an overarching integrative structure to link our study’s purpose, research questions, design, and data collection procedures with analysis and reporting. The flexible and inductive qualities of grounded theory reflect the exploratory research approach that guided the arts-based photovoice research as well as the analysis of the dynamic social processes that took place at a photovoice exhibition (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory techniques generate a conceptual framework of the social process of experiencing a photovoice exhibition by bridging theory with practice. Interpretive thematic analysis of our data seeks to provide a grounded theory for disability researchers and practitioners interested in social change and greater inclusion. Our goal was combining interpretive thematic analysis through a generic social processes framework so that findings that can be applied across different social contexts (Charmaz, 2014).

Design

We designed mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) tools to capture audience and stakeholder response to the “Through My Eyes” exhibition to gain knowledge and understanding of their experience. For clarity, the term “audience” refers to people who viewed the physical exhibition, the term “viewers” refer to people who saw the exhibition online and/or webinar, and the term “stakeholders” includes our co-researchers and funding partners, who had the most at stake in the exhibition. We collected responses from:

- Audience members and online viewers who experienced the exhibition/webinar, focusing on what they feel, learn, and do before, during, and after they experience the exhibition/webinar.
- Co-researchers and funding partners to understand their experience of the exhibition (stakeholders).
- Academic research team members (the authors) to enhance methodologic consistency.

There are many ways to obtain audience response in an exhibition setting (listed in order of most employed): interviews, observation, survey/questionnaire, focus group, artefact review, journals, recorded conversations, web analytics, and participant data (Grack-Nelson & Cohn, 2015). Limited by resources, we chose to evaluate the exhibition through the following four data collection methods: questionnaire, interview, chat room recorded text/conversations, and journals.

In a small body of literature, researchers have begun to consider the most effective ways of conceptualising the impact of arts-based research. For our topic of inclusion through photovoice, we found Lafrenière and Cox’s (2012, p. 331) framework to be insightful for assessing the impact of arts-based works because we were interested in understanding audience response to the following questions:

- Emotions/feelings: Does the arts-based work generate emotions and/or feelings?
- Understanding: Does the artistic work help the reader/audience notice, understand and appraise the issues at stake?
- Response: Does the artwork generate internal dialogue or prompt interpersonal discussion so that it furthers engagement and response?
- Change: Does the artwork move the audience to change in salient ways?

This framework expands upon the meaning of impact in arts-based research, it considers the importance of engaging audiences, and it emphasises how viewing images can be deeply affecting (Mitchell et al., 2018). Combining these elements into our survey tools laid a foundation for assessing impact and potential change.

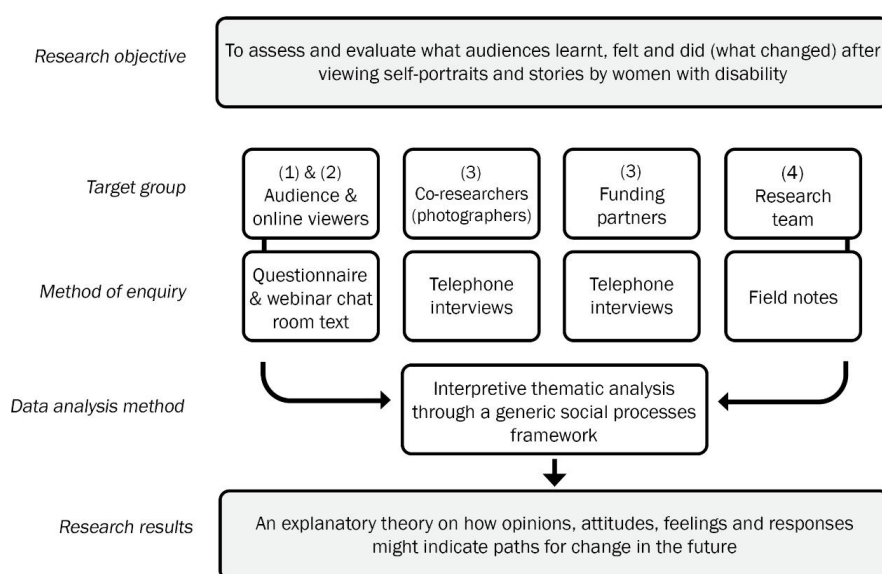
Recruitment of Participants

Research staff and stakeholders were contacted through a brief email message to take part. Potential “audience” participants were alerted to the evaluation research via a poster at the exhibition. The poster displayed a Quick Response (QR) code that participants could photograph from their mobile phone for a fast and easy link to the questionnaire, should they choose to participate. For online “viewers,” the questionnaire was prominently displayed at the bottom of the exhibition website page. In addition, webinar attendees were sent a link to the questionnaire immediately following the webinar and received a post-event email with a link to the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Four strategies were used to access response directly from audiences, online viewers, stakeholders, and the research team about “Through My Eyes” exhibition, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Evaluation Model



