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Advancing inclusive research practices and media discourses

representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers

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Advancing inclusive research practices and media discourses:
representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. I also declare the following academic presentations that arose from the work of this study:

Durell, S. (2011a) *A hall of mirrors: realities or distortions? Representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.* Poster presentation at the Interdisciplinary Disability Research Conference: A critical space to engage at Warwick University, on 13 July 2011

Durell, S. (2011b) *Learning disabled people and newspaper representations: advancing disability and media discourses.* Paper presentation at the Transformative Difference: Disability, Culture and the Academy Conference at Liverpool Hope University, on 8 September 2011

Durell, S. (2013a) *What do you professors know about learning disability? Learning disabled people: advancing inclusive research practices.* Abstract/Poster presentation at the Postgraduate Research Symposium at Coventry University, on 25 March 2013

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Abstract

As a result of a complex range of cultural, economic and social factors, contributions by learning disabled people to the production of knowledge have been at best marginalised and at worst rendered silent. This study seeks to break that silence by engaging learning disabled people as co-producers of disability and media research discourses. It does this in two main ways: by addressing the manner in which they are positioned in the research process, and by identifying the ways in which they are (mis)represented or not in newspapers. This research not only investigates but it also presents new ways of giving learning disabled people a say in the knowledge production process.

By the adoption of a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process, this study aims to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, it uniquely incorporates distinct but interrelated data collection stages, including a research advisory group and two focus groups with learning disabled people and their supporters, alongside a content analysis of five hundred and forty six learning disability news stories.

This study offers new insights into the application and development of inclusive research principles, highlighting the contributions of supporters to the research process and the roles of a nondisabled inclusive researcher. It reveals the predominant ways by which learning disabled adults are represented by newspapers and how they are not generally engaged as sources of these news stories, while presenting the views of focus group members, throughout these discussions of the content analysis. This thesis concludes with a consideration of the implications of the findings for the future direction of inclusive research practices and media discourses that engage learning disabled people as co-producers of knowledge.

List of abbreviations

ABC	Audit Bureau of Circulations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BGT	Britain's Got Talent
BILD	British Institute of Learning Disabilities
DH	Department of Health
ICD-10	International Classification of Diseases (10th edn.)
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ICIDH	International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap
IQ	Intelligence quotient
LD	Learning disability
NHS	National Health Service
RAG	Research Advisory Group
UK	United Kingdom
UPIAS	Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation
WHO	World Health Organisation

Chapter one
Setting the scene

Introduction

> There are traditional academic ways of doing research. However, people with learning difficulties are involved better when imaginative and accessible methods are used. This leads to better research, better data and the chance of real change (The Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006:85).

> I just want people to understand what I'm capable of. Sometimes people see the disability first, and not me, Sarah – the person and what I'm like (Sarah, cited in Mencap 2013).

As a result of a complex range of cultural, economic and social factors, contributions by learning disabled people to the production of knowledge have been at best marginalised and at worst rendered silent. This includes much of research and media imagery, as emphasised by the two quotations above. This study seeks to break that silence by engaging learning disabled people as active members of research communities and as equal members of less disabling societies. It does this in two main ways: by addressing the manner in which they are positioned in the research process, and by identifying the ways in which they are (mis)represented or not in newspapers.

Research agendas and research processes have been questioned by learning disabled people, activists and academics. These discussions have challenged and influenced the ways in which research is undertaken by and with learning disabled people (see for example, Walmsley and Johnson 2003). While there is now a growing body of empirical research in the areas of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a), few studies have focused on the newspaper representations of learning disabled people, with a near absence of their views and experiences within this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987). Consequently, this research seeks to address these significant omissions not only by investigating but by also offering new ways that give learning disabled people a say in the knowledge production process.

However, many media studies do not isolate disabled people into distinct groups for consideration (see for example, Cooke *et al.* 2000 and the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and Glasgow Media Unit 2011). Moreover, the disabled people's movement in the United Kingdom (UK) reject the use of labels and approach disability from a social model perspective, which argues that disabled people are not disabled by their impairments but by the disabling barriers they encounter in society (Oliver 2013).

Influenced by other new social movements (Pichardo 1997), such as anti-racism and feminism groups (see for example, Finkelstein 2001 and

Morris 1991), during the 1970s and the 1980s, the disabled people's movement started to narrate its own story (see for example, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation 1975). But only later and in limited ways did learning disabled people begin to tell their own narrative (see for example, Walmsley and Johnson 2003:61) and eventually, they became involved with disability discourses (see for example, Aspis 1999 and Docherty *et al.* 2005). Indeed, much that has been told and is known about learning disability (LD) has been produced by non learning disabled people, raising questions on how they can be the authors of their own stories (see for example, Atkinson and Walmsley 1999, Gerber 1990 and Goble 1998).

Further, since at least the 1960s, disabled people and their organisations have drawn attention to the relationship between disabling media imagery and discrimination (see for example, Barnes 1992a). However, such matters have only recently received direct consideration from learning disabled people and their supporters (see for example, Wild Bunch 2010), along with concerns that they are rarely portrayed in the media (see for example, Evans 2009:5). Therefore, research that engages learning disabled people as co-producers of knowledge and which focuses on their representations by a leading medium that is likely to engage with LD discourses, can present an indication of how they are being (mis)represented or not by modern-day media and by so doing,

commonalities among struggles can be recognised, as their views can come together with the collective voice of disabled people.

By adopting a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process, the overall aim of this study is to develop critical insights in conducting inclusive research with and for learning disabled people. It involves the design, execution and reflection of a research project that seeks to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, this study uniquely incorporates distinct but interrelated data collection stages, which include:

- a research advisory group (RAG) with learning disabled people and their supporters
- a content analysis of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults, by the print version of English national newspapers
- two focus groups with learning disabled people and their supporters
- a researcher's diary, which features the subjective experiences of the research process

This study offers new insights into the application and development of inclusive research principles, drawing attention to the contributions of supporters to the research process and the roles that I played as a nondisabled inclusive researcher. It also reveals the predominant ways by

which learning disabled adults are represented by newspapers and how they are generally not engaged as sources of these news stories, while presenting the views of focus group members, throughout these discussions of content analysis. Consequently, it aspires for the active engagement of learning disabled people as co-producers of knowledge in research and media discourses, while addressing the significant lack of LD studies in the field of disability and media and the near absence of their lived experiences in this body of work.

In this chapter, I will offer an insight into my motivations for instigating this study and the rationale for its focus on inclusive research practices and newsprint discourses. These are included here because there remains 'an increasing recognition of the importance of situating biography in the inevitable emotional engagement between the researcher and their chosen field of research' (Singh 2004:2). Consequently, I believe it is of the essence to expose the personal circumstances that compelled this considerable undertaking, including some reflections on the evolution of these underlying principles, particularly in the preliminary stages of my doctoral journey. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the structure of this thesis.

Preliminary ideas and influencing matters

In July 2001, I secured the Kings Fund award for integrating complementary therapies into nursing practice, following the development

of an aromatherapy service with and for learning disabled people. As a result, I was presented with a further education grant that enabled me to embark on a media studies degree and to consolidate my academic, personal and professional interests in the areas of LD and media (Grapevine 2001:11 and Learning Disability Practice 2001:3). I wanted to build upon my general awareness of the media and the ways in which its varied organisations and systems, including newspapers (Price 1997:141), could support disabled people and their supporters, with matters that were of concern to them, such as in their challenges against oppressive practices (Cooke *et al.* 2000:4).

My interest in the English national press also grew around this period because as I emphasise in chapter four, learning disabled people are rarely portrayed in the media (Evans 2009:5). So, I needed to identify a leading medium that was likely to engage regularly with LD discourses, so that it could be used as a vehicle for identifying and for critically analysing the significance and meanings of contemporary media representations of learning disabled adults. Such a purpose could be served by the English national press because despite speculation surrounding the demise of this industry, its standing remains in modern society, with the British population noted as avid newspaper readers (Williams 2010:1 and 241).

Further, I discovered an emerging body of research within the area of mental health and media (Durell 2005). This included the infuential work of the Glasgow Media Research Group that highlights the ways in which conditions like schizophrenia are 'portrayed and routinely stigmatised' by the British media and it illustrates the impact of such portrayals 'on public belief… on the attitudes and responses of carers, as well as on those of users of mental health services'. It also argues that these issues are of significance 'for questions of social policy' (Philo 1996a:xi). Moreover, this research was cited in a petition drawn up by fellows and members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in April 1995 and forwarded to editors of national newspapers and television controllers that called:

> for a major debate to take place particularly within the media, broadcasting and the press, to question the persistent replication of stigmatising and false images of psychiatric illness (Philo 1996b:113).

However, I found little material that related specifically to LD and most importantly, these discourses were not been informed by learning disabled people themselves (see for example, Wertheimer 1987). This lack of LD studies within the realms of disability and media, and the near absence of the lived experiences of learning disabled people in the production of this research, raised the question that if media imagery was of vital importance to disabled people, including people with a mental health condition, then would it not be significant to learning disabled people, as well? Further, could explorations of contemporary portrayals of

learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers instigate such discourses, with and for learning disabled people?

It was not until a few years later that I gave these preliminary thoughts more serious consideration and I started applying them to a doctoral framework, while raising and discussing such questions with interested parties. So, for example, while undertaking a post graduate certificate in Applied Health Studies, I followed a research pathway and advanced my understanding of the research process and developed upon my researcher's skills, such as the significance of keeping a research diary and its potential contribution to fieldwork practices (Dyson 1995). I also highlighted my concerns during a focus group meeting that was part of a study, exploring future research priorities in LD and which involved learning disabled people and their supporters:

> One participant felt that we make inadequate use of the media; we should look at the portrayal of people with learning disabilities, as the use of stereotypes can perpetuate outdated attitudes. She said that the media is a resource that could be used positively (Williams *et al.* 2008a:52).

But it was during the preliminary stages of my doctoral journey when I went beyond the academic realms of LD and nursing, that I fully appreciated the influential significance of disability studies to the disabled people's movement and disability research, in the UK (Walmsley 2005:724-725). I delved into the writings of pioneering academics (see

for example, Barnes 1990, Finkelstein 2001, Hunt 1966 and Oliver 1990)

because as Benjamin (2001:2) observes:

> Everything has a history. At least part of the answer to any question about the contemporary world can come from studying the circumstances that led up to it. The problem is to find those past events, forces, arrangements, ideas, or facts that had the greatest influence on the present subject you have questions about. The more you understand about these past influences, the more you will know about the present subject to which they are related.

Consequently, as I explain in chapter two, the foundations of this study were set by a critical examination of the individual and the social models of disability and their definitions of disability concepts, including the term 'learning disability'. Through the incorporation of a LD perspective to these discourses, this analytical review responded to concerns that have been raised with regards to the marginalisation of learning disabled people by the social model and their exclusion from corresponding analyses (see for example, Chappell 1998:219) and by so doing, the views and experiences of learning disabled people added to this area of study. It also reinvigorated my belief that with facilitated access to academic debates, learning disabled people can support disability activism, challenge segregation and identify commonalities with other disabled people (Boxall 2007:226).

This underlying principle was advanced further when I started reviewing the literature on emancipatory and inclusive research philosophies and their application to disability research practices, which I

present in chapter five. I was stimulated by the emerging body of work from learning disabled researchers (see for example, The Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006 and The Money, Friends and Making Ends Meet Research Group 2011) and the co-production of research by learning disabled and non-learning disabled researchers (see for example, Abell *et al.* 2007, Bjornsdottir and Svensdottir 2008, Blunt *et al.* 2012 and Townson *et al.* 2004). Alongside personal and professional experiences of working with and for learning disabled people across a wide range of settings, including self advocacy groups, this academic material informed and supported me during the RAG and the focus group stages of this study.

I reflect upon such influences in chapters six and seven, when I describe and discuss the research process and the major matters and possibilities that arose during the fieldwork stages, including the 'inclusiveness' of the learning disabled people that were involved in the research and the roles that I played as a nondisabled inclusive researcher. These critical reflections may be of interest to disability researchers, since as I emphasise in chapter five, many learning disabled people require considerable support from non-learning disabled researchers in order to participate in research. This has raised questions over the validity of this body of work, as a true representation of their views (Kiernan 1999:46), together with the need for 'some honest reflections' by nondisabled inclusive researchers 'on exactly what roles such people have played'

(Walmsley 2004:65). This generation of data can therefore highlight the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the development of disability research practices.

Additionally, I undertook a module in data analysis and for its corresponding assignment I critically appraised and reflected on the application of a quantitative approach to the examination of data (Durell 2010). Consequently, I re-evaluated reflexivity 'as a way of promoting quality within the research process' (Northway 2000:391), along with a reconsideration of my position as a researcher and the adoption of reflexivity 'as a tool for methodological self-visibility' (Kingdon 2005:627), to support the crucial engagement of learning disabled people in research discourses (see for example, Docherty *et al.* 2005). The espousal of researcher reflexivity is of the essence to inclusive research practices (Walmsley 2004:65) and in chapter five such matters are given close consideration.

Further, I completed a module in the areas of journalism and society to update my knowledge on journalistic practices. For assessment purposes, I re-examined the concept of news values and explored the newsworthiness of LD stories, by a newsprint medium (Durell 2011). This exploratory piece formed the basis of the second part of chapter four, as it drew my attention to the rare use of learning disabled people as sources of news stories (see for example, Wertheimer 1987:29) and how

as a result, they are rendered silent in these discourses. Concerns were also noted of how disabled people can be used 'as exemplars to substantiate generalised third person claims' and not as primary informants of a news story (Huws and Jones 2011:102). Such matters were integrated in the coding schedule of this study's content analysis, which I refer to in chapter eight, not only to identity the sources of news stories, but also to explore the level of employment of learning disabled people as informants in these narratives, when they are used in practice.

During this doctoral journey, I was also enthused by the many arts and media projects that continue to challenge disabling representations by interpreting and presenting disability from the perspectives of disabled people (see for example, Disability Arts Online 2013). Further, as I highlight in chapter three, this thesis uncovered new insights into how some learning disabled people and their supporters have contested disablist media imagery either by confronting the perpetrator direct (see for example, Mencap 2011); or through regulatory bodies (see for example, Midgley 2010); with some achievements noted as a result of this opposition (see for example, Wild Bunch 2010). These LD-led confrontations against disabling media outputs sustained my motivation for undertaking this research and validated it as matter of concern for learning disabled people and their supporters.

This research has, therefore, been forthcoming for many years. It stemmed from my observations of the significant lack of LD research in the field of disability and media, with few studies examining the press coverage of LD and the near absence of the views and experiences of learning disabled people in this body of work. But the main focus of this study gradually evolved from the critical analyses of the significance and meanings of contemporary portrayals of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers, to the application of these explorations as a medium for developing new ways of doing inclusive research with and for learning disabled people, engaging them as active members of research communities in the co-production of knowledge. Moreover, as I reiterate throughout this thesis, this study assimilated 'the idea of research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183), turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors, with the intention that it generated knowledge of use to learning disabled people and their supporters in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30).

To summarise, the overall aim of this study is to develop critical insights in conducting inclusive research with and for learning disabled people, through the adoption of a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, it involves a research project that seeks to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults

by the UK's contemporary, national newsprint medium. This study uniquely incorporates distinct but interrelated data collection stages, including a RAG and two focus groups with learning disabled people and their supporters, alongside a content analysis of five hundred and forty six LD news stories.

Read all about it: the structure of this thesis

To facilitate such objectives, chapter two sets the foundations of this study by presenting the individual and the social models of disability and their definitions of disability concepts. This includes the term 'learning disability' and how it is defined by international and national organisations and by learning disabled people and their associations in the UK. It also explores the influences of the individual and the social approaches of disability on LD discourses. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how these explorations informed and influenced the focus of this research and it presents the terminology that I applied throughout this thesis and a rationale for their selection.

The following chapter provides an overview of the stereotypical ways in which the media represents disabled people and adds to this body of work by bringing in specific LD representations that may not be reflected, within these generalised disability media stereotypes. It closes with an evaluation of how these categorisations can support analyses of

the representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

A synopsis of the modern-day landscape of the UK's national newsprint medium is presented in chapter four. This narrative then moves on to the concept of news values and its application to the findings of research studies that have specifically examined the press coverage of LD. Finally, it identifies the three newspapers that were used for the content analytical stage of this study, including a justification for their selection. It also refers to the ways in which content analyses can be augmented by the newsworthiness of LD stories.

Chapter five turns to the application of a social model approach to disability studies and associated research ideas by presenting an overview of emancipatory and inclusive research philosophies. It concludes with an appraisal of how this synopsis informed and influenced the underlying research approach of this study and the rationale for its application, together with a reflection of my role as a nondisabled inclusive researcher, within the field of disability studies.

The next three chapters relate to this study's research design and methodology. Chapter six and seven describes and discusses the ways in which I approached the development and the facilitation of the RAG and the focus groups. It explores the major matters and possibilities that

arose during these fieldwork practices, while incorporating my reflections of the research process. It also considers the contributions of the supporting members to the activities of the groups. Chapter eight offers an account of the employment of content analysis as a data collection method, which narrates my emergence as an 'emancipatory' content analyst, within the field of disability studies. This includes an exploration of a series of its individual stages and the major matters and possibilities that transpired, during its application.

Chapter nine turns to the empirical data that was collected, during two of the distinct but interrelated data collection stages of this study, namely: the content analysis and the focus groups. The views of focus group members are incorporated throughout these discussions of content analysis, culminating with a consideration of the significance and meanings of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers.

The final chapter provides an overview of the key findings of this study and draws them together to demonstrate their contributions to the advancement of inclusive LD research practices and to situate them within the wider realms of disability and media. It considers the strengths and the limitations of this research and the implications of the findings for the future direction of inclusive research practices and media discourses that engage learning disabled people as co-producers of knowledge.

Chapter two
Disability: a tale of two models

<u>Introduction</u>

> Where impairment is defined in negative terms, this reinforces disparaging attitudes, with disabled people pitied and patronised as tragic victims (Barnes and Mercer 2010:11).

The language of disability has been observed as a disputed issue even among disabled people and their organisations, particularly as there are diverse meanings associated with key terms, across linguistic and cultural spheres. Disability has also been recognised as having no universal character and within 'some cultures and languages there is no term for 'disability' and social 'difference' is categorised in many different ways' (Barnes *et al.* 1999:6 and 14). The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011:6) views disability as 'complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested', while Stevenson (2010:36) identifies its terminology as 'always complex, controversial, and constantly evolving'.

Nevertheless, in English speaking countries words like 'cripple', 'spastic' and 'mongol' have been noted to have lost their former technical meanings and are nowadays generally considered abusive terms (Barnes

and Mercer 2010:11). Other expressions such as 'the disabled', 'the deaf'
or 'the blind', which depersonalise and objectify disabled people, are now
also regarded as unacceptable (Oliver and Barnes 1998:14). Moreover, as
Barnes and Mercer (2003:17) observe, given that the lives of disabled
people can be 'so affected by 'official' definitions and meanings', an
analysis of the widely accepted language has been an understandable
obsession for many disabled people (see also for example, Harpur 2012).
Consequently, a critical examination of the language of disability and its
associated discourses are of the essence for any disability study and this
thesis is no exception.

In this chapter, I will set the foundations by presenting the
individual and the social models of disability and their definitions of
disability concepts. I have chosen to understand disability in relation to
these two approaches, because they remain major perspectives for
appreciating the experiences of disabled people, disability politics,
legislation and services (Oliver 2009). While there is now a growing body
of literature that critically examines these distinct ways of thinking about
disability (see for example, Beattie 2012, Goodley 2012, Hughes 2009,
Jolly 2012, Peuravaara 2013, Reindal 2009 and 2010, Sapey 2012 and
Turner 2001), I will focus on the writings of pioneering academics (see for
example, Oliver 1990), since their works remain highly influential within
the field of disability studies. This overview will also include the term
'learning disability' and how it is defined by international and national

organisations and by learning disabled people and their associations in the UK. Moreover, I will explore the influences of the individual and the social approaches of disability on LD discourses. This chapter will conclude with an appraisal of how these explorations have informed and influenced the focus of this study and it will present the terminology that will be applied throughout this thesis and a rationale for their selection.

The individual model of disability

Barnes (2009:2) argues that across time, cultures and locations there have been significant changes in the societal responses to people with impairments or long term health conditions, but consistently the individual model of disability has been the approach that has dominated Western societies since the late eighteenth century. According to Oliver (1996a:32), this model places the disability 'problem' within the individual and views the causes of this 'problem' as evolving from the functional restrictions or psychological losses which are presumed to arise from disability. Moreover, he notes how these two features underpin a personal tragedy approach, which implies 'that disability is some terrible chance event which occurs at random to unfortunate individuals'.

Barnes *et al.* (2010:161) maintain that once the person is classified in this way the 'disability' becomes their defining feature and their inability is generalised. The solution then lies in intervention by doctors

and allied professionals applying curative and rehabilitation practices, with these 'experts' defining the individual's needs and how they should be met. Further, they explain that the aim of this medicalisation of disability is to overcome or minimise the negative consequences of the impairment: a personal tragedy, which dictates that life should be led as a passive victim, dependant on family and friends, welfare benefits and services.

Early beginnings

The origins of the individual model can be traced back to the economic and social conditions that emanated during the eighteenth century from industrial capitalism, when the workforce was categorised between disabled and non-disabled workers (Oliver and Barnes 1998:30). Transformations in all spheres of daily living prompted by industrialisation affected the situation of people who were economically and socially dependant on others (Ryan and Thomas 1987:100-101).

People with impairments were also disadvantaged by the emerging industrialised working ethos involving the operation of machinery with strict controls and demands on production (Barnes *et al.* 1999:18). This became an issue for a capitalist state 'whose initial response to all social problems was harsh deterrence and institutionalisation', particularly as these individuals 'were unable rather than unwilling to cope with the new demands made on the labour force'. Deterrence was sure to fail and came

to be deemed as unfair. So, people with impairments were controlled through specialist institutions and the provision of treatment or refuge 'from a harsh world, rather than punishment' (Oliver 1996b:28).

Disabled people were classified as a social and educational problem and many were segregated within a variety of institutions and out of the mainstream of everyday life (Oliver 1990:33-35). Such rearrangements exacerbated the portrayals of people with impairments as a social concern and as 'not capable of making a proper economical contribution and a 'burden' on their family and local community' (Barnes and Mercer 2006:11). Earlier English definitions of those unable to work had not mentioned people with impairments but as a new disabled category developed, this inability to work became the basis 'to deciding who was, and who was not, disabled' (Priestley 2008:403).

Indeed, Oliver (1990:47) suggests that prior to the rise of capitalism disabled people were integrated within their communities. They had a number of social and economic roles and despite the variations in individual contributions and the sanctions that were often applied, disabled people were generally not excluded. But within a capitalistic regime disability became 'individual pathology' and with the inability to meet the demands of waged labour, disabled people were controlled by exclusion. Oliver (1990:35) thus argues that while many disabled people

lived out their lives within a family setting, when relatives were unwilling

or unable to cope, they became possible candidates for institutions.

The rise of institutions

During the nineteenth century, there was also a major influence by

'Christian morality and humanitarian values', which had an immense

effect on the lives of disabled people, including the questioning of the

harsh treatment of people who were generally regarded as incapable of

finding work. Together with general suspicions of ineligible people

claiming charity, these principles provoked an exclusionary process which

not only differentiated disabled people from other disadvantaged

community groups, but also differentiated them into specific categories,

with different treatments for each group. This differentiation process was

turning into a more complicated procedure and it was starting to need the

employment of 'experts' to operationlise it properly. With the support of

the medical profession, state officials developed four specific categories:

the 'aged and infirm', the 'sick', the 'insane', and the 'defectives' (Oliver

and Barnes 1998:31).

Indeed, the rise of institutions and their specialisations has also

been associated and coincided with the rising dominance of the medical

profession, which readily legitimated the classification between 'deserving

and undeserving people' and attributed the sick label to disabled people,

putting them in medical institutions and establishing the personal tragedy

approach (Oliver 1996b:28-29). Together with the medicalisation of illness and impairment, the medical profession sanctioned the radical changes in the treatment of disabled people, categorised by professional dominance and institutionalisation. Disabled and sick people were identified, classified and regulated and this signalled the 'therapeutic state with its new and polarised conceptions of normal and abnormal, sane and insane, healthy and sick' (Barnes *et al.* 1999:19). Further, these institutional trends brought together the beliefs of diverse groups, as Crowther (1981:90) connects:

> Specialised institutions appealed to humanitarians who felt that the helpless would be 'better off' inside them; to eugenists who hoped incarceration would prevent the unfit from breeding; to the medical elite who were themselves becoming more specialised; and to a vague public sense of propriety which disliked mixing the deserving with the disreputable poor.

The medicalisation of disability

Finkelstein (1980:8) argues that this segregation of disabled people led to the development of successful medical practices within hospital based medicine, which ensured a higher survival rate for people with physical impairments. Further, he observes that these medical advances must have reinforced the connection between disabled people and institutions, facilitating the medical dominance in this area and the development of a wide range of professional workers. Barnes and Mercer (2003:27) identify the ascendancy of the medical profession not only through its justification in relation to disease theories and scientific knowledge based healing but also strengthened by its location within

specialised establishments. Consequently, these institutions established a hierarchy 'between professional experts and lay patients' and a 'medical monopoly of health care' legitimised by the state.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Oliver and Barnes (1998:32) note the dramatic increase in the institutionalisation of disabled people with the shift to heavier industries such as iron and railways, stressing the need for the physical fitness of workers. Further, they explain how the rigorous tightening of welfare legislation placed more emphasis on the application of the 'workhouse test' to anyone seeking aid. But the twentieth century also saw 'some fundamental changes in the patterns of disease and disability', with unsuccessful medical interventions for the treatment of chronic and degenerative diseases, within modern industrialised societies. As a result, the medical profession diversified its practice to include 'rehabilitation as well as treatment, as the pattern of diseases shifted from acute to chronic' (Oliver 1990:53). Still, none of this should deny the substantial gains that have been noted from the medicalisation of disability. For example, Oliver (1990:48-49) emphasises how it 'has increased survival rates and prolonged life expectancy for many disabled people as well as eradicating some disabling conditions'.

Nevertheless, criticisms remain of the 'negative and partial view' of disability that is prompted by this approach. Brisenden (1986:20-21) argues that if the experience of disability is only approached from a

medical perspective, generally it will always be perceived as 'a particular set of physical or intellectual dysfunctions and little else'. Therefore, he believes that it is of the essence 'to build up a picture of what it is like to be a disabled person in a world run by nondisabled people' and to regard the experiences and views of disabled people with overriding significance, so 'that they begin to outweigh the detached observations of the 'medical' expert, which have invested in them the power of history'.

Additionally, as Barnes and Mercer (2003:29) explain, a materialistic approach to the origins of the individual model must not overemphasise capitalist interests or the process of the medical profession as a capitalistic agent, as this would ignore any independence between competing groups and their conflicts within varied capitalistic interests. Moreover, Priestley (2008:404) highlights how the kind of disability definitions developed in countries such as the UK or the United States have been interpreted differently in particular situations, emphasising how it is imperative:

> to view disability and disabled people as policy categories that are more flexible than fixed, determined not so much by a person's biology as by social, economic and political circumstances.

Indeed, such strategic reclassifications of disability can be applied to the latest transformations of welfare legislation in the UK. Concerns have been raised by many disabled people, their supporters and their organisations about the impact of the changes to disability benefits and

their calls on the Government not to 'treat disabled people as an easy target for cuts in the budget and spending review' (Kaye *et al.* 2012:49).

Having presented an overview of the individual model of disability, I will now turn to the terminology with which it is generally affiliated (see for example, Barnes 2009, Hurst 2000, Pfeiffer 1998 and 2000 and Smith 2009) and two classification schemas of the WHO (1980 and 2001): the *International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap* (ICIDH) and the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF).

Classification schemas: the ICIDH and the ICF

The ICIDH was developed to clarify concepts and terminology surrounding disability, which would facilitate research and policy (Barnes 2009:2). It constructed a threefold distinction between impairment, disability and handicap and offered the following definitions:

- **Impairment:** any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function.

- **Disability:** any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

- **Handicap:** a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, and social and cultural factors) for that individual (WHO 1980:27-29).

These three concepts illustrated the effects of disease at the level of its impact on: the body (impairment), the person (disability) and the person as a social being (handicap). The ICIDH offered a system for categorising these different aspects of the consequences of disease and presented a theoretical framework through which to correlate impairment, handicap and disability (Badley 1993:161). Bury (2000a:1073) believes that through this publication, the WHO appeared to be moving away from an approach of health and disease towards a model that 'recognised the consequences of health related phenomenon'. Consequently, the ICIDH's distinctive credentials were asserted as a 'socio-medical model' (Bury 1996a:20) and it was applied within a variety of contexts and for a range of purposes (see for example, Bickenbach *et al.* 1999, Chamie 1989, Halbertsma 1995 and Minaire 1992). However, it was also 'widely criticised as being unusable, confused, confusing and even disablist' (Oliver 2009:111). So, an overall dissatisfaction with the ICIDH among disabled people and their organisations, together with criticisms from medical researchers, resulted in the development of the ICF (WHO 2001) (Barnes and Mercer 2003:15).

Unlike its predecessor, disabled people and their organisations were involved in the development of the ICF (Hurst 2003:573) and the WHO (2001:242) emphasised that it should not be misappropriated in ways that were detrimental to the interests of disabled people, particularly as the ICF serves as a basis for the assessment and measurement of

disability in many health and social contexts. This included the use of disabling terminology and the eradication of the term 'handicap', 'owing to its pejorative connotations in English'. However, the category of impairment was maintained by the ICF but the classifications of disability and handicap were replaced by the terms 'activity limitations' and 'participation restrictions'. These concepts are defined as follows:

- **Activity limitations** are difficulties an individual may have in executing activities. An activity limitation may range from a slight to a severe deviation in terms of quality or quantity in executing the activity in a manner or to the extent that is expected of people without the health condition.

- **Participation restrictions** are problems an individual may experience in involvement in life situations. The presence of a participation restriction is determined by comparing an individual's participation to that which is expected of an individual without disability in that culture or society (WHO 2001:213).

Within the ICF, functioning is considered as an umbrella term that includes all bodily functions, activities and participation; while disability covers impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. A fourth dimension: contextual factors, includes the environment and it interacts with all of the ICF's constructs, allowing for individualised profiles within a variety of spheres (WHO 2001:3). Additionally, the ICF is described as universal because instead of categorising disabled people as a distinct group, it 'covers all human functioning and treats disability as a continuum' (WHO 2011:5).

Bickenbach (2008:108) acknowledges how 'the ICF is making a profound and lasting impact on all health professionals', with the scientific literature documenting its use in a variety of clinical applications and studies. Its usefulness for a diversity of purposes such as 'research, surveillance and reporting - related to describing and measuring health and disability', has also been noted (WHO 2011:5).

The ICF: strengths and weaknesses

The ICF incorporated the socio-medical model into a new bio-psycho-social approach (Barnes and Mercer 2003:15). Smith (2009:17) believes that this transition addresses some of the criticisms of the ICIDH by the disabled people's movement as it recognises that 'deficient bodily function' can be supported for socially, 'allowing the active participation of people with impairments'. However, he also emphasises how this arrangement is still considered as inadequate by many disabled people and their organisations, because even though the social environment is incorporated in the ICF, it still relies 'on a medicalised understanding of disability and so cannot avoid an essentialist interpretation of 'normality''.

Equally, Oliver and Sapey (2006:60) argue that the ICF is based on the assumption that the constituents of each level can be reduced to numbers, as can the intricate relationships between them, concluding that the scientific rationality of the individual approach remains. Bickenbach *et al.* (1999:1185) attribute this aversion to classification systems among

some disabled people to the 'residue of the rejection of labelling' schemas, which can be addressed by the ICF's universalistic approach. But Oliver and Sapey (2006:60) maintain that the ICF may provide more work within research, social and medical fields, but 'it is unlikely to contribute any more to improving the lives of disabled people than did the ICIDH'.

Nevertheless, the WHO (2011:28) promotes the ICF as 'a workable compromise between medical and social models'. Shakespeare (2006:59-60) considers its 'medico-psycho-social' approach as 'a sensible and practical way' for understanding the complexity of disability and refutes the comments of some disability rights activists that it is just a retagging of the discredited ICIDH. Moreover, he perceives the ICF as a way forward for defining and researching disability and an approach that should be supported by disability studies, particularly since it recognises the environment as causing restrictions and the overall application of the term 'disability' describes the entire process of disablement.

However in terms of practicalities, Chapireau (2005:309) highlights general problems with the application of the ICF including issues over its coding system and guidelines and poor validation techniques, with a lack of standardised procedures. Doubts about its usefulness have also been noted:

So, how do we answer questions about who is disabled or the prevalence of disability in a country or region? As a multi-domain, multi-dimensional, interactive and continuous phenomenon (as it is characterised in the ICF), we must specify which impairment domains qualify to which degree of severity. Different prevalence answers flow from different decisions. If we are interested in any impairment domain, to any degree of severity, then prevalence is roughly universal – a conclusion of no use to policy-makers whatsoever (Bickenbach 2009:120).

While acknowledging its weaknesses, Hurst (2000:1086-1087) maintains that the ICF can promote a rights approach to disability and disabled people must continue to be involved in its application and utilise it for their own means. Nonetheless, the ICF remains generally associated with the individual model of disability (see for example, Oliver and Barnes 2012 and Smith 2009). Oliver (2009:44) observes how this approach 'for too long' dominated disability legislation and as a result the provision of inadequate services for disabled people. Moreover, he concludes that it was not until the emergence of the social model of disability that the essential change to the direction of services for disabled people was articulated. It is to this approach and its terminology that I will now turn.

The social model of disability

From a social model perspective, disability is associated with 'disabling barriers and attitudes' in which the focus is redirected from medical conditions and functional limitations to 'the physical, social and economic disabling barriers experienced by disabled people and the impact of ant-discrimination policies'. Further, the experience of disability

does not exist solely at an individual psychological level or even within interpersonal relations but encompasses a diverse range of social and material factors and circumstances, including family and income. Besides, the individual and collective situations of disabled people are not fixed and the disability experience is evolving and temporal in nature, spanning an individual's meaning of disability, the wider conditions of disabling barriers and societal attitudes and the influences of policies and support systems. However, this approach does not deny the significance of impairment in people's lives or the relevance of medical treatment to the experience of impairment. Instead, it highlights the indifference by advocates of the individual model to the existence or influences of 'disabling social and environmental barriers' (Barnes and Mercer 2006:36-37).

Origins and terminology

According to Oliver (2009:42-43), the inception of the social model of disability stems from a publication by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976, a UK based 'organisation whose membership was exclusive to disabled people'. This document radicalised the meaning of disability with a revolutionary definition, stating that impairment was not the main cause of the social exclusion experienced by disabled people 'but in the way society responded to people with impairments'.

UPIAS (1975:14) questioned the role of professionals in the lives of disabled people and emphasised 'the imperative need for disabled people to become their own experts'. It broadly accepted the medical definition of impairment as was defined by classification schemas, such as the ICIDH (WHO 1980) (Oliver and Barnes 1998:16) and offered the following terms:

- **Impairment:** Lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb or organ or mechanism of the body.

- **Disability:** The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities (UPIAS 1975:14).

Subsequent discussions with other organisations of disabled people have broadened this terminology and its reference to 'physical impairments'. Consequently, any impairment could be embraced within the potential scope of disability, including sensory or intellectual (Barnes *et al.* 2010:163).

The growth of the disabled people's movement

UPIAS was in the front line of disabled activists and their organisations and their increasing criticisms of the individual model and the call for an alternative approach (Barnes *et al.* 2010:163). Drawing from the lessons learnt from the struggles of disabled people for the control of residential homes in Britain in the 1960s, their transformation of disability as a form of social oppression was 'a holistic approach' that

rejected 'the traditional paternalistic and patronising approach to social policy' (Barnes 1998:73).

During the 1970s and the 1980s within Europe and North America, disabled people and their organisations were becoming increasingly dismissive of the individual model and were reflecting upon the 'organisation of society rather than individual functional limitations or differences' (Barnes and Mercer 2010:29). Barnes *et al.* (1999:86) observe how the widespread acceptance of the individual model prevailed in Western society, even among disabled people. But during 'the economic and political crises' of this period, the reformation of the 'British welfare state' hit disabled people significantly hard. They note how one inadvertent consequence of these failing welfare policies and government cutbacks was 'the politicisation of disability, and the generation of a disabled people's movement'.

The social model 'became the central concept around which disabled people begun to interpret their own experiences and organise their own political movement' (Oliver 1996b:26). So, it shifted 'attention to disabled people's common experiences of oppression and exclusion and those areas that might be changed by collective political action and social change' (Oliver and Barnes 2012:22). The social model was also adopted by professionals and became incorporated into the state. By the 1990s, this approach 'was being colonised by a range of organisations, interests

and individuals, some of whom had bitterly opposed its appearance less than ten years previously' (Oliver 2009:48).

The social model: supporters and critics

Barnes (2000:443) describes the social model as a 'major catalyst' for the growing politicisation of disabled people and their associations worldwide, which has influenced social policy globally. This has included anti-discrimination legislation that protects people with impairments from unequal practices and the ICF's (WHO 2001) revised definition of disablement and its attempt to incorporate key aspects from a social perspective.

Nevertheless, Oliver (2009:51-57) no longer perceives it as the 'glue' that binds the disabled people's movement together, in the manner that it did in the 1980s. Further, he observes that on occasions its application has not always guaranteed a positive impact on the lives of disabled people, professional practice and services. Critiques of the model's conceptual and practical application have also been raised from within and beyond the disabled people's movement and disability studies (Barnes and Mercer 2010:34 and Thomas 2007:58). It is to some of these major discourses that I will now turn.

Bringing impairment back in

One of the main criticisms that have been noted of the social model involves its inability to deal effectively with the realities of impairment (Oliver 2009:48). French (1993:17) asserts 'that some of the most profound problems experienced by people with certain impairments are difficult if not impossible to solve through social manipulation' and cites her visual impairment, as an example. But Oliver (2009:48) argues that the social model is not about 'the personal experience of impairment but the collective experience of disablement', asserting that the limitations imposed upon disabled people by functional impairments 'are an inadequate basis for building a political movement'.

Similarly, Hughes and Paterson (1997:326-336) call for the development of the social model, proposing 'an embodied, rather than a disembodied, notion of disability', while acknowledging that 'the experience of impairment' has not been ignored by the disabled people's movement or disabled people. They observe that this differentiation between disability and impairment de-medicalises disability but it also exposes 'the impaired body' to the sole control of medical interpretations and turn to phenomenology as a way of advancing disability discourses and the development of a sociology of impairment.

Nevertheless, Barnes and Mercer (2010:30) insist that the social model severed the traditional casual link between impairment and disability not because it was denying the 'reality' of impairment but

because it was not necessarily a substantial condition of disability. Further, they emphasise how the focus shifted to how much and in what ways society limits engagement opportunities in everyday economic and social activities, making people with impairments essentially dependent. Indeed, UPIAS (1975:4) clearly stated:

> In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.

This leads to a related contention and the disregard of the social model to the subjective bodily experiences of disabled people and the physiological and psychological pain associated with impairment and disability (Oliver 1996a:38 and Oliver 2009:48). Oliver (1996a:38) maintains that in reality this has not been a denial at all but 'a pragmatic attempt to identify and address issues that can be changed through collective action rather than medical or professional intervention'. However, as highlighted by Barnes and Mercer (2003:68), disabled feminists such as Morris (1991), have led on these challenges, with parallel arguments by medical sociologists emphasising how a significant aspect of the 'oppressive quality of chronic illness and disability' is for many people 'undeniably to do with the pain and discomfort of bodies' (Williams 1998:243).

While acknowledging that 'disability is also influenced by context and culture', Bury (2000b:178-180) contends that disability is in the main caused by impairment, whether this is related to the effects of disease, genetic disorders, accidents, trauma, injuries or features of the ageing process. Moreover, he criticises the social model for rejecting any causal association between impairment and disability, with references to personal attributes or bodily limitations immediately turned into negative individualisation and the exclusion of whole areas of experience. He thus concludes that:

> in the understandable desire to resist the negative aspects of the medicalisation of disability, the social model often produces an over socialised perspective that denies the effects of impairments and illness on personal and social life and on the disablement process as a whole.

By contrast, Barnes (1998:77) argues that the literature produced by medical sociologists and others, which deal explicitly with these matters are effectively blurring 'the crucial distinction between the experience of impairment and the experience of disability'. Many are described as emotional autobiographies or concerned with the medical and practical factors of a particular condition. This he believes is reinforcing negative cultural representations of disabled people and distracting attention from the 'materialistic and cultural forces' that compound the disadvantages of disabled people. Besides, as Barnes (1998:77) emphasises these physical and psychological experiences are

not unique to people with impairments and many disabled people will never encounter them.

A reliance on the medical interpretation of impairment has also raised strong resistance and how far someone 'qualifies' as having a particular impairment and as a disabled person, remains a debatable issue (Barnes and Mercer 2010:35). For example, a large number of people identified as having a hearing impairment and who use sign language as their first language, reject a bio-medical categorisation and identify themselves as Deaf people, members of a linguistic and cultural group (see for example, Ladd 1988:197). Still, Barnes *et al.* (1999:93) recognise that a basic disagreement remains about the ways in which the personal experience of impairment is integrated within the social model. There is no dispute that this experience is not central, the division rests on whether the focus should be confined to disability or to also include impairment (see for example, Morris 2013).

Other social divisions

Another major criticism that has been raised about the social model refers to its inability to integrate other social divisions (Barnes 1998:76 and Oliver 2009:49) like gender (see for example, Morris 1991), ethnicity (see for example, Begum *et al.* 1994) and sexuality (see for example, Shakespeare *et al.* 1996). But it has been noted that 'a simple additive approach encourages the construction of a misleading league table of

oppressions encountered by different subgroups of disabled people'
(Barnes and Mercer 2003:58). Further, as Oliver (2009:49) argues it is
not that the social model cannot cope with these concerns but that its
critics have spent more time criticising it for its perceived weaknesses,
rather than attempt to apply it in practice to areas such as 'racism,
sexism and sexuality'.

But as Barnes (1998:76-77) explains it is of the essence to
remember when reviewing such critiques, which emerged in the early
1990s and included discussions about the integration of impairment, that
the gradual prominence of the social model was mainly located in the
1980s. Many of the early writings by disabled activists and disabled
people's organisations were not readily available and many people appear
to be unaware that the social model surfaced from the direct experiences
of disabled people. He believes that some of these earlier works (see for
example, Campling 1981) have been overlooked and academics have
been impelled to cover the same ground instead of 'building on what has
gone before'.

Disabled people as 'other'

The issue of 'otherness' is a further criticism that has been observed
of the social model, which refers to the premise that it is not the physical
and environmental barriers that disabled people face but by the manner
cultural values locate disabled people as 'other' (Oliver 2009:49). Indeed,

Shakespeare (1994:296-297) maintains that people with impairments are disabled not only by material discrimination but also through prejudice, which lies at an interpersonal level and is inherent in cultural representations, language and socialisation. Drawing from feminist writers, he suggests that disabled people are posed as 'other' because people with impairments 'can represent the victory of body over mind; of nature over culture; of death over life'. So, it is not disability that nondisabled people fear but impairment because it reminds them of 'their own vulnerability'.

Shakespeare (1994:295) also proposes that the historical origins of disability can be best understood with reference to the work of social anthropologists, like Mary Douglas (1984). Early societies reacted to anomalies like impairments by reducing ambiguity, by physical control, by avoidance, by labelling it as dangerous or by adopting it as a ritual. So, historical experiences like 'the freak show, the court jester, the asylum, the Nazi extermination' can be observed within any of these categories. Shakespeare (1994:298) argues that disabled people represent a threat to order or to the self perception of western people, who since the Enlightenment have perceived themselves 'as perfectible… over and above all other beings', suggesting that 'this ethic of invincibility' should perhaps be identified with masculinity and its focus of concerns with potency, supremacy and domination.

Barnes (1996:49) regards Shakespeare's (1994) exploration as adding a valuable dimension to understanding the cultural role in the oppression of disabled people, particularly to the experience of impairment and in correctly presenting the cultural origins of this oppression in Western society, as predating the rise of capitalism. However, by following Douglas' (1984) phenomenological approach, Shakespeare (1994) proposes that all cultural responses to impairment are essentially negative and prejudice against people with impairments is unavoidable and universal. Barnes (1996:49) argues that there is ample anthropological evidence (see for example, Albrecht 1992), which demonstrates that not all societies respond to impairment in similar ways. Further, he emphasises that such arguments also divert attention away from economic and social factors by reducing explanations of cultural phenomena such as perceptions of physical, sensory and intellectual diversity to the level of thinking processes. Barnes (1996:57) thus concludes that in whatever form, prejudice is the creation of a particular form of social development related to western capitalism and its elimination lies in the arrest and transformation of such thought and practice, including economic and cultural initiatives and a culture that recognises and celebrates human difference whatever its cause, instead of oppressing it.

Dismissal of the social model

Latter criticisms of the social model have called for its abandonment with Shakespeare and Watson (2002:9-11) describing it as an 'ideological litmus test' of British disability politics, which is used by the disabled people's movement to distinguish between progressive and inadequate organisations, legislation and ideas. These academics recognise the significance of the social model to the disabled people's movement and the liberating impact on disabled people themselves, alongside the value of analysing and campaigning against social barriers. But they also perceive it as out of date and call for a 'more adequate approach to disability politics'.

Indeed, another approach is presented by Shakespeare (2006:58-59) and broadly describes the complex interplay of features that compound the experience of people with impairments, defining disability as 'the outcome of the interaction between individual and contextual factors - which includes impairment, personality, individual attitudes, environment, policy and culture'. He accepts that for many disabled people in varied contexts 'social barriers and oppression play a part in generating disability', but disagrees with defining disability 'as either social barriers or oppression'. This standpoint allows his justification for allegiance to the ICF and the relational understanding of disability as preferred in Nordic countries (see also for example, Shakespeare 2012).

Sheldon (2007:210) agrees with this interconnection of disability and impairment and that the distinction between them is ambiguous but she also views it as essential to separate them analytically 'treating them not as concrete objects but as abstractions', so that political strategies can be identified. She argues that Shakespeare's (2006) definition of disability makes critiques of disabled people's oppression difficult to formulate and 'undermines any attempts at social change'. Sheldon (2007:211) maintains that while Shakespeare (2006) acknowledges that rights, removal of barriers and identity politics are not enough to answer the problems of disability, these significant insights are used to argue for the dismissal of the social model and not for a more ambitious 'materialistic' development of this approach.

Still, Shakespeare (2006:53) dismisses the counterarguments of advocates of the social model when 'they resist criticism on the basis that the social model is not a social theory or an explanation or an idea'. This is another major criticism of the social model and its inadequacy as a social theory of disablement, which is perceived by Oliver (2009:49) as problematic, since it seems absurd to criticise it 'for not being something that it has never claimed to be'. Moreover, he emphasises how the architects of the social model have never equated it to a theory of disability and most have stated that these theoretical discourses still need to occur.

Nevertheless, Barnes and Mercer (2010:36) identify how disability discourses now regularly acknowledge the influences of the social model which includes its impact on legislation at an organisational and state level and challenges from within and beyond the disabled people's movement. This highlights the importance for exploring the varied and contrasting understandings of the social model and for exercising caution, as Finkelstein (2001:6) reflects:

> Sadly a lot of people have come to think of the social model of disability as if it were an explanation, definition or theory and many people use the model in a rather sterile formalistic way.

So far, this chapter has focused on some general debates about the individual and social models of disability. In doing so, it has defined disability and its associated terminology from the perspectives of two major approaches. I will now turn to the term 'learning disability' and how it is defined by international and national organisations and by learning disabled people and their associations in the UK. I will also explore the influences of the individual and the social approaches of disability on LD discourses.

Learning disability: terminology and models

In the UK, the use of the term 'learning disabilities' prevails among most professionals and carers and in the majority of the LD literature, policy documents and service provision (MacIntyre 2008:2). But many learning disabled people and their self advocacy groups favour the phrase

'learning difficulties' (Emerson *et al.* 2001:5). This term is also used within educational systems and refers to people with 'specific learning difficulties' (such as, dyslexia); 'but who do not have a significant general impairment in intelligence' (Holland 2011:1).

LD replaced previous names that are now perceived as derogatory and obsolete, such as 'mental handicap', 'mental retardation', 'mental subnormality' and 'mental deficiency'. Other terminologies are used in other countries and at an international level. For example, in the United States of America, the term 'developmental disabilities' is generally used, while internationally the idiom 'intellectual disabilities' is also employed. They all refer to the same range of impairments but have different connotations (Emerson *et al.* 2001:5).

Diagnostic schemas and LD

The application of LD as a concept can vary according to the context in which it is used and it is a term that is relatively difficult to define, with many different definitions presently in use (MacIntyre 2008:2). For example, the WHO (2010) lists LD as 'mental retardation' within the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10), under the mental and behavioural disorders section. It defines it as 'a condition of an arrested or incomplete development of mind' and assesses the measure of a LD via intelligence quotient (IQ) testing and other social adaptation assessments. Besides applying an outdated term 'mental retardation',

which can be deemed as offensive for many learning disabled people,
Emerson *et al.* (2001:5-6) consider this definition as obsolete, impossible
to define accurately and a legacy of mental health legislation. It can also
be extremely difficult to measure the IQ of a person with a 'severe or
profound' LD and an exact IQ figure is not usually specified, with
estimations given of the range 'within which the person's IQ is likely to
fall'. Conversely, 'people with a mild LD' may remain undiagnosed
because they function and adapt well socially (British Institute of Learning
Disabilities (BILD) 2010:3). Jenkins (1998:17) observes the limited
importance of 'organic pathologies' in the causation and categorisation of
LD and claims that:

> the statistical plotting of a normal curve of distribution for measured
> intelligence has probably been the most influential factor in the
> definition and creation of a category of persons known as the 'mildly
> mentally retarded'. Before the advent of the bell-shaped curve, the
> category simply did not exist.

Other concerns over such diagnostic schemas have also been
identified. For example, Gillman *et al.* (2000:398) emphasise how these
systems tend to be based on the assumption that every person has the
ability to read, understand speech or communicate verbally. Holland
(2011:3-4) also argues that the application of IQ testing for assessing the
presence and degree of LD is now perceived as outdated and does not
necessarily highlight individual strengths and abilities. Further, it may be
an important measurement but only if it is performed alongside other
assessment methods including social functioning and adaptation. He

therefore proposes that the assessment of social functioning must include the 'wider context of a person's social environment, their support arrangements and general lifestyle' and features such as gender, age and ethnicity must also be considered.

However, Gillman *et al.* (1997:675) assert that the lived experiences of learning disabled people tend to be created by others through means that are useful to professionals, such as IQ testing and clinical diagnosis (see also for example, Dyson 1987). Consequently, learning disabled people are categorised by professionals to inform treatment and promote prognosis, as Goble (1998:834) observes:

> few groups have been so completely subject to medicalisation in our society as people with learning difficulties. A key component in their historic and continued oppression is the medical profession's assumption of the powers of definition, classification and diagnosis on the basis of criteria such as IQ, adaptive behaviour and bio-genetic profiles or 'syndromes'.

Further, these LD categorisations situates 'the 'problem' and the solution within the individual, thereby ignoring structural oppression and discrimination, such as poverty, and physical and attitudinal barriers' (Gillman *et al.* 2000:390).

Valuing People and Valuing People Now

Another definition of the term LD was presented in the UK by the Department of Health (DH) in 2001 through the White Paper: *Valuing People*, which is based on the premise that learning disabled people have

legal and civil rights, should have the opportunity to be independent and be able to make choices in their everyday lives and should be fully included in their local communities (DH 2001:23-24). LD is observed to include the presence of:

- a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with;
- a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning);
- which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development (DH 2001:14).

This definition includes people with a diverse range of impairments, including physical and/or sensory and the presence of a low IQ does not necessarily justify health and social care provision. Social functioning and communication skills assessments are also encouraged for determining need. But clear distinctions are given in relation to learning disabled people with autism and the exclusion of people with a higher level autistic spectrum disorder, such as Asperger's syndrome is asserted, as are individuals identified as having 'learning difficulties' and supported within educational settings (DH 2001:14-15). A new strategy: *Valuing People Now* (DH 2009) superseded this publication but the underlying principles and the definition of LD of its precursor remains.

However, Boxall *et al.* (2004:110) identify the DH's (2001) definition as inadequate because it implies that LD 'is a static problem located' within learning disabled people and ignores 'the range of political, social, environmental and cultural influences', including segregational

policies and the attitudes and expectations of others, which can impinge upon our ability to learn. Walmsley (2005:725) observes that *Valuing People* (DH 2001) 'sits in a solitary place' misaligned from legislation that was prompted by disabled people's movements and much influenced by normalisation theory and social role valorisation principles (see for example, Chappell 1997 and Wolfensberger 1972). These concepts will be explored further in chapter five.

Walmsley (2005:729-730) associates the underlying principles of this white paper: rights, independence, choice and inclusion with the social model of disability but she also identifies how the mechanisms for achieving such objectives are dependant on service improvements and a 'service-based process', instead of 'an emphasis on the right to the type of assistance an individual needs to achieve his or her goals… barriers are not much mentioned'. Indeed, Barnes and Mercer (2010:178) emphasise that service provision for learning disabled people remains entrenched within a 'care protection and welfare ethos' and hidden within 'the language of empowerment and civil rights'.

To label or not to label

But none of this should deny the dilemmas of diagnosing and labelling people with a LD categorisation (see for example, Inglis 2013). Ho (2004:86) recognises how this diagnostic label can establish service eligibility and protection by civil rights legislation. But it can also impose

the individual model of disability by professionals and policy makers onto learning disabled people and limitations in educational and social systems can be ignored. As a result, the definitional control lies with professionals and while a LD label 'can open doors to resources' it can also cause dehumanising treatment and restrict opportunities (Gillman *et al.* 2000:389). The consequences of this categorisation:

> is sometimes more than just being called names. It does sometimes mean that you get the support that you may need. It also means that lots of other things happen to you – like day centres, and being sent to live in houses you don't like (Palmer *et al.* 1999:37).

Learning disabled people and terminology

Definitions presented by learning disabled people are not essentially based around diagnostic schemas. For example, People First (n.d.a) is a British organisation run by and for learning disabled people, which aims to raise the awareness of and campaign for the rights of learning disabled people and also support self advocacy groups nationwide. They prefer the term 'learning difficulties' because it suggests that learning support needs can vary over time and define it as a societal label that is ascribed to learning disabled people in order 'to mark us out as not being able to understand things the same as other people' (People First n.d.b). Rather than thinking within medical terms such as 'autism' or 'Down syndrome', People First (n.d.b) consider the varied support needs that people may require in their daily lives.

This preferred terminology by some learning disabled people does

recognise the ability of people to learn and 'puts 'people' first' but as

Brechin (1999:58) emphasises it also locates the problem with the

individual and:

> if 'disability' is disallowed in favour of 'learning difficulties' it then becomes quite difficult to find the language to raise questions about the enabling or disabling processes in society which may be at work in 'constructing' learning disability – questions which are at the heart of discussions about social models of disability more generally.

Walmsley (1994:148) also favours the term LD as it attempts to integrate

the experiences of learning disabled people within a social model

framework, arguing that the term 'people with learning difficulties' 'places

the problem within an educational/psychological framework'. Still, the

individual model is rejected by People First (n.d.b) who argue in favour of

the social model asserting that it:

> is a way of thinking about disability that says it is society that needs to change to include disabled people. We should not have to change to fit in with society. We are against the medical model of disability, which is the view that being disabled means there is 'something wrong' with you. Doctors and teachers and other professionals put labels on us marking us out as different from everyone else.

Learning disabled people and the social model

Other learning disabled people are also resisting the individual

model of disability and are adopting a social approach to their lived

experiences. Docherty *et al.* (2005:29-35) present themselves as a group

of 'learning disabled researchers and university researchers', who favour

the term 'learning disabled' since it is a name they have chosen for

themselves and because it widens it to other disabled people and 'disabled means the same, whatever disability you've got'. However, it is clear from their overall stance that these researchers are referring to 'impairment' when they apply the term 'disability'. Moreover, they discard the individual model and apply a social approach to their research asserting that 'barriers' make them disabled as well. As Oliver (1990:xiv) asserts:

> all disabled people experience disability as social restriction, whether those restrictions occur as a consequence of inaccessible built environments, questionable notions of intelligence and social competence… or hostile public attitudes to people with non-visible disabilities.

Similarly, Aspis (1999:174) generally describes herself 'as a disabled person who has been labelled by the system as having learning difficulties'. Through this description she draws attention to the fact that this label has been imposed upon her by the 'system' and the use of the term 'disabled person' identifies her as a member of the disabled people's movement 'which is made up of people who seek social change collectively'. In her review of jargon free LD literature, Aspis (1999:181-182) highlights the amount of central information that 'is omitted from the text in order to reinforce acceptance of the status quo', which can include details about why people are labelled. Although not always deliberate, these omissions can become an extension of the oppression experienced by learning disabled people. She argues that many learning disabled people can be supported to learn and understand their rights,

even though this may not be of interest to supporters of learning disabled people:

> because it would change the power balance in the relationship between us and them which would mean different structures and ways of working which bear no resemblance to those to which they are accustomed. The responsibility therefore lies largely on the shoulders of the disability movement to close the gap of omission and silence.

Nonetheless, Walmsley (2005:724-725) recognises the uneasy relationship between the disabled people's movement and LD: 'more often than not ignoring its existence', with 'few people involved in LD' initially appreciating the influential significance of disability studies. Chappell (1998:219) also recalls the marginalisation of learning disabled people by the social model and their exclusion 'from the analyses of the sociology of disability'. However, Boxall (2002:217-218) insists that this exclusion may be due to the relative lack of publications that apply the social model to the experiences of learning disabled people rather than weaknesses in the explanatory power of the approach itself. She notes how theorising of the social model has been largely authored and controlled by disabled people but there have been few contributions to the social model literature by learning disabled people. Generally, the majority of social model writings have been created by disabled people without the LD label, who have not necessarily sought to portray the experiences of learning disabled people.

Indeed, Aspis (2000:4) observes how 'people with bodily impairments' have dominated the disabled people's movement and as a consequence, the issues of learning disabled people have not been 'properly tackled or theorised'. But as Boxall (2002:218) emphasises: 'this is perhaps not surprising, given the emphasis of the disabled people's movement on self-representation and disabled people speaking on their own behalf'. Moreover, as Chappell *et al.* (2001:48-49) observe learning disabled people may already be 'doing' the social model, although not in written form or articulated in theoretical language. So, for example, they identify elements of a social approach within LD self advocacy groups, to which I will now turn.

Learning disabled people and the self advocacy movement

Self definition has been identified as a major feature of the organisation of disabled people (Campbell and Oliver 1996:105). Equally for learning disabled people, self advocacy can present a framework for re-examining old terminology and for developing new ones (Chappell *et al.* 2001:48):

> I prefer the term learning difficulties – it's a better term. Why is it better? Because it's much nicer – we want to learn and *I like it*. I got the council to change the name (Lloyd Page (self advocate) cited in Goodley 2000:85).

Additionally, an understanding of the LD label can lead to a repossession of disability by learning disabled people, in accordance with the social model (Chappell *et al.* 2001:48):

> Who has 47 cells? I have. They haven't, they've only got 46 (Anya Souza (self advocate) cited in Goodley 2000:124).

