

## “Looks like a lot of awesome things are coming out of the study!”: Reflections on researching, communicating and challenging everyday inequalities

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, a growing interest in so-called ‘everyday’ inequalities is raising intriguing questions for qualitative research in psychology. How best might we canvass people’s mundane experiences with inequalities given that these experiences are often normalized or entrenched to the extent that they disappear from view, or are otherwise hard to articulate in the course of a conventional qualitative research encounter? And, should we find ourselves as custodians of data that do pinpoint inequalities, what options and opportunities exist for reporting and sharing participants’ narratives in challenging and transformative ways? In this article, we present a response to these questions. Moving against the attachment to standardisation that characterises much psychological inquiry, we outline a project where methodological flexibility and a focus on collaborative documentation helped us to surface rich experiential data on everyday ableism. By spending time with participants, and equipped with a toolbox of creative, collaborative and conventional methods, we built the relational foundations necessary for participants to *show, tell and share* their encounters with ableism with us. From here, we discuss how our experiences with creative and collaborative data collection emboldened us to experiment with a new (to us) way of sharing research findings: the comic. Outlining our research team’s collaboration with illustrator Toby Morris, we show and tell the potential of illustrated narratives for sharing research on everyday inequalities – and challenging them.

### 1. Introduction

A commitment to enhancing wellbeing, alleviating suffering and challenging inequality animates many branches of social research, within and beyond psychology. As critical and qualitative approaches continue to gain ground within psychology’s mainstream (Gough and Lyons, 2016), scholars are taking up opportunities to conduct rich experiential work that locates psychological and social experiences within a broader sociocultural system; what Weis and Fine (2012, p. 174) have named “circuits of dispossession and privilege”. At the same time, this burgeoning interest in the qualitative texture of everyday life – and in the making of ‘everyday’ inequalities in particular – raises a series of methodological challenges (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2017). It is well documented that dominant, common-sense perspectives on social life tend to obscure, refute or naturalise inequalities in ways that can make

them difficult to pinpoint and speak about (Ahmed, 2012; Baker, 2010; Benton-Greig et al., submitted; Clarke et al., 2004; Gill, 2014; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), even for those most acutely affected by them. In these circumstances, there is a strong case in favour of moving beyond the “orthodoxy of qualitative interviewing” (Gough, 2006, p. 167) towards less conventional and more creative methodological alternatives.

In recent years, there has been steady and increasing interest in expanding the methodological canon of qualitative psychology. New approaches and methods are bubbling in from outside the discipline and/or through sub-disciplinary work at the margins of conventional western psychology, such as liberation, indigenous, queer and feminist psychologies (Fahs, 2012; Kitzinger, 1991; Lather, 2008; Le Grice and Braun, 2016; Liebert, 2016; Lykes and Hershberg, 2012; McClelland and Fine, 2008; Moane, 2006; L. T. Smith, 1999; Stanley et al., 2015). Leading examples of methodological innovation include an array of

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visual methods (Reavey, 2012) such as photovoice and photo elicitation (see, for example, Hodgetts et al., 2012), go-along interviews (Kusenbach, 2003) and haerenga kitea (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2017), mapping (Futch and Fine, 2014; McGrath et al., 2019) and story completion (Braun et al., 2018), as well as embodied methods like role play and performance (Fox, 2016) and body mapping (Lys et al., 2018). Such methods are hailed for their potential to unsettle standard researcher-participant relations and, in doing so, making space for participants to play a more active and determining role in research process and research products (see, for example, Cahill, 2007; McClelland and Fine, 2008; Retallack et al., 2016). This is one reason why creative and participatory approaches are especially suited to research on inequalities, and research with children and young people in particular (McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain, 2018).

But what comes next? Through working with participants in creative and collaborative ways, we may find ourselves custodians of rich bodies of data that document inequalities. Beyond standard forms of academic reporting, what options and opportunities exist for sharing participants' narratives in challenging and transformative ways? Creative approaches, such as performance, poetry and illustration, are a powerful way to engage wider communities with research findings. When addressing weighty matters of inequality, privilege and injustice, creative modes of research communication share many of the advantages of creative methods. In a recent essay, political theorist Emily Beausoleil (2020, p. 1) notes the power of creative performance to "break through" to privileged and advantaged audiences, moving them from "entrenched habits of inattention" towards "receptivity and responsiveness". Creative works can tell compelling stories about personal and social life: stories that raise consciousness, stories that unsettle taken-for-granted, and stories that reach out to audiences, inviting them to think and act a little differently.

In this paper, we outline and reflect on our experiences with creative approaches to research methods, data collection and sharing research findings as part of the "Enabling Participation" project. We join a vibrant conversation about the analytical and practical potential of projects that, like ours, bring together a constellation of different methods to enable a flexible, open-ended and serendipitous exploration of everyday inequalities. After briefly orienting the reader to the project, we begin by outlining our flexible approach to research methods and data collection, grounded in a commitment to 'two-way traffic' between researchers and participants. From here, we tack away from research process and towards research reporting, moving to a discussion of a creative collaboration with illustrator Toby Morris on a new (to us) way of sharing research findings: the comic. In doing so, we hope to advance intra- and interdisciplinary conversations about the innovative possibilities of creative qualitative research beyond singular and standard approaches that characterise psychology's "methodolatry" (Chamberlain, 2000).