Audience and Online Viewer Questionnaire

The audience questionnaire included basic (non-identifiable) demographic questions, Likert-style questions on impact and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions related to the individual's experience of the exhibition using Lafrenière and Cox's (2012) performative criteria framework (see Appendix A). To administer the questionnaire and collate the results, we used our university approved *Qualtrics* online survey software as it includes a tool that checks questionnaires for accessibility requirements. As an aid to people with vision impairment, the questionnaire began by stating the number of questions and anticipated completion time (Kaczmarek & Wolff, 2007). In addition, *Qualtrics* software presents data and questions in an accessible and user-friendly manner for screen readers and other devices.

Online Webinar Chat Room Text

As part of our promotion strategy to raise awareness and attract exhibition viewers online, we hosted an interactive webinar, with co-researchers as speakers. The speakers engaged viewers by asking questions around interpretation and encouraged viewers to share their thoughts through an online chat room linked to the webinar. The chat room was monitored for any offensive remarks and was recorded for later analysis.

Co-Researchers and Funding Partner Interviews

In addition to audience response, our co-researchers (photographers) and funding partners have vested interests in an impactful exhibition. The first author conducted brief telephone interviews within a few days of the online webinar with members of each group. She asked open-ended questions including audience engagement, feedback received, and whether their expectations for greater inclusion were met. Answers were recorded by the first author through written notes.

Researchers' Reflexive Journaling

The academic researchers also recorded their thoughts, feelings, interpretations of viewer behaviour immediately after the exhibition and webinar to add insight into findings, using reflexive journals.

Ethical Concerns and Consent

Approval for this research was granted by University of New South Wales' Human Research Ethics Committee in two stages. First, we obtained ethics approval for co-researchers to engage in photovoice enquiry on disability identity (reference HC180845). Our ethical concerns focused on the well-being of the women throughout the research process, upholding and respecting their rights as copyright holders, and ensuring their voice was presented in a way that remained true to their intent, among other things. Our second successful ethics application (reference HC200185) focused on audience, viewer, and stakeholder engagement with "Through My Eyes" through a variety of platforms (online, webinar, and local exhibition).

Questionnaire, Interviews, and Journals

Reflective of our participatory approach, an informed consent process, self-determination, and choice were central to our data collection (Ponic & Jategaonkar, 2012).

Given the expressed aim and objectives of our project, and the focus of the questionnaire/interviews, the risks were considered low, and the contact details of appropriate well-being services were provided on a consent poster (audience), an online link (viewers), or emailed directly (stakeholders).

Interactive Webinar and Chat Room

Before, during and after the interactive webinar, the potential for risk to co-researchers, stakeholders, and staff may have included unexpected, patronising, or hateful responses. We devised a response plan of actions to reduce the risk of harm should offensive behaviour occur:

- Before and after webinar: A list of appropriate wellbeing services were emailed to participants to be followed-up as the situation warranted. No offensive behaviour was noted.
- During webinar: An expert in disability studies and experienced chat room host (author AD) monitored the chat room for offensive behaviour. Gross offenders would be removed from the chat room immediately. Again, no offensive behaviour was noted.

Analysis

The aesthetic and participatory experience of a photography exhibition can increase empathetic understanding for audiences, providing a pathway to social change (Franks, 2006; Sandell & Nightingale, 2012). We generated multiple sets of research data including questionnaire data, interviews, chat room entries, and journals. These datasets, when merged, enabled us to develop a rich interrogation of how people responded to photovoice research findings and to understand if social change happened.

Grounded Theory and Interpretive Thematic Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory underpinned our planning, practice, research, and analysis to help us better understand the social dynamics of how people interact with a photo exhibition about women and disability. We chose methods that were inductive, iterative, evolutionary, and comparative methods (Charmaz, 2014). All qualitative responses from the questionnaire, chat room, journals, and interviews were coded line-by-line by the first author using NVivo12™ (software that supports qualitative analysis). From there we employed Braun and Clarke's (2013) interpretive thematic analysis to guide our interrogation of the data. Results were reviewed, discussed and refined through consultation among the authors (see Table 1).

We sought to understand impact through analysing what respondents wrote or said after viewing the photovoice research on disability. We subjected data to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. We focused not only on if respondents said change occurred or not, but also *how* they described what they learnt, felt, and did. The challenge of comparing their qualitative data, to connect their words and phrases in a meaningful, theorised manner, required a framework beyond our initial interpretive thematic analysis. We needed a tool that would help us break apart respondents' feedback into different phases to compare them across fields and later, to develop theory around audiences and social change (Puddephatt & McLuhan, 2019). We determined that examining human group life through a generic and comparative social processes framework would enable us to focus on changes that occurred by viewing "Through My Eyes."