Further, 'the sense of collectivity' promoted by self advocacy has been acknowledged as a social approach that can challenge the divisive feature of the categorisation of people into subgroups of impairment and enable individuals to reveal 'their self determination in the face of the indignities of discrimination' (Chappell *et al.* 2001:48):

> you can't say you're 'just handicapped' because you're labelling someone and that's not the way to talk to someone (Anya Souza (self advocate) cited in Goodley 2000:125).

Chappell *et al.* (2001:48) observe that defiance is a recurring theme in the experiences of many learning disabled people and self advocacy can provide 'a focus and public recognition to this resilience and resistance'. Moreover, Boxall (2002:219) proposes that instead of focusing on the marginalisation of learning disabled people by social model discourses, it may be preferable to examine the ways in which they can be supported, so that they can contribute to these discussions.

Barriers to academic discourses

Some of the barriers to the participation of learning disabled people in academic discourses have been identified: 'we might want to study the social model ourselves but we can't because it isn't accessible. It should be in pictures and large print' (Docherty *et al.* 2005:34). Walmsley (1994:158) emphasises how many learning disabled people are unable to

read and understand academic papers in their traditional format. She argues that it is important to acknowledge how the written medium can exclude learning disabled people, just as steps prevent people who use wheelchairs from buildings. Further, Walmsley (1994:158) believes that 'with help and imagination' this barrier can be conquered just like 'steps can be surmounted or replaced'. Indeed, Boxall (2007:226) claims that with facilitated access to participation in academic debate, learning disabled people can support disability activism by challenging segregation and by identifying commonalities with other disabled people. This in turn can strengthen the social model of disability. As Docherty *et al.* (2005:43) assert:

> All disabled people should be together in one block. If we're all going in the same direction about disability we should be all together, not Down's syndrome down this way, people with visual impairment down that way. We all want the same things: equality, independence and human rights. All disabled people should be pulling together.

Having explored varied definitions of the term 'learning disability' and examined the influences of the individual and the social models of disability to LD discourses, I will now conclude this chapter with an appraisal of how this review of the disability literature has informed and influenced the focus of this study. I will also present the terminology that will be applied throughout this thesis and a rationale for its selection.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the individual and the social models of disability by exploring their underlying principles, origins and associated terminology, together with their influences on LD discourses. Through the incorporation of a LD perspective, this review responds to some of the concerns that have been raised with regards to the marginalisation of learning disabled people by the social model and their exclusion from corresponding analyses (see for example, Chappell 1998:219) and by so doing, the views and experiences of learning disabled people have added to this field of study.

While acknowledging some of the major criticisms that have been raised of the social model, it still presents this study with a way of thinking about disability that can break the silence of learning disabled people in the production of knowledge, by engaging them as active members of research communities and as equal members of less disabling societies. Rodgers (1999:422) concluded from the application of 'a multi-dimensional, social model of health' to her research that 'this did allow much more room for the concerns of people with learning difficulties to be raised, than would have been the case within a traditional medical model of health'. Therefore, contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers can be explored, through an inclusive approach that engages this group as partners in the research and which gives due precedence to their lived experiences, on the matters under discussion. It can also start addressing

the significant lack of LD research in the field of disability and media (see

for example, Haller 2010a) and the few studies that have examined the

newspaper representations of learning disabled people, with the near

absence of their views and experiences in this body of work (see for

example, Wertheimer 1987), as I highlighted in chapter one. Further, the

content analytical stage of this study can also present an indication of the

modern day newspaper representations of learning disabled people and

whether these portrayals are still being influenced by an individual

approach to disability.

Moreover, I support the contention that the social model can be

enhanced by learning disabled people and commonalities among struggles

can be recognised, as their views come together with the collective voice

of disabled people (see for example, Docherty *et al.* 2005). I do not

intend to impose it with unrealistic expectations but I trust it's efficacy in

assisting me in the continued politicisation of disabled people, particularly

as:

> The social model is not about showing that every dysfunction in our
> bodies can be compensated for by a gadget, or good design, so that
> everybody can work an 8-hour day and play badminton in the
> evenings. It's a way of demonstrating that everyone – even
> someone who has no movement, no sensory function and who is
> going to die tomorrow – has the right to a certain standard of living
> and to be treated with respect (Vasey 1992, cited in Barnes and
> Mercer 2010:36).

In keeping with a social approach to disability, I will be applying the term 'disabled people' throughout this thesis instead of 'people with disabilities' because this latter phrase links disability directly to the individual instead of society, referring to a medical condition and confusing impairment with disability. Further, by associating disability with impairment this term disregards the social and environmental barriers experienced by disabled people and the need for change, denying 'a political or 'disabled identity''. Within the disabled people's movement particularly in Britain, the word 'disabled' before 'people' or 'person' has become the symbol of association with this collective identity (Oliver and Barnes 1998:18). Therefore, if other terminology is used this will only be within direct quotations.

By contrast, 'people with learning disabilities' remains the general terminology that prevails among the majority of the literature in the field, policy documents, service provision and LD circles in the UK (MacIntyre 2008:2). There are some learning disabled people who prefer the phrase 'people with learning difficulties' because it suggests that learning support needs can vary over time. They define it as a societal label that is ascribed to learning disabled people with the intention of marking them 'out as not being able to understand things the same as other people' (People First n.d.b). But this term is also used by schooling systems to refer to people with 'specific' learning conditions (Holland 2011:1) and it situates 'the problem within an educational/psychological framework'

(Walmsley 1994:148). So, even though it does recognise the ability of people to learn and 'puts 'people' first', this terminology also locates the problem with the individual and if the word 'disability' is substituted by 'difficulty', it can prove challenging to express concerns about 'enabling or disabling processes in society' that may be at work in the interpretation of LD, matters which are central to social model discussions (Brechin 1999:58).

Equally, some learning disabled researchers have chosen to use the phrase 'learning disabled people' because this widens it to other disabled people and while referring to 'impairment' in their application of the term 'disability', they assert that 'disabled means the same, whatever disability you've got'. Further, they reject an individual approach to disability and apply the social model to their work, stating that 'barriers' make them disabled as well (Docherty *et al.* 2005:29-35).

Nevertheless, and in parallel with former observations of the use of the phrase 'people with disabilities' in the UK, the term 'learning disabled people' can stand accused of correlating and confusing impairment with disability and a disregard of the societal and environmental barriers encountered by disabled people, undermining the need for change and the recognition of a collective 'disabled identity' (Oliver and Barnes 1998:18). Advocates of the social model of disability clearly distinguish between impairment and disability so that there is no ambiguity in

terminology that may compromise the idea of disability as a form of social oppression for all disabled people, whatever their impairment (see for example, Barnes and Mercer 2010:30, Oliver 1996a:38 and UPIAS 1975:4). As previously emphasised in this chapter, the social model is not about 'the personal experience of impairment but the collective experience of disablement' and the limitations imposed upon disabled people by functional impairments are an inadequate foundation 'for building a political movement' (Oliver 2009:48).

Informed and influenced by this chapter's literature review of the individual and the social models of disability, along with their bearing on LD discourses, I support this crucial distinction between impairment and disability advocated by a social approach because it does not deny 'the 'reality' of impairment… but it is not necessarily a sufficient condition of disability'. Instead, it diverts attention to the extent and to the ways society limits engagement opportunities for people with impairments in everyday economic and social activities, rendering them essentially dependent and thus, it asserts the significance of the widespread experiences of oppressive practices, focusing on those matters that could be transformed 'by collective political action and social change' (Barnes and Mercer 2010:30).

However, this poses challenges in the formation of self-identities by individuals who experience different impairments, including LD (Oliver

and Barnes 2012:113). Indeed, some learning disabled people have observed that in order for them to develop a response to the social oppression which stems from a disabling society, there is a need to assert a standpoint which is informed by their experiences of LD (see for example, Aspis 2000, Goodley 2000, People First n.d.b and Williams *et al.* 2005). This stance has been adopted by Docherty *et al.* (2005:29 and 43) who assert their position as 'learning disabled researchers' and as reiterated earlier, it is a name they have chosen for themselves because it supports disability activism by challenging segregation and by identifying commonalities with other disabled people and their views can become one with the collective voice of the disabled people's movement:

> When disabled people come together, we're stronger. When we're with other disabled people we're not so disabled – we may have impairments but it's the world outside that makes us disabled… What we should be doing is all fighting together for the same goal.

So, while a clear distinction between impairment and disability will be observed throughout this thesis, the former relating to 'the medical condition' and the latter referring generically to 'externally imposed disadvantage and social restriction' (Oliver and Barnes 1998:18), I will be using the phrase 'learning disabled people' as asserted by Docherty *et al.* (2005:29) so that the lived experiences of disabled people labelled with a LD (see for example, Aspis 1999:174) are integrated within the broader challenges in the conceptualisations of disability and the disabled people's movement. If other terms are used this will only be within direct quotations. However, during my fieldwork practices I will use the phrase

'people with a learning disability', because this remains the most commonly used term across LD circles in the UK. Moreover, I will acknowledge and respect the preferred terminology of the people involved in this study.

In the next chapter, I will now turn to an overview of media representations of disability by drawing from the corresponding literature to start identifying how learning disabled people can be (mis)represented or not in a newsprint medium. By the term media, I am referring to the 'institutions and techniques' that are applied to distribute 'symbolic content to audiences'. Generally these include radio, newspapers, television, music, film and advertising (Price 1997:141). Less common media involve 'paintings, sculpture, dance and other means of communicating ideas' (Kroon 2010:411).

Wilde (2005:66-67) emphasises how media representations of 'disability, impairment and normality' have been perceived as a major component in the construction and preservation of the underlying principles of the individual model of disability, thus 'perpetuating discriminatory attitudes towards impairment and providing few sources of identification for disabled people'. She contends that the basis of these representations tend 'to reflect impairment-specific archetypes' that are 'easily generalised to denote homogenous characteristics of recognisable impairment 'groups' or the wider population of disabled people'.

Mitchell and Synder (2001:199) argue that research in the areas of disability and media representations perceives most artistic and popular portrayals of disability 'as debilitating to reigning cultural attitudes'. Moreover, they observe that the analyses of these 'negative' images supports the idea that disability is 'socially produced' and the identification of common stereotypes reinforces 'audiences' sense of alienation and distance from disability', initiating 'an important process of scholarly attempts to rehabilitate public beliefs'.

It is to this subject matter that I will now turn and the stereotypical ways in which the media represents disabled people. Berger (2012:125) identifies how stereotypes are applied extensively in the media because 'they can utilise notions people have about the groups being stereotyped'. Within the context of this study, the concept of stereotyping will be approached as:

> the social classification of particular groups and people as often highly simplified and generalised signs, which implicitly or explicitly represent a set of values, judgements and assumptions concerning their behaviour, characteristics or history (O'Sullivan *et al.* 1994:299-300).

Chapter three
Disability in the media

> Public representations have the power to select, arrange, and
> prioritise certain assumptions and ideas about different kinds of
> people, bringing some to the fore, dramatising and idealising or
> demonising them, while casting others into the social margins, so
> that they have little active public presence or only a narrow and
> negative public image (Pickering 2001:xiii).

Barnes and Mercer (2010:211) observe how traditionally
stereotypical representations of disability have been produced across a
variety of cultural formats, with 'common sense assumptions of passivity
and dependence' consistently reinforced across everyday living. They
argue that these portrayals have played a significant role in the 'overall
marginalisation of disabled people within mainstream society'. While
acknowledging that consumers of media and other cultural formats should
not be regarded as 'cultural dupes' who are incapable of filtering or
disallowing these disabling stereotypes, Barnes and Mercer (2010:211)
maintain that 'the sheer volume and consistency of disabling images is a
barrier not experienced by many other disadvantaged minorities'.

Moreover, despite recent 'public sensitivity to prejudicial images' gaining ground and disabled people challenging the prevalent meanings of disability and creating new representations that 'reflect their experiences, values and demands for social justice', Barnes and Mercer (2010:211-212) perceive the possibilities for establishing a 'vibrant disability sub culture' and an opposing 'cultural politics' to a disabling society as compromised. However, they do observe how some disability arts contributors are applying a more optimistic perspective, perceiving culture as a vital arena for protest and the appropriation of new beliefs and identities and celebrating this potential:

> The very fact that previous representations of disability have been narrow, confused and unimaginative leaves the way open for disabled writers and film makers. What we can produce can blow the past away (Sutherland 1997:20).

Many arts and media projects continue to challenge prevalent representations, by interpreting and presenting disability from the perspectives of disabled people (see for example, Abbott 2011, Abnormally Funny People 2013, British Broadcasting Corporation 2013, Carousel 2012, Disability Arts Online 2013, Envisioning Meanings 2013, Gosling 2013, Heavy Load 2011, Roaring Girl Productions 2013 and Shape 2013). Nevertheless, since at least the 1960s, disabled people and their organisations have been highlighting the relationship between 'disablist imagery, the media and discrimination' (Barnes 1992a:2). Hunt (1966:xi) expressed the perspectives of many disabled people when he asserted: 'we are tired of being statistics, cases, wonderfully courageous examples

to the world, pitiable objects to stimulate fund-raising'. Barnes (1991:45) believes that this statement truly summarises one of the key obstacles towards the emancipation of disabled people: the stereotypical depictions of disabled people in popular culture and a sentiment still relevant to contemporary society. Indeed, Anderson (2011:15) argues that modern media representations of disabled people have been accused of portrayals which 'have frequently been limited to the sentimental, pathological and sensational, or that disabled individuals are simply not represented at all'.

In this chapter, I will present an overview of the stereotypical ways in which the media has been noted to represent disability, including other representations that could be regarded as more specific to LD and by so doing, I will start identifying how learning disabled people can be (mis)represented or not in a newsprint medium. I will be drawing extensively from Barnes (1992a:1) and his 'exploration of the principles for media representations of disabled people' that consolidated research findings in the field of disability and media, together with contributions from organisations of disabled people, media associations and advertisers. The intended purpose of this report was to instigate 'from all media organisations a firm commitment to eradicate disabling imagery in all cultural forms and so help facilitate an end to institutional discrimination against disabled people'. Further, I will refer to Clogston's (1990) models of news media representations of disability, which are based on 'minority group and deviance theories' research and they have been observed to be

capable of facilitating explorations of media portrayals of disabled people (Haller 2010b:40). Indeed, these seminal works can be taken forward through their application to the critical examination of the national newsprint coverage of LD, advancing understandings not only in this particular medium and their corresponding LD discourses, but also in the study of disability and media imagery, generally. Consequently, I will conclude this chapter with an evaluation of how these categorisations can support analyses of the portrayals of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers, in an attempt to converge these lived experiences with that of disabled people and to facilitate the recognition of commonalities among struggles.

Media representations of disability: prevailing stereotypes

Barnes and Mercer (2010:193) observe how several analyses of the representations of disability by the American media have generated classifications of the most prevailing stereotypes of disabled people (see for example, Biklen and Bogdan 1977). Similarly, Barnes (1992a:3-15) presents an overview of how the media produces and perpetuates disabling representations and lists recurring stereotypes of disabled people. These include the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic, as an object of violence, as sinister and evil, as atmosphere, as 'super cripple', as an object of ridicule, as their own worst and only enemy, as burden, as sexually abnormal, as unable of participating fully in community life and as normal. However, Barnes (1992a:3) emphasises that each stereotype

is not 'mutually exclusive' as repeatedly one will be related to another, particularly across fictional portrayals. So, for example, the depiction of the disabled person as sinister and evil is regularly associated with sexually abnormal attributes.

In succession, Barnes (1992a:3) explores each of these 'commonly recurring media stereotypes' and examines their disabling influences for disabled people. It is to these analyses that I will now turn. I will also be drawing from other related discourses so that the identification of the stereotypical representations of disabled people by the media is not simply a 'sterile' exercise and 'connections to the structures that give rise to and perpetuate them are made' (Pointon and Davies 1997:1).

The disabled person as pitiable and pathetic

Barnes (1992a:3) asserts that the stereotypical media portrayal of the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic is reinforced by television charity shows such as *Children in Need*. Many disabled people have been critical of these types of programmes and several campaigns have challenged such media formats (see for example, Disability Now 2009 and Queen 2011). Devereux (1996:65-66) observes how telethons can contribute to the media's hegemonic process by offering 'the powerful a role to play as benign figures who help those that are relatively powerless'. This reaffirms their superior status and by emphasising the responsibility for solutions on individuals, establishments or communities,

'the politically powerful, the comfortable and the rich are vindicated in terms of their responsibilities'. So, the types of feelings that are prompted by these programmes 'are almost entirely inappropriate and negative, producing pity on the one hand and a smug 'feel good' factor on the other' (Ross 1997:674). Moreover, as Queen (2011) asserts they do not address the roots of the problems faced by many disabled people and 'this pity does nothing towards freeing us and giving us a level playing field to participate on, to help us move away from disadvantage'.

Barnes (1992a:3-4) identifies the stereotype of the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic as a regular feature of popular fiction with the inclusion of 'overtly dependant disabled people' across storylines to portray the 'goodness and sensitivity' of other characters. Disabled people are presented as particularly endearing to stimulate 'even greater feelings of sentimentality, as opposed to genuine compassion'. These include characters like Tiny Tim in Charles Dicken's: *A Christmas Carol*.

This stereotypical portrayal also features across the news media including television and newspapers, with disabled people (frequently children) presented in hospitals or nursing homes and the perpetuation of 'the myth that disability is synonymous with illness and suffering'. So, in addition to instigating sympathy this prevalence of a medical approach to impairment assists in diverting 'the public's attention away from the social factors which cause disability' (Barnes 1992a:4). Darke (1997:11)

observes that the entertaining value of disability imagery succeeds with

the creation of:

> a simplified world where problems are individualised… and where
> social problems and groups are marginalised and deemed to be
> responsible for their own suffering and salvation… Consequently,
> society is absolved of any responsibility while at the same time it is
> left unchallenged and unaffected.

These news stories regularly have an underlying 'sentimental tone' which

can be condescending and offensive to disabled people and while 'neutral'

terms like disabled people are used, they still refer to disabled people 'as

plucky, brave, courageous, victims or unfortunate' (Barnes 1992a:4).

Additionally, Barnes (1992a:4-5) observes how news items about

health and fundraising events portray disabled people 'as pitiable, passive

and dependent' and feature regularly in the British Press (see for

example, Cooke *et al.* 2000:12-13 and Wertheimer 1987:13). He also

refers to the tactics employed by charity advertising which continue to

present disabled people 'as pitiable', despite concerns raised by the

disabled community of these types of campaigns (see for example, Hevey

1992 and Reay 2010a). Moreover, Barnes (1992a:5) emphasises the

varied ways in which the messages conveyed by some charity adverts can

'have severe negative implications for disabled people'. This includes the

reiteration 'of traditional medical explanations for disability' via

organisations, which are generally perceived as having the interests of

disabled people in mind and seriously challenges 'the environmental

approach favoured by disabled people'. He thus argues that instead of alleviating the dependence of disabled people, these advertisements 'help to maintain it'.

The disabled person as an object of violence

> Commonly held beliefs from the past – that disabled people are a freakish spectacle, fair game for amusement and mockery, that they deserve to be treated as slaves, that they are blameworthy scapegoats for society's ills, even that they should not exist at all and should be destroyed – live on and even thrive amongst some people today (Quarmby 2011:2).

Barnes (1992a:6) observes how in real life 'disabled people are often subject to violent abuse by nondisabled people and this is frequently reflected in the media'. Further, he believes that these depictions not only contributes to and underpins the misguided assumption that disabled people are completely helpless and dependant, but it also assists in the perpetuation of such violence. Moreover, Barnes (1992a:6) asserts how the invisibility across media portrayals of a diversity of roles for disabled people reinforces stereotypical beliefs that disabled people are unable of looking after themselves and therefore, are 'susceptible to violence'.

The representation of disabled people as victims of violence is common in films and television mediums, with Hollywood classics such as: *Whatever happened to Baby Jane*, deemed as a fine example (Barnes 1992a:6). Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992:138) also note how disabled characters within their study's sample of the portrayal of disabled people

on British television were 'more than three times as likely' as nondisabled counterparts 'to be dead by the end of the programme'. Further, the fatality of these disabled characters was regularly considered 'as a personal and individual matter' and rarely was there any indication presented within these televised films 'that society or social arrangements or social attitudes and values had any bearing upon the fate of these people'.

Equally, the press has been observed as having a tendency to 'sensationalise violence against disabled people' (Barnes 1992a:7). For example, Wertheimer (1987:15) found that within her UK study of the national and local press coverage of LD, stories about individual learning disabled people 'as victims, outnumbered stories about achievement by two to one'. These involved instances in which learning disabled people had being subject to sexual assault, theft and vandalism or physical abuse. Barnes (1992a:7) asserts that apart from supporting the belief that disabled people 'are helpless, pitiable and unable to function without protection, these stories reinforce, albeit implicitly, the Eugenic conviction that the 'natural' solution to the problems associated with impairment is a violent one'.

The disabled person as sinister and evil

However, representations by the media of the disabled person as sinister and evil is identified by Barnes (1992a:7) as 'one of the most

persistent stereotypes' and a significant barrier for the 'successful integration' of disabled people into society. He draws from a wide range of examples including characters with physical impairments within literary texts, such as Long John Silver in Robert Louis Stevenson's: *Treasure Island*; the partiality among film producers of the portrayal of disabled people 'as essentially evil' and the connection of 'impairment to wickedness and villainy', like the array of impaired criminals within the *James Bond* movies (see for example, Wright 2012a). Barnes (1992a:7) also refers to fictional television programmes, which often represent 'disabled people as criminals or monsters', with people who experience mental distress, regularly depicted as breaking the law and exhibiting violent behaviour.

Indeed, the prevalence of this stereotypical representation which relates violence to people with a mental health condition has been observed by varied research studies (see for example, Philo *et al.* 1996:47 and Philo *et al.* 2010:40). Moreover, it has been noted that the way in which 'mental illness is reported in the media can contribute to negative public perceptions and subsequently to high levels of discrimination across society' (O'Hara 2011:12).

Longmore (1987:66-68) argues that the enduring connection of 'disability with malevolence' across television and film mediums reflects and supports (although in an exaggerated form) three widespread

prejudices against disabled people: 'disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their fate; disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them'. He also identifies that closely associated to the criminal portrayal of disabled people is the monster characterisation, which involves extreme forms of visible, physical features and like criminal depictions 'express disfigurement of personality and deformity of soul' and again impairment is depicted as the 'cause of evildoing, punishment for it, or both'.

The disabled person as atmosphere

In the stereotypical representation of the disabled person as atmosphere, Barnes (1992a:8) explains how disabled people can at times be included in film or television drama storylines to augment a particular mood such as 'one of menace, mystery or deprivation or to add character to the visual impact of the production'. This, he argues 'dilutes the humanity of disabled people', by relegating them 'to objects of curiosity'. Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992:137) also observe how disabled characters are included in feature films 'for ulterior motives' and to enhance the movie's atmosphere. They believe that disabled characters are not introduced in storylines 'because they are ordinary people like others but in order to suggest precisely the opposite, that they are not ordinary people'.

Barnes (1992a:8) also identifies how horror and science fiction movies support nondisabled audiences' preoccupation with physical difference and that these representations 'nurture and perpetuate the unfounded belief that appearance is inextricably linked to a person's moral character and value'. Film genres such as horror movies have been also noted to portray their impaired characters 'so superficially' that they are meagre depictions, who simply add 'a touch of generic colour', adding atmosphere and a simple classification 'between who is good in the narrative and who is bad'. These 'abnormal' characterisations:

> places disability within the medical model, and they reinforce the film's normal central character's (heroic) normalness, but their marginalisation within the narrative ensures that they remain ciphers rather than anything of intentional wider social significance; their symbolic nature is directed to that individual film's resolution rather than a wider social resolution (Darke 1998:186).

Equally, Barnes (1992a:8) associates the stereotype of the disabled person as atmosphere to the display of disabled people as 'exotica' just like when 'John Merrick was publicly humiliated in fairgrounds'. Indeed, a contemporary example of this stereotypical derivative can be identified in the British television reality series: *The Undateables*, which 'follows the journeys of several extraordinary singletons as they enter the dating circuit in pursuit of love' (Channel Four 2012). In a review of this programme, the UK Disabled People's Council and the European Disability Forum (2012) emphasised how the title looked 'bad on paper' but that it appeared even worse when the series' marketing campaign involved nationwide billboards with 'towering images of people with disfigurement

or wheelchair users with the title 'Undateable' emblazoned next to them'. Further, they argued that if the name of this programme appeared offensive then perhaps that was the marketing aim of the television channel in their quest for an audience. Consequently:

> this series and the way it is being marketed raise a crucial question of dignity and representation… the media have a very important role to play in the relationship between disabled and nondisabled people… despite major efforts in favour of integration, or inclusion, disabled people continue to be invisible from the society and from the media. Beside that, when they are finally on air like yesterday evening on Channel 4, disabled people are the subjects of uncomfortable voyeurism.

The disabled person as 'super cripple'

The characteristics of the disabled person as 'super cripple' are compared by Barnes (1992a:8) with stereotypical portrayals of black people and their 'super qualities in order to elicit respect from white people'. So, a black person is often presented as having a great sense of rhythm or as an exceptional sports person. In the case of disabled people, Barnes (1992a:8) explains how they are attributed with super human features, such as a blind person is represented as a visionary with a 'sixth sense' or hyper sensitive hearing. Equally, disabled people (particularly children) 'are praised excessively for relatively ordinary achievements'. Ross (1997:673) emphasises that:

> the insistence on disabled people's bravery in 'overcoming' their disabilities places them in a heroic category which many find offensive, as it suggests that nondisabled society's expectations of their abilities is so low that to manage to live even an 'ordinary' life is seen as a wondrous achievement.

These depictions have been identified across a variety of mediums. From award winning films like *My Left Foot*, television programmes such as *Ironside* to the stories that thrive in news reports about the achievements of disabled people 'either extraordinary or managing to fit into a 'normal' life'. A large proportion of this news coverage involves charity appeals (Barnes 1992a:9). Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992:31) describe the underlying mood of this type of reporting as 'predictably sympathetic and indeed emotive'. So, as Barnes (1992a:9) contends this 'triumph over tragedy approach' conveniently omits the fact that disability is a social concern, 'which cannot be addressed by misplaced sentimentality over individual impairments'.

This stereotype also features regularly across charity advertising and Barnes (1992a:9) argues that these representations can have several negative consequences for disabled people. For example, misguided beliefs about the abilities of disabled people can result in them being refused vital services and by focusing on the individual achievements of a disabled person, these portrayals support the notion that disabled people need to overcompensate so that they can be accepted into their communities. Further, 'by emphasising the extraordinary achievements' of a disabled person, the media is suggesting that the experiences of 'ordinary' people (disabled or nondisabled) are trivial. Consequently, nondisabled people perceive 'super cripples' as unrepresentative of the

disabled community generally 'and the gulf between the two groups remains as wide as ever'.

While 'super cripple' media imagery is also associated with successful Paralympian athletes (see for example, Tynedal and Wolbring 2013:29), when compared to the television coverage of the 2009 Special Olympics in Leicester, Carter and Williams (2012:224) found that:

> much of it… reproduced and reinforced dominant discourses concerning people with learning disabilities: that these are largely 'sympathetic', normatively passive, dependent people who deal bravely with their impairments and rely profoundly on the assistance of others.

Nevertheless, the 2012 London Games was described as 'a landmark event in the history of the Paralympic Movement' and the prospect of unprecedented television coverage offered the Paralympics with the opportunity, 'to really reach a mainstream audience' (Bundon 2012). Many commentators have reflected upon the legacy and effect of such sporting imagery in challenging representations of the lived experiences of disabled people (see for example, Beechey 2012, Brittain *et al.* 2013, Carter 2012, Mencap Cymru 2012, Roulstone 2012, Turning Point 2013, Wolbring 2012, Wood 2013 and Wright 2012b), with questions raised on the absence 'amongst these extremes of stereotypes and superhumans' of 'the disabled working and middle classes' (Wade 2012). Moreover, as Beddard (2013:1) observes 'the rarefied orbit of 'mainstream' acceptance

and celebration was short lived, as disabled people have become principle scapegoats of political posturing and austerity measures'.

The disabled person as an object of ridicule

'Laughing at disability is anything but new' (Mallett 2010:6). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was common amongst the wealthy to keep 'idiots' for amusement and visits to institutions like Bedlam were also 'a typical form of entertainment for the able but ignorant'. While 'such thoughtless behaviour' may be expected in less enlightened times, disablist humour in contemporary society prevails and the ridicule of disabled people can be identified as a major aspect of many comedy movies and television programmes (Barnes 1992a:9-10) (see also for example, Mallett 2010).

Barnes (1992a:10) argues that 'the negative implications for disabled people of this type of abuse should not be underestimated' as it can challenge the few opportunities disabled people may have to be taken seriously by nondisabled society and it has the ability to damage the sense of worth of disabled people. He recognises that at times all sectors of a community will be subjected to the 'butt of popular humour' and disabled people cannot be or should not expect to be excluded from this. But he only accepts public mockery if the negative imagery can be 'offset against positive ones', or if the people that are being ridiculed can defend themselves, should they so wish.

Additionally, during the time of his writings, Barnes (1992a:10) believed that there were practically no 'positive' media representations of disabled people and many did not have the resources to fight such discrimination. However, in recent years some disabled people and their supporters have challenged disablist humour either by confronting the perpetrator direct (see for example, Mencap 2011 and Smith 2011:46) or through regulatory bodies (see for example, Midgley 2010); with some achievements noted, as a result of these confrontations (see for example, Gruner 2010 and Wild Bunch 2010).

While Barnes (1992a:10) does identify a number of disabled performers, who have created a type of humour that focuses on the bizarre ways society treats disabled people, he believes that these artists and their work are often ignored by the media. Still, Haller (2010b:170) observes how disabled people have started to take control of the 'humour message' and disabled cartoonists and comics are poking 'fun at society's barriers and their own place in a world that has pitying or negative attitudes toward them' (see also for example, Abnormally Funny People 2013). Moreover, she acknowledges the emergence of a new phase of disability humour, which presents an integrated perspective rather than a disability focused edge. However, Haller (2010b:170-171) emphasises that the authority of disabled humourists is crucial within these types of comedy and nondisabled audiences must be aware that these were created by disabled people, if not the humour can be perceived 'as cruel,

rather than funny'. She also highlights how they can illustrate the 'increasing visibility and integration' of disabled people in societies, allowing audiences 'to feel comfortable with humour that includes disability'. Haller (2010b:171) asserts that humour created by disabled people 'for all audiences challenges stereotypes and builds bridges to understanding'. Moreover, she maintains that when comedies involve disabled characters that share equal status with the nondisabled individuals of a show, this portrays a message to audiences that disabled people can have 'a full, interesting and exciting life' and they can be fully participating members of their societies.

The disabled person as their own worst and only enemy

The stereotype of the disabled person as their own worst and only enemy is illustrated by Barnes (1992a:10) through the many 'so called disability films', which involve storylines of disabled people engrossed in self pity, who could overcome their difficulties by thinking positively and rising to 'the challenge'. He refers to films like *Coming Home* and *Born on the Fourth of July* as celebrated examples that narrate the 'psychological trauma' of coming to terms with impairment in a nondisabled world and disability is employed 'as a metaphor for dependency and vulnerability'. Disability is therefore perceived primarily as a 'problem of emotional coping and personal acceptance' and 'with the proper attitude anyone can cope with and overcome any situation or condition' (Black and Pretes 2007:67).

Longmore (1987:70-71) observes how portrayals of the 'maladjusted disabled person' across film and television mediums present disability as a 'problem of psychological self acceptance, of emotional adjustment. Social prejudice rarely intrudes'. Further, across these narratives nondisabled characters have no concerns in accepting their disabled counterparts and have a better understanding of the 'true nature' of their problems. He thus argues that disabled people are generally portrayed as lacking insight about themselves and others and 'emotional education' usually from a nondisabled person, provides the solution for 'disabled individuals to confront themselves'.

Barnes (1992a:11) considers such perceptions to stem from 'the traditional medical view of disability' and its underlying 'individual assumptions', which lead to a 'psychology of impairment' that interprets the behaviours of disabled people as 'individual pathology'. This he believes allows nondisabled people to reconstruct disabled people's anger over disablism as 'self destructive bitterness' that emerges from their inability to acknowledge the 'limitations' of impairment and avoids addressing the real cause of disabled people's resentment: 'the attitudes and policies of an overtly disablist society'.

The disabled person as burden

The stereotypical representation of the disabled person as burden is associated by Barnes (1992a:11) with the perception that disabled people

are helpless and dependent on nondisabled people for care. As a result, it fails to identify that with appropriate support, disabled people can achieve independence like nondisabled people. Moreover, he argues how this stereotype originates from the belief that the needs of disabled people are 'profoundly different' to those of people without impairments and that meeting such requirements is 'an unacceptable drain on society's resources'.

Barnes (1992a:11) identifies how this stereotype has been widely used across the advertising campaigns 'by the carers lobby'. He explains that as a result of 'a chronic shortage of support services for disabled people, informal caring is now big business… in organisational and campaigning terms' and that in their attempts to generate funding for their members, many of these organisations present the care of disabled people 'as a constant burden'. He measures the success of such campaigns by 'the fact that the term 'carers' is now synonymous with self sacrifice and martyrdom', whereas notions of disabled people invoke 'images of suffering and unhappiness for those around them'. Moreover, he asserts that this situation 'would not arise if disabled people were not forced to rely on unpaid informal carers' for essential support and 'due to inadequate community based provision' they are rarely able to choose or recruit their own personal assistants. Barnes (1992a:12) proposes that the 'exploitation' of this stereotypical representation by carers' organisations 'is a direct outcome of this unsatisfactory situation'.

Such circumstances have changed for many disabled people in the UK, as some have benefitted from the personalisation agenda and other related programmes (see for example, Carr 2010:36, Hatton and Waters 2011:4 and Sibley 2010). 'Personalisation is about giving people choice and control over their lives, and ensuring that care and support responds to people's needs and what they want to achieve' (HM Government 2012:54). However, 'bureaucracy and cuts' have been identified to continue 'undermining the implementation of personalisation' (Community Care 2012) and more recently, concerns have been raised by some disabled people about how:

> underpinning welfare reforms have been orchestrated efforts by the coalition government and tabloid press to discredit our community; we have suddenly become 'scroungers', 'benefit cheats' and 'burdens' (Beddard 2013:1).

Indeed, contemporary media portrayals of the disabled person as burden remain (see for example, British Film Institute 2010a, Jones and Smith 2007:7, Jones and Harwood 2009:12-13 and Mills and Erzikova 2008:13-14). The Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and the Glasgow Media Unit (2011:9) recorded an increase in the number of British Press items of this stereotypical representation for the period 2010-2011 when compared to 2004-2005 and noted 'more discussion of disability benefits in terms of being a claimed drain on the economy and a burden on the state… with some articles even blaming the recession itself on incapacity benefit claimants'.

By contrast, in their analysis of the national newspaper coverage of benefits in Britain from 1995 to 2011, Baumberg *et al.* (2012:4) found 'that negative coverage in 2010/11 was at about the same level as in the late 1990s'. However, they observed that 'both the language and content of 'negative' coverage have changed substantially over time' and although 'fraud remains very important in negative coverage, articles are much more likely now to refer to lack of reciprocity and effort on the part of claimants than they were previously'. Further, from their examination of survey data and media coverage, Baumberg *et al.* (2012:4) support 'the idea that negative media coverage is linked to stigma'.

Walker (2012) highlights concerns raised by several disabled people's organisations and charities in the UK over a rise in public resentment and abuse directed at disabled people and while they believe this to be caused primarily by the 'government's focus on alleged fraud and over claiming to justify cuts in disability benefits', they also note how 'inflammatory media coverage has played a role in this' (see also for example, Quarmby 2012). A survey by Scope (2012) revealed how forty seven per cent of respondents which involved disabled people, parents of disabled people and carers, felt that public attitudes towards disabled people had worsened in recent times. It also highlighted the matter of 'benefit scroungers' as a major concern with disabled people singling 'out the tiny number of people falsely claiming disability benefits and the way their actions are reported as chief causes of public hostility'. So, as Barnes

(1992a:12) argues 'while such imagery persists, the belief that society would be better off without disabled people will never disappear'.

The disabled person as sexually abnormal

Since ancient times, misguided assumptions about the sexuality of disabled people have been a common theme within literature and art. Generally, these depictions have been about male experiences with little exploration of the sexuality of disabled women and characteristically, the disabled person has been portrayed as sexually impotent. This assumption is so prevalent that examples can be identified within a diversity of mediums, including music, television dramas and newspapers. Further, a 'preoccupation with sexual impotency' underpins many story lines of 'disability' films, such as *Coming Home* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, previously mentioned under the stereotype of the disabled person as their own worst and only enemy (Barnes 1992a:12).

However, a fuller appreciation of the negative implications of such stereotypical representations is presented by Barnes (1992a:12) through the film: *Whose life is it anyway?* This movie narrates the story of a sculptor who becomes paralysed and who instigates legal proceedings 'to exert his right to die' because he 'faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in a long stay hospital' and because he is no longer able to sculpt. 'But most significantly, because he believes he has lost his masculinity… The court rules in his favour'. Longmore (1987:73) notes

how this storyline fails to examine 'the sexual physiology' of people with a spinal cord injury and the potential of 'sexual rehabilitation'. Moreover, it conveys the message that disabled people's lives are not 'worth living' because they are 'sexually dead' (Barnes 1992a:12).

Similarly, the common media portrayal of disabled women as asexual presents them as the 'perfect alibi for men's adultery', since it excuses the heterosexual affairs of nondisabled male characters, on the basis that their wives are impaired and are therefore unable to have sex (Barnes 1992a:12). Kent (1987:62-63) observes how across the depictions of disabled women within varied plays and novels, 'disability sets the tone for the woman's interactions with others' and 'seems to undermine the very roots of her womanhood'. Still, some authors have managed to depict disabled women as 'total persons' capable of the 'full range of human experience and emotion' and Kent (1987:63) believes that these works can perhaps 'open the way for an understanding of disabled woman based upon awareness and respect'.

Barnes (1992a:12) also identifies other variations to the stereotype of the disabled person as sexually abnormal, which portray disabled people 'as sex starved or sexually degenerate' and refers to the character Quasimodo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* as a classic example. Longmore (1987:72) asserts that 'sexual menace, deviancy and danger stem from the loss of control often represented as inherent in the

experience of disability'. This 'sexual perversion' is also frequently associated with mental illness and features regularly within the news medium, especially the redtop tabloids (Barnes 1992a:13 and see also for example, Philo *et al.* 1996:53-55).

Another form of the disabled person as sexually abnormal is described by Barnes (1992a:13) 'as a curious twist' because it refers to men with mild impairments who are sometimes viewed 'as brave and sexy', such as Lord Nelson and the 1970s rock star, Ian Dury. A more contemporary example can be found in the *House* character played by Hugh Laurie, who was voted the second sexiest doctor on television in 2008 (Donnelly 2008) and who on screen, 'requires a cane for mobility in his right leg' (IMDb 2010). Barnes (1992a:13) does not identify any parallel depictions of disabled women and believes that on the occasions in which they are portrayed, they are generally presented 'in a most unglamorous fashion'. However, more recently modern media depictions of disabled women as attractive and sexual have been noted (see for example, Masters 2010 and Scarlet 2012).

The disabled person as unable to participate fully in community life

Barnes (1992a:13) argues that the stereotype of the disabled person as being unable to participate in community life is 'mainly one of omission' with disabled people rarely portrayed as 'integral and productive members' of their communities. He maintains that the absence of such

portrayals supports the belief that disabled people are 'inferior' and that they should be segregated. Disabled people are also 'conspicuous by their absence from mainstream popular culture' and are underrepresented by varied media formats such as television films and dramas, in contrast to the estimated number of disabled people within the British population.

Additionally, when compared to nondisabled portrayals, Barnes (1992a:13) argues that disabled people tend to be of a lower status and this standing is 'lowered further by the patronising attitudes and behaviour of nondisabled characters'. Further, he emphasises how disabled people are rarely depicted within factual programmes, unless these are directly related to disability, with a low incidence of disabled people in frontline media roles, such as newsreaders or their lack of participation within media discourses, which are not necessarily associated to disability, like chat shows. Some observers have also raised concerns in these areas (see for example, Cumberbatch and Negrine 1992:135-141, British Standards Commission 2003:2, Harpe and Malcolm 2005:33, Ipsos MORI 2011, Ofcom 2005:2 and Sancho 2003:15-16).

Another concern highlighted by Barnes (1992a:13) is the failure of the news medium to cover major disability matters like rights issues, with a few notable exceptions. Barnes and Mercer (2010:191) identify 'recent examples of novel and more overtly hostile' media illustrations of disabled people, which are generally connected with their involvement in 'political

protest campaigns'. They recall the media's initial confusion on how to report such demonstrations, with mentions of 'the last civil rights battle' gradually 'mixed with suggestions that such actions threatened to alienate erstwhile (nondisabled) supporters'. Recently, disabled activists in the UK have also protested 'against the role the media are playing in worsening attitudes towards disabled people and a complete failure to give space to the realities of what this government are doing to disabled people' (Disabled People Against Cuts 2013). However, 'a re-energised disability politics' has been observed to be spreading all over Britain and many disabled people and their organisations are employing social mediums such as, 'Facebook, blogs and Twitter… to make their voices heard'. Consequently, 'with the explosion of social media campaigning activities more and more disabled people are now able to speak for themselves' (Patrick 2012).

Barnes (1992a:13-14) also refers to the general invisibility of disabled people within mainstream advertising, which as well as concealing disability and disabled people from society overall, 'this undermines their role as consumers in the same market place as nondisabled people'. Equally, he criticises charity advertising for rarely discussing the exclusion of disabled people from mainstream community living, habitually portraying impairment as the cause of disabled people's problems, which can only be solved by solutions that focus on the individual and 'not on society'. Moreover, this 'implies that disabled

people have no choice but to turn to charities controlled and run by nondisabled people for help', when alternative approaches from self help organisations of disabled people is available, most of which operate 'with inadequate funding and little public recognition'. Barnes (1992a:14) thus maintains that mainstream charity advertising denies these organisations with that support and consequently hinders disabled people's 'struggle for self determination and independence'.

The disabled person as normal

The final media stereotype presented by Barnes (1992a:14) is of the disabled person as normal. He describes this as 'a recent development' with the appearance of disabled characters that 'just happen to have impairments' within varied mediums, such as television dramas and soaps and across advertising. While this assimilation is welcomed by Barnes (1992a:14), he still identifies its particular limitations for the removal of discriminatory practices, with depictions that tend to be 'one dimensional' and does little to 'reflect the experience of disability'. He refers to several disabled characters (played by disabled actors) in British television soaps like *Brookside, EastEnders* and *Emmerdale* that remained marginal to the overall storylines and only appeared on several occasions.

The British Film Institute (2010b) also lists varied attempts within television soaps which have included story lines about disabled people,

concluding that considering its large audiences and the broadcast time that is afforded to this genre, disabled people 'are not well represented most of the time, and hardly ever are characters there in their own right, not just as a plot device'. Nevertheless, in recent years some improvements have been noted in media portrayals of disability (see for example, Reay 2010b and Usmar 2013), with four major television British soaps introducing 'disabled actors into their cast', although these programmes tend to 'routinely make disabled characters vengeful and personality-driven' (Reay 2010c).

Barnes (1992a:14) reiterates previous concerns highlighted in the discussion of the disabled person as being unable to participate in community life stereotype and how television portrayals of disabled people are unrepresentative of the disabled community as a whole and do not reflect the overall diversity of the disabled population. Moreover, disabled characters are overwhelmingly portrayed with impairments that affect 'their mobility, behaviour or appearance'. So, he observes how 'the wheelchair and the guide dog have become symbols for the experience of disability' both on television and the media generally, maintaining 'widespread ignorance about the realities of impairment'.

However, Barnes (1992a:14) recognises how illustrations of disabled people, which do not refer directly to disability have reached American mainstream advertising (see for example, Longmore 1987:77

and Haller 2010b:202-203). He refers to adverts that feature young disabled actors as wheelchair users and employing sign language within 'normal' settings and while these portrayals can be perceived as a way forward 'in terms of integration', their 'emphasis of youth and commerciality' present an unchallenged 'normalisation' of disability. Barnes (1992a:14-15) argues that like all media illustrations of disabled people they do not reflect the diversity of the disabled community and disabled people do not fit neatly into nondisabled views of normality. Further, this prominence on 'normality tends to obscure the need for change' and if disabled people are presented 'as normal then there is little need for policies to bring about a society free from disablism'.

The stereotype of the disabled person as normal is also identified by Barnes (1992a:15) across charity advertising in the UK, with some adverts focusing on the 'positive' rather than the 'negative' features of disability and the 'able bodied' attributes of a disabled person are emphasised while their impairments are overlooked. He proposes that these representations undermine the 'disabled identity' of disabled people and although it presents them as 'normal', they still require other nondisabled people to plead for their everyday necessities. So, Barnes (1992a:15) believes that 'the claim to normality is untenable because 'normal' people are rarely dependent on the benevolence of others for their livelihood'. This approach also focuses on the individual rather than a disabling society.

Disabling media imagery

Barnes (1992a:15) concludes that his explorations of the prevailing stereotypical representations of disabled people demonstrate how the majority of information by the media about disability tends to be 'extremely negative'. He asserts that these 'form the bedrock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based' and are fundamental to the discrimination encountered daily by disabled people, contributing to their systematic exclusion from society. Barnes (1992a:15) also argues that attempts 'by some elements in the media to remedy the situation and 'normalise' disabled people will only partly resolve the problem'. Such concerns continue to be raised by disabled people and their organisations with regards to the prevalence of disabling media imagery in present-day society (see for example, Shape 2012 and Mencap Cymru 2012).

Having presented an overview of Barnes' (1992a:3) explorations of the 'commonly recurring media stereotypes' of disabled people, I will now turn to Clogston's (1990) models of news media representations of disability.

News media representations of disability: traditional and progressive models

In a content analytical study of the disability coverage in American newspapers and national news magazines, Clogston (1990:4-6) drew

from societal perceptions of disabled people to develop two categories of media portrayals of disability: traditional and progressive. A traditional category represents disabled people 'as malfunctioning in a medical or economic way' and encompasses three models: the medical, the social pathology and the 'super crip'. The medical model regards disability as an illness and the disabled person is portrayed as passive and dependant on health professionals for treatment or maintenance. The social pathology model presents the disabled person 'as a disadvantaged client', who looks onto the state or society for economical support, which is regarded as a gift and not the disabled person's right. The 'super crip' model refers to the extreme cases when a disabled person is regarded as deviant or 'less than human because of the disability' and involves stories about individuals who 'overcome their disabilities' inspirationally, supporting the belief that if they can do it, why cannot all disabled people do it too.

By contrast, Clogston's (1990:6) progressive category perceives people as disabled by 'society's inability to adapt its physical, social or occupational environment and its attitudes toward those who are different' and incorporates two models: the minority/civil rights and the cultural pluralism. The former observes disabled people as members of a 'minority group with legitimate political grievances', while the latter regard disabled people as 'multi faceted' individuals with no undue interest paid to the disability and disabled people depicted as nondisabled people.

Through the application of these five models to the news stories of his study's sample, Clogston (1992:12) concluded 'that while the state of news coverage of disability issues is not hopeless, it has a long way to go to be considered progressive' and whereas the use of language 'may not be as big a problem as might be thought', he still identified many instances in which traditional references were used in the news coverage of disability, which tend to stereotype disabled people in a negative way.

Clogston's (1990) models of news media representations of disability were developed further by Haller (1995:10-14) through her exploration of the news reporting of the 1990 American with Disabilities Act. She added three more models to reflect the societal changes following this legislation: business, within the traditional category and legal and consumer, within the progressive classification. She also extended the application of these models by acknowledging that more than one might be represented in a story (Haller 2009:7).

Haller's (1995:10-14) additional traditional business model refers to portrayals of disabled people and their concerns 'as costly to society', particularly for businesses. In the added progressive legal model, the media explains the illegality of treating disabled people in certain ways and presents legislation as legal tools to stop discrimination. In the other progressive consumer model, the media depicts disabled people as an 'untapped consumer group' and an accessible society could be profitable

to both businesses and society generally. Haller (2009:7) concluded that these additional models together with Clogston's (1990) taxonomy of news media representations of disability 'created a systematic way to study and categorise' portrayals of disabled people by a news medium.

Correlating disabling media stereotypes

Similarities can be identified between Barnes' (1992a:3) 'commonly recurring media stereotypes' and Clogston's (1990:4-6) models of news media representations of disability, together with Haller's (1995:10-14) development of his work. For example, Barnes' (1992a:3-6) stereotype of the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic with its 'medical approach to impairment' can be related with Clogston's (1990:5) traditional medical model. Parallel associations can also be found with Barnes' (1992a:10-11) stereotype of the disabled person as their own worst and only enemy and its perceptions that stem from 'the traditional medical view of disability'.

Additionally, Clogston's (1990:5) traditional 'super crip' model can be coupled with Barnes' (1992a:8-9) stereotype of the disabled person as a 'super cripple' and its 'triumph over tragedy approach'. While Clogston's (1990:5-6) traditional social pathology model and Haller's (1995:10-14) additional business model can be related to Barnes' (1992a:11-12) stereotype of the disabled person as a burden and the view that disabled people are helpless and dependent on nondisabled people for care and are 'an unacceptable drain on society's resources'.

Equally, Clogston's (1990:6) progressive category with its corresponding minority civil rights and cultural pluralism models can be related to Barnes' (1992a:13-14) concerns of the stereotype of the disabled person as incapable of participating fully in community life and how this depiction 'is mainly one of omission'. Additionally, Barnes' (1992a:14-15) trepidation with the stereotype of the disabled person as normal can be linked with Clogston's (1990:6) cultural pluralism approach which involves disabled people as 'multi faceted' individuals, 'whose disability is just one aspect of many' and disabled people are portrayed as nondisabled people. A representation that Barnes (1992a:14-15) attributes with particular limitations for the removal of discriminatory practices against disabled people.

Learning disability: adding to the media's stereotypical mix

However, other representations which could be regarded as more specific to LD have been identified, within analyses of the media coverage of learning disabled people. These do not necessarily feature in discussions about traditional media stereotypes of disabled people as documented by Barnes (1992a), Clogston (1990) or Haller (1995:10-14). So, it is to these particular LD depictions that I will now turn, adding to the exploration of the media's stereotypical mix of disability and the advancement of these seminal works.

The learning disabled person as an eternal child

One representation that can be particularly attributed to LD is the stereotype of the learning disabled person as an eternal child. Some characteristics of Barnes' (1992a) media stereotypes of the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic, as a burden and as sexually abnormal can be identified within this stereotypical representation. For example, McCarthy (1999:53) observes how traditionally 'because of their limited intellectual capacity' learning disabled people 'were considered to forever have the mind of a child' and 'were associated with child-like interests and pursuits' and often treated as children. Hence, within this 'eternal child' context if learning disabled people 'were just overgrown children', then they were also deemed as asexual and 'just as it was unthinkable to talk to young children about sex', it was also inconceivable to talk to learning disabled adults about sexuality. This prioritised the protection of 'their natural innocence' and 'fitted into an 'ignorance is bliss' philosophy'.

However, the stereotype of the learning disabled person as an eternal child primarily concerns learning disabled people 'with the dependence of children and only the level of understanding of a child' (Wertheimer 1987:20). Wolfensberger (1972:23-24) describes this view of learning disabled people as people 'who are and perhaps always will be much younger than their age' and generally those who hold this perception 'do not place strong or even reasonable developmental and adaptational demands upon the person so perceived'. Consequently, when such belief is displaced onto learning disabled people it undermines 'their

rights to be seen as adults and treated in an age appropriate way. It detracts from their dignity, inhibits independence and reduces their self-respect' (Understanding Individual Needs n.d.).

Indeed, Quarmby (2008:32 and 37) explores the role played by language 'in shaping our individual and collective attitudes towards disabled people', in her report of disability hate crime in the UK. She highlights how with the 'best of intentions' the term 'bullying' is regularly used by associations that work with learning disabled people to support them in their understanding 'that they are being wrongly targeted and to seek redress'. But then this is reflected in media reporting, with descriptions of learning disabled people 'as having the mental age of a child' and 'such language encourages the infantilisation of disabled victims of crime within the criminal justice system and masks the gravity of their experiences'.

Within her study of the press coverage of learning disabled people in the UK, Wertheimer (1987:22) found that 'the unrealistic image of the eternal child is still alive and kicking' and identified depictions of learning disabled people as eternal children even within a story that 'was clearly about adults'. Across the film medium, the childlike features of learning disabled characters have also been noted (see for example, Marks 1999:161-162 and Pavlides 2005:127-129). Kimpton-Nye (1997:34-35) observes how cinematic portrayals of learning disabled characters are

'based on social and cultural conventions' about learning disabled people and often feature as 'simple, childlike characterisations'. Moreover, he argues that these depictions 'represent the film makers' own feelings of fear, desire and shame' about LD as they 'fear the mental impairment of the learning disabled… but, at the same time, they feel shameful about such uncharitable feelings' and so generally portray learning disabled characters as 'cute, overgrown children. This is out of a sense of magnanimity and, perversely, a sense of desire'.

Kimpton-Nye (1997:35) asserts that for the film makers, these portrayals of learning disabled people as 'overgrown children' evoke 'a state of unspoiled adulthood, reminiscent of a mythical time in the Garden of Eden before life became complex and tainted'. But the problem with these portrayals is that they are not representative of the 'real lives' of learning disabled people and these learning disabled characters 'are exploited as thinly coded messages for portraying blessed, loveable simplicity'.

Confusing learning disability with mental illness

Another media representation that could be identified as particularly relevant for learning disabled people (as for people with a mental health condition) involves a failure to distinguish between LD and mental ill-health. While it may prove difficult to present such misunderstandings as a distinct stereotype, a general confusion about these conditions prevails,

within contemporary society (see for example, Learning Difficulties Media 2006:13, Mencap 2012:33 and Turning Point 2013). This misconception can be related to the historical associations of LD with mental health traditions, such as the asylums of the nineteenth century, which despite legal differentiation between 'idiots', 'lunatics' and individuals of 'unsound mind', placed all three under the overall categorisation of 'insanity' (Borsay 2005:66); or the use of the word 'mental' in former LD terminology like 'mental handicap' that 'linked more directly to the area of mental illness' and mental health legislation and 'it is a connection which lingers in the public mind' (Walmsley 2005:725).

Learning Difficulties Media (2006:13-14) believe that this widespread public confusion between LD and mental illness places an 'additional stigma' on learning disabled people, particularly as media coverage of mental distress is generally associated with violence. A correlation that was previously highlighted within the discussion of Barnes' (1992a:7) media stereotype of the disabled person 'as sinister and evil' (see for example, Philo *et al.* 1996:47 and Philo *et al.* 2010:40).

Wertheimer (1987:24-25) found that within the time period of her study, terms like LD had yet to reach the British Press. But she also identified how many journalists were still unable to distinguish between LD and mental illness and noted varied ways in which this confusion was conveyed by a newsprint medium. This included instances when the two

terms: 'mental illness and mental handicap' were used interchangeably, within a story.

Similarly, in an analysis of representations of learning disabled people by a British national newspaper: the *Guardian* during the period March to July 1983, McGill and Cummings (1990:62 and 68) highlighted a juxtaposition with people from other 'devalued' groups, particularly people with a mental health condition. Although in some stories these references attempted 'to clarify the distinction between the two groups'. Still, they found these findings to be consistent with Wolfensberger's (1972:14-15) explanation 'of the generality of attitudes towards different deviances' and how 'juxtaposition leads to the transfer of attitudes from one group to another'. So, bearing in mind the notion of the 'naïve' reader, McGill and Cummings (1990:68) emphasised that even in the stories which attempted to clarify the differences between learning disabled people and people with a mental health condition, these articles could have the reverse effect to the one originally intended. In a follow up study, Wilkinson and McGill (2009:70) noted how a 'high level of juxtapositions with mental illness reported in the 1983 sample appears to persist', but the 2001 sample showed higher incidences of juxtapositions with other groups, particularly 'the disabled, menaces and victims'.

Having identified two further representations that could be regarded as more specific to LD and which do not necessarily feature in discussions

of traditional media depictions of disabled people, I will now conclude this chapter by evaluating how collectively these categorisations can support analyses of the portrayals of learning disabled adults by the modern-day, print version of English national newspapers. This application can advance understandings of this particular medium and their corresponding LD discourses, while contributing to the study of disability and media imagery, generally.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an exploration of the prevailing ways in which the media represents disability and revealed 'disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people' (Barnes 1992a:15), including other representations that could be regarded as more specific to LD (see for example, Wertheimer 1987). In doing so, it started identifying how learning disabled people can be (mis)represented or not in a newsprint medium. Haller (2010b:40-41) emphasises how through the application of categorisations to media representations of disability, Clogston (1990) illustrated 'whether disabled people were still being presented in stigmatising, traditional ways, or whether they were being presented in a more progressive, disability rights manner'. Additionally, she argues that his findings reflected the status of disabled people generally within society because as Higgins (1992:6-7) asserts, 'we as a society 'make disability' through our language, media and other public and visible ways'.

But as Barnes and Mercer (2010:193-195) recognise, disabling media stereotypes are mediated and shaped by other social divisions, such as gender and it is essential that discourses of disabling portrayals acknowledge the diversity of the disabled community. Further, the idea of a 'positive' or a 'negative' depiction can be 'complex and contradictory'. Pointon and Davies (1997:1) emphasise how it is 'too simplistic' to compare between 'negative' and 'positive' media representations because even though disabled people are generally clear 'about what might constitute the former, the identification of 'positive' is fraught with difficulty'.

Taking into consideration these observations, there are two main ways in which categorisations of media representations of disability can support analyses of the portrayals of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers. First, Barnes' (1992a:3) 'commonly recurring media stereotypes' and Clogston's (1990:4-6) models of news media representations of disability, together with Haller's (1995:10-14) development of his work can be incorporated within an analytical framework through which these representations can be explored. Other depictions that could be regarded as more specific to LD can be integrated as well, adding to the media's stereotypical mix of disability. This can support a systematic process to the analyses of media content while acknowledging the diversity of the disabled population, as opposed to comparisons between 'negative' and 'positive' depictions of

disabled people and the application of a rudimentary approach to the study of media representations.

Secondly, it can allow for the identification of the prevailing ways in which learning disabled people are being portrayed by a current national newsprint medium and whether these concur with the generalised media stereotypes of disabled people and other more LD specific portrayals. Subsequent findings can also present a reflection of the status of learning disabled people within contemporary society, so that commonalities among struggles can be recognised and their experiences can come together with the collective voice of disabled people. As a result, these critical analyses can start addressing the significant lack of LD studies in the field of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a) and the few studies that have examined the newspaper representations of learning disabled people, to which I referred to in chapter one, with the near absence of their views and experiences in this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987).