## 2. Project overview and methods

The "Enabling Participation" project was developed in response to a request from the local disability community, who pointed to the absence of young disabled people's experiences in the team's prior work on youth mobility and community participation. Supported by disability community representatives and advisors, the team was awarded funding for the research by the New Zealand Health Research Council. The project's purpose was to unravel the diverse influences on community participation and mobility of physically disabled and mobility-impaired young people, blind and low vision young people, and hearing-impaired and D/deaf young people. The project pulled together a team from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, with experience in a wide range of methodological approaches, from discourse analysis to accelerometry. The multidisciplinary nature of the team was one of its key strengths, leaving us well positioned to move beyond the methodological cannon of qualitative psychology.

As the project progressed, and our team's familiarity with and

attunement to participants' realities increased, our focus on ableism intensified. Ableism is best understood as a structuring system of privilege that elevates non-disabled embodiment as superior and diminishes and stigmatises disabled people; ableist practices are the focus of the emerging field of ableism studies (Campbell, 2009, 2012).

### 2.1. Participants

Data collection for the project ran from mid-2016 to early 2018. During this time, we worked intensively with 35 young people aged 12 to 25 who identified as blind or low vision, D/deaf or hearing-impaired, or physically disabled/mobility-impaired. In some cases, we also met with parents, caregivers, flatmates and whānau (family), some of whom were also invited to be interviewed as part of the research. All the young people involved in the research were living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participants reported a range of ethnicities, including Māori, Pākehā, Pasifika, Asian and African. For a more detailed account of participant recruitment and demographics, see Calder-Dawe et al. (2019).

### 2.2. Data collection

We met participants and whānau multiple times over a period of months for in-depth interviews, surveys, trip diaries, and go-along interviews with participants in the community. We took a toolbox approach to research methods, allowing us to draw on a range of data collection strategies and to adapt our mode of investigation to the interests and availability of those we were working with, as well as their preferred communication styles and modes of mobility (see Carroll et al., 2018 for a more extensive discussion of the different elements of our toolbox approach). Our core methods included in-depth in situ interviews with young people, parents and whānau, quantitative surveys (the CAPE and PAC; see King et al., 2007), trip diaries, global positioning system (GPS) and accelerometer measures, photography, and go-along interviews with participants conducted out in the community. Data collection was led by two researchers, and settings varied. We almost always spent some time at participants' homes, as well as in a range of other places including cafés, gyms, shopping malls, schools, neighbourhood streets, parks, sports games, at the beach, in private vehicles and on public transport.

## 3. 'Two-way traffic': methodological flexibility and collaborative documentation

In the project overview presented above, we have outlined our work following the conventions of a standard qualitative methods section. We described the team and the origin story of the research, offered demographic information about the young people we worked with, outlined data collection methods and details of location and duration in a satisfactory – but not excessive – level of detail. While our description is accurate and does go some way towards representing the context and enactment of the research, it skirts around the crucial elements of the research process that have been fundamental to this project's success. In what follows, we tell a different methodological narrative. We move into a more in-depth account of the way we worked with participants, exploring the flexible and collaborative approach to data collection, which we conceptualise as 'two-way traffic', in some detail.

Over the course of the project, we spent a great deal of time with participants, meeting several times – 11 times in one case – over a period of months. This is unusual in qualitative psychology, where a substantial volume of work hinges on one-off meetings with participants (a single interview or focus group, for example). The conceptual justification for our time-intensive approach could hinge on the recursive dimension it unlocks: multiple meetings allow for a layering up of data (see, for example, Calder-Dawe et al., 2019). More important for this research than multilayered data, however, was the layering up of 'two-way

traffic', of connection and trust that this intensive work with participants made possible. This was particularly important for this project, given that our team had been invited into the disability research space as outsiders and/or novices (both to the lived experience of disability and ableism as a young person, and to disability scholarship and activism). We spent time with young people and whānau over a period of months (and in some cases, years), and with their help and generosity, we gradually tuned ourselves into new understandings of disability and ableism.

### 3.1. 'Two-way traffic'

'Two-way traffic' is a colloquial phrase used to describe an interactional flow, a kind of give-and-take between two parties or people. We came across the phrase during our research while on a go-along interview with Tane, which took place at a local community gym. Tane used the phrase 'two way-traffic' to describe his connection with a personal trainer he worked with once a week: "[we] always joke and laugh and all that, give each other crap [...] it's not just one way it's both ways". Although we did not realise it at first, Tane's metaphor of 'two-way traffic' has proved to be a very apt way to characterise our research process, which was centred on connection and the reciprocal exchange of words, ideas and experiences.

One central way in which our commitment to 'two-way traffic' shaped and improved the research process was by pushing us towards genuine flexibility, embracing the use of creative methods and enabling our creative use of standard methods. Across the social sciences, psychology is known for its disciplinary enthusiasm for standardisation as an indicator for rigour and validity (Chamberlain, 2000; Gough and Lyons, 2016). While these commitments are not always a strong fit for qualitative methodologies (Lather, 1986), a sense that qualitative research ought to be done in the same way with all participants continues to haunt the methodological imaginations of many qualitative psychology researchers (ourselves included). Over the course of this research project, however, we came to realise through our 'two-way traffic' with participants that we needed to deviate from standardisation. Rather than attempting to run through every method in our toolbox with each participant, we became more interested in working out what appealed most and worked best (or least well) for the different young people we were working with. For some participants, for example, carrying around a GPS or accelerometer was an enthralling prospect; for others, it landed less comfortably as an unwanted form of personal monitoring, or simply proved impracticable.

As we spent time with participants, we also became increasingly sensitised to the exclusionary norms underpinning several of the research tools and methods we had planned to use. For example, rigorous accelerometry measurement protocols require a consistent and specific placement of devices to catch specific movement patterns modelled on walking. Such standard approaches did not cater to wheelchair users, for example, and would have provided flawed measures of physical activity. Even so, through our conversations with young participants, we tested out ways equipment could be put to use to document something of value to participants. One young person decided to take her GPS unit sailing and was delighted with the GPS map this produced, which showed her criss-crossing the Waitematā Harbour – a visual representation of an activity she described as profoundly liberating.