Table 1

Braun and Clarke's (2013) Six Phases of Interpretive Thematic Analysis, with Prus' (1987) Generic Social Processes as a Framework as Applied to our Research

Phase 1	Repeated and prolonged engagement with the data Read and re-read all forms of data (questionnaire, interview, chat room recorded text/conversations, and journals), wrote reflections and thoughts in OneNote. Input all data into qualitative software NVivo12 for Phase 2.
Phase 2	Generated initial codes Used initial coding to find phrases, line by line, that stood out as evocative, and found repetitive patterns of action and thoughts, looked for consistencies, recorded codes, and created coding framework. Created word clouds through NVivo12 for each dataset for further insight. Held team meetings every other week to discuss progress and find insight.
Phase 3	Searched for themes Summarised initial findings for each dataset (questionnaire, interview, chat room recorded text/conversations, and journals) into basic themes of self-awareness, understandings of disability, empathy, awareness, self-reflection, power(ful), agency, intense, uncomfortable, connection, and no effect.
Phase 4	Reviewed themes and subthemes After team consultation of themes constructed in phase 3, we examined themes through Prus' (1987) Generic Social Processes (GSP) framework to focus on changes that occurred because of "Through My Eyes" and construct themes of change.
Phase 5	Defined and named themes Three overarching GSP identified: acquiring knowledge, achieving identity, and taking action. "Taking action" was further separated into subgroups by topic of type of change and according to audience experience of disability to interrogate differences between audience subgroups.
Phase 6	Produced report Weaved together data, analysis, connections to scholarly literature to answer research questions and develop theory around audiences and social change, with extracts from data as evidence of key elements. Kept language and concepts consistent throughout.

Generic Social Processes

Robert Prus' (1987, 2010) framework assisted our examination of how people knowingly and intentionally contend with community life and bigger issues, like those raised through our photovoice project. Prus' (1987) identified sets of generic social processes (GSP) that frame the way individuals and groups interact and form relationships in everyday social phenomena. We used GSP as a tool and framework to engage with our datasets in a broader, trans-contextual way. GSP enhanced our analytical process by delineating findings to isolate and explore what interested audiences/viewers, how they interacted and interpreted the images and words in front of them. GSP placed emphasis on the "doing" of human group life to develop conceptually rich findings (Prus, 2010). They are also implicated in most significant social change, which speaks directly to our research questions (Puddephatt & McLuhan, 2019). By consolidating our results into GSP, we could reflect upon more universal concepts from the data, beyond our research project, to contribute to broader implications for photovoice research impact for greater applicability.

Findings

In determining impact, our richest source of data came from the questionnaire and therefore, we analysed this dataset first. Important to our inclusive research ethos, feedback

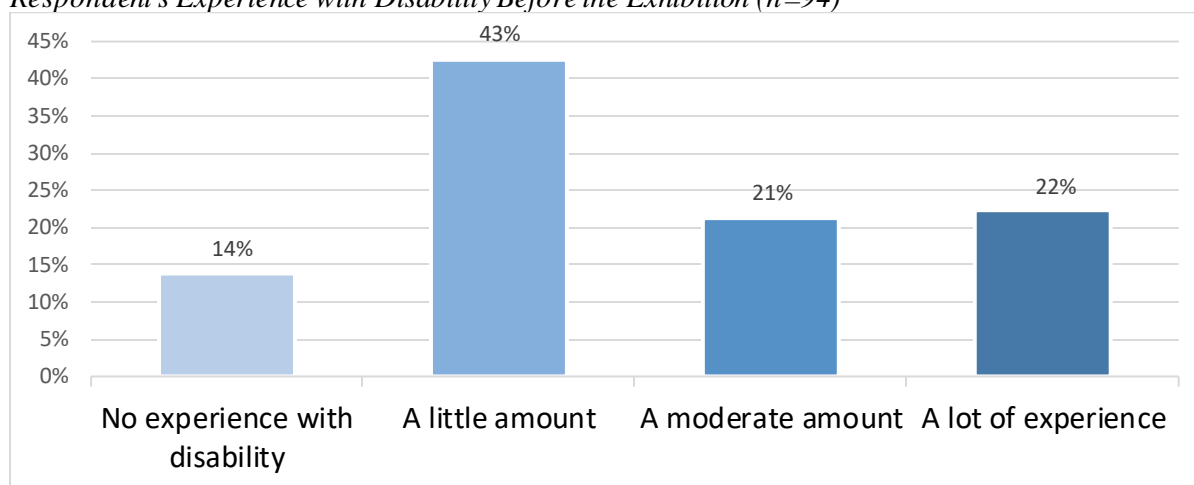
and data from co-researchers and funders were also analysed and added, along with the authors' reflexive journals.

