What are the lived experiences of theatre practice and disability among professional directors and actors in theatres funded by Arts Council England? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

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Abstract

A growing number of theatre and disability scholars, activists, artists, and critics have called for the increased and accurate onstage representation of disabled people in theatre. Arts Council England's shift in diversity strategy brought a new dynamic to this long-running debate. Since 2015 its funded theatre organisations have been required to demonstrate progress towards increasing workplace opportunities for disabled people alongside other minority communities. Still, it is rare for an actor with a physical impairment to be cast in an onstage role in any major theatre.

Drawing on the rich history and critical knowledge of disability studies, and considering emerging theatre practice from a phenomenological perspective, the aims of this thesis are: to understand more about why non-disabled directors and disabled actors are choosing to, or not to, work together; to facilitate open sharing of personal experiences of theatre practice and disability among directors and actors; and to motivate policy based on lived experiences of practice and impact long-term change.

Key concepts of lived experience are drawn upon in the thesis to analyse current theatre practice from an individual perspective. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is used to facilitate exploration of real-life experiences of theatre practice and disability among professional actors and directors employed in Arts Council England's most highly funded theatres across England. Interviews were carried out with seven actors with physical impairments who self-define as disabled people, and twelve directors who consider themselves non-disabled people.

Interview data revealed what is happening when a shift from the outside-in, in Arts Council England's diversity strategy, impacts an inside-out view of intrapersonal and interpersonal processes of engagement with disability in theatre. Extending beyond assumptions of casting or funding requirements, this gave rise to complex and entirely personal responses reflected in six emergent superordinate themes and subthemes. Concerning actor-participants, this study enables detailed discussion around the impact of theatre on perceptions of identity, navigating directors' inexperience of disability, and wrestling with authenticity. Regarding director-participants, it opens discussion around disability consciousness, narratives of caution and confidence, and perceptions of external constraints on casting.

A synthesis of findings led to the proposal of stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors. Naming a process of engagement that understands individuals working in theatre as having a particular distance from disability, and captures steps towards routinely and effectively working together, may be beneficial in moving progress towards the accurate representation of disabled people in theatre.

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My work is dedicated to its participants, who generously gave their time to engage with my study with openness and honesty. It is also dedicated to my precious friend John, who I hope has discovered that uniqueness is of great worth in our world.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been previously submitted for an award of this university or any other institution. The content of the thesis is legally allowable under copyright legislation.

Signed:

Nina Michelle Worthington

30 January 2021

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Chapter One - Introduction

In the United Kingdom over fourteen million people report as 'disabled'; that is twenty-one percent of people defining as having physical, cognitive, or mental health impairments (Department of Work and Pensions, 2020). Yet, it is still rare for an actor with a physical impairment to be cast in an onstage role in any major theatre. Arts Council England's current diversity strategy has brought a new dynamic to the long-running debate surrounding this issue. It has potential to significantly shift experiences of theatre practice and disability among professional directors and actors working within Arts Council England (ACE) funded theatres. Historically, work with disabled people in theatre has remained predominantly the domain of a few specialist companies, such as Graeae Theatre Company, an 'authority in accessible aesthetics', 'a world-class theatre company […] artistically led by disabled people' (Graeae, no date). Most publicly funded theatre organisations, however, have not shared the responsibility for increasing diversity in the arts in relation to disability (Bazalgette, 2014, p.7). As Darren Henley, chief executive of ACE, remarks, 'Talent is everywhere: opportunity is not. Not yet' (quoted in Brown, 2015).

There is much debate and scholarship surrounding the representation of disabled people in the arts, with common agreement in media and scholarly discourse that change is needed. Theatre and disability scholars have examined how disabled people have been portrayed in dramatic scripts (Kuppers, 2003; Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Sandahl and Auslander, 2005; Sandahl, 2008; Conroy, 2009). They expand upon theatre's almost entirely clichéd, negative portrayals of disability, its role in misinforming society's perceptions of disabled people, and urge theatre makers to resist stereotypical casting choices. Activists and artists have campaigned against the limitations imposed on disabled people in casting (Startin, 2014; Snow, 2016); they challenge the rigidity of recruitment processes, which theatre maker Simon Startin believes are often inaccessible:

> either physically, in the case of fringe venues where young actors might make their mark, or institutionally as in drama schools where they […] balk

> at actually opening their doors […] or in the deep-down aesthetics and ideas of what currently theatre is believed to be (2014).

Theatre critics are also increasingly diligent in drawing attention to exclusive or inappropriate directorial decisions, particularly casting of non-disabled people as disabled characters and inaccurate portrayals of disability and impairment (Birkett, 2015; Snow, 2017); Birkett notes, ‘when non-disabled actors play disabled people they love to squirm, startle and speak as if they were drunk’ (2015). Issues surrounding disability and theatre are extensive. However, Kuppers narrows these to three central topics: ‘access’ for disabled performers; ‘audience development’, access for disabled audience members; ‘social embedment’, the perception of disabled people’s participation in theatre as routine practice (2017, pp.4-5; p.37). A call for transformation in each of these areas is evident in theory and practice. Furthermore, ‘a creative case for change is based not only on workplace equality and an accurate reflection of disability but on the contribution of creative talent disabled actors can bring to British theatre’ (Fox and MacPearson, 2015, p.7).

In January 2016 ACE published its second annual workforce data report, providing a baseline for monitoring representation in the arts. This revealed that across all its National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) the disabled workforce stood at four percent against a working age population of nineteen percent (ACE, 2016; Annual Population Survey, 2016). ACE’s findings remained largely unchanged in 2017, with some major theatres with more than fifty employees having no disabled people in their workforce at all (ACE, 2018a). The final publication of data for its 2015-2018 National Portfolio showed ‘the total percentage of disabled workers in NPOs’ still being only five percent (ACE, 2019). Despite this statistical evidence that the underrepresentation of disabled people is an ongoing issue in the arts and prior to a shift in ACE’s diversity strategy, Startin was experiencing what he perceived as an increased ‘appetite to engage’ with disabled people in the theatre workplace; he notes this is ‘not an overnight sea-change, but slow, often laborious attrition’ (Startin, 2014). In line with his observation, there is evidence that professional performance opportunities for disabled people are now developing outside of theatre created by experts such as Graeae, with signs that approaches to casting disabled people are shifting.

Open audition days for disabled people have been held by organisations including the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), the National Theatre, Manchester Royal Exchange, and Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Actor Nadia Albina, who describes herself as having a physical disability (Gardner, 2014), performed her debut season with the RSC in 2015. She was cast as Cassandra in *Hecuba*, the Duke of Venice in *Othello*, and Nerissa in *Merchant of Venice*. Artistic Director Rufus Norris 'worked with a disabled performer for the first time when he cast Kiruna Stamell in *Everyman* – his first production as director of the National Theatre', he has since cast Jamie Beddard, who has cerebral palsy, in *The Threepenny Opera* (Hutchinson, 2016a). These are professional actors who self-define as disabled people who have been cast in roles that do not specify impairment in the script, roles traditionally played by non-disabled people. Such casting choices delimit onstage opportunities available to disabled people and challenge historical casting approaches, which are expanded upon in my literature review.

In addition, theatre history was made by Mat Fraser, said to be the first actor with a physical impairment to play Richard III, at Hull Truck Theatre in June 2017 (Tripney, 2017). Also, Karina Jones was the first blind actor to play the heroine, Susy, a blind character in a national tour of *Wait Until Dark* (Vale, 2017). These notable casting choices support Startin's sense that a shift towards increased onstage engagement with disabled people is taking place, however, whether this can now be considered 'sea-change' is debatable (2014). Most of these directorial decisions were still deemed newsworthy rather than routine, even when a disabled person was simply cast as a disabled character; a disabled person cast in a role not written as a disabled character was expressed as even more extraordinary. It seems there are still many organisations and individuals who consider casting disabled people an exception, not part of routine, everyday theatre practice. Understandably, Karina Jones questions, 'It's 2017 and yet I am the first blind actress to take the role of a blind person in a play that has been around since the 60s. Why?' (quoted in Edwards, 2017).

In contrast to disability ACE reported 'continued progress with Black and minority ethnic representation' (2015a, p.7); in 2016 'BME' workforce figures for ACE's funded organisations stood at seventeen percent, two percent higher than average among the working age population (ACE, 2015a; 2016; Annual Population Survey, 2016). It seems principles underpinning what has been referred to as ‘colour-blind casting’, which ‘ignores the appearance of an actor […] anchored in the belief that talented actors can play any role’, are acknowledged by directors and reflected in casting decisions (Young, 2013, p.56). Yet, similar principles are rarely applied, or thought to be insufficient in casting disabled people (Rogers and Thorpe, 2014, p.428). The notion that a talented actor with an impairment can play any role seems rarely actioned. ACE’s *Analysis of Theatre in England* notes, ‘there is little evidence of crossover in the employment of disabled actors from specific disability-focused shows into content that is not about disability’ (Naylor *et al*, 2016, p.51). The findings of this and other ACE reports make certain what is already widely acknowledged in the theatre industry, media, and literature that there are specific, complex ‘ongoing issues around disabled people’ (ACE, 2016, p.3). Moreover, regarding disability representation in theatre, Artistic Director Sue Emmas believes that, ‘directors can have the biggest impact. They choose the stories to tell and the collaborators they work with to tell those stories’ (quoted in Bano, 2017).

In response to this current situation, my research investigates personal experiences of theatre practice and disability among professional directors who consider themselves non-disabled, and professional actors who self-define as disabled people. Participants in both groups are either based in ACE’s most highly funded theatres (those receiving over two million pounds in funding between 2015 and 2018) or have been employed by NPO theatres within that timeframe. In introducing my research, I will set out the context for the interdisciplinary, qualitative approach taken in this study. I will overview ACE’s current diversity strategy and initiatives, and pinpoint ways this may affect directors’ and actors’ experiences of working in theatre. Key definitions and terms will be clarified, and the aims and objectives of my research outlined.

1.1 Arts Council England and Ramps on the Moon

Arts Council England is described as ‘the main body charged with developing the arts in England through the shrewd investment of public funds’ (ACE, 2013). Its remit for the arts includes ‘visual and performing artforms, music, dance, theatre and literature’ (ACE, 2013). Receiving funding from Government and the National Lottery, ACE’s role is to ‘champion, develop and invest in artistic and cultural experiences’ (ACE, no date). ACE offers three main types of investment, ‘National Portfolio’, funding over 800 arts organisations, museums, and libraries in England, ‘Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants’, and ‘Arts Council Development Funds’, which ‘focus on diversity’ (ACE, no date). In 2010 ACE published its ten-year framework highlighting five strategic goals aimed at achieving ‘Great art for everyone’, later revised to define its ‘mission’ as ‘Great art and culture for everyone’ (ACE, 2010; 2013). This was said to mark ‘a new era’ for ACE, detailing how its investment would ‘make real long-term change’ across the arts sector (ACE, 2013).

ACE sets out diversity as, ‘recognising, respecting and valuing people’s differences to contribute and to realise their full potential by promoting an inclusive culture for all’ (2017a, p.4). It considers its ten-year framework as the driving force behind progress towards increased representation of some minority groups in the arts (2016, p.36). However, recognising that responsibility for diversity was still not shared equally across its NPOs, in 2015 ACE announced a ‘fundamental shift’ in its strategy (Bazalgette, 2014, p.1); the decision was made to ‘publish annual data on the composition (disability, ethnicity, gender) of the workforce of all its National Portfolio Organisations’ (ACE, 2015b). Henley explains, ‘we ask funded organisations to provide correct and comprehensive data […] going forward, we will have to look at the funding conditions of those that do not comply’ (2016, p.4). Since 2015 theatres core funded by ACE have been required to evidence ‘how they contribute to the Creative Case for Diversity through their work’, to demonstrate progress towards increasing workplace opportunities for disabled people alongside other minority communities (ACE, 2017b). For the first time it seems that theatres, including the National Theatre, the RSC, and regional theatres across England are being held accountable for the position disabled people have in their workforce.