Along similar lines to the GPS, the survey tools we used (CAPE and PAC) were crafted for a US audience and designed to score individual participants' activity levels. We used these surveys against the grain: first modifying for cultural fit to an Aotearoa context, and then using questions as jumping off points for discussion and declining to calculate and analyse scores. At times, the survey questions catalysed unanticipated discussions about activities, pleasures and memories. On other occasions, the questions themselves became a focus of researcher-participant scrutiny and amusement, as when Saamir responded to a

question about his interest in playing tennis by highlighting the question's racialised and generational dimensions:

[tennis] just doesn't seem like fun – it is older white people. But I would like to do it, maybe I will become an old white person one day and I will do it then [laughs]

While our creative licence with standard (and standardising) research methods such as GPS, accelerometry and activity surveys was useful, the most generative and conscientizing for us as researchers interested in ableism were the creative methods we used. Participant-directed photography and go-along interviews created unique openings for researchers and participants to collaboratively pinpoint instances of ableism in day-to-day experience. We consider both go-along interviews and participant-directed photography as creative methods because they offer ways of working with people that go beyond a wordy 'telling' of personal experience, typical of the interviewing and survey approaches we were also using. Go-alongs made visible the meaningful dilemmas that surrounded everyday mobility for participants. This shift from *telling* towards *showing and experiencing* is, we contend, especially useful for understanding discrimination and inequalities which, as outlined above, can be notoriously hard to speak about and pinpoint. Building on a strong foundation of 'two-way traffic' that helped us to tune into participants' experiences, priorities and concerns, the collaborative nature of the "Enabling Participation" research, as well as creative methods that invited participants to show as well as tell (see also Hodgetts et al., 2012), allowed us to document a range of instances of mundane ableism. In the section below, we take a closer look at our use of go-along interviews, exploring how this flexible method, combined with our emphasis on two-way traffic and collaborative documentation, allowed us to precipitate and explore powerful examples of everyday ableism that would otherwise not have featured in the research.

### 3.2. Go-alongs: documenting the hit of everyday ableism

Go-alongs involved accompanying a participant on a trip or activity of their choosing, and collaboratively documenting elements of their journey that they found significant (photos were often, but not always, taken by the research team, a small variation from more common photovoice and photo-elicitation methods). As part of the 'two-way traffic' approach we developed within this research, go-alongs were not standardised: participants were invited to curate and direct whether, where and how the go-alongs would take place. Taking trips and spending time out and about with participants allowed us to collaboratively document and problematize the 'hit' of everyday ableism – the intrusive staring at NZSL users; footpath closures and unevenness that precipitated accidents and caused delays; bus drivers who refused to stop for patrons using wheelchairs. The way we travelled depended on what the participant usually did, and what they wanted to do. Sometimes we were driven by participants or took taxis, on other occasions we went along with parents and support workers, or walked. We also did several go-alongs using public transport: a transport mode that is well known for precipitating ableist discrimination.

During one of these public transport go-alongs, Saamir showed us how he manoeuvred his wheelchair to access the bus stop, which was on an elevated traffic island with a thick, raised curb. He powered across the road at speed, jumping the raised curb which circles the stop. While he executed the move stylishly on this occasion, a slight misjudgement could lead to serious injury, as Saamir observed matter-of-factly: "if there are cars coming and you fuck up the kerb then you are kind of screwed". Along similar lines, a go-along with Alice provided an opportunity to direct our research focus towards non-disabled folk whose attentiveness could make – or break – a public transport journey. Alice identified a bus trip it suited her to take with us and suggested that we might collaboratively test the bus driver. We asked, when boarding, if he could alert us when we had reached a given stop. This was a meaningful

test: Alice often asked drivers to do this. If and when they forgot (a common occurrence), a cascade of complications could ensue, disrupting the carefully planned journey she had prepared before leaving home (M. Smith et al., 2021). We shared conspiratorial speculations about whether or not the driver would alert us, as the stop approached – with a certain pleasure in knowledge that this test would not impinge on Alice’s journey, time and energy (as it happened, the driver did alert us). As these short vignettes attest, go-alongs were a powerful method for researching barriers to everyday mobility, sensitising us as researchers to the mundane complexities, tensions and complications of travel in a way that could not have been achieved through talk alone – if, indeed, the topic came up at all.

As well as these planned documentations, go-alongs also allowed us to document the unplanned ‘hit’ of ableism. About 10 min after we arrived at the bus stop with Saamir, our bus pulled up – we were the only ones waiting at the time – and then drove off while we were making our way towards the front door. This semi-official, ‘researchy’ documentation of discrimination that may otherwise have passed unremarked upon was something interviewees seemed to particularly value. Taken together, the individual instances of routine, everyday intrusions, exclusions and discrimination we documented built a compelling picture of how ableism was impinging on the lives of the young people we were working with.

#### 4. From collaborative documentation to creative dissemination

As outlined above, our methodological and relational commitments to ‘two-way traffic’ arose from our position as invited outsiders to disability research and catalysed our flexible and creative approach to research methods. Some approaches, like the go-along interviews, made openings for researchers and participants to collaboratively document important dimensions of participants’ day-to-day lives, and particularly the hit of ableism. In this section, we shift our focus from research process to research outcomes. Having documented everyday ableism in rich detail using a wide array of methods, our next question was: what next?