Demographic Characteristics

We received 103 responses to the questionnaire, of which 94 had partially or fully completed fields and were included in our analytic process. Most responders identified as female (81%) and not having a disability (74%). However, most people (86%) described themselves as having some experience of disability: working, caring, or living with people with disability and/or having a disability (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Respondent's Experience with Disability Before the Exhibition (n=94)



Respondents offered rich data by answering five open-ended questions about their thoughts and feelings whilst interacting with the exhibition/webinar to help us understand impact. We applied Prus' (1987) GSP framework to our initial, thematically analysed findings. We found a pattern in their responses that spoke of:

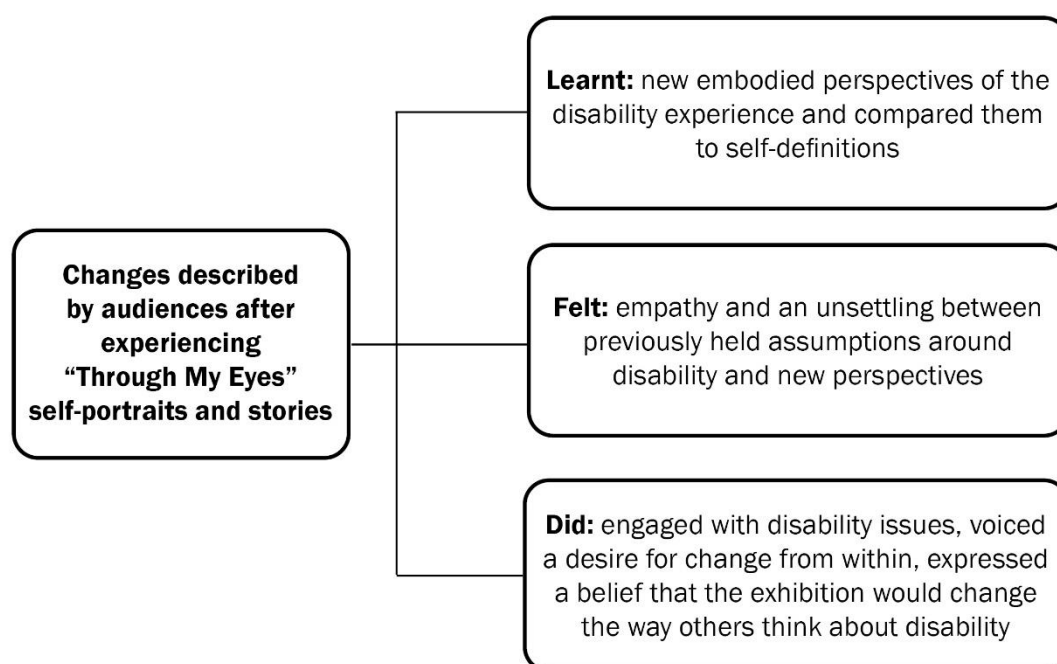
- (a) acquiring perspectives (what was learnt),
- (b) achieving identity (what was felt), and
- (c) taking action (what was done)

to reveal their interactions with "Through My Eyes" exhibition, as shown in Figure 5.

Prus (1987) divided each GSP into many subprocesses to guide researchers through applying his framework, an aid we found particularly useful when interrogating data through the two closely linked GSPs: acquiring knowledge and achieving identity (see Table 2). In our analysis breakdown below, we highlight subprocesses used to identify quotes and reinforce our findings. We received over 300 quotes to interrogate from which we selected meaningful and representational excerpts to highlight what audiences/viewers learnt, felt, and did.

Figure 5

What Audiences/Viewers Learnt, Felt, and Did After Viewing the Exhibition/Webinar

**Table 2**

Prus' (1987, pp. 274-275) GSPs: *Acquiring Knowledge* and *Achieving Identity* and their Subprocesses

<p>Acquiring perspectives provides the substantive content for association</p> <p>Prus' subprocesses listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receiving definitions of objects from others • developing images of objects • learning (cultural) patterns of objects • encountering inconsistencies • applying perspectives • resolving dilemmas • improvising on existing perspectives • promoting perspectives to others 	<p>Achieving identity is contingent on one's self-reflectivity</p> <p>Prus' subprocesses listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encountering definitions of self from others • attributing qualities to self • comparing incoming definitions of self • resisting unwanted identity imputations • selectively conveying information about self to others • gleaning information about others • assigning identities to others • promoting specific identities of others • encountering resistance from others • reassessing identities imputed to others
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Acquiring Knowledge: What Audiences/Viewers Learnt from “Through My Eyes”

Respondents described how they related to self-portraits of disability and the meanings they formed about disability, about women, and/or perspectives different from their own. We have listed respondent’s quotes connected to the following acquiring perspectives subprocesses (Prus, 1987) in bold type (see Table 3).