In the next chapter, I will present an overview of Britain's contemporary national newsprint industry with the intention of validating it as a leading medium that is likely to engage regularly with LD discourses and which can be used as a vehicle for identifying and for critically analysing the significance and meanings of contemporary media representations of learning disabled adults. In media influenced societies,

the press has been noted to have a significant effect on the 'knowledge, attitudes and public policies' regarding a diversity of issues, including the ways it portrays disabled people. Further, such 'influence can, at its best, enhance knowledge and promote social awareness of disabilities. At its worst, it can promulgate misinformation and reinforce negative stereotypes' (Keller *et al.* 1990:271). Moreover, as Haller (2010b:41) asserts:

> The information in newspapers, whether correct or not, reaches millions of people each day in print form and then has a second life on the Internet as the information lands in blogs or news sites. These news stories act as significant agents in socially constructing images of people with disabilities and disability issues in many cultures. News stories filter out into public consciousness and are still typically viewed as representations of 'reality'.

Equally, news values have been identified as an important area of journalism studies that can clarify 'the ways in which some phenomena become identified as 'events' and the ways that some of those 'events' are then selected to become 'news''. This concept can allow for an exploration of 'the ways in which certain elements of the selected 'events' will be emphasised whilst others will be downplayed or excluded' (O'Neill and Harcup 2009:162 and 171). Additionally, the values of the news media in representing disabled people can help assess their 'societal status and whether there are changes in the social culture regarding their issues' (Haller 2010b:28). Subsequently, I will also present the concept of news values within journalistic discourses, to highlight the ways in which content analyses can be augmented by the newsworthiness of LD stories.

Chapter four
Britain's contemporary national press, news values and the newsworthiness of learning disability

<u>Introduction</u>

> It's been great to see Susan Boyle get so far. You rarely see people with a learning disability in the media (Evans 2009:5).

Findings from a UK survey identified Susan Boyle as the only public figure named with a LD (Ipsos MORI 2011). Her initial singing performance on the 2009 series of *Britain's Got Talent* (BGT) reportedly had a television audience of more than ten million and its *YouTube* counterpart had by mid April 2009, been viewed almost thirty million times (Midgley 2009:25). Nevertheless, as I emphasised in chapter one, an exploration of contemporary media representations of learning disabled people within a British milieu, requires the identification of a leading medium, which is likely to engage regularly with LD discourses and not just with atypical cases, like the Susan Boyle story. Britain's national newsprint industry can serve as the vehicle for such explorations, referring to those newspapers that are broadly described by Cole and Harcup (2010:19) as published in London and readily available across the country.

In the UK, the standing of newspapers remains despite some observers speculating the demise of this industry (see for example, Lynn 2013 and Williams 2010). Rival media such as radio and television, stand accused of referring to newspapers and maintaining their reputation as the most influential medium (Cole and Harcup 2010:5). Further, Britain has 'the greatest variety of newspapers of any nation in the world, and that is particularly true of our national press' (Cole and Harcup 2010:19), with titles such as the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* ranked 'among the top ten of Europe's most read newspapers' (Williams 2010:1). Moreover, some learning disabled people have also highlighted 'that they would or might read a newspaper with simple words and pictures' (United Response 2013).

In this chapter, I will present a synopsis of the modern-day landscape of the UK's national newsprint industry, identifying the leading titles for its three main market sectors and their distinguishing journalistic style, corresponding readership, circulation figures and political allegiances. I will then turn to the concept of newsworthiness and an exploration of the findings of research studies that have specifically examined the representations of learning disabled people by a newsprint medium, through the application of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) taxonomy of news values. Consequently, I will conclude this chapter by naming the three newspapers that will be examined during the content analysis stage of this study and a rationale for their selection. I will also consider the

newsworthiness of LD stories and how this can inform analyses of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

Britain's national newsprint medium: a modern-day landscape

For many years in the UK, newspapers have played 'an important part in cultural and political life by informing, entertaining, exasperating, delighting and infuriating their readers' (O'Malley and Soley 2000:1). Their role has also been widely contested. For some, one of their key functions is to underpin the process of democracy (see for example, Randall 2011:25); while for others their primary goal is in terms of a commodity for reader as consumers (see for example, Conboy and Steel 2008:651). Nevertheless, newspapers can be simply regarded as suppliers of information that entertain and offer discussions of phenomena and decisions. They may not be the only informant of news, nor are they recognised as the most reliable resource, 'but people like newspapers' (Cooke *et al.* 2000:5).

The British population has been noted as great consumers of the newsprint medium (Williams 2010:1). Despite concerns raised about the decline in circulation and sales of newspapers, changing readership trends and technological developments (see for example, Barnett 2006:9-14, Brook 2007, Curtice and Mair 2008:163-164, Franklin 2008:3-4, McNair 2009:3-6, Meyer 2004:16, Page 2011, Preston 2008:642-643 and the

Economist 2006), a large number of their print versions are still bought in the UK and plenty of time is spent reading them (Cole and Harcup 2010:10). For example, the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) data for December 2010 registered total average circulatory figures for daily national newspapers of nearly nine and a half million and over nine million for Sunday titles (the *Guardian* 2011a and 2011b). Additionally, readership levels for the UK's 'top ten best selling' national daily titles for the period of December 2010, were identified at an average of over twenty four million readers, with Sunday editions recorded at around twenty six million (News and Journalism Research Group 2010:9 and 11).

Britain's national newspaper industry 'is highly stratified… and is influenced by class, education, occupation and self-image' and it can be differentiated into three main types of newspapers: the redtop tabloids, the mid-markets and the 'quality' sector (Cole and Harcup 2010:20). In the main, the British Press is noted as Conservative in stance, still individual political allegiances have been accredited to the leading titles of these major market sectors (see for example, McNair 2009:88). I will now present each of these categories in turn.

The redtop tabloids

The redtop tabloids are described by Cole and Harcup (2010:22) as traditionally the most popular newspapers, which were initially targeted at the 'working man' and now broadly appeal to both male and female

readers from the 'lower socio-economic groups'. They have a 'typically sensationalist news style, a celebrity-oriented and sexualized news agenda, and the use of aggressive journalistic methods such as paparazzi coverage and chequebook journalism' (Johansson 2008:402). Titles like the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Star* fall under this category and share some key features. For example, these newspapers focus on light news, an entertaining touch and a human interest appeal, with a predominant use of pictures over words and 'most stories running to less than 400 words' (Tunstall 1996:11).

Tabloidese is the language employed by the redtop tabloids, a style that Cole and Harcup (2010:22-23) suggest was refined and adapted by the *Sun*. This involves the use of 'short words and sentences, nouns as adjectives and expressions seldom spoken by anyone at all', providing 'the quick read' that these newspapers believe are required by their readers. They also observe how the redtop tabloids are still selling in large amounts, although 'they are losing sales faster' than any other newspaper category. Nonetheless, ABC figures for December 2010 confirmed the *Sun* as the UK's leading national daily, with an average circulation of around 2.7 million (the *Guardian* 2011a) and while at times its political allegiances has shifted, this redtop tabloid title is accredited as supporting the Conservative party (see for example, Greenslade 2010).

The mid-markets

The resurgence of the mid-market sector is according to Cole and Harcup (2010:27) the story of the *Daily Mail* and its weekend counterpart, the *Mail on Sunday*. The former is Britain's second best selling national daily (to the *Sun*), with ABC data recording an average circulation of over two million, for the month of December 2010 (the *Guardian* 2011a) and which has consistently supported a pro-Conservative stance (see for example, Greenslade 2010). While these mid-market titles are not without their liberal critics (see for example, Davis 2008:357), they have been noted to be taken extremely seriously by politicians because they represent a considerable and 'unignorable strand of British public opinion'. Further, these publications set the agenda with a detailed knowledge of its readership, exemplifying 'the idea that a successful newspaper both reflects and reinforces the prejudices of its readers' (Cole and Harcup 2010:28).

By contrast to its redtop tabloid counterparts, the *Mail* titles cannot stand accused of disregarding 'serious' news. As Cole and Harcup (2010:28-29) observe, it is a tabloid that places an emphasis on text with long items running over more than one page and a sound record of 'exposure' stories that regularly create a stir, influencing or even setting the political agenda. They also lead on 'lifestyle' features and enjoy the highest number of female readers of any other national newspaper. Further, Cole and Harcup (2010:29-31) emphasise how the *Mail* titles have recognised changes in British culture, identifying its target

readership as the expanding middle classes, who they regularly portray 'as the voice of 'middle England' and its success indicates 'that this constituency exists'. Moreover, the *Mail* titles have been attracting 'upwardly mobile' readers from the redtop tabloids, while 'competing with right-of-centre' newspapers of the 'quality' sector.

The 'quality' sector

'Quality' national newspapers focus on the 'in-depth and comprehensive coverage' of a story, which is written in 'moderate and emotionally controlled language (assumedly) typical of the middle classes'. Rather than taking a tabloid approach and the human interest angle of a story, 'quality' titles tend to lead on an 'issue' or the substantive concerns of an item. Additionally, they are more 'print heavy' than the 'more pictorial' redtop tabloids and are less likely to employ 'ethically dubious reporting practices, such as… paying sources for stories' (Franklin *et al.* 2005:29).

Consequently, the 'quality' sector is by tradition committed to text and debate, not so interested in human interest stories and popular culture and enjoys 'a presence and influence way beyond their relatively modest circulations'. It is also regularly featured within the 'dumbing down' debate since it occupies 'the higher, more serious, more issue-driven ground' and so 'has more potential for descent'. Additionally, its regular readership tends to include 'the higher socio-economic and

intellectual area of society' (Cole and Harcup 2010:31). These 'quality'

publications include titles like the *Times*, the *Guardian* and the

Independent (Tunstall 1996:12), with the *Daily Telegraph* noted as the

UK's leading national 'quality' daily. ABC data recorded its average

circulation of around 630,000 for the month of December 2010 (the

Guardian 2011a) and politically, it has always supported the

Conservatives (see for example, Greenslade 2010).

Having provided a synopsis of Britain's contemporary national press

in order to support my subsequent rationale for the three newspapers

that will be examined during the content analysis stage of this study, I

will now turn to the concept of news values and a consideration of the

newsworthiness of LD stories.

News values: an overview

> …of the millions of events which occur every day in the world, only
> a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories';
> and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as
> the day's news in the news media (Hall 1982:234).

News values can be broadly defined as the criteria that an event

must satisfy before journalists can decide on its newsworthiness (Price

1997:159). It is a concept that often divides journalists and academics.

Journalists will tend to argue about having an innate instinct for what

makes a good news story; while academics will attempt to analyse the

process by splitting up news stories into abstract classifications and by

examining habitual journalistic practices, 'through the prism of theory' (Cole and Harcup 2010:172).

Indeed, the seminal nature of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) work to the study of news values has been widely recognised (Watson 2003:134). They produced a list of factors that they perceived as eliciting public interest in the consumption of news media (see Box 1), stating 'no claim for completeness in the list of factors or deductions'; while adding how these factors were 'not independent of each other' (Galtung and Ruge 1965:64 and 71).

Box 1: Factors affecting the flow of news
1. Frequency
2. Threshold
3. Unambiguity
4. Meaningfulness
5. Consonance
6. Unexpectedness
7. Continuity
8. Composition
9. Reference to elite nations
10. Reference to elite people
11. Reference to persons
12. Reference to something negative
Source: Galtung and Ruge (1965:70-71)

Although their work remains an ideal starting point for discussing the concept of news values it is not without its critics. From a sociological perspective the list may appear satisfactory but from an editorial angle this criterion is lacking and areas such as individuality or motivations of journalistic personnel are not considered. There is also no scope for the influences in news reporting by advertising revenues or 'the quasi-political

manoeuvring' between public relations and journalistic professions, along with changes in the modern media landscape (Brighton and Foy 2007:7-8 and 14).

Price (1997:159) emphasises how many journalists would not necessarily agree with Galtung and Ruge's (1965) listing of factors affecting the flow of news but maintains that this taxonomy can still provide a useful framework for analysing how institutional constraints can affect the process of news creation. Subsequently, Galtung and Ruge's (1965) thesis has been re-examined and their list of factors have been revised.

A contemporary set of news values

An example of such revision can be found in the empirical study of the British Press undertaken by Harcup and O'Neill (2001). These researchers were informed but not uncritical of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) work and found that potential news stories must in general satisfy one or more requirements from a set of 'more' contemporary news values (see Box 2).

While Franklin *et al.* (2005:174) perceive Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) taxonomy as a better summary of contemporary newspaper content, they still believe that it does not challenge the ideological reasons behind their application. So, for example they argue how the illustration of ephemeral issues as newsworthy does not 'explain why this is the case', nor does it question 'whether it is in the public interest to pander persistently to 'what interests the public''.

Additional influences

Equally, Richardson (2007:92-95) recognises how the exact manifestation of the meanings attributed to news values by journalists, as they classify news from plain events is also dependant on the perceived inclination of their target audiences. Further, he argues that journalistic

meaning can be communicated as much by what is included and excluded as newsworthy, with news values changing over time. Moreover, through this 'guesswork', journalists can still miss out on a story or misjudge the values of its audiences (see for example, Durell 2005).

Other influences on news values have been observed to include the ways in which news is collected. News is compiled within highly structured business organisations that may vary in its configuration from one establishment to another, although generally every news organisation acquires news from the same resources, such as news agencies. The majority of news stories are planned because editors just cannot rely on events just happening in order to fill up their news reports. So, in order to comply with the increasing demand for news, journalists are reliant on similar news sources for material and in practice this can result in a large amount of duplication. News values 'are also influenced by the particular deadlines and requirements of each medium' (Fleming *et al.* 2006:6-8).

There is also a danger in attempting to codify news values as it can end up as a simple subject headings listing of stories, 'almost like an account of the sections of an extensive broadsheet newspaper' (Brighton and Foy 2007:8). Many journalists may refer to an 'instinctive nose' to the concept of news values but most academics would argue that it is maybe impossible to analyse news values in a meaningful way without

taking into account 'occupational routines, budgets, the market, and ideology' (O'Neill and Harcup 2009:171).

Despite the varied dimensions of how news values might be determined, Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) taxonomy can assist in the process of understanding the ways in which phenomena are identified as 'events' and the manner by which some of these 'events' are selected and processed into 'news' (Cole and Harcup 2010:173). Consequently, in the next section of this chapter, I will apply this categorisation to the findings of research studies that have specifically examined the newspaper coverage of learning disabled people, to facilitate explorations of the newsworthiness of LD stories and how this can inform subsequent analyses of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

The newsworthiness of learning disability

Few studies have specifically examined the newspaper coverage of learning disabled people. Table 1 lists those that are readily available and have focused on this matter to date. With the exception of Carter *et al.* (1996) who examined the press in Sydney Australia, the remaining studies reviewed newspaper portrayals within a British context. Moreover, none of these analyses included the views and experiences of learning disabled people, within their research design or discourses.

Table 1: Studies that have focused on the newspaper coverage of learning disabled people

Authors	Date	Title
Wilkinson, P. and McGill, P.	2009	Representation of people with intellectual disabilities in a British Newspaper in 1983 and 2001
Carter, M., Parmenter, T.R. and Watters, M.	1996	National, metropolitan and local newsprint coverage of developmental disability
Ralph, S. and Corbett, J.	1994	How the Local and Provincial press in Britain Reported the Re-launch of Mencap: Changing Images of Learning Disabilities
McGill, P. and Cummings, R.	1990	An analysis of the representation of people with mental handicaps in a British newspaper
Wertheimer, A.	1987	According to the Papers: press reporting on people with learning difficulties

Notwithstanding the amount of information presented by these researchers within these publications and their diverse features, Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) news values' prerequisites can still be identified in some of the published findings of these analyses. For example, Wertheimer (1987:11) collected 1,489 press cuttings from national, local and regional newspapers in the UK over a period of six weeks, during March and April 1987. She observed how two major news stories dominated the newspaper coverage of learning disabled people during the time period of her study.

The story of Jeanette

The first item related to the case of Jeanette, a young learning disabled woman who was sterilised before the age of eighteen. In the first two weeks of the running of this story, newspaper coverage of the court

case and related publicity accounted for fifty seven per cent and fifty per cent of Wertheimer's (1987:11) total number of items. Jeanette's story received a lot of coverage and 'it was clearly something on which many people held very strong opinions'; but learning disabled people 'were not asked to give their views' and 'headline writers had a field day' (Wertheimer 1987:34).

This storyline can be related to several factors of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001:279) taxonomy. For example, it concerned an 'entertainment' factor and a 'human interest' appeal and as Jeanette's court case progressed it stimulated an 'unfolding drama'. These features can also be associated to the 'relevance' of this item to its readers and as journalists followed up on the story, a public debate developed over the rights of learning disabled people to have children. This is reflected in some of the contrasting headlines quoted by Wertheimer (1987:34-35): 'girls who mustn't be mums' and 'should any girl lose her right to have a baby'. In turn, these discourses also portrayed Jeanette's story as a 'bad' news item, which was covered with negative connotations both of conflict and tragedy, with each newspaper taking a particular stance on the story.

The story of the royal cousins

Wertheimer's (1987:11) second major news item concerned a royal family connection and while it ran for a shorter length of time compared to Jeanette's story, it still accounted for forty per cent of press cuttings

during the week the story was covered. Wertheimer (1987:31-32) explains how this storyline involved an exclusive from the *Sun*, which revealed that two first cousins of the Queen (nieces of the Queen Mother) had been admitted to a long term institution in 1941. Other members of the Royal family had also been put into this hospital in the same year. Varied discussions emanated from this news story including 'the fact that the Queen Mother's two nieces had been declared officially dead in Burke's Peerage'; the call for the Queen Mother to resign from her patronage of Mencap and the representation of learning disabled people 'as a eugenic threat', with the *Times* reassuring its readers that 'Royal blood is clear' and the *News of the World* calling for Princes William and Harry, 'to be screened for hereditary disease'.

Consequently, this storyline involved an 'entertainment' feature with a 'human interest' appeal; elements of both 'bad' and 'good' news and the inclusion of the 'power elite': royalty, with its associations of 'celebrity' status. The newsworthiness of celebrities is also recognised by Wertheimer (1987:28) through her observations of the pictures that were published across her study's sample. She identified one hundred and seventy seven photographs in the general coverage, fifty three images in the reporting of Jeanette's sterilisation case and ninety two across the Royal Family's news items. One in four pictures included learning disabled people 'but it was fundraisers and others evoking images of charity who 'topped the bill'' and involved 'Royal and other 'star' visitors'.

Other storylines

Other major storylines recorded by Wertheimer (1987:13) refer to services for learning disabled people and fundraising events. Individual stories about learning disabled people ranked fifth and covered a mixture of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001:279) categorisation of 'bad' and 'good' news items, although these tended to portray learning disabled people as victims rather than as achievers, by two to one (Wertheimer 1987:15). This 'good' news angle can also be identified within Ralph and Corbett's (1994:9-12) review of the ninety press reports regarding the relaunch of Mencap, within local and regional UK newspapers. They found that this medium mostly used the idea of 'joy/happiness' from Mencap's promotion of four new concepts: 'joy, dignity, independence and pride'. These items included descriptions like: 'the 'forgotten people' are making a happy comeback in a new logo campaign'. Moreover, some newspapers considered Mencap's promotional photographs as 'happier' pictures that 'created a more positive image' of learning disabled people.

Wertheimer (1987:16) found that other issues such as, welfare benefits or legislation received little attention even though the 1986 Disabled Person's Act, which had direct implications for learning disabled people, was going through Parliament during the period of her study's press coverage. Ralph and Corbett (1994:14) also noted how only twenty one of the ninety reports they analysed mentioned 'Mencap's role as a campaigning or a pressure group or as specifically fighting discrimination'.

Similarly, Carter *et al.* (1996:178-180) identified sport as 'the most commonly addressed topic' and observed a low level of national newspaper coverage of learning disabled people and disability issues, taking into account the 'prominence of the Disability Discrimination Act', at the time of their research. Nevertheless, they acknowledged some caution in the interpretation of their data and recognised that the nature of newspaper coverage of disability appears to depend upon particular activities of varied interest groups, such as Deaf awareness week or major but infrequent events, like the Paralympics.

Autism, Down syndrome and other conditions

Equally, in their follow up study to McGill and Cummings (1990), Wilkinson and McGill (2009:73) found an under representation of learning disabled people with 'severe' LD or additional conditions; while people with autism or Down syndrome were 'over represented by comparison with their prevalence', within the learning disabled population. This increased reporting about people with autism is explained by Wilkinson and McGill (2009:74) to the 'considerable discussion and research in recent years on whether we have an autism 'epidemic' and what, if such can be established, might be causing it'. However, they could not account for the over representation of people with Down syndrome as 'there has not been such a background'.

This focus within the LD coverage of particular conditions can also be informed through the application of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001:279) taxonomy. For example, these items can embrace an angle of 'entertainment' with 'an unfolding drama' and could appeal to either a 'bad' or a 'good' news approach. Further, if as Wilkinson and McGill (2009:74) observed recent research and discussions have highlighted 'an autism epidemic', then this can substantiate the 'magnitude' of this news coverage and identify it as an issue of 'relevance' for newspaper audiences. These ongoing discourses can also incorporate 'follow up' storylines.

Wilkinson and McGill (2009:73-74) noted that although learning disabled people with 'non specific' LD are 'no longer sick and much more likely to be adults than in 1983', people with autism and Down syndrome were mostly represented as children and within predominantly medically related stories. In an attempt to explain these age related portrayals, they highlighted the numbers of news stories, within their study's sample that referred to children, which was 'much more than expected on the basis of the number of children/adults population'. Nonetheless, it can prove difficult to apply Harcup and O'Neill's (2001:279) news values framework to these particular portrayals of learning disabled children without further information of the news stories in question, other than an 'entertainment' factor and a 'human interest' appeal. However, Niblock (2005:77) lists 'unusual people' as an inherent value within the events of

a story and news that involve 'vulnerable' people attract most coverage because society places 'tremendous importance on the integrity of human existence… children are unusual in the same way'.

Within the broader allure of 'unusualness', Carter *et al.* (1996:81) suggest that there is an over representation of physical impairment to LD, considering the lower prevalence of the former to the higher incidence of the latter. This finding is consistent with Keller *et al.* (1990:275) who recorded how 'the category of physically disabled, a low prevalence disability category, received the most references (twenty seven per cent)'. While Carter *et al.* (1996:181) acknowledged that it may be inapt to expect the newspaper medium to reflect society's relative prevalence of disability, they still assert that the scant coverage of learning disabled people is not consistent 'with the educational, social and economic impact' of LD.

This propensity by the newsprint medium for the coverage of people with physical impairments can be associated with previous discussions in chapter three, on the media's partiality for portrayals of disabled characterisations with more 'visible' impairments (see for example, Barnes 1992a:14). Moreover, Haller (2000:279) asserts that an image of 'disability-related equipment' such as a wheelchair, appeals to 'two long-held values in journalism', drama and human interest. She argues that in terms of the news media's values of representations of disability 'people

who have visually apparent disabilities are valued within the news because of the unspoken and emotional cues they provide' (Haller 2000:273). Equally, this might also explain the over representation of people with Down syndrome in the newsprint medium, as noted by Wilkinson and McGill (2009:74) and the physical features that are characteristic of people with this condition (Smith 2011:52). Indeed, Harpe and Malcolm (2005:33) observe that the recognition of a LD 'is almost always instantaneous with someone who has Down's syndrome, which is not necessarily the case with people with other learning disabilities'.

Having explored the concept of newsworthiness through the application of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) taxonomy of news values to the findings of research studies that have specifically examined the representations of learning disabled people by a newsprint medium, I will now conclude this chapter by naming the three newspapers that will be examined during the content analysis stage of this study and a rationale for their selection. A consideration on how analyses of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers can be informed by the concept of news values will also be discussed.

Conclusion

The first section of this chapter presented a modern-day landscape of the UK's national newsprint industry and reiterated my former assertions in chapter one, that the standing of newspapers remain despite speculations surrounding the demise of this industry, with the British population noted as great consumers of the newsprint medium (Williams 2010:1 and 241). Influenced by class, education, employment and self-image, Britain's national press is highly stratified and it can be distinguished into three main types of newspapers: the redtop tabloids, the mid-markets and the 'quality' sector (Cole and Harcup 2010:20). While political allegiances can be accredited to each of the leading titles of these major market sectors, in the main the British Press is noted as supportive of the Conservative party (see for example, McNair 2009:88).

ABC figures for December 2010 identified the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* as the leading dailies, for each market sector of the UK's contemporary national newsprint medium (the *Guardian* 2011a). Notwithstanding their pro-Conservative stance (see for example, Greenslade 2010), these newspapers can still be regarded as broadly representing the diversity of the English national press, with their individual journalistic style and corresponding readership (see for example, Cole and Harcup 2010). An understanding of these features can inform this study's content analysis, since each title's distinct approach together with their affiliation to particular groups of readers can influence the narration of a story and consequently, representations of learning

disabled people. Consequently, these titles will be selected primarily because of their large circulation and their standing as agenda setting media in the UK, particularly as the time frame of this study's content analysis involves the years 2006 to 2010 and contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers, in an attempt to present a more current picture of how LD is (mis)represented or not by this medium. Nonetheless, they are likely to reflect the views of the Conservatives, including the emergence of a Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition establishment in 2010 and 'an increase in the politicisation of the media coverage of disability, a shift which reflects the Coalition Government's agenda' (The Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and the Glasgow Media Unit 2011:7). Therefore, comparative LD studies of other national newsprint media with lower circulatory figures and different political allegiances, such as the *Daily Mirror*, would clearly be of interest for further research in the UK's contemporary press coverage of learning disabled people. ABC figures for December 2010 credited this redtop tabloid with an average circulation of around 1.1 million (the *Guardian* 2011a) and it has traditionally supported the Labour party (see for example, Greenslade 2010).

The second section of this chapter explored the concept of news values, which has been described as one of the most significant areas of journalism studies because 'it goes to the heart of what is included, what is excluded and why' (O'Neill and Harcup 2009:162). Moreover, as Haller

(1999:2) observes: 'journalists select the content and frame of the news, thereby constructing reality for those who read, watch or listen to their stories'.

While acknowledging that there are limitations to the application of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) categorisation of news values to the findings of the few research studies that have specifically examined the newspaper coverage of LD (see Table 1), this exploratory exercise can still inform subsequent analyses of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary print version of English national newspapers because it highlights the characteristics that can make a LD story newsworthy and it draws attention to how certain elements of a storyline can be heightened, downplayed or excluded. So, for example, LD items appear to satisfy several newsworthiness features, such as celebrity, entertainment, a bad and/or good news overtone, magnitude, relevance and a follow up trend on leading storylines (see for example, Wertheimer 1987:31 and 34 and Wilkinson and McGill 2009:74). Issues such as welfare benefits and legislation appear to have little newsworthiness and enjoy limited newspaper coverage (see for example, Carter *et al.* 1996:180 and Wertheimer 1987:16). Stories regarding individuals with 'severe' LD or additional impairments also tend to feature less frequently than items about people with certain conditions (Wilkinson and McGill 2009:73-74), with more news coverage awarded to people with physical impairments than to learning disabled people (Carter *et al.* 1996:181).

The rare use of learning disabled people as sources for newspaper stories has also been recognised. Wertheimer (1987:29) noted that within her study's sample, there was only one possible exception were learning disabled people were given the opportunity 'to express their opinions directly'. Other studies have identified the general absence of the voices of disabled people in the press coverage of disability (see for example, Adams 2008:5, Cooke *et al.* 2000:6 and Robertson 2009:12). Additional concerns have been raised on how disabled people can be used 'as exemplars to substantiate generalised third person claims' and not as primary informants of a news story (Huws and Jones 2011:102). These observations reveal the silencing of disabled people in newspaper discourses, a concern to which I referred to in chapter one, while emphasising not only the significance of the identification of the sources of news stories but that close attention should also be given to their prominence within these storylines.

These considerations can be assimilated within an analytical framework for exploring LD representations by the modern-day English national newsprint medium, through the incorporation of a 'source(s)' variable that not only identifies the sources of news stories but also explores the level of employment of learning disabled people as informants in these narratives, when they are used in practice. Consequently, subsequent findings from these critical analyses can reveal new insights into the use of learning disabled people as primary sources

for news items and the integration of their lived experiences within these storylines. It can also assist in the assessment of their societal status and whether they are changes in the social culture, with regard to their issues (Haller 2010b:28).

Nevertheless, by adopting a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process, this study aims to develop critical insights in conducting inclusive research with and for learning disabled people. It involves a research project that seeks to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers. So, in order to set this study in context, it is of the essence to understand the importance of this central objective. Indeed, none of the LD newspaper studies that were examined in this chapter included the views and experiences of learning disabled people, within their research design or discourses (see Table 1). However, the emergence of social model thinking to the concept of disability has challenged and developed the ways in which disability research is undertaken, with disabled people, activists and academics questioning research agendas and research processes (see for example, Barnes 2003, Oliver 1992, The Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006 and Walmsley 2005). Consequently, these discourses have influenced the ways in which research is undertaken by and with learning disabled people and the manner in which they are positioned in the research process (see for

example, Walmsley and Johnson 2003). It is to these research

philosophies that I will now turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter five
Disability research: underlying philosophies

<u>Introduction</u>

> Disability is not measles. It is not a medical condition that needs to
> be eliminated from the population. It is a social status and the
> research agenda must take into account the political implications
> attached to this status (Rioux 1994:7).

Chapter two set the foundations of this study by presenting the

individual and the social models of disability and their definitions of

disability concepts, together with the impact of these approaches on LD

discourses. These explorations informed and influenced the focus of this

research and identified the social model as a way of thinking about

disability that can break the silence of learning disabled people in the

production of knowledge. Consequently, contemporary representations of

learning disabled adults by the print version of English national

newspapers can be explored, through an inclusive approach that engages

this group as partners in the research and which gives due precedence to

their views and experiences, on the matters under discussion.

The beginnings of the social model were traced back to UPIAS'

(1976) reconceptualisation of disability as a form of social oppression

(Oliver 2009:42-43) and the increasing criticisms from disabled activists and their organisations of the individual model and calls for an alternative approach (Barnes *et al.* 2010:163). The social model not only exerted a powerful influence on disabled people and their organisations and disability politics but it 'also underpinned the growth of academic teaching and research on disability in Britain' (Barnes and Mercer 2004:1). So, if social model thinking approached disability 'as the societal response to impairment', then it followed 'that research should switch from the 'problems' created by impairment to changing society in order to increase disabled people's opportunities for full inclusion' (Walmsley 2005:731).

Since at least the 1960s, disabled activists had been highly critical of mainstream research on disability (see for example, Hunt 1981). Barnes (2008:461) provides three fundamental critiques of disability research, prior to the mid 1990s and how it tended to be orientated towards the recording of the prevalence of impairment and associated problems; it often focused on the individual experience of chronic illness; and finally, that the research process tended not to involve disabled people or their organisations and it was based upon an individual model of disability, playing down the effects of 'disabling physical and social environments' and with little impact on policy.

It is these critiques of research being carried out by 'powerful experts on relatively powerless subjects' (Ward and Flynn 1994:30-31)

that has prompted demands for an emancipatory approach (see for example, Barton 2005:317 and Oliver 1992:101), which gives voice and legitimacy to disabled peoples experiences and thereby, as Barnes (2008:458) argues, acts as a basis for challenging 'the widespread social oppression of disabled people'. The social model of disability and its associated emancipatory research principles also filtered into the field of LD studies and influenced the development of inclusive research with learning disabled people (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:59).

In this chapter, I will present an overview of emancipatory and inclusive research philosophies by tracing their origins, identifying their key features and highlighting the challenges and matters in their application to disability research practices, referring particularly to literature within a British context. This chapter will conclude with an appraisal of how this synopsis informed and influenced the underlying research approach of this study and the rationale for its application, together with a reflection of my role as a nondisabled inclusive researcher, within the field of disability studies.

Emancipatory disability research

The idea of emancipation has long been embedded in the enlightenment tradition and its associations with notions of freedom or liberty (see for example, Manning and France 2006). Oliver (1992:110) describes how the development of emancipatory research stemmed from

the gradual dismissal of a positivist approach to social research, 'as the pursuit of absolute knowledge through the scientific method'; and an increasing disillusionment with the interpretative research perspective, 'as the generation of socially useful knowledge within particular historical and social contexts'. He identifies how an emancipatory approach is about the facilitation 'of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever levels it occurs'.

Additionally, Oliver (1997:16-17) emphasises that emancipatory research is not about arguing against the search for knowledge as such, but it is an assertion that it is impossible 'to research oppression in an objective or scientific way'. By this, he is suggesting that unless disabled people are enabled to influence research, then their views will continue to be marginalised. As Barnes (1996b:110) argues, 'if disability research is about researching oppression', then researchers can either be on the side of the 'oppressors', or in support of the 'oppressed'. So, the concern for emancipatory research is not about how to empower people; but once they have chosen to empower themselves, what can research do to support such a process. This involves changing 'the social relations of research production', with researchers placing their 'knowledge and skills' in the control of their research subjects (Oliver 1992:111).

Oliver (1999a:183) believes that the eventual development of a 'truly' emancipatory approach to disability research must be based on a

discourse, which is also emancipatory and 'the idea of research as production'. Therefore, research has to be perceived 'as a productive rather than an investigative exercise' (Oliver and Barnes 2012:29). This requires an engagement with the world instead of a distancing from it:

> Thus the research act is not an attempt to change the world through the process of investigation but an attempt to change the world by producing ourselves and others in differing ways from those we have produced before, intentionally or not (Oliver 2002:14).

The reclassification of research as production can also turn the focus of researchers onto the behaviour of oppressors, as opposed to the 'parasiting' of the experiences of disabled people. This can add a significant aspect to disability research and although it is unable to prevent 'the separation of researcher and researched… it nonetheless produces useful knowledge for disabled people and their organisations in the struggle against oppression' (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30).

Origins

The underlying principles of emancipatory disability research originated from the increasing disillusionment by disabled people with disability research and the self-reflection by disabled and nondisabled researchers of their own research practices (Zarb 1992:127). Barnes and Mercer (1997:2) trace back critiques of social research on 'disability' to at least the 1960s. They identify *Le Court Cheshire Home* study as a 'celebrated case in the history of the disabled people's movement', when

disabled residents approached 'experts' in 'group dynamics', for support in their struggle against management and professionals 'for greater control over their everyday lives'. Consequently, a study by Miller and Gwynne (1974) was undertaken on the residential institutions for people with physical impairments and young people with chronic conditions. However, it soon became apparent to the residents that they 'had been conned' and that these 'unbiased social scientists' were following their own agenda (Hunt 1981:39).

Barnes and Mercer (1997:2) observe how these concerns were confirmed by the final research report (Miller and Gwynne 1974), which rejected the residents' grievances and 'recommended a reworking of traditional practice although they categorised institutional life as a 'living death''. Indeed, several of *Le Court Cheshire Home* residents instigated the formation of UPIAS in 1975 (Barnes and Mercer 1997:2), which as reiterated earlier, set the foundations for the social model of disability by radicalising the meaning of disability with a revolutionary definition (Oliver 2009:42-43). Research practices gradually absorbed social model thinking of disability as a form of social oppression (see for example, Barnes 1990) and an alternative approach for researching disability started to emerge. This drew from 'critical theory' and embraced:

> a political commitment to confront disability by changing: the social relations of research production, including the role of funding bodies and the relationship between researchers and those being researched; and the links between research 'findings' and policy responses (Barnes and Mercer 2004:8-9).

Key features of an emancipatory approach

In their review of an emancipatory approach to disability research,

Stone and Priestley (1996:706) identify its key features to include:

- the adoption of a social model of disablement as the epistemological basis for research production
- the surrender of claims to objectivity through overt political commitment to the struggles of disabled people for self emancipation
- the willingness only to undertake research where it will be of practical benefit to the self empowerment of disabled people and/or the removal of disabling barriers
- the evolution of control over research production to ensure full accountability to disabled people and their organisations
- giving voice to the personal as political whilst endeavouring to collectivise the political commonality of individual experiences
- the willingness to adopt a plurality of methods for data collection and analysis in response to the changing needs of disabled people

From the varied critiques of emancipatory disability research, it is also possible to extract its primary premises. This includes its espousal of a social model approach to disability and its rejection of an individual model perspective of impairment, which involves giving disabled people and disability 'proper recognition' in social research; and presents disability research as a radical alternative to traditional research that 'should be about changing the world, not simply describing it'. This 'political challenge' requires changes to 'the social and material relations of research production' (Barnes and Mercer 1997:5-6) and 'warrants the generation and production of meaningful and accessible knowledge' about the varied disabling structures that produced and maintain 'the multiple deprivations encountered by the overwhelming majority of disabled people and their families' (Barnes 2003:6). Changes to the social relations

of research production 'entails the removal of hierarchical relations between researchers and researched… ensuring that disabled people are not objectified during the research process'; while the transformations to the material relations involves 'ensuring that disabled people are represented in the academe and funding organisations giving them control to define what research can be conducted and how it should be done' (Danieli and Woodhams 2005:284). In brief, emancipatory disability research:

> is about the systematic demystification of the structures and processes which create disability, and the workable dialogue between the research community and disabled people in order to facilitate the latter's empowerment (Barnes 1992b:122).

However, since its emergence, questions have been posed on whether an emancipatory approach to disability research is a 'realistic goal' or an 'impossible dream' (Oliver 1997:15). Several disability researchers have examined the extent, to which their projects achieved emancipatory status, through reflective accounts of their research journeys (see for example, Barnes 2003, Carmichael 2004, Oliver 1997, Priestley 1997, Riddell *et al.* 1998, Seymour and Garbutt 1998, Shakespeare 1997, Stone and Priestley 1996 and Zarb 1997). Others have reviewed the utility of an emancipatory approach to disability research, highlighting issues with its key features and subsequent application to research practices (see for example, Barnes 2008, Bailey 2004, Barton 2005, Bury 1996b, Danieli and Woodhams 2005, Davis 2000, Kiernan 1999, Kitchin 2000, Mercer 2004 and Zarb 2003).

Collectively, these discussions have identified varied challenges and matters that may be of consequence to the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to prospective emancipatory disability research. It is to these concerns that I will now turn and the application of emancipatory principles to disability research practices.

Challenges and matters for disability research practices

Concerns have been raised about the adoption of a social model of disability as the basis for emancipatory disability research, particularly as not all research participants labelled as 'disabled' consider themselves 'disabled' or are aware or supportive of a social model approach to disability (see for example, Bury 1996b:113 and Stone and Priestley 1996:715). Perspectives that are not supportive of social model thinking can also 'be marginalised, ignored or dismissed as a form of 'false consciousness'' (Danieli and Woodhams 2005:287). Additionally, social model allegiance can inhibit researchers in their research practices, as for example, it can restrict their 'intellectual freedom… and their capacity to interpret the worlds and cultures of others' (Davis 2000:193). So, the application of a social approach 'reinforces the need to ensure that emancipatory disability research is 'reflexive' and self critical' (Barnes and Mercer 2004:9) and that it informs research practices, rather than impose theory 'on people's experiences' (Bailey 2004:145-146).

Another concern with an adherence of a social model approach refers to the role of the individual experiences of disabled people, within emancipatory disability research (see for example, Barnes 2008:463, Mercer 2004:120 and Zarb 2003:10-11). This can be related to critiques of the social model of disability and its disregard for the subjective experiences of impairment, which was discussed in chapter two (see for example, French 1993:17). So, as Bailey (2004:141-142) explains, if disability is understood as oppression and there are systems by which it operates, these can be explored through the examination of individual experience. She proposes that past research on lived experiences that has led to individualistic interpretations, should not deny the possibility of doing research differently and 'the effects of recognition of structural barriers, discrimination or inequality in our experience should not be underestimated as a motivator for action'.

Nevertheless, Finkelstein (1999:861) insists that such 'personal accounts may actually uncover little more than the known debilitating effects of living in a world designed for people with abilities' and argues for a social model approach to disability research that centres on a critical analysis of the 'inner workings of the disabling society'. Barnes (2001:13) also emphasises how there is a 'great danger' in focusing on disabled people's experiences as 'the significance of the environment in which those experiences are shaped' can be ignored and as a result this can support, perhaps inadvertently, a personal tragedy approach to disability.

Barnes (2003:10) thus observes that within an emancipatory disability research approach, it is important for any accounts of the experiences of disabled people to be firmly embedded 'within an environmental and cultural setting that highlights the disabling consequences of a society organised around the needs of a mythical, affluent nondisabled majority'.

Equally, disability researchers have highlighted a variety of challenges that may be posed by the changes to the social and material relations of research production, from an emancipatory disability research perspective (see for example, Barnes and Mercer 1997:6). This refers to the control of the research process by disabled people and their organisations, rather than professional researchers and includes both the research agenda and funding matters (Barnes 2001:5). However, as Carmichael (2004:193) highlights, this emphasis on the central role of disabled people within emancipatory disability research, should not be confused with 'the assumption that only disabled people should carry out such research'. As Barnes (2003:6) asserts:

> Emancipatory research is not about biology it is about commitment and researchers putting their knowledge and skills at the disposal of disabled people and their organisations; they do not necessarily have to have an impairment to do this.

Zarb (1992:127) also maintains that neither disabled people nor disability researchers 'have much control over the material relations of research production'. However, he believes that 'we can still go some way towards changing the social relations of research production through our

own practice and the relationships we develop with disabled people and their representative organisations'.

Challenges relating to the social relations of research production within emancipatory disability research practices, range from concerns over asymmetrical relations between disabled people and researchers to the contradictions for researchers of maintaining research integrity while surrendering control to disabled people (see for example, Barnes 2008, Barnes and Mercer 1997, Danieli and Woodhams 2005, Mercer 2004, Oliver 1997, Priestley 1997, Seymour and Garbutt 1998, Shakespeare 1996, Stone and Priestley 1996 and Zarb 1992).

Matters regarding the material relations of research production, involve issues over the restrictions and barriers imposed by funding bodies, providers of services and institutions that carry out research, like universities. These include the influences of 'objectivity' to research practices, issues of accountability to the disabled community by disability researchers and the poor accommodation of individual support needs, within the organisation of disability research (see for example, Barnes 2003, Barnes and Mercer 1997, Mercer 2004, Oliver 1997 and Seymour and Garbutt 1998).

Zarb (2003:6) observes how considering 'the continuing constraints posed by the social and material barriers of research production, it is not

surprising', that scepticism remains among disabled people about the role of research. Indeed, the application of emancipatory principles to disability research practices has raised questions on whether or not research results in any practical benefits for disabled people and/or contributes to the process of their empowerment and emancipation (see for example, Kitchin 2000, Mercer 2004, Oliver 1997, Shakespeare 1996, Stone and Priestley 1996 and Zarb 1997). Barnes (2008:464) has also highlighted the importance of the widespread dissemination of research products, particularly in accessible formats for disabled people to 'stimulate campaign and legislative action' and more generally, to influence legislation and service provision. But as Mercer (2004:122) emphasises, a research project can 'succeed' or 'fail' at different levels and the measurement of 'emancipation as a research outcome' can be undertaken in varied ways. Further, he recognises that 'empowerment rarely entails a sudden conversion on the road to Damascus... Typically, it is more diffuse, uncertain, and drawn out'. This results in the 'unsatisfactory prospect' of only been able to judge the emancipatory effects of research long 'after the event' (Oliver 1997:25).

So far, this chapter has focused on more generalised debates about emancipatory disability research and it has identified a series of propositions about the varied challenges and matters that may be of significance to the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to prospective emancipatory disability research.

But questions have also been raised about the applicability of this approach to learning disabled people and the translation of emancipatory principles to LD research (see for example, Boxall *et al.* 2004, Chappell 2000, Kiernan 1999, Rodgers 1999, Walmsley and Johnson 2003, Ward 1997 and Williams *et al.* 2008a). Riddell *et al.* (1998:81-82) argue that the application of emancipatory principles to disability research is 'imaginable' with people with physical impairments but attempts to fulfil such criteria with learning disabled people can prove more complex:

> the expertise of the researcher… is not transmissible to some people with cognitive impairments; the involvement of people with learning difficulties in the process of the research may similarly be limited; current models of the consultation and involvement of people with learning difficulties in issues affecting their lives suggest that the pulls either to the trivial or to the professionally stage-managed are hard to resist.

Nonetheless, the influence of the social model of disability and emancipatory principles to LD research practices has been noted (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:59); even if research with learning disabled people is been 'increasingly framed as 'inclusive'' (Bigby and Frawley 2010:53). It is to this inclusive approach to LD research that I will now turn, to explore how emancipatory disability research principles can be translated, adapted or indeed rejected.

Inclusive research with learning disabled people

Many learning disabled people have been and are still, regularly excluded from being actively involved in research. But this situation has

become increasingly challenged by self advocacy groups of learning disabled people and by researchers who work with them, through the advancement of inclusive research (Johnson 2009:251). Walmsley and Johnson (2003:9-10) describe inclusive research, as research in which learning disabled people 'are active participants, not only as subjects but also as initiators, doers, writers and disseminators of research' and which embraces a range of research traditions, including participatory and emancipatory. So, as Johnson (2009:251) acknowledges, 'a wide range of permutations are to be found within an inclusive research framework' (see for example, Ward and Simons 1998).

Chappell (2000:40) observes that one of the main differences between participatory and emancipatory approaches to disability research lies 'in the relationship between disabled people and researchers'. The former tends to involve working partnerships between researchers and the participants of the research, rather than the incorporation of affiliations with organisations, that seek to represent learning disabled people democratically. By contrast, in emancipatory disability research disabled people, represented through their democratic organisations, must control the whole research process. Zarb (1992:128) perceives participatory research that involves disabled people in a 'meaningful' manner as a prerequisite to emancipatory research, as both disabled people and researchers can learn from each other and it can pave 'the way for researchers to make themselves 'available' to disabled people'.

But he also argues that 'it is no more than that', asserting that an increase in the participation and involvement of disabled people in research practices cannot 'by itself constitute as emancipatory research unless and until it is disabled people themselves who are controlling the research and deciding who should be involved and how'.

Still, both of these approaches have been noted to support the increased involvement and control by disabled people over research generally, with the common aim of improving their lives (Bjornsdottir and Svensdottir 2008:264). Despite their variations (see for example, Walmsley 2001:196), inclusive research with learning disabled people arguably incorporates both participatory and emancipatory principles to research practices (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:9-10).

Background and influences

Walmsley (2001:188) perceives the advancement of an inclusive approach to LD research, as a unique feature of the late twentieth century and prior to the study of Robert Edgerton in the 1960s (Edgerton 1993), she finds no evidence of any research, which attempted to access or to represent the opinions of learning disabled people. She thus concludes that the LD field had been led by 'eugenics, psychology, educational studies and medical investigations' in which learning disabled people 'were tested, counted, observed, analysed, described and frequently pathologised, but never asked for their views'. However, Walmsley

(2001:188) attributes the rise of normalisation principles, which developed during the 1960s and 1970s in Scandinavia (see for example, Bank-Mikkelson 1980 and Nirje 1980) and in America (see for example, Wolfensberger 1972), as a major influence on researchers, who started to perceive learning disabled people as potential active contributors of research.

In brief, the principle of normalisation regards learning disabled people as undervalued by society and who possess 'stigmatised identities', with second rate services reinforcing a 'vicious circle of devalued identities'. Its application to the transformation of 'high quality services' can generate 'high quality lifestyles' for learning disabled people, enabling their integration with socially valued individuals. However, this promotion of associations between learning disabled people and individuals ascribed with a 'high social value', namely nondisabled people, has been noted as a matter of concern. Such line of reasoning can have serious implications for the relationships between learning disabled people and the identification of other learning disabled people, 'as the problem to be avoided (literally), undermines the possibility of collective political action, based on commonality of experience' (Chappell 1997:45 and 49).

Chappell (1999:104) identifies the American version developed by Wolfensberger (1972) as the model which was adopted in the UK by service providers and academics, 'who were concerned at the poor

standards of care in many long stay hospitals'. He took normalisation

principles further, reframing them as 'social role valorisation' (Johnson *et*

al. 2010:68). But while many professionals have been influenced by the

principle of normalisation, it has not been adopted as an underlying

philosophy by disabled people or by organisations, which are accountable

to them (Oliver 1999b:8).

Nonetheless, Gilbert (2004:299-300) acknowledges normalisation

principles particularly social role valorisation, as instrumental in the

provision of a 'humanistic value set', which asserted that learning disabled

people 'should have a voice in events that affect their lives and enabled

them to do so'. This included their inclusion in evaluation and research

processes (see for example, Walmsley 2001). However, in its assertion for

participation, normalisation has focused on services and their evaluation

and stands accused of being professionally driven (see for example,

Chappell 2000 and Walmsley and Johnson 2003). Further, as Walmsley

(1994:150) explains:

> it proposes that disabled people should be enabled to enter the
> world as it is, and enjoy the rights most people enjoy, but the onus
> is on them to conform, and on services to enable them to do so.

Consequently, research undertaken within a normalisation context,

generally revolves around 'changing individuals to reduce stigma and

devaluation rather than social change' (Gilbert 2004:300). Additionally,

Chappell (1999:112) identifies this body of research as 'problematic'

because for example, it generally doesn't ascertain the views of learning disabled people nor does it critically analyse 'the question of social norms' and what it can mean for learning disabled people to follow them. But as Walmsley and Johnson (2003:59) observe, normalisation principles paved the way for learning disabled people to be taken seriously as potential research respondents, with its emphasis on according individuals 'valued social roles' and 'on the duty of nondisabled people to work for the interests of devalued people, particularly as advocates'. It supplied 'the conditions to make speaking out possible' and influenced the development of inclusive research approaches of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Walmsley 2001:188).

Another influence on inclusive approaches to LD research arose with the emergence of the social model of disability. From the early 1990s, some researchers strived to go beyond participatory practices and tried to meet the more rigorous demands of emancipatory disability research (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:50-51), which as discussed earlier involves changing 'the social relations of research production' with researchers placing their 'knowledge and skills' in the control of their research subjects (Oliver 1992:111).

> This raised the stakes considerably in terms of what some learning disability researchers began to demand of themselves and their work. The type of research characteristic of normalisation inspired models – that the research should demonstrate ways in which a 'normal life' could be promoted – was not enough. Somehow, the researcher was expected to find ways of giving control to people

with learning disabilities, and of being accountable to them (Walmsley 2005:734).

However, Walmsley and Johnson (2003:59) assert that there has been a failure to critically examine emancipatory principles within the context of LD. They attribute this failure partly because of a disregard by the disabled people's movement for tackling the concerns of learning disabled people and partly because nondisabled allies have failed to support learning disabled people 'in working through the implications of emancipatory research for themselves'. Indeed and as previously highlighted, questions have been raised about the applicability of this approach to learning disabled people and the translation of emancipatory principles to LD research (see for example, Riddell *et al.* 1998:81-82). Parallel concerns were also mentioned in chapter two regarding the marginalisation of learning disabled people from social model discourses and academia (see for example, Chappell 1998:219 and Boxall 2002:217-218). Nonetheless, 'the nagging sense that LD research should move towards a more emancipatory approach has become evident subsequently' (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:53) and such principles have influenced and developed the ways in which research is undertaken by and with learning disabled people (see for example, Aspis 2000, Blunt *et al.* 2012, who refer to the special June 2012 edition of the *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, March *et al.* 1997, Rodgers 1999, Stevenson 2010, The Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006, The Money, Friends and Making Ends Meet Research Group 2011 and Williams *et al.* 2008a).

Walmsley and Johnson (2003:54) also identify self advocacy as playing an important role in the facilitation of inclusive research, stating that without it there would be 'no possibility' of organising groups of learning disabled people through which they can work collectively on research projects. Moreover, they assert that if researchers are to be accountable to organisations of learning disabled people, 'then self advocacy groups are vital', identifying self advocacy as the particular form for 'speaking up and out' within LD circles.

People First (n.d.b) emphasise how self advocacy groups are for learning disabled people 'to meet and share their experiences, support each other, learn to speak up, find out about their rights *(and)* speak up to local services about what is important to them'. Goodley (1997:373) observes that when learning disabled people 'step out of the passive role assigned by society and take up the role of self advocate, this feeds into the political aims of the social model'. Indeed, elements of a social approach were identified in chapter two, within the views and experiences of learning disabled people and self advocacy groups (see for example, Chappell *et al.* 2001:48).

The influence of self advocacy on research which has sought to represent the views of learning disabled people has been observed as a two way process:

On the one hand it could be argued that self advocacy influenced researchers by demonstrating not only that people with learning disabilities wanted to 'speak up' but that they could do so. On the other hand it seemed likely that self advocacy influenced the people who were involved in it, showing them the value of research and giving them the confidence to take part (Atkinson 2001:34).

Walmsley and Johnson (2003:60) acknowledge how individual self advocates and self advocacy groups have worked successfully with researchers within a participatory context and insights into the views of learning disabled people have been achieved (see for example, Atkinson 2004, Bjornsdottir and Svensdottir 2008, Chapman 2005, Goodley 2000, Gramlich *et al.* 2002, Ham *et al.* 2004, Hollomotz 2011, March *et al.* 1997, Palmer *et al.* 1999, Schoeters *et al.* 2005, Townson *et al.* 2004 and Williams *et al.* 2005). But concerns have been raised about how the involvement of self advocates in research can be perceived as tokenistic and the role of nondisabled allies has also been questioned (Aspis 2000:2-3).

Additionally, 'self advocacy has not touched equally the lives of different groups' of learning disabled people (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:57-58) and it has been argued that more needs to be done to include people with 'severe' LD (Walmsley and Downer 1997:43-44). Nevertheless, Goodley (2000:3) describes how the self advocacy movement has encouraged learning disabled people 'to revolt against disablement in a variety of ways, in a number of contexts, individually

and collectively, with and without the support of others'. As self advocate,

Gordon McBride, cited by Williams *et al.* (2005:8) asserts:

> Research is important, because at the end of the day it is giving each and every self advocate the chance to speak up about each topic, and they have the experience of what has happened in their lives… I think it is important for that to happen, because nobody else can do it for them.

Key characteristics of an inclusive approach

Inclusive research has been described as a 'flexible approach', which is firmly based on the lived experiences, of learning disabled people (Williams *et al.* 2008b:35). The Learning Difficulties Research Team (2006:85-87) recommend that inclusive research projects should 'think outside the box, be prepared to change, plan ahead' to involve learning disabled people from the start, 'get the right funding, get better at accessible information' and make sure that learning disabled people 'make a difference'.

However, terms such as 'inclusive research' can have diverse connotations for different people and some nondisabled researchers may believe that they are working inclusively, when they are only engaging learning disabled people 'in very small parts of the projects' (Blunt *et al.* 2012:83). Indeed, Chapman and McNulty (2004:77) assert that the use of the term 'inclusive research' only acknowledges the fact that learning disabled people may have been included in some way and can refer to varied levels of involvement. So, they believe that 'it is important to be

really clear about how the research is being done, who wants to have it done in the first place and how it is used'.

Walmsley and Johnson (2003:63-64 and 78) propose that if a research project is to be perceived as 'inclusive', either from a participatory or emancipatory approach, it must exhibit the following characteristics:

- the research problem must be one that is owned (not necessarily initiated) by disabled people
- it should further the interests of disabled people; nondisabled researchers should be on the side of learning disabled people
- it should be collaborative – learning disabled people should be involved in the process of doing the research
- learning disabled people should be able to exert some control over process and outcomes
- the research question, process and reports must be accessible to learning disabled people

They also identify challenges and matters that have emerged in the efforts to support inclusive research with learning disabled people, which range from ownership issues, to 'the difficult tightrope' of honestly representing learning disabled people 'and being on their side'. Some of these questions can be related to previous discussions on the problems that may be posed by the social and material relations of research production, from an emancipatory disability research perspective (see for example, Barnes and Mercer 1997:6 and Zarb 1992); the applicability of social model thinking to learning disabled people and the translation of emancipatory principles to LD research (see for example, Riddell *et al.*

1998:81-82); and concerns surrounding the involvement of self advocates in research (Aspis 2000:2-3).

Challenges and matters for inclusive research practices

Ward and Simons (1998:130) identify a range of institutional barriers to the involvement of learning disabled people working together with academics as co-researchers, within participatory research practices. These include the general prerequisites of academic qualifications by universities in their appointments for research grades, effectively excluding learning disabled people. While they recognise that this should not necessarily prevent their employment in other positions, it does raise 'questions of fairness in terms of status and income'. Abell *et al.* (2007:123) also observe that while they aim for all of the researchers in their group 'to be equal, the academic structure around researching is far more easily accessed by professionals'. Additionally, time pressures posed by funding bodies and publication schedules can affect the participation of learning disabled people in research, particularly as working with learning disabled people 'or, at least, doing it properly – takes time' (Stalker 1998:6).

Equally, the role of the research supporter within inclusive practices has been described as a 'contentious one' (Williams *et al.* 2005:8) and can be compared with that of the nondisabled advisor of self advocacy groups (see for example, Goodley 1997). Involvement in the research

process by learning disabled people has led to the growth of 'alliances with sympathetic non learning disabled people' (Gilbert 2004:300) and have been identified as more closely related to participatory rather than emancipatory research (see for example, Chappell 2000 and Walmsley 2001). But 'working with nondisabled allies is often seen as a watering-down of true emancipatory research' (Williams and England 2005:30) and while participatory practices have been noted as offering 'an achievable way' for learning disabled people to partake in research, it can uphold 'the authority of nondisabled researchers and institutionalises the relative power positions of researcher and researched' (Chappell 1999:111-112).

Kiernan (1999:46) observes that from an emancipatory disability research perspective, learning disabled people should be meaningfully included and be in control throughout all stages of the research process. But since research is reliant on intellectual skills, it is less accessible for learning disabled people than it would be for disabled people, who do not experience an 'intellectual' impairment. He thus asserts that learning disabled people 'will need substantial support' from researchers in order to participate in research and this raises concerns over the validity of such research in truly representing the views of learning disabled people, as 'the influence of the research supporter cannot be detached from the research process'. Williams *et al.* (2005:8) argue that if most learning disabled researchers require some form of support it is important to explore how these practices are managed to identify how nondisabled

supporters can contribute to the research process, 'without taking it over'.

As Chappell (2000:41) asserts:

> If people with learning difficulties need nondisabled allies in the research process in order to convey their experiences in a way which is acceptable to the research community and its gatekeepers, how can the integrity of their accounts be maintained? How do we prevent nondisabled researchers, even ones who are sympathetic to the struggles of people with learning difficulties, from assuming a dominant role in the research process?

Consequently, from a self advocacy perspective, a nondominating supporter has been identified as a fundamental feature of good research support (Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84). Chapman (2005:18) emphasises 'the necessity for reflexivity and awareness of issues of power' within research teams of learning disabled people and nondisabled supporters. These attributes are discussed by Williams *et al.* (2005:8), who also recognise the need for research supporters, to offer 'honest accounts of practice *(that)* will help us all consider the issues and dilemmas, and thereby contribute to theory'.

Walmsley (2004:66) observes how prevailing inclusive research practices with learning disabled people have taken for granted the functions and skills of the research supporter and argues that 'these roles deserve more than just passing and self-effacing mention they often receive in the literature'. Moreover, she emphasises how the imbalances of power between learning disabled people and researchers 'continue to be camouflaged by a rhetoric of participation' and a way forward is to

clarify what roles can be played by inclusive research supporters, so that

existing skills can be developed and new entrants to the field can 'develop

theirs'. As Chapman and McNulty (2004:77) explain:

> We need to think about how people can keep control of their
> research if other research support people are involved as well. We
> can't do this unless we know what sort of things the research
> supporters do and how and why they do it and how people with
> learning difficulties attempt to have control.