Theatre critic Lyn Gardner describes this shift in external strategy as:

> One of the most encouraging signs […] to encourage diversity […] a long way from the kind of box ticking we've seen in the past […] Diversity, of every kind, has to be core to any theatre organisation and what it does (2015).

Nevertheless, in terms of theatre, ACE's methods of gathering workforce data were condemned for broadly categorising staff as 'artistic', 'specialist' or 'other', and neglecting an opportunity to provide specific detail monitoring onstage representation (Snow, 2016; Equity, 2016). Despite this perceived failing, ACE's new approach has, for the first time, presented disability data gathered from theatres publicly and in isolation from that of other minority groups. Thus, specific dialogue regarding the need to increase the representation of disabled people in theatre has been advanced as part of the wider arts and diversity debate.

Arts Council England's effort to promote the work of disabled artists during its 2015-2018 funding period, following its shift in strategy, may be viewed as plentiful. It indicates marked change from past engagement with disabled people as part of a distinct arts sector. Disability Arts is long acknowledged as a movement developed over five decades, coinciding with the rise in UK disability rights activism in the 1970s (ACE, 2003, p.2; Johnston, 2016, p.21). Disability theatre is considered a 'branch of a wider international disability arts and culture movement', that 'sought to create art that expressed and explored disability as a valued human condition […] addressing the displacement of [disabled people] from audiences and the stage' (Johnston, 2016, p.15; p.21). Few scholars have attempted to map its history; as theatre venues were so often inaccessible to disabled people, its complex, grassroots development in the UK is hard to trace in literature (Kuppers, 2017, p.16). Finkelstein notes disability arts provided 'an alternative to the mainstream, representing the ideas of disabled people' (cited in ACE, 2003, p.8). The National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (no date), a recent heritage project delivered by Shape Arts, 'a disability-led arts organisation', now offers an online catalogue and learning resources charting contributions to the Disability Arts Movement since its inception. This project was part-funded by ACE and acknowledges individuals and companies who shaped the movement and continue to do so.

The Disability Arts Movement is also celebrated as influencing shifting perceptions of disability in what might be considered mainstream theatre today (NDACA, no date; ACE, 2003; Johnston, 2016; Kuppers, 2017). In ACE's publication *Celebrating Disability Arts* key companies are recognised to have 'broken new ground […] and helped the arts sector as a whole take access more seriously' (ACE, 2003, p.1). In this, Allan Sutherland, an artist writing extensively on disability arts, points to key events in the first thirty 30 years of the movement. He credits Graeae as the 'first professional theatre company of disabled people' (ACE, 2003, p.15). Founded in 1980, Graeae is considered 'one of the few such companies in the world', continuing to be 'one of the best-known disability theatre groups in the UK' (ACE, 2003, p.15; Kuppers, 2017, p.23). Graeae was distinct in its work with Deaf and disabled people with 'physical and sensory impairments', and its ongoing work is relevant throughout this thesis (ACE, 2003, p.4). Others such as Mind the Gap, founded in 1988 and continuing to work 'alongside artists with learning disabilities', are also recognised as shaping the disability arts sector (ACE, 2003, p.20; Mind the Gap, 2021). Both companies, and others emerging from disability arts, are sustained by ACE funding. They share a commitment to creating 'world-class theatre', and promoting onstage opportunities for disabled people, not just within a specific sector, but across the theatre industry (Graeae, no date; Mind the Gap, 2021).

In terms of ACE's engagement with theatre and disability its strategic initiatives reflect a new, dual focus. ACE continues to support organisations such as DadaFest 'one of the first disabled-led arts organisations in the UK', which emerged as part of a network of UK agencies developing disability arts (ACE, 2003, p.18). DadaFest (no date) ran its first disability arts festival in 2001 and its continued aim is to 'develop and showcase excellent disability and d/Deaf arts'. Significant and strategic funding also sustains Unlimited (no date) which received £1.8 million in 2016 to continue a programme of commissioning work by disabled artists. However, in addition to promoting original work by disabled artists or 'disability-focused shows', ACE's targeted initiatives aim to increase the participation of disabled people and embed accessibility in theatre more widely (Naylor et al, 2016, p.51); a shift that Graeae continues to be key in.

In 2015 Ramps on the Moon (2018), received £2.3 million, the largest ever grant given as part of ACE's strategic touring programme (Hutchinson, 2015a). Like ACE supported work already mentioned its purpose is to raise the profile of D/deaf and disabled artists; in contrast, however, *Ramps on The Moon (ROTM)* is targeted at collaboration between performers and practitioners based in major theatres. ROTM raises the profile of talented actors, yet 'the art is not about disability' (ROTM, 2018). The strategic touring funding awarded to New Wolsey Theatre to deliver this initiative seems to be ACE's only strategy for enabling directors based in theatre buildings to explore ways to increase onstage opportunities for disabled people within their practice. The prerequisite for an initiative such as ROTM, awarded a further £2.1 million in to 2018 to continue its work (ACE, 2018b), infers an acknowledgment that relationships between directors and actors, non-disabled and disabled, are powerful in realising ACE's Creative Case for Diversity (2013); that their experiences of working together are influential in shaping the future climate for disabled people in the arts.

Ramps on the Moon is described as, 'a critical movement striving for a step change in the inclusion and integration of Deaf and disabled individuals in the UK theatre sector' (ROTM, 2018). The project involves six NPO theatres including New Wolsey Theatre, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Nottingham Playhouse, Leeds Playhouse, Sheffield Theatres, and strategic partner Graeae Theatre Company. Participation in the ROTM consortium involves commitment to, 'a programme of organisational change', and 'creating long-term employment opportunities for Deaf and disabled individuals' (ROTM, 2018). Over six years each theatre leads on a large-scale touring production involving a 'roughly equal mix of Deaf and disabled, and non-disabled performers within a large cast of 18 to 20' (ROTM, 2018). To date the consortium of ROTM partners has produced: The Government Inspector in 2016, directed by Roxana Silbert, then artistic director of Birmingham Repertory Theatre; The Who's Tommy in 2017, directed by Kerry Michael, then artistic director of Theatre Royal Stratford East; Our Country's Good in 2018, directed by Fiona Buffini, associate director at Nottingham Playhouse; Oliver Twist in 2020, directed by Amy Leach, associate director at Leeds Playhouse (ROTM, 2018). The extent to which these directors had previously experienced work with disabled people is likely to vary. Nevertheless, in relation to responding to ACE's diversity strategy, the opportunity afforded to them can be viewed as a privileged position; they have the chance to direct a professional cast including actors with a range of impairments, with access to the expertise of Graeae and in the familiarity of their home theatre. ROTM set out to expose participants to: 'a casting process that allows all theatres in the consortium to input into and learn from'; 'toolkits developed for participation programmes'; 'sharing of best practice between consortium partners and across the industry' (ROTM, 2018). It is unlikely that directors and actors working in non-participating theatres have access to such a comprehensive opportunity to explore working together, which for some may be new territory.

NPO theatres outside the ROTM consortium are still required to demonstrate progress towards increasing workplace opportunities for disabled people; for individuals working in these environments experiences of theatre practice and disability may be decidedly different (ACE, 2017b). Questions expressed by directors in media articles, such as, 'how does a director communicate ideas to a deaf and mute actress who is playing Helen Keller?' (Fraser, 2015) and 'what is the right sort of play for a deaf and disabled actor to be in' (Hutchinson, 2016b), indicate an ongoing lack of understanding around casting decisions and practical aspects of working with disabled people in theatre. Equally, actor Mat Fraser believes, 'there aren't many directors who trust a disabled actor in a lead role', and that 'there are only a few Shakespearean roles that a disabled actor can play' (2017a). Such comments point to the range of complex perceptions of theatre practice and disability that might be navigated by disabled and non-disabled people in the theatre workplace. If further understanding of unresolved issues surrounding the underrepresentation of disabled people in the arts is to be sought after, individuals' questions and perceptions such as these require detailed investigation.

1.2 Lived Experience: Directors and Actors

Phenomenology, the study of lived experience, is a lens through which the impact of ACE's shift in strategy on theatre practice can be explored in detail from directors and actors' personal perspectives (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.14). As strategy and practice are shifting, so are personal experiences of theatre practice and disability among professionals working in theatre. In an overview of key concepts of drama and performance, Pickering asserts, 'Drama, the most public of all the arts, always involves people […] Therefore, any aspect of the human condition may become the business of the dramatists [or] the performer' (2005, p.225). As Johnston recognises, 'anyone who participates in contemporary theatre will encounter at least one if not many disabled figures, themes or tropes onstage […] most will also likely find themselves as or among disabled people in theatre' (2016, p.2). It seems that ACE's shift in strategy has further elevated disability as the business of its NPO theatres. Progress towards increasing the representation of disabled people in theatre work on and off stage may be slow, however, disability is fast becoming the day-to-day business of all individuals working in the industry. Gardner makes clear, 'no artistic director planning a programme or casting a show can hide any longer behind lack of knowledge […] people will be on your case' (2016). She suggests external pressure from ACE has made issues surrounding the representation of disabled people in theatre impossible for directors to ignore, there are repercussions for doing so, which will impact creative decisions in practice.

Fraser describes ROTM's approach to casting disabled people in roles not specifying impairment as, 'a no brainer, modern-day necessity [...] a great opportunity to reimagine roles' (2017b). However, as directors and actors' approaches to theatre are grounded on a vast range of theories and experiences, reimagining roles may be a complex and personal process, particularly for those with little lived experience of disability. The role of the director embraces a range of skills utilized to facilitate casting, rehearsals, and aspects necessary for final performance. British theatre director Peter Brook sums up the work of a director in two words, how and why. Both are vast concepts. He describes 'how' as small, practical aspects of crafting work, and 'why' as a director's vision, motivation, and purpose in creating theatre (Brook in Giannachi and Luckhurst, 1999, pp.ix-xiii). ACE's shift in strategy and the increased participation of disabled people in theatre has potential to destabilize both. For non-disabled and disabled people, directors and actors, to work together effectively the day-to-day business of theatre, casting, rehearsal, and performance practice may need shifting; this is in addition to personal beliefs and understandings of theatre and of disability itself. As Sandahl considers *Disability Phenomenology's Role in Revolutionising Theatrical Space* she questions, 'what might our theatre look like if […] disabled artists could fully and boldly participate?' (2002, p.24). Sandahl perceives, 'we would not only alter the ideology of our performance space, but we would serve as a model for change to the larger social order' (2002, p.24).

In considering practical aspects of crafting work with actors with a range of impairments, Graeae's artistic director Jenny Sealey views accessible approaches to casting and performance as 'simple' (2017). Michele Taylor, ROTM's director for change, also insists it is a myth 'that it requires particular skills and experience to work with D/deaf and disabled people' (2017). However, integral aspects of ROTM partners' commitments suggest that directors based in producing house theatres may benefit from a level of guidance and opportunity to develop skills and knowledge when considering disabled people in their practice. Casting processes and accessible rehearsal and performance methods are highlighted as key areas where learning needs to take place (ROTM, 2018). In this way, and in contrast to Sealey, theatre practitioners Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl assert that, 'commitment to include everyone is not easy, especially when extraordinary financial and logistical efforts are involved' (2007, p.232). In addition, as is recognised in students starting out in disability studies, initial consideration of disability perspectives can create personal moments of disruption and disorientation (Parrey, 2016; 2018); resistance, anxiety and blurring of professional identity can occur when pre-existing assumptions of disability are opened-up to alternative ways of thinking (Burch, 2017). ACE's shift in strategy and the ROTM initiative may provoke genuine reassessment of casting, rehearsal, and performance practices; however, due attention must also be given to psychological shifts in understandings of disability and theatre practice that are being navigated in the workplace. If these are not considered, even though onstage opportunities for disabled people may increase, it is possible that the environments, structures, and attitudes experienced in theatre will be neither helpful nor appropriate.