Table 3

Respondent's Quotes on Acquiring Knowledge through Self-Portraits and Stories

Receiving definitions from others
<i>These women became more relatable, they were seen as deeper, more complex people and not just looked at with someone with a disability. Someone with hopes, dreams, and an acute awareness of how they are seen by society.</i>
Developing images of others and oneself
<i>It made the disparity between what we see and what is felt by the individuals with disabilities so apparent.</i>
Learning cultural patterns of others
<i>It's a different perspective from what I know, people who belong to an identity have a different way of looking at things than what I know. Even considering how wheelchair users interact with the environment is something I simply do not consider.</i>
Encountering inconsistencies within and across perspectives
<i>Challenge in my concept of beauty—realised that people with disability are people we tend to look away from and have difficulty treating as normal.</i>
Improvising on existing perspectives
<i>I think it gave me more empathy for disabled people and make me more mindful about interacting with a disabled person as I would anyone else.</i>
Promoting or defending perspectives to others
<i>Reminded me to explore the perspective of women with disability in a more active way. Agency for people with disability is a key determinant of inclusion.</i>

Respondents said the women with disability became more “relatable” through a better understanding of what disability means. Respondents could also see the “disparity” between differing perspectives and learnt about the cultural patterns of the other, or “things I do not consider.” In addition, respondents appear to recognise inconsistencies between perspectives (“that people with disability are people we tend to look away from and have difficulty treating as normal”). They also wrote of changing their current perspective to have “more empathy” and promoting disability perspectives to others “in a more active way” indicating sparks of social change.

Achieving Identity: How “Through My Eyes” Changed the Way Audiences Felt

In this section, we organised respondent’s descriptions of their own feelings, views, and thoughts of disability. We can see patterns reflected throughout the following quotes, organised by the following achieving identity subprocesses (Prus, 1987) in bold type (see Table 4).

Table 4*Respondent's Quotes on Achieving Identity through Self-Portraits and Stories*

Encountering definitions of self from others
<i>I was impressed [by] the strength of the participants and then disappointed in myself for the way I find myself othering people with an obvious disability.</i>
Attributing qualities to self (self-definitions)
<i>As a woman I could relate to so much that was said about body image, expectations about intelligence and ability were relatable to me. I felt inspired and connected.</i>
Comparing incoming and self-designed definitions of self
<i>It made me examine my own biases. In terms of how I view people with an obvious disability and how I view the built environment and its accessibility.</i>
Reassessing identities imputed to others
<i>Brought it back into my consciousness, and made me consider the person not the disability, one doesn't often take the time to consider the impact of disability on somebody's life, too busy leading our own lives—so good to step back and make time for this consideration.</i>
Resisting unwanted identity imputations
<i>I smiled a lot and I'm impressed with the strength of the subjects. But I checked myself a couple of times, in case I was feeling pity and smugness, which I would be ashamed of. I think my main thoughts were around how different my life would be if my body was built like these women's bodies—still an incredibly self-centred position to hold.</i>

We arranged our findings into achieving identity GSP to identify the to-and-fro respondents described through encountering, comparing, reassessing, and resisting new self-definitions. Phrases like “I was impressed ... then disappointed,” “made me consider the person not the disability,” and “I smiled a lot ... would be ashamed of” draw attention to an internalised reflection about of who we feel we want to or should be, with who we think we are. We employed a GSP framework to highlight feelings of empathy created by engaging with the photographs and stories, about seeing “the issue from the view of the person experiencing the effects of disability.” Audiences/viewers discovered a connection through both photographs and accompanying words to “recognise fellow complex and complete humans.”

Taking Action: Social Change around Discrimination and Disability

In this section, we analysed change or the hope of change for audiences on a personal level and broader societal level, if expressed. Acting activities included participating in the exhibition and survey, engaging with the topics presented through the exhibition and reflecting about one's own and others' understanding of women's disability experience. We organised our findings and the following quotes, not by generic subprocesses, as above, but by (a) group and subgroup findings by demographics, as well as by (b) topics of personal and broader change.