Having explored the concept of inclusive research by and with

learning disabled people, I will now conclude this chapter with a

consideration on how this synopsis of the emerging literature on

emancipatory and inclusive research philosophies has informed and

influenced my decision for the research approach that was adopted in this

study and my rationale for its application, together with a reflection of my

role as a nondisabled inclusive researcher, within the field of disability

studies.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an exploration of emancipatory and inclusive

research philosophies which traced their origins, identified their key

features and highlighted the challenges and matters in their application to

disability research practices, including influences of the former to LD

research. This revealed a number of critical considerations for this study.

Inclusive research with learning disabled people embraces both participatory and emancipatory practices (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:9-10). However, each of these traditions vary in their approach to the relationships between disabled people and researchers and in who controls the research process (Chappell 2000:40). Participatory principles can be regarded as a prerequisite of emancipatory research, 'but it is no more than that' and should not be constituted as emancipatory, unless the research is controlled by disabled people themselves (Zarb 1992:128).

While acknowledging the challenges and matters that have been raised in the translation of inclusive research principles to LD research (see for example, Stalker 1998:6 and Ward and Simons 1998:130), including the role of the research supporter (see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004:77, Chappell 2000:41, Williams and England 2005:30 and Williams *et al.* 2005:8), this will be the approach that will be adopted in this study, as it is defined by Walmsley and Johnson (2003:64). I have chosen to apply the term 'inclusive research' because it acknowledges both participatory and emancipatory approaches for research by and with learning disabled people and by doing so, it does not make any prior assumptions about whether this study will correspond specifically to either of these research traditions. It also reflects the origins and values of this style of research (Williams *et al.* 2005:8).

From the outset, I do recognise that this study will not meet fundamental emancipatory principles as for example, I will be in control of the research and not learning disabled people and it therefore might be better placed, within a participatory perspective. But I strive to go beyond participatory practices in facilitating research that can contribute to the emancipatory process of disabled people (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:50-51). Therefore, this study will remain open to emancipatory thinking so that the research process can be informed and influenced by learning disabled people, themselves. The application of the term 'inclusive research' reflects this underlying motivation.

This will not be a straightforward journey and I approach it with some trepidation, particularly as it will be challenged by the material and social relations of research production. In practice, this study will be set within a doctoral framework, which can limit the 'inclusiveness' of a project, 'largely because of academic expectations and requirements' (Bjornsdottir and Svensdottir 2008:268). Zarb (1992:127) acknowledges that neither disabled people nor researchers 'have much control over the material relations of research production'; but he asserts that researchers 'can still go some way' towards transforming the social relations of research production, through their research practices and the associations that they develop with disabled people and their organisations.

Indeed, I am conscious of how 'the established social relations of research production give rise to inequalities of power between researcher and researched' (Priestley 1997:88). As a nondisabled inclusive researcher, one of the key challenges will be to ensure that my initiation for analysing the representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers does not jeopardise:

> work being done which does not benefit people with learning disabilities, as so much past (and some current) research has done. It is indeed a fine line between acknowledging that people with learning disabilities do not know enough to ask the right questions and giving researchers the sense that they have the right to do whatever research they choose (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:140).

However, as emphasised in chapter three, since at least the 1960s, disabled people and their organisations have been highlighting the relationship between 'disablist imagery, the media and discrimination' (Barnes 1992a:2). In recent years, some learning disabled people and their supporters have also successfully challenged disabling media portrayals through regulatory bodies (see for example, Wild Bunch 2010). But while there is now a growing body of empirical research within the areas of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a), as highlighted at different points of this thesis, there is a significant lack of LD studies in this area of interest, with little research specifically examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page 136) and a near absence of their views and experiences, within this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987).

Consequently, I am initiating research in this area primarily because the matter in question could be of concern to learning disabled people, if they were made aware of it (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:127). Further, as Minkes *et al.* (1995:94) emphasise, 'most of the time… the very people in whose name the research is done never get to hear about it'. This study will therefore incorporate 'the idea of research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183), turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors, with the intention that it generates knowledge of use to learning disabled people and their supporters in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30). Moreover, as this study is influenced by the social model of disability and not all people labelled as 'disabled' regard themselves as "disabled' or are united on a theoretical and research agenda guided by the social model' (Barnes and Mercer 2009:4), I must ensure that this approach informs research practices, rather than impose theory 'on people's experiences' (Bailey 2004:145-146). This reiterates the need for this study to be 'reflexive and self critical' (Barnes and Mercer 2004:9).

The adoption of researcher reflexivity is central to inclusive research practices (Walmsley 2004:65). Reflexivity can be viewed 'as a way of promoting quality within the research process' (Northway 2000:391), which can add 'validity and rigour in research by providing information about the contexts in which data are located' (Etherington 2004:37). It can be simply described as 'the process associated with researchers' self

awareness – of how they impact and transform the research they undertake' (Kingdon 2005:622). Issues of self reflection by researchers can also be regarded as an essential component of the research process and the collection of data and 'may be an expression of a political and ideological commitment to stand with other participants in the research' (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:41). Reflexivity can also be a 'painful' exercise, as researchers must make sure that they examine their 'own research practice in the context of the current oppressive social and material relations of research production' (Oliver 1997:28). Further,

> a critical reflection upon where practical strategic choices have positioned us as applied researchers enables us to compensate for the inherent weaknesses in the approach we have implicitly adopted (Dyson and Brown 2006:186).

Nevertheless, the need for 'some honest reflections' by nondisabled inclusive researchers have been asserted 'on exactly what roles such people have played' (Walmsley 2004:65), particularly as many learning disabled people require considerable support from non-learning disabled researchers in order to participate in research. This has raised questions over the authenticity of this body of work, as a true representation of their lived experiences (Kiernan 1999:46). Consequently, in the two chapters that follow, I will present a sincere and reflective account of my experiences of 'doing' inclusive research, revealing the 'inclusiveness' of the learning disabled people that were involved in this research and the roles that I played as a nondisabled inclusive researcher. I trust that this narrative will in some way be of interest to disability researchers,

highlighting the contribution of research to the empowerment process of

disabled people and to the advancement of disability research practices

(see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004:77), while also introducing

more 'vulnerability' into this study. As Stone and Priestley (1996:700)

observe:

> a major consequence of making available the reasoning procedures
> which underlie the knowledge produced out of the research is
> 'vulnerability'… this is the only satisfactory… way of tackling
> fundamental features of the power relationship between researchers
> and researched. This is particularly important for nondisabled
> researchers because the inherent power relationship between
> researcher and researched is accentuated by the unequal power
> relationship which exists between disabled people and nondisabled
> people in the wider world.

Chapter six
Welcome to the real world: research design and methodology

<u>Introduction</u>

> In writing up research, we tell (structured) stories about data. It is only natural then, that our readers should expect to be told how we gathered our data, what data we ended up with, and how we analysed them (Silverman 2000:233).

This chapter, along with the two chapters that follow, strive to meet such expectations by describing and discussing the research process and the major matters and possibilities that arose during this study's fieldwork practices. By adopting a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process, the overall aim of this study is to develop critical insights in conducting inclusive research with and for learning disabled people. It involves the design, execution and reflection of a research project that seeks to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, it incorporates distinct but interrelated stages for collecting data, which includes:

- a RAG with learning disabled people and their supporters
- a content analysis of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults, by the print version of English national newspapers
- two focus groups with learning disabled people and their supporters
- a researcher's diary, which features the subjective experiences of the research process

However, debates have been raised about the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, within individual research projects. These tend to revolve around two main types of arguments: 'the epistemological version', which perceives quantitative and qualitative research as based on 'incompatible' epistemological and ontological principles and so 'mixed methods research is not possible'; and 'the technical version', which recognises that quantitative and qualitative research are both allied with distinct 'epistemological and ontological assumptions but the connections are not viewed as fixed and ineluctable. Research methods are perceived… as autonomous'. So, one form of data collection is observed as 'capable of being pressed into the service of another'. From this latter perspective multi-strategy research is 'both feasible and desirable' (Bryman 2008:606).

Emancipatory disability research is regularly associated with the application of qualitative data but such association can be deemed problematic because 'there can be no simple casual relation between the

use of qualitative data and the removal of disabling barriers'. Indeed,

some strongly criticised disability research, such as Miller and Gwynne

(1974) which was previously mentioned in chapter five, was based on

qualitative data. The concern therefore lies with the theoretical framework

that guides the collection of information and analysis and not the

'qualitative nature of the data'. Moreover, quantitative research

approaches can support the identification of disabling barriers (Stone and

Priestley 1996:705). Therefore, some disability researchers advocate the

employment of both quantitative and qualitative data to emancipatory

disability research (see for example, Barnes 1992b and Mercer 2004).

For the purposes of this study, the rationale behind the adoption of

a 'mixed method approach' was more about 'how well the research tools

work rather than how well they fit within a specific research philosophy'

(Denscombe 2007:118). So, for example, findings from its (quantitative

and qualitative) content analysis stage provided the basis of discussions

for another of the qualitative stages of this study: the focus groups.

Moreover, and as mentioned in chapter five, one of the key features of

emancipatory disability research is 'the willingness to adopt a plurality of

methods for data collection and analysis in response to the changing

needs of disabled people' (Stone and Priestley 1996:706). This

combination of research methods also embraces 'the idea of research as

production' (Oliver 1999a:183), turning the focus of this study onto the

behaviours of oppressors and the production of knowledge that is of use

to disabled people and their supporters, in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30).

In this chapter, I will present an account of the initial setting up phase of this study, including the recruitment process and the accessible materials that were designed and developed for the prospective members of the RAG and the focus groups. I will then focus on its RAG and how learning disabled people and their supporters were engaged as active members of research communities in the co-production of knowledge. During these explorations, I will examine the major matters and possibilities that arose during these fieldwork practices, while incorporating my reflections of the research process, which will be drawn from my research diary entries. I will also consider the contributions of the supporting members of the RAG to these activities. Where applicable, I will use a pseudonym or name initials to attribute each quotation or idea from a RAG member to the appropriate individual, with the intention of maintaining their anonymity from the reader. These reflective discussions may be of interest to disability researchers, highlighting the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the development of disability research practices. The focus group and the content analysis stages of this study will be addressed in chapters seven and eight, respectively.

<u>Setting up the study</u>

The initial setting up phase of this study involved a range of tasks, including the development of eligibility criteria and varied accessible materials for the prospective members of the RAG and the focus groups; and the compilation of a draft content analysis coding schedule. These supported the application for ethical clearance and satisfied the requirements of Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1).

I will now present an overview of the processes that were involved in the development of these recruitment criteria and accessible materials. The resources that were designed for the content analytical stage of this study will be discussed in chapter eight.

The recruitment process

Since this study was set within a doctoral framework, I knew from the onset that I would be working to a tight timetable. So, in order to speed up the recruitment process, I identified prospective members of the RAG and the focus groups through initial contacts with key stakeholders from a range of statutory, private and charitable LD organisations. This led to the development of a non probability sample, which could be perceived as a form of convenience sampling because 'it is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility' (Bryman 2008:183).

Butler *et al.* (2012:136) observed how it was easier to arrange focus groups with learning disabled people through independent organisations 'because they already had a regular meeting place that we could go to which was part of their routine'. Still, they encountered gate keeping problems during the recruitment process of their study, as it involved 'sensitive topics' and some gate keepers, such as professionals or service managers, did not think that these matters were 'suitable for their clients'. Equally, during the gaining access phase of her study, Stalker (1998:8) noted that while gatekeepers did not 'give permission on behalf of specific individuals; clearly it was in their power to block access in the first place'. Booth and Booth (1997:129) also emphasised other concerns in 'the use of intermediaries' during their 'establishing contact' stages of the recruitment process and how:

> the researcher has no direct control over how the study is first presented and explained; people's feelings towards the third party might act as an uncontrollable source of response bias; and, where a practitioner is involved as the go-between, the researcher may be too closely identified with authority or officialdom.

However, they concluded that 'in practice, there was no way round these dangers if the study was going to get done'.

Similarly, Johnson (2009:255) highlighted the challenges of 'doing inclusive research within a service setting'. These included the existing expectations of support workers about the individuals that they were working with and how learning disabled people were not always interested

in the research process. However, she did find support workers who were enthusiastic about the projects and who along with learning disabled people, learnt about research. In some instances, their beliefs about learning disabled people changed as a consequence of their involvement. The service also provided resources, such as transport and staff time to develop the research projects, which in turn supported an original group to continue meeting and to undertake their own research.

Such matters were given careful consideration throughout this study's recruitment process and I decided that the key stakeholder group would be mostly comprised of senior managers with whom I had previously engaged with professionally and who I knew from our past affiliations had an affinity for inclusive research practices by and with learning disabled people and who would be supportive of such endeavours. They were initially provided with the aims and objectives of the study, its approach and an overview of what individuals could expect in terms of their involvement in the project.

All key stakeholders were also informed of this study's eligibility criteria with regard to the prospective members of the RAG and the focus groups. These stipulated that they:

- were over the age of eighteen
- have a mild learning disability
- have the capacity to give informed consent
- have an interest in media representations of learning disabled people and/or in partaking in research

- have the ability to engage/disengage in group activities
- did not reside within a National Health Service (NHS) establishment

However, I felt uncomfortable with the adoption of the second criterion of a 'mild' LD as not unlike the LD diagnostic schemas that were critiqued in chapter two (see for example, WHO 2010), I could also stand accused of categorising learning disabled people and subjecting them to the process of medicalisation (see for example, Goble 1998:834). Such application could appear to ignore 'structural oppression and discrimination' and could situate the difficulty and the resolution, within the learning disabled person (Gillman *et al.* 2000:390).

But this eligibility criterion was not concerned with medical classifications and was based around the consideration of the varied support needs that people may require in their daily lives. An approach promoted by some self advocacy groups of learning disabled people (see for example, People First n.d.b), which was highlighted in chapter two. I had to be realistic about how this study was limited by the adherence of a doctoral schedule as doing research *with* learning disabled people 'instead of just *about* them takes time, thought and energy' (Ward 1998:130). So, for example, such strict timeframes would not have accommodated the development of a genuine rapport with learning disabled people who have 'high individual communication needs' and who may require 'information provided in ways that are individual to them' and 'through people who know them well' (The Information for All Team at the Norah Fry Research

Centre and the Royal National Institute of the Blind Multiple Disability Services 2004:122).

Nonetheless, as this study was underpinned by inclusive research principles, all members of the RAG and the focus groups were considered as prospective 'co-researchers'. This involves an exploration of a person's 'potential for decision making and participation in research activity' (Stevenson 2010:45), supporting this study's central aim which is to develop critical insights in conducting inclusive research with and for learning disabled people. Through the adoption of a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process, this study seeks to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

Equally, learning disabled people 'are a heterogeneous group' (Townsley *et al.* 2003:40) and prospective affiliates of the RAG and the focus groups were not supposed to be representative of all learning disabled people. Instead, as Lewis *et al.* (2008:79) observed about the members of their research reference and advisory groups, 'the involved individuals illustrated the perspectives of some disabled people'.

Influenced by the ethical standards of other LD researchers (see for example, the Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006:47-49), in

subsequent communications with key stakeholders, I identified the capacity to give informed consent as an important criterion, which was negotiated with the individual, rather than by proxy. Potential RAG and focus group members were given the option to sign a consent form or to assert their consent and this was recorded by their supporters on the said proforma (see Appendices 8 and 11). So, consent could be communicated verbally or nonverbally and with or without a signature on a consent form.

Moreover, throughout my fieldwork practices, I approached consent as an ongoing activity. Knox *et al.* (2000:56-57) perceived 'informed consent as a process, rather than an initial agreement' and their study's informant consent form was used simply as a preliminary guide. They argued that it was 'the strategy of 'ongoing consent' that offered both the informant and the inquirer the opportunity to not only consent to, but also to contribute to the topics of discussion'. So, for example, any matters that arose during their fieldwork practices that were not explicitly outlined on the original consent form could be 'negotiated with informants individually and progressively'. Rodgers (1999:428) also acknowledged the use of a 'simplified consent form... to mark a participant's formal decision to take part in' her study and was also aware of how individuals could change their minds, during any of the other stages of the research process. She maintained ongoing consent by providing 'information in

small doses' and by recapping and repeating particulars, 'allowing plenty of time for thought and questions'.

The ability to engage in and disengage from group activities was also included as eligibility criteria for prospective RAG and focus group members to highlight the fact that throughout my fieldwork practices, I would fully respect the views of members and would cease my interactions with them, should they ask me to do so. Additionally, a decision not to take part or to withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason, would not affect individuals in any way.

The last criterion was incorporated because if this study had recruited individuals who resided within an NHS establishment, then further ethical clearance beyond the remits of Coventry University would have been required and this could have delayed considerably the recruitment process (see for example, Butler *et al.* 2012:136). Parallel concerns led to the compilation of a NHS employee criterion for supporters of learning disabled people, within their eligibility criteria. These were also distributed to all key stakeholders and stated that they:

- were over the age of eighteen
- sign a consent form
- have an interest in media representations of learning disabled people and/or in supporting learning disabled people in research
- identify their primary role as a supporter for a member or members of the RAG or focus groups
- not be a NHS employee

Supporters were included in this study because prospective members of the RAG and the focus groups may have wanted someone, who they knew and trusted to be present at the meetings for support. For example, the Learning Difficulties Research Team (2006:32) allowed supporters into their interviews with learning disabled people if individuals 'wanted them there'. They 'thought this was important in helping people with higher support needs or people who felt nervous about the interview to take part'. As Walmsley (2004:66) observes many learning disabled people 'need support to lead fulfilling lives, including participation in research'.

Equally, and as highlighted in chapter five, the role of the research supporter has been identified as significant in the development of inclusive practices by and with learning disabled people (see for example, Walmsley and Johnson 2003), particularly as many learning disabled people require considerable support from non-learning disabled researchers in order to participate in research. This has raised questions over the validity of this body of work, as a true representation of their lived experiences (Kiernan 1999:46). Concerns have therefore been raised over how these practices are managed so that nondisabled supporters can contribute to the research process, 'without taking it over' (Williams *et al.* 2005:8). Consequently, a clear understanding of the fourth eligibility criterion by key stakeholders and by prospective supporters was of the essence to this study. Nevertheless, it remained

open to contributions from 'nondominating' supporters (Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84). Moreover, throughout the lifespan of the groups, I encouraged a teamwork approach between disabled and nondisabled members, because as observed by other researchers, everyone can learn from each other and that included me (see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004 and Williams *et al.* 2005).

Following initial communications with key stakeholders, introductory meetings were then arranged to discuss further details of the study. These ranged from practical factors like venue accessibility to disclosures of harm or potential harm. At these encounters, I also pointed out that data from the RAG and focus groups would be collected via observations and the compilation of contemporaneous notes. I had decided not to use any recording equipment during the course of this study's fieldwork practices, since such application could:

- deter key stakeholders from identifying potential RAG and focus group members
- deter potential RAG and focus groups members from engaging in this study
- distract RAG and focus group members, during the meetings
- influence the discussions of RAG and focus group members, during the meetings
- be affected by other practical matters, such as noisy surroundings, within a day service setting

Indeed, particular appliances such as visual or audio recording devices have been noted to affect the behaviours of the people being recorded, including researchers. For example, during their interviews with

adult children of learning disabled parents, Booth and Booth (1997:135) used to switch off their tape recorder for a variety of reasons:

> to relax the informant; to check whether the recorder was having an inhibiting effect; to mark the shift to a new and perhaps sensitive topic; and to give both parties a breather.

These researchers also emphasised how recording practices can exert a lot of pressure on the interviewer, 'who is constantly aware of being 'on air' and playing to an audience (including the transcriber and any research colleagues)'. Equally, Barnes (1992:120) noted how his hand held Dictaphone 'proved less useful than anticipated due to background noise', while he was collecting data, within day centres.

These initial and subsequent stages of the recruitment process were supported by varied proforma and it is to these materials and their development that I will now turn.

Accessible materials

> …if someone doesn't understand the words, it is the writer's, not the reader's problem (Young and Pringle 1996:2).

While acknowledging that learning disabled people 'are a heterogeneous group and the needs of people who bear this label vary greatly' (Townsley *et al.* 2003:40), in chapter two, the written medium was identified as a barrier to the participation of many learning disabled people in academic discourses which could be made more accessible with some support and creativity (see for example, Docherty *et al.* 2005 and

Walmsley 1994). Additionally, 'the importance of providing accessible and understandable information is a significant part of the recruitment and consent process' (Cameron and Murphy 2006:116). Moreover, accessibility is of the essence in inclusive LD research (Walmsley 2001:201).

All of the proforma for this study were produced with these principles in mind and varied resources informed their development. For instance, I examined information leaflets from past research studies (see for example, the Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006:109-112) and I consulted varied guides for making information more accessible (see for example, Change and the National Equality Partnership 1996, Inspired Services 2004 and Mencap 2002). This included easy read papers, which avoid the use of long sentences and words and use pictures to illustrate the meaning of a text (Social Care Institute for Excellence 2005).

Bashford *et al.* (1995:217) observe how illustrations can be 'a vital source of extra information and may well serve as the main source of meaning for some readers'. Images for the materials were sourced from version three of Photosymbols (2013), a popular picture library for making easy read information for learning disabled people, which 'feature real people and objects mixed with graphics'. Additionally, a photograph of me would be positioned next to my contact details, so that individuals could add a face to the name (see for example, Ham *et al.* 2004:402).

This was accompanied by a picture of several English national newspapers to support the association of this study with the newspaper medium.

Additionally, the development of these initial documents was supported through consultations with members of my supervisory team and former fellow workers. For example, I drew from the experiences of Dr Geraldine Brady and her research with and for children and young people (see for example, Brady 2004). An ex colleague with wide-ranging experiences of working with and for learning disabled people and who uses a diverse range of media for developing accessible materials, was also approached for further advice in the development of the forms. Moreover, these original documents needed to be 'tested for effectiveness by direct consultation with the target audience' (Townsley *et al.* 2003:390). So, they were reviewed by RAG members and amended accordingly, once this group was set up and running.

Table 2 presents the varied proforma that were developed for this study, together with further details of their proposed applications and corresponding appendices. These documents were used by all of the members of the RAG and the focus groups, including supporters because distinct versions for disabled and nondisabled people could have perpetuated 'what amounts to a 'them' and 'us' ethos' (Bashford *et al.* 1995:213).

Table 2: The varied proforma of this study

Name	Further details	Appendices
Introductory letter	This was used during the initial stages of the recruitment process and forwarded via key stakeholders to prospective RAG and focus group members. It was adapted according to whether addressees were prospective members of the RAG of the focus groups. Further details such as, contact names and dates were added accordingly.	Appendix 2
Introduction sheet	This was used during the initial stages of the recruitment process and forwarded via key stakeholders to prospective RAG and focus group members. It was designed as an introductory text to the study.	Appendix 3
Invitation letter	This was designed to follow on introductory meetings with interested parties, if needed. Further details such as, venues and dates were added accordingly.	Appendix 4
Information sheet	This was used during the initial stages of the recruitment process and forwarded via key stakeholders to prospective RAG and focus group members and/or during introductory meetings with interested parties. It was designed to provide individuals with a detailed overview of the study, which highlighted particular areas such as, confidentiality matters and how to make a complaint.	Appendix 5
Frequently asked questions sheet	This complemented the information sheet and was used during introductory meetings with interested parties. It was designed to provide a summary of particular matters such as, what individuals could expect in terms of their involvement in the study. It was adapted according to whether addressees were prospective members of the RAG of the focus groups. Further details such as, venues and dates were added accordingly.	Appendix 6
Covering letter	This was designed to follow on introductory meetings with interested parties, if needed. Further details such as, venue and dates were added accordingly.	Appendix 7
Consent form	This was the preliminary consent form of this study, which was developed further following feedback from the RAG (see Appendix 11).	Appendix 8
Thank you letter	This was designed to thank members following the facilitation of the focus groups and the conclusion of the RAG. It was distributed via key stakeholders and personalised accordingly.	Appendix 9

The details of the information sheet (see Appendix 5) were transcribed to an oversized paper roll design, which presents with a combination of pictures and words, information in an easy to understand format (see Appendix 10). This is a popular communication tool that is applied within LD circles, including self advocacy groups of learning disabled people. For example, a paper roll format is widely used by Talkback (2013), a self advocacy organisation led by and with learning disabled people. Indeed, it was during my employment with this organisation that I saw the potential of adopting this medium to inclusive research practices and for explaining more readily research terminology and other related matters to individuals unfamiliar with academic discourses. This includes both learning disabled and non learning disabled people. While no copyright is held on such a format, I still gained approval from Talkback's Chief Executive to apply a paper roll design to the information sheet of this study, providing that I acknowledge their work practices as an example of the successful application of a graphic information tool with and for learning disabled people (see for example, Talkback Health Passport 2013).

With the artistic support of an ex colleague who has extensive experience in the design, creation and application of paper rolls within LD circles, the information sheet was reproduced in a paper roll format (see Appendix 10). This supplemented the details of the information sheet (see Appendix 5). Additionally, as semi structured interviews were originally

considered as a possible technique for collecting data, it is named within a part of the paper roll. But this method is not mentioned within the varied proforma because it was never applied in practice. While the paper roll was employed throughout the life course of the RAG to reiterate information, to support discussions and to maintain consent as an ongoing process, it was mostly used during the introductory meetings with RAG and focus group members.

The paper roll was photographed in consecutive sections as illustrated in Appendix 10. These images were incorporated within an A4 landscape word document and were distributed to potential RAG and focus group members, as per the text based information sheet. Individuals therefore had access to both a pictorial edition of the information sheet (see Appendix 10) and the original document (see Appendix 5). This reflects the underlying principle of 'parallel texts', which is a way of presenting information to learning disabled people in an accessible format and 'not only provides a simplified version but also facilitates access to the main document' (Bashford *et al.* 1995:211).

Nevertheless, as Bashford *et al.* (1995:219) observe 'making documents accessible is only one aspect of the proper involvement of people with intellectual disabilities in research'. Indeed, close attention should also be given to other matters during the development and the facilitation of inclusive research practices. For example, Booth and Booth

(1996:55) identify a range of inhibiting factors which can limit some people's ability to converse openly within narrative research. This includes 'inarticulateness, unresponsiveness, a concrete frame of reference and difficulties with the concept of time'. However, they insist that researchers should place more emphasis on how to overcome the barriers that can impede the involvement of learning disabled people in research rather than focus on their 'limitations'. Indeed, this study was underpinned by a responsive approach to the facilitation of inclusive research practices so that the individual requirements of members of the RAG and the focus groups could be accommodated. Further, the RAG could provide this study with the expertise for the development of resources and processes that could enhance the research experiences of focus group members. It is to this distinct but interrelated data collection stage that I will now turn.

Research advisory groups: learning from the experienced

> We are a very settled group and have known each other for many years. We are a learning group and see ourselves as a group of learners. We meet to learn and talk about things that matter to us.

> We are a group of friends that meet every week in the afternoon. We do different things every week but we also have our routine and do some things every week, like the way we start our group or we take it in turns to talk about our news.

> We can relax during our meetings and do our own thing, like for example do a word search puzzle or close our eyes if we are feeling tired. But we are still part of a group when we are doing our own things.

> Our group is made up of both men and women. Some of us have girlfriends, boyfriends or are married. One of us is gay. Some of us are single.

We all have different personalities – we all come in different shapes and sizes. Some of us use different aids to get around like for example a trilater, a wheelchair (manual or electric) or a mobility scooter and some of us wear glasses. One of us wears a hearing aid.

Pepsi helps us with the group. She's a good link worker, a good listener, a good team player and makes a good cuppa tea and coffee. Pepsi has helped Shirley a lot with our group. She keeps all our papers in the office, up to date and we trust her.

We are a happy group!

This description of the RAG was developed by its members, during our concluding meetings. While the original comments were slightly edited to add some structure to the overall narrative, this final version was approved by RAG members, who also gave permission for its inclusion in this chapter.

The RAG had ten members: four women and six men. Their ages ranged from 35 to 65 years and all identified as White British. Two of the members were nondisabled supporters who worked for the day service in which the group was set. Pepsi was the pseudonym chosen collectively by RAG members for the senior support worker who assisted throughout the development and the facilitation of the group. The other support worker left their employment during the life course of the RAG and was not involved in its latter stages or with the compilation of this description.

Key features of RAGs

Tarleton *et al.* (2004:75) identify 'advisory or consultative groups' as one of the main ways in which learning disabled people 'are involved in research'. The Learning Difficulties Research Team (2006:62-64) found that in their review of LD research projects 'all but one' (eleven out of twelve) involved advisory groups. Some they noted as 'fairly traditional' and composed of a range of professionals and other individuals, including learning disabled people; while one project had two groups. One involved learning disabled people and their supporters and the other included 'professional experts'. These researchers concluded that 'advisory groups are better at involvement when they':

- meet regularly
- are personal and friendly
- have social time together
- include more people with learning difficulties
- pay people
- find more creative ways of discussing issues, asking questions and speaking up

The aims of this study's RAG

The RAG of this study was set up during the early part of the second year of my doctoral journey, after ethical clearance had been granted by Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee and I could proceed with its development (see Appendix 1). It was therefore not convened in time to inform this study's overall research design. However, subsequent fieldwork practices were informed and influenced by the RAG, as it ran concurrently with the other data collection stages of this study and these matters will be discussed in latter sections of this chapter.

Three main aims underpinned the set up of this group. First, it supported the engagement of learning disabled people in the co-production of knowledge, as active members of research communities and by so doing, RAG members were able to exert some direction over the process and outcomes of this study. This corresponded with inclusive research principles, as previously highlighted in chapter five (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:64). Parallel aims have underpinned the setting up of RAGs within other LD research studies. For example, Porter *et al.* (2006:12) described an advisory group as their most important data collection method for supporting inclusive research practices and 'its prime focus was to shape the process of the research'. Stalker (1998:13) set up a RAG so that it would give her project 'guidance on various aspects of its design and execution', particularly as:

> there was a real need for advice on some of the methodological issues raised by the study; a group of this kind also provided a vehicle for the active involvement of individuals with learning difficulties.

The second aim of this study's RAG concerned my optimistic endeavours to go beyond participatory research practices with the intention that involvement in RAG activities could in some way contribute towards the emancipatory process of its members (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:50-51). Similarly, Rodgers (1999:423) convened a group for her study which involved professionals, carers and learning disabled women, committing herself to supporting the group 'to develop for its own needs, as well as using it as a sounding board for' her ideas. She found this

approach 'particularly helpful as a way of allowing ideas and concerns to be raised from the perspective of the people in the group', instead of stemming from 'consultation' about issues that she had identified as 'relevant'. Further, 'the group provided many useful insights, as well as mutual support'.

Finally, the RAG offered me ongoing contact with learning disabled people and their supporters. These interactions exposed me to the lived experiences of learning disabled people, while keeping me informed on related LD matters. Indeed, Barnes (1992:122) asserted that in order 'for researchers, with or without impairments, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of disability it is essential that they interact with disabled people on a regular basis'. Williams (1999:48-49) highlighted in her reflections of 'researching together' with learning disabled people that she benefitted from the support of a research group 'primarily in terms of the development of ideas' that informed her doctoral work, 'but also as a means of keeping in touch with the concerns and reality of the lives of people' labelled with a LD.

Recruiting research advisory group members

RAG members were engaged for this study as per the recruitment guidelines that were described in the previous setting up section of this chapter. Ideally, the group needed to run over the other data collection stages of this study. This could involve a period of up to eighteen months.

So, I had to recruit members who could commit to such a timeframe and who were involved with an organisation that could support such commitment. With these considerations in mind, I approached a senior manager from a LD day service who I had worked with before. I knew from our former working relations that they were supportive of inclusive research practices by and with learning disabled people. They also worked for an established organisation that had no known concerns about its future provision of services. Additionally, there was a multimedia group based within this service that had been running for several years and the subject matter of this study could have been of interest to them and to their media projects.

The senior manager was enthusiastic about setting up a RAG within their organisation, should individuals be interested in getting involved and, after several emails, a meeting was arranged with them and one of their senior support workers. Due to our former working relationships, this was an informal encounter and I was able to highlight this study's eligibility criteria with regard to the prospective members of the RAG. These were previously listed in the setting up section of this chapter. It was also an opportunity for them to ask any questions and to discuss particulars further.

No issues were raised about the eligibility criteria within these discussions and it proved popular that 'nondominating' supporters

(Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84) would be regarded as valued members of the RAG, particularly as I was hoping that relationships within the group would develop 'from a place of learning' (Chapman and McNulty 2004:81). Further, I did not envisage supporting staff taking over the group because during my past liaisons within this establishment, I had noted how relationships between learning disabled people and support workers appeared to be overtly positive.

However, as I had estimated meeting with the RAG around every two months, concerns were raised about whether some members would be able to remember what had been covered from one meeting to the next. Indeed, 'problems with memory' have been noted by some learning disabled researchers (Williams 1999:50) and varied techniques, such as the distribution of pre set agendas and minutes prior to people getting together, have been applied in LD research projects to support the recollection by group members of past meetings (Porter *et al.* 2006:12-13). So, throughout the lifespan of the RAG I was attentive and responsive to memory matters and with the assistance of members, developed ways for addressing any issues in this area.

The senior manager had also been considering other individuals as prospective RAG members, rather than their service's multimedia group. So, following this initial meeting and a further email to the senior manager and the senior support worker in which I reiterated this study's

inclusion criteria and attached varied documents, such as my Coventry

University's ethics review feedback form (see Appendix 1) and an

introductory letter and introductory sheet (see Appendices 2 and 3,

respectively) for them to discuss with prospective members, I was

advised by the senior manager to contact another senior support worker.

This was to explore the possibility of setting up the RAG with the group of

individuals that they had been considering, since our initial meeting.

I rang the senior manager to talk about this matter further and they

highlighted that as some of the members of the multimedia group were

quite busy and in demand, they did not want to approach them with

details of this study as this could put some pressure on their schedules.

Indeed, Simons (1992:17) observed how a People First self advocacy

group was increasingly being approached for their support over a range of

matters by outside groups and was finding it hard to set their own

agenda, partly because it was responding to the requests of others.

Rodgers (1999:422-423) also had to convene her own RAG because she

knew that her local People First self advocacy group was regularly having:

> their own agendas swamped by requests for consultation from
> various agencies and individuals, and felt it was unfair to prevent
> them from following their own interests by putting forward yet
> another request for help.

The senior manager also explained how the other group under

consideration would be a better option for this study because it was

established and met regularly, within the day service. Hence, they

believed that it would be quite easy for me to fit around their schedule. Moreover, as this group was well supported by two workers it would be feasible for those people who did not want to join the RAG to be otherwise engaged with these members of staff, during our meetings. This would also apply to two individuals within the group, as the senior manager did not feel comfortable with them being involved in the RAG because of issues surrounding their capacity to give informed consent for this study. They would therefore remain in the same meeting room as the RAG but occupied in their own activity, with the support of staff.

During this part of the conversation, I felt uneasy because of the delicate scenarios that could arise from this set up. For example, the two individuals in question would be present in RAG meetings and would contribute to these discussions. But this study could not take their contributions into account, if there were concerns with their capacity to give informed consent. However, I never voiced this unease with the senior manager because I knew from our former working relations that should such a situation arise I would be able to discuss this further with them, to ensure the active engagement of all prospective RAG members in the co-production of knowledge. Moreover, as previously highlighted in the recruitment guidelines section of this chapter, I was approaching consent as an ongoing process (see for example, Knox *et al.* 2000) and could address such matters on an individual basis, as and when they emerged.

Nevertheless, since our initial meeting when this particular group was mentioned, I had had some reservations about engaging with these individuals, since I had worked with several of the members in the past and I was worried that some might confuse my former position with this current study and roles could become blurred. Equally, there were several advantages for setting up a RAG with these individuals, especially as I would not be approaching such venture 'completely 'cold', that is with no idea of group members' skills and abilities' (Gates and Waight 2007:118). So, for example, from our past relations we had built up a good rapport and knew each other reasonably well. These connections could form a strong foundation for the development and establishment of the RAG. Chappell (1999:108-109) observes how from an ethnographic tradition, which is 'well established' in LD research,

> researchers take time to get to know their respondents and the circumstances of their lives. This can be very important in building up a rapport between researcher and respondent. It helps to avoid the problem of respondents being intimidated by the research process and giving the answers that they think the researcher wants to hear.

Additionally, I had an understanding of their preferred methods of communication and could be responsive to the facilitation of inclusive research practices by accommodating individual requirements. Our initial RAG dealings could be well supported with the resources that I had already produced for this study. For example, the paper roll version of the information sheet (see Appendix 10), could provide these prospective RAG members with vital information about the study in an easy to

understand format that would be accessible to them. I was also familiar with the set up of the day provision and the ways in which this group of individuals formatted their meetings. So, the RAG could be developed around the schedule of the organisation and meetings could be arranged in a manner that was familiar and amenable to its members. This would minimise my imposition to the service and to the routines of individuals and staff. Indeed, Barnes (1992:119) observed how as he was able to undertake research within centres where he had already worked, his 'intrusion into the system on a full time basis would be almost negligible'.

Equally, as the RAG was set within a regular meeting place, members could attend meetings as part of their routine and were well supported by two support workers. So, I did not have to concern myself over practical issues, such as transport and individual support. Varied researchers have emphasised the significance of these matters, while supporting learning disabled people in research practices (Butler *et al.* 2012:136). For example, Cambridge and McCarthy (2001:479) noted that during their facilitation of focus groups with learning disabled people, on average for all of their meetings, 'two out of 10 group members failed to show up on the day'. They found that the main reasons for this non attendance 'cited in order of frequency were transport difficulties, unavailability of helpers and work or other planned activities received a priority'. However, this drop rate was less problematic for their 'three day centre focus groups because they were based in the day centres

themselves, imposing minimal additional logistical demands on travelling and attendance'. Burke *et al.* (2003:67) also emphasised how 'the practicalities of staff release and transport arrangements' were addressed by the 'goodwill' of support workers and without such support they 'would have been unable to continue with the project'.

While acknowledging my initial reservations about engaging with a group of individuals that were already known to me and in view of the practical matters that could arise during the lifespan of the RAG, I contacted the other member of staff, as advised by the senior manager. This person was Pepsi, the senior support worker that was mentioned previously in the RAG description, as composed by its members. We had met in passing during my past working relations with their organisation and following varied communications, we arranged to meet to discuss the study in detail. This included the current set up of the group and the consent matters that had been previously raised by the senior manager, with particular reference to the two individuals and my related apprehensions. Pepsi put my mind at ease with their down-to-earth attitude to the development and establishment of a RAG and their enthusiasm to support such an enterprise.

During this meeting, I provided Pepsi with a hard copy of my ethics application document, together with Coventry University's ethics review feedback form (see Appendix 1) and my criminal record bureau form for

their records and safe keeping. These supported them with any enquiries that could be posed by other management personnel from within their organisation, during the lifespan of the group. I also compiled individual information packs for prospective RAG members that supported their initial discussions with Pepsi, which included an introductory letter and an introduction sheet (see Appendices 2 and 3, respectively).

Pepsi contacted me a few days later to inform me that they had spoken to some of the members of the group and had identified four individuals who had shown an interest in finding more about the study and in meeting with me. One person did not want to be involved and they still needed to talk to three people. Pepsi recommended that I come and meet with the whole group to discuss the study further. They did not think that I would be imposing on those individuals who still needed to be approached because one of them would most definitely be interested and the two remaining individuals could decide there and then whether they wanted to get involved with the RAG or not. I would also not be in the way of the disinterested person because they could choose to join the group or to be engaged elsewhere. I trusted Pepsi's approach to these matters and a date and time were arranged for an initial meeting with the whole group, at the day centre.

Despite the prompt attention that was given by the senior manager and Pepsi to the recruitment process of this study, this initial stage took

diverse communications and four months to complete. These key stakeholders were optimistic about setting up a RAG within their organisation but I was unsure about whether this group of individuals would be interested in engaging in such an endeavour. It was not until after our initial meetings that this uncertainty was addressed and these encounters initiated the foundation of this study's RAG.

I will now turn to an overview of the RAG meetings which will include their general format. I will also provide a more detailed account of the group's two initial sessions with the intention of generating data that may be of interest to disability researchers, emphasising the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the advancement of disability research practices. Moreover, throughout these accounts, I will include my reflections of these fieldwork experiences, as a nondisabled inclusive researcher.

The RAG meetings

The group of individuals that developed into this study's RAG were already meeting on a weekly basis in the afternoon for three hours. They had a fortnightly routine when they would meet one week with a self advocacy organisation, with varied agendas running throughout the year. During the other weeks, they were supported by Pepsi and another support worker from the day service and generally these meetings had no set programme. These were the proposed times for scheduling RAG

activities because as previously highlighted, it would cause minimum disruption to members, staff and the organisation.

The RAG met on fourteen occasions, over a period of eighteen months and meetings were held within day service premises and arranged through Pepsi. Generally, attendance was good with the occasional apology from members as they were busy elsewhere within the service or away on holiday. The two individuals that were previously mentioned in the discussions with the senior manager and Pepsi were present in several of these meetings. Sometimes they were otherwise engaged in their own activities but I still did not want them to be excluded from their regular routine with the group. So, while they were included within the context of the RAG, they did not really partake in the meetings and none of their contributions are reflected in any part of this thesis. Similarly, there were also a few occasions when the RAG was joined by other learning disabled people or staff. These instances were unplanned and happened for varied reasons, such as a learning disabled person would join us for a brief period while they waited for someone or a member of staff would cover for Pepsi, while they were otherwise engaged in the day service. However, these visitors caused minimum disruption to the RAG and they did not in effect contribute to its activities.

With the exception of our fifth session when we only talked for around half an hour after a scheduled self advocacy meeting, I met with

the group throughout the weeks that had no set programme and remained with them for around three hours. However, this time slot was not exclusive to RAG activities and we always had time for refreshments and gradually integrated other group interests, such as talking about our news, watching online music videos and surfing the worldwide web. I thoroughly enjoyed being in the company of RAG members and engaging with them in these more social pursuits and had always thought that it would have been disrespectful of me, if I had left the meetings once our RAG work had been completed.

These interactions also kept me in regular contact with the lived experiences of learning disabled people and their supporters. As formerly mentioned in this chapter, this was one of the main aims of this study's RAG and it is an objective that has been identified as significant by other disability researchers (see for example, Barnes 1992 and Williams 1999). Whittaker (1990:43) observed that 'listening to someone speaking of their own direct experience can be a most effective way of keeping the real world in our minds'. Throughout the lifespan of the RAG, I regularly emphasised the significance of such exposure to the group and I thanked members for keeping me in touch with reality.

During the first session, I introduced or reintroduced myself to group members and presented an overview of the study and the concept of a RAG to them. Both Pepsi and their fellow co-worker were present. I

found this introduction really challenging because it proved hard for me to ascertain the level of engagement and interest of individuals as generally people were very quiet, with two individuals falling asleep during my presentation of the paper roll (see Appendix 10). Some learning disabled researchers have observed how during meetings it was hard for people 'to stay focused and concentrate. It was sometimes hard to really listen to what other people were saying, sitting down for a long time' (The Money, Friends and Making Ends Meet Research Group 2012:129). Whittaker (1990:42) also highlights during her review of how to best involve learning disabled people in meetings that:

> even when professionals are committed to the idea of participation, they may still find it difficult. The fact that someone may have worked with people with learning difficulties for many years may not mean that they find this sort of communication easy.

While I was not completely disheartened by these initial responses, as during my past associations with some of the members of this group it had not been unusual for people to snooze during meetings, I had to make sure that I was presenting information in an accessible manner, so that individuals could make a genuine decision about whether they wanted to get involved in the study.

The concluding part of my presentation was supported by Pepsi who reiterated important details to the group. For example, they explained to members that if they did not want me coming to their meetings then they could tell Pepsi, if they did not want to tell me directly. I would then be

asked not to come again and no questions would be asked. Further, a complaint procedure was in place should the group not be happy with any aspect of my conduct. Pepsi's straight forward explanations not only reaffirmed vital matters but it also highlighted the reciprocal relationship that they had developed with the group. Members trusted Pepsi and were reassured by the fact that they could approach them for support should any matters arise, during the lifetime of the study. Additionally, Pepsi's approach in this initial session along with their rapport with group members, confirmed my belief that as a 'nondominating' supporter (Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84) they would be able to contribute to the research process, 'without taking it over' (Williams *et al.* 2005:8).

At the end of my talk, most of the group expressed an interest in the study and another meeting was arranged for the following month. This schedule presented all members, including the individuals who had yet to express an interest or to make up their minds, with some time to think about whether they wanted to get involved with the RAG. This time span also gave me four weeks to prepare for our next session and to develop on the preliminary edition of the consent form (see Appendix 8).

This introductory meeting lasted around forty minutes and my suggestion of breaking up for a cup of tea or coffee was welcomed by everyone and brought our session to a close. However, I remained with the group until their scheduled time was over, socialising with them over

a hot beverage. Following this initial encounter with the group, both Pepsi and their colleague remained positive about the development of a RAG. They believed that members would have a better understanding of the matter in question once they had attended several meetings and in due course, they would contribute to the study. To support this learning process, Pepsi suggested that I supply them with informative materials, which they could look at as a group or individually, prior to our next meeting. Consequently, I gave Pepsi several hard copies of the information and the frequently asked questions sheets, together with the A4 version of the paper roll (see Appendices 5, 6 and 10, respectively).

Fortunately and for reasons unknown to me, the ambience of our second meeting was a much livelier affair and was directed by the group. Indeed, no one fell asleep and both Pepsi and their fellow co-worker were once more present. Everyone got engaged in their own way and at their own pace. So, for example while I was presenting the paper roll to the group again to remind them of what we had spoken about at our initial session (see Appendix 10), there were two individuals engaged in their own activity, namely a word search puzzle or drawing a picture. However, they were still part of the group as they were listening to our discussions and on occasions looking up to see what was going on. These activities were very much part of the regular format of the group's meetings as highlighted in the RAG description which was presented earlier in this chapter.

Additionally, one group member had not been present at the introductory session. So, I asked the rest of the group for assistance, as they had already been introduced to the study and they could support me with my presentation by partaking and making details clearer for this person. Further, I wanted to make my talk more interactive, particularly as throughout the first meeting, members had been very quiet. While questions about the study and my doctorate were encouraged by Pepsi, their colleague and me, not unlike the former session, none were posed by any of the group members. Perhaps as McCarthy (1998:141) concluded from her research interviews with learning disabled women, 'in practice it takes a particularly confident research subject to put personal questions to a researcher'. However, I did observe how some individuals were supporting my narration as requested. For example, I overheard one person (SI) correct another (FI) when they stated that I was looking at newspapers not books. These comments not only clarified certain details that I could have missed during my presentation but they also revealed how some members were already developing an understanding of the overall remit of the study.

During this second session the consent forms were also completed (see Appendix 11), with support from Pepsi and their fellow co-worker. We paired up with individual group members and carefully read the form with them, making sure that they had understood what they were consenting to and offering the opportunity to ask any questions. Every

RAG member completed and signed a consent form, including Pepsi and their colleague. This procedure could be perceived as flawed, particularly as individuals were being asked by a known and trusted member of staff, whether they wanted to be part of the RAG and this association could have increased their propensity to consent (McCarthy 1998:143). But as formerly emphasised in this chapter, the concept of informed consent was approached throughout this study as an ongoing process. Drawing from the fieldwork practices of other researchers (see for example, Knox *et al.* 2000 and Rodgers 1999), the completion of the consent form by RAG members simply marked their initial decision to take part in the study. Members could change their minds at any stage of the research process and these decisions were always respected. Ongoing consent was progressively and individually maintained, with the reiteration of information and the allocation of time for further questioning and discussion. It was agreed by the group that I took away the completed consent forms to have them photocopied. These duplicates were then given to Pepsi for safe keeping in the office. A date was also arranged for our next meeting, when following my suggestion, we talked about newspapers, so that we could all learn more about them.

So, having dealt with preliminary formalities such as introductions and consent, it could be said that this study's RAG was set up and running by the second session. There were some major matters and possibilities that emerged during its lifetime and it is to an exploration of these

themes that I will now turn, which will include my reflections of developing and facilitating such a venture.

Matters and possibilities

> It is useful to remember what happens ordinarily at meetings; there are people who talk too much while others say virtually nothing; some people stick to the topic while others are inclined to wander off it! (Whittaker 1990:46)

Such observation emphasises the fact that generally learning disabled people behave in the same ways in meetings as anyone else. However, as Stalker (1998:14) argues: 'why then do others worry about it, pass judgement, or impose different interpretations on their behaviour?' Still, like 'others' I worried about the dynamics of the RAG, particularly about its quieter members, since I did not want exclusionary fieldwork practices to be the cause of their subdued behaviour. As specified earlier in this chapter, by means of a responsive approach to the facilitation of inclusive research practices, I focused on the barriers that could hinder the involvement of learning disabled people in research, rather than on individual 'limitations' (Booth and Booth 1996:55). So, for example, I frequently questioned the accessibility of some of the resources that were used in the RAG meetings. Through the expertise of the group along with my observations and reflections, these materials were reviewed and made more user-friendly, not only for the RAG but also for subsequent focus group members (see for example, Appendix 11).

Nevertheless, I was uncertain about the group's overall research experience and as Williams *et al.* (2005:10) observed about their fieldwork practices: 'when we started out on this project, there was no particular reason why any of the members should have an idea of what research was'. I was also concerned about the level of awareness of RAG members about being actually involved in research. The Learning Difficulties Research Team (2006:69) found in their review of LD projects that in one case, researchers believed:

> that the participants with learning difficulties were not really aware that they were taking part in research. They knew they were taking part in the activity involved but not that this was research.

So, during the lifetime of the RAG, I regularly reiterated information to members, to encourage discussion and to maintain ongoing consent. Such techniques were always employed in an unobtrusive manner because I also had 'to remember that not all lay participants have the time or inclination, even if politically aware, to take control of research production' (Barnes 2008:465). But inadvertently these techniques seem to also contribute to the group's understanding of research, while supporting their meaningful involvement in this study. For example, it was not until a latter meeting when I asked the group what if anything had they gained from the RAG meetings, that I was able to confirm how some members, such as FI and SI were aware of their involvement in research practices and that they 'would be interested in working with university people, like Shirley in the future and get paid for it'.

Further, I had my reservations about whether this study's overall theme, namely the representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers, was of interest to the RAG, because it proved extremely challenging to instigate any discussions around this topic and other associated matters. However, as formerly asserted in the concluding section of chapter five, I was initiating research in this area not only because of the significant lack of LD studies in the field of disability and media, with few studies examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people but because of the near absence of their lived experiences in this body of work (see Table 1, page 136). Therefore, the matter in question could be identified as a relatively new arena within LD discourses that could be of concern to learning disabled people, if they were made aware of it (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:127).

Abell *et al.* (2007:123) describe how their group chose a topic which 'they felt passionate about' as this kept them going when the research became 'slow or difficult'. They assert that 'researchers need to pick research areas that they are really interested in, as research is a long haul'. Williams *et al.* (2005:13) also believe that their project would not have been as successful, 'had the researchers pursued questions that did not fully engage them'. So, while the overall theme of this study may not have been of particular concern to RAG members, I discovered other areas that were of interest to them, such as the development of

accessible materials for the prospective focus groups (see for example, Appendices 11 and 12) or the compilation of ten top tips for researchers, wanting to work inclusively with learning disabled people, which will be presented in chapter ten. Consequently, the RAG was able to exert some direction over the process and outcomes of this study as active members of research communities in the co-production of knowledge, while contributing towards the advancement of inclusive research practices (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:64).

With reference to my initial reservation regarding the blurring of roles, such concerns never transpired and RAG members did not appear to confuse my former job, with my existing research position. Still, I approached these former acquaintances with some trepidation. Aspis (1997:653) believes that while growing up learning disabled people 'learn that professionals are helpful and attentive by the one to one attention they receive'. She argues that this 'intense attention' is not provided by other disabled people. So, learning disabled people 'will do anything to be accepted' by nondisabled people or by people 'valued by society like service providers, social workers and professionals' and these interactions makes them feel valued. Parallel concerns were highlighted in chapter five, with the underlying principles of normalisation and the promotion of facilitating relationships between learning disabled people and individuals ascribed with a high societal value (Chappell 1997:49). Additionally, Stalker (1998:6) associates the tendency to acquiescence by some

learning disabled people not to their impairment, but to the fact that 'so many aspects of their lives are controlled by others'.

While these arguments should not be generalised to all learning disabled people, it does raise concerns on whether such motives compelled RAG members to become involved with this study. I was constantly wary of the challenges that this could pose to the social relations of research production and the development of asymmetrical relationships between disabled people and researchers, as emphasised in the previous chapter (see for example, Danieli and Woodhams 2005, Oliver 1997, Stone and Priestley 1996 and Zarb 1992). So, even though this study was underpinned by inclusive research principles (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:64) and was committed in shifting 'the 'social relations' of disability research production' (Stevenson 2010:43), my position as a researcher still accorded me with 'a particular status' (Barnes 2008:463), which could inadvertently contribute to 'the internalised oppression' of learning disabled people (Aspis 1997:653). Consequently, reflexivity and an awareness of power relations were of the essence, throughout my fieldwork practices (Chapman 2005:18).

Another matter that emerged during the lifetime of the RAG concerned memory issues. Since my preliminary discussions with the senior manager of the day service, the frequency of the RAG meetings was highlighted as a concern, because it was believed that considerable

gaps between sessions could have an effect on any memory problems that could be experienced by some members. Indeed, as formerly mentioned in this chapter, some learning disabled researchers have identified parallel issues (see for example, Williams 1999:50) and varied techniques have been introduced by some inclusive researchers to support the recollection by RAG members, from one meeting to the next (see for example, Porter *et al.* 2006:12-13). Riddell *at al.* (2001:232) perceive structure as an important element of the business of an advisory group and identify the expectation that such arrangements are to be provided by the researchers themselves.

From the inception of this study's RAG, I took on board such responsibility and gradually introduced some structure into the meetings that was amenable to its members, as they reflected a parallel format of their regular sessions and routines. So, for example, I knew from my past working experiences with some of the members, that group proceedings were regularly recorded on flip chart paper, as they were discussed. I applied such technique in many of our sessions and would return to these documents as and when required in latter discussions, to remind individuals of what we had previously covered, to reiterate information and to maintain ongoing consent.

Nevertheless, I was attentive and responsive to memory matters, especially as I did observe at times RAG members struggling to

remember details from past sessions. This included Pepsi. Such incidents made me reflect upon the realities of everyday living and how it can generally prove difficult for individuals to remember things, unless they are fully absorbed in particular affairs. So, I did not perceive poor recall as exclusive to learning disabled people nor as an individual flaw; but as an indication of my facilitation skills and whether I was making information accessible to the group.

Throughout the lifespan of the RAG, I advocated directness in this matter and would praise individuals' honesty when they were open about being unable to remember particulars. Therefore, details about the study together with what had been formerly covered in sessions were regularly reiterated to members and ongoing consent was maintained. Additionally, these reiterations made the group 'aware of the possibility of forgetting the achievements which they had made as the process unfolded' (Burke *et al.* 2003:68).

Equally, as other LD researchers have highlighted about RAGs (see for example, Porter *et al.* 2005:580), I would have preferred if we had met more often, as I did observe that when meetings were held closer together, this shorter interlude did appear to make it easier for members to remember details from past sessions, while supporting them to be more attuned with RAG activities. However, the frequency of the meetings was heavily dependant on multiple factors. For instance, as the RAG met

on a Monday afternoon, this weekday coincided with varied public holidays when the service was closed and members were off for the day. I also had to keep abreast with the other distinct but interrelated data collection stages of this study and needed time in between meetings to prepare for prospective discussions.

However, additional session dates were not requested because I did not want to impose further on the goodwill of RAG members and did not want my fieldwork practices to become exploitative. As Stalker (1998:17) emphasises, I needed to strike a balance 'which ensures that the researcher neither intrudes unwanted in people's lives, nor becomes so immersed in 'the cause' that she loses sight of the academic agenda'. So, while I would have preferred to have had more meetings with the group, to support the enhancement of members' research experiences and the development of my fieldwork practices, their level of involvement turned out to be adequate for the requirements of this study and its tight doctoral schedule. Most importantly I did not outstay my welcome and I regularly thanked RAG members for their time and all of their contributions and support.

Additionally, refreshments slots already featured in the group's regular meeting format and from the beginning this was also integrated within the RAG sessions. This would take place half way through the meeting. Depending on how members felt on the day and how they

wanted the session arranged, along with the matters that needed to be covered. RAG activities would be undertaken either before or after this break. At every meeting I would bring in a snack for the group to share and enjoy, as a small token of my appreciation for their time and for all of their assistance, particularly as I was not in the position to offer them payment for their involvement with the RAG. It was also a way for showing my respect towards their views and experiences and to the contributions that members were affording to this study. Besides, I considered these refreshments slots as an important aspect of the RAG sessions because they allowed the group to take time out, particularly if members had had a busy morning and had then been somewhat engaged with RAG matters. It also offered them with socialising opportunities because as previously highlighted in this chapter, RAGs 'are better at involvement when… they have social time together' (The Learning Difficulties Research Team 2006:63).

The significance of these refreshments slots to RAG meetings were emphasised by its members when they were compiling the ten top tips for researchers wanting to work inclusively with learning disabled people, which will be presented in chapter ten. Comments included: 'It's nice… It makes me feel good… You share… a social event', together with the assertion that if meetings were 'fun' you remembered more. Gates and Waight (2007:123) emphasised the importance of the provision of refreshments within research fieldwork practices. They were unable to

pay learning disabled people for their participation in focus groups but ensured that all participants were offered a hot beverage and biscuits at each of their meetings. These researchers asserted that:

> this should not be dismissed as trivial or unimportant. We learned that the value of tea, coffee and chocolate biscuits in research should not be underestimated. The importance of being rewarded and this reward, no matter how humble, being offered simultaneously with what was being said, respected and valued was important. And whether that was achieved by weekly tea, coffee and biscuits, or chocolates at the end of the six week series of focus groups, we have learned was immaterial; that it was achieved at all was of primary importance.

By contrast, Butler *et al.* (2012:138 and 140) were able to pay learning disabled people for taking part in their focus groups meetings but they still ended their groups 'with a celebration', when they brought in food and drink and socialised with them. It was also their 'way of saying goodbye to the group'. An advisory group of a LD research project also observed how they would 'go out to lunch to celebrate', once they had disseminated their research findings at their 'end of project conference' (Porter *et al.* 2005:585).

Regrettably, this study's RAG was never able to get together for a final celebratory occasion, during which members could have expressed final reflections, on their involvement in this research. They had welcomed the idea of concluding RAG activities with a party and during several instances we had started to talk about this. But organisational changes to the day service resulted in the sudden disbanding of the

group, making it extremely difficult to get all of the members together again for one more session. Therefore, the underlying principles for the regular refreshments slots of the RAG meetings became all the more significant. This inopportune turn of events made me reflect on how generally neither disabled people nor researchers 'have much control over the material relations of research production' (Zarb 1992:127).

Having explored some of the major matters and possibilities that emerged during the lifetime of the RAG, I will now turn to an examination of the contributions of its nondisabled members, with particular reference to Pepsi and the role that they played within the group, as well as to this study's fieldwork practices.