The dissemination strategies we planned with participants and advisors at the start of the project were mostly conventional and formal: we had planned to share key messages and findings from the research with disability organisations and with service sector organisations that participants identified as important to reach. To determine what these priorities were, we planned to host a series of workshops inviting young people, our research advisors and whānau along to hear our provisional findings, and to help shape and direct the ways we shared the research. As part of the workshops, we reported back on what we had been told and what we had documented through our collaborative work with young people. We talked about overarching patterns and shared particular (anonymised) stories and experiences we had been entrusted with. The extent to which our findings resonated within the groups affirmed for us that, as hoped, our analyses were tapping into meaningful experiences and priorities that were more-than-individual. On this basis, we felt confident sharing findings through the networks and organisations we had planned, with a view to highlighting and transforming everyday ableism in transport systems, educational systems and in social life more generally.

As well as affirming the research team’s analysis, the workshop space facilitated a different kind of two-way traffic: this time, between participants, advisors and whānau who did not know each other, but who were able to connect through common experiences that may, for many, have been unarticulated until then. To illustrate, a father, whose son was not present, voiced his hopes and questions about his son’s opportunities to explore his sexuality and form intimate partner relationships in an ableist context where disabled men’s sexual rights and interests may be overlooked or constrained (see for example Abbott et al., 2019). This opened space for a young disabled participant to respond, sharing his own experiences with the older man, whom he had not met before the

workshop. The level of connection and sharing we observed at the workshops between those who had never met was, it seemed to us, scaffolded through the trust, rapport and familiarity that had built up between participants, whānau and researchers over the course of the research.

Fresh from our experiences with creative methods during the research, and confident in the potency and resonance of our findings, we found ourselves asking: could we be doing more with the stories we had been told than channelling them into professional reports and academic writing? Could we put some of participants’ snapshots of everyday ableism into broader circulation, in a way that might reach and communicate with the people who enact everyday ableism, and give them pause for thought? With support from advisors and participants, we decided to pursue this idea. Given that we didn’t come to the research with a plan for creative dissemination in mind, the first question was: what shall we do? What *can* we do with the skills and resources we have available? And which medium will help us to share findings about everyday ableism with people in our communities who might be perpetuating it? While some existing participatory approaches, such as photovoice, use community exhibitions to address similar aims (see Liebenberg, 2018 for an introductory discussion and further references), we needed an approach that could travel beyond conventional exhibition spaces and that would allow us to draw on our wider data set, of which photographs were only a small part. In what follows, we work through our experience developing a ‘comic explainer’. As we shall see, this approach proved to be an innovative and powerful way to communicate what participants had shared with us about everyday ableism to a wider audience.

##### 4.1. Selecting a medium

We settled on illustration as our medium for a few different reasons. First, there was a strong match between our purpose – spotlighting everyday ableism and reaching a wide, non-disabled audience – and the use of short illustrated narratives, because they can be distributed in a range of striking and accessible ways. Illustrations can become part of the built environment: a poster or billboard can be read by passers-by at busy intersections, a form of street-based exhibition. Given that so many ableist microaggressions we had documented during go-along interviews had occurred on urban streets, the possibility of populating these same streetscapes with anti-ableist messaging was very appealing. Another advantage of illustrated narratives is that they can be published in print media. Thus, we realised that we would have a way to insert our analysis into sighted people’s fields of vision through magazines and newspapers, and printed copies could also be easily delivered to and displayed in schools or community centres. Third, illustrations can also have a digital life of their own: they can be hosted on a website, and from there linked and shared onwards and outwards.

The possibility of combining written narrative and illustration to represent participants’ everyday experiences with ableism rather than simply writing about it also appealed to our team. Drawing felt important because so many of the everyday issues that arose for participants related to flawed and ableist assumptions about disability and visibility. In the course of our project, we had observed first-hand how young people with relatively perceptible disabilities experienced sustained staring from strangers as well as intrusive medicalised questioning and receiving unwanted ‘help’. On the other hand, those with disabilities that were less readily apparent were challenged because their embodiment didn’t match up with ableist stereotypes about what disability ‘looks like’ (Calder-Dawe et al., 2019). We thought that an illustrated narrative would have real potential to disrupt ableist assumptions and diversify representations of disability, while also having the accessibility advantages of combined narrative and visual representation.

A third and final set of advantages related to participant time and the research burden. Illustration offered a way for us to work with the rich data we already had without requiring participants to be involved in



Fig. 1. Above are three illustrations of the same panel in various stages of development, from initial story boarding (left) to pencil sketch (centre) to the final version. These illustrations give a sense of how the language and images changed between each stage of production as we refined the comic.