Concerned with these complexities, the initial three-year funding period following ACE's shift in strategy, 2015-2018, has delivered a unique situation in which to conduct this study. It allows experiences of theatre practice and disability among directors and actors to be examined in the context of a new strategic funding requirement. As former chair of ACE, Bazalgette stated one year on from announcing its new approach, 'it's all about changing minds, not a quick fix' (2015). Therefore, considering ACE's vision for 'great art and culture for everyone', it seems crucial to examine at ground level where practice and personal perceptions are shifting to and from (ACE, 2013). Without a clear understanding of the personal experiences of directors and actors currently working in theatre it seems impossible to assess where change towards engagement with disabled people in theatre is happening, and where it is still needed. There is a need for original and in-depth knowledge from within the theatre workplace; this undergirds the rationale for my study, the necessity for interdisciplinary, qualitative, and nuanced investigation into the unresolved underrepresentation of disabled people on stage. Although addressing social science researchers, Braud and Andersons' thoughts on gaining insight into practice seem relevant in this; they state that 'we need an imaginative, even outlandish, science to envision the potential of human experience, not just more tidy reports' (1998, p.xxvii).

Consequently, this study provides evidence of how shifting strategy, theatre practice, and personal understandings of theatre and disability are being navigated in real-life. By drawing on the rich history and critical knowledge of disability studies, and considering emerging practice from a phenomenological perspective, challenges and opportunities created in this can be explored. The phenomenon of disabled actors and non-disabled directors working together in routine theatre practice has already necessitated a shift from the outside-in, in strategy; yet, gaining detailed insight into shifts from the inside-out, in personal perceptions, understandings and behaviours, demands a qualitative dimension. Key concepts of lived experience are drawn upon in my research to make way for a subjective understanding of current theatre practice from an individual perspective. This allows for a clearer understanding of the current theatre climate for disabled people from the perspectives of several individuals, for directors and actors to step outside of their everyday activities to reflect on personal perceptions of working together; to examine their own thoughts, feelings, values, and will in this (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.13).

1.3 Definition of Terminology

With signs of change in approaches to disability and theatre practice emerging, any discussion that acknowledges disabled people as professionals within the theatre industry demands terminology that reflects that shift. Therefore, in framing my topic, it is necessary to consider and explain use of the terms *theatre practice*, *disability,* and *impairment* within my research. *Practice* can be 'very broadly defined as any form of professional work or community activity or individual endeavour in which action is informed by values, beliefs and experience' (British Education Research Association, 2017). Use of the term in this study refers to professional work in producing house theatres; these are theatres in which onstage productions are cast and created independently or alongside partner organisations. *Theatre practice* refers to the action of theatre-making from conception to completion; this involves casting, rehearsal, and staging a final performance. When referring to theatre involving disabled people the term *inclusive* is often added, yet such diversity terminology is contested as setting up 'a binary of "us" and "them"' (Fox and MacPearson, 2015, p.7). Although past exclusion in theatre is recognised in my research, terms associated with specialist work fail to convey the commonplace notion of disabled people as professional actors in theatre that is central to this study. I consider my work distinct from theatre research focused on disability narrative in scripts or productions or applied theatre work; it is not concerned with theatre purposed to challenge, transform, or inform participants or spectators about disability issues. Instead, it does not draw to physical impairment as something remarkable, but centres on theatre as an employer of professionals engaged in the day-to-day work of theatre-making who self-define as disabled people. In parallel with this distinction, Taylor's definition of her work is helpful in clarifying use of the term *theatre practice* in my study. She explains, 'I'm not talking here about "disability product", vital though that is to a rich inclusive arts infrastructure. I’m talking specifically about an ordinary expectation that [disabled people] will be in theatre spaces as performers’ (Taylor, 2017).

Disability terms are widely debated in their use for social comprehensibility. They are ambiguous, under constant scrutiny, and increasingly prevalent in theatre discussion (Kuppers, 2003; McIntyre, 2013). Outside of their lived experience of disability through personal impairment, family, friends, colleagues, or work, theatre professionals may question the need for awareness of disability history, politics, and theory. Yet, as is expanded on in the more in-depth discussion in my literature review, theatre makers cannot be absolved of responsibility in considering how work they create might contribute towards understandings of disability in society. As such, the values, beliefs, and experiences that shape approaches to onstage work with disabled people can only be considered fully when widespread definitions of disability are examined and understood.

You are disabled under the Equality Act (2010) ‘if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a “substantial” and “long-term” negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities’. However, policy-based definitions such as this overlook phenomenological variance, the fact individuals may differ in whether they consider an impairment to have a negative affect or not. Discourse regarding deafness and impairment is an example of the complex nature of disability terminology and self-definition. Although deaf people are considered disabled under the Equality Act (2010), it is argued that people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) should be considered a linguistic minority community (Ladd cited in Campbell and Oliver, 1996, p.120). People with acquired hearing loss are more likely not to use sign language, preferring to communicate orally, and may identify as disabled people. Deaf, BSL users often do not. For this reason, theatre organisations, researchers, and disability scholars embrace an all-encompassing term, *D/deaf and disabled actors*. This shortcut is increasingly applied to describe actors who identify as part of the Deaf community and use sign language (uppercase D), people with hearing loss (lowercase d), and with other physical, cognitive, or mental health impairments. This term is prominent in theatre and media-based literature, so is evident in discussing current practice in my study.

Disability scholars provide a wealth of literature detailing the range of disability models, which it is not necessary to replicate here. However, the foremost distinction between the medical and social models of disability is helpful to highlight; behaviours and attitudes, approaches to practice, workplace environments and organisational structures are often based upon these theories. Oliver offers a simple description of this distinction, stating, ‘the idea underpinning the [medical] model was that of personal tragedy, while the idea underpinning the social model was that of externally imposed restriction’ (2004, p.19). The medical model identifies disability through medical diagnosis with this being the disadvantaging factor (Oliver and Barnes, 2012, p.11). In this way, blame for lack of participation is attributed to ‘a problem population who possess conditions needing amelioration or cure’ (Sandahl and Auslander, 2005, p.7). This understanding is ‘vigorously rejected by organisations of disabled people, but still pervades many attitudes towards disabled people’ (Graeae, 2009). The medical model has been the basis for almost all theatrical portrayals of disability in the past (Oliver, 2004, p.19; Kempe, 2013, p.62). If responsibility for diversity in the arts is to be shared, and casting and theatre practice with disabled people reimagined, a shift away from medical model beliefs is required. It is, therefore, the opposing social model that underpins my research.

The social model was born out of a reappraisal of the definition of disability by academics and disability rights campaigners in the 1970s (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002, p.3; Johnston, 2016, p.16). As disability rights developed as a serious civil rights movement the term disability was, ‘remobilized by advocates for its power to reference disabling social and economic conditions [connecting a] vast complement of people through their shared experience of oppression’ (Johnston, 2016, p.17). The central aspect of the social model is this identification of disabled people as an oppressed social group, a definition with positive connotations associated with activism and shared identity (Goodley, 2011, p.9). Differentiation is made between the terms *impairment* and *disability*, connecting the former with the individual body and the latter with social and cultural phenomenon (Finkelstein, 1980, 1981; Barnes, 1991; Oliver, 1990, 1996). Disabled People’s International, the first international organisation governed and led by disabled people, initially proposed this dual classification in 1981 (Barnes, 1991). Impairment is defined as, ‘the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental, or sensory impairment’ (Barnes, 1991). Disability is defined as, ‘the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers’ (Barnes, 1991).

With disability identified as flawed social values and organisation of society, Kuppers points to the ‘instantaneous lifting of guilt’ delivered by the social model as its most valuable feature (2017, p.7). Disabled people are no longer deemed in need of fixing by medical intervention, instead, Kuppers perceives the social model as:

> Stepping back from forms of acceptable behaviour that are too narrow and do not allow us to value other knowledges, changing the shape of our days and our buildings to allow for more of us to be deemed human and valuable in our world (2017, p.9).

In this way, the social model is associated with action, with personal reflection that shapes changes in beliefs, values, day-to-day routines, and environments. In relation to disability in theatre, this perception of the social model emphasises how both personal and practical adjustments are vital in substantiating the rights of disabled people in the theatre workplace.

My writing adheres to social model views and distinction between impairment and disability. However, it is also acknowledged that, despite its positive connotations and being ‘the bedrock to contemporary disability studies’, some consider the social model of disability incomplete (Gray, 2009, p.319). The primary objection is that its barrier emphasis denies the impact of personal impairment (Oliver and Barnes, 2012). Shakespeare and Watson describe impairment and disability as, ‘different aspects of a single experience’, explaining, ‘It is difficult to determine where impairment ends […] Disability is a complex dialectic of biological, psychological, cultural and socio-political factors, which cannot be extricated’ (2002, p.24). Indeed, Oliver asserts that ‘the social model is not about the personal experience of impairment’ (2004, p.85). Hence, Shakespeare (2018) argues it is not enough to replace the medical model with the social model of disability; he explains, ‘it’s more complicated than that. Disabled people have medical and psychological issues as well as the social barriers they face. And sometimes that’s unpopular with activists who want to blame everything on society’ (Shakespeare, 2018). Lived experience of impairment and disability in theatre practice are intrinsically intertwined in this study; as such, social model concepts frame my research and its terminology, but alternative theories are also relevant and referred to accordingly. Equally, although terms used in my study are aligned with the preferred language of disability scholars and activists, it is also appreciated that many people still find the terms *disability*, *disabled* and *impairment* restricting.

The vast range of impairment types is acknowledged in this study, but it has been necessary to simplify it. Whilst maintaining that issues of discrimination may be common among all disabled people, and actors may have multiple impairments, it is appreciated that issues raised in theatre practice with actors with one impairment type may differ to others. Therefore, for simplification, the term *actor* refers to the experiences of people with physical rather than mental health or cognitive impairments, unless stated otherwise. In addition, the term *disabled actor* is evident in literary and participant quotations and in my writing as way of clarifying the focus on actors with physical impairments. It is, however, also appreciated that although actors may self-define as disabled people this label can be problematic for some in terms of professional identity and recognition in the theatre industry; a matter raised later in the discussion. It is not my intention to marginalise people from this discussion. Instead, it is my hope that others will engage in similar qualitative research projects so discussion around disability and theatre practice can be expanded and connections can be explored in the future.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

This interdisciplinary research crosses the boundaries of theatre, disability studies, and phenomenology. Debate within these fields is passionate, yet intersections seem plagued by historical assumptions, politics, and entrenched research approaches. Complex and personal negotiations across these fields are now crucial in gaining an informed understanding of today’s theatre industry. The field of disability studies provides critical insight into the representation and portrayal of disabled people in theatre, which is relevant to individual practitioners and in understanding shifts in theatre practice. Nevertheless, disability scholar Tom Shakespeare cautions that in the past his field has neglected lived experience; there has been little concern with the complexity of disability as phenomenon from the viewpoint of disabled people and non-disabled (Shakespeare, 2005). Likewise, connections with phenomenology in theatre studies have centred on audience reception or actor to character transformation; lived experience of theatre as a workplace has been side-lined in academic writing. New interdisciplinary perspectives are, thus, crucial, so that real-life experiences of theatre practice and disability can be explored and understood.