Research advisory group supporters

In chapter five, the role of the research supporter was identified as significant in the development of inclusive practices by and with learning disabled people and some of the key challenges that they can pose to the translation of inclusive principles were presented (see for example, Chappell 2000:41, Kiernan 1999:46 and Williams *et al.* 2005:8). These discussions have led some LD researchers to call for a clarification of the roles that can be played by research supporters, so that asymmetrical relations between learning disabled people and researchers can be exposed and existing practices can be developed further (see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004:77 and Walmsley 2004:66).

An exploration of the contributions by the nondisabled members to this study's RAG will be presented here as a responsive attempt to these concerns, with the intention that together with my reflections of my experiences of 'doing' inclusive research, it can also present data that may be of interest to disability researchers, highlighting the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the ongoing development of disability research practices.

As specified in the recruitment guidelines section of this chapter, supporters were included as prospective RAG members because learning disabled associates may have wanted support at the meetings, from someone who they knew and trusted. However, this involvement needed to be carefully managed so that nondisabled supporters could contribute to the research process, 'without taking it over' (Williams *et al.* 2005:8). Equally, the promotion of a teamwork approach could also enable RAG members to learn from each other (see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004).

From the onset and as I had expected from my former working experiences at this organisation, it proved easy to apply such underlying principles to the general format of the RAG. The group wanted someone like Pepsi present in their meetings and unlike other RAGs (see for example, Porter *et al.* 2006:12) members never opted to attend meetings on their own. Indeed, during the compilation of the ten top tips for

researchers who want to work inclusively with learning disabled people, which will be presented in chapter ten, members emphasised the need for researchers to involve everyone and this included staff, who knew them well. Chapman and McNulty (2004:80) observe how their research group had always said that they 'did want support and felt annoyed that other groups did not seem to recognise that as their own choice'. So, perhaps as Williams *et al.* (2005:8) argue:

> it is theoretically possible for people to be in control, but with support. This is a direct parallel with the argument of disabled writers (e.g. Morris 1993) that independence in general does not mean managing on your own without support.

Teamwork principles were also listed as an important factor by the RAG in their ten top tips, as in 'helping each other out'. The Learning Difficulties Research Team (2006:91) asserted that if their project worked, 'then it was because of team work' and one significant aspect of this was to 'use people's strengths and talents'. Throughout the lifetime of this study's RAG, I observed that working as a team appeared to be of second nature to the group and during meetings, members would support each other in varied ways, such as taking it in turn to read documents aloud for the benefit of those who found reading difficult. However, this team work ethos extended to all members and enabled the group to learn from each other. Naturally this included me, as one RAG member (AM) asserted during a latter discussion: 'Shirley has learnt from us'. So, 'it wasn't just supporters helping out researchers with learning difficulties.

We all helped each other. It was a two-way thing' (The Learning

Difficulties Research Team 2006:93).

Further, during the initial discussions when the RAG description was

been developed by its members, Pepsi identified themselves as part of

the group and did not want to be referred to by their job title. Generally,

both Pepsi and their colleague enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with RAG

members and contributed to discussions in a 'nondominating' manner

(Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84). So, as Chapman and McNulty (2004:78)

explained about the way of working of their research group, this study's

RAG appeared to:

> work in a more cooperative manner where everyone is equal rather
> than to a 'people first' model where supporters are in the
> background and not supposed to take part in things.

However, unlike Butler *et al.* (2012:141) who established that

during their focus group meetings with learning disabled people, 'support

workers chipping in with their opinions were rarely helpful', in this study

the views of the research supporter were useful to the group and to

subsequent fieldwork practices. This can be clearly demonstrated by

Pepsi's feedback on the draft consent form that I presented to the group,

at the first meeting (see Appendix 8). With this information, I was able to

produce a document that was more user-friendly not only for the RAG but

also for prospective focus group members (see Appendix 11). Pepsi and

their colleague also supported the group with the completion of said

proforma and the initiation of this study's ongoing consent process, as formerly highlighted in this chapter.

There were also many other occasions during the RAG meetings when these supporters assisted with the facilitation of discussions, such as the reiteration of important information at our first group meeting, as described earlier. Pepsi and their colleague also rephrased questions so that members could have a better understanding of the subject under discussion or they would clarify particular points that were raised by members, when I found dialogues difficult to understand.

Additionally, Pepsi and their colleague played a vital role with the practical arrangements of the group. Indeed, the impact of practicalities such as transport and individual support, to the active involvement of learning disabled people in fieldwork practices were highlighted earlier in this chapter and should not be taken lightly (see for example, Burke *et al.* 2003:67, Butler *et al.* 2012:136, Cambridge and McCarthy 2001:479 and Porter *et al.* 2006:12). It could be argued that as the RAG was set within a day service and its meetings were integrated within a regular slot of this provision, Pepsi and their colleague were just fulfilling their everyday responsibilities by supporting the group with RAG activities. However, they always ensured that members were well supported and that meetings ran smoothly. So, for example, they provided the two individuals within the group whose capacity to give informed consent had

been formerly questioned by the senior manager with one to one support, ensuring their inclusion within the context of the RAG. Meeting dates were arranged via Pepsi who would always check for any prior arrangements in the day services diary, confirming the availability of members, staff and rooms and would advise me accordingly. They also circulated related correspondence to RAG members, such as the thank you letters (see Appendix 9). Moreover, and in their own time, Pepsi reviewed and commented on the initial draft of this section of the chapter and reflected on their involvement in this research project, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the RAG that went beyond the lifetime of the group (see Appendix 13).

This exploration of the contributions by the nondisabled members of this study's RAG clearly identifies the invaluable roles that they played. Without their continued enthusiasm and support, it would have proved difficult for me to manage, develop and sustain such a venture, particularly as it was set within a tight doctoral schedule and with limited resources. Their reciprocal relations with RAG members facilitated the process of working, within inclusive research principles (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:64). These were based on 'mutual respect and trust', which as Chapman and McNulty (2004:81) observe:

> enables expertise to be learned and taught. In this spirit people in the group share experience and learn from each other, and produce work together that is person led.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This chapter presented an overview of the initial setting up phase of this study, including the recruitment process and the accessible materials that were designed and developed for the prospective members of the RAG and the focus groups. It then focused on its RAG and how learning disabled people and their supporters were engaged as active members of research communities in the co-production of knowledge. During these explorations, I examined the major matters and possibilities that arose during these fieldwork practices, while incorporating my reflections of the research process, drawing from my research diary entries. I also considered the contributions of the supporting members of the RAG to these activities. Within these reflective accounts, I generated data that may be of interest to disability researchers, highlighting the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the advancement of disability research practices. In the next chapter, I will now turn to the focus group stage of this study.

Chapter seven
Focus groups: facilitating disability and media research discussions

Introduction

> The denial of a voice to disabled people has been over-determined in the case of those labelled 'mentally retarded' by our historically shifting criteria… This label has carried with it the understanding that individuals lack the power to learn and to reason. How can one admit such a voice into meaningful discussions about anything beyond the most basic immediate needs? Our present assumption, however, is that researchers must do so (Gerber 1990:4).

The focus group method was incorporated as a data collecting technique for this study because 'this approach can illuminate the concerns of those whose voices are otherwise muted' (Barbour 2007:27). As a result, it can help to break the silencing of learning disabled people by addressing the manner, in which they are positioned in the process of the research. Gates and Waight (2007:111) assert that focus groups are 'a legitimate methodological approach within the research process in the field of learning disabilities'. The dynamics of focus groups have also been identified as useful in breaking down some of the existing barriers to the inclusion of learning disabled people in research (Barr *et al.* 2003:579).

In this chapter, I will present an account of the use of the focus group method to this study and the ways in which learning disabled people and their supporters were engaged as active members of research communities in the co-production of knowledge. I will explore the major matters and possibilities that arose during this stage and consideration will be given to the contributions of the supporting members of the focus groups to these endeavours. Where applicable, I will use name initials to attribute each quotation or idea from a focus group member to the appropriate individual, with the intention of maintaining their anonymity from the reader. Throughout these discussions, I will continue to include my reflections of these fieldwork experiences, as a nondisabled inclusive researcher. In parallel with the underlying intentions of the former chapter, I trust that these narratives will in some way be of interest to disability researchers, drawing attention to the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the development of disability research practices.

Key features of focus groups

While the differentiation between 'the focus group method and the group interview' can be deemed as ambiguous, with the frequent interchangeable application of these two terms, Bryman (2008:473-474) proposes the following definition as a starting point:

> The focus group method is a form of group interview in which there are several participants (in addition to the moderator/facilitator); there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly

defined topic; and the accent is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning.

Generally, focus groups are undertaken under the spectrum of qualitative research traditions and their origins can be traced back to the 1940s, across broadcasting, marketing and public relations research (Barbour 2007:6 and Bryman 2008:473). Some of the uses of the focus group method have been noted to include:

- The examination of the ways in which individuals in conjunction with other group members, construe the researcher's topic of interest. This has instigated a growth in the use of this method by 'audience reception' studies and the interpretations by audiences of 'cultural and media texts'.
- A better understanding 'about *why* people feel the way they do' and the elicitation of a diverse range of perspectives on the topic under discussion.
- The ability for members to highlight matters of concern to them on the topic in question, since moderators have to relinquish some control to the group.
- A more realistic account of what people think about a said topic because within the context of a focus group, members 'will often argue with each other and challenge each other's views'.
- The exploration of how 'individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it' (Bryman 2008:475-476).

Focus groups can offer a number of advantages, since it is a 'socially orientated' research technique that can capture 'real life data', within 'a social environment, possessing flexibility, high face validity, relatively low cost, potentially speedy results, and a capacity to increase the size of a qualitative study' (Krueger 1994:37). Equally, some of the main limitations of this data collection method have been observed to range from the 'delicate balance' of allowing members control over focus

group proceedings and the extent in which moderator's involvement can influence discussions; to more practical matters, such as the difficulties in the organisation of such meetings (Bryman 2008:488-489).

Krueger (1994:39) distinguishes three main phases during the conducting process of a focus group research project: 'planning the study, conducting the interviews, and analysing and reporting'. Within each of these stages, he identifies 'steps that require consideration and action'. It is to some of these concerns that I will now turn, as I present an overview of the application of the focus group method to this study, alongside my reflections of said fieldwork practices.

The aims of this study's focus groups

The three main aims of this study's RAG that were discussed in the previous chapter, also applied to the focus groups stage. However, one central aim underpinned the use of this data collection method. In chapter five, I presented 'the idea of research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183) and I incorporated this as an underlying principle of this research, turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors, with the intention of generating knowledge of use to learning disabled people and their supporters in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30). An analysis of media content can draw attention to a variety of themes that require further examination through focus group discussions (Hansen *et al.* 1998:260), like in 'audience reception' studies

(Bryman 2008:475). But I was mostly concerned in applying the findings of this study's content analysis, as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers, to facilitate their active engagement in disability and media research discourses, as co-producers of knowledge.

As already emphasised at different points of this thesis, there is a significant lack of LD studies in the field of disability and media, with little research examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people and the near absence of their views and experiences in this body of work (see Table 1, page 136). So, I instigated this study because it could be of interest to learning disabled people, if they were made aware of it (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:127). The incorporation of focus groups in this study's overall research design could support such intentions, mainly as they can be perceived as a 'friendly, respectful research method' and for focus group members, this can involve 'both an enjoyable set of interactions and a sense of being listened to' (Morgan 1998:59). Still, it would have been naive of me to assume that such exchanges would reflect 'everyday interactions'. Instead, as Kitzinger (1994:106) proposes, focus groups:

> should be used to encourage people to engage with one another, verbally formulate their ideas and draw out the cognitive structures which previously have been unarticulated.

Moreover, I wanted to go beyond participatory research, as specified by the second aim of this study's RAG, with the intention that involvement in a focus group could be in some way contribute to the emancipation of its members (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:50-51). But as previously noted in chapter five, 'research cannot ever lead directly to the empowerment of disabled people… empowerment is not something that can be given, but something that people must take for themselves' (Zarb 2003:8). The central issue 'is not how to empower people but, once people have decided to empower themselves, precisely what research can do to facilitate this process' (Oliver 1992:111). The focus group stage of this study was therefore centred on supporting the facilitation of such a process.

Recruiting focus group members

In contrast to the RAG, prospective focus group members did not have to concern themselves with a long term commitment to this research, since they would only be obliged to attend one meeting. Nevertheless, the same recruitment guidelines that were described in the setting up section of chapter six were used for the engagement process of prospective focus group members, alongside this study's eligibility criteria, highlighting how:

> a focus group is not just a haphazard discussion or brainstorming among people who happen to be available; it is a well planned research endeavour that requires the same care and attention associated with any other type of scientific research (Stewart *et al.* 2007:51).

Initially, I approached a few senior managers from a range of LD organisations, to get a feel for their level of interest in supporting this study. As with the recruitment of RAG members, I chose these contacts because I had observed during our past professional affiliations that they had an affinity for inclusive research practices by and with learning disabled people and they would be sympathetic of such endeavours. Further, these key stakeholders would most probably approach individuals from 'natural groupings' and who were known to each other (Bryman 2008:482). This use of pre-existing groups has been noted to offer 'naturally occurring' discussions, with 'friends and colleagues' relating to 'each other's comments to actual incidents in their shared daily lives' (Kitzinger 1994:105). It can also make 'the task of finding, contacting and engaging the desired types of participants a great deal easier than drawing participants completely at random' (Hansen *et al.* 1998:268). These practicalities were of the essence, as I was working within a tight doctoral schedule and with limited resources.

Following these preliminary communications, I met with two project co-ordinators from a LD organisation to discuss this study in detail. Due to former working partnerships, we were already acquainted and while this meeting was set informally, I still supplied them with detailed information, parallel to what I provided Pepsi at our first encounter, as previously discussed in the RAG section of chapter six (see Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 6). This initial meeting also provided these prospective research

supporters with the opportunity to ask any questions and to discuss particulars further, such as accessibility and consent matters. They identified no major concerns in approaching potential focus group members with details of the study and were very enthusiastic about supporting such a research endeavour, should individuals be interested in getting involved. Not unlike my former RAG experiences, it proved popular that this study was open to contributions from 'nondominating' supporters (Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84) and that it applied a teamwork approach to its fieldwork practices (see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004 and Williams *et al.* 2005).

Equally, I identified prospective focus group members through a purposive sampling approach, since they were 'purposely chosen for their expertise' (Knox *et al.* 2000:50). Through my LD networks, I found two associations which were involved or had been involved in media related matters with and for learning disabled people. So, I approached key stakeholders from both of these organisations not only because the subject matter of this study could be of interest to them but because the resulting findings of its content analysis could prove useful for learning disabled people and their supporters, in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30).

I was unable to organise a meeting with one of these associations because even though they were interested in getting involved in the

study, due to financial cuts their group was in the process of being disbanded. However, I was able to arrange a focus group with the other LD organisation, after meeting with two of their managers. Once more, detailed information about the research was presented to these key stakeholders at this initial encounter (see Appendices 1, 2, 3, and 6).

This introductory meeting also offered these individuals with the chance to ask questions and to discuss any matters in more detail. Yet again, no major issues were raised during these discussions and they were keen in becoming involved with the study and in supporting the recruitment of prospective focus group members, from within their organisation, should it appeal to them. It was also a good opportunity for me to highlight important aspects of the research and to ask questions about particular areas, such as accessibility requests. Consequently, I was able to talk about the flexible manner in which the focus group meeting would be facilitated, with the application of easy read materials that could be accommodated to meet the requirements of members, this study's affinity to contributions from 'nondominating' supporters (Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84) and its underlying teamwork approach, throughout its fieldwork practices (see for example, Chapman and McNulty 2004 and Williams *et al.* 2005).

Two focus groups were arranged for this study and altogether, they included eight women and nine men. In terms of the total number of

members for each meeting, they were within the remit of 'the ideal group size… between six and ten' (Hansen 1998:270). The first included the two managers from the LD association that were involved in media related matters with and for learning disabled people and five of their learning disabled colleagues. The ages of these focus group members ranged from 27 to 60 years with five people identified as White British, one person as Black British and another member as Asian British. This meeting was set up as a one off endeavour and was held within one of their offices. The second focus group involved the two project co-ordinators from the LD organisation, who were already acquainted with me and eight learning disabled people. The ages of these members ranged from 25 to 55 years, all identified as White British. This meeting was arranged around the group's regular session and was held within their customary venue.

Consequently and not unlike the set up of the RAG (see Chapter six), I did not have to concern myself over practical matters, such as transport issues, since both of the focus groups were set within a familiar meeting place and individuals could attend the session as part of their regular schedule. They were also well supported by people who knew them well (see for example, Cambridge and McCarthy 2001:479). While I had also worked in the past with a few of the prospective members of the second focus group, I had no reservations about engaging with them. From my RAG experiences, I had become more perceptive to the several

advantages of involving individuals that were already known to me (see for example, Chappell 1999:109 and Gates and Waight 2007:118).

I will now turn to an overview of these focus group meetings which will include their general format and my reflections of these fieldwork experiences. The narration of this sequence of events may be of interest to disability researchers, highlighting the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the advancement of disability research practices.

The focus group meetings

While the focus groups were facilitated in a relaxed and accessible manner, allowing members with the flexibility of articulating their views 'in their own 'language' and on their own terms', I still applied some structure to the meetings, so that emerging discussions remained focused on the matter in question. The application of such a framework also increased consistency throughout the facilitation of the two focus groups, enabling comparisons between them (Hansen *et al.* 1998:273-274).

Drawing from the expertise of RAG members (see for example, Appendices 18 and 19) and from my experiences of facilitating said endeavour, I designed a session plan for the focus groups. These meetings lasted for around three hours and included a comfort break. Table 3 presents an outline of their arrangement and content, together

with the resources that I used during these encounters and their corresponding appendices, were applicable. The voting cards (marked with an asterisk (*) in Table 3) are available upon request from the author. Indeed, a number of these resources were developed with the support of the RAG and my ex colleague, who had already assisted me with the initial development of some of this study's accessible materials (see for example, Appendices 11, 12 and 14).

Table 3: Session plan for focus group meetings

Duration	Content	Activity	Resources	Appendices
5 minutes	Welcome & thank you Meeting outline & aims	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slides 1–3 Voting cards*	Appendix 12
25 minutes	Study presentation	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slide 4 Paper roll	Appendix 12 Appendix 10
15 minutes	Any questions/comments?	Group discussion and/or 1:1	Proforma	Appendices 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10
15 minutes	Completion of consent forms	Group discussion and/or 1:1	Consent form	Appendix 11
30 minutes	**BREAK**	**BREAK**	**BREAK**	**-**
5 minutes	Why did I choose to get involved? What would I like to take from today?	Group discussion and/or 1:1	Power point slides 5-6 Flip chart Pens	Appendix 12
5 minutes	Study in context – strengths/limitations	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slide 7 Newspapers	Appendix 12
5 minutes	Overview of study's findings	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slides 8-10 Flip chart Pens	Appendix 12
15 minutes	Stereotypes	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slides 11-12 Bar chart (handout) Flip chart Pens	Appendix 12 Appendix 14
15 minutes	Themes	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slide 13 Flip chart Pens	Appendix 12
15 minutes	Confusion with LD and mental health	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slide 14 Flip chart Pens	Appendix 12

Duration	Content	Activity	Resources	Appendices
15 minutes	Sources	Input – open to comments & questions	Power point slide 15 Flip chart Pens	Appendix 12
15 minutes	Did you take what you wanted from today? Any questions, comments or reflections?	Group discussion and/or 1:1	Flip chart Pens Post its	-
-	Thank you and closure	-	Power point slide 16	Appendix 12
3 hours	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**

The meeting was divided into two distinct parts. During the first part, I introduced or reintroduced myself to everyone and thanked them for their support and interest in the research. This was followed by a clear explanation of the overall format of the meeting and a detailed description of the study was then presented, which was open to comments and questions from prospective focus group members and which incorporated confidentiality matters, providing 'consistent background information to each participant about the purpose of the study in order to minimize tacit assumptions' (Krueger 1994:65). The presentation was supported by the paper roll and the varied proforma and power point presentation that I gradually developed, throughout the lifespan of this study (see for example, Appendices 2, 6, 10 and 12) and to which I have referred to previously, on several occasions.

The consent form (see Appendix 11) was then introduced to the groups and some individuals requested assistance with its completion. In parallel with the manner in which said proforma had been completed by

the RAG (see Chapter six), with support from the managers and the project co-ordinators, these were read with and for some prospective focus group members, to ensure that they had understood what they were consenting to and to offer them the opportunity to ask any further questions. Every person completed and signed a consent form, although the timing varied between the two groups. So, the completion of said proforma was carried out by the first group prior to their comfort break, while this was scheduled after refreshments for the second group, since introductory discussions had taken much longer than anticipated and members were in need of a break. However, the completion of said documentation only marked their preliminary decision of taking part in focus group discussions, since as previously emphasised in earlier sections of this chapter, the concept of informed consent was approached throughout this study as an ongoing process (see for example, Knox *et al.* 2000 and Rodgers 1999).

All of these forms were taken away by me for photocopying and duplicates were returned to individuals at a later date, via one of the managers or a project co-ordinator, together with a personalised thank you letter, expressing my gratitude for their interest and contributions to the study (see Appendix 9). For members of the second focus group, I also included all of their related proforma and organised these into individual packs, as during this meeting, some people had found the paperwork confusing (see for example, Appendices 5, 6 and 10).

Additionally, as I was not in the position to offer members payment for their involvement in the focus groups, all members were personally thanked on the day with the provision of varied snacks for their comfort break, as in the case of the first meeting, or by sharing sweets and chocolate with the group, as in the case of the second session. So, in parallel with the set up of this study's RAG (see Chapter six), these small tokens of appreciation acknowledged respect and value for member's views and experiences and their contributions to the study (Gates and Waight 2007:123).

While some interesting discussions and matters emerged during the first part of the meetings, none of these are documented in this thesis because from the onset, I had made it clear to prospective members that their contributions would only be noted following the completion of their consent forms. So, I purposively divided the session into two distinct parts, so that individuals could feel completely at ease during this introductory stage, encouraging them to pose any questions or comments about the study and their potential involvement, in the knowledge that I was not recording such exchanges.

This arrangement was discriminated further with the integration of a comfort break, which clearly separated the two parts of the session. But this distinction was only really applicable for members of the first focus group, since I had to reschedule the refreshments slot for the second

meeting, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, flexible breaks within focus group meetings have been designed to relax members, 'to break down barriers between facilitators and participants and to give participants some control over what happened and when' (Cambridge and McCarthy 2001:479-480). This refreshments period also allowed me with a momentary pause, during which I could reflect upon the dynamics of the groups and the level of involvement by individual members. Therefore, I was somewhat more prepared for the second part of the focus group, as I considered the different strategies that could be applied in the moderation of subsequent discussions, so that they were accessible to all members, while promoting fluent engagement (see for example, Krueger 1994 and Gates and Waight 2007).

Following the comfort break and the completion of the consent form by the second group, I resumed the meetings by reiterating to members that I would now start documenting what was been discussed by the group. As highlighted in the recruitment guidelines section of chapter six, no recording devices were applied during the collection of this data, even though focus group meetings have been observed to work better 'if it is recorded and subsequently transcribed' (Bryman 2008:476). Instead, these were based on contemporaneous notes that I wrote down on flip chart paper, as discussions transpired and they were checked regularly with the groups (see for example, Box 3). Further copies of these flip chart sheets are available upon request from the author.

Box 3: First focus group: contemporaneous notes recorded in meeting, sheet one

| Interested in subject |
| Interested in the study |
| Came to learn |
| Raising awareness: learning from today |
| Interested in the newspaper stories about people with a LD |
| We can also tell you about our experiences of been in the media |

This approach is similar to the manner in which Barr *et al.* (2003:582) collected their data during the facilitation of focus groups with learning disabled people, which 'worked well, as many of the responses were brief and could be recorded in note form'. Additionally, with the application of member checking techniques they were able to feedback 'the key points noted to group members… discussing these until participants agreed these were an accurate representation of their views'. Through member checking, moderators can present focus group associates with an outline of the main points that they have been examining and this process has two main advantages:

> It is close in time to when comments were made and therefore least subject to memory fade. More important, however, this process allows and encourages the participants to verify that the summary is accurate and complete (Krueger 1994:147-148).

During the facilitation of this study's focus groups and in real time, I validated with members my documentation of the key points under consideration, as well as confirming that I was capturing the true meanings of such discussions. Moreover, personal disclosures were not noted and when these flip chart papers were photographed for the purposes of including them as illustrations for this thesis, any other individual details were removed from these images. Confidentiality and anonymity matters were always of the essence to this study but during the focus group stage, these were of particular significance because it involved individuals who were currently active in media discourses and I was concerned that if identified, this could have an adverse effect on their

pioneering work. So, while this study could have promoted and celebrated such media relations, I did not exploit 'an individual's willingness to discuss their private thoughts and or relationships in order to enhance the quality of research' (Barnes 2008:467).

To begin with, I posed two main questions to members regarding their decision to be involved in the study and what they were hoping to gain from such involvement (see Table 3). For the first focus group, people were generally interested in media representations of LD and had come to the meeting to learn more about this, with the intention of raising the awareness of others, in the matter under discussion. So, they 'were interested in the content – what Shirley found out', with one member (SM) asserting: 'subject close to my heart. Passionate about it'. For the second focus group, some people were interested in getting involved in this study because newspapers 'are talking about' learning disabled people and sometimes they 'get it right'. Therefore, they wanted to learn more about them. However, as one member (PF) emphasised: 'it can be difficult for some people to 'read' them. So we get 'our' news from the TV'.

Mansell *at al.* (2004:81) observe that 'the focus group is in some ways a one sided relationship, with the researcher gaining important insights into the subject being explored while individual respondents simply shares their experiences'. Consequently, I wanted to some extent

challenge the social relations of research production and the asymmetrical relationships that can develop between disabled people and researchers. Such matters were mentioned in chapter five (see for example, Barnes 2008, Danieli and Woodhams 2005, Oliver 1997 and Stone and Priestley 1996) and in chapter six, during the RAG stage of this study.

Equally, these initial enquiries also facilitated a subsequent evaluation of the meetings by members, since they could return to these opening thoughts at a latter stage and reflect upon their focus group experiences, including my moderating skills. Such appraisals also contributed towards my adoption of reflexivity to inclusive research practices (Walmsley 2004:65), while subjecting this study to critical scrutiny, so that I could learn from my weaknesses and avoid their replication in future projects (Zarb 1992:136). Moreover, and as observed by a member of this study's RAG (see Chapter six), some focus group associates noted how I could learn from them, since they could tell me about their 'experiences of being in the media' (EC) and the fact that learning disabled people 'have great things to say' (GM). I will turn to some of these matters and possibilities in the following section of this chapter.

Subsequently, I proceeded to place this study's content analysis into some form of context, within the broad spectrum of the English national newsprint industry and disability and media studies (see Table

3); while creating 'a permissive environment… that nurtures different perceptions and points of view, without pressuring participants to vote, plan or reach consensus' (Krueger 1994:6). So, I pointed out to the groups some of its strengths and limitations, including the use of the Lexis Library system in the identification of prospective LD newsprint stories. Additionally, I explained how the findings of this study's content analysis were not an absolute illustration of newspaper representations of learning disabled people. Still, they could present 'a slice of media content to assist in understanding the trends of media coverage of disability' (Haller 1999:1). Some members reflected upon such matters when they were considering the number of LD stories that I had identified for the purposes of this study's content analysis and the representativeness of its sample.

The findings of this study's content analysis were presented progressively and I arranged them 'in a focused sequence', which ranged 'from general to specific' (Krueger 1994:67). In the main, these discussions were supported by the power point presentation that I had gradually developed throughout the lifespan of this study and which I referred to earlier (see Appendix 12). Within this resource, the eleventh slide included a bar chart that showed the number of times prominent stereotypes had been used by each story, overall. This graph was also distributed to members via a handout, which incorporated code descriptors (see Appendix 14).

While I did have some concerns about presenting information via this type of format because I was unsure about how accessible it would be for individuals, I still did not want to be condescending to them. This different type of graphic representation could offer members with the opportunity to develop upon their knowledge about the presentation and assimilation of research data. As Williams *et al.* (2005:11) observed, one attribute of the role of their nondisabled research supporter 'was that of 'translator' into plain English'. Learning disabled associates of this research team 'did not just want writing to be stripped of jargon. They also wanted to learn some of the technical aspects of research and to actually expand their vocabulary'.

Notwithstanding and as previously emphasised in chapter six, learning disabled people are not a homogeneous group (Townsley *et al.* 2003:40). However, it was still reassuring to note the comments of one member from the first focus group (LR), who had liked said bar chart (see Appendix 14), because it had presented information in a clear manner. Moreover, in their reflections of what they had gained from their involvement in the meeting, this individual referred to learning about the Lexis Library (see Chapter eight), as prior to the session they had not been aware of the existence of such a database. The paper roll was also described as a 'good' resource, by other members of the group.

However, for some individuals in the second meeting, the portrayal of data through a graph format proved difficult to understand. Indeed, as Krueger (1994:120-121) emphasises 'groups vary greatly and flexibility is essential'. Consequently, throughout the facilitation of this study's focus groups, I had to monitor regularly my skills as a moderator and the resources that I was using to promote the engagement of all members (see for example, Gates and Waight 2007).

During this moderation, I also referred directly to specific LD newspaper stories to facilitate the descriptions of the varied examples, across the 'stereotype' variable of the coding schedule and to assist in the illustration of some of the key findings of this study's content analysis. These included the Fiona Pilkington and the Susan Boyle storylines (see Appendix 12, Slide 10). Additionally, I read out direct quotations from some of the items that had involved learning disabled people as leading informants, because I wanted to present members with real examples of the sources of the newsprint stories (see for example, Beckford 2010a and Paton 2009). Collectively, these further particulars provided members with more detailed information about the subject matter in question and proved to be a helpful way for stimulating and focusing discussions, within the groups. As the sessions progressed, it did prove harder to focus these discourses and I noted a range of verbal and nonverbal cues from several group members, indicating signs of fatigue. However, considering the

duration of the meetings, it was hardly surprising that some members were starting to feel tired and restless in the latter discussion stages.

While I was able to conclude the focus groups by thanking members for their contributions and by covering other particulars, such as the way in which I would be distributing copies of their consent forms, this closing stage was rushed, particularly as I had run out of time and people needed to leave. So, perhaps I could have been more attentive to the pace of earlier discussions, monitoring the schedule as it progressed, so that enough time was allowed for the closure of the meeting (see for example, Krueger 1994:199). Further, I could have met more than once with each of the groups and spread out the content of this three hour session, into more practicable segments, since it proved too long for some people, as previously noted. This would have been particularly beneficial for members of the second session, because as initial discussions had taken much longer than anticipated and some individuals had requested assistance with the completion of their consent forms, by the time I started to present the findings of this study's content analysis, there were only about thirty minutes remaining of our scheduled time together. So, I had to hurry members through our latter discussions and as a result, this could have had an adverse effect on their contributions.

Instead, I could have followed a similar approach to that of Butler *et al.* (2012:136 and 139). They met with each of their focus groups on four

occasions 'for an hour, usually once a week' and were able to gradually

adapt their moderation skills and the resources that they used during

these encounters, according to the 'different needs and wishes' of

associates. However, for the purposes of this study it would have proved

difficult to arrange consecutive meetings with members, because of

people's former commitments and busy schedules. In the case of the

second focus group, such endeavours would have been arranged around

their regular sessions. So, as previously highlighted in the RAG section of

chapter six, I did not want to impose further on the goodwill of people

and I did not want my fieldwork practices to become exploitative (see for

example, Stalker 1998:17).

Having provided an overview of the focus group stage of this study,

I will now turn to an exploration of some of the major matters and

possibilities that emerged, during this fieldwork component. This will

include my reflections of the co-ordination and the facilitation of such

endeavour.

Matters and possibilities

From its inception, one of the main matters for the focus groups of

this study was the question of how many meetings to facilitate. Krueger

(1994:88) observes how when compared to a quantitative survey

approach, the number of people and groups involved in a focus group

study is relatively small and advises researchers to continue moderating

meetings, 'until little new information is provided'. He argues that the first

two sessions with a specific group of individuals can provide a large

amount of new data. But as subsequent meetings are facilitated, a fair

amount of information will already have been covered and if this happens,

then 'there is limited value in continuing with additional group discussions

with that particular audience segment'. So, if fresh insights are discovered

in the third focus group, then researchers should moderate additional

meetings, as required. Nevertheless, 'the number of groups will depend

on the aims of the research and on available resources' (Hansen

1998:268).

In an earlier section of this chapter, I accredited the central aim of

this study's focus groups with 'the idea of research as production' (Oliver

1999a:183) and in applying the findings of this study's content analysis,

as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and

their supporters of contemporary representations of learning disabled

adults by the print version of English national newspapers, to facilitate

their active engagement in disability and media research discourses, as

co-producers of knowledge. Therefore, this stage was not concerned with

the generalisation of its resultant data to a learning disabled population

(see for example, Barr *et al.* 2003). Instead, I was taking advantage of a

data collection method that can 'allow for collective observations to

surface and for discussion to be built on and relevant issues or lines of

inquiry explored' (Cambridge and McCarthy 2001:477). Consequently, as

Hansen (1998:268) observes 'if focus groups are used merely for exploratory purposes... then as few as two, three, or four groups may be sufficient' (Hansen 1998:268).

For the purposes of this study, I had initially speculated on moderating three focus groups. But as previously highlighted, I was unable to organise a meeting with a particular LD organisation. There were other key stakeholders from my LD contacts, who after initial enquiries had expressed an interest in supporting this study and in due course, I could have set up another focus group with them. Nevertheless, focus groups can 'take a long time to arrange' (Bryman 2008:479) and 'you cannot rush things. It takes time to set up the groups and to prepare for them' (Butler *et al.* 2012:142). Such considerations did dissuade me from coordinating one more focus group for this study, since I was working within a tight doctoral schedule and with limited resources. So, as Mason (2012:30) observes 'all researchers have to scale their plans and expectations to the realities of their time and resources'.

Another matter that emerged during the course of the meetings concerned the role that I played as an educator, rather than as a facilitator of inclusive research. So, for example, I presented the groups with an overview of the newspaper sample of this study's content analysis, which covered details like the individual journalistic style of each title and I also responded to improvised questions, as and when these

were posed by members. While these interactions provided the groups with the opportunity to develop upon their knowledge of this study's overall topic, I was still vigilant with the manner that I facilitated such information, because I did not want to lead members or influence their opinions on the matters under discussion.

Gates and Waight (2007:114 and 119) observed in their focus group study that while all of their 'participants were interested in being involved in research… few had much lived experience of mental-health problems'. Consequently, there were times when their facilitators 'had to provide detailed explanation, and as such this had the potential to be construed as leading informants'. However, they found that there was a need to make the concept of mental health much more accessible 'but in such a way that the group were not being led or manipulated into what the researchers wished to hear'.

Additionally, Krueger (1994:102) emphasises that 'moderating requires self-discipline' and moderators 'who have a personal commitment to the topic of inquiry need to be particularly careful to suspend their personal views and seek out the perceptions of the group participants'. Indeed, during the moderation of the focus groups of this study, occasionally I did inadvertently find myself unable to hold back on my personal opinions. So, for example, on one occasion I mentioned my reading preference for a particular newspaper title. These momentary

failures mostly occurred in the second session when I found myself much more relaxed, since I was already acquainted with several members of the group. Fortunately, one member (GM) brought this matter to my attention. So, I apologised directly to everyone and was careful not to express my own thoughts, during the facilitation of latter discussions. I will return to this constructive criticism of my fieldwork practices in the next section of this chapter.

This study's focus groups could have also benefitted from the services of an assistant moderator. Krueger (1994:103-104) observes how within this team approach each person has allocated tasks, with the moderator fundamentally concerned with the moderation of discussions and some note recording; while the assistant takes copious notes and manages the practicalities of the meeting, like the operation of any recording devices and the arrangement of refreshments. Moreover, 'as the group dynamic is important, there should be a second researcher present to observe and capture the interaction between group members' (Gates and Waight 2007:113).

Within the focus groups of this study, as I will highlight in the next section of this chapter, some of these responsibilities were readily undertaken by the nondisabled members of the groups. Still, there are practical advantages in the co-facilitation of meetings, since it could have 'allowed for questions to be led and responses recorded without the need

to tape record sessions or disrupt the flow of discussion' (Cambridge and McCarthy 2001:479). Consequently, I could have employed the services of my ex colleague, who has extensive experience of facilitating meetings with and for learning disabled people and who had already assisted me with the production of the paper roll version of this study's information sheet (see Appendix 10). They could have successfully transcribed the proceedings of this study's focus groups in a graphical format and as a result, I could have immersed myself fully in the moderation of the meetings, noting the group dynamics as the sessions progressed. Moreover, such graphic facilitation could have enhanced the focus group experience for members and promoted their engagement in the discussions. Porter *et al.* (2006:13-14) adopted such an approach throughout their inclusive research practices, which included focus groups with learning disabled people. They observed that:

> The strength of this approach was evident in the extent to which it promoted discussion. In verbal recording there may be no attempt to do more than write key words. Although this may promote reflection on the selection of words, the construction and building of a picture in graphic representation is slower and provides additional time for thinking and prolongs engagement with the subject matter.

Throughout the moderation of the focus groups, I also drew constantly from the RAG phase of this study and the views and experiences of its members, alongside my reflections of facilitating such a venture, as described in chapter six. Consequently, while I did have some concerns with regards to my facilitation skills, especially as I had observed how several members of the second group were in the main

very quiet, with one person falling asleep during the latter stages of our discussions, I was not completely discouraged by these responses.

In parallel to the group dynamics of the RAG, during my past relations with some of these focus group associates it had not been unusual for them to be quiet during sessions. It also did not surprise me when one member fell asleep during the second part of the meeting, considering the length of its earlier instalment. Moreover, as previously discussed in the RAG section of chapter six, I did have reservations about whether the overall theme of this study was of particular interest to the entire membership of the group. Gates and Waight (2007:124) concluded from their experiences of moderating focus groups with learning disabled people that 'self-evidently, if a topic has no relevance to participants or their life, they will not be interested in discussing it, any more than anyone else would'. I could therefore not expect all members to be interested or fully engaged in the subject of this study's focus group discussions (see for example, Abell *et al.* 2007:123 and Williams *et al.* 2005:13).

Notwithstanding, I could have taken more care with the facilitation of the session and the manner in which I promoted and supported individuals with their involvement and contributions to the discussions. So, for example, in the case of the second group's quieter members:

> extra effort is required to get these individuals to elaborate their views and to feel that their comments are wanted and appreciated… Eye contact often provides sufficient encouragement to speak, and if all else fails, the moderator can call on them (Krueger 1994:118).

However, as people were leaving the meeting, I overheard one of the quieter individuals (PA) remarking to one of the project co-ordinators (BN) on how interesting they had found the session. Gates and Waight (2007:122) found that in their recordings of the interactions between learning disabled people and their support workers, which were not actually heard during their focus groups, how 'often it was the quiet words that were most revealing'. Within the context of this study's second meeting, I felt somewhat reassured when I overheard these 'quiet words' from one of its members because even though this person had been quiet throughout the focus group, they still appeared to have found the overall experience to be worth their while.

Equally, during the latter part of the first meeting, members evaluated the session and reflected upon the two questions that I had initially posed to them, regarding their decision to be involved in this study and what they were hoping to gain from such involvement. Overall, the group had 'liked the discussion', with one person asserting: 'Puts our roles into perspective – gives us ammunition' (MS). Such remarks were reiterated by the additional feedback that was facilitated by this nondisabled member (see Appendix 15). They described how the group

had 'found the session interesting and enlightening'. Moreover, they requested that I forward:

> some of the stats that you presented to us so that I can begin to use them to argue for more media involvement? It's nice to meet someone as passionate as I am about this issue, so anything that can help me in my work would be most useful.

Supplementary comments were also facilitated by one of the nondisabled members of the second focus group (see Box 4). These included some general 'positive' observations about the press and learning disabled people:

- ✓ Nowadays people are better educated (in LD).
- ✓ Newspapers have encouraged and caused the change in the way people think about people with a learning disability.
- ✓ Due to political correctness, newspapers have to be more careful about what they say.
- ✓ The Undateables: Newspapers have highlighted the challenges faced by people with a learning disability.

In addition, the group stated: 'We think it's <u>very good</u> that Shirley is doing this research because it will raise people's awareness and knowledge in LD'.

Box 4: Second focus group: feedback following meeting

Shirley

Focus Group. April 2012.

Our additional comments:

- Don't use the word "disability". We prefer the term "special needs" or "different". We are still equal.

too negative.
- Don't use the term "mentally handicapped".

- Nowadays people are better educated (in LD).
  - Newspapers have encouraged and caused the change in the way people think about people with a learning disability. ✓ Positive

- Due to political correctness, N/Ps have to be more careful about what they say. ✓ Positive

- The Undateables : N/Ps have highlighted the challenges faced by people with a LD. ✓ Positive.

- We think it's very good that shirley is doing this research because it will raise peoples awareness and knowledge in LD
  / ps: wants to be your helper!!! ☺

Collectively, these statements not only assisted in the appraisal of the focus group meetings by members, as discussed previously, but they also revealed an emancipatory approach to disability research (see for example, Stone and Priestley 1996:706), along with a key feature of inclusive research practices, as noted in chapter five and that 'it should further the interests of disabled people; nondisabled researchers should be on the side of learning disabled people' (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:64). Further, these commentaries supported an underlying principle of this study and the incorporation of 'research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183), turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors and the production of knowledge of use to learning disabled people and their supporters in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30).

Having explored some of the major matters and possibilities that emerged during the focus groups of this study, I will now turn to an examination of the roles that nondisabled members played in these meetings, alongside their contributions to my fieldwork practices.

Focus group research supporters

Following the exploration of the contributions of the nondisabled members of this study's RAG, in chapter six I emphasised the valuable roles that these research supporters played, throughout the lifespan of the group, concluding that without such assistance, it could have proved

difficult for me to sustain such a venture. Further, I identified a 'mutual respect and trust' in their working relations with the RAG that facilitated the sharing of knowledge and skills among all members and the production of 'person led' work (Chapman and McNulty 2004:81).

Equally, the assistance of nondisabled members was of the essence in the focus group stage of this study and they played a range of significant roles. For example, the recruitment of prospective focus group members was a relatively straightforward process, since it was enabled by research supporters who approached such intermediary responsibilities with enthusiasm and in an open-minded manner. Their associations with the learning disabled members of this study's focus groups appeared to have developed 'from a place of learning' (Chapman and McNulty 2004:81). Consequently, I did not experience any gate keeping problems during these preliminary communications, as observed by other LD researchers (see for example, Butler *et al.* 2012:136). Instead and as highlighted earlier, nondisabled members perceived the potential contributions of learning disabled people as central to this study, given that they had 'great things to say' (GM, second focus group member).

Additionally, I found that group members enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with each other and interactions were overtly positive, with research supporters contributing to discussions in a 'nondominating' manner (Tarleton *et al.* 2004:84). So, not unlike the RAG of this study, as

documented in chapter six, focus group associates appeared to be working together as equals, rather than in a manner where research supporters remain in the background and are 'not supposed to take part in things' (Chapman and McNulty 2004:78).

Contributions from nondisabled members also proved useful to the groups' discussions and to my fieldwork practices. This can be clearly demonstrated by an issue that was raised by one of the project co-ordinators (GM) during the second session, with a question that I posed on the total number of LD stories that I had found during the content analysis stage of this study and how I needed to put this information into some form of context to the group. Further and as previously highlighted, on the occasion when I inadvertently found myself unable to hold back on my personal opinion, this research supporter brought this matter to my attention. Subsequently, I was careful not to express my own thoughts during the facilitation of latter discussions, focusing instead on 'the perceptions of the group participants' (Krueger 1994:102).

During the course of the focus groups, there were many occasions when nondisabled members assumed the informal role of assistant moderator (Krueger 1994:103-104). So, for instance, they readily led on the practical arrangements of the sessions by procuring meeting spaces and varied equipment and by supporting me with the setting up of the rooms. They also provided learning disabled members with individual

assistance, as and when this was requested or required, including support with the completion of the consent form (see Appendix 11), as I described earlier.

Further, research supporters ensured the smooth running of the meetings by clarifying particular points that were raised by members, when I found dialogues difficult to understand (Llewellyn 2009:846), encouraging conversations between themselves, as opposed to continuously addressing all comments to me (Owen 2001:655-656). Barr *et al.* (2003:583-584) observed from their focus group study, that such interactions can promote deeper discussions and they can facilitate 'the volunteering of personal views about participants' individual circumstances that, without the active support and encouragement from their peers, may not have been voiced'.

Moreover, as Krueger (1994:104) explains the assistant moderator 'is also extremely helpful in performing the post meeting analysis of the session'. Within the context of this study's focus groups, while individuals were only obliged to attend one meeting, nondisabled members went beyond such obligations and facilitated additional feedback from their associates, following the sessions (see Appendix 15 and Box 4). Indeed, as emphasised earlier, these further commentaries proved to be of importance in the evaluation of the meetings by members, while revealing a key feature of inclusive research practices (Walmsley and Johnson

2003:64) and supporting this study's underlying principle of 'research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183). They were also of value, during the subsequent analyses of empirical data, to which I will refer to in chapter nine.

In brief, the roles that were performed by nondisabled members proved of the essence in the application of the focus group method to this study. Such committed assistance facilitated the active engagement of learning disabled people in the research process, as co-producers of knowledge and the translation of inclusive research principles (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:64).

Conclusion

This chapter presented a synopsis of the employment of the focus group method to this study and the ways in which learning disabled people and their supporters were engaged as active members of research communities in the co-production of knowledge. Through a sincere and reflective account of my experiences of 'doing' inclusive research with and for learning disabled people, I explored the major matters and possibilities that arose during these fieldwork practices and consideration was also given to the contributions of the supporting members of the focus groups to these activities. Moreover, I generated data that may be of interest to disability researchers, drawing attention to the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the

advancement of disability research practices. In the next chapter, I will

now turn to the content analytical stage of this study.

Chapter eight
Content analysis: exploring newspaper representations of learning disabled people

Introduction

> It is we who have the time, resources and skills to conduct methodical work, to make sense of experience and locate individuals in historic and social contexts (Kelly *et al.* 1994:37).

While expertise has 'become a dirty word in radical research, whether feminist, third world or disability', some researchers have recognised the positive aspects of their skills. Further, the systematic and expert employment of these analytical abilities has been observed to be of the essence, 'if disability research is to avoid falling into the trap of mere story-telling'. Still, researchers should not take such expertise, 'as a green light to assume knowledge of the needs, feelings and conceptualisations of other research participants' (Stone and Priestley 1996:713). Indeed, parallel concerns were also presented in chapter five, with regards to inclusive research practices by and with learning disabled people (see for example, Walmsley and Johnson 2003:140).

As I explained in the previous chapter, the focus groups of this study were primarily concerned in applying the findings of its content

analytical stage, as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers. The purpose was thereby to facilitate their active engagement in disability and media research discourses as co-producers of knowledge, while paving the way for making my content analytical skills 'available' to them (Zarb 1992:128) and the reclassification of 'research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183).

Moreover, if content analysis is approached with the understanding that most present-day Western societies are 'mass-mediated cultures' and 'reality' is understood through personal experience and information from the mass media (Haller 2010b:27), then the study of 'media content surely helps us assess what reality it is that they consume' (Shoemaker and Reese 1991:24). Consequently, the content analytical stage of this study can generate knowledge of use to disabled people and their supporters, in their struggles against oppressive practices, turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30).

In this chapter, I will present an account of this study's content analysis, which will narrate my emergence as an 'emancipatory' content analyst within the field of disability studies. This will include an introduction of its key features and an exploration of its varied stages as they transpired, alongside the major matters and possibilities that arose

during these fieldwork practices. These reflective discussions can support the advancement of this research technique, particularly as some academics have highlighted the poor reporting and evaluation by content analysts 'of the consequences of methodological decisions' (Lacy and Riffe 1993:131), together with concerns 'over various methodological sins' (Riffe and Freitag 1997:874). So, I will also generate data that may be of significance to researchers, interested in the application of content analysis and its ongoing development (see for example, Haller 2010b:v).

Key features of content analysis

Content analysis has been defined as 'a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest of communication' (Berelson 1952:18). This well-known definition has been described as useful because it highlights key features of this method's origins and concerns. This includes its claim to objectivity and its emphasis on manifest data, which exposes the scientific motivations that supported its advancement. However, its assertion to objectivity has been questioned (Deacon *et al.* 2010:118). For example, within the execution of a content analysis 'there is much interpretive work to do, relying on a good knowledge of the texts under examination' (Stokes 2003:56). Further, as Price (1997:55) observes, 'the beliefs which motivate researchers… will colour their perception of content'.

The conception of content analysis has also been noted as much broader, involving both manifest and latent content (Janowitz 1968:647-648). The former concerns the exposure of 'the apparent content of the item in question', while the latter refers to the 'meanings that lie beneath the superficial indicators of content' (Bryman 2008:275). Holsti (1969:14) argued that content analysis should not be limited to the description of manifest content and 'inferences about the latent meanings of messages should be permitted but… they require corroboration by independent evidence'.

Additionally, the emergence of a range of qualitative approaches to content analyses has been identified (Krippendorff 2004:15). Qualitative content analysis has been described as a research technique 'for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1278). Haller and Ralph (2001:243) acknowledge that 'the methodology of content analysis is enhanced by the use of both quantitative and qualitative' investigations. As Holsti (1969:11) asserts 'it is by moving back and forth between these approaches that the investigator is most likely to gain insight into the meaning of his data'.

Nonetheless, as Krippendorff (2004:87-89) argues, all readings of texts are qualitative, even when particular features of a text are

subsequently translated into numbers. He proposes that quantification should not be a defining condition for content analyses and maintains that qualitative approaches to the interpretation of texts should not be deemed as incompatible with content analysis, while observing how content analysts can employ varied contexts and follow multiple research questions.

One of the main advantages of quantitative content analysis of manifest phenomena is that it allows for the 'reduction to numbers of large amounts of information or data that would be logistically impossible for close qualitative' investigations (Riffe *et al.* 1998:31). Generally, as a research technique, some of the strengths of content analysis have also been noted to include:

- Its transparency, as its coding system and sampling practices can be clearly presented, allowing for replications and follow up studies.
- Its applicability to longitudinal analyses, as it can trace changes in frequency over time, with relative ease.
- Its unobtrusiveness, as it is deemed 'a non reactive method'.
- Its flexibility, as it can be employed to a wide range of phenomena (Bryman 2008:288-289).

Equally, some of the limitations of content analysis have been observed to involve the following matters:

- It 'can only be as good as the documents on which the practitioner works'. So, it is recommended that documents are assessed in terms of: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (see for example, Scott 1990).
- It is impossible to formulate coding manuals which 'do not entail some interpretation on the part of coders'.
- It is likely that particular difficulties will 'arise when the aim is to impute latent rather than manifest content'.

- It can prove difficult to determine 'the answers to 'why' questions' and 'suggested answers can usually only be speculations'.
- It can sometimes stand 'accused of being atheoretical' because inadvertently an emphasis can be 'placed on what is measurable rather than what is theoretically significant or important' (Bryman 2008:291).

In terms of practicalities, the laborious nature of content analysis has also been identified as its main weakness, since for example, the coding of hundreds of column inches of newspapers can be very time consuming (Stokes 2003:59). Consequently, content analysis requires a lot of patience from the researcher, as the examination of large amounts of content, can be a tedious task (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:154).

Aims of this study's content analysis

This study's content analysis was underpinned by two key interrelated aims: to identify the ways in which learning disabled adults are (mis)represented or not, by the contemporary print version of English national newspapers, with the intention of generating data that could be of use to learning disabled people in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30). So, as previously emphasised, these findings could be applied as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters during the focus groups, engaging them in disability and media research discourses, as co-producers of knowledge. Further, resultant findings could start addressing the significant lack of LD studies in the field of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a), as highlighted at different points of this

thesis, with little research examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page 136), and the near absence of their views and experiences within this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987).

With these motivations in mind, I chose to approach content analysis from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective to facilitate a more thorough examination of the areas under discussion, which includes both the manifest features of a given text and its latent content. This also reflected the underlying mixed method approach of this study, as discussed in chapter six (Denscombe 2007:118). As a result, I adopted a broader definition of content analysis as presented by Holsti (1969:14), who defined it as 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified features of messages'. So, for example, quantitative content analysis could reveal the manifest content of a news item, such as the 'source(s)' of a news story; while qualitative content analysis could allow for the examination of the latent content of an item to explore whether learning disabled adults were being employed as leading informants of the stories or as 'exemplars to substantiate generalised third person claims' (Huws and Jones 2011:102).

Stages of this study's content analysis

Content analysis is traditionally associated with a series of distinct stages which consists of 'defining your concerns, sampling, deciding what

to count, deciding on qualifying criteria, designing a coding frame, collecting data and analysing the results' (Deacon *et al.* 2010:119-131). I will now refer to each of these stages in turn to help illustrate the varied procedures and decisions that were involved in this study's content analysis. I will also be exploring the major matters and possibilities that arose during these fieldwork practices, while integrating my reflections as an emerging 'emancipatory' content analyst within the field of disability studies. These discussions may be of significance to researchers, interested in the application of this research technique and its ongoing development.

Defining your concerns

The first stage of a content analysis refers to the clear articulation of the matter under investigation (Deacon *et al.* 2010:119) and the formulation of specific research questions, since these will direct both 'the selection of the media to be content analysed and the coding schedule' (Bryman 2008:276). Riffe *et al.* (1998:46-48) organise this stage under the broader heading of 'conceptualisation and purpose', which involves the identification of a problem, the examination of the relevant literature, a deduction process and the clear awareness of the purpose of the study. They also maintain that such 'purpose will guide the research design'.

As previously stated, one of the central concerns of this study is to identify the ways in which learning disabled adults are (mis)represented

or not, by the contemporary print version of English national newspapers. While this purpose introduces the medium to be examined, it does not specify the total range of content to be analysed. It also does not provide direction to the development of a coding schedule, other than its particular focus on learning disabled adults. I will discuss these particular matters further in the sampling stage of this content analysis.

Nevertheless, in chapter three through an examination of the prevalent ways in which disability can be represented by the media (see for example, Barnes 1992a, Clogston 1990 and Haller 1995), I revealed 'disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people' (Barnes 1992a:15). I also identified other portrayals that could be regarded as more specific to LD, within the analyses of the media coverage of learning disabled people (see for example, Wertheimer 1987). In chapter four, I explored the concept of newsworthiness by applying Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) taxonomy of news values to the findings of the few research studies that have specifically examined the newspaper coverage of LD (see Table 1, page 136). Through this exploratory exercise, I was able to uncover some of the characteristics that can make a LD story newsworthy and how certain elements of these narratives can be heightened, downplayed or excluded. I also identified the rare use of learning disabled people as sources for newspaper stories and the low prominence of disabled people across storylines, when they are used, in practice (see for example, Carter *et al.*

1996, Huws and Jones 2011, Wertheimer 1987 and Wilkinson and McGill 2009).

These exploratory literature reviews provided me with a clearer picture of the purpose of this study and prompted a list of specific research questions (see Box 5). Consequently, this realised the first step of this study's content analysis, while instigating other matters such as the progression of its coding schedule, which will be covered in the designing a coding frame stage.

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Box 5: Defining your concerns: specific research questions

1. How are learning disabled adults represented by the contemporary print version of English national newspapers?
2. Do these representations concur with the generalised media stereotypes of disabled people?
3. Do these representations concur with the more specific media stereotypes of learning disabled people?
4. Within these storylines, if more than one media stereotype is portrayed, which is the most prominent?
5. Within these narratives, is there still confusion between LD and mental illness, if the latter is mentioned?
6. What are the main theme(s) of these news stories?
7. Who (if any) are the source(s) of these news stories?
8. Are learning disabled adults employed as primary informants?

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Sampling

The second stage of a content analysis concerns the selection of its sample and the development of a sampling strategy, which involves varied steps. First, the total range of content to be analysed needs to be clearly defined and various issues need to be clarified, since these will guide the sampling strategy and mark out the eventual inferences that will be drawn from the study. So, for example, 'it would be rather dubious

to start making inferences about *all* fictional representations of crime, if you had sampled only soap operas' (Deacon *et al.* 2010:120).

For this study's content analysis, I had to be quite selective with the medium that was to be examined because it could have proved difficult to locate media representations of learning disabled adults for subsequent analyses. As reiterated in chapter four, learning disabled people are rarely portrayed in the media (Evans 2009:5). Consequently, I opted for the English national press because it is a medium that is likely to have some regular engagement with LD discourses and not just with atypical cases, like the Susan Boyle story (see for example, Midgley 2009:25). Further, despite speculations surrounding the demise of this industry, the standing of newspapers remains and the British population is still regarded as great consumers of newsprint media (Williams 2010).

The second step in the development of a sampling strategy refers to the issue of unitisation and the organisation of the units of analysis. However, with texts these may not be as easy to identify (Deacon *et al.* 2010:120). Beardsworth (1980:375) observes how some quantitative content analyses have a very specific focus and apply individual words as their sampling units to examine 'the lexical contents and/or syntactic structures of documents'; while other studies take a broader view of themes within texts, which:

relies upon the coder to recognise certain themes or ideas in the text, and then to allocate these to predetermined categories. While both approaches are applicable to the study of press output, in practice the latter seems to have been used more frequently.

In this content analytical study, I employed the more generalised thematic analysis as my sampling units. This provided a much wider application to the textual elements to be examined, particularly as I would be able to systematically assign these to the preset categories that I gradually developed, during subsequent stages of the content analysis (see for example, designing a coding frame phase). However, I was also aware that while some categorisations can be relatively easy to quantify, when the coding process is thematic an interpretative approach needs to be taken, since it can involve the examination of both manifest and latent content (Bryman 2008:282). This can create problems with the validity and reliability of a content analysis (Riffe *et al.* 1998:68). I will refer to such matters, in latter sections of this chapter.

The final step in the development of a sampling strategy applies to the issue of 'representativeness', which involves considerations in relation to time and the range of the sampling period, together with how much is sampled across the elements of the study's population. These decisions can be influenced by practical constraints such as time, cost and the availability of documents (Deacon *et al.* 2010:122). Additionally, there may be occasions 'when purposive sampling is useful' (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:158). This type of non probability sampling proved of

benefit for the aims of this content analysis, since 'the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases… in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed' (Bryman 2008:415). Therefore, the years 2006 to 2010 were chosen as the sampling dates because I was focusing specifically on modern-day portrayals of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers, in an attempt to present a more current review of how LD was (mis)represented or not by this medium.

As I highlighted in chapter four, only five studies have examined the newspaper coverage of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page 136). The sampling dates for these enquiries have been limited to the mid-late 1980s (McGill and Cummings 1990 and Wertheimer 1987), the early 1990s (Carter *et al.* 1996 and Ralph and Corbett 1994) and the year, 2001 (Wilkinson and McGill 2009). Consequently, more contemporary time frames have yet to be explored. Additionally, these analyses were based within concise periods of time, ranging from six weeks (Wertheimer 1987), eight weeks (Carter *et al.* 1996 and Ralph and Corbett 1994) and five months (McGill and Cummings 1990 and Wilkinson and McGill 2009). So, I wanted to cover a more extensive time span of five full years of LD reporting, by the English national newsprint media.