# ENABLING PARTICIPATION

## RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE ON ABLEISM

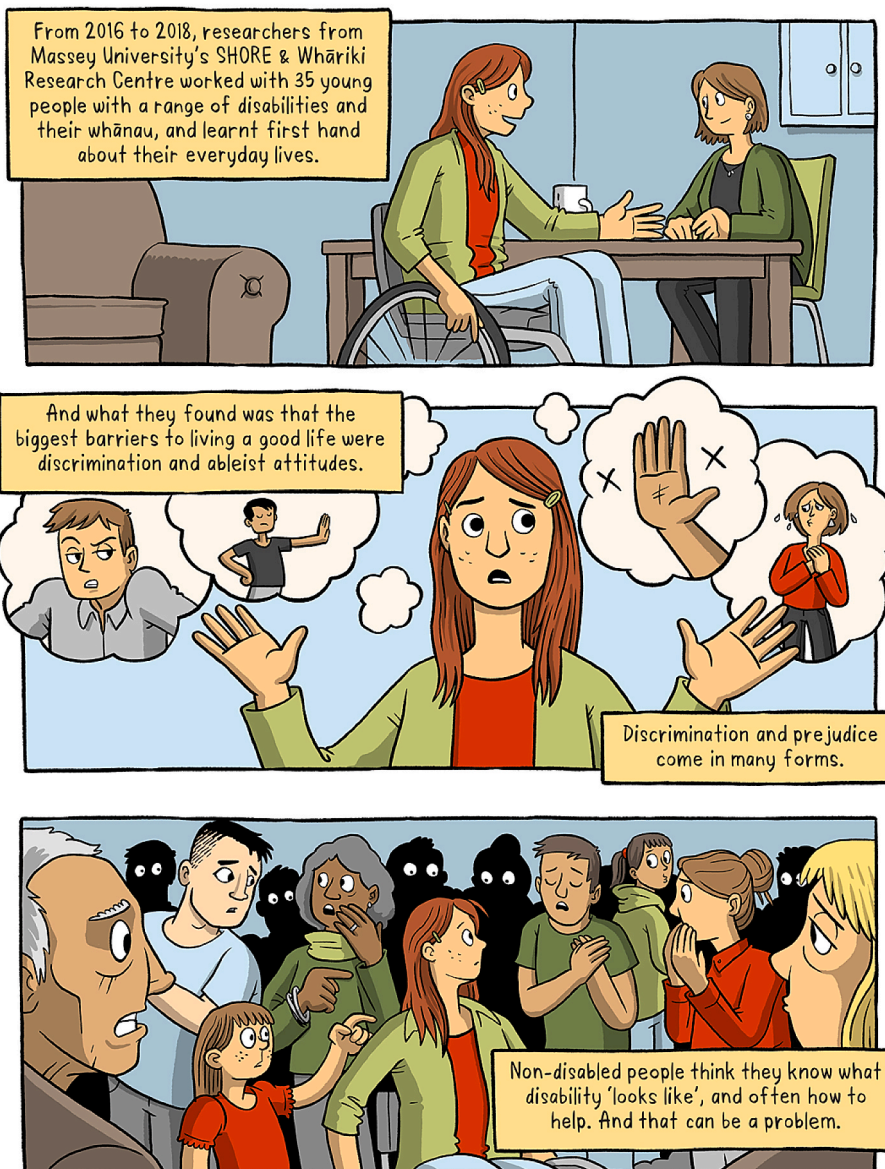


Fig. 2. The final version of the comic.

## KEY FINDING 1: UNDERSTANDING

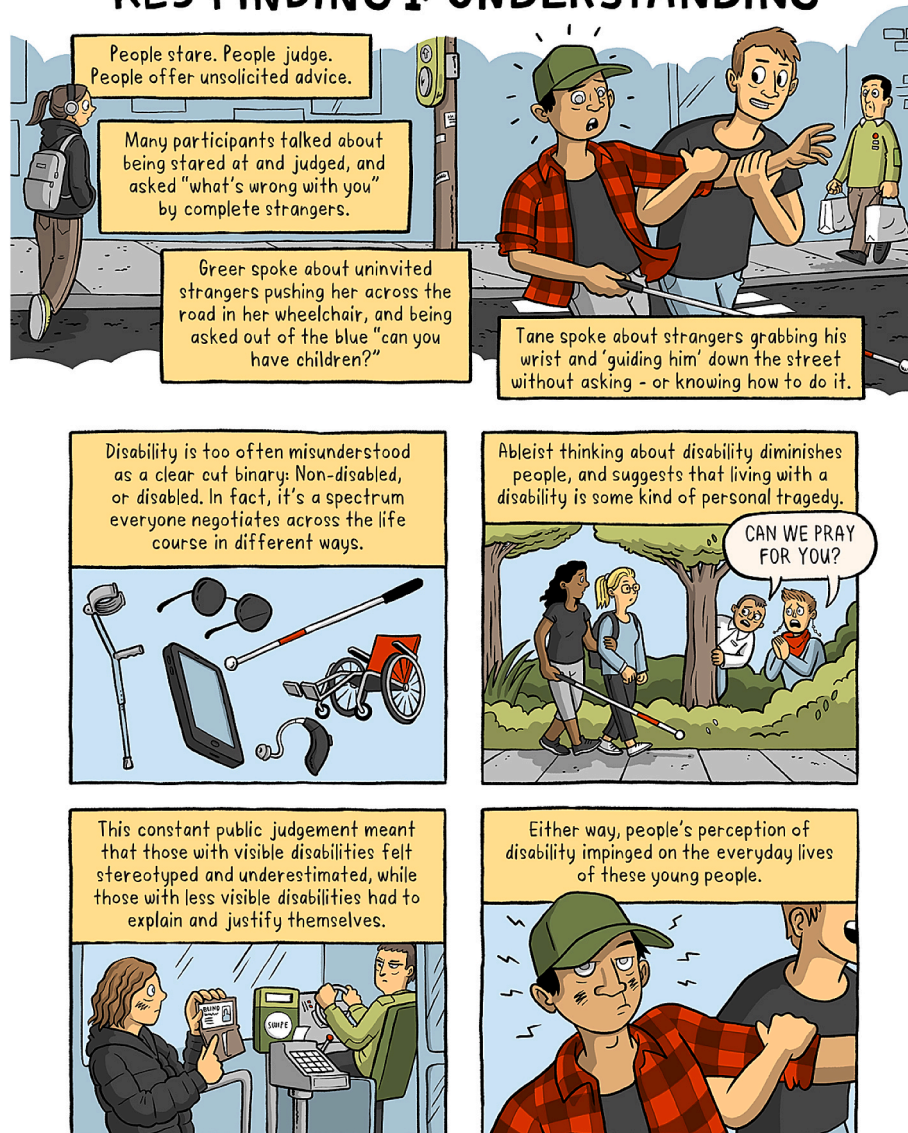


Fig. 2. (continued).

further activities such as filming. This was important, in the case of this project, where participants had already given substantial amounts of their time to the research. In addition, illustration wouldn't compromise confidentiality in the way that using images of participants could. Using illustration, we could represent participants without identifying them, and we could also weave a composite narrative that drew together elements of different people's experience in a way that wasn't identifying.