Through semi-structured interviews this research questions how theatrical preferences and understandings of disability among directors who self-define as non-disabled, and actors who identify as disabled people, influence approaches to working together. Also, what each perceive as challenges and opportunities in this. There have been few studies concerned with the participation of disabled people in professional theatre practice outside the confines of specialist companies or projects, or that give voice to directors and actors. Furthermore, Brook believes that:

> Directors, by the nature of their craft, have become more and more isolated from one another […] We must seize every opportunity that offers the possibility of understanding and respecting each other’s work, and enjoy the possibility of being influenced and changed by another director (Brook in Giannachi and Luckhurst, 1999, p.xii).

Crucially, therefore, this research voices the perspectives of professionals employed within theatre organisations that receive ACE funding and are producing onstage work. It provides an understanding of their thoughts, commitments, and feelings through talking about their experiences of the theatre workplace in their own words in as much detail as possible (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005, p.21). Directors’ and actors’ experiences of theatre encompass work they have observed or involvement in the process of theatre-making along with its successes and failings. Experiences of disability, however, extend beyond work in theatre, they are personal, professional, or both; they are first-hand accounts of disability, encounters with disabled friends, family or colleagues, or wider encounters with disability in training settings, the media, arts, and literature. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), familiar to the qualitative psychological field, assists my study in creating a clearer picture of how directors and actors are making sense of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The process of IPA is explained in the research methodology chapter.

Consequently, my study aims to: recognise and understand more about why non-disabled directors and disabled actors are choosing to, or not to, work together; facilitate open dialogue, sharing of personal experiences among professional directors and actors, non-disabled and disabled; motivate policy based on real-life experiences of practice and impact long-term change towards the accurate onstage representation of disabled people in theatre. Drawing to phenomenology, asking 'how [a] person's world is lived and experienced', my intention is that findings from the study will provide new knowledge (Finlay, 2011, p.3); not from statistics, from the outside-in, but from the inside-out. It is hoped that discoveries made will build bridges to what is happening in theatres right now; providing a clear sense of the current theatre climate for disabled people, where change is taking place, and where strategies may be best targeted going forward.

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in three sections. Each is designed to draw the reader towards a particular focal point about experiences of theatre practice and disability in this study. These focal points are aiming to get under the surface of what is happening in the theatre workplace, and to explore the real-life implications of ACE's diversity strategy for disabled actors and non-disabled directors. I am suggesting ACE's shift in approach regarding disability is having a significant impact on individuals' day-to-day work in theatre. This first section, *Background to the Study*, is in three chapters. This chapter has outlined perspectives of disability and theatre from different disciplines and the industry, which can be drawn on to make sense of actors and directors' lived experiences. ACE's strategy regarding disability has been set out alongside the rational for my study, terminology adopted in my writing, and my research aims and objectives. Next, we explore the research terrain regarding experiences of theatre practice and disability through a *Literature Review* in chapter two. We will notice that disabled actors and non-disabled directors working together in professional theatre has been rarely studied. Also, that it is necessary to consider this phenomenon in response to industry-wide calls to increase the representation of disabled people in theatre. Theoretical perspectives and prospects for building on existing research, drawn from the review, lead towards the study design for this thesis, which is then outlined in chapter three, *Research Methodology*.

The second section, *Discussion: Lived Experiences of Theatre Practice and Disability,* is in two parts. In *Part 1* we take an in-depth look at how day-to-day work in theatre is experienced by actor-participants in this study. Over chapters four to six we explore three superordinate themes emerging from interview data. These are examined through analysis of actors' verbal accounts, which allow us to make sense of their individual experiences and reflect on them. In *Part 2* chapters seven to nine take the same approach to discussing three superordinate themes for director-participants. The focus remains on examining, interpreting, and reflecting on individuals' interview responses. Within each group, actors and directors, it is possible to make connections between participants, and with existing literature and practice. But, in line with idiographic roots of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the focus rests on person-by-person exploration of lived experiences of theatre practice and disability.

Observations across groups are reserved for the final thesis section, *Synthesis and Conclusion.* This moves from summarizing key findings in the data, to identifying higher-order themes that make it possible to step back from individuals' experiences. Chapter ten allows us to consider what connections across actor and director participants mean for each group, and in terms of theory, policy, practice, and research. Keeping the conversation going in a way that normalises complexity surfaced in this study will be suggested as a theoretical and practical way of expanding engagement with disability in theatre and diversity strategies. I will suggest that current approaches to pursuing the accurate representation of disabled people can be replaced with strategy reflecting stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for those working in theatre, and the industry itself. My thesis leaves you, not with my last words, but with the words of actor and director participants and their intrapersonal, take-home message for moving forwards.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

My literature review allows for the lived experiences of directors and actors working within Arts Council England's NPO theatres to be considered in relation to academic and media discourse, providing a foundation for interpreting data collected in interviews. It seeks to build on bedrock of knowledge in theatre and disability studies to explore real-life experiences of theatre practice and disability. Previous studies directly concerned with disabled people working professionally in theatre are sparse. Sandahl and Auslander note, 'earlier scholars within disability studies looked askance at the arts, seeing them as purveyors of negative images of people with disabilities' (2005, p.6). They also acknowledge most theatre scholars engaging with disabled people were, 'the non-disabled interested in applying the arts as therapy' (2005, p.6). Fox and Sandahl equally recognise limitations of existing research in this area, commenting, 'when theater spaces are inaccessible, and when training programmes still produce too few disabled actors and playwrights, is it any wonder that there seems to be a kind of benign neglect of theatrical discourse within disability studies?' (2018a, p.121).

Kuppers perceives that 'the fields of disability and theatre developed through conversations in journals and anthropologies' (2017, p.79); these include Kuppers' special issue for *Contemporary Theatre Review* (2001), Fahy and King's *Peering Behind the Curtain* (2002), *Bodies in Commotion* by Sandahl and Auslander (2005), and Henderson and Ostrander for *Text and Performance Quarterly* (2008) (Kuppers, 2017, p.79). More recent publications include Johnston's *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama* (2016), Kuppers' *Theatre and Disability* (2017), and Fox and Sandahl's *Drama, Theatrical Performance, and Disability* for the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* (2018b). These move from historical accounts of disability in theatre to offer a more nuanced discussion of shifts in theory and practice, and the perspectives of disabled people in the industry. These align with the approach taken in my study and are referred to as appropriate. In terms of past studies of theatre practice with disabled people, special issues of *RIDE: Journal for Applied Theatre* offer an example of the many articles on disability-focused theatre projects, training, and initiatives (K. Johnston, 2017; Saur and Johansen, 2013; Dacre and Bulmer, 2009; Eckard and Myers, 2009). Although these may seem relevant to my study, as is more common, they centre on specialist projects and well-being; they do little to shed light on the experiences of actors with physical impairments in the context of professional practice.

As mentioned in the introduction, theatre and phenomenology has primarily been associated with studies into how performances are encountered by spectators, or how actors experience transformation into role (D. Johnston, 2017; Bleeker, Foley Sherman and Nedelkopoulou, 2015). However, theatre and performance scholar D. Johnston identifies a more recent call within the field for, ‘a rigorous phenomenology focusing in “the thing itself” on stage in contrast to the study of signs and social discourse’ (2017, p.69). Few academics have examined lived experience of theatre practice and disability in the workplace aside from work such as: Fahy and King’s interviews with three professional actors with physical impairments (2002); Raynor and Hayward’s article, *Experiences of Actors with Disabilities in the Entertainment Industry,* which briefly profiles the thoughts and feelings of American actors (2009); and Sealey’s collection of testimonies *Reasons to be Graeae: A Work in Progress* (2018), which gives insight into specific experiences of actors and theatre makers who are part of Graeae’s development as a disabled-led company.

Insight into the day-to-day work of professional directors is mainly limited to a few collections of interviews (Delgado and Heritage, 1996; Giannachi and Luckhurst, 1999; Delgado and Rebellato, 2010). These categorise the approaches of individual and high-profile directors such as Declan Donnellan; his approach to theatre-making is singled out as actor focused, described as the kind of director whose aim is, ‘liberating the actor to achieve the closest possible relationship with the audience’ (Delgado and Heritage, 1996, p.11; Delgado and Rebellato, 2010, p.146). Comparisons between directors’ working preferences are made; for example, Donnellan is identified as a director who uses ‘imaginative, non-naturalistic devices’ in contrast to Katie Mitchell’s trademark liking for ‘intense realism of performance style’ (Delgado and Rebellato, 2010, p.146; p.319). In some ways this literature is helpful in highlighting the vastness of belief systems and practice methods among directors and confronted by actors working with them. However, there has been little attempt to consider how directors' beliefs and working preferences are interpreted in relation to disability; Band *et al's* (2011) education-based study, *'Disabled students in the Performing Arts – Are We Setting Them Up to Succeed',* is a rare example of academic writing that attempts to give voice to practitioners' initial experiences of working with disabled people in rehearsals.

With this dearth of similar approaches to that taken in my study acknowledged, deeper understanding of the experiences of directors and actors working in NPO theatres has been sought through a broad range of sources. The voice of actors and directors is more prominent in online newspaper articles than in academic writing; guidance for accessible casting, rehearsal and performance practice is also set out in publications by organisations such as ACE (2017c), Equity (2015), and Graeae (2009). As such, varied standpoints on theatre practice and disability have been pursued by reviewing academic work alongside websites, theatre reviews, newspaper articles, blog posts, and policy documents relevant to this study.

Gould, artistic director of DadaFest (no date), believes, 'a disability-focused organisation…cannot be properly understood without understanding the social context in which disabled and deaf people make art, and the history of that context' (quoted in Nwachukwu and Robinson, 2016). This statement emphasises the place of disability studies knowledge in informing the work of NPO theatres tasked with increasing engagement with disabled people. Before ACE's more recent statistical revelations and resulting attention on the disabled workforce in its NPOs, the portrayal of disability in dramatic literature and responses to disabled people in the arts had been long debated by disability and theatre scholars. Historically, studies have chiefly pursued a socio-political objective with scholars presenting an activist response to misunderstandings of disability and prejudice in society. Literature has been consigned to the development of two central discussions: the scrutiny and recognition of common portrayals of disability in the arts, and disability aesthetics, the signification of impairment in performance (Barnes, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 1997; 2000; Fahy and King, 2002; Kuppers, 2003; Sandahl and Auslander, 2005; Conroy, 2010). Both bodies of knowledge raise crucial questions surrounding ACE's shift in diversity strategy and the representation of disabled people in theatre today. As such, the discussion that follows first refers to how directors and actors experience theatrical roles and casting. It overviews how dramatic portrayals of disability have been understood, manipulated, and challenged in the past. It also illustrates where alternative approaches to roles and casting are relevant to increasing opportunities for disabled people in theatre today. The discussion then refers to how directors and actors respond to and interpret impairment. It considers studies in disability aesthetics and signification, pointing to how individual mind-sets and familiarity with impairment are relevant to decisions made in theatre today.

2.1 Historical Portrayals of Disability

Oliver and Barnes identify a link between a rise in disability studies courses and the growth in interdisciplinary publications (2012, p.2); this has contributed to an increased number of academic analyses of portrayals of disability in the arts, with studies in film and television drawing some parallels with theatre. Scholars present overwhelming recognition that a shift in approaches to casting is required to avoid further stigmatization of the disabled community; most disabled characters in scripts and roles assigned to disabled people in the past have been clichéd and archetypal, reinforcing negative stereotypes (Kuppers, 2001; Lewis, 2006; Sandahl, 2008; Kempe, 2013). Back in 1991, Richard Wood, ex-chairman of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People observed that ‘all the arts and media representation of disabled people has so far been totally negative’ (cited in Conroy, 2009, p.10; Kempe, 2013, p.7). Kempe discusses this uncompromising perception in *Drama, Disability and Education*, finding it difficult to contest in his chronology of dramatic characters (Kempe, 2013, pp.21-36). It is not surprising then that Kuppers mentions, ‘since the beginning of disability performance criticism in the late 1990s, many writers in the field (me included) come from a pretty overtly politicized aesthetic place, with exclusion usually stingingly felt’ (2017, p.36). Or that Shakespeare accuses the field of disability studies of becoming entrenched in barrier recognition and an oppression focused response to its subjects (2005). Until recently, approaches to writing disabled characters or casting disabled people have given scholars little alternative in approach as, ‘much of what we see on our stages […] are antiquated, inaccurate, inauthentic portrayals of the lived experience of disabled people’ (Bruno, 2014).