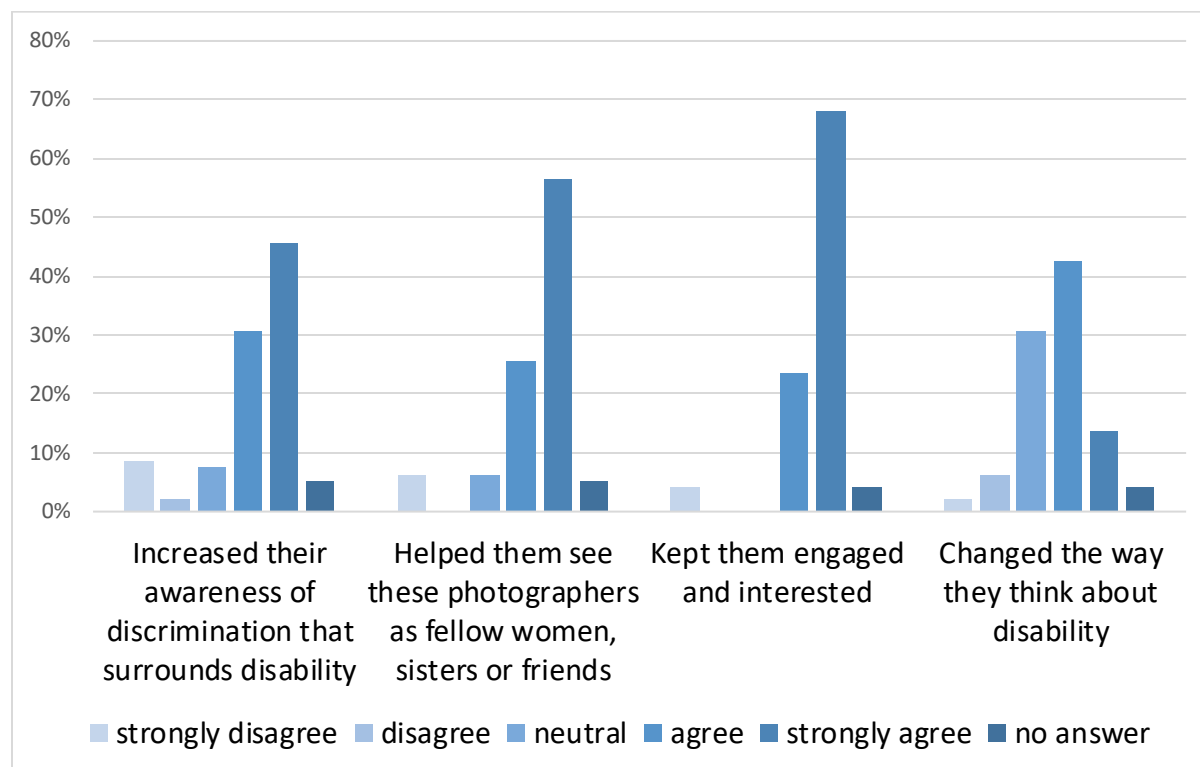
Group and Subgroup Findings by Demographics

We examined data captured from Likert-style questions on engagement, discrimination, and change. Overall, respondents indicated that photovoice research was engaging, increased their awareness of discrimination that surrounds disability, helped them see the photographers

as fellow women, sisters, or friends and that it changed the way they think about disability (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Respondents on Engagement, Discrimination, and Change (n=94)



However, encouraging these overall results might be considered, a deeper interrogation of the qualitative responses revealed a complex interplay between experience of and attitudes to disability. Specifically, different results were found when results were disaggregated according to (a) respondents with disability, (b) respondents as carers/family members of people with disability, and (c) respondents without disability.

Subgroup Findings: People Without Disability. Respondents who strongly/agreed that the exhibition changed the way they think about disability were, not surprisingly, mainly people without disability. A repeated pattern of engagement with the underlying themes of equality was uncovered through some of their responses, including:

Interesting to view people with disabilities not as disabled but as people.
 Because I don't focus on details, many of the photos that I looked at just looked like normal individuals.
 They were interesting photographs, they didn't really highlight the disability, they focused on some aspect of the individual's personality.

This, we believe, is an important finding—that this group engaged with the underlying principles of the project and saw beyond disability into multiple identities for people with disability. Their words above also suggest an unsettling of an expectation built around heavily ingrained notions of disability as difference. They point to an element of surprise, to a

disconnect between an exhibition about disability and exhibition about all peoples' desires, ambitions, frustrations, and accomplishments.

Subgroup Findings: Carers/Family Members of People with Disability. A different subgroup who expressed other thoughts on the topic of change were carers and family members of people with disability. These respondents did not agree that this project changed the way they think about disability, with a mode response of "neutral." However, they articulated the following:

Each photo tells me something about the artist. Women to be admired for who they are.

Pride in their work, their passion and desire to seek [to] change other's views.

I admire the photographer's beauty, bravery, talent, and selflessness.

The above quotes speak of pride and admiration. This subgroup indicated that although they did not feel differently about disability, they found the works engaging and interesting and the artworks increased their awareness of discrimination around disability.

Subgroup Findings: People with Disability. The remaining group, people with disability, offered further complexity around the topic of change. Their responses were positioned in between the previous two groups, with about half strongly agreeing or agreeing that the project changed the way they think about disability:

Just opened up my view even more of how society has shaped what we say is "normal."

Some amazing photos. I feel understood.