### 4.2. So, how do you draw ableism?

Having settled on an illustrated narrative as our medium, we approached Toby Morris, a local illustrator, comic artist and writer. We knew from his previous work that Toby took an interest in social justice issues, and he seemed to have a knack for condensing complex ideas and mountains of words into a simple and compelling narrative (Toby has since become widely known internationally for his science communication collaborations with Dr Siouxsie Wiles on COVID-19). Toby agreed to work with us, and we embarked on a collaborative and recursive process of distilling a short, comic-style illustrated narrative out of the immensely rich and multifaceted data we had collected on ableism.

We began by sharing selected research materials with Toby. This

included our published work, summaries of findings we had produced and circulated to participants, whānau and advisors as well as short transcript extracts relating to situations we thought could convey ableism visually. Working with these resources, Toby began the first step in the process: refining the script, which would form the heart of the comic, around which pencil drawings and then final coloured illustrations could be structured (for an illustration of these three stages, see Fig. 1 below). We and our advisors provided multiple rounds of feedback at each stage, as did participants whose distinctive experiences featured in the work. The collaborative process was extremely valuable. Toby helped us as researchers step away from the convoluted vocabularies we usually trade in, in order to make a crisp and effective comic (something we would have struggled to achieve without his insight). At the same time, our deep familiarity with the data, our relationships with participants and advisors and our overarching feel for the spirit of what we were looking for allowed us to guide Toby to refine the narrative and produce something that was representative and meaningful, and that had resonance with our data set.

Over the seven months of our collaboration, a number of tensions and knotty questions arose for our team. Perhaps the knottiest was how to draw ableism. We wanted the illustrated narrative to disrupt ableist

## KEY FINDING 2: ACCESSIBILITY

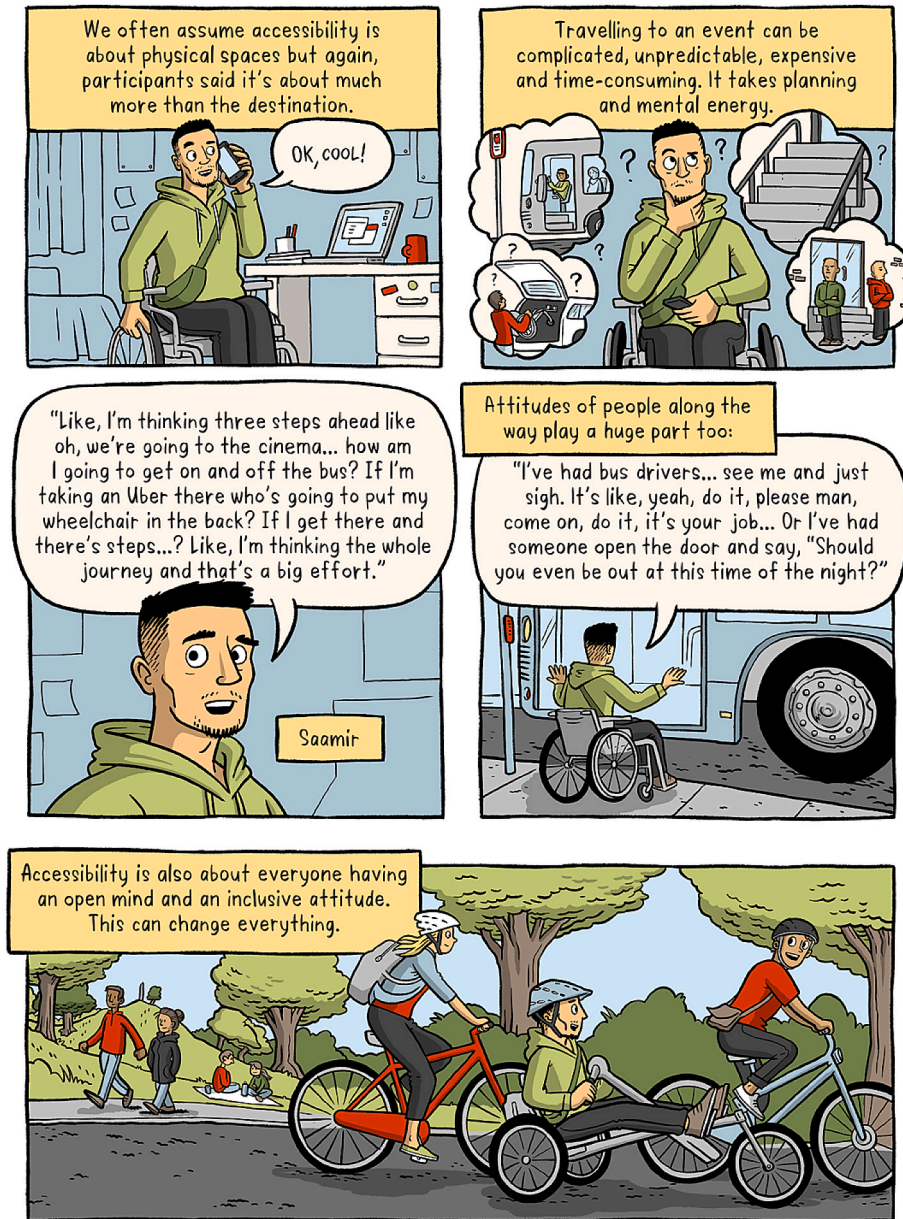


Fig. 2. (continued).

assumptions about what disability 'looks like' because, as discussed above, so many of the everyday issues that arose for participants related to flawed assumptions linking disability to particular perceptible variations in bodily form and/or mobility and communication style. While we wanted to challenge this hegemonic visual regime of disability, we also needed the representations to be intelligible to general readers in an ableist context. We had conflicting currents within the advisory group about how to navigate this tension: some feedback suggested that we needed to emphasise less visible and invisible disabilities more; others suggested we stick with Toby's initial sketches, which were weighted towards the perceptible and used visual cues and markers of disability.