In terms of the types of newspapers that were analysed, three out of these five studies examined the local and the national press coverage

of learning disabled people (Carter *et al.* 1996, Ralph and Corbett 1994 and Wertheimer 1987); while Wilkinson and McGill's (2009) follow up study of McGill and Cummings' (1990) analyses, both focused on the LD reporting by the English national 'quality' newspaper: the *Guardian* (see Table 1, page 136).

The sample that I chose across the elements of the population of this study's content analysis was the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*. These three national titles were selected because as explained in chapter four, they are the leading dailies for each market sector of the UK's modern-day national newsprint medium (the *Guardian* 2011a) and they could be considered as broadly representing the diversity of the English national press (see for example, Cole and Harcup 2010). I also had to take into account 'the feasibility and accessibility of materials' (Riffe *et al.* 1998:49), given the limited time and resources at my disposal. So, I knew that potential newsprint stories from these national dailies were readily available via electronic resources, such as the Lexis Library, which I accessed through Coventry University's e-library (Coventry University 2009). If required, I could also retrieve hard copies of this material, through the British Library Newspapers (British Library 2012).

However, I was still wary of the 'methodological implications of using digital newspaper archives for analysis of media content' and the

varied concerns that have been identified, regarding its validity and reliability. While these concerns should 'not deny a role for the use of proxy data in media analysis, they do highlight the need for caution when researchers rely on text-based, digitalized archives' (Deacon 2007:5). So, for example, in terms of validity, keyword searching through the Lexis Library system is suitable for 'identifying tangible things' but it is not as 'effective for analysing more complex and multifaceted themes'. While in relation to reliability matters, 'search engines may have varying levels of sophistication, and the comprehensiveness of the archives may be affected by complex issues associated with publishing rights and copyright' (Deacon *et al.* 2010:133-136).

Nevertheless, the Lexis Library includes a diverse range of electronic databases that 'are full text searchable' and because of its 'unique organising patterns of the system' it can locate almost immediately all documents, which contain such characters. Its catalogues include 'all stories from most major and many minor newspapers, many magazines and trade journals', as well as television and radio news transcripts. Although it was never designed to meet the requirements of a content analysis, because of 'its extensive and systematic database, storage, search, and download capabilities', it inadvertently became an essential resource for media content analysts (Neuendorf 2002:219-220).

Koch (1991:205) observes that 'the search phrase is a strainer that allows the researcher to extract from the digital soup only those data that bear directly and specifically on the problem at hand'. So, through its keyword search capability, the Lexis Library provided me with an orderly method by which I defined further the total range of data that was subsequently examined in this study's content analysis. The search terms 'learning disability', 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disabled' were used to identify the LD coverage for each of the national newspaper titles, over the years 2006 to 2010. I did not have to concern myself over the singular and plural forms of these terms, as the search system treated them both as the same (Neuendorf 2004:222).

The first two keywords were chosen because as emphasised in chapter two, the use of the term 'learning disability' prevails among most professionals and carers and in the majority of the LD literature, policy documents and service provision in the UK (MacIntyre 2008:2); while many learning disabled people and their self advocacy groups favour the phrase 'learning difficulties' (Emerson *et al.* 2001:5). The general application of these terms was also discussed with this study's RAG as I was interested in their views on the matter. I also included the keywords 'learning disabled' to extend the range of this content analysis data set and to find out whether the English national newsprint media were employing such terminology in their modern-day narratives.

However, as Haller (2010b:30) acknowledged during her content analysis of representations of disability by the American newsprint media, the limitation of this type of search is that it can disregard stories about individual impairments, if none of the specified keywords were applied in the narratives, such as a story about a blind person that does not employ the word disability. She asserted that as the focus of her study was disability matters in general and disabled people, the use of the search terms 'disabled, disability, disabilities and handicapped', presented her with the most viable option, while only slightly limiting the number of stories of her study.

Equally, within the context of this study's content analysis, there could have been some stories of direct relevance to the matter in question, which could have been missed because they did not include any of the key search phrases, within their storylines. So, for example, an item could have talked about a person with Down syndrome but not referred to other impairments, such as a LD. I did not consider this limitation as a major concern since this study's overall focus was on learning disabled people and LD matters. So, even though there could have been a slight limitation to the number of items that were subsequently examined in this content analysis, the application of these three specific terms presented the most practicable option.

Additionally, I purposively applied another sampling restriction by focusing only on stories about learning disabled adults because I had to be realistic about the time and resources that were available to me. Deacon *et al.* (2010:122) observe that with most studies, researchers 'will often have to trade off what is desirable with what is feasible'. I also thought that this particular characteristic could support my latter analyses of the portrayal of the learning disabled person as an eternal child, since these storylines would be 'clearly about adults' (Wertheimer 1987:22).

I undertook some initial keyword searches to reacquaint myself with the Lexis Library and to check whether LD related items were being identified by the system. This provided me with an indication of the potential scale of the data available for further examination, in comparison to the few studies that had specifically examined the press coverage of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page 136). So, for example, Wertheimer (1987) had the largest content sample of 1,489 cuttings, which was followed with one hundred and thirty four articles by Carter *et al.* (1996), ninety newspaper reports by Ralph and Corbett (1994), eighty six articles by Wilkinson and McGill (2009) and thirty five items by McGill and Cummings (1990).

While, anticipating that through the collective LD reporting of the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* over the designated time span of five years, I would be able to construct a representative sample for

subsequent analyses of the portrayals of learning disabled adults by the

modern-day, print version of English national newspapers, I did not

perceive this as a complete illustration of media content. So, as Haller

(1999:1) emphasised about her content analytical study of the

mainstream news coverage of disability issues:

> This project… makes no claims to be a definitive representation of media content, rather it provides a slice of media content to assist in understanding the trends of media coverage of disability.

However, this exploratory exercise never prepared me for the

underlying arduous tasks ahead, particularly as I had to evaluate every

single item that was initially identified by the Lexis Library to facilitate the

selection of relevant stories and the elimination of irrelevant ones. To

support this assessment, I developed a list of inclusion and exclusion

criteria because I wanted to be methodical with my decisions (see Box 6).

Box 6: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for initial keyword search on the Lexis Library

1. If the story refers exclusively to the terms 'learning disability', 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disabled', as a 'specific' impairment, such as dyslexia (Holland 2011:1), then exclude item from the sample.

2. If the story refers to the terms 'learning disability', 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disabled', as a 'specific' impairment, such as dyslexia (Holland 2011:1), but also mentions LD as an 'overall' impairment, then include item in the sample.

3. If the story refers exclusively to the terms 'learning disability', 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disabled' from within an educational context, then exclude item from the sample.

4. If the story refers to the terms 'learning disability', 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disabled' from within an educational context, but also mentions LD as an 'overall' impairment from outside an educational context, then include item in the sample.

5. If the story refers exclusively to learning disabled children (under the age of eighteen years), then exclude item from the sample.

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6. If the story refers to learning disabled children (under the age of eighteen years), but also mentions the future of these children as grown ups and/or life as a learning disabled adult, then include item in the sample.
7. If the story refers exclusively to pregnancy matters, such as the consequences of drinking alcohol during pregnancy, then exclude item from the sample.
8. If the story includes any of the keywords but these are not used within the context of LD, such as 'learning' of financial 'difficulties' (McGowan 2006), then exclude item from the sample.
9. If the story includes any of the keywords but these are used in passing, such as reference to the financial affairs of an organisation, which provide services to learning disabled people, but no other mention is made about learning disabled people or LD service(s), then exclude item from the sample.

Additionally, I quickly learnt more about some of the limitations of the Lexis Library system that had not materialised during my preliminary keyword searches. For example, 'it is common to find duplicated items in article lists produced by Lexis-Nexis searches', which on occasions can also include 'multiple counts' (Deacon 2007:17-18). This manual 'weeding' of duplicated material was a lengthy process, as I had to compare each multiple count word by word, while taking note of any slight variations, such as the publication of a later edition of a said item.

Further, the resulting keyword search lists for the *Daily Mail* included stories from its Sunday publications. Since this study focused on the LD coverage by the leading 'dailies' of the English national press, these items were taken out from these inventories. I also noted that there were a small number of stories from the *Daily Mail's* Irish and Scottish editions incorporated in these listings and these were also removed. No

such issues were ever identified for the *Daily Telegraph's* resulting keyword search lists. But when I started applying the same principles to the *Sun's* successive Lexis Library keyword searches, it proved very difficult to identify accurately the Irish and the Scottish versions of items, since these were not always distinguishable. While I had initially excluded parallel *Daily Mail's* items from their relevant lists, following these categorisation issues with the *Sun*, I decided to overturn said exclusions. I believed this to be the most feasible option because it only involved a handful of items and I would not have been able to apply the same methodical procedures to the redtop tabloid examples.

The materialisation of these unanticipated matters during the evaluation of the resulting keyword search lists from the Lexis Library, really made me appreciate the significance of keeping such processes as systematic as possible. Consequently, I intentionally evaluated all listings for each newspaper per year on separate days, while keeping a register of the total number of stories that I was selecting for the purposes of this content analysis. These procedures were methodically repeated on distinct occasions over a period of nine days, until I was satisfied with the selection of relevant items and the elimination of irrelevant ones. Further, from the start of this evaluation process I had printed a copy of every single story as they appeared on the system.

These hard copy editions proved of the essence during this assessment period because I was able to record comments about my filtering decisions individually on many items, which I could then refer to, as and when required. Notwithstanding, the systematic approach that I applied during this 'weeding' process, additional exclusions were still made during the latter stages of this content analysis, as I will discuss shortly.

Deciding what to count

The third stage of a content analysis requires 'careful planning and some imagination' because even though particular variables, such as the 'actors' that are manifestly referred to in texts, appear frequently in thematically based content analyses, there are no standard lists of what should be quantified. So, decisions of what to count must be decided by a study's research objectives. Further, it is important to note how viable it is to quantify a unit of analysis 'accurately and reliably, as some things are easier to count than others'. So, for example, it might be easy to code a news story as a front page lead but it might prove more challenging to quantify quickly and constantly the underlying narrative structure and mode of address, within an item (Deacon *et al.* 2010:122-124).

Such matters were discussed earlier when I highlighted that I would be employing a thematic analysis as my sampling units. This required a more interpretative approach, since it involved the examination of latent

content which could cause particular difficulties, during the coding process (Bryman 2008:282 and 291). Still, prompted by the 'conceptualisation and purpose' of the first stage (Riffe *et al.* 1998:46), there were particular variables that I wanted to quantify, involving both manifest and latent content. These could support the identification and subsequent analyses of the significance and meanings of the representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers by focus group members, while addressing the specific research questions that were previously listed in the opening stage of this content analysis. Consequently, particular details could be coded for each LD item of this study's sample (see Box 7).

Box 7: Deciding what to count: coding categories
1. The newspaper title in which the story was published
2. The date in which the story was published
3. The length of the story in words
4. The headline of the story (if any)
5. The generalised media stereotypes of disabled people that were portrayed, within the story's narrative (if any)
6. The more specific media portrayals of learning disabled people that were represented, within the story's narrative (if any)
7. The most prominent stereotype, if more than one was employed within the story's narrative
8. The confusion between LD and mental illness (if any), when the latter was also referred to within the story's narrative
9. The main theme(s) that were covered, within the story's narrative
10. The source(s) of the story (if any)

I would have liked to have included a wider range of variables, such as the use of any images, within the stories. But as this study's content analysis was dependant on the identification of LD newsprint stories by means of the Lexis Library, it was also restricted by the limitations of the

system. So, I was unable to code the visual elements of subsequent items, since such digitalised archives are in the main text based and do not incorporate such details within their collections (see for example, Deacon 2007:10).

Deciding on qualifying criteria

The fourth stage of a content analysis involves more decisions in order 'to identify systematically which units of your sample fall within the remit of your study'. So, for instance, a study on crime media coverage would require 'a standardised procedure for differentiating crime items from non-crime items' (Deacon *et al.* 2010:125). In this study's content analysis, I incorporated a number of qualifying criteria during its sampling stage and the gradual development of a sampling strategy (see for example, Box 6). As a result, from the outset these decisions influenced the scope and extent of this content analysis and I identified no more conditions at this point.

Nevertheless, as I will emphasise during the latter stages of this content analytical study, I did underestimate the total number of stories that ended up as my content sample. So, perhaps if I had made supplementary stipulations during this stage of the content analysis, these could have made the process of collecting data and analysing the results much more manageable, particularly as within the context of this

study I was a lone coder, working with limited resources and within tight doctoral schedules.

Designing a coding frame

The fifth stage of a content analysis comprises the production of two research tools: a coding schedule and a coding manual. The former 'is a proforma sheet on which you enter the values for each of your variables'. The latter contains the coding values 'for each of the variables listed on the coding sheet'. This involves a non linear process because as these instruments are developed it is advisable 'to 'road test' them on selected content examples, to see how easy the variables and values are to operationalise, and to gain some sense of their comprehensiveness'. Any matters that may arise during this pilot testing should then feedback into the progression of their design (Deacon *et al.* 2010:126-130).

Schreier (2012:175) asserts that while it is important to consider the reliability of a coding frame, its validity is also of consequence, arguing that 'a coding frame is valid to the extent that the categories adequately represent the concepts under study'. Bryman (2008:288) identifies a number of 'potential dangers' that require careful consideration, during the development of a coding scheme for a content analysis. These include the need for 'discrete dimensions, mutually exclusive categories, exhaustive categories, clear instructions and … clarity about the unit of analyses'. Additionally, the development of

'*categories*, or of making use of pre-existing ones, will help influence what is found' (Price 1997:55). As Langley (1993:25) explains:

> A research project concerning images of women in the media may well use content analysis as a method. A content analysis frame can be drawn which only includes counting instances where women are portrayed in stereotypical ways. A significant degree of stereotyping will inevitably be found.

Therefore, in some situations the selection from a number of categories might require further coding on whether the category is absent or present, so as to avoid the risk that particular groups will be ignored (Leiss *et al.* 1990:222-223).

With such matters in mind, I will now discuss the development of a coding frame for this study's content analysis, starting with its coding schedule.

Developing a coding schedule

As mentioned in chapter six, a draft coding schedule was initially designed for this content analysis to support the application for ethical clearance and to fulfil the requirements of Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). The general outline of this proforma was derived from a coding schedule, which I produced for a former content analysis that focused on the national newspaper coverage of the Frank Bruno story and his mental ill-health over a period of four days, during 2003 (Durell 2005).

However, it would not have been possible to apply so many dimensions to this study's content analysis coding sheet, since I envisaged a much larger sample and it was also limited to the analysis of media content, through a digital newspaper archive system, as previously discussed (see for example, Deacon 2007:10). Nevertheless, said document prompted this stage of the content analysis and I piloted varied versions of this proforma on a sample of content, adjusting its limitations accordingly, until it took the form of the final coding schedule (see Box 8).

Box 8: Final content analysis coding schedule

Article Number _____

General
1. Newspaper
DM – Daily Mail
DT – Daily Telegraph
S – The Sun

2. Date _____

3. Length of story in words _____

4. Headline _____

Content
5. Stereotype [Prominence]
a) Medical model [ ]
b) Social pathology model [ ]
c) Business model [ ]
d) Minority/Civil rights model [ ]
e) Cultural pluralism model [ ]
f) Legal model [ ]
g) Consumer model [ ]
h) Pitiable and pathetic [ ]
i) Object of violence [ ]
j) Sinister and evil [ ]
k) Atmosphere [ ]
l) 'Super cripple' [ ]
m) Object of ridicule [ ]
n) Their own worst and only enemy [ ]

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o) Burden [ ]
p) Sexually abnormal [ ]
q) Unable to participate fully in community life [ ]
r) Normal [ ]
s) Eternal child [ ]
t) Other _____

6. Confusion with mental illness   **Yes/No**

7. Theme(s)
a) _____
b) _____
c) _____

8. Source(s)
a) Learning disabled person
b) Family member of a learning disabled person
c) Friend of a learning disabled person
d) Paid carer of a learning disabled person
e) Spokesperson or reference to a LD organisation, including charities
f) Spokesperson or reference to a charitable organisation, such as the Alzheimer's Society
g) Spokesperson or reference to a governmental organisation, including Fire Service, councils, NHS Trusts, Health Care Commission, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and Ofsted
h) Spokesperson or reference to a professional organisation, such as Royal College of Midwives
i) Prime Minister, Minister, Member of Parliament, politician, spokesperson for political parties and other senior governmental positions, such as Attorney General or Justice Secretary
j) Police, judge, coroner, ombudsman, court spokesperson and legal representatives, such as lawyer or solicitor
k) Health professional, including doctors, scientists and professors
l) Teaching professional, including professors (generic)
m) Celebrities, including sports
n) Neighbour
NA) Not applicable
o) Unknown
p) Other_____

The first four variables of the coding schedule were grouped under a

general section and mostly included manifest content, such as the name

of the newspaper and the date in which a story appeared or the length of

an item in words. However, the headline variable could also involve latent content, as for instance a stereotypical representation of disabled people could be reflected within a story's title. Since this dimension could be interrelated to subsequent variables, I considered such associations, during the collecting data and analysing the results stages of this study's content analysis.

The next variable of the coding schedule concerned stereotypes and its list of categories was created through 'a priori coding' system as they were established prior to the collection of data and were 'based on some theoretical or conceptual rationale' (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:159). With the exception of the 'other' category which was included to render the list exhaustive (Krippendorff 2004:132), while facilitating the identification of alternative stereotypical representations, these categories were drawn from the academic material that I presented in the third chapter of this thesis, concerning the generalised media portrayals of disabled people and representations that could be regarded as more specific to learning disabled people (see for example, Barnes 1992a, Clogston 1990, Haller 1995 and Wertheimer 1987).

However, within this literature review of the stereotypical ways in which the media represents disability, I acknowledged similarities between a few of these categorisations. Consequently, I combined Barnes' (1992a:8-9) stereotype of the disabled person as a 'super cripple' with

Clogston's (1990:5) traditional 'super crip' model and listed 'super cripple' as a single category, within the coding schedule (see Box 8). While concerns could still be raised over the mutual exclusiveness of some of the other categories, I envisaged that with 'clear instructions' I could be specific about 'what factors to take into account when assigning codes to each category' (Bryman 2008:288). Indeed, such direction was provided by the coding manual, which I will discuss shortly.

But as previously highlighted in chapter three, each of these stereotypes are not 'mutually exclusive' because repeatedly one will be related to another (Barnes 1992a:3). Further, more than one stereotypical representation can be portrayed within a story (Haller 2009:7). As a result, the aspect of prominence was incorporated to the stereotype variable because I did not want to simply count the instances when learning disabled adults were being portrayed in stereotypical ways. I was concerned in the standing of these stereotypes and in identifying the ones, which took precedence overall within the stories' narratives, when more than one was featured.

The concept of prominence can be perceived as an abstract construct which 'means something that is first, or most important, and clearly distinct from all else in these qualities'. Within a news item it can be measured in varied ways, such as an 'actor's prominence can be assessed according to how much story space is taken up with assertions

attributed to the actor' (Riffe *et al.* 1998:106). So, to ensure reliability during my subsequent categorisation of this variable, I decided to determine the prominence of a stereotype within an item, through a combination of measures. These included whether it was represented in a story's headline and the amount of 'story space' that was taken up by the stereotypical representation, within the narrative. Still, I knew that a quick and constant quantification of these underlying narrative structures could prove challenging (Deacon *et al.* 2010:124), particularly as this coding process would be thematic and I would be taking an interpretative approach (Bryman 2008:282). I will be discussing such challenges, during the latter stages of this study's content analysis.

The sixth variable of the content schedule referred to another kind of media portrayal that was mentioned in chapter three and which could be regarded as particularly relevant for learning disabled people, as for people with a mental health condition. This involves a failure to distinguish between LD and mental illness and while it may prove difficult to present such misunderstandings as a distinct stereotype, a general confusion about these conditions appears to prevail within present-day society (see for example, Mencap 2012:33). For this particular variable, I wanted to ascertain whether such misapprehensions were absent or present within the storylines and not only referred to the distinguishing ability of journalists; but also to the manner in which LD narratives were presented and if these portrayals supported such misunderstandings

(Wertheimer 1987:24-25). However, as I will highlight during the collecting data stage of this content analysis, there were a few occasions when the interpretation of this dimension was not as straightforward as I had expected it to be. So, I had to refer to the coding manual for further direction.

The seventh variable involved the overall theme or themes that were covered within the stories' narratives and it was limited to the coding of up to three main topics, which made the resultant data much more manageable for subsequent analyses. These were categorised further during the analysing the results stage of this content analysis, through an 'emergent coding' process, which 'establishes categories after a preliminary examination of the data' and the resultant categories are 'based on common factors or themes that emerge from the data themselves' (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:159).

Similar procedures were also applied to the gradual development of the list of categories for the concluding variable of the coding schedule 'source(s)', which I will discuss in the final stage of this content analysis. The 'unknown' category was included to reflect the instances when an informant was not named within a storyline, while the 'other' category facilitated the classification of alternative sources and rendered the list exhaustive, since it represented 'all units not describable by the existing ones' (Krippendorff 2004:132). This final variable concerned the sources

that were used in the stories and was prompted by the exploratory

literature review from chapter four and the rare use of learning disabled

people, as informants for newspaper stories (see for example,

Wertheimer 1987:29), alongside concerns of how disabled people can be

used 'as exemplars to substantiate generalised third person claims' and

not as primary informants of a news story (Huws and Jones 2011:102). It

was included not only to ascertain the identity of the sources, but also to

explore the level of employment of learning disabled people as informants

in these narratives, when they are used in practice.

Having provided an overview of the development of a coding

schedule for this study's content analysis, I will now turn to its coding

manual.

Developing a coding manual

The second research instrument in the design of a coding frame is

the coding manual, which as described previously incorporates the

production of coding values for the variables listed in the coding sheet.

Often this can involve 'a lot of careful consideration as some things are

easier to categorise than others' (Deacon *et al.* 2010:127).

Most of the variables listed in the coding sheet of this content

analytical study generally involved the classification of manifest content

and I felt confident about coding these methodically. So, during the

development of the coding manual, I focused on the coding values of the dimensions that I anticipated would prove more difficult to categorise, because they involved the examination of mostly latent content and they required the most interpretation, during their categorisation (Bryman 2008:282). Further, concerns with the validity and the reliability of the coding process can be raised and what is required:

> is a body of coding rules which will provide criteria for valid coding decisions… and which will also be sufficiently clear to produce repeatable results, either by different coders, or by the same coder at different times (Beardsworth 1980:381-382).

The coding manual of this study's content analysis was constructed to support such concerns and proved to be an indispensable research tool. It is available upon request from the author and includes the coding values of the 'stereotype' and the confusion with mental illness variables. The former was based on the exploratory literature reviews of chapter three and the prevalent ways in which disabled people can be represented by the media, including other depictions that could be regarded as more specific to LD (see for example, Barnes 1992a, Clogston 1990, Haller 1995 and Wertheimer 1987). It was developed early on because I had my reservations about coding this dimension and I knew that it could prove challenging:

> for even someone trained in media content analysis to see the nuances of stereotypes about disability in news stories. The media models, especially, have always been difficult to assess and have been refined numerous times in an effort to reliably quantify them (Haller 1999:8).

By contrast, the coding values for the confusion with mental illness variable emerged in the early data collecting stages of this content analysis. As previously mentioned, in some instances I found this dimension difficult to categorise, so I incorporated extracts from Wertheimer's (1987:24-25) study which referred to varied examples when a misconstruction between LD and mental illness had been noted, during the press reporting of learning disabled people. Schreier (2012:100) emphasises how category descriptors can be 'somewhat abstract' and it can prove 'helpful to have some examples that illustrate the category'.

Having presented an overview of the development of this study's coding frame, I will now turn to the next phase of this content analysis.

Collecting data

The sixth stage of a content analysis involves the implementation of the coding schedule to a sample of content. This coding process can involve much interpretation 'even on apparently simple matters' and it is of the essence 'to be as consistent and systematic as possible' in the application of these research instruments. But even with well tested coding schedules and manuals, there can be examples that can prove difficult to code, within pre-determined categories. So, on these occasions coders must decide on 'coding solutions' and repeat these 'studiously for any similar cases that occur', to ensure reliability in the coding process. A

variety of statistical methods can be employed 'to check the degree to which coders tally in their analyses', like inter-coder reliability tests and it is advisable that these are conducted during the early stages of the data collection process, so that 'problematic areas' can be highlighted and coding procedures adjusted accordingly. This concern over coding reliability also applies to the application of coding frames by lone coders (Deacon *et al.* 2010:130-131).

Krippendorff (2004:131) argues that under ideal circumstances, finalised coding instructions should not be tested for reliability by the individuals who were involved in their development, but by 'a fresh set of coders'. He also perceives the application of coding frames by content analysts themselves as 'questionable practice', since it is impossible to discriminate 'whether the data generated under these conditions are the products of the written instructions or of the analysts' conceptual expertise'. Krippendorff (2004:131) thus proposes for content analysts to refer to other coders, who understand the coding guidelines and apply them reliably, 'before they assert that the instructions account for their data'.

Such resources were not available to me and as I performed both the role of content analyst and that of coder, I was wary of the reliability issues that could emerge, particularly during the data collection process and my reliance on intra-coder reliability measures (Schreier 2012:191-

192). It is to some of these matters that I will now turn, as I illustrate the range of procedures and decisions that were involved in this stage of the content analysis.

> Placing a unit of analysis into a content category is called coding. It is the most time consuming and least glamorous part of a content analysis (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:162).

The coding process for this study's content analysis turned out to be much more onerous than I had anticipated and as previously emphasised, I attribute such exertions to the sheer volume of the sample in question. Further, I had to take into consideration that I was a sole coder, working with limited resources and to a tight doctoral schedule. So, instead of creating a coding sheet for each individual story (see for example, Riffe *et al.* 1998:79), I decided to record the data from the hard copy version of the stories, directly onto an excel spreadsheet. Within this workbook, each row corresponded to a news story and all variables from the coding schedule (see Box 8), were listed individually in columns (Schreier 2012:208).

Although I was aware of the 'host of confusion' that could occur with this method of data collection as for example, coders 'may enter the categories… for one variable into the cells of another' (Krippendorff 2004:148); the use of paper coding sheets could 'add more time to the coding process' and 'this double recording on paper and keyboard also increases the chance of transcribing error' (Riffe *et al.* 1998:116).

Moreover, with the support of an advanced excel user, I gradually developed the general design of the database and incorporated supplementary features such as auto filters which as I will discuss shortly, proved of the essence during the final stage of this content analysis.

The process of coding took around six weeks to complete and did get somewhat easier, as I became more proficient with the use of the coding frame. The overall procedure was performed twice on distinct occasions, to ensure that my coding of each variable had not shifted during the data collection stage. Any inconsistencies were examined further by referring to my coding decisions in examples when items had not fitted neatly within the individual dimensions, so that these could then be meticulously repeated to other similar instances. Further, 'comparisons across points in time' allowed for the assessment of the reliability of the coding frame and 'the extent that the results of the analysis remain stable over time' (Schreier 2012:167).

During the early phases of the coding process, I was able to refine further the content sample of this study. As highlighted previously, despite having applied a systematic approach throughout the sampling stage of this content analysis, I still identified several stories that needed to be discounted because they were replicated or because they fell within the remits of the exclusionary criteria (see Box 6). Further, the coding

values for the confusion with mental illness variable were developed, during this preliminary data collecting stage.

Moreover, while it is advisable for coders to work exclusively with the coding instructions and not to depend upon 'extraneous sources of information' or to 'confer among themselves as to why they do what they do' (Krippendorff 2004:131), I would have welcomed communications with a fellow coder, as I found coding to be a very lonely exercise. Most of the variables were relatively straightforward to quantify but I did at first question my coding decisions for the 'stereotype' dimension and its prominence, within a story's narrative. Indeed, as I pointed out earlier, a quick and constant quantification of these underlying narrative structures can prove challenging (Deacon *et al.* 2010:124), since the coding process is thematic, calling for an interpretative approach (Bryman 2008:282).

Consequently, I took time out from the early stages of the coding and revisited the relevant literature (see for example, Barnes 1992a and Wertheimer 1987), to re-examine the intricacies of the stereotypical ways in which the media represents disabled people because as previously emphasised, stereotypical portrayals of disability have proved difficult to appraise (Haller 1999:8). This interlude also allowed me 'to maintain a reflexive position with regards to my own preconceptions and ideas, and how these might affect analysis and interpretation' (Foster 2006:289).

Additionally, I reviewed a sample of this study's content to think about the different ways in which it could be categorised, in an attempt to ensure a more structured approach to the coding of the stories. After careful consideration, I decided to code this dimension in the order that it appeared within the storyline, if more than one was depicted. This included headlines, where applicable. However, if the same stereotypical representation featured in different segments of the story's narrative, I only categorised it once, at its first appearance.

This chronological system proved to be an effective and organised way for categorising the 'stereotype' variable because it made the further examination of any inconsistencies during the second coding session a much more coherent process. As Holsti (1969:19) observes: 'language is complex, and even the trained analyst with keen insight may find it difficult to make maximum use of his data unless he uses systematic methods'. As a result, I felt more confident with my coding decisions and the identification of the stereotype that took precedence, within the storylines, when more than one was featured. I also developed coding procedures for the 'source(s)' dimension. So, for example, if a relative of a learning disabled person was presented as a celebrity within a story's narrative, they were only coded once as a family member. Other enhancements to this study's coding schedule were also made in the next stage of this content analysis, to facilitate the analyses of results. It is to

this final phase and its associated matters and possibilities that I will now turn.

Analysing the results

The final stage of a content analysis refers to the close examination of the data that was produced through the former coding process and 'the bigger the content sample… the more daunting this task can seem'. For this reason, familiarisation with a 'computerised statistical package' is recommended to support a quick and easy exploration and summation of the data in question. This stage should also include a period of reflection and a return to the initial phase, when research concerns were defined. Moreover, the case for any findings must not be overstated, as it can be easy to forget about the factors that were involved in their creation, rendering reflexivity of the essence. So, while statistical tests can prove useful for the exposure of inconsistencies in the use of a coding frame, consideration should always be given to the insights 'about the validity and reliability of particular measures', when analysing data. These are of particular importance whenever a 'dramatic or counter-intuitive finding' is encountered (Deacon *et al.* 2010:131-132).

During the early part of the 'analysing the results' stage, I was overwhelmed by the amount of data that had been generated by the main coding and by the impending tasks ahead. I was therefore relieved to have recorded all of the findings onto an excel spreadsheet. Krippendorff

(2004:146) emphasises how such workbooks 'offer convenient overviews of whole data arrays, but they often make it difficult for analysts to connect cell contents to recording units and available categories'. However, I was able to address such concerns with the support of an advanced excel user. As previously mentioned, I gradually evolved the general design of the excel spreadsheet, with the integration of auxiliary features. Additionally, as this individual was adept in the application of this computer software, I was able to draw from their expertise as they assisted me with the creation of individual worksheets for specific variables, breaking down the main database into much more workable components.

Final refinements were also made to the 'theme(s)' and 'source(s)' dimensions of the coding schedule (see Box 8). The former, as highlighted earlier, involved further categorisation through 'emergent coding' and the development of categories following an initial analysis of the data (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:159). Consequently, through the application of auto filters, I gradually grouped the themes that I had noted during the coding stage under general headings and I allocated each one with a code and an overall description to facilitate recording (see Table 4).

Table 4: General headings for the 'theme(s)' variable

No	Code	Description
1	CCC	Reporting of court case proceedings that involve learning disabled people as perpetrators of crime
2	CCV	Reporting of court case proceedings that involve learning disabled people as victims of crime, includes public inquiries
3	CEL	Celebrity features, which referred to LD or learning disabled people
4	COND	Individual, family, paid carers and general perspectives on particular conditions
5	EV	Features that refer to employment and volunteering opportunities with learning disabled people
6	IND	Individual stories about learning disabled people
7	M	Miscellaneous items in which reference to LD or learning disabled people is made generally
8	ORG	Features on organisations and their employees that provide services for learning disabled people, includes charities
9	PA	Individual, family, paid carers and general perspectives on services, benefits etc. Includes 'misuse' of benefits/services or high costs to taxpayer or state
10	PC	Coverage of or reference to incidents when learning disabled people were perpetrators of crime
11	PF	Individual, family, paid carers and general perspectives on services (LD and general), benefits etc. Includes discriminatory practices against learning disabled people, closure of LD services and criticisms of the benefits system
12	RC	Raising a learning disabled child, from a parents perspective
13	RF	Coverage of reports, social and legal reforms or guidelines, which were related to, or referred to LD or to learning disabled people
14	RS	Coverage of research studies which were related or referred to LD or to learning disabled people
15	RV	Reviews of books, TV programmes, plays, music, food etc… that referred to LD or learning disabled people
16	S	Sports related items, such as the coverage of sports events that involved learning disabled athletes or referred to sports people, involved in LD sports events or organisations
17	SB	Susan Boyle, includes coverage or reference to her story
18	T	Coverage of or reference to incidents when discriminatory language was used
19	VG	Coverage of or reference to incidents when learning disabled people were victims of crime within communities and/or instances of victimisation, in general
20	VS	Coverage of or reference to incidents when learning disabled people were victims of crime and/or instances of victimisation within specific communities, such as residential homes or NHS establishments

This procedure was applied in a consistent and systematic manner and transformed this diverse body of information into succinct thematic units for further analyses. Moreover, I was able to identify four inconsistencies in the former categorisation of this variable. These minor amendments refined further the findings of this content analysis and contributed towards the validity and the reliability of the coding process.

Similarly, for the 'source(s)' variable, following the main coding of its preliminary categories (see Box 9), I found that too many stories had fallen within the 'other' category, calling for a re-examination of said categorisation because it was 'probably overlooking some relevant content characteristic' (Wimmer and Dominick 2006:161). This frequent application of the 'residual category' could also indicate low face validity for the coding frame of this content analysis, as it was not covering the meaning of the data in question. So, through a closer inspection of the 'segments' that are allocated to the 'residual category', commonalities can be identified and 'some additional substantive categories' can be created (Schreier 2012:186).

Box 9: Preliminary categories listed in the coding schedule for the 'source(s)' variable
a) Learning disabled person
b) Family member of a learning disabled person
c) Friend of a learning disabled person
d) Paid carer of a learning disabled person
e) Spokesperson of a learning disabled organisation
f) Other

Subsequently, and with the support of my advanced excel associate, each entry in the 'other' section was broken up into individual columns. At once, I noted a large number of informants such as police, judge or lawyer, which were pulled together into interrelated groups. This reorganisation of the 'other' category instigated the advancement of the categories for the 'source(s)' variable and their incorporation within the final coding schedule. Further, I only coded a 'source(s)' category once, per item and I added the 'not applicable' (NA) category to this variable,

because not all items employed informants, within their storylines (see Box 8).

But as Schreier (2012:201) observes, 'if you become aware of major shortcomings during or following the main coding… you may indeed have to make more changes to your coding frame and redo the main coding'. So, I recoded the 'source(s)' variable because I wanted to maintain the reliability of the coding process and its subsequent findings. Indeed, during this 'second trial coding', which was based on the revised final version of the coding schedule (Schreier 2012:202), I only noted one minor change to my previous categorisations of the 'source(s)' variable. Additionally, as it involved a short period of reflection about the resultant data and their production (Deacon *et al.* 2010:132), I had the opportunity to return to the intricacies of said dimension and a consideration of these factors to the exploration of results.

Throughout this last stage of the content analysis, I also thought about how to best present its findings to learning disabled people and their supporters, in subsequent focus groups. So, in parallel with the initial setting up phase of this study, accessibility matters were of the essence to its content analytical aspect. As discussed in chapter six, with the support of the RAG and my ex colleague, who had already assisted me with the development of some of this study's accessible materials, I was able to reflect upon such concerns and gradually developed a power

point presentation that portrayed information in a more user-friendly manner (see Appendix 12), together with a bar chart that showed the number of times prominent stereotypes had been used by each news story, overall (see Appendix 14). With the creation of these accessible resources, I concluded the final stage of this study's content analysis.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This chapter provided an overview of the content analytical aspect of this study, which included an introduction of its key features and an exploration of its varied stages as they transpired, alongside the major matters and possibilities that arose, during these fieldwork practices. Through these reflective discussions, I narrated my emergence as an 'emancipatory' content analyst, within the field of disability studies and generated data that may be of concern to researchers, interested in the use of this research technique and its ongoing development.

If this stage of the research was 'classified on a continuum of how far disabled people exercise power throughout the research process', it would have fallen 'very much on the lower end of the scale' (Rodgers 1999:421). However, the overall aims of this content analysis were to identify the ways in which learning disabled adults are (mis)represented or not, by the contemporary print version of English national newspapers, turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors, with the intention of generating data that could be of use to learning disabled people, in their

struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30). So, as highlighted earlier, resulting findings could be applied as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters in the focus group stage of this study, to facilitate their engagement in disability and media research discourses, as co-producers of knowledge. Further, they could start addressing the significant lack of LD research in the field of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a), with few studies examining the press coverage of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page 136) and the near absence of their views and experiences, within this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987).

It is to these matters that I will now turn and the examination of the empirical data that was collected during the content analysis and the focus group components of this research, when I will be posing two main questions: what is the contemporary English national newsprint medium saying about learning disabled adults and what do learning disabled people think about these portrayals? I will employ quantitative ways for presenting such information alongside more qualitative arrangements, reflecting the mixed methods research design of this study.

Chapter nine
Hot off the English Press: learning disabled people and the contemporary national newsprint medium

<u>Introduction</u>

> The analysis of newspaper content seems a fruitful approach to the problem of how people with mental handicaps, are and come to be, socially represented… Newspapers, however, are not an infallible marker or producer of social attitudes and behaviour. There is a clear need for research to address the question of just how newspapers are, in the social sense of the term, *constructed*… So far as people with mental handicap are concerned it seems important to know whether the words are just 'words' or the prelude to 'sticks and stones' (McGill and Wilkinson 1990:68).

From the onset, this thesis highlighted the silencing of learning disabled people in the production of knowledge, which included much of research and media imagery (see for example, chapters one and three). It therefore seeks to break that silence by addressing the manner in which they are positioned in the research process, and by identifying the ways in which they are (mis)represented or not, in newspapers.

In the previous chapter, I presented an account of the content analytical stage of this study, which narrated my emergence as an 'emancipatory' content analyst, within the field of disability studies. Two key interrelated aims underpinned the content analysis: to identify the

ways in which learning disabled adults are (mis)represented or not, by the contemporary print version of English national newspapers, turning its focus onto the behaviours of oppressors, with the intention of generating data that could be of use to learning disabled people in their struggles against oppressive practices (Oliver and Barnes 2012:30). So, as asserted in chapter seven, these findings could be applied as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters during the focus groups, to facilitate their active engagement in disability and media research discourses, as co-producers of knowledge. This paved the way for making my content analytical skills 'available' to them (Zarb 1992:128) and the re-categorisation of 'research as production' (Oliver 1999a:183).

The overall aims of this chapter is to identify contemporary portrayals of learning disabled adults by the English national newsprint medium and to present an account of the explorations of the significance and meanings of these depictions, by learning disabled people and their supporters. As a result, it will start addressing the significant lack of LD research in the field of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a), as highlighted at varied points of this thesis and the few studies that have examined the newspaper representations of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page 136), with the near absence of their views and experiences in this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987). Moreover, this chapter will generate knowledge that does not silence

learning disabled people, crediting them as active members of disability and media research communities in the co-production of knowledge.

To begin with, I will report on the key findings of this study's content analysis, starting with an overview of its general findings. I will then examine in turn the remaining variables, as listed in the coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307), while referring to individual news items and specific storylines[1], to reveal prime examples of contemporary portrayals of learning disabled people by the English national press and to facilitate more detailed explorations of these newsprint narratives. I will also compare and contrast these analyses with the growing body of empirical research, within the areas of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a). The views of focus group members will be incorporated throughout these discussions and where applicable, I will use name initials to attribute each quotation or idea from a member to the appropriate individual, with the intention of maintaining their anonymity from the reader. I will conclude this chapter with a consideration of the significance and meanings of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers.

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[1] There were some instances when the Lexis Library system did not indicate the page number(s) in which a story appeared in a newspaper. So, there are occasions within this chapter, when a news story may not include a page number in its reference. These items have been marked with an asterisk (*) in the list of references.

However, I will focus solely on the findings drawn from the categories of the coding schedule and not on supplementary observations, such as the use of the term 'mental age' by some news stories in their descriptions of learning disabled adults. This would have involved a reconsideration of the varied stages of this content analysis and I had to maintain the boundaries of what was been included and why (see for example, Deacon *et al.* 2010:119-131). Further, I will only explore the aspects that are of particular significance to the central aims of this study. So, while an understanding of the distinct attributes of each newspaper did inform this study's content analysis and subsequent focus group discussions (see Table 3, page 252), since they can influence the narration of a story and consequently, portrayals of learning disabled people, I will not draw extensively on these factors or from the relevant literature (see for example, Cole and Harcup 2010). Therefore, I will not be referring to the 'length of story in words' variable (see Box 8, page 307), as its resulting data simply reflected the journalistic style of each newspaper and it was of little consequence to the realisation of this study's overall aims.

It can prove difficult to be certain of the particular ways in which newspaper audiences interpreted these LD newsprint stories, as Smith and Thomas (2005:55) stated prior to the presentation of their research findings and subsequent critical discussions:

what follows is an attempt to more-or-less adequately explain how the newspaper readers *might* have interpreted the media coverage. The claims we make herein should therefore be regarded as preliminary in nature and open to much more theoretical-empirical discussion than we can give here.

So, as I emphasised in chapters seven and eight, the sample of this study's content analysis is not offered as a complete media portrayal of LD but as 'a slice of media content' that can 'assist in understanding the trends of media coverage of disability' (Haller 1999:1), prompting dialogues with some learning disabled people and their supporters about media representations of LD.

General findings

In total, five hundred and forty six LD stories were identified as this study's content analytical sample, through the keyword search capability of the Lexis Library and following a series of filtering techniques, as I explained in chapter seven. These are presented in Table 5 by each newspaper, per year.

Table 5: Number of new stories by each newspaper, per year

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
The *Daily Mail*	54	43	38	46	28	209
The *Daily Telegraph*	24	37	24	24	37	146
The *Sun*	26	32	30	52	51	191
Total	104	112	92	122	116	546

Overall, the *Daily Mail* had the largest number of articles and in 2006 its coverage included over twice as many items (n=54), as the *Daily Telegraph* (n=24) and the *Sun* (n=26). However, during 2009 the *Sun's*

coverage involved more stories (n=52) than its mid-market (n=46) and its 'quality' (n=24) counterparts and almost doubled its items in 2010 (n=51) in contrast to the *Daily Mail* (n=28). For the years 2006, 2008 and 2009 the *Daily Telegraph* had the least number of stories (n=24), per each individual period, while in 2007 and 2010 it produced thirty seven items each year, publishing more than the *Sun* (n=32) and the *Daily Mail* (n=28), respectively (see Table 5).

While a considerable increase in the reporting of disability by the UK's national newsprint medium between the years 2004-5 and 2010-11 was recorded by the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and the Glasgow Media Unit (2011:4), it proved difficult to correlate such results with the overall data that was collected in this content analysis, apart from the significant increase in the *Sun's* LD coverage for the years 2009 and 2010 (n=52 and n=51, respectively) (see Table 5).

Nevertheless, and as discussed in chapter seven, I presented these general findings to the focus groups of this study, to find out what they thought about the extent and representativeness of this study's content analytical sample (see Appendix 12, Slide 9). Generally, members either believed that this constituted a lot of LD coverage or hardly any at all, with some individuals reflecting upon the fact that this information needed to be put into some form of context, particularly as it only represented 'a 'small' proportion' of all of the LD stories that had been

published by the media, during the specified period of time. However,

during preliminary discussions with the first focus group, members

observed that:

> Journalists don't always see that people with a learning disability
> are 'news', if other <u>more</u> interesting news come up and LD stories
> get cut. LD stories are low on the register.

Wertheimer (1987:ii and 2) also noted that 'one story of major

interest to the press will dominate all other coverage relating' to learning

disabled people, which 'can present a very distorted view of what people

with learning difficulties are like', as discussed in chapter four. She

concluded from her study's findings that:

> The overall number of cuttings would undoubtedly have been
> somewhat fewer had it not been for the fact that although the
> survey period was randomly chosen…, two stories of national
> interest featured heavily in both national and local newspapers
> during that time.

Indeed, there were several instances in which particular news

stories dominated the news agenda and were reported upon by all of the

three newspapers of this content analysis. These included the case of

Fiona Pilkington and her learning disabled daughter, Francesca (see for

example, Britten 2009, Greenhill 2009 and Parker and Parker 2009a),

which was 'hailed as the Stephen Lawrence moment for disability hate

crime' (Jardine 2009:19); or the atypical story of Susan Boyle (see for

example, Nathan 2009, Revoir and Simpson 2009 and Singh 2009), which

was previously referred to in chapter four. However, the manner of

reporting varied for each individual publication and this diversity could be

attributed to the journalistic style of each newspaper, as discussed in chapter four (see for example, Cole and Harcup 2010:22-36).

Although the level of reporting that was given to some of these leading storylines will be examined further within subsequent sections of this chapter, other influencing factors such as the occurrence of particular events during the time period of this content analysis could not really explain the variances in the LD coverage by each newspaper, per year (see Chart 1). As Carter *et al.* (1996:179) explain:

> The nature of press coverage of disability related issues appears to vary depending on specific promotional activities of various interest groups (e.g. deafness awareness week) or major but infrequent events such as the Para Olympics.

Chart 1: Variances in the LD coverage by each newspaper, per year
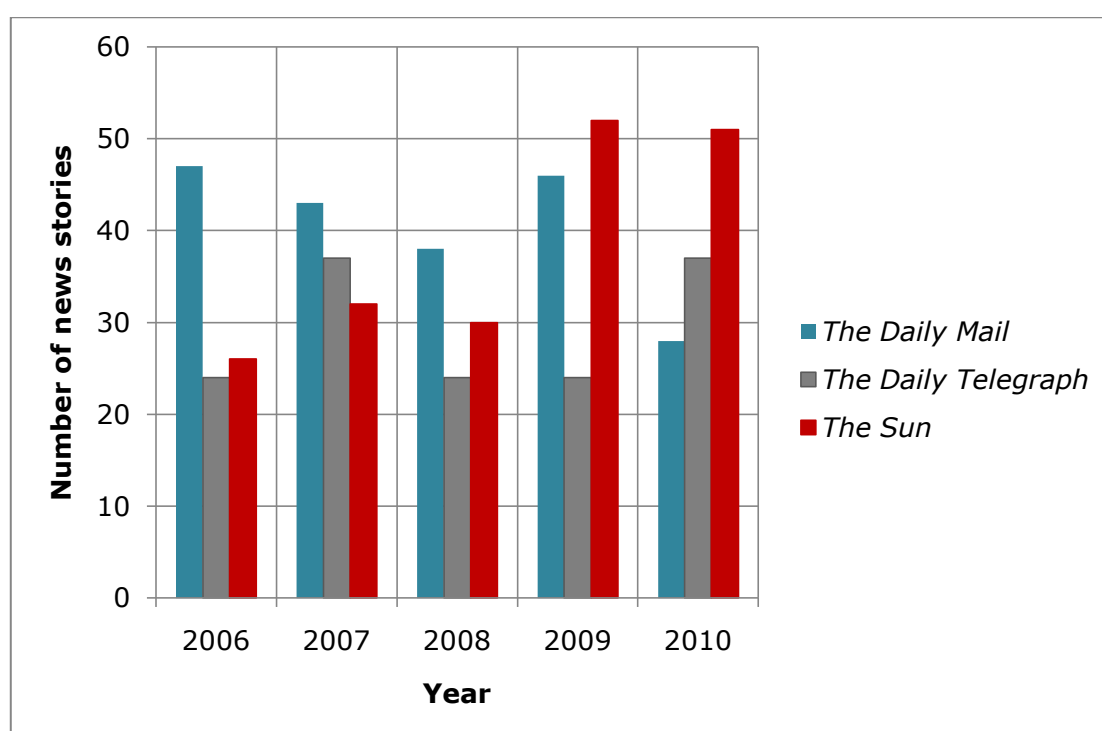
But within the context of this study's content analysis, there seemed to be no connection to a particular period of time when LD news stories were published. Events appeared to be reported as and when these occurred, alongside the occasional coverage of corresponding themes and follow ups to individual storylines, including the publication of letters from newspaper readers, commenting on particular matters. So, for example, on the 6th July 2006 the *Daily Mail* reported on the findings of an enquiry by the Healthcare Commission and the Commission for Social Care Inspection into the care provision for learning disabled people by varied NHS treatment centres and residential units. This investigation exposed the abuse of learning disabled people in these establishments, which resulted in subsequent inspections of LD services in England (Doughty 2006:6). On the following day, this mid-market title published a letter written by a father of a learning disabled woman, who commented on the findings of this enquiry (Bayliss 2006a:78); and on the 13th July 2006 another feature written by a journalist with experience of working with learning disabled people in a residential setting, extended these discussions by talking about their abuse by home care staff (Poulton 2006:65).

This story was also featured by the *Daily Telegraph* with an initial article on the 5th July 2006 reporting the 'criminal investigation' that had been instigated following the findings of the report into the 'shocking treatment' of learning disabled people (Hall and Savill 2006:7). Not unlike

its corresponding mid-market counterpart, on the following day three

letters commenting on the matter in question were published by this

'quality' title (Bayliss 2006b, Burt 2006 and Churchill 2006) of which one

was a longer version of the correspondence that was published by the

Daily Mail on the 7th July 2006 (Bayliss 2006a). However, this particular

storyline was not covered by any of the redtop tabloid items of this

content analysis.

Having presented an overview of the general findings of this study's

content analysis, which included some initial comments from the focus

groups, I will now examine in turn the remaining variables as listed in the

coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307). The headline category will be

explored within the stereotype and the confusion with mental illness

categories. Throughout these discussions, I will continue to incorporate

the views of focus group members.

The stereotype variable

In chapter eight, I described how the list of categories for the

stereotype variable of this study's coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307),

was produced through 'a priori coding' system (Wimmer and Dominick

2006:159). These were drawn from the literature reviewed in the third

chapter of this thesis, concerning the generalised media representations

of disabled people and other portrayals that could be regarded as more

specific to learning disabled people (see for example, Barnes 1992a,

Clogston 1990, Haller 1995 and Wertheimer 1987). Further, and as highlighted in chapter eight, if the same stereotypical representation featured in different segments of a story's narrative, I only coded it once, at its first appearance. Moreover, I applied the aspect of prominence to this variable because I did not want to simply count the instances when learning disabled adults were being portrayed in stereotypical ways. I was more concerned in the standing of these stereotypes, within the storylines and in identifying the ones which took precedence overall, when more than one was featured.

In this section of the chapter, I will present an overview of the stereotype variable of this content analysis, starting with a consideration of the news stories that featured more than one stereotype, within their discourses. These particular explorations have been included because I will be examining in more detail, those items which featured only one stereotypical representation, during the prominent aspect of this variable. I will then briefly explore the relationships that can exist between stereotypes and the portrayal of conflicting categorisations, within individual items. An examination of the aspect of prominence will then follow and I will focus on the two leading stereotypes, across all of the newspaper stories of this content analytical study, along with the 'other' contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers. Throughout these explorations, I

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will refer to single news items and specific storylines to facilitate more detailed analyses.

Stereotypical representations: an overview

A preliminary coding of the stereotype variable revealed that all of the three newspapers of this study's sample had the greatest number of news stories under the single characterisation group. However, two hundred and eighty four items incorporated more than one stereotype within their narratives (see Table 6), reiterating Haller's (2009:7) observation 'that more than one model may be present in a story'.

Table 6: Count of stereotypes featured in each news story, per newspaper

Count of stereotypes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
The *Daily Mail*	88	56	27	18	9	7	2	1	0	1	209
The *Daily Telegraph*	61	49	21	7	7	0	1	0	0	0	146
The *Sun*	113	52	15	9	0	2	0	0	0	0	191
Total	262	157	63	34	16	9	3	1	0	1	546

An overall exploration of the news stories that featured more than one stereotype within their discourses (n=284), identified as an object of violence as the most regularly applied representation (n=147). This was followed by the medical model (n=125) and the as an eternal child categories (n=63). However, the cultural pluralism model never featured in any of the items of this study's sample and the consumer model and the as their own worst and only enemy stereotype, were only coded once (see Chart 2 and Table 7).

Chart 2: Count of stereotypes featured in news stories with more than one characterisation, overall
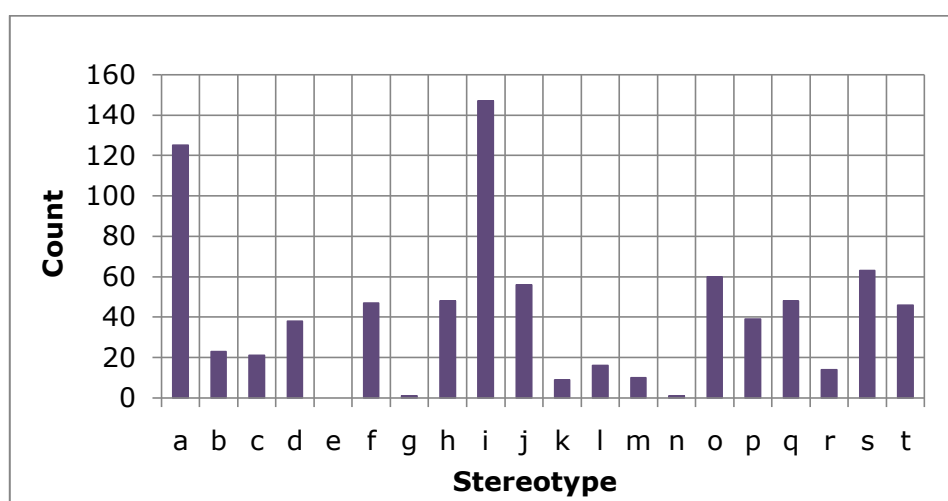
Table 7: Count of stereotypes featured in news stories with more than one characterisation, overall (in order of frequency)

No.	Stereotype	Total
1	i) Object of violence	147
2	a) Medical model	125
3	s) Eternal child	63
4	o) Burden	60
5	j) Sinister and evil	56
6	h) Pitiable and pathetic	48
7	q) Unable to participate fully in community life	48
8	f) Legal model	47
9	t) Other	46
10	p) Sexually abnormal	39
11	d) Minority/Civil rights model	38
12	b) Social pathology model	23
13	c) Business model	21
14	l) 'Super cripple'	16
15	r) Normal	14
16	m) Object of ridicule	10
17	k) Atmosphere	9
18	g) Consumer model	1
19	n) Their worst and only enemy	1
20	e) Cultural pluralism model	0

When this particular data set was examined per newspaper, it revealed the *Daily Mail* as the only publication that included the consumer model (n=1) and the as their own worst and only enemy category (n=1). However, the medical model was its most featured representation

(n=67), which was followed by the as an object of violence stereotype

(n=60). By contrast, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sun* featured the largest

number of items, under the as an object of violence stereotype (n=50 and

n=37, respectively) and this was followed by the medical model (n=32

and n=26, respectively) (see Table 8). So, as Kittay (2001:558)

observes, learning disabled people:

> have at times been objects of pity, compassion, or abuse by their
> caretakers and society at large. But they have rarely been seen as
> subjects, as citizens, as persons with equal entitlement to
> fulfilment.

Table 8: Count of stereotypes featured in news stories with more than one characterisation, per newspaper

Stereotype	The *Daily Mail*	The *Daily Telegraph*	The *Sun*	Total
a) Medical model	67	32	26	125
b) Social pathology model	12	6	5	23
c) Business model	11	8	2	21
d) Minority/Civil rights model	16	16	6	38
e) Cultural pluralism model	0	0	0	0
f) Legal model	19	24	4	47
g) Consumer model	1	0	0	1
h) Pitiable and pathetic	26	9	13	48
i) Object of violence	60	50	37	147
j) Sinister and evil	27	9	20	56
k) Atmosphere	2	4	3	9
l) 'Super cripple'	6	6	4	16
m) Object of ridicule	2	5	3	10
n) Their worst and only enemy	1	0	0	1
o) Burden	35	14	11	60
p) Sexually abnormal	20	8	11	39
q) Unable to participate fully in community life	27	10	11	48
r) Normal	6	5	3	14
s) Eternal child	36	11	16	63
t) Other	10	14	22	46

Relationships between stereotypes

However, representations of more than one characterisation within

a news story can also reflect culturally embedded relationships between

stereotypes. As previously highlighted in chapter three, Barnes (1992a:3) emphasises that recurrent media stereotypes of disabled people are not 'mutually exclusive' as frequently one will be related to another. So, for example, the representation of the disabled person as sinister and evil is regularly combined with sexually abnormal attributes, particularly within fictional formats. These particular correlations were explored in the stories of this content analysis.

The stereotypical representations of the disabled person as sinister and evil and as sexually abnormal were identified fifty six and thirty nine times, respectively (see Table 7). Sixteen of these news stories applied a combination of both and in nine instances other stereotypes were also identified. The majority of these items were run by the *Daily Mail* (n=9), followed by the *Sun* (n=6) and the *Daily Telegraph* (n=1) (see Table 9).

Table 9: News stories which featured a combination of both the 'as sinister and evil' and the 'as sexually abnormal' stereotypes

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
1	*The *Daily Mail*	11/08/09	Allen, V. *et al.*	Evil brothers who broke baby Peter
2	*The *Daily Mail*	02/08/08	Levy, G.	Rambo, karate kid, rock star: The fantasy life of Barry George
3	*The *Daily Mail*	02/08/08	Hale, B. and Wright, S.	Women who kept faith
4	*The *Daily Mail*	06/11/07	Wright, S.	Blonde paid £500 a day to give him head massage
5	*The *Daily Mail*	12/06/07	The *Daily Mail*	Rapists among the 8,000 sex offenders let off with a caution
6	The *Daily Mail*	24/02/07	Courtenay-Smith, N.	Hotel of hope
7	The *Daily Mail*	24/02/07	Cassidy, D.	Dark side of a teen idol
8	*The *Daily Mail*	28/10/06	Carroll, B.	Evil reign of piped piper sex beast
9	*The *Daily Mail*	07/02/06	Macaskill, G. and Madeley, G.	Raped and murdered after she called 999 five times
10	*The *Daily Telegraph*	22/11/10	Moore, M.	Judge flouts 'worrying' guidelines to jail sex attacker

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
11	*The *Sun*	28/10/09	Finlay, D.	Perv: I'm danger to kids. Judge: You're free to go
12	*The *Sun*	04/01/08	Riley, W.	Sex terror of jogger
13	*The *Sun*	29/06/07	Bugler, T.	Victim in blast at free perv
14	*The *Sun*	03/05/07	Bugler, T.	Rape bid at store by fiend in tights
15	*The *Sun*	18/01/07	The *Sun*	Love bite girl on perv list
16	*The *Sun*	15/08/06	Riley, W.	Girl, 9, groomed for video rape

Fourteen of these articles (marked with an asterisk (*) in Table 9) concerned narratives about learning disabled people who had committed criminal offences but they also talked about crimes of a sexual nature. Consequently, they were coded with the as sinister and evil and the as sexually abnormal categories and in several cases the news stories' headlines reiterated the combination of these categorisations (see for example, Bugler 2007a, Carroll 2006 and Moore 2010). The incidents that were covered by these items ranged from rape and murder (Macaskill and Madeley 2006); to the court case of a learning disabled woman who admitted 'using lewd behaviour', towards a fourteen year old boy (The *Sun* 2007a). Within these stories, it proved difficult to correlate culturally embedded relationships between stereotypes because they involved the narration of factual events and not fictional storylines (Barnes 1992a:3).