Barnes’ classic study *Disabling Imagery and the Media* (1992) summarizes the most frequently documented stereotyped portrayals of disabled characters. These represent the disabled person as ‘pitiable and pathetic’ ‘an object of violence’, ‘sinister and evil’, ‘atmosphere or curio’, ‘super-cripple’, ‘an object of ridicule’, ‘their own worst and only enemy’, ‘burden’, ‘sexually abnormal’, ‘incapable of participating fully in community life’, and as ‘normal’ (Barnes, 1992). This summary is illustrative of findings in many individual studies into cultural portrayals of disability, on stage, in film, and the media (Gartner and Joe, 1987; Cumberbatch and Negrine, 1992; Norden, 1994; Riddell and Watson 2003; Darke, 2004). Barnes describes, ‘Stereotype assumptions about disabled people are based on superstition, myths and beliefs from earlier less enlightened times. They are inherent to our culture and persist partly because they are constantly reproduced’ (1992). Scholars discuss the motivation for the recurrence of these role-types being their use as dramatic device. For example, they are exploited to emphasise storylines of personal tragedy, the inclusion of overtly dependent disabled people is purposed to highlight a non-disabled character's sensitivity and goodness (Klein, 2011, p.913). Mitchell and Synder label this cultural leaning towards manipulating disability, ‘narrative prosthesis’, indicating ‘that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight’ (2000, p.49). Harnett points out impairment has been, ‘exploited by scriptwriters for dramatic effect, for emotional appeal or for blatant symbolism’ (2000, p.21).

Lewis, editor of one of the first collections of plays by disabled playwrights, *Beyond Victims and Villains* (2006), introduces those unfamiliar with disability politics to questioning the usefulness and danger of metaphorical narratives in established plays. Regarding *Richard III,* Lewis states, ‘those who stage it […] must confront the assumption that a deformed body represents an evil soul’, and concerning *The Glass Menagerie* asks, ‘to what extent does Laura's [impairment] play into society’s assumptions of the disabled as helpless victims?’ (cited in Tolan, 2001). Her challenging questions are relevant to directors casting these roles in current practice, and to actors playing those roles; the implication is that both must position personal perceptions of disability and impairment alongside an understanding of how a particular narrative might influence views of disabled people in society. Similarly, Fox and Lipkin's (2002) exploration of connections between feminist and disability theatre places responsibility on practitioners to consider personal understandings of disability; they acknowledge 'more troublesome metaphorical uses' of disability, asking, 'to what end might the feminist practitioner of theatre concern herself with disability culture?' (Fox and Lipkin, 2002, p.80). Fox and Lipkin acknowledge value in understanding disability politics and history for theatre makers; they maintain that 'metaphor, which is at the heart of theatrical language, need not be rejected completely' if understanding of disability studies and lived experience of disability are interwoven in practice (2002, p.79).

Sandahl and Auslander's collection of essays, *Bodies in Commotion* (2005), delves deeper into the meanings of a range of depictions of disability onstage. Akin to Lewis (2006), and Fox and Lipkin (2002), their work moves from the common rhetoric of barrier recognition and identifying oppressive stereotypes. It considers examples of independent work by disabled artists who have 'challenged tired narrative conventions […] and created work based on their own experiences' (Sandahl and Auslander, 2005, p.4). As mentioned in chapter one, and is important to reiterate at this point, performing published play-text within producing house theatres is still only one of many ways an actor may favour practicing their craft. There are many independent artists and disability-specific companies that choose to create original work with a strong disability narrative; these often employ verbatim theatre to disclose personal experience. Disability theorist and author of *Extraordinary Bodies* Garland-Thomson defines disability arts as, 'a genre of self-representation, a form of autobiography that merges the visual with the narrative' (1997, p.334). Although not the focus of the discussion here, it is appreciated that the Disability Arts Movement has paved the way for many of the shifts in wider theatre today; it has allowed for alternative approaches to portraying disability to be explored on stage and in academia, and for talented performers who identify as disabled people to be recognised (Vasey, 1992; Barnes and Mercer, 2001).

Acquaintance with historical portrayals of disability on stage and screen, their dramatic manipulation and association with the medical model of disability, is matter of course for disability scholars; Fox notes, ‘part of what disability studies has trained me to do is to recognize the limited range of tropes to which disabled people are assigned in representation’ (2016, p.129). These understandings remain the primary basis for analysing dramatic text and directorial approaches to disability on stage. However, directors and actors working in NPO theatres may be estranged from insights taken for granted in the field of disability studies. This knowledge is increasingly relevant in theatre practice and valuable in negotiating stereotype and cliché so that appropriate and informed casting choices can be made (Fox and MacPherson, 2015, p.2). In reviewing newspaper articles published since ACE’s shift in strategy in 2015 it is obvious that theatre critics still encounter portrayals of disability deemed inappropriate, even in new writing (Birkett, 2015; Snow, 2017). As mentioned in introducing my study, issue is raised with the re-enactment of a disabled character by a non-disabled person, commonly referred to as ‘cripping up’ (Shaban, 2015; Ryan, 2015). This practice has been debated by scholars with widely held belief that its long history has only served to entrench misunderstandings of disability further (Johnston, 2016, p.44).

Wide media comment on Charing Cross Theatre’s production *The Braille Legacy* evidences estrangement and negotiation with disability understandings among directors (Gardner, 2017; Shenton, 2017; Snow, 2017). The production was labelled ‘a case for better communication with the disability arts sector’ (Scarlet, 2017). Directors were accused of ‘the same old mistakes’, not casting any visually impaired or blind actors as blind characters and falling into ‘the usual tropes when it comes to portraying blindness’ (Scarlet, 2017). As a disabled person and professional in arts and media, Scarlet settles, ‘what *The Braille Legacy* shows is not a production purposely avoiding employing disabled talent or not appealing to a disabled audience, but a wider lack of knowledge and understanding within the entire mainstream theatrical industry’ (2017). With these issues in mind, it seems that, when considering disability history and politics, casting some of the most popular iconic roles in theatre is a challenge for directors and a consideration for actors; however, this only seems unsurmountable if understanding and acknowledgment of a need for shifting approaches to disability in theatre is lacking. It seems crucial that those making casting decisions not only recognise the cultural weight of reproducing disability stereotypes but discover alternative approaches to casting disabled people also.

Literature presents a clear outline of role-types that risk further harm to disability understandings in society, yet few scholars seem to set out what might constitute a positive portrayal of disability in theatre. Barnes notes that portrayals of ordinary people engaged in everyday life, work, and relationships, characters 'who just happen to have impairments', are rare (1992, p.18). He suggests a positive portrayal of disability displays multidimensional characterisation of a person, with complexity of personality and emotions, including a variety of life aspects (Barnes, 1992). In *Exploring Disability* Barnes and Mercer acknowledge how the 'good parts of ordinary life – love, romance and sex' should be included in disabled characters (2010, p.189). Riley (2005) notes that positive portrayals of disabled people have been criticised for deflecting from painful realities of living with impairment; he argues that challenging aspects of disability may be portrayed accurately in narrative if focused on the 'rights, feelings, and thoughts of the [character] instead of the people around him' (Riley, 2005, p.100). These scholars provide helpful benchmarks for those unaccustomed with disability studies in thinking about challenging historical approaches to disability in theatre. However, if casting disabled people in productions depended solely on finding disabled characters with these attributes written in existing plays, an appropriate opportunity to do so will hardly ever arise.

There is scope for writing new, modern plays that reimagine disabled characters. Hence, the purpose of projects such as Graeae's Write to Play programme; described as a 'flagship writer development programme, cultivating and championing Deaf and disabled playwrights nationwide' (Graeae, no date). However, Fox's work also allows for a more objective approach to literary disability studies (2015; 2016; 2018); she highlights value in questioning, 'what could a reconsideration of the most canonical images of disability in dramatic literature […]

do for directors […] critics and audiences' (2016, p.131). Her work in 'mainstream drama' asserts that, 'disability's presence in it can be understood as more subversive than has been allowed' (2018, p.145). Fox suggests by 'differently envisioning' classic plays like *The Glass Menagerie*, 'a more nuanced deployment of disability' in theatre practice is possible (2016, p.133; p.148); this is valuable in considering new opportunities for casting and directing and resonates with the pursuit of detailed understandings of theatre practice and disability in this study. Nonetheless, if NPO theatres aim to make substantial progress towards increasing the onstage representation of disabled people in scripted plays they are producing right now, there is also need for a less prescriptive approach to casting; that is considering disabled people for a wide range of roles, not just those written as disabled characters in the script.

In considering shifting approaches to casting that may be experienced by directors and actors in the context of ACE's diversity strategy, re-appropriation of principles associated with 'colour-blind casting' can be called into question; as mentioned, this 'ignores the appearance of an actor […] anchored in the belief that talented actors can play any role' (Young, 2013, p.56). In many ways extending this belief to disabled people delimits casting; freeing a director to consider disabled people in day-to-day practice not only for plays specifying a disabled character, and avoiding metaphor-laden, disability narrative. Dyson, founder of *VisAble* casting agency for disabled performers, promotes this approach, stating, 'unless there is a specific reason someone's disability ruled them out of a role, casting directors should consider "any actor for any role" […] everybody [should] forget disability in this respect […] ignore disability in this respect' (quoted in Hutchinson, 2015b). Similarly, Sealey asserts, 'ethically […] it should never be a problem if any character is played by a deaf or disabled actor […] it is not an issue or a concern that "this means my play will suddenly become a disabled play"' (2017). Playwright Charles Mee also sets out a challenge to directors at the beginning of his playscripts that dispels the idea that casting a disabled person will shift narrative. Mee states:

> My plays don't take race and disability as their subject matter [...] But I want my plays to be the way my own life is: race and disability exist. They are not denied […] As with life itself, the lead can be played by an actor in a

> wheelchair, or a deaf performer and that is not the subject of the play (no date).

Mee does not take it for granted that directors will routinely consider disabled people for a role that does not specify impairment. Rather, he indicates that directors need prompting to be open-minded in casting and that the belief that casting a disabled person will make the play about disability needs challenging in practice.

2.2. Disability Aesthetics and Signification of Impairment

The ability of an audience to see beyond impairment in performance is an issue commonly debated in relation to disability aesthetics and theatre. In considering onstage representations of disability, scholars have commonly drawn to theorizing aesthetics, how the disabled body signifies in performance (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Fahy and King 2002; Conroy, 2010). These studies acknowledge metaphoric and dramatic manipulation of disability, yet, more pressing than examining the portrayal of disabled characters is a concern with reception and perception of the body itself. They focus on societal understandings of disability, identity politics, normalcy, and ableism. Bolt describes the term ableism as, ‘the idea of ableness, the perfect or perfectible body […] ableism renders non-disabled people supreme’ (2015, p.1105). A notable example of this approach to examining theatre and disability is Garland-Thomson’s widely acknowledged freak show scholarship (1996; 1997). She considers how the stared-upon disabled body reinforces a sense of normalcy for non-disabled audiences. This notion pervades her later examination of disability art, in which she further insists, ‘in the context of an ableist society the disabled body summons the stare, and the stare mandates the story’ (Garland-Thomson, 2000, p.335).