It changed how I see myself having a disability. I'm not alone.

Their responses reflect how rarely we see public exhibitions from the perspective of people with disability. Portraits of disability continue to remain largely absent from the public realm, including mass and social media (Frohman, 2019). What we see and do not see shines a torchlight on what our community views as important, worthy, to be included in public discourse, and not forgotten. Their quotes speak poignantly of personal experience of systemic exclusion and social isolation. Seeing portraits of our community that looks like our community is an important step on the road to greater inclusion.

Findings Organised by Topics of Personal and Broader Change

In this section we organised audience responses to address our research question around changing negative assumptions about and misperceptions of women with disability.

Reporting No Change. There were few quotes about no change, which may have been a product of how we worded the survey question. However, of the few, here are two of them:

In all honesty, if I didn't identify as disabled, I would probably have said it changed my perception, but given my lived experience and understanding of the disability spectrum, it was simply preaching to the choir for me.

I've long been aware of the dangers of ableism and the barriers faced by disabled people, so it hasn't changed my perception per se. However, I did realise that I don't think of disabled women in day-to-day settings like bathing their children.

Both quotes express dual thoughts around change. In the first one, a woman articulated that change would have taken place if she was not disabled but did not for her as a woman with disability. The second quote points to a disconnect between public and private disability identities, to a blind spot about the multiple identities in everyone, including people with disability.

Reporting Personal Change. Others, however, wrote about their own personal change:

I hope I change my thinking on disability, learn more, and increase my understanding for the rest of my life.

This was powerful. I consider myself enlightened, yet it still moves me and was thought provoking. It changed my bias.

I used to look at them and feel sorry but now I have no need to feel sorry because they are the same as me.

Speaking of Broader Change. Furthermore, others expressed the power of the exhibition to change on a broader scale:

The photo viewing was a very intense experience; I thought about the ways in which this group of women presented themselves; it was raw and confronting; powerful and beautiful; I thought about the ways in which this series of photographs have the power to change the way people think; change the assumptions they may have; change their behaviours.

It took me into a personal space of those represented, reminding me of the sameness, instead of the difference, of people living with a disability. In that way, it also encouraged me to recognise their agency and potential, or real, power to change perceptions and challenge traditional, somewhat limiting, notions of what it means to both live with a disability and be a human being.

These final two groups describe not only change from within but also speak of the artworks' "power to change perceptions," and challenge the status quo.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that self-portraits and stories produced through the photovoice method and displayed at a public exhibition can create an effective platform to engage audiences and viewers (referred to as audiences from this point onwards) on important social issues. "Through My Eyes" generated a new opportunity for audiences to confront topics of marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion that women with disability continue to experience. Assumptions of difference, as discussed in the introduction, are a driver of systemic exclusion for people with disability. Survey respondents consciously or unconsciously acknowledged underlying biases that contribute to negative attitudes around disability that lead to exclusion (Manning et al., 2016). They also described a negotiation between preconceived notions of disability as difference with new understandings of "now I have no need to feel sorry because they are the same as me."

This shift in attitude hints at the beginnings of social change, of questioning one's own (mis)perceptions of disability. From here we begin to understand how social change happens—through a conscious process that is negotiated in a social context (Puddephatt & McLuhan, 2019). Audiences learnt new knowledge about the disability experience through active

engagement with the underlying equality messages present in the self-portraits and accompanying stories, sowing seeds for greater inclusion.

Audiences connected with “Through My Eyes” not only to explore the women’s stories, but also to better understand their own value sets (Smith, 2016). They took time to attend the exhibition or webinar and to respond to the survey in thoughtful and thought-provoking ways. They described how they could “relate to so much that was said about body image, expectations about intelligence and ability” to discover shared common ground with women with disability. Empathetic understanding led to self-reflection, of making “me examine my own biases.” This is an important finding as feelings of empathy of the other increases the perceived need for social justice that leads to social change (Ruiz-Junco, 2017). Audiences looked within themselves, reassessed previously held assumptions around disability as a direct result of viewing “Through My Eyes.”

Falk (2009) posits that people visit specific exhibitions because they reflect their own view of themselves. If so, then their attendance of “Through My Eyes” reflects upon their need to know and learn more about disability because it remains problematic for the self, for others, and for society. By taking time to attend an exhibition/webinar on disability, they are indicating a desire for greater social discourse around disability.

Audiences also acted as a direct result of viewing the exhibition. They engaged with the underlying equality principles present in the photographic self-portraits, responded to the survey in thoughtful ways, and voiced a desire for change from within and on a broader societal scale. Azoulay (2008) reframes photography as a speech act, or an advocacy tool, something that initiates a dialogue between the viewer and the viewed. She reminds us that the “photo acts, thus making others act” (Azoulay, 2008, p. 137). Her quote affirms the role of photographic self-portraits to provoke through dialogue and to engage audiences to think beyond the immediate exchange, of how “this series of photographs have the power to change the way people think.”