Another example from this group of items concerned the *Daily Mail's* 'Hotel of hope' feature. Within this news story, 'the early days' of this leisure establishment are described as involving learning disabled learners, who had 'been physically and sexually abused, and it was almost impossible to help them. They suffered from terrible anger problems'.

These personality traits support a 'sinister and evil' image and they are reiterated by the description of an incident, when a trainee threw a chair that 'just missed a group of elderly guests'. Further, the running of the hotel is expressed as being much harder in those days because of these particular individuals (Courtenay-Smith 2007:13).

The underlying features of the as sexually abnormal stereotype can also be identified throughout this storyline (Barnes 1992a:12), by the explanations of the necessary monitoring of the development of relationships among the learning disabled trainees. This is highlighted as an important role for residential staff alongside the provision of sex education and is supported by the story's opening paragraphs, with its narration of the 'romantic tensions' among the learning disabled students and the description of a 'potentially messy love quadrangle (*which*) looks set to explode'. But even though both the as sinister and evil and the as sexually abnormal stereotypes can be found within this item, the former appears to refer to past cohorts of learning disabled learners and not to the current intake of trainees (Courtenay-Smith 2007:13). In total, ten different stereotypes were identified within this story (see Table 6), as it incorporated an assortment of stereotypical representations of learning disabled people. Subsequently, it was coded with a leading stereotype of the 'other'.

Conflicting stereotypes

Drawing from the stories of her study's sample, Wertheimer (1987:30) noted that contradictory images of learning disabled people can create confusion for newspaper audiences. She found that at times they were being portrayed as 'a danger to small children, sometimes violent and generally rather anti-social' and in other occasions, they were 'lovely people but mild mannered and smiling… socially aware and probably too shy to approach anyone'.

Conflicting stereotypical portrayals of learning disabled people were also identified, within some of the news stories of this content analysis. For example, twenty five items included both the stereotype of learning disabled people as an object of violence and as sinister and evil, within their narrations. In eighteen of these instances, other categorisations were also identified. The majority of these news stories were run by the *Daily Mail* (n=14), followed by the *Sun* (n=6) and the *Daily Telegraph* (n=5) (see Table 10).

Table 10: News stories which featured a combination of both the as an object of violence and the as sinister and evil stereotypes

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	21/09/10	Leonard, T.	Is it because she's a woman that this double killer is to be executed
2	The *Daily Mail*	01/06/09	Boshoff, A.	Next stop for SUBO? A lonely hotel room and a £500 a night tour
3	The *Daily Mail*	03/06/08	Grant, G.	The Bebo crimewave
4	The *Daily Mail*	02/08/08	Levy, G.	Rambo, karate kid, rock star: The fantasy life of Barry George
5	The *Daily Mail*	02/08/08	Hale, B. and Wright, S.	Women who kept faith
6	The *Daily Mail*	04/11/08	Hale, B.	Mother killed toddler, then

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
				surfed the web for dates
7	The *Daily Mail*	24/02/07	Cassidy, D.	Dark side of a teen idol
8	The *Daily Mail*	16/03/07	Rees, G.	Gladiator fight care home staff face jail
9	The *Daily Mail*	23/06/07	Horne, B.	Jail for mother who watched as daughter aged nine was raped
10	The *Daily Mail*	05/12/07	Carey, T.	Mathew was born with brain damage because his mother drank while pregnant
11	The *Daily Mail*	06/07/06	Doughty, S.	Drugged, tied up, beaten, starved.
12	The *Daily Mail*	13/07/06	Poulton, S.	And they call this caring
13	The *Daily Mail*	28/09/06	MacGregor, V.	Man threw autism sufferer down escalator in store row
14	The *Daily Mail*	01/11/06	The *Daily Mail*	They think that I'm stupid, but I'm not. I love my children
15	The *Daily Telegraph*	20/10/09	Pierce, A.	Sir Ludovic Kennedy broadcaster and campaigner dies
16	The *Daily Telegraph*	17/01/07	Fleming, N.	Sex assaults and abuse uncovered at care homes
17	The *Daily Telegraph*	22/03/07	Payne, S.	Four drowned man they suspected was paedophile
18	The *Daily Telegraph*	12/08/06	Stokes, P.	Troubled boy who tumbled from Humber Bridge may have thought he was flying
19	The *Daily Telegraph*	17/07/06	Grice, E.	Cry of an enfant sauvage
20	The *Sun*	28/07/07	Coles, J.	Evil 3 killed disabled man
21	The *Sun*	23/06/07	Horne, B.	Love and hate
22	The *Sun*	09/09/08	Clench, J.	Ma used pillow to kill son 3
23	The *Sun*	13/08/09	The *Sun*	Carers in fight club
24	The *Sun*	29/05/09	Wells, T.	Boyling Susan is in hiding
25	The *Sun*	29/05/09	Walker, D. *et al.*	Save our SUBO

But as highlighted in the former discussion of relationships between stereotypes, it could be argued that both of these representations can be applicable to an item, as they involved the narration of actual events. So, for example, Clench (2008) and Hale (2008) reported on the court case of a learning disabled woman, who had been assaulted by her son's father. But she also stood accused of murdering her son. Payne (2007:11)

covered the murder trial of four people, who drowned a learning disabled man, 'they suspected was paedophile'.

Another story, which was referred to in the general findings section of this chapter, narrated the 'horrific events' witnessed by a journalist who had worked in a 'care home' for learning disabled people to gain 'a better practical understanding', as she embarked on a psychology degree. Poulton (2006:65) described home staff as 'veterans of the learning disabilities circuit', who 'at break time… would try to outdo each other with stories about the beatings they had endured in their years of service', describing the story of a colleague who 'had been hospitalised for six weeks after having all of her ribs broken by a service user'. She then presented an overview of past and current experiences of abuse by staff towards the learning disabled people she had worked with and describes her 'soft spot' for Maureen a 'resident', who had experienced years of abuse from carers, raising the question: 'How could adults charged with caring for these poor people be so cruel?'

Her account continued with 'a very disturbing encounter' of her own in which she was threatened by a male 'resident' and how 'just as quickly as his fury begun, it disappeared and he followed… *(her)* sheepishly back to the dining room'. Poulton (2006:65) recalled how she left her post as a direct consequence of this incident and felt angry for allowing herself 'to

be placed in such a vulnerable position, but even more angry about a system' that had left her 'exposed to the dangers of the job'.

Newspaper features, such as Poulton's (2006), can be simply perceived as a candid recollection of events by a support worker and their experiences of working with learning disabled people, in a residential setting. Nevertheless, the simultaneous application of contradictory stereotypes within narratives can confuse audiences, particularly if they have little or no direct experience of LD. As Wertheimer (1987:30) argues: 'sometimes, however, the average newspaper reader must get somewhat confused when the stories give rather conflicting images'.

But what about the standing of these stereotypical representations, within the narratives of the news stories of this content analysis? It is to the aspect of prominence of the stereotype variable that I will now turn. This will include an examination of the two leading depictions, across all of the items of this study, together with the 'other' contemporary portrayals of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers.

Prominent stereotypes

Chart 3 and Table 11 present a count of the prominent stereotypes that were featured by each news story, overall and includes all of the items of this study's sample (n=546). However, these graphs exclude

categories 'e' (cultural pluralism model) and 'g' (consumer model) because these were never coded as prominent stereotypes, reiterating former discussions of the under representations of these models in items that featured more than one stereotype, within their narratives (see Chart 2 and Table 7). These exclusions also apply to Chart 4 and Table 12, which will follow in subsequent discussions.

Chart 3: Count of prominent stereotypes featured by each news story, overall
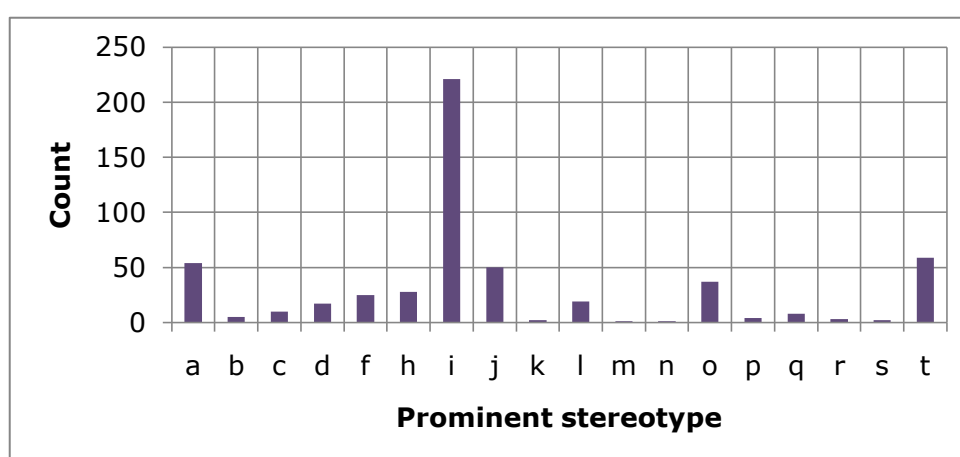
Table 11: Count of prominent stereotypes featured by each news story, overall (in order of frequency)

Ranking	Prominent stereotype	Total
1	i) Object of violence	221
2	t) Other	59
3	a) Medical model	54
4	j) Sinister and evil	50
5	o) Burden	37
6	h) Pitiable and pathetic	28
7	f) Legal model	25
8	l) 'Super cripple'	19
9	d) Minority/Civil rights model	17
10	c) Business model	10
11	q) Unable to participate fully in community life	8
12	b) Social pathology model	5
13	p) Sexually abnormal	4
14	r) Normal	3
15	k) Atmosphere	2
16	s) Eternal child	2
17	m) Object of ridicule	1
18	n) Their own worst and only enemy	1
	Total	546

These findings identified that not unlike the news stories that featured more than one stereotype, within their narratives (see Chart 2 and Table 7), as an object of violence was still the most used leading characterisation (n=221), amounting to forty per cent of the items that were coded for this particular variable (see Chart 3 and Table 11).

This information was presented to the focus group members of this study and generally they were surprised to learn that so many stories talked about learning disabled people as objects of violence. However, one person (SM) from the first meeting had expected more stereotypical representations of learning disabled people as pitiable and pathetic, while another member (KI) attributed the high proportion of as an object of violence items to the fact that 'there has been a lot of disability hate crime stories and also because of people's attitudes towards' learning disabled people.

Indeed, as highlighted in an earlier section of this chapter: 'one story of major interest to the press will dominate all other coverage relating' to learning disabled people and 'this can present a very distorted view of what people with learning difficulties are like' (Wertheimer 1987:ii). Moreover, as McMillan (2011:18) asserts:

> Rising numbers of people are being taken to court for committing 'hate crimes' against individuals with disabilities… Whether this means that people with disabilities are increasingly being targeted by unscrupulous individuals who see them as a 'soft touch', for example, is a moot point.

When this data set was examined per newspaper, it also revealed the as an object of violence stereotype as the most featured category, by all of the three titles. This was led by the *Sun* (n=92), followed by the *Daily Mail* (n=71) and the *Daily Telegraph* (n=58). However, for the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* the second leading stereotype was the medical model (n=24 and n=19, respectively), while for the *Sun* it was the 'other' category (n=26) (see Chart 4 and Table 12).

Chart 4: Count of prominent stereotypes featured in each news story, per newspaper
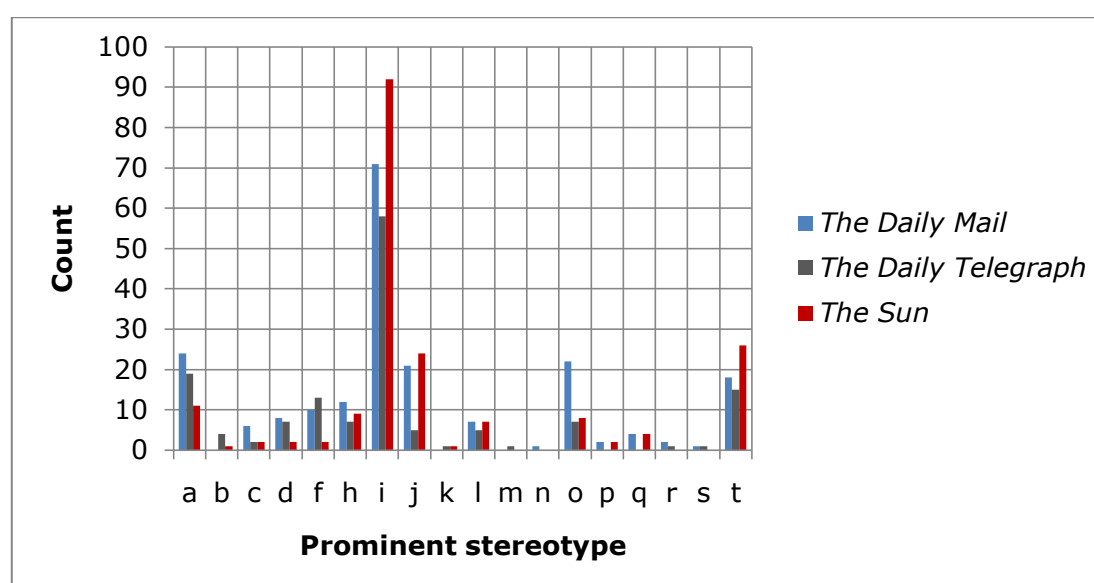
Table 12: Count of prominent stereotypes featured by each news story, per newspaper

Stereotype	The *Daily Mail*	The *Daily Telegraph*	The *Sun*	Total
a) Medical model	24	19	11	54
b) Social pathology model	0	4	1	5
c) Business model	6	2	2	10
d) Minority/Civil rights model	8	7	2	17
f) Legal model	10	13	2	25
h) Pitiable and pathetic	12	7	9	28
i) Object of violence	71	58	92	221
j) Sinister and evil	21	5	24	50
k) Atmosphere	0	1	1	2
l) 'Super cripple'	7	5	7	19
m) Object of ridicule	0	1	0	1
n) Their own worst and only enemy	1	0	0	1
o) Burden	22	7	8	37
p) Sexually abnormal	2	0	2	4

Stereotype	The *Daily Mail*	The *Daily Telegraph*	The *Sun*	Total
q) Unable to participate fully in community life	4	0	4	8
r) Normal	2	1	0	3
s) Eternal child	1	1	0	2
t) Other	18	15	26	59
Total	**209**	**146**	**191**	**546**

But how were learning disabled people portrayed by the most featured categories, within the stories of this content analysis? It is to these depictions that I will now turn and to the as an object of violence, the medical model and the 'other' categorisations. Throughout these discussions, I will be referring to individual news items and specific storylines, to reveal prime examples of contemporary representations of learning disabled people by the English national newsprint medium and to facilitate more detailed explorations of the narratives.

The learning disabled person as an object of violence

As highlighted in chapter three, the press has been observed as having a propensity to 'sensationalise violence against disabled people' (Barnes 1992a:7). Wertheimer (1987:15) found that within her newspaper sample, stories about individual 'people with learning difficulties as victims, outnumbered stories about achievement by two to one'. These instances of victimisation included people 'being subjected to sexual abuse… theft and vandalism'. Similarly, across the stories of this content analysis, the stereotypical representation of the learning disabled person as an object of violence, concerned individuals who had been victims of a wide range of criminal acts, including theft (see for example,

The Sun 2010a), sexual and/or physical assault (see for example, Hull 2006 and Stokes 2007) and murder (see for example, Henry 2006).

There were also articles that reported on incidents in which learning disabled people had been 'objects of violence' but within their own homes or in a care setting. So, for example, an article from the *Sun* (2009b:22) described how staff had 'forced residents with learning disabilities to fight'; while Womack (2007:10) covered Mencap's (2007) *Death by indifference* report, which accused:

> the NHS of 'institutional discrimination' against vulnerable patients, leading to neglect and premature death, saying discrimination happened when organisations failed to make changes to meet people's needs or tackle ignorance and prejudice in the workforce and culture.

Additionally, there were instances in which a learning disabled person had been a victim of a combination of criminal acts, like in the case of Michael Gilbert, who was:

> taken in when he was 15, was treated as a slave by the warped scroungers who inflicted pain on him for fun and used him as a source of income… When Michael finally died from the abuse, aged 26 they beheaded him, cut up his body and dumped the parts in a lake at a beauty spot (France and Parker 2010:22).

Several items also referred to the individual deaths of other learning disabled people. These included David Askew, who had been 'tormented by generations of teenagers over two decades' and had 'collapsed and died in his garden within minutes of youths goading him yet again outside his home' (Bunyan and Edwards 2010:8). Birrell (2010) talked about the

events that led to the passing of this gentleman and referred to Fiona Pilkington, who had 'killed herself and her disabled daughter after years of abuse from neighbours'. Indeed, twenty items coded with a prominent stereotype of as an object of violence, covered or referred to the deaths of Fiona Pilkington and her learning disabled daughter, Francesca (see Table 13).

Table 13: News stories which covered or referred to the deaths of Fiona Pilkington and her learning disabled daughter, Francesca and were coded with as an object of violence prominent stereotype

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	22/09/10	Birrell, I.	This epidemic of hate crimes against the very vulnerable reveals a callousness at the heart of society
2	The *Daily Mail*	29/05/10	Martin, A. and Allen, V.	Firework killer had a nationwide ASBO
3	The *Daily Mail*	12/04/10	Connolly, R.	The return of Britain's Got Talent proves we're hooked on a cruel culture of humiliation
4	The *Daily Mail*	12/03/10	Tozer, J.	Tormented to his death
5	The *Daily Mail*	07/11/09	Salkeld, L.	Tormented mother's sacrifice
6	The *Daily Mail*	29/09/09	Clark, N. and Greenhill, S.	Shameless, the feral family behind a 10-year reign of terror
7	The *Daily Mail*	25/09/09	Greenhill, S.	Mother in blazing car horror leaves a diary of despair
8	The *Daily Mail*	27/10/07	Wilkes, D.	Bullies 'drove mother and daughter to fireball death'
9	The *Daily Telegraph*	13/03/10	Jardine, C.	Beat the yobs at their own game – get a dog
10	The *Daily Telegraph*	13/03/10	Bunyan, N. and Edwards, R.	Tormented to death by gangs of yobs
11	The *Daily Telegraph*	03/02/10	Whitehead, T.	£100 overtime for police who take phone call on day off
12	The *Daily Telegraph*	03/10/09	Whitehead, T.	Bobbies on beat for just 6 hours a week
13	The *Daily Telegraph*	30/09/09	Jardine, C.	Will we hear the next cry for help?
14	The *Daily Telegraph*	25/09/09	Britten, N.	Diary of mother driven to despair by bullies
15	The *Daily Telegraph*	21/09/09	Johnston, P.	The police must connect with local people

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
16	The *Sun*	12/03/10	Patrick, G.	Tormented to death by ASBO thugs
17	The *Sun*	02/10/09	*The Sun*	Get tough on yobs' parents
18	The *Sun*	26/09/09	Parker, A. and Parker, N.	Yob family ban after fire deaths
19	The *Sun*	25/09/09	Parker, N. and Parker, A.	Taunts mum's diary of hell
20	The *Sun*	18/09/09	Parker, A.	Thug hell mum's car fire death

Birrell (2010) also referred to varied cases in which disabled people had been victims of hate and mate crimes, describing them as 'the ignored minority, left behind in the battle against bigotry'. He also emphasised how it still seemed fine for President Obama:

> to make a bad taste joke about the Special Olympics… for pop stars and Hollywood pin-ups to call each other 'retards' and for reality television shows like *The X Factor* to use people with learning difficulties as a prop to build their ratings.

This latter assertion echoes the underlying sentiments of some of the news stories of this content analysis, that covered or referred to Susan Boyle and were coded with as an object of violence prominent stereotype (see Table 14). One redtop tabloid item described how the 'Susan Boyle's mania' had 'turned nasty' and highlighted concerns for her general well being (Maxwell 2009:11). These reservations were reiterated by the remaining items as they documented her subsequent 'breakdown', with critics of the television series claiming that she was 'over rated and that the show was verging on child cruelty' (Revoir 2009); while a 'quality' feature concluded that the Susan Boyle's story, 'which was sold to us as a fairytale come true, now reads like a lesson in sadness and shame. Her sadness and our shame' (Gerrard 2009:23).

Table 14: News stories which covered or referred to Susan Boyle and were coded with as an object of violence prominent stereotype

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist/Author	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	04/06/09	Revoir, P.	Subo's crisis was so predictable says Parkinson
2	The *Daily Mail*	02/06/09	Revoir, P. and Simpson, R.	Britain's Got Talent: Now the backlash
3	The *Daily Mail*	02/06/09	Platell, A.	Sorry, but all of us – including me – must share the blame…
4	The *Daily Mail*	28/05/09	The *Daily Mail*	If this plastic freak is Susan Boyle's support, things can only end in tears
5	The *Daily Telegraph*	11/06/09	Woods, J.	Face it, you're past your sell-by date
6	The *Daily Telegraph*	02/06/09	Gerrard, N.	Her sadness, our shame
7	The *Daily Telegraph*	02/06/09	Singh, A.	Talent show may face Boyle inquiry
8	The *Sun*	04/06/09	Smeato, J.	I know what you're going through, SuBo
9	The *Sun*	29/04/09	Maxwell, M.	Susan's got life to lead

The medical model

In chapter two, I noted that the content analytical stage of this study could present an indication on whether the modern day newspaper representations of learning disabled people are still being influenced by an individual way of thinking about disability, with its 'personal tragedy' approach (Oliver 2009:43). Wilkinson and McGill (2001:73) observed that within their 2001 sample of LD articles from the British newspaper: the *Guardian*, 'the medically related representation of people as 'patients' found in 1983 was no longer apparent'. Conversely and as previously highlighted, the medical model was identified as one of the leading categories, across the items of this content analysis (see Tables 9, 12 and 13). This involved news stories that depicted disability as an illness and disabled people as passive and dependant on health professionals for treatment or maintenance (Clogston 1990:5).

There were several features that reported on research and/or medical and/or scientific expertise in particular conditions or syndromes, which covered or referred to LD (see for example, Alleyne 2009, the *Sun* 2010b, Waters and Coleman 2006). Some of these items described the life experiences of the family members of learning disabled people and run with the headlines: 'For 20 years, no one could explain why this little girl had severe learning problems… until a genetic breakthrough gave her mother the answer' (Gregory 2006); or 'Bizarre eating disorder nearly killed my sister' (Hurst 2006).

Another story narrated the working experiences of a junior doctor and started with a description of the hospital that he was practising in, which included a 'NHS 'continuing care' ward'. This healthcare provision was presented as:

> for people who are so severely disabled that they must be cared for permanently. They require constant specialist nursing and medical attention, owing to multiple degenerative diseases that pose complex management problems… It is one of the most haunting places I have to visit… There is no hope for any of these people. Instead they are kept as comfortable as possible until they die and are released from their torture… The only relief from the unremitting bleakness is the staff, whose gentle dedication and devotion to their patients is remarkable (Pemberton 2008:26).

Other items also talked about organisations or services, which provided support for learning disabled people (see for example, Cockcroft 2009, Grant 2007 and the *Sun* 2006a). One story reported on the work of a charity and featured a learning disabled man with epilepsy, who had led a

'sheltered life', until 'his mum showed signs of dementia' and she could no longer 'look after him or their home, and Robert was left to control his own medicine, often taking the wrong doses at the wrong times of the day'. As a result, he 'was admitted to hospital until a more suitable home could be found'. The story then explained on how such provision came as part of the charity's 'supported living service' and how without this support, Robert would never have had 'a new lease of life' (The *Sun* 2010c:3).

The 'other' categorisation

The 'other' category ranked second both in the count of prominent stereotypes that were featured by each news story, overall (n=59) (see Chart 3 and Table 11) and in the case of the *Sun*, when this aspect of the variable was examined, per newspaper (n=26) (see Chart 4 and Table 12). This categorisation involved a diverse range of articles. So, for example, there were several items that simply mentioned learning disabled people in passing or made reference to the terms 'learning disability' or 'learning difficulty' (see for example, Allen 2009, Brass 2008, Britten 2006, Gritten 2007 and The *Daily Telegraph* 2010).

However, in thirteen instances these expressions were applied as descriptive terms and they presented learning disabled people as 'dim' individuals (see Table 15). These included a mid-market item, which described the television programme *Kirstie and Phil's Perfect Christmas*,

as a 'Blue Peter for adults, but adults with severe learning difficulties'
(The *Daily Mail* 2010a). While in a book review, Robey (2010:22)
explained how in one vignette, the author talks 'about living with a
temporal-spatial learning difficulty, and how it's always made her useless
at public counting and multiple choice – like having 'the village idiot
camped out in half your brain''.

Table 15: News stories which presented learning disabled people as 'dim' and were coded with the 'other' prominent stereotype

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	09/12/10	The *Daily Mail*	Jones moans
2	The *Daily Mail*	15/02/10	Weathers, H.	Hounded out by hysteria
3	The *Daily Mail*	28/12/09	Jones, L.	I've never liked the homeless
4	The *Daily Mail*	11/09/09	Platell, A.	Strictly versus X Factor
5	The *Daily Mail*	21/03/09	Pascoe-Watson, G.	Can Obama drop a Barack? Yes he can
6	The *Daily Mail*	25/05/07	Johnston, J. and Wallis, L.	The cult guru who stole my son
7	The *Daily Telegraph*	14/08/10	Robey, T.	Hide them in the peanut butter!
8	The *Daily Telegraph*	12/11/07	Cramb, A.	Straight guy Tony Blair is the butt of old school's playful joke
9	The *Daily Telegraph*	06/02/07	Barking, S.	Daddy long legs to Dostoevsky. You're a-Z of ethical PR
10	The *Daily Telegraph*	28/11/06	Brown, C.	Where am I?
11	The *Sun*	13/11/10	Appleyard, M.	My mum gave me away, but Laura loves me the way I am
12	The *Sun*	28/01/09	Moore, J.	Kelly Pocock was quite rightly hauled
13	The *Sun*	11/01/07	Leckie, B.	Ruth Kelly

There were also two other features that were coded with a principle
categorisation of the 'other', because they did not really fall under the
remit of any of the other stereotypes of this content analysis' coding
schedule (see Box 8, page 307). These referred to a television
documentary about Heavy Load, a UK based punk group that was referred
to in chapter three. The *Sun's* (2008a) story introduced them 'as loud,
fun, unpredictable punks – three of whom happen to have learning

difficulties', while adding that this made 'them the kind of 'novelty' ripe for documentary treatment'. But the narrative also explained that 'as the film progresses we see that the band are determined to prove they can entertain audiences outside their 'disability night' gigs', with the drummer of the band 'who has Down's syndrome', hailed as 'the star of the film'.

Similar details were covered by the *Daily Telegraph's* item, which presented Heavy Load as a series of 'outsider musicians' and described three of their members as 'genuine outsiders', as they have a LD. It also referred to the drummer of the group as 'a man in his late forties with Down's syndrome' but then the narrative turned to his individuality 'moody, solitary and serious minded… He's fascinating – a walking definition of an artistic temperament' (Gritten 2008:29). So, while both of these features highlighted the fact that three of the band members were learning disabled, they focused primarily on the artistic talents of these musicians, with the *Sun's* (2008a) item opening with the statement 'you will be pleased to know that punk is not dead'.

Having presented an overview of the stereotype variable, I will now turn to the next category of this content analysis' coding schedule, namely, the confusion of LD with mental illness (see Box 8, page 307). The views of focus group members will be incorporated within these explorations.

Confusing learning disability with mental illness

During the period of Wertheimer's (1987:24) study, terms such as 'learning difficulties' or 'learning disabilities' were 'yet to reach the press' and she raised concerns around 'the inability of many journalists to distinguish between mental illness and mental handicap (learning difficulties)'. Indeed, one news story from this study's content analysis echoed such matters in an interview with former Mencap's president, Lord Rix, who highlighted how generally in the past there had been a confusion 'between people with mental illness and learning disability' (Dalton 2010:7).

But as previously highlighted in chapter two, the term 'learning disability' is now generally used (MacIntyre 2008:2). Additionally, this research concerned contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers. Nevertheless, in chapter eight, I attributed the inclusion of this variable to the coding schedule of this content analysis (see Box 8, page 307), because I wanted to ascertain whether within the newsprint medium, confusion still persisted between LD and mental illness. This not only referred to the distinguishing ability of journalists but also to the manner in which LD narratives were presented and whether these portrayals supported such misunderstandings (Wertheimer 1987:24-25).

There were fifty seven instances in which illustrations of this confusion were coded, within the items of this content analysis with earlier time periods having the highest number of occurrences (see Table 16). When this data was presented to the focus groups, the first group were in the main surprised at the low incidence of such confusion, as they had thought that the newsprint medium would have got 'it more 'muddled' up'; while members of the second focus group emphasised this confusion between LD and mental health, as of importance 'to everybody with a LD'.

Table 16: Number of times when a confusion with mental illness was coded by newspaper, per year

Newspaper	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
The *Daily Mail*	8	11	4	6	5	34
The *Daily Telegraph*	3	3	2	4	4	16
The *Sun*	2	4	1	0	0	7
Total	**13**	**18**	**7**	**10**	**9**	**57**

With reference to individual publication, the *Daily Mail* had the most number of items (n=34) coded with a confusion with mental illness category. This was followed by the *Daily Telegraph* (n=16) and the *Sun* (n=7) (see Table 16). There also appeared to be a decreasing trend across the mid-market and the redtop tabloid titles, while the number of instances by their 'quality' counterpart remained relatively constant, throughout the time period of this study's sample (see Chart 5).

Chart 5: Number of times when a confusion with mental illness was coded by newspaper, per year
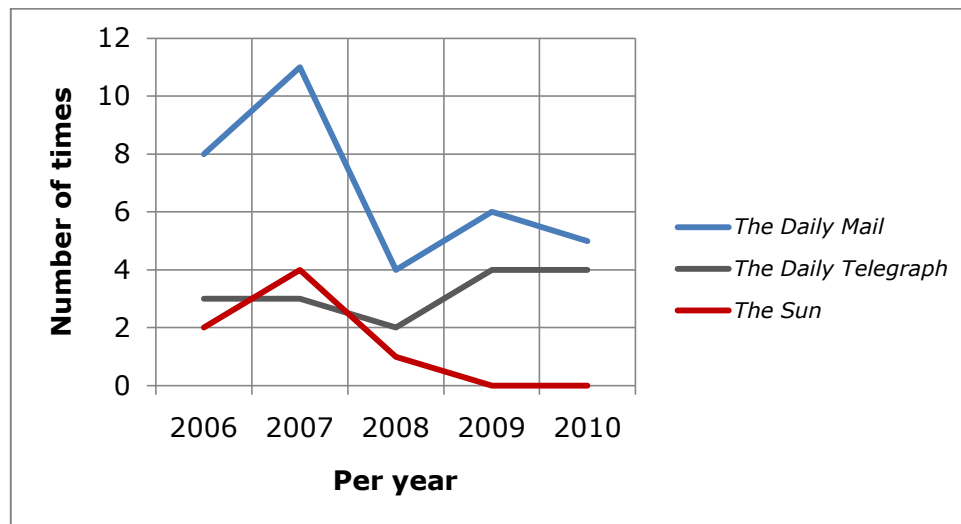
However, 2007 was the year with the largest number of instances (n=18) and it also involved the most examples from both the *Daily Mail* (n=11) and the *Sun* (n=4) (see Table 16). Therefore, it is to an exploration of this group of items that I will now turn (see Table 17).

Table 17: News stories which were coded with a confusion with mental illness, for the year 2007

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist/Author	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	27/10/07	Wilkes, D.	Bullies drove mother and daughter to fireball death
2	The *Daily Mail*	09/07/07	Wright, S.	The child abuser kills himself in court with hidden poison
3	The *Daily Mail*	23/06/07	Horne, B.	Jail for mother who watched as daughter aged nine was raped
4	The *Daily Mail*	22/06/07	Merrick, J.	Only 1 in 1,000 attacks on NHS staff leads to a prosecution
5	The *Daily Mail*	12/06/07	*The Daily Mail*	Autism: we are failing our children
6	The *Daily Mail*	05/06/07	Stagg, P.S.	Letters: disastrous policy
7	The *Daily Mail*	25/05/07	Johnston, J. and Wallis, L.	The cult guru who stole my son
8	The *Daily Mail*	17/04/07	Brogan, B.	Autism sufferers could fall foul of mental health bill
9	The *Daily Mail*	10/04/07	Feinmann, J.	Abigail's journey
10	The *Daily Mail*	16/03/07	Johnson, S.	Salary snoopers
11	The *Daily Mail*	16/03/07	Rees, G.	Gladiator fight care home staff face jail
12	The *Daily Telegraph*	19/09/07	Spencer, C.	Flight path Bush Theatre London W12

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist/Author	Headline
13	The *Daily Telegraph*	01/05/07	Gregg, D.P.	Letters: the stabbing of a daughter and the failure of government policy on problem families
14	The *Daily Telegraph*	26/02/07	Highfield, R.	Brain booster has potential to treat Down's syndrome
15	The *Sun*	20/11/07	Boyes, N.	Brute who stabbed woman to death
16	The *Sun*	23/06/07	Horne, B.	Love and hate
17	The *Sun*	15/05/07	*The Sun*	Stranded man plea
18	The *Sun*	03/05/07	Bugler, T.	Rape bid at store by fiend in tights

Amongst the group of news stories coded with a confusion with mental illness variable for the year 2007, there were several items which employed the phrase 'learning disabilities' or 'learning difficulties' along with other expressions, such as 'mental impairment' (see for example, Highfield 2007:8); 'mentally disabled' (Wilkes 2007:29) or 'the mentally handicapped' (Stagg 2007). While such terminology could be perceived as alternative descriptors for LD, this medley of words could still generate misunderstandings between LD and mental illness. Further, in some instances they involved terms that as mentioned in chapter two, are now deemed as derogatory and obsolete (Emerson *et al.* 2001:5). Indeed, this was highlighted by members of the second focus group in their additional comments, when they referred to the use of terminology: 'don't use the term 'mentally handicapped' – too negative'. They also highlighted their preference for the terms 'special needs' or 'different', while asserting: 'We are still equal' (see Box 4, page 274).

There were also some pieces that incorporated both a LD and a mental health angle, within their storylines. So, for example, one *Daily Mail* feature mentioned in passing how a Royal College of Psychiatrist publication had drawn 'on similar ideas as the 2001 Government White Paper, *Valuing People*, aimed at people with learning disabilities'. But predominantly this narration revolved around mental health issues and ran with the headline:

> Abigail's Journey. Good health: two years after Abigail Witchalls was paralysed by a deranged attacker, her psychiatrist mother describes her amazing recovery… and, surprisingly, insists: we must NOT toughen our mental health laws (Feinmann 2007:48).

Another article from the *Daily Mail* (2007b) concerned issues faced by Irish children with autism and their families and their struggles for services and 'treatment'. In this piece, the terms 'learning difficulties', 'learning disabilities' and 'intellectual disability' were used interchangeably and a variety of discourses were presented. This included the argument for a particular therapy that was described as improving the IQ of children with autism and the fact that in Ireland 'many autistic adults end up in psychiatric units under sedation'.

These ambiguous narratives can be associated with Wertheimer's (1987:24-25) findings and her observations that in some instances misunderstanding could be caused by the joint reporting of learning disability and mental illness. Moreover, she emphasised that this

confusion could even apply to newspaper readers 'who reckon to understand' the difference between them as:

> it is hard to get a picture of who or what was being discussed in an article headlined 'Takeover set on mental health services' which went on to discuss services 'for the (sic) mentally handicapped' and then proceeded to a discussion about 'staff involved in mental health services!''

But having explored the group of news stories across the 2007 confusion with mental illness variable, were there instances within the stories of this content analysis when narratives made a distinction between LD and mental illness?

A mid-market item that run with the headline: '1 in 5 Scots are now classed as disabled', clearly listed the varied types of 'disability' named in an executive document, which included 'physical or sensory impairments, mental health conditions, learning difficulties and long term health conditions, such as HIV' (Howarth and Grant 2008:17). There were also two stories, which reported on the same research study and ran with similar headlines, 'It's no joke, sarcasm can help detect dementia' (Hope 2008:23) and 'Inability to spot sarcasm linked to dementia' (Smith 2008:9). Both of these features clearly explained how a particular form of dementia can often go undiagnosed or can be 'mistaken for learning difficulties' (Hope 2008:23), with Smith (2008:9) adding 'or personality disorder'.

There were also items that talked about individual learning disabled people, such as in the case of Fiona Pilkington, who was described by Jardine (2009:19) as having 'learning difficulties herself' and who was also 'suffering from depression'. A letter to the *Daily Mail* written by a parent of a learning disabled woman, highlighted her 'severe learning difficulties' and then explained how 'at 18 she started to show signs of mental illness… manic depression, a dreadful disorder' (Fisher 2006:69). Another story covered the 'emotional breakdown' of Susan Boyle describing the 'star' as having a LD, while also referring to one of the programme's judges, who insisted that she had 'no underlying mental issues' (Nathan and Robertson 2009:5).

Indeed, there were thirty four instances across the stories of this content analysis that covered or referred to Susan Boyle (see Table 18). Most of these items talked about the gradual deterioration of Susan's mental well being and/or her admission to a mental health clinic for treatment. Although prior to the 'breakdown' incident, Midgley (2009:25) mentioned how she had suffered 'from depression and anxiety', following the death of her mother.

Table 18: News stories that covered or referred to Susan Boyle

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist/Author	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	16/01/10	Todd, B. and Nathan, S.	So what sent SUBO into a rage twice in 24 hours?
2	The *Daily Mail*	27/11/09	Boshoff, S.	Sobbing SUBO just wants to go home
3	The *Daily Mail*	20/08/09	Thomas, L.	X factor chiefs bring in the psychologists
4	The *Daily Mail*	08/08/09	Boshoff, A.	A reborn angel's delight
5	The *Daily Mail*	06/08/09	Boucher, P. and Clements, J.	The X recluse
6	The *Daily Mail*	20/06/09	Thomas, L.	Screaming SUBO skips fourth show
7	The *Daily Mail*	04/06/09	Revoir, P.	Subo's crisis was so predictable, says Parkinson
8	The *Daily Mail*	03/06/09	Simpson, R. *et al.*	Susan will need to be in Priory for weeks
9	The *Daily Mail*	02/06/09	Revoir, P. and Simpson, R.	Britain's got talent: now the backlash
10	The *Daily Mail*	02/06/09	Platell, A.	Sorry, but all of us – including me – must share the blame
11	The *Daily Mail*	01/06/09	Boshoff, A.	Next stop for Subo? A lonely hotel room and a £500 a night tour
12	The *Daily Mail*	28/05/09	*The Daily Mail*	If this plastic freak is Susan Boyle's support – things can only end in tears
13	The *Daily Mail*	22/05/09	Lampert, N.	The weird, the wacky and the not so wonderful!
14	The *Daily Mail*	18/04/09	Clarke, N.	Simple Susie superstar
15	The *Daily Telegraph*	11/06/09	Woods, J.	Face it: you're past your sell-by date
16	The *Daily Telegraph*	02/06/09	Singh, A.	Talent show may face Boyle inquiry
17	The *Daily Telegraph*	02/06/09	Gerrard, N.	Her sadness – our shame
18	The *Daily Telegraph*	18/04/09	Midgley, N.	Can this woman be the saviour of ITV?
19	The *Sun*	06/04/10	Hamilton, S.	Susan: I'm no Boyle painting
20	The *Sun*	17/11/09	Holmwood, L.	I promised my mum I would do something with my life, just before she died; Susan Boyle on vow behind her audition
21	The *Sun*	16/11/09	*The Sun*	SUBO defied docs
22	The *Sun*	18/08/09	Lee, C.	It's like Big Brother meets Jerry Springer
23	The *Sun*	06/08/09	Menhinnitt, D. and Nathan, S.	Autistic lad is X factor hit
24	The *Sun*	12/06/09	Jackson, K.	MPs shouldn't be paid, it's like your religion
25	The *Sun*	11/06/09	Lee, C.	Craig: I'd like to see BB end now
26	The *Sun*	04/06/09	Smeato, J.	I know what you're going through, SuBo
27	The *Sun*	03/06/09	Evans, C.	My view
28	The *Sun*	03/06/09	Nathan, S. and Robertson, C.	SUBO is a NoGo
29	The *Sun*	02/06/09	Quilliamp, S.	Stressed all along
30	The *Sun*	02/06/09	Nathan, S.	Susan's collapse; Why Boyle's in rehab
31	The *Sun*	01/06/09	Nathan, S. *et al.*	Boyle in a state
32	The *Sun*	29/05/09	Wells, T.	Boyling Susan is in hiding
33	The *Sun*	29/05/09	Walker, D. *et al.*	Save our SUBO
34	The *Sun*	29/04/09	Maxwell, M.	Susan's got life to lead

Within some of these news stories, Susan's 'learning difficulties' were identified as contributing to her inability to cope with the demands of her new found fame (see for example, Quilliamp 2009 and Smeato 2009). Others raised concerns on whether 'vulnerable' contestants like Susan 'should appear on reality shows' (Thomas 2009a). Such matters were highlighted earlier, during the as an object of violence prominent stereotype discussions (see Table 14).

In the main, these items associated Susan's mental ill-health with her transition to celebrity status and not with her LD. Narratives tended to relate her hospital admission with 'the stress of taking part in the programme' (Woods 2009:23) and 'like anyone else she has a breaking point – she is only human after all' (Walker *et al.* 2009:4). Such discourses were discussed in some detail with members of the first focus group of this study, with one person (EC) observing at the end of the meeting, how it was 'good' that the news stories of this content analysis had been generally supportive of Susan Boyle and her mental distress.

However, there were two mid-market Susan Boyle items that were coded with the category of confusion between LD and mental illness. The first story presented her as:

> well known in the village where she has lived all her life as the slightly batty spinster… Every village has one, and 48 year old Susan Boyle, who was born with minor brain damage and has learning difficulties, obligingly played the role to which she had been cast (Clarke 2009).

The second featured the period after her breakdown and how her life and physical appearance had had the 'ultimate makeover' and 'no matter how elegant and radiant she looks in pictures, there is no putting a gloss on her fragile mental health'. This narrative then proceeded to describe Susan as 'born with slight learning difficulties due to oxygen deprivation during birth' and 'how locals knew her as a slightly batty spinster' (Boshoff 2009c).

Overall, this exploration of the confusion of LD with mental illness variable reiterates Wertheimer's (1987:24-25) concerns that such misunderstandings can be supported by the manner in which LD narratives are presented by a newsprint medium. Further, as McGill and Wilkinson (1990:68) observe:

> Bearing in mind the concept of the 'naïve reader'… an article which attempts to clarify the difference between, say, people with mental handicaps and people with mental health problems may have an effect opposite to the one intended.

Nevertheless, terms like 'learning disabilities' or 'learning difficulties' appear to have reached the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers and there were instances when LD was clearly distinguished from mental ill health, such as in the coverage of the Susan Boyle story (see for example, Nathan and Robertson 2009). This storyline was one of the overall headings of the next category of this study's coding schedule 'theme(s)' (see Box 8, page 307), to which I will now turn.

These discussions of the content analysis will feature comments from focus group members.

The themes variable: recurring storylines

The themes variable could be simply presented as a narration of events as and when they occurred, alongside the coverage of related topics and follow ups to individual storylines. However, a preliminary examination of this category revealed a variety of recurring themes, across the news stories of this content analysis. Consequently, and as I explained in chapter eight, these were coded and grouped under distinct general headings, transforming this diverse body of information into succinct thematic units for further analyses (see Table 4, page 323). However, this variable was limited to the coding of up to three main topics, because this made the resultant data much more manageable for subsequent analyses. Consequently, as in some cases more than one theme was featured within a storyline, the amount of items listed under this variable exceeded the total number of news stories of the content analytical sample (n=546) (see Table 5) and in total, six hundred and fifty five instances were coded for this category (see Table 19).

Table 19: Count of general themes which were covered by each news story, per newspaper

General themes	The *Daily Mail*	The *Daily Telegraph*	The *Sun*	Total
CCC: Reporting of court case proceedings that involve learning disabled people as perpetrators of crime	11	4	20	35
CCV: Reporting of court case proceedings that involve learning disabled people as victims of crime, includes public inquiries	29	15	46	90
CEL: Celebrity features which referred to LD or learning disabled people	4	3	1	8
COND: Individual, family, paid carers and general perspectives on particular conditions	15	3	6	24
EV: Features that refer to employment and volunteering opportunities with learning disabled people	2	2	2	6
IND: Individual stories about learning disabled people	25	10	16	51
M: Miscellaneous items in which reference to LD or learning disabled people is made generally	17	17	10	44
ORG: Features on organisations and their employees that provide services for learning disabled people, includes charities	2	8	3	13
PA: Individual, family, paid carers and general perspectives on services, benefits etc. Includes 'misuse' of benefits/services or high costs to taxpayer or state	6	1	3	10
PC: Coverage of or reference to incidents when learning disabled people were perpetrators of crime	7	2	6	15
PF: Individual, family, paid carers and general perspectives on services (LD and general), benefits etc. Includes discriminatory practices against learning disabled people, closure of LD services and criticisms of the benefits system	36	19	9	64
RC: Raising a learning disabled child, from a parents perspective	19	3	5	27
RF: Coverage of reports, social and legal reforms or guidelines which were related to or referred to LD or to learning disabled people	23	29	3	55
RS: Coverage of research studies which were related or referred to LD or to learning disabled people	8	9	1	18
RV: Reviews of books, TV programmes, plays, music, food etc… that referred to LD or learning disabled people	5	15	13	33
S: Sports related items, such as the coverage of sports events that involved learning disabled athletes or referred to sports people, involved in LD sports events or organisations	4	2	5	11
SB: Susan Boyle, includes coverage or reference to her story	14	4	16	34
T: Coverage of or reference to incidents when discriminatory language was used	1	5	2	8
VG: Coverage of or reference to incidents when learning disabled people were victims of crime within communities, in general	24	16	36	76
VS: Coverage of or reference to incidents when learning disabled people were victims of crime and/or instances of victimisation within specific communities, such as residential homes or NHS establishments	10	17	6	33
Total	262	184	209	655

Chart 6: Count of general themes which were covered by each news story, per newspaper
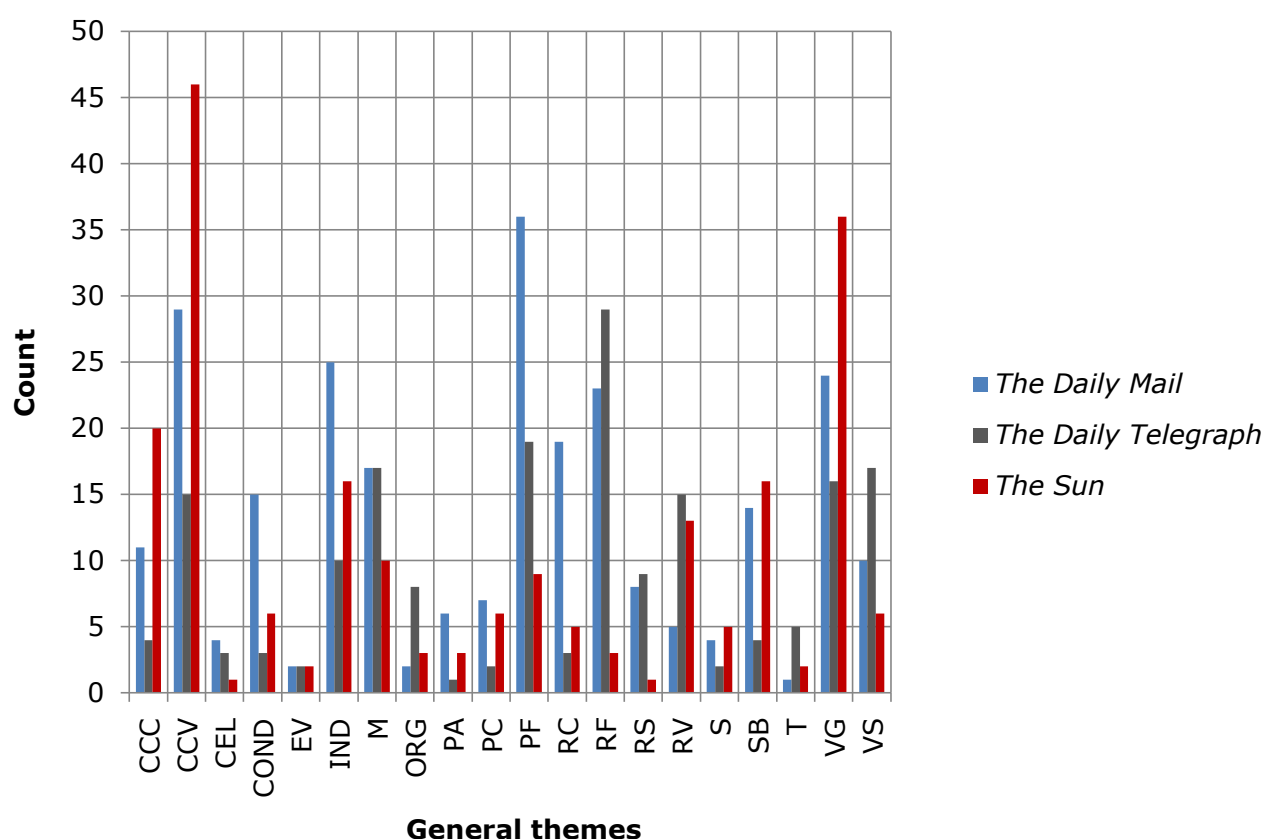
When this data was explored per newspaper, the 'PF' themes categorisation was the highest ranking group for the *Daily Mail* (n=36). These involved articles that talked about discriminatory practices against learning disabled people, closure of LD services and critics of the benefits system. By contrast, the *Daily Telegraph* had the most number of stories (n=29), across the 'RF' themes category with the coverage of reports, social and legal reforms or guidelines that were related to or referred to LD or to learning disabled people; while the *Sun* ranked the highest in the 'CCV' group, which included storylines about the reporting of court case proceedings that involved learning disabled people as victims of crime

(n=46) (see Chart 6 and Table 19). This inclination by each publication

for particular storylines can be explained by their individual journalistic

styles, which were formerly discussed in chapter four (see for example,

Cole and Harcup 2010 and Tunstall 1996).

Nevertheless, a further exploration of the themes variable revealed

that overall, the 'CCV' category was the most featured topic (n=90). This

was followed by the coverage of or reference to incidents when learning

disabled people had been victims of crime and/or instances of

victimisation within communities, generally (VG) (n=76). There were also

thirty three news stories that covered or made reference to incidents

when learning disabled people had been victims of crime and/or instances

of victimisation within specific communities, such as residential homes or

NHS establishments (VS) (see Table 19).

Collectively, these three groups of items covered an array of

storylines that ranged from the coverage of or reference to disability hate

crime incidents (see for example, Birrell 2010, Britten 2009 and the *Daily*

Mail 2010b); manslaughter or murder cases (see for example,

Brocklebank 2008 and the *Sun* 2006b); sexual and/or physical assaults,

both in the community generally (see for example, Steggles 2007); or

within specific communities, such as 'a specialist hospital' (see for

example, the *Sun* 2007c); to the story of 'three disabled teenagers' who

were allegedly sent out of a beauty salon as they were 'scaring off other

customers' and as a result they won £4,500, 'in an out-of-court settlement' (Cockcroft 2008:13 and Grant 2008b:5).

Additionally, there were fourteen items within the 'individual' (IND) themes variable, which represented or referred to learning disabled people as 'victims'. However, these narrations were not coded with a 'CCV', 'VG' or 'VS' category because they did not necessarily involve criminal activities or clearly established acts of victimisation against learning disabled people, either generally or within specific communities. So, for example, one story talked about how 'care home chiefs' were being investigated over claims that 'care home workers' had taken a 'patient to a strip show', allegedly without her consent (MacDonald 2006); while Grice's (2006:17) feature narrated the upbringing of 'an enfant sauvage' who had 'survived on raw meat and scraps' after 'her indifferent, alcoholic parents left her outside one night and she crawled into a hovel where they kept dogs'.

Nine items presented the cases of learning disabled people as 'victims' of social services and/or justice systems (see for example, Bruce 2008, Leonard 2010 and Steggles 2008). Seven of these narratives referred specifically to learning disabled parents and how their parenting skills had been questioned by social care professionals and/or the courts (see for example, Beckford 2010b, Dolan 2009, the *Daily Mail* 2006 and Weathers 2009). Generally, such discourses were sympathetic to the

difficulties faced by learning disabled parents and run with headlines like:

'Council staff used CCTV to spy on parents in the bedroom' (Beckford 2008:14) or: 'You can't silence justice: open family courts and an outrageous abuse of power' (Phillips 2006:18). By contrast, in their comparative study of the newspaper coverage of disability, the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and the Glasgow Media Unit (2011:8) identified that a:

> reduction in stories representing disabled people as victims and as sufferers was also accompanied by a reduction in the number of articles describing disabled people as being in genuine need of services or experiencing inadequate service provision.

Nonetheless, within this content analysis, other instances of victimisation could also be recognised across narratives that were explored in the as an object of violence prominent stereotype discussions, which included the application of disablist language by celebrities and the employment of learning disabled contestants by some reality TV programmes (see for example, Birrell 2010). So, the themes variable that covered or made reference to eight instances when discriminatory language was used (T) could also be considered as victimisation incidents (see Table 20), as could the nine items coded with a Susan Boyle themes category (SB), which were formerly identified as having a leading characterisation of as an object of violence (see Table 14).

Table 20: News stories which were coded with a 'T' themes category and covered or made reference to incidents when discriminatory language was used

	Newspaper	Date	Journalist/Author	Headline
1	The *Daily Mail*	14/05/09	Doughty, S.	Slurred by the adoption Nazis
2	The *Daily Telegraph*	26/10/10	Midgley, N.	BBC says sorry after Clarkson's joke about 'special needs' Ferrari
3	The *Daily Telegraph*	11/03/10	Beckford, M.	TV has human right to offend, says watchdog
4	The *Daily Telegraph*	15/05/09	Paton, G.	Charity drops 'retarded' remark
5	The *Daily Telegraph*	11/10/08	Martin, N.	Anger at BBC disabled jibe
6	The *Daily Telegraph*	05/04/06	Condron, S.	Eden project chief quits over disabled comment
7	The *Sun*	21/03/09	Pascoe-Watson, G.	Can Obama drop a Barrack? Yes he can
8	The *Sun*	25/02/08	*The Sun*	Disabled howl row

A further twelve stories from the 'individual' (IND) themes variable covered the fatality of a learning disabled person, with the cause of death ranging from a home fire (the *Sun* 2006c); causes unknown (Duffy 2009); drowning (the *Daily Mail* 2007c and the *Sun* 2007d); epilepsy (the *Sun* 2009d); swine flu (Derbyshire 2009); to two instances when parents had killed themselves and their learning disabled sons (Brooke 2006, Brooke *et al.* 2006, Craven and Brooke 2006, Knight 2006, Savill 2007 and Salkeld and Andrews 2007).

Consequently, it could be argued that in this content analysis, thirty eight per cent of items (n=251), involved some form of victim related theme, reiterating previous explorations of the prominence of the learning disabled person as an object of violence stereotype (see Charts 2 to 4 and Tables 8, 12 and 13). When these findings were presented to the first focus group of this study, members were in the main not surprised 'given the amount of stories about disability hate crime', within the sample of

this research project. It is also possible to apply the concept of news values, as discussed in chapter four, to disability hate crime events and how certain features within these narratives, such as a human interest appeal and a bad news overtone (see Box 2, page 133), can transform them into newsworthy LD stories, accounting for their prominence across the news stories of this content analysis.

Still, as previously emphasised, Wertheimer (1987:15) found that items about individual learning disabled people as 'victims outnumbered stories about achievement by two to one'. Further, she only came across two articles about learning disabled people 'involved in criminal activities'. In this study's content analysis, there were thirty five items that reported on court case proceedings of learning disabled people as perpetrators of crime (CCC); together with fifteen stories, which covered or made reference to incidents when learning disabled people were presented as responsible for criminal activities (PC) (see Table 19).

Equally, Carter *et al.* (1996:178) identified sport as 'the most commonly addressed topic', within their newspaper coverage of LD; while Wilkinson and McGill (2001:72) found that working with learning disabled people was one of the most frequently featured theme, across a 2001 sample of articles from the British newspaper: the *Guardian*. However, both of these themes were among the lowest ranking groups across this study's content analytical sample, with only eleven news stories coded

with a sports related themes category (S) and six features that referred to employment and volunteering opportunities, with learning disabled people (EV) (see Table 19).

Having presented an overview of the themes variable, I will now turn to the final category of this study's coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307) and the sources of the news stories of this content analysis, which will include the views of focus group members.

The sources variable: informing storylines

Not unlike the themes variable of this content analytical study, an array of informants was identified during the coding of the source category and these were arranged under generic group headings, as I explained in chapter eight. Further, since in some cases more than one source was featured in a storyline, the amount of items listed for this variable exceeded the total number of news stories of this content analysis (n=546) (see Table 5). Consequently, nine hundred and fifty eight instances were recorded under this categorisation (see Table 21).

Table 21: An overview of the sources that were used by each news story, per newspaper

Source(s)	The *Daily Mail*	The *Daily Telegraph*	The *Sun*	Total
a) Learning disabled person	30	7	20	57
b) Family member of a learning disabled person	75	22	45	142
c) Friend of a learning disabled person	4	2	1	7
d) Paid carer of a learning disabled person	10	4	5	19
e) LD organisation	19	22	6	47
f) Charitable organisation	18	15	4	37
g) Governmental organisation	38	22	12	72
h) Professional organisation	5	4	1	10
i) Politicians and senior governmental positions	33	23	10	66
j) Law and order	59	31	64	154
k) Health professional	18	13	2	33
l) Teaching professional	8	8	1	17
m) Celebrity	11	2	14	27
n) Neighbour	14	8	9	31
NA) Not applicable	17	22	37	76
o) Unknown	12	5	9	26
p) Other	64	35	38	137
Total	435	245	278	958

However, and as I highlighted in chapter eight, the 'source(s)' variable was not simply about the number of informers that were employed by the news stories, as a category was only coded once, per item. Primarily, it concerned the identification of these informants, if any were used and an exploration of the level of employment of learning disabled people as sources, within the narratives. Therefore, Table 21 presents an overview of the sources that were used by the news stories of this content analysis, per newspaper. Additionally, the exploration that follows only focuses on four hundred and seventy stories of this study's sample, as seventy six items did not use informants within their storylines and they were coded with a 'not applicable' (NA) categorisation. This particular data set is visually represented by Chart 7.