Garland-Thomson also asserts that the non-disabled spectator ‘demands an explanation […] “what happened to you?” […] Simply the presence of the visibly disabled performer onstage engenders this dynamic’ (2000, p.334). Her views are echoed by others who consider aesthetics and narrative from the perspective of onlookers of disability arts, upholding that disability always signifies in performance (Kuppers, 2003; Fahy and King, 2002; Sandahl and Auslander, 2005). Extending this view Fahy and King state that, ‘disability not only demands its own narrative – an explanation of the defiant body – but its inherent difference calls attention to all bodies […] onstage. It informs our perceptions and interpretations of the drama’ (2002, p.ix). Based on the opinion of these early disability and theatre scholars it seems that, even before an actor with physical impairment has begun to enact a character, attention is drawn to the body, the body raises questions, and the story is determined on disability.

The common rhetoric of disability studies compromises the expectation of an equal playing field in theatre practice; repeated academic emphasis on disability aesthetics and spectatorship risks devaluing the onstage achievements and talent of actors. If perceptions of disabled actors today are based on theories such as Garland-Thomson’s (2000), it can be presumed that non-disabled people are incapable of viewing their performance as anything other than spectacle or plot device. It would also be conceivable for directors to believe that disabled people can only play roles specifying impairment unless they are willing to create a disability-focused narrative in every instance. Kuppers, however, sheds light on the context in which many of these studies were written, which is helpful in connecting the outworking of ACE’s strategy today and existing literature; she acknowledges that as ‘much of the mainstream was historically inaccessible to many disabled people […] disability theatre’s work happens on the edges, in solo performances, in off-beat spaces’ (Kuppers, 2017, p.49). She notes, even in her own early work, this, ‘shaped [her] theorist’s attention’ on to how performers ‘manipulate the ways audiences make meaning in what they see and experience’ (Kuppers, 2017, pp.50-51). Manipulating the stare remains an important tactic in some disability performance (Garland-Thomson, 2000; Kuppers, 2017, p.49). However, ‘since the available “scripts’ of disability”’ were so limited in the past, manipulation of the stare in disability narrative has narrowed scholarly perspectives (Fahy and King, 2002, p.ix).

Historically, disability theorists have responded to onlookers’ shock and surprise; Fahy and King acknowledge, ‘images of physical difference are so unexpected […] disability is so often hidden from view in contemporary society that most able-bodied viewers have no frame of reference for responding to it' (2002, p.x). However, in his attempt to theorize representations of disability in modern and visual art Siebers notes, '[as] we may expect disability to exert even greater power over art in the future […] it is worth asking how the presence of disability requires us to revise traditional conceptions of aesthetic production and appreciation' (2010, pp.10-11). In this way, as actors with physical impairments become more visible and 'exert greater power' in theatre, audiences have an increased 'frame of reference' for responding to them onstage (Siebers, 2010, p.11; Fahy and King, 2002, p.x). Hence, as approaches to casting disabled people shift, traditional understandings of disability in theatre need shifting also. Conroy's writing in *Theatre and the Body* moves towards this, drawing to phenomenology to 'reflect on perception and find the underlying truth of all systems of perception' (2010, p.57). Conroy argues it cannot be assumed that '[a] play "offers" one overriding "meaning" or a single coherent performance' (2010, p.56). Rather, emphasis is on how 'disparate bodies' have different 'sorts of relationships with the world' (Conroy, 2010, p.56). Also, acknowledging acting itself, 'exhibits aesthetic and analytical processes […] a terribly complex phenomenon' (Conroy; 2010, p.36).

Conroy allows for more objective readings of theatre and the body, presenting phenomenology as, 'an important reference point for […] scholars and practitioners in disability theatre' (2010, p.55). This work connects with the interdisciplinary approach taken in this study. In relation to casting, Conroy's opinions sit between that of industry professionals and the early work disability scholars, in line with Sealey (2017), Dyson (in Hutchinson, 2015b) and Mee (no date) believing, 'there is no reason whatsoever that the character Hamlet should not be a wheelchair user' (Conroy, 2010, p.35). However, referring to casting 'the disabled actor Nabil Shaban' as Hamlet, it is noted that, 'such casting might seem aesthetically innovative and it could well foreground the conventions that are used to understand and analyse the play' (Conroy, 2010, p.35). This perception of theatre and 'disparate bodies' does not take it for granted that 'the stare' will 'mandate the story' (Conroy, 2010, p.56; Garland-Thomson, 2000); still, it does acknowledge that impairment might impact interpretation of narrative and character.

2.3 Revising Traditions

In terms of revising ‘traditional conceptions of aesthetic production’ as Siebers suggests, it seems overly optimistic to presume that ableist mind-sets are now negated (2010, p.11). However, shifts in theatre are making it possible for scholars to take a more nuanced approach to discussing theatre practice and disability as disabled people are cast in non-traditional roles and audiences become more familiar with such choices. In *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama* theatre scholar Johnston exemplifies a new approach to the subject (2016). Kuppers observes how her work takes it as obvious that disabled people ‘can be artful too’, and ‘does not engage in long analyses of how disabled people signify in public [or…] political condemnation’ (2017, p.36). Johnston engages with how an actor’s impairment will ‘inform’, ‘enhance’ and ‘layer’ the playing of the character in a classic text (2016, pp.83-88); but does not assume this is ‘a lens through which everything would be seen’ (Gardner cited in Johnston, 2016, p.83). Johnston refers to casting disabled people in roles not specified as disabled characters in a script (2016); in a similar way to this study, the perspectives of practitioners and scholars are interwoven as she considers new approaches to casting and accessibility in theatre.

Kuppers also acknowledges how her own approach to academic discourse has shifted in theme, from political, to how-to, to access and infrastructural discussion (2017, pp.50-53). In *Theatre and Disability* Kuppers values connections between critical disability studies and reflections on her experiences as a disabled person, theatregoer, and practitioner; her writing hints at how such linkage can advance existing scholarship, indicating value in the approach taken in my study, which links theory to real-life experiences of working in theatre. Most recently, Fox and Sandahl acknowledge how contributors in a special issue of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies,* ‘push the casting discussion forward into new territory in significant and nuanced ways’ (2018, p.123). They note how art forms examined by scholars are now, ‘inviting […] spectators to stare and in so doing, rewrite old assumptions about the disabled body while discovering new aspects of disability aesthetics and disability gain’ (Fox and Sandahl, 2018, p.121). They perceive a new approach to the subject of casting that is, ‘not as simple as reversing old patterns and casting disabled actors’ (Fox and Sandahl, 2018, p.122).

In her article *Using our Words* Sandahl acknowledges the complexity of lived experience of theatre and disability, which resonates with the approach taken in my study (2018). She asserts that ‘actual disability experiences are messier than the narratives that contain them’ (Sandahl, 2018, p.141). Sandahl explains how those starting out in disability studies, ‘earnestly want unambiguous *do’s* and *don’ts* on issues of language, disability etiquette, and politics’ (2018, p.130). Yet, what scholars, directors, and actors confront in reality are ‘representational conundrums […] challenging, puzzling, or paradoxical issues that are unique to or complicated by disability’s presence’; hence, casting ‘a historical play’, or ‘well known disabled characters’ is not straightforward (Sandahl, 2018, pp.130-131). Sandahl suggests a necessity to question, ‘what did I experience’, giving attention to ‘sensations that arise phenomenologically’ when ‘trying to make sense of disability’s meaning in drama and live performance’ (2018, p.142). When confronting issues of ‘authenticity’, ‘stereotypes’, ‘metaphor’ and ‘language’ connected with theatre and disability, Sandahl urges ‘theatre people’ to, ‘spend uncomfortable time with representational conundrums, generate possibilities, experiment with options, make informed choices, and take responsibility for the outcomes – fail and try again’ (2018, p.132).

2.4 Summary

This overview of key literature in disability and theatre studies highlights critical tensions and connections between past exploration of portrayals of disability in the arts and shifting practice today. It is evident that social, political, and historical landscapes set out in disability studies are relevant to those working in NPO theatres tasked with increasing the representation of disabled people in their workforce. These are significant in considering the lived experiences of directors and actors working in theatre. Theorists and industry professionals seem to differ in their perception of how complex the navigation of these landscapes may be in the workplace. The reproduction of iconic disabled characters, often recognised as reinforcing negative stereotypes, present challenges for both directors and actors if further stigmatization of the disabled community is to be avoided. Fraser, who played Richard III, comments that:

> all [directors] have to do is cast a real disabled actor in a role, and it can change that role from being at best tired, clichéd […] at worst ignorant and […] offensive, to a […] witty, clever […] social historical comment (2017b).

He implies casting a disabled person in a disabled role is a sure way to avoid the pitfalls of the past. However, the work of disability scholars suggests casting or performing a disabled character must be tackled from a place of knowledge, understanding disability culture and the real-life experiences of disabled people (Fox and Lipkin, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Fox, 2016; Sandahl; 2018). This cannot be assumed for actors or directors, whether they identify as disabled people or not. Thus, when concerned with experiences of theatre practice and disability, existing literature raises query around the significance of personal understandings of disability, and how knowledge of its history and politics is interpreted in day-to-day decisions in practice.

Literature concerned with disability aesthetics discussed here also raises query around how impairment is responded to, interpreted onstage, and experienced in theatre workplaces. Existing studies suggest that the extent to which a disabled person is recognised for talent in interpreting characters or storylines hinges on individual mind-sets and familiarity with disability. In a, albeit slowly, changing theatre climate where disabled people are more visible, revisions of traditional concepts of disability and theatre do seem timely and necessary. Gould still believes, 'theatre involving deaf and disabled people faces barriers because of people's outdated misconceptions' (quoted in Hutchinson, 2016c); however, new insights can no longer take for granted that impairment is always drawn to in performance, or that disabled people's talent is always valued differently. Complex, classic roles afforded to actors such as Nadia Albina suggest otherwise, as does ROTM's accolade of Best Touring Production 2017 for *The Who's Tommy* (UK Theatre, no date). How directors and actors experience responses to impairment in performance, as spectators, or their assumptions of audiences, should not be presumed, but investigated in the context of theatre practice today.

The absolutes of early disability scholars contrast with the complex nature of human experience in which perceptions and perspectives constantly change. The concept of actors with physical impairments as part of routine practice and familiar in the theatre industry is still an emerging phenomenon. It is central to this study and to ACE's vision of, 'achieving great art for everyone' (ACE, 2010; 2013). Individuals working in theatre may hold to traditional beliefs and perceptions of roles and casting; others may perceive alternative understandings and onstage opportunities as actors or directors. Existing literature emphasises how shifting approaches to theatre practice and disability can only be investigated fully on a person-by-person basis. If onstage representation of disabled people is to increase, detailed understanding of how current perceptions of disability and theatre influence directors' and actors' experiences of working together is paramount. As Fox acknowledges:

> It is important to mark where stereotype and ableism have been promulgated on the stage; it is important to mark where disability culture has reclaimed those images and written new ones. But in between is a wide space in which we can move across the disabled and nondisabled boundaries (2015, p.131).

The chapter that follows describes the methods adopted in this study, which make new discoveries that build on the foundation of existing research possible whilst also moving across these boundaries.

Chapter Three - Research Methodology

This chapter is devoted to describing, clarifying, and justifying the methodological approach taken in this study. Methods have been selected in view of current academic and media debate, and gaps in existing research. My study involves theatre directors who identify as non-disabled, and actors who self-define as disabled people with a physical impairment. Participants in both groups have undertaken paid work in ACE's funded theatre organisations during its funding round 2015 to 2108. A series of semi-structured, exploratory interviews are central in opening key areas of discussion. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is adopted as an inductive approach to identifying themes in data and connecting these to literature. Time and resources available for the study have also been considered. With these key attentions of the research in mind, this chapter first describes the methodological decisions taken and theoretical foundations of IPA. It then sets out the procedures for participant selection, followed by a description of the process and validity of data collection and analysis. Finally, ethical issues and researcher positioning are considered.