Other challenging considerations included how to balance creative license and creative impact, on one hand, with staying true to the data, to our analysis and to participants' own words, on the other. A key point of contention here was around wordiness, language use and analytic terms: how do you even explain ableism? Should we use the word?

Shouldn't we? We also grappled with the question of whether and how to use narration to signal our researcher voice: how to disrupt the impression that this was unmediated testimony from participants without confusing the reader and muddying and weakening the narrative. Over many rounds of discussion, we charted a way forward through these dilemmas. We are, we admit, still puzzling over these matters; there is no foolproof answer. We were fortunate to be guided by advisors and some participants, as well as by Toby and his feel for 'what works'. The comic is reproduced below (Fig. 2).

### 4.3. Sharing the comic: policy and public spheres

The comic presented as Fig. 2 above includes vignettes illustrating young people's accounts of discriminating practices in education, transport and recreation, so our dissemination efforts began in these sectors. The uptake by the education sector was immediate. The comic

## KEY FINDING 3: PARTICIPATION

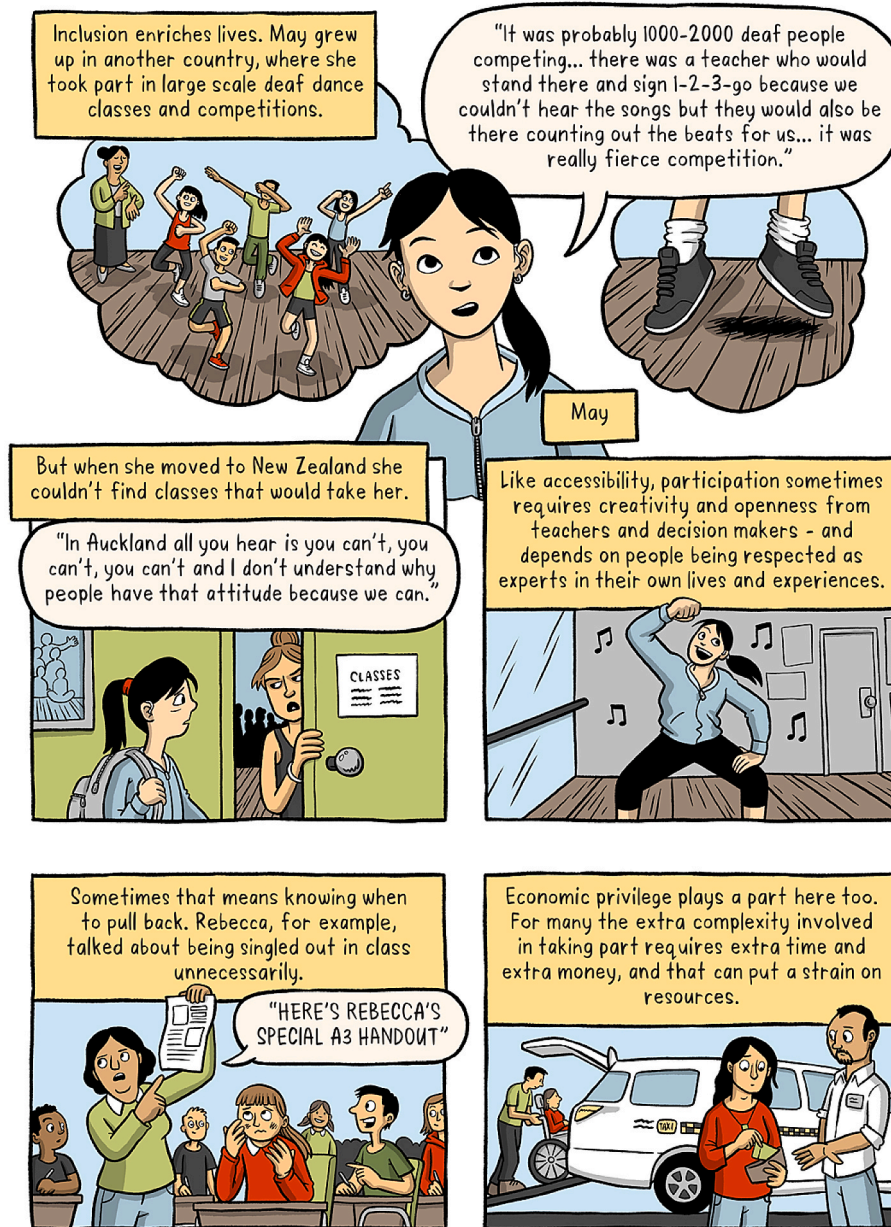


Fig. 2. (continued).

was included in publications circulated to every school in the country, in a gazette for teachers and newsletter for boards responsible for school governance. A companion article noted the availability of printed posters and requests flowed in from teachers around the country. Although we didn't ask how they were to be used, a secondary school teacher volunteered it would be used as a resource for a human rights module. The Ministry of Education placed the comic on their website and printed copies for a conference exhibit. It was also displayed on websites of the Office of the Prime Minister and the Human Rights Commission.