Chart 7: An overview of the sources that were used by each news story, per newspaper
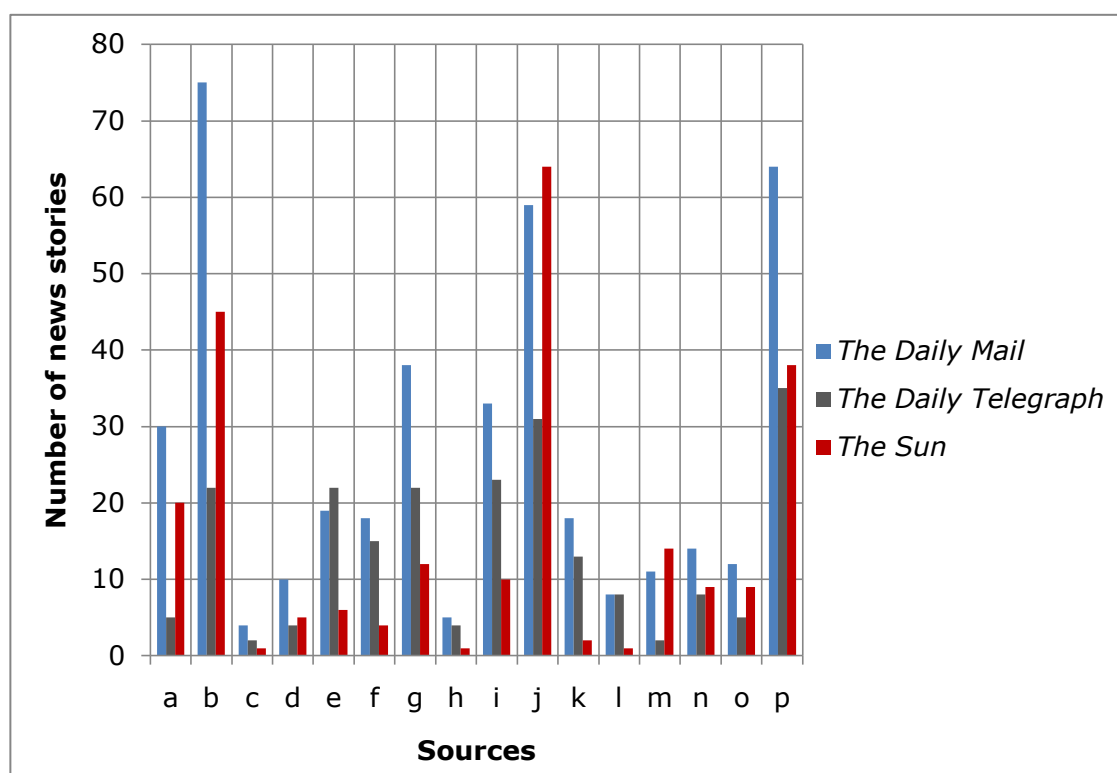
Overall, the most used source across the items of this content analysis was the categorisation of law and order (j) (n=154) (see Table 21). These findings can be associated with the former analyses of the themes variable and the high proportion of storylines with a 'victim' related theme (see Chart 6 and Table 19); which in turn reiterated earlier explorations of the prominence of the stereotypical representation of learning disabled people as an object of violence, across the news stories of this study (see Charts 2 to 4 and Tables 8, 12 and 13).

When this data was examined per newspaper, the *Daily Mail* ranked highest across the family member of a learning disabled person 'source(s)' variable (b) (n=75), the second most used informant of this

content analysis (n=142). One hundred and thirty eight instances across the 'quality' items, involved organisational and professional sources (namely categories: 'e' to 'l'). By contrast, the *Sun* which had the most number of items across the 'CCV' themes category, with the reporting of court case proceedings that involved learning disabled people as victims of crime (n=46) (see Chart 6 and Table 19), also led in the law and order (j) 'source(s)' categorisation (n=64), the most used informant of this content analytical study (n=154) (see Chart 7 and Table 21). Such partiality by each publication for particular sources of news stories can be explained by their individual journalistic styles, as discussed in chapter four (see for example, Cole and Harcup 2010 and Tunstall 1996).

But what about the use of learning disabled people as sources for the news stories of this study's content analysis?

In the concluding section of chapter four, I drew attention to the rare use of learning disabled people, as sources for newspaper stories (see for example, Wertheimer 1987:29). Concerns were also raised of the general absence of the voices of disabled people in the press coverage of disability (see for example, Adams 2008:5, Cooke *et al.* 2000:6 and Robertson 2009:12), with the use of disabled people 'as exemplars to substantiate generalised third person claims', rather than as primary sources of a news story (Huws and Jones 2011:102). Such observations highlighted the silencing of disabled people in newspaper discourses, a

matter to which I referred to in chapter one, while emphasising not only the significance of the identification of the sources of news stories but that close attention should also be given to their prominence within these storylines. Consequently, these explorations can reveal new insights into the use of learning disabled people as primary sources for news items and the integration of their lived experiences within these storylines. It can also assist in the assessment of their societal status and whether they are changes in the social culture, with regard to their issues (Haller 2010b:28).

Within the sample of this content analysis, there were fifty seven instances when the 'learning disabled person' (a) sources category was coded, with the *Daily Mail* leading in application (n=30), followed by the *Sun* (n=20) and the *Daily Telegraph* (n=7), respectively (see Chart 7 and Table 21). Although in four of these items the story's informant was disputing her LD (Dolan 2009, Knapton 2009, Moore 2009 and Weathers 2009). Additionally, one story (Evans 2009) was originally assigned with a 'not applicable' (NA) sources category because the informant was unidentifiable, within the narrative. This was amended following this study's first focus group meeting, when said omission was highlighted by a group member (see Appendix 12, Slide 15). However, two stories which were coded with a 'LD organisation' (e) sources categorisation, featured learning disabled people, as spokespersons for their establishments (Beckford 2010a and Paton 2009).

In total, only six per cent of the 'source(s)' variable of this content

analysis involved a learning disabled person (n=59), highlighting their

poor uptake as informants and their lack of involvement within newsprint

discussions, including narratives that could be of significance to many

learning disabled people (see Chart 7 and Table 21). So, as emphasised in

the preliminary discussions with members of this study's first focus

group: 'Better media coverage will improve attitudes towards people with

a LD. Why aren't more people with a LD in the media? Where are they?'

Moreover, they observed that journalists are sometimes more interested

in talking with 'executive' people, than with learning disabled media

spokespersons.

Wertheimer (1987:34) noted that within her analyses of the

representations of learning disabled people by the British Press, during

the extensive coverage of a sterilisation case of a learning disabled

woman, which was previously discussed in chapter four, much of this

reporting 'accounted for a substantial proportion of the letters, comment

column pieces and leaders' of her survey. However, the knowledge base

of these opinions were not always known and 'regrettably those who were

potentially most affected – other people with learning difficulties – were

not asked to give their views'.

Cooke *et al.* (2000:6) argue that newspapers tend to cover

disability and disabled people as 'other', since 'there is an inherent

assumption that this is the only way in which readers will access the story' and 'they are not expected to see their own experiences reflected in the accounts of a disabled person'. So, narrations focus on the views of relatives, friends or professionals as 'their responses to a disabled person is felt to be closer to the experience of the average reader' and as a result they will feel more at ease with this 'peer' reporting.

Out of the ninety stories of this content analytical study, which were coded with a 'CCV' themes category and reported on the court case proceedings of learning disabled people as victims of crime, only seven items included the perspective of a learning disabled person (Brooke and Tait 2006, France and Parker 2010, Grant 2008b, Koster 2008, Pownall 2009, and the *Sun* 2010d). Although, as previously mentioned, in one of these cases the story's source was disputing their LD (Knapton 2009).

When the data of the 'source(s)' variable of this content analysis was presented to this study's first focus group, generally members felt that 'as media spokespeople of a LD organisation... we've scratched the surface', with one member (SM) stating that said information made them 'feel very proud' of their colleagues and their media work. Equally, when these findings were discussed with the second focus group and compared with what Wertheimer (1987:29) had found in her study, overall members thought that this was a move forward, with one member (PF) asserting: 'Journalists should come here... should be talking to people with

a learning disability'. Therefore, it is of the essence 'for someone to have their own voices and their own words heard' (Mencap Cymru 2013:1).

But what about the level of employment of learning disabled people, as informants for the fifty seven stories of this content analysis, which were coded with a learning disabled person (a) 'source(s)' variable?

A further exploration of the use of disabled people as sources for news stories can reveal their prominence, within these narratives. This can also support an assessment of their societal status and reveal any changes in the social culture, with regard to their concerns (Haller 2010b:28). So, for example, Huws and Jones (2011:102) found in their study of the portrayals of autism by the British Press that 'instead of acting as primary sources to report, refute or confirm issues, people with autism were used as exemplars to substantiate generalised third person claims'. Equally, Nairn and Coverdale (2005:281) noted that only five of the six hundred newsprint items of their study's sample, met their 'criteria for a person with a mental disorder being reported directly'.

However, out of the fifty seven items of this content analysis that featured an 'a' sources category, forty four stories used a learning disabled person as a leading informant, with storylines ranging from sports features (see for example, Larkin 2007, Lowe 2007 and Macaskill 2008); Susan Boyle (see for example, Hamilton 2010 and Holmwood

2009); victimisation incidents (see for example, Koster 2008 and Sharpe 2006); to a *Daily Mail* article, which told the story of Andrea and Paul 'the first Down's couple to marry in Britain' (Cable 2006:28). Further, the two articles coded with a LD organisation (e) 'source(s)' variable, which featured learning disabled people as spokespeople for their establishments (Beckford 2010a and Paton 2009), presented these individuals as primary informants.

There were also other instances in which learning disabled people were still able to express their views and experiences in the matter under discussion, even though they were employed as third party sources. So, for example, an item that was previously referred to in the general findings section of this chapter, reported on the abuse of learning disabled people by 'care home staff' and featured several sources. These included the parents of a learning disabled man, who was described as a '38-year-old, who has a mental age of five and a half'. However, his lived experiences of 'abuse at the hands of care home staff' were noted within the narrative as he explained: 'they shouldn't have done it to me… I knew it was wrong. I want to tell the police, I want them to be involved' (Doughty 2006:6). So, while a poor uptake of learning disabled people as sources for news stories was observed within the sample of this content analysis (n=59), their opinions still featured with some prominence across narratives.

Having presented an overview of the data that was collected during the content analysis stage of this study, together with the views of focus group members with regards to these discussions; I will now conclude this chapter with a consideration of the significance and meanings of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers.

Conclusion

This chapter reported on the key findings of this study's content analysis, which included an overview of the general data that was collected and an examination of the remaining variables, as listed in the coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307). It referred to individual news stories and specific storylines to reveal prime examples of contemporary portrayals of learning disabled people by the English national newsprint medium, facilitating more detailed explorations of these narratives. I also compared and contrasted these analyses with the growing body of empirical research, within the areas of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a). Throughout these discussions, I incorporated the views of focus group members to facilitate their active engagement in disability and media research discourses, as co-producers of knowledge. Consequently, it started to address the significant lack of LD research in the field of disability and media (see for example, Haller 2010a), which was reiterated earlier and the handful of studies that have examined the newspaper representations of learning disabled people (see Table 1, page

136), with the near absence of their views and experiences in this body of work (see for example, Wertheimer 1987).

In total, five hundred and forty six news stories formed the sample of this content analysis (see Table 5). The learning disabled person as an object of violence was identified as the most featured media stereotype (see Charts 2 and 3 and Tables 8 and 12). This standing was reiterated further by the themes variable, as thirty eight per cent of the stories (n=251), involved some form of victim related theme (see Chart 6 and Tables 15, 20 and 21). While one member from the first focus group (KI) attributed this high-ranking characterisation to the recent prevalence of disability hate crime stories and people's attitudes towards learning disabled people, generally members were surprised to learn about this prominence.

Fifty seven of the articles confused LD with mental illness (see Table 16). These findings also surprised some focus group members, as they thought that the press would have got 'it more 'muddled' up'. Others observed that such misinterpretation was of importance 'to everybody with a LD'. But despite the fact that terms like 'learning disabilities' or 'learning difficulties' are now regularly used by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers and there were occasions within the stories of this content analysis when LD was clearly differentiated from mental ill-health, misunderstandings can still be supported by the

way in which narratives are presented, by a newsprint medium (see for example, Feinmann 2007:48).

In only around six per cent of the items (n=59) was a learning disabled person used as a source in the storylines, drawing attention to their rare use as informants and their lack of engagement in newsprint discourses (see Chart 7 and Table 21). While their opinions still featured with some standing across narratives and not just to validate generalised third party claims (see for example, Doughty 2006:6), learning disabled people are not in the main been asked to express their views. So, as asserted by one of the members of the second focus group (PF), journalists 'should be talking to people with a learning disability'.

To conclude, news media content can help us understand the values of this medium in their representations of disabled people and their issues, while assessing their societal status and any changes in the social culture with regard to their concerns (Haller 2010b:28). In chapter three, I explored the prevalent ways in which disability can be represented by the media to reveal 'disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people' (Barnes 1992a:15), including other portrayals that could be regarded as more specific to LD (see for example, Wertheimer 1987). This included the stereotypical depiction of the disabled person as an object of violence, which is regularly featured by the media, particularly as in real life many disabled people are often

subject to victimisation. These portrayals have been noted to contribute

to and underpin the misguided idea that disabled people are completely

helpless and dependant, while supporting the perpetuation of such

victimisation. Further, the absence across media portrayals of a diversity

of roles for disabled people also reinforces the belief that disabled people

are incapable of looking after themselves and are therefore, 'susceptible

to violence' (Barnes 1992a:6).

Nonetheless, the predominant coverage of the learning disabled

person as an object of violence by a national newsprint medium can draw

attention to the significance of these events, because as Quarmby

(2011:236) asserts:

> The targeting of disabled people has happened while society has
> looked the other way. Disability hate crime was the invisible crime,
> the crime that people looked straight through because they could
> not recognise it for what it was. Now it is coming into focus, and we
> can ignore it no longer.

It is also possible to apply the concept of news values, which was

presented in chapter four, to disability hate crime events to identify

characteristics within storylines, such as a human interest appeal and a

bad news overtone (see Box 2, page 133) that can transform them into

newsworthy LD items, accounting for their prominence across the news

stories of this content analytical sample. But while it is of the essence 'to

talk about victims' these narratives 'can create the idea that disabled

people are only ever victims' (Mencap Cymru 2013:1). So, as asserted by

some of this study's first focus group members:

> Newspapers like to make news, that's why people buy newspapers. It would be good if there were more 'positive' stories about people with a LD in the newspapers. But what is positive? It's about achieving things, also things like people with a LD, not been seen.

In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I will present an

overview of the key findings of this study, drawing them together to

demonstrate their contributions and implications to the future direction of

inclusive LD research practices and to situate them within the wider

realms of disability and media discourses.

Chapter ten
Advancing inclusive research practices and media discourses: learning disabled people and newspaper representations

<u>Introduction</u>

> What do university people know about people with a learning difficulty? (AM, RAG member).

> People to see me 'as a person' not my LD… But is that newsworthy? Think it is: What life is like for people with a learning disability… that should be in the papers (KI, focus group member).

The above quotations were drawn from the data that was collected during the fieldwork stages of this study. The first quotation refers to the RAG and their thoughts on ten top tips for researchers wanting to work inclusively with learning disabled people, as discussed in chapter six. One person accentuated the expertise of learning disabled people in LD discourses, advocating for their active involvement in research and the advancement of inclusive research principles. The second quotation concerns the first focus group and their views on the findings of this study's content analysis, which were presented in chapter eight. During this meeting, one member emphasised the need for others to acknowledge them as a person and not simply for their LD, while

recognising the newsworthiness of the lived experiences of learning disabled people in the advancement of newsprint discourses.

Taken together, these quotations underpin the overall aim of this research, which is to develop critical insights in conducting inclusive research with and for learning disabled people. Through the adoption of a mixed method approach in which learning disabled people are placed at the centre of the research process, this study seeks to identify and critically analyse the significance and meanings of representations of learning disabled adults by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I offered an insight into my motivations for instigating this study and the rationale for its focus on two domains of the silencing of learning disabled people in the production of knowledge, namely, research practices and the newsprint medium. Essentially, it stemmed from my observations of the significant lack of LD studies in the field of disability and media, with few studies examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people and the near absence of their views and experiences, within this body of work. I also identified the English national press as a leading medium that was likely to engage regularly with LD discourses, since learning disabled people are rarely portrayed in the media. Consequently, it was acknowledged as a leading vehicle, through which contemporary media representations of LD

could be identified, as a basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters.

Influenced by a social model approach to disability and through the application and development of inclusive research philosophies to my fieldwork practices, I facilitated access with and for learning disabled people to academic debates and engaged them as co-producers of knowledge. Moreover, given that I was seeking to use my research as a vehicle for empowerment, Oliver's (1999a:183) notion of 'research as production' prompted me to focus my efforts on ensuring that the generation of knowledge could be of use to disabled people and their supporters, in their struggles against oppressive practices.

In this chapter, I will present an overview of the key findings of this study, drawing them together to demonstrate their contribution to the advancement of inclusive LD research practices and to situate them, within the wider realms of disability and media discourses. I will then highlight the strengths and the limitations of the research, including its level of inclusiveness with and for learning disabled people and the roles that I played as a nondisabled inclusive researcher. Consideration of the implications of the findings for the future direction of inclusive research practices and media discourses that engage learning disabled people as co-producers of knowledge will also be given.

<u>Key findings</u>

This study was informed and influenced by a systematic literature review incorporating a number of interlinked themes ranging from an overview of the individual and the social models of disability by exploring their underlying principles, origins and associated terminology, together with their influences to LD discourses; a synopsis of the modern-day landscape of the UK's national newsprint medium; to an exploration of the application of a social model approach to disability studies and associated research and the emergence of emancipatory and inclusive research traditions (see Chapters two, four and five, respectively).

Through the application of a mixed method approach, I also incorporated distinct but interrelated data collection stages, including a RAG and two focus groups with learning disabled people and their supporters and a content analysis of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults, by the print version of English national newspapers. Additionally, I kept a research diary and adopted a reflexive stance to the research process and my fieldwork practices (see Chapters six to eight, respectively).

As a result, a wealth of data was generated in the lifetime of this study, from which it is possible to identify a number of key points that can contribute to the advancement of inclusive research practices by and with

learning disabled people, while drawing from some main themes which can be situated, within the wider realms of disability and media.

First, while the marginalisation of learning disabled people in social model discourses was noted in chapter two, this study followed the premise that rather than focus on said omissions, it was preferable to explore the ways in which learning disabled people could be supported so that they could contribute to these discussions. Additionally, I supported the contention that the social model can be enhanced by learning disabled people and commonalities among struggles can be recognised, as their views come together with the collective voice of disabled people.

The social model presented this study with a way of thinking about disability that could break the silence of learning disabled people in the production of knowledge. Consequently, contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers were explored, through an inclusive approach that engaged this group as partners in the research and that gave due precedence to their lived experiences, on the matters under discussion.

However, barriers to academic discourses were also recognised in chapter two, including the inaccessibility of the written medium for many learning disabled people, which could be made more accessible with some support and creativity. So, I gradually developed a range of user-friendly

resources for this study (see Table 2, page 200) and the RAG was involved in the development of some of these tools (see for example, Appendices 11 and 12). This included the reproduction of the details from the information sheet (see Appendix 5) to an oversized paper roll design that explained with a combination of pictures and words, particulars in an easy to understand format (see Appendix 10). The paper roll version of this study's information sheet was an innovative way of presenting information to individuals who were unfamiliar with academic language and which explained research terminology and other related matters in a straightforward manner. Subsequent feedback of these resources by members of the RAG and the focus groups were overtly positive. These accessible materials proved invaluable throughout this study's fieldwork practices, as they supported the active engagement of learning disabled people and their supporters in academic discourses, facilitating the process of working within inclusive research principles (see Chapters six and seven).

Secondly, and as emphasised in chapter three, disabling media imagery remains a concern for many disabled people and their organisations, with the prevalence of generalised disability stereotypes. In this regard, I identified other depictions that could be regarded as more specific to LD, adding to the media's stereotypical mix of disability, while advancing seminal works in the areas of disability and media and related discourses. Collectively, these media portrayals were integrated within a

content analysis coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307), through which contemporary representations of learning disabled adults in the print version of English national newspapers were subsequently examined. This framework offered a novel approach to the analyses of media content that acknowledged the diversity of the disabled population, rather than simply distinguishing between 'negative' and 'positive' portrayals of disabled people and a rudimentary approach to the study of media representations (see Chapters eight and nine).

Thirdly, in chapter four, I pointed out that as learning disabled people are rarely portrayed in the media, a leading medium that was likely to engage regularly with LD discourses needed to be identified, so that it could be used as a vehicle to identify modern-day media portrayals of learning disabled adults. Consequently, the English national press was recognised as an appropriate influential medium, despite speculation surrounding the demise of this industry and in total, five hundred and forty six LD stories were found for the period 2006 to 2010. These items formed the basis of this study's content analytical sample and the significance and meanings of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the English national newsprint medium were subsequently analysed by learning disabled people and their supporters (see Chapter nine).

The concept of newsworthiness was also explored in chapter four, by applying Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) taxonomy of news values to the findings of the handful of research studies that have specifically examined the newspaper coverage of LD (see Table 1, page 136). This exploratory exercise highlighted some of the characteristics that can make a LD story newsworthy and drew attention to how certain elements of a storyline can be heightened, downplayed or excluded. It also identified the rare use of learning disabled people as sources for newspaper stories and the low prominence of disabled people across storylines, when they are used, in practice. This prompted the inclusion of a 'source(s)' variable to this study's content analysis coding schedule (see Box 8, page 307). However, it was included not only to ascertain the identity of these sources, but also to explore the level of employment of learning disabled people as informants, within the narratives. As a result, findings from this content analysis revealed new insights into the use of learning disabled people as primary sources for news stories and the integration of their views and experiences within these storylines. It also helped to assess their societal status and any changes in the social culture with regard to their concerns (see Chapters eight and nine).

Fourthly, while some of the challenges and matters that have been raised in the translation of inclusive research principles to LD research were recognised in chapter five, this was the approach that was adopted in this study, as defined by Walmsley and Johnson (2003:64). I chose to

apply the term 'inclusive research' because it acknowledges both participatory and emancipatory approaches for research by and with learning disabled people and by so doing, it did not make any prior assumptions about whether this research would correspond specifically to either of these research traditions.

From its inception, I knew that this study would not meet fundamental emancipatory principles, particularly as it would be challenged by the material and the social relations of research production. But I strived to go beyond participatory practices and to facilitate research that could contribute to the emancipatory process of disabled people. Consequently, this study remained open to emancipatory thinking and this allowed for the research process to be informed and influenced, by learning disabled people and their supporters (see Chapters six and seven).

Similarly, in chapter five, I pointed out that many learning disabled people require considerable support from non-learning disabled researchers in order to participate in research, raising questions over the validity of this body of work, as a true representation of their views and experiences. Consequently, the role of the research supporter was identified as significant in the development of inclusive LD practices, alongside concerns about how these practices are managed so that they can contribute to the research process, in a nondominating manner. This

study was amenable to contributions from nondisabled members and as I explained in chapters six and seven, an underlying teamwork ethos was promoted throughout the lifetime of the RAG and the focus groups, so that everybody could learn from each other.

However, no concerns were ever noted with regards to a group associate attempting to take over research proceedings and following explorations of the contributions of the nondisabled members of this study's RAG, which was presented in chapter six, I concluded that without such assistance, it would have been difficult for me to sustain such a venture. Nondisabled members also proved to be pivotal in the application of the focus group method to this study and supported the active involvement of learning disabled people, within the research process and the translation of inclusive research principles (see Chapter seven). Moreover, I observed how members of both the RAG and the focus groups enjoyed reciprocal relations and worked together as equals, instead of in the traditional manner where research supporters remain in the background and are not expected to play a part in things. As a result, a team work approach enabled group members to learn from each other and as one person pointed out during a RAG meeting, this included me (see Chapter six).

Finally, as I reiterated earlier in this chapter, this research arose from my observations of the significant lack of LD studies in the field of

disability and media, with little research examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people and the near absence of their views and experiences, within this body of work. So, in line with inclusive research principles, I initiated this study mainly because the matter in question could be of concern to learning disabled people, if they were made aware of it. By putting my time, resources and skills at the disposal of learning disabled people, I was able to engage them as co-producers of knowledge, turning the focus of the research onto the behaviours of oppressors and the generation of knowledge that was of use to learning disabled people and their supporters in their struggles against oppressive practices (see Chapters six to eight, respectively).

In chapter seven, I provided an account of the application of content analysis, as a data collection method to this study, which narrated my emergence as an 'emancipatory' content analyst, within the field of disability studies, generating data that may be of concern to researchers, interested in the use of this research technique and its ongoing development. Key findings from this content analysis identified the learning disabled person as an object of violence, as the most featured media stereotype (see Charts 2 and 3 and Tables 8 and 12, pages 340, 349, 341 and 351, respectively). This prominence was emphasised further by the themes variable, as thirty eight per cent of the stories (n=251), involved some form of victim related theme (see Chart 6 and Tables 15, 20 and 21, pages 373, 359, 377 and 380, respectively).

Fifty seven of the articles confused LD with mental illness (see Table 16, page 362). In only around six per cent of the items (n=59), was a learning disabled person used as a source, within the storylines (see Chart 7 and Table 21, pages 380-381). However, their opinions still featured with some standing across narratives, as they were referred to as leading informants and not just to validate generalised third party claims (see Chapter nine).

This resulting data was presented to two focus groups of learning disabled people and their supporters. While I appreciated that the overall theme of this study may not have been of particular interest to the entire membership of the groups, these meetings instigated discussions around contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the print version of English national newspapers. Members were able to reflect upon the significance and meanings of these portrayals for learning disabled people and corresponding media discourses, indicating key features of an inclusive research approach. But above all, some of the people in whose name I undertook the content analysis for, got to learn about it and for several individuals it placed their media roles into perspective, giving them 'ammunition' in their argument for more direct media involvement by learning disabled spokespersons (see Chapter seven).

Strengths and limitations

The strengths and the limitations of this study can be considered as being located, within its two linked domains: the development of inclusive LD research practices and the advancement of disability and media studies. The former concerns the inclusiveness of learning disabled people in the research and the roles that I played as a nondisabled inclusive researcher. The latter relates to the lack of LD research in the field of disability and media, with few studies examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people and the near absence of their lived experiences in this body of work.

In chapter five, I identified how the term 'inclusive research' can have an array of connotations, with some nondisabled researchers believing that they are working inclusively, when learning disabled people are only being engaged in tiny elements of their projects. I also pointed out that the application of this phrase may well only acknowledge the fact that learning disabled people were involved in some way and that it can refer to varied levels of involvement. Therefore, it is of the essence for researchers to be very clear about how the research is undertaken, who instigated it and how it is applied in practice.

Within the context of this study, I adopted an inclusive research approach, as defined by Walmsley and Johnson (2003:63-64). They proposed a set of key categories that a project must exhibit, if it is to be perceived as 'inclusive', which can embrace both participatory and

emancipatory perspectives (see Chapter five). Through an exploration of said criteria, I will now present an indication of the inclusiveness of learning disabled people in the research and the roles that I played as a nondisabled inclusive researcher, highlighting some of the strengths and limitations of this study. This generation of data may be of interest to disability researchers, highlighting the contribution of research to the empowerment process of disabled people and to the advancement of disability research practices.

It could be argued that the research problem of this study was not one that was owned directly by disabled people, particularly as it was set within a doctoral framework, limiting its propensity for inclusiveness, mainly because of the expectations and requirements of academia. So, for example, I had to seek ethical clearance from Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1), before I could proceed with the setting up of the RAG. It was therefore not convened in time for members to inform this study's overall research design (see Chapter six).

Nevertheless, while acknowledging that learning disabled people are not a homogeneous group and that not everyone has the time or the inclination to take control of the production of research, the interests of learning disabled people were at the heart of this study and throughout its lifetime, they were encouraged and supported to be actively involved in the research process and to exercise some control over fieldwork

practices and outcomes. Further, the adoption of researcher reflexivity and accessibility matters were central to this research. So, although I did not have complete control over the material relations of research production, I still tried to go some way towards changing social relations, through my fieldwork practices and the associations that I developed with learning disabled people and their supporters (see Chapters six and seven).

Learning disabled people were not simply involved as research subjects, they were engaged as researchers performing active roles, such as 'initiators, doers, writers and disseminators of research' (Walmsley and Johnson 2003:9-10). So, for example, drawing from our RAG experiences and as a team, we compiled ten top tips for researchers wanting to work inclusively with learning disabled people (see Chapter six). As a result, RAG members contributed to the development of inclusive LD research practices, as co-producers of knowledge and as active members of research communities. I will be referring to these principles in a latter section of this chapter.

In chapter seven, I explained how through the LD reporting of the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* for the years 2006 to 2010, I constructed an illustrative sample of the portrayals of learning disabled adults, by the modern-day, print versions of English national newspapers. However, I did not perceive this collection of LD newsprint stories as a

complete illustration of media content. Instead, it presented 'a slice of media content' that could 'assist in understanding the trends of media coverage of disability' (Haller 1999:1). Nonetheless, it could start addressing the significant lack of LD research within the realms of disability and media, particularly as few studies have specifically examined the press coverage of learning disabled people, with a near absence of their views and experiences in the production of this body of work (see Table 1, page 136).

Focus group members were presented with the resultant data, as a basis to instigate discussions on the matter in question with learning disabled people and their supporters. But unlike 'audience reception' studies (Bryman 2008:475), when analyses of media content highlight a variety of themes which are then examined further through focus group discussions (Hansen *et al.* 1998:260), members were actively involved as data analysts in the co-production of knowledge. Further, several individuals from the first focus group indicated that they would be applying this information to their media work, with the intention of raising awareness in the areas of LD and media discourses. This had the unique effect of transforming the concept of research from investigation to production, turning the focus onto the behaviours of oppressors and the generation of data that was of use to disabled people and their supporters, in their challenges against oppressive practices. Therefore, some focus group members started to address the omission of the lived

experiences of learning disabled people, within disability and media research discourses (see Chapter seven).

However, this way of 'doing' inclusive LD research can be perceived as merely participatory, given that an increase in involvement cannot by itself represent emancipatory research unless it is controlled by disabled people themselves. So, while this study remained opened to emancipatory thinking and the research process was informed and influenced by group members, in reality it was not controlled by them and this presented me with 'a daunting task' (Stone and Priestley 1996:706). Moreover, it raised the ethical question of what right did I have as a nondisabled researcher to lead on this research, other than the conviction that it could further the interests of learning disabled people?

Consequently, as explained in chapters six and seven, I was very much aware of the challenges that can be posed by the social relations of research production and the development of asymmetrical relationships between disabled people and researchers, since enhanced levels of involvement 'does not necessarily challenge or alter' these power relations (Stone and Priestley 1996:709). So, although I was committed in transforming such associations, as a researcher I was accorded with a given status and inadvertently, this could have contributed to 'the internalised oppression' of learning disabled people (Aspis 1997:653).

With such matters in mind and through a responsive approach to the facilitation of inclusive research practices, I focused on the barriers that could obstruct the involvement of learning disabled people in research, rather than on the 'limitations' of individuals. So, for example, I developed guiding principles for the recruitment process of this study. This included the application of consent as an ongoing activity, so if any concerns were raised in this area, they could be addressed on a case by case basis. In addition, I gradually produced a range of user-friendly resources (see for example, Table 2, page 200), with a view to breaking down some of the barriers that can prevent many learning disabled people from being involved in academic discourses (see Chapters six and seven). However, this thesis in its current form is inaccessible for many learning disabled people and their supporters, limiting the dissemination of this study's findings to the academy. It will therefore require additional formatting so that it reaches those individuals for whom I undertook the research, along with a much wider public audience.

Supporters were also included in this research, since learning disabled people may have wanted someone who they knew and trust to be present at the meetings for support. Further, as this study was open to contributions from nondominating supporters, it benefitted greatly from their involvement. This included support with the practical arrangements of the meetings and reciprocal assistance with the facilitation of discussions (see Chapters six and seven).

Some structure was applied to the meetings, particularly in the case of the focus groups, in order for emerging discussions to remain focused on the subject in question. Nonetheless, I facilitated them in a relaxed and accessible manner, presenting members with the flexibility of expressing their opinions 'in their own 'language' and on their own terms' (Hansen *et al.* 1998:273 274), while repeatedly offering opportunities for any questions on the matters under discussion (see for example, Table 3, page 252). I also worked around people's schedules so that my interventions would cause minimum disruption to group members, staff and their organisations. Proceedings from meetings were collected via observations and the compilation of contemporaneous notes, primarily because I did not want RAG or focus group members to be deterred from being engaged in this study or for their discussions to be affected by the use of recording equipment. This way of noting minutes proved to be of value during meetings, as for example, focus group members regularly confirmed my documentation of key points, as well as validating that I was capturing the true meanings of the discussions. As I was not in the position to offer members payment for their involvement in this study, I also provided snacks or chocolates and sweets for the groups to share and enjoy in the refreshments breaks or during the meetings. These small tokens of appreciation acknowledged respect and value for the views and experiences of members and their contributions to this research (see Chapters six and seven).

Additionally, through the reclassification of research as production, I placed my content analytical skills at the disposal of learning disabled people and their supporters and I performed a content analysis of the LD coverage by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers. However, as I stated in chapter eight, this stage was 'very much on the lower end of the scale' as regards to how far learning disabled people were able to exercise control, during this part of the research process (Rodgers 1999:421). Still, resultant findings from this content analysis proved of the essence for the focus groups, as it formed the basis for subsequent critical analyses by learning disabled people and their supporters of contemporary representations of learning disabled adults by the English national newsprint medium (see Chapter nine).

Through this responsive approach to the facilitation of inclusive research practices, learning disabled people and their supporters were actively engaged in this study, influencing the direction of the research, as well as its outcomes. So, for example, as the RAG met on fourteen occasions, over a period of eighteen months, it ran concurrently with the other data collection stages of this research. Members kept me grounded as a nondisabled inclusive LD researcher by regularly reminding me of the lived experiences of learning disabled people. Without these ongoing reciprocal relations, I could have become distant to the central concerns of this study, particularly as much of this scholarly activity involved research and media discourses, which silenced learning disabled people

and did not engage them as co-producers of knowledge. As a consequence, RAG members influenced the direction of this study by informing the way in which I approached my fieldwork practices and in turn, this had some bearing on its outcomes (see Chapter six).

To summarise, as a nondisabled inclusive researcher one of my main roles was that of instigator, because as I reiterated earlier, this study emerged from my observations of the lack of LD research in the field of disability and media, with few studies examining the newspaper representations of learning disabled people and the near absence of their lived experiences in the production of this body of work. I instigated this research on the basis that it could be of concern to learning disabled people, if they were made aware of it. Indeed, through the resulting data that emerged from the focus group discussions, some members validated it as a matter of significance for learning disabled people and their supporters, while for others the research was deemed of importance because it would raise people's understanding in LD matters (see Chapter nine).

Other key roles involved facilitation skills, alongside an element of teaching and translating, making the process of research much more accessible to the members of the groups, as they exercised some control over this study's fieldwork practices and outcomes. Additionally, I undertook the role of 'emancipatory' content analyst and generated

knowledge that was of use to learning disabled people and their supporters (see Chapter eight).

But throughout this doctoral journey, I also embraced the role of learner, as I drew from the wealth of material during my systematic reviews of the relevant literature, while developing relations with the groups 'from a place of learning' (Chapman and McNulty 2004:81). I therefore learnt from the expertise of the RAG and the focus groups and my experiences of facilitating these ventures, whether this involved the development of an accessible resource (see for example, Appendices 8 and 11) or constructive feedback from members about my facilitation skills (see Chapter seven). They afforded this study with invaluable insights, along with mutual support and exposed it to the views and experiences of learning disabled people, as they engaged in academic discourses as co-producers of knowledge, while contributing to the advancement of inclusive research practices and media discourses.

Future directions for inclusive research practices and media discourses

Research agendas and research processes have been questioned by learning disabled people, activists and academics. These discussions have challenged and influenced the ways in which research is undertaken by and with learning disabled people, with LD research progressively framed as inclusive. But while this research approach can embrace both participatory and emancipatory traditions, it has been associated more

closely to the former, given that research by learning disabled people generally involves working in partnerships with sympathetic non-learning disabled allies. Consequently, it is often perceived 'as a watering-down of true emancipatory research' (Williams and England 2005:30) and even if participatory practices can offer a feasible way for the participation of learning disabled people in research, it can still uphold power relations between researchers and researched. Equally, as research is partly reliant on intellectual skills, it can be less accessible for learning disabled people than it would be for disabled people, who do not experience an 'intellectual' impairment. So, learning disabled people may require considerable support from non-learning disabled researchers in order to participate in research. This has raised concerns over the validity of said research as a true representation of their views, while calling for explorations of how these practices are managed, to learn more about how non-learning disabled supporters contribute to the research process, in a nondominating manner (see Chapter five).

In response to these matters and based on the expertise of this study's RAG and our experiences of doing research together as a team, we compiled ten top tips for researchers wanting to work inclusively with learning disabled people (see Box 10). They are offered as a preliminary guide for researchers working on their own projects and for when they are reviewing other people's work. These principles are not listed in any order of priority nor are they to be applied uncritically, since it is central for the

advancement of inclusive research practices that it is approached as an ongoing process. As a result, emancipatory disability research can progress from an 'impossible dream' to a 'realistic goal' (Oliver 1997:15) and it can meaningfully affect the empowerment of disabled people, 'the policies that affect their lives, and the ongoing struggle for a more equitable and just society' (Barnes 2008:469).

Box 10: Ten top tips for researchers wanting to work inclusively, with learning disabled people

1. Treat people with *respect*.
2. *Involve* everyone. Include learning disabled people with 'high support needs' and supporting staff, who 'know us well'.
3. Talk and *listen* to what learning disabled people have to say.
4. Give people *time* and 'make it quality time'.
5. Be *flexible*. Some learning disabled people 'need one-to-one support to learn'.
6. Make knowledge *accessible*. Use words together with pictures, as this can help many learning disabled people to understand things better.
7. Be *creative* and make sure that your equipment works before you start a meeting and always have enough resources, like handouts 'to go round'.
8. Be *appreciative* for people's time and value their contributions. Small tokens of appreciation like 'cake, cookies or a yoghurt' can make people 'feel good' and appreciated.
9. Work together as a *team* and help each other out.
10. *Keep in touch* with the LD world by facilitating the active involvement of learning disabled people in research.

So, since the compilation of these ten top tips, I would add the matter of *frequency* to the list, as I observed that if RAG meetings were held closer together, this shorter interlude did appear to make it easier for members to recall details from past sessions, while supporting them to be more attuned with group activities. RAG members might add the matter of *payment* to the list, as in subsequent discussions some members highlighted that they would be interested in working with other

'university people' in the future and in getting paid for their work (see Chapter six). Further, I do not perceive these guiding principles as solely for researchers who want to work inclusively with learning disabled people, as they could also prove of interest for researchers who want to work inclusively with other people whose first language is not research and who want to make the research process more accessible to a wider audience, particularly those 'working with all forms of marginalised and oppressed groups' (Barton 2005:318).

Within the wider realms of disability and media discourses, the content analytical stage of this study revealed the learning disabled person as an object of violence, as the most featured media stereotype (see Charts 2 and 3 and Tables 8 and 12, pages 340, 349, 341 and 351, respectively). This prominence was accentuated further following subsequent explorations of the themes variable (see Chart 6 and Tables 15, 20 and 21, pages 373, 359, 377 and 380, respectively). One focus group member attributed these key findings to the fact that 'there has been a lot of disability hate crime stories and also because of people's attitudes towards' learning disabled people (see Chapter nine).

Indeed, as discussed in chapter three, the stereotypical representation of the disabled person as an object of violence is regularly featured by the media, as in real life many disabled people are often subject to victimisation. They have also been accredited as contributing to

and underpinning the flawed impression of disabled people as completely

helpless and dependant, along with the perpetuation of such victimisation.

Equally, it is possible to isolate features from disability hate crime events,

such as a human interest appeal and a bad news overtone, which can

transform them into newsworthy LD stories and can account for their

prominence across the national newsprint medium (see Chapter four).

But this prevailing coverage can also draw attention to the

significance of these events because disability hate crime can be ignored

no longer. So, it is of the essence for the UK's national newsprint medium

to report on the daily lives of learning disabled people, because while

most everyday phenomena might not be deemed as newsworthy, the

absence across media portrayals of a diversity of roles for disabled people

can reinforce the belief that they are incapable of looking after

themselves and are therefore, 'susceptible to violence' (Barnes 1992a:6).

Moreover, as findings from this study's content analysis reveal, if learning

disabled people are not in the main engaged as sources of news stories

(see Chart 7 and Table 21, pages 380-381), then those who are most

affected by these storylines are not been asked to express their views. As

emphasised by members of this study's focus groups, learning disabled

people must be actively engaged within these narratives. Consequently,

their views can be assimilated by a national newsprint medium, for

subsequent dissemination to wider audiences and public realms. Such

inclusionary journalism practices can be facilitated by supporters of

learning disabled people, as they direct media personnel to learning disabled media spokespeople as sources for their stories.

Conclusion

Learning disabled people were central to this study and a major conclusion that can be drawn from its findings was that working together was fun, hard work and everybody had the chance to learn from each other. Through the application of inclusive research principles, this study embraced the lived experiences of learning disabled people, as they were actively engaged in explorations of media representations and commonalities among struggles were recognised as their views came together with the collective voice of disabled people. Nevertheless, in the real world research can be, and often is disabling, so researchers must be aware of their limitations and acknowledge their work as incomplete and as an ongoing process. This research therefore makes a significant contribution to the emerging literature in the field of disability and media studies, which no longer silences learning disabled people and engages them as co-producers of knowledge, crediting them not only as active members of research communities but also as equal members of less disabling societies.

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Appendix 1
Ethics review feedback form

Name of applicant: Shirley Durell
Faculty/School/Department: DSCS
Research project title: A hall of mirrors: realities or distortions? The representations of adults with a learning disability by the contemporary, print version of English national newspapers

Comments by the reviewer

1. Evaluation of the ethics of the proposal: No concerns – all aspects appear to have been considered and mitigated against.
2. Evaluation of the participant information sheet and consent form: Both forms appear very comprehensive and written in easy to understand language. Particularly welcomed the reference to the researcher by name throughout the documents as this generates a sense of warmth and approachability. Minor comment – suggest rewording sentence 3 page 2 as the language is a little technical. Would also comment that the format of the letter is particularly appealing especially the use of the photograph.
3. **Recommendation:** (Please indicate as appropriate and advise on any conditions. If there any conditions, the applicant will be required to resubmit his/her application and this will be sent to the same reviewer). [x]   Approved - no conditions attached [ ]   Approved with minor conditions (no need to resubmit) [ ]   Conditional upon the following – please use additional sheets if necessary (please re-submit application) [ ]   Rejected for the following reason(s) – please use other side if necessary [ ]   Further advice/notes - please use other side if necessary

Name of reviewer: Diane Phimister

Signature: Diane Phimister

Date: 08.12.10

Date

Hello,

My name is Shirley Durell.

I am a research student at Coventry University.

Research is about findings answers to questions.

RAG: I am going to be looking at how English national newspapers show people with a learning disability. I need people to help me do this.

Focus group: I have been looking at what English national newspapers are saying about people with a learning disability. I would like to show you what I have found out and listen to what you think.

If you would like to find out more, please let _____ know and I will come to meet you.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Durell

☎ **07910 779 579**

💻 **durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk**

What English national newspapers say about people with a learning disability

What do newspapers say about me?

Does this change what people think about me?

471

What English national newspapers say about people with a learning disability

How do I want newspapers to show me?

Would you like to help Shirley answer these questions?

Shirley Durell

☎ **07910 779 579**

💻 **durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk**

Date

Hello,

My name is Shirley Durell and we met _____

I am the research student at Coventry University.

Research is about findings answers to questions.

I am going to be looking at how English national newspapers show people with a learning disability and what people think about this.

I need people to help me do this and you wanted to help me.

Our first meeting will be:

Venue
Day
Time

I look forward to working with you.
Yours sincerely,

Shirley Durell

☎ 07910 779 579

💻 durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk

What English National newspapers say about people with a learning disability

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand **why** the research is being conducted and **what** it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to find out what English national newspapers are saying about people with a learning disability and what people with a learning disability think about these representations.

Why have I being chosen?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an adult with a learning disability who has an interest in what newspapers says about people with a learning disability and/or wants to be involved in research.

Who is organising the research?

Shirley Durell is organising the research as part of her PhD study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?

Yes, all the information that is collected from you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. Shirley takes confidentiality very seriously. She will make every effort to ensure that the things you tell her can't be identified with you by name or indirectly. Any details that she keeps about you will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a secure place, accessible only to her. This information will be stored in a secure location until such time as she destroys it.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, please keep this information sheet complete the accompanying informed consent form signifying that you understand your rights in relation to this research and are happy to participate. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw the information you provide at any time prior to the publication of findings and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw, or a decision not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part, Shirley would like you to join a _____ with her. She will ask you your thoughts about what the newspapers say about people with a learning disability.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There may be no direct personal benefits in taking part, but by telling Shirley about your experiences and opinions, she can find out about the things that are working well and the things that are not working well. Others can learn more about how to involve people in research. She also hopes that this will in turn help to improve understanding and experiences of what newspapers say about people with a learning disability.

What will happen with the results of this study?

The information Shirley collects from you along with the information she collects from other people taking part in the study will be looked at together. She is looking for patterns in what a number of people may say about their experiences and opinions. What you have to tell her is unique and she is interested in its special features as well as its similarities with things other people may tell her.

The results of the study will be included in a PhD thesis and Shirley would be happy to send you a copy or a summary of her findings. The results of the study may also be published in an article in a journal, in a book and in a newspaper and described at research meetings and conferences. Your name or

contact details will not appear anywhere in published documents.

Making a complaint
If you are unhappy with any aspect of this research then you should tell Shirley in the first instance. If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research then you should write to:

Professor Ian Marshall,
Deputy Vice Chancellor (academic),
Coventry University,
Priory Street,
Coventry
CV1 5FB

In your letter, please provide as much detail about the research as possible, Shirley's name and indicate in detail the nature of your complaint.

Who has reviewed the study?
The study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by Coventry University Ethics Committee.

When will the findings be available?
The findings in the form of a PhD thesis will be available in March 2013 and will be available from Shirley Durell.

Who do I contact for more information?
If you have any questions or are unclear about any of the information provided above you can contact Shirley Durell via email: **durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk**
Telephone: **07910 779 579**

Please do not hesitate to contact Shirley Durell at any time if you would like further information or if you would like to comment on the research. Shirley welcomes your input and opinions.

Appendix 6
Frequently asked questions sheet

Question 1: Do I have to take part?
No, it is your choice to take part or not.

Question 2: What do I have to do?
RAG: I will come to _____. I will talk to you for _____.

Focus group: You will have to come to a focus group meeting.
The meeting will be for about two hours.

Question 3: Who will know what I have said?
No one will know.

- ✓ I will not use your name in any report.
- ✓ I will make sure other people cannot guess who you are
  and what you have said.
- ✓ I will keep notes very carefully. I will not show them to
  anyone.

Question 4: What if I don't understand something?
You can ask me to explain anything you don't understand.

Question 5: What if I change my mind and don't want to take part anymore?
RAG: It is okay to say that you don't want to take part
anymore.

Focus group: It is okay to say that you don't want to take part.
Just let me know so that I know that you won't be coming.

Question 6: What if I want someone to support me?
It is okay to ask someone you know and trust to come with you
to the meetings (RAG)/focus group meeting (focus group).

Question 7: What do I get for doing this?
You won't be paid for taking part but hopefully you will be
supporting others by helping them learn from your views and
experiences.

Question 8: What if I want to find out more?
You can call or email me and ask me any other questions.

Thank you.

Shirley Durell

This picture of several newspapers has been removed due to third party copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed in the Lanchester library, Coventry University.

☎ **07910 779 579**

🖥 **durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk**

Appendix 7
Covering letter

Hello,

You are invited to take part in a research study.

This study is to find out how English national newspapers show people with a learning disability and what you think about what they are saying.

Your participation in this study will be (to be deleted as appropriate):

- a steering group (further details)
- a focus group (further details)

Before you decide whether you would like to take part in this study it is important for you to read the participant information sheet.

You can ask someone you know and trust to help you.

I can also help you with this and explain anything you do not understand and answer any questions that you may have.

It is important that you have the time to think about whether or not you want to take part.

If you decide you do not want to take part that is okay.

If you want to take part, I will ask you to fill up a consent form. You can ask someone you know and trust to help you. I can also help you with this and go through it with you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Durell

☎ **07910 779 579**

💻 **durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk**

> # What English national newspapers say about people with a learning disability

☑ Choose a box to tick.

☐ I confirm that I have understood the information sheet (dated) and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw (including the information I provide) at any time during the study and don't have to give a reason.

☐ I understand that the information I provide will be private and confidential.

☐ I am happy that information collected may be used in reports produced by Shirley Durell.

☐ I agree to take part in the study.

Name	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature
Witnessed	Date	Signature

<u>Research Advisory Group</u>

Date

Hello,

Thank you for taking part in _____

It was good to meet you (and your supporter if applicable).

As you know, I have been looking at how English national newspapers show people with a learning disability. I have also been talking to people to find out what they think about this.

Thank you for helping me to do this.

By taking part in this research study you have hopefully supported others by helping them learn from your views and experiences.

Please contact me if you would like a copy of my report or a summary of my findings.

Best wishes,

Shirley Durell

This picture of several newspapers has been removed due to third party copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed in the Lanchester library, Coventry University.

07910 779 579

durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk

<u>Focus groups</u>

Date

Dear _____ ,

It was good to meet you.

I wanted to thank you for taking part in the focus group meeting on _____ .

As you know, I have been looking at how English national newspapers show people with a learning disability.

I also wanted to talk to people to find out what they think about this. Thank you for helping me to do this.

By taking part in this study you have hopefully supported others by helping them learn from your views and experiences.

My report should be finished by the end of this year. I will pass it on to _____ so that they can show it to you.

I have also put in with this letter, a photocopy of your consent form for you.

Best wishes,

Shirley Durell

☎ **07910 779 579**

💻 **durells@uni.coventry.ac.uk**

Appendix 10
Information sheet (paper roll version)
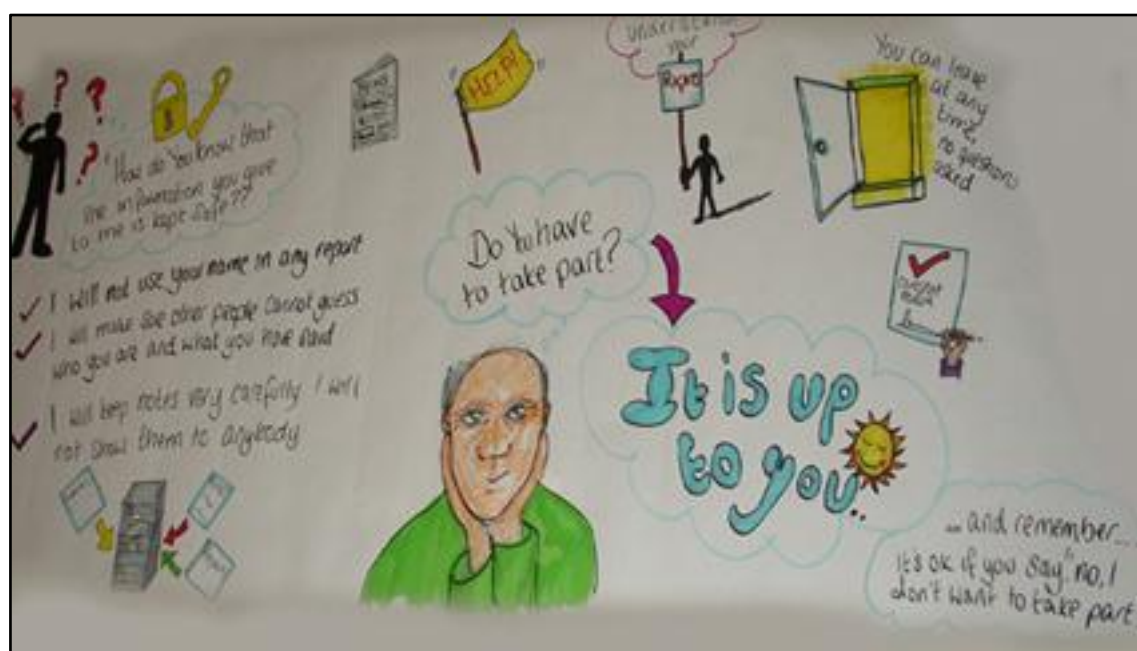
Make a complaint: ✗

Professor Ian Marshall,
Deputy Vice Chancellor
(academic),
Coventry University,
Priory Street,
Coventry
CV1 5FB

Letter

DURELL and BOSTOCK 2010

> **What English national newspapers say about people with a learning disability**

Consent Form

Please tick

I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated (date) and have had the chance to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw (including the information I provide) at any time during the study and don't have to give a reason.

487

I understand that the information I provide will be private and confidential.

I am happy that information collected may be used in reports produced by Shirley Durell.

What English national newspapers say about people with a learning disability

I agree to take part in the study.

Name	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature
Witnessed	Date	Signature

Appendix 12
Final draft focus group presentation (power point version)

The power point version of the focus group presentation pages were presented individually in a landscape format, against a light yellow background, as shown below. Images for this presentation were sourced from version three of Photosymbols (2011), from other sources or pictures that were taken for such purposes.

Please note that Slide 15 was amended for the second meeting to '57 newspaper stories talked to people with a learning disability', following a correction noted by a member of the first focus group.

Slide 1	
Slide 2	

Slide 3	**Talk and listen**
Slide 4	**Shirley's paper roll**
Slide 5	**What are English national newspapers saying about people with a learning disability?**

Slide 6	**What do people with a learning disability think about these stories?**
Slide 7	**Before we start...**
Slide 8	**The Daily Mail** **The Daily Telegraph** **The Sun** ✓ **2006** ✓ **2007** ✓ **2008** ✓ **2009** ✓ **2010**

			Slide 9	**Shirley found 546 newspaper stories**

Slide 9

Shirley found 546 newspaper stories

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
The Daily Mail	54	43	38	46	28	209
The Daily Telegraph	24	37	24	24	37	146
The Sun	26	32	30	52	51	191
Total	104	112	92	122	116	546

Slide 10

Fiona Pilkington and her daughter Francesca

These images have been removed due to third party copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed in the Lanchester library, Coventry University.

David Askew   **Susan Boyle**

Slide 11

Slide 12	**221 newspaper stories** **Abuse** **Bullying** **Discrimination** **Disability hate crime...** **...Susan Boyle**
Slide 13	**Themes...** **90 stories about court cases** **76 stories about victimisation in communities** **33 stories about victimisation in specific communities** Court

Slide 14	**57 stories confused learning disability with mental health**
Slide 15	**56 newspaper stories** **Talked to people with a learning disability**
Slide 16	

Appendix 13
Pepsi's reflections of their involvement with the RAG and their comments on the RAG section of the draft methodology chapter

Dear Shirley,

Thank you for your draft edition of your chapter! (No I didn't go to sleep!!)

The draft in my opinion is honest, accurate and realistic to your meetings with the RAG.

Initially, I felt quite nervous on presenting the concept of the meetings to the group and was unsure of their reactions and understanding of the subject - often people that have LD become 'blurred' in the papers with a person that may have a mental health illness/condition.

A person with LD may not recognise this (that they have LD) within themselves and this made me feel more uncomfortable! Before your visits I always made a point of asking each individual if they were 'happy' to take part in the process.

The RAG always enjoyed and looked forward to your visit, meeting and discussions. This I feel was down to:
- Your personality and the ability to connect with all the individuals within the RAG (and non participating)
- The way you presented the meetings. The recall of previous meetings helped individuals to remember discussions (me included!!!)
- Not being a member of our organisation!
- The paper roll was an excellent recall which helped the group to keep focused
- Visual aids which were used throughout the meetings I feel were invaluable and made individuals feel included – especially for those were vocal communication is difficult
- And above all you made the meetings 'fun' (on such a serious subject) and treated every member of the RAG with respect and as an equal. I thank you for the latter.

This particular group would have voiced their opinions to me if they did <u>not</u> want to attend or for you to attend (they have all sought advice from me in the past and are not backwards in coming forwards!)

Pepsi
12/11/2012

Appendix 14
Focus group handout

Number of times prominent stereotypes used by each news story, overall
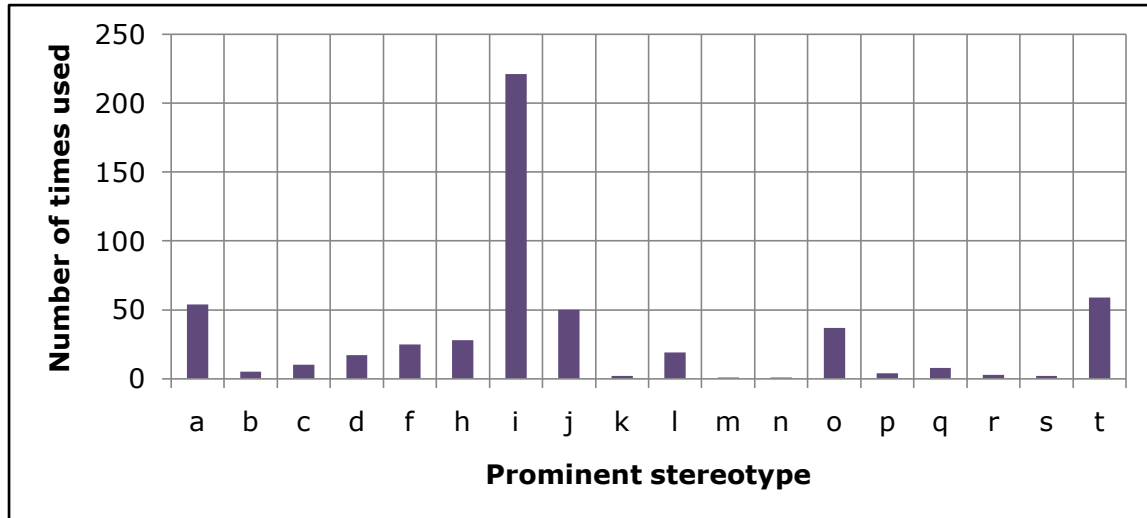
Code descriptors for reference, including totals in order of frequency

Prominent stereotype	Total
i) Object of violence	221
t) Other	59
a) Medical model	54
j) Sinister and evil	50
o) Burden	37
h) Pitiable and pathetic	28
f) Legal model	25
l) 'Super cripple'	19
d) Minority/Civil rights model	17
c) Business model	10
q) Unable to participate fully in community life	8
b) Social pathology model	5
p) Sexually abnormal	4
r) Normal	3
k) Atmosphere	2
s) Eternal child	2
m) Object of ridicule	1
n) Their own worst and only enemy	1
Total	546

Appendix 15
First focus group: feedback following meeting

Hi Shirley,

Thanks for coming and running the focus group with our spokes-people with learning disability. They found the session interesting and enlightening as did I and… has just arrived and the first thing … said was 'Shirley was good yesterday wasn't she?'

I'd like to wish you good luck with the thesis and please do let us know when it's completed - we'd love to see it.

You did mention some other inclusive research that had been done some time ago. I would grateful if you could send a link to that or point me in the right direction as to where to find it.

I wonder if you could also send over some of the stats that you presented to us so that I can begin to use them to argue for more media involvement? It's nice to meet someone as passionate as I am about this issue, so anything that can help me in my work would be most useful.

Look forward to hearing from you,

Cheers…