As already noted, Gardner describes ACE's shift diversity strategy regarding disability as, 'a long way from the kind of box ticking we've seen in the past' (2015). As such, this study explores the notion that engagement with disabled people is now an everyday expectation of work within NPO theatres. This is a unique moment in theatre history in which narratives of real-life experiences of the phenomenon of non-disabled directors and disabled actors working together can be examined in detail. As is clear from reviewing literature, in-depth consideration of lived experiences of theatre as a workplace is sparse, particularly regarding disabled people in professional practice. In response to this, the construction of my research question naturally led to a qualitative research approach; a means of providing appropriate and detailed understanding of directors' and actors' experiences. Qualitative research is characterized as involving, 'verbal descriptions of real-life situations' (Silverman, 2014, p.4). Qualitative methods enable 'rich descriptive accounts of the phenomenon under investigation' to be placed at the core of this study (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014, p.7).

The implications of ACE's shift in diversity strategy for individuals working in the theatre industry cannot be measured by quantitative methods alone; quantitative research is a means for testing objective theories, which is not the premise for this study (Creswell, 2002, p.7). It could be argued that a broader survey-based quantitative study may provide an unbiased report on reality. However, ACE has demonstrated how lack of detail in existing data prevents complex understandings of slow progress made in increasing the representation of disabled people in the theatre workplace. Over three years of publishing *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case*, and setting out requirements and repercussions for future funding, workplace figures for disability in theatres remain largely unchanged (ACE, 2016; 2018a; 2019). As such, ongoing issues surrounding theatre practice and disability demand nuanced exploration of a qualitative dimension from the perspective of those working in the industry itself. Furthermore, in terms of validity, Silverman notes that in both quantitative and qualitative research there is 'inevitable (and necessary) intrusion of common-sense judgements into practical decision making' (2014, p.9). Both equally demand disciplined inquiry and rigorous use of strategies adopted for handling raw text data. So, whilst guarding against bias and misinterpretation by pursuing a rigorous methodological approach, the qualitative dimension of this research is considered crucial. This makes it possible for personal experiences of theatre practice and disability among directors and actors to be adequately investigated and understood.

3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

To delve under the surface of directors' and actors' experiences of theatre practice and disability, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was considered as a research strategy. IPA was first outlined as a research approach by Smith in the mid-1990s; it continues to grow in popularity in field of psychology and is increasingly adopted in interdisciplinary studies (Smith, 1996). Unlike grounded theory, which aims to generate a new theory from the ground up, IPA is, 'committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, p.1). Smith, Flowers and Larkin explain, 'when people are engaged with an experience of something […] they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening and IPA research aims to engage with these reflections' (2009, p.3). Grounded theory does display some similarities to IPA in that both systematically use text to generate themes and start with an individual case, which is then brought into the context of other cases. However, Willig explains, 'grounded theory aims to identify and explicate contextualized social processes that account for phenomena. By contrast, IPA is concerned with gaining a better understanding of the quality and texture of individual experiences' (2013, p.99). IPA is phenomenological in the sense that experience is explored 'in its own terms', with no presupposed theories, expectations, or hypothesis (Smith, Flowers, Larkin 2009, p.1). This inductive, thematic analysis enables findings in my study to emerge from frequent, dominant, and significant themes inherent in the raw data and collected in a way that would not be possible with grounded theory. Ultimately, I sought an approach that will give due attention to individuals' unique reflections on their experiences of theatre practice and disability, before moving to draw any connections with others. Considering the scope and purpose of this study, IPA offers a reflexive and appropriate method for exploring in detail how non-disabled directors and disabled actors make sense of their world (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.3).

The main theoretical foundations of IPA are rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Phenomenology, the study of lived experience, was developed through the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Its founding principles are that specific experiences of life events or activities should be examined in isolation; also, that the components influencing personal interpretation of these are, 'unique to each person's embodied and situated relationship to the world', and this uniqueness should be scrutinised (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.21). Furthermore, in introducing *Theatre/Theory*, Fortier notes how phenomenology, 'takes account of the fact that to be in the world is to encounter other people […] there is awareness that others perceive us, judge us and set limits for us' (2002 p.41). Considering external pressure from ACE to increase workforce disability figures in theatre, and the intention of understanding directors and actors' perceptions of working together, these primary concerns of phenomenology offer a fitting approach to my subject. In addition, it emphasises, ‘particulars of human experience […] by taking into account matters such as history, language and context’ (Elliot, Fischer and Rennie, 1999, p.217). Hence, the phenomenological lens in my study makes way for individuals’ experiences to be considered alongside disability and theatre history and politics, the current theatre climate, ACE’s strategy, and distinct theatre environments and workplace cultures.

Phenomenology is increasingly recognised as an alternative to semiotics. Rather than addressing theatre as a system of codes, it opens discussion into how theatre appears, feels, is sensed or perceived, and the lived experience of those who encounter it (Fortier, 2002; Bleeker, Foley Sherman and Nedelkopoulou, 2015). In terms of examining disability in theatre practice, it is already identified as, ‘an important reference point for many scholars and practitioners of disability theatre’, as mentioned in the thesis introduction (Conroy, 2010, p.55). In addition, Sandahl recognises phenomenological perspectives of physical impairment as critical in dismantling oppressive, traditional ‘theatrical narrative’ and ‘form’ (Sandahl, 2002, p.21). Thus, highlighting how insights gleaned from phenomenological perspectives have potential to facilitate more effective working practice with disabled people in theatre, and further align my methodological choices with the aims of my study.

Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, is the second concept connected with IPA. This theory, influenced by the work of Heidegger and Gadamer, examines the role interpretation and the ‘interpreter’ play in forming meaning (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, pp.16-25). The interpretivist views society as organic, shaped by the interactions of individuals, and created by people as they interpret experiences (Burton and Bartlett, 2005, p.22). This theory parallels with my understanding of theatre-making as an organic process and underlines the influential role of directors and actors in shaping the process from casting, rehearsal, to final performance. In the context of investigating directors and actors’ lived experiences, hermeneutic theory is pivotal; the centrality of interpretation in navigating shifting and emerging interactions between non-disabled and disabled people in current theatre practice is of upmost importance in my research. Furthermore, IPA engages the researcher in a ‘double hermeneutic’ (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p.53); interpretation takes place on two levels, at the level of the participant, who is giving their interpretation of experiences and events, and at the level of the researcher, who endeavours to interpret and make sense of the participant's interpretation (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.3; Smith and Osborn, 2008, p.53). In this way, hermeneutics enables this study to capture directors and actors' interpretations of experiences of theatre practice and disability, whilst also recognising the fluidity of these in a shifting theatre climate. This has the benefit of not being purely dependant on what participants say in interview. Instead, as the researcher, my reflexive process of interpreting participants' responses has potential to offer more detailed understanding of the current theatre climate for disabled people.

Finally, the third influential concept of IPA is idiography. Not based on a principle of generalization at the level of groups or populations, the focus is on, 'in-depth analysis of single cases […] in their unique contexts' (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014, p.8). Even among qualitative methodologies, IPA is unusual in having this obligation (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014, p.8). IPA's idiographic orientation provides two ways of acquiring knowledge; it allows the researcher 'to learn something about both the important generic themes in the analysis and the narrative lifeworld of the particular participants who have told their stories' (Smith and Eatough, 2006, p.326). Idiographic principles are consistent with the aims of my research, focusing on the uniqueness of individuals and the distinct environments, structures, and attitudes they navigate in theatre. As is set out in the description that follows, in-depth, one to one, semi-structured interviews undertaken for this study can be described as idiographic; they offer flexibility and freedom to identify and delve deeper into the unique complexity of each participant's lived experience. Idiography's concern with detail and depth of analysis also meets a need for thorough and systematic scrutiny of data collected in my interviews; how the process of IPA facilitates this is also set out later in the chapter. Pointing to the 'particular' in my study sets it apart from ACE's publications and broad statements in the media regarding theatre practice and disability and the position of directors and actors in this (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.29). An idiographic approach to my study enables me as the researcher and you as the reader to be:

> Better positioned to think about how we and other people might deal with the particular situation being explored, how at the deepest level we share a great deal with a person whose personal circumstances may, at face value, seem entirely separate and different from our own. Thus, in some ways the detail of the individual also brings us closer to significant aspects of the general (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.32).

The three-fold theoretical foundation of IPA opens my research to a psychological view of what is being experienced in the theatre workplace today. IPA opens understanding of how this is interpreted by individuals, the unique ‘property’ of each individual, and their personal ‘relationship to, or involvement in the phenomena of interest’ (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.29). IPA’s framework adheres to the aims of this study concentrating on uncovering detailed and nuanced insights, which are lacking in existing academic approaches to the subject.

3.2 Participant Selection

This section explains how a small but defined group of participants, twelve directors and seven actors, were purposely sampled to take part in a one to one, semi-structured interview for this research (Cassell, 2015, p.33). The recommendation for IPA researchers is to find a homogeneous sample to report in detail (Coyle and Lyons, 2007, p.40). Pietkiewicz and Smith suggest how homogeneous the sample is, depends on both interpretive and pragmatic issues (2014, p.10). In relation to the interpretive, my criteria for selecting a defined group of participants focused on three factors. Firstly, recognising gaps in literature in terms of professionals working in theatre, only directors and actors in recent, paid employment were sought to take part. Secondly, concerned with shifts in theatre practice and the unresolved nature of debate surrounding disability representation, criteria for sampling considered individuals’ position of influence; I sought a sample group whose day-to-day decisions have potential to impact routine approaches to theatre practice and disability. Thirdly, criteria for selection focused on those for whom this topic has professional and personal significance; for this reason, directors and actors who have worked in NPOs during ACE’s initial funding period following its shift in strategy, 2015 to 2018, became my single source of recruitment.

Funding provided by ACE plays a key role in supporting the work of some of the highest profile and influential theatre directors and actors in the country, including those working in renowned theatre environments such as the RSC and the National Theatre. As set out in my introduction, NPO theatres have received a clear mandate to ensure they are working towards ‘great art and culture for everyone’ (ACE, 2013). As it is now imperative NPOs report annually on workplace diversity, it seemed probable that issues surrounding the participation of disabled people in theatre would have heightened personal relevance for those employed within these organisations (Bazalgette, 2014). Considering the funding implications of ACE’s diversity strategy, my criteria for sampling only included participants employed within ACE’s most highly funded NPOs; theatre organisations that received more than two million pounds of ACE funding between 2015 and 2018. NPO investment was examined closely to specifically identify organisations meeting this criterion (ACE, 2015c). Information from individual theatre websites helped establish the creative output of these organisations, making it possible to categorise thirty-two of ACE’s most highly funded NPOs as producing house theatres, which have cast and created productions between 2015 and 2018. My decision to focus on ACE’s most highly funded producing house theatres enforces an element of homogeneity in sampling; however, as these NPOs span the entire country, it still allows for diverse theatrical preferences, workplace environments and cultures, and levels of engagement with disability in theatre practice to be represented in my work.

In response to many campaigns for the demise of literature, media, and theatre content written about disability but lacking the voice of disabled people, the inclusion of dual perspectives is an important factor in this study. The decision to involve two participant groups, directors and actors, non-disabled and disabled, allows for comparable and contrasting views on current theatre practice to be examined. This is essential in exploring my subject thoroughly and advancing dialogue around theatre practice and disability based on real-life experience, not just theory. A further web-based survey identified artistic, assistant, and associate directors employed within the thirty-two sampled NPOs who have directed onstage productions. This led to forty-four individual email invitations to participate in the study being distributed to directors. Identifying and contacting potential actor-participants was a more complex process, as few had a Spotlight listing or agent through which they can be contacted. An ongoing awareness of live theatre productions that included actors with physical impairments in the cast was crucial. By viewing online cast lists on theatre and actors' websites, in the press, and Spotlight listings, it was possible to identify twelve actors with physical impairments who have undertaken professional work in NPO theatres between 2015 and 2018. These actors were contacted directly by email or via agents.