As it was easily shared digitally, we do not know full the extent of its reach. However, we do know it became a resource for diversity training in workplaces and tertiary institutions and, although not our target audience, was widely shared through websites and organisational newsletters across the disability sector. The regional transport agency circulated the comic through their intranet, it reached Auckland City

Council through a staff newsletter and it was displayed as a poster in the offices of the national transport agency. We had numerous direct requests for resources from individuals and groups. One organisation contacted us on behalf of a member to request a copy be gifted to her son's school, noting "Any information they can use to lessen the stigma or preconceived assumptions would be welcome". The fact that the representations of ableism we produced could be put to work in this way, diverting some of the burden of explanation and consciousness-raising away from individual families, was an immensely satisfying illustration of the practical value of the project in general, and of the comic explainer in particular.

Traditional modes of public sphere research dissemination were also used, for example online publishers *The Conversation* (Carroll et al., 2019). On-circulation from this source included a regional media outlet that gave the comic the title: "Ableism – it's a real thing, and are you guilty of it?" Perhaps less successful than dissemination via digital

## AND IN CONCLUSION...



Fig. 2. (continued).

sharing was the on-street display of the comic as four large posters (Fig. 3). Although it was located adjacent to a busy bus stop, to read the text on the comic required standing close to it. We undertook no systematic observation of passer-by engagement with the comic, but informal observation suggested this was occasional but limited. The only follow-up dissemination arising from the poster display was a radio interview about the study with a journalist who had seen it on the street.

#### 4.4. Sharing the comic: participants and the team

Project advisors and participants seemed genuinely delighted that we were crafting a creative critique of ableism tailored to a general audience, a reminder for us that outside action research paradigms, participants relatively seldom get to see, hold and benefit from the fruits of research, beyond a summary of findings (which may or may not be

meaningful and accessible). This is what we heard from a couple of participants about what seeing their experiences represented in the illustration meant to them:

It's a really amazing opportunity to be involved in this way and I'm very excited about how it turns out. [...] I think it sends a pretty powerful message. Thanks for involving me! (Saamir)

I'm more than happy to be included ... Looks like a lot of awesome things are coming out of the study! (Rebecca)

This was an important reminder for us about the ethical strengths of creative dissemination: it offers a way to honour and amplify participants' contributions to research, activating the "catalytic validity" (Lather, 1986) of the research and boosting the odds that truly 'awesome things' will arise from the work we do.

Toby Morris, the illustrator, also shared some reflections on how his



Fig. 3. A photo showing the comic in poster form on a central city street.

immersion in the research data had shaped his own understandings of disability representation and ableism, in ways that are informing his practice going forward. Talking about a panel he drew in a recent comic, Toby said:

I had all the reading I'd been doing on this project fresh in my mind as I put [together] the panel about racism overlapping with other forms of discrimination including ableism, and about how our all-pervading sense and our assumptions of what's 'normal' can be discriminatory without us realising.

This is an exciting, unanticipated line of 'soft' impact: Toby Morris is a popular illustrator, and as he carries this intersectional awareness of ableism onwards and outwards in his work, there's potential for his illustrations to amplify and diversify representations of disabled people and disability issues in Aotearoa.

## 5. Concluding reflections

For researchers interested in understanding everyday inequalities, there are real benefits to creative and collaborative approaches that invite participants and researchers to show as well as tell. In this article, we have discussed an unconventional and innovative research project, and explained how a deviation away from standard and standardising qualitative methods elicited rich data on everyday ableism, emboldening us to explore creative strategies for sharing research findings. In our research, creative methods enabled an important shift from the 'telling' typical of words-only qualitative interviewing towards a more open-ended emphasis on showing, 'being with' and creating alongside (see also Hodgetts et al., 2012; Liebenberg, 2018). This emphasis on collaboratively documenting ableism was particularly important in shifting the research gaze away from disabled bodies (the focus of much eugenicist and ableist research) and towards practices of privilege that give rise to the social experience of disability (see Campbell, 2009 for a rich, detailed presentation of this argument).

Of course, this approach is not without its limitations and specificities. It is rare, in our experience, to have the funder flexibility and the research time necessary to undertake in-depth and responsive work of the kind we have outlined here. We are especially grateful to have had the trust and support of the New Zealand Health Research Council as we reworked our research plans and project timelines. The success of our project also arose from the partnerships and relationships we were able to develop, due in large part to the support and generosity of local disability communities and our advisors. These factors, while seldom explicitly considered in methodological literatures, create the conditions of possibility for creative, collaborative research.

This project has been a steep and fertile learning curve for our team, and in sharing our experiences and reflections, we hope to have sparked readers' and researchers' imaginations. While we have emphasised the value of creative approaches to data collection, this paper is far from a rejection of more familiar qualitative methods, or wordy approaches to research more generally. Nor do we intend to present a rose-tinted view of creative approaches such as photo-elicitation and go-along interviewing. These approaches, like more familiar qualitative methods, have their distinctive constellations of strengths and weaknesses, and will inevitably appeal to and engage some people more than others. Instead, our purpose has been to illustrate the potential of integrating creative and collaborative approaches in ways that enhance qualitative researchers' toolkits, particularly in research concerning power, privilege and inequality. Reflecting on this project also reminds us – and, we hope, our readers – that creative innovation is not confined to a preordained research process and data collection methods. Some of the most exciting developments may arise as ours did: somewhat unexpectedly, as we sought out new and impactful ways to put our findings to work for social change.

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## Credit author statement

Octavia Calder-Dawe: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing- Original Draft. Karen Witten: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing- Review & Editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. Penelope Carroll: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing- Review & Editing, Project administration. Toby Morris: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualisation.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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