Limitations

Assessing social change was a broad ambitious target and the results derived from our evaluation tools were not definitive, especially given our limited outreach resources and activities. The survey questions (see Appendix A) represented a balance between our desire for data and a practical number of questions for participants. Current public safety measures around COVID-19 necessitated an unexpected move to contactless data collection methods. The pandemic inadvertently brought to our attention that our original planned data collection methods were not as inclusive or accessible as we had originally thought. The pandemic pushed us in new directions to rethink and alter our evaluation techniques, to consider which abilities had been privileged in our design process. We see this as a positive outcome.

In qualitative work, there is no such thing as neutral comparison of data (Charmaz, 2014). Our privileges and subjectivities as non-disabled (for now) researchers will have influenced our interpretations of the results. Other researchers with the same data may have employed other methods and tools to make sense of the data, used different quotes from the 300 plus options, which would tell a different story from ours. The responses we received were varied and rich, reflecting a cohort of respondents who were engaged with social issues and wanted to offer their thoughts and feelings around disability. Although their views may not be indicative of the average citizen, they reflect a group of people connected by their desire for change both within themselves and in their community. Social change can occur, to paraphrase Eleanor Roosevelt (1948), but it must begin in small places, close to home, for unless these changes have meaning here, they will have little meaning anywhere.

Conclusions

We draw conclusions that an artfully executed photovoice exhibition on women and disability created social change: it engaged and changed the way audiences think about disability, generating a pathway to greater inclusion. The exhibition created an opportunity for audiences to mindfully expand upon important social issues that would not have otherwise occurred. Nearly a hundred people took time to report what they learnt, felt, and did after viewing an exhibition on disability, an indication of a community's desire for greater public discourse and action on disability and inclusion. Our research adds to the small body of literature around audience impact from viewing photovoice research artworks and self-portraits of disability.

The visceral exhibition experience was, according to one respondent, "raw and confronting; powerful and beautiful," reflecting upon the aesthetic strengths of the artworks and the photographers' talent and lived experience. "Through My Eyes" was impactful because women with disability were genuinely and collaboratively involved throughout the arts-based process (Dodd et al., 2010). Our research findings strongly support the useful role the arts and arts-based research can play in shifting negative attitudes and perceptions of disability difference to counter prejudice and promote equality (Sandell & Nightingale, 2012). Through a public dissemination of powerful, confronting, and authentic self-portraits and stories, audiences gained insight into the reality of discrimination, exclusion, and marginality that women with disability continue to experience. Audience's stories of personal change and desire for broader change occurred because of viewing "Through My Eyes." In this light, photovoice research on disability, strategically geared for a public exhibition, delivered upon its aims of community impact.

Broad-scale social change that increases inclusion for people with disability requires a multitude of efforts. Photovoice research exhibitions, like "Through My Eyes," is a step (albeit small) towards meaningful change. Claudia Mitchell (2015) maintains that exhibiting research works engages audiences so that they can not only see the need for change, but also the possibilities that change can bring. Based upon evidence of change highlighted in this paper, we continue to promote the online content through social media and seek new opportunities to display the physical exhibition to reach other audiences. We add, however, that this endeavour has had limited success at the time of writing this paper. Claiming space, making visible the issues affecting marginalised groups, remains elusive. We will persist.

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Appendix A

“Through My Eyes” Audience and Viewer Feedback

Q1 Thank you for taking part in this survey. It contains 12 questions (plus 1 optional question) and should take 2-3 minutes to complete. Do you identify as:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary or other

Q2 Do you identify as (you can tick more than one box):

- ☐ Having a disability
- ☐ Not having a disability
- ☐ Carer/family member of someone with a disability
- ☐ Other

Q3 Prior to seeing the exhibition or webinar, had you had much experience with disability?

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ None

Q4 Why did you take the time to see the exhibition/participate in the webinar?

Q5 Please tell us some of the FEELINGS or THOUGHTS you had while interacting with the photographs or webinar speakers:

Q6 The photographs and stories increased my awareness of discrimination that surrounds disability.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Strongly agree
-

Q7 The images helped me see these photographers as fellow women, sisters or friends.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q8 The exhibition contained many stereotypical photographs of disability and/or women.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q9 The series of photographs and stories kept me engaged and interested.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q10 The photographs and stories changed the way I think about disability.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q11 If you answered agree or strongly agree to the last question, can you tell us how it changed the way you think about disability?

Q12 Did any photo or group of photos have a strong impact on you? If so, which one(s) and why?

Q13 Thank you for participating in our survey, your feedback is important to our research project. Please feel free to leave comment below (optional).

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