Another important principle for sampling actor-participants related to impairment type. As mentioned in the definition of terms, although a range of impairments are acknowledged in my study it is particularly concerned with actors with impairments that present as visible, physical difference, which may be obvious to an audience. This further definition of the sample group opens the prospect of challenging theatrical structures and beliefs regarding disability aesthetics and practical accessibility in casting, rehearsal, and performance practice. This sample criterion aligns my work with the most common impairment type reported in the United Kingdom. In the case of Department of Work and Pension figures, physical impairment encompasses mobility, stamina, breathing, fatigue, dexterity, vision, and hearing impairments (2020, p.7).

The largely positive response to the invitation to participate in my study yielded twelve artistic or associate directors and seven actors, a mix of male and female. Although director-participants were recruited based on employment status and creative output, not whether they self-defined as disabled or not, all chose to self-define as non-disabled people in the process of agreeing to participate. Likewise, as issues surrounding self-definition and disability are complex, it was not taken for granted that all actor-participants would identify as disabled people; however, this was the case in the process of agreeing to take part, in addition some participants had publicly identified as disabled people in media articles. Years of experience in professional theatre employment among actor and director-participants span five to thirty-five years.

Relevant to the pragmatic aspects of finding a homogeneous sample, it was evident from ACE's figures that a sample group that includes disabled people working professionally in theatre would be small; hence, the suitability of IPA to this study. In seeking accuracy and excellence, I considered recommendations from psychology doctoral programmes on sample size. These suggest that six to eight individuals will generate sufficient data for an IPA study, allowing comparisons to be made without compromising on detail (Turpin *et al*, 1997). It is also recognised when interviewing communities that are less visible or difficult to access that a smaller sample may be 'extremely valuable' (Alder and Alder cited in Baker and Edwards, no date, p.8). However, reflecting on sampling for qualitative studies*,* Charmaz suggests the number of interviews should increase if a controversial topic is pursued (cited in Baker and Edwards, no date, p.22). Based on ACE figures, it is certainly possible to view the disabled community as a less visible. In addition, recognising complex disability politics, external pressure from ACE, and media attention on theatre makers who misrepresent disability it is certain my research topic may be considered as controversial. Consequently, the response to the invitation to participate in this study from directors and actors is fitting to IPA's requirement for detailed analysis, and sufficient to make allowance for the sensitive nature of my subject. Thus, in line with the foundations of IPA, my sample appropriately represents a perspective, that of an individual director or actor, rather than a population; it is part of a broader research terrain that brings aspects of the inside-out to an outside-in directive.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

This research focuses on an advantageous single-method design. Data collection takes place in the form of one to one, semi-structured interviews. These are audio recorded as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), so that individuals' personal experiences can be examined in depth. Since the 1980s interviews have become commonplace in social science and organisational research, long recognised as a valid tool for gathering 'reliable and objective data about the subjective aspects of worker experience' (Cassell, 2015, p.2). Although rare, this has proved effective in gathering data in the fields of theatre and performance; as mentioned in the literature review, interviews have been a primary source of insight into the individual approaches and perspectives of theatre directors and adopted as a preferred method of discussing their practice (Delgado and Rebellato, 2010; Giannachi and Luckhurst, 1999; Manfull, 1999). In an interview with director Peter Sellars published in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, Delgado effectively guides him though a schedule of questions addressing social and political issues of immigration and representation (Delgado and Rebellato, 2010*,* pp.377-392). Existing research such as this demonstrates the usefulness of interviews in freeing directors to reflect on wider social and political matters, and to interpret these in relation to their personal background and experiences. Sellars articulates his feelings on migration and exile and connects these with personal decisions made in practice. In concluding the interview, he reflects on how his personal experiences position him to promote a 'shift' in the way these issues are represented in theatre in the future (Delgado and Rebellato, 2010, p.392). Pursuing one to one, semi-structured interviews in my study was, therefore, considered an opportunity to take director and actor participants on a similar journey. This approach enables participants in my study to reflect on their position in relation to wider issues of theatre and disability, a perspective neglected in existing work.

Collecting data outside of the confines of one specific encounter, project, or production enables more abstract understandings of theatre practice and disability to be discussed in this study. More often qualitative theatre and disability studies have focused on data derived from case studies, analysing short-term drama projects based in theatre, health, or education settings. Case studies commonly focus in detail on one event, situation, or organisation (Yin, 2016). This approach has proved effective for Band *et al* (2011) in their study of a performance project involving practitioners and performers with a range of impairments. However, my intention is to paint a clearer picture of what is happening in the theatre industry right now, to reach beyond the perspective of any one director, actor, performance, or project. The decision to capitalise on rich data derived from interviews in this study made it possible for a range of actors and directors to participate and voice their opinions, so that diverse experiences of theatre practice and disability can be examined separately and related in detail.

Focus groups were also considered in the early stages of my research. However, the aim of these is to gather opinions, not experiences, to look for trends in how a subject is perceived by a group as a whole; not focusing on individuals in the way IPA prescribes (Krueger and Casey, 2008, p.2). There are drawbacks to gathering data in a group setting, including dominant characters influencing responses and others not having time or space to offer opinions (Krueger and Casey, 2008, p.15). In the context of politically or socially sensitive topics, group settings can also make it difficult for participants to be open, make confidentiality more complex, and risk a lack in detailed responses (Gray, 2014, p.471). Hence, this is not a suitable approach to exploring my subject. Still, as focus groups can give insight into organisational concerns, they may offer means to expand the findings of this study and the possibility of bringing the two participant groups together in future research.

One to one, semi-structured interviews offered the potential to uncover the actual views of participants, rather than expected or standard responses to closed questions. Unlike natural conversation the interview is controlled, having space for divergence whilst returning to structured questions. Reflecting on collecting data in a social science context, Stephens notes subtle nuances that distinguish this as a research method, explaining it, ‘affords the interviewer the opportunity to continually remould the interaction to their needs and interests’ (2007, p.211). In this way, with awareness of IPA’s roots in idiography, the interview schedule for this study was designed to gather narrative unique to each participant. It recognises, ‘individuals have unique ways of defining their world’, (Denzin, 2009, pp.125-126). For these reasons, one to one interviews proved beneficial in allowing me, as the researcher, to be actively involved in mutual dialogue, having the option to explore additional lines of inquiry and to pursue emerging themes as individuals share information (Walshaw, 2012, p.63; p.72). This method of gathering data helped build rapport and trust between the interviewee and me, the researcher, whilst allowing time and space for personal reflection and detailed individual responses from all participants (Cassell, 2015, p.26).

Drafting the interview schedule was a complex procedure that balanced an awareness of disability history and politics, the sensitive nature of current debate around disability in theatre and casting, IPA requirements, and ethical guidelines (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Prominent issues surrounding theatre and disability identified in the literature review informed the interview schedule; these relate to understanding and awareness, casting and theatrical roles, audiences and accessibility, and confidence and ability. These issues raised in existing literature provided clarity and direction in formulating interview questions and opened potential for dialogue around the following subjects:

- Pre-existing assumptions of theatre practice and disability - preferred theatrical approaches, awareness and understandings of disability, and the relevance of disability and impairment in experiences of theatre so far.
- The current theatre climate for professional actors with impairments – external strategies and initiatives, casting routes and processes, audience responses, and environments, structures, and attitudes navigated in the workplace.
- ‘Reimagining’ practice and perceptions (Fraser, 2017b) - the shape of effective rehearsal and performance approaches, personal ‘disorientation’ (Parrey, 2016; 2018), and the benefits and challenges of disabled actors and non-disabled directors working together more.

Interviews were guided by a schedule of core, open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to talk freely about their experiences of working in theatre (see Appendix 1 and 2). In conducting the interviews, it was not necessary to follow the schedule in sequence or to ask every question. In addition to core questions, prompt questions were designed to probe further into attention-grabbing or significant comments and views expressed by the participant. Simple prompts, such as, *how did that make you feel,* and, *can you say a bit more about that*, assisted me in listening attentively and guiding the dialogue spontaneously. The interview schedule along with its core and prompt questions was piloted with one director and one actor who did not participate in the study to ensure that questions were open and without presupposition. The schedule design and its modifications were discussed with another IPA researcher to develop a coherent schedule that works with, and is attempting to elicit, lived experience responses rather than expected responses.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the inductive, thematic process associated with IPA allows research findings to emerge from the interview data. The focus of analysis is on participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.79). The process of IPA begins in the interview itself, as the researcher becomes aware of the thoughts, feelings, and values expressed by the participant. Audio recordings of each interview are transcribed before beginning the analysis (see Appendix 3). This is structured around the following process (Howitt and Cramer, 2014, p.439; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, pp.79-107):

- Reading, listening and notetaking - Each transcript is read several times, interviews are re-listened to and each transcript is annotated line by line with exploratory reflections, comments, and observations for each participant. These are coded for descriptive, linguistic, and conceptional features (see Appendix 3).
- Identifying themes - Based on annotations, emergent themes are identified and titled for each participant and written alongside individual transcripts (see Appendix 3). 'Turning notes into themes involves an attempt to produce a concise and pithy statement of what was important in the various comments […] a synergistic process of description and interpretation' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.92).
- Searching for connections across emergent themes - Themes in each transcript are grouped together with a descriptive heading. A table of superordinate themes is produced for each participant linking to extracts from the original transcripts with line numbers (see Appendix 4).
- Moving to the next case – The analysis moves to the next participants' transcript, 'bracketing' ideas emerging from the previous case as much as possible; at this stage in the IPA process the researcher attempts to suspend presuppositions and acquired understanding based on previous transcripts so that new themes can emerge for each participant (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.100; Tufford and Newman, 2010, pp.80-96).

- Searching for patterns across cases - Recognising themes or superordinate themes shared across participants, a master table of superordinate themes is created showing connections for each participant group. Extracts from transcripts from a range of participants are linked to each theme (see Appendix 5 and 6).

A concern as a qualitative researcher is following sufficient guidelines for assessing the quality of the unique data yielded in my study. Yardley suggests several principles for measuring the value of qualitative research; these are, ‘sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance’ (2007, p.215). I have attempted to ensure my research considers these by: choosing to adopt and adhere to the foundations and process of IPA; drawing on connections with a diverse range of existing literature; using open-ended interview questions, giving participants the opportunity to speak freely; carefully transcribing raw data; and supporting themes with verbatim quotes from transcripts in a way that enables the reader to evaluate connections between data and interpretation. Pietkiewicz and Smith note that linking themes to direct quotes from transcripts, ‘enables the reader to assess the pertinence of the interpretations […] it retains the voice of the participant’s personal experience’ (2014, p.13). Although the use of participant quotations is an important aspect in validating data analysis in this study, reflexivity is also significant to its transparency and is discussed in closing this chapter regarding my own position as the researcher.

3.4 Ethical Issues

‘The growing complexity of the world means that research in the real world is of growing importance’ (Gray, 2014, p.11). However, conducting research in ‘any setting where human beings come together for communication, relationship or discourse’ is not without challenges (Gray, 2014, p.4). As a workplace, theatres can be viewed as organisations, businesses, and communities each with distinct procedures and cultures. It is important to be aware of sensitive political, historical, personal, and economic issues associated with my research subject, and that individuals working in distinct theatre workplaces may interpret these issues differently. As such, credible findings in this research could only be sought through communication that was sensitive to ethical issues and to the individual needs of each participant. I do not consider either participant group in this study to be vulnerable. However, I am aware that in an interview setting people can feel vulnerable, particularly when questions touch on sensitive issues such as disability and impairment. Potential hazards relating to invasion of privacy have also required consideration and the following procedures have been put in place to address these.

Following a positive response to an initial email invitation to participate in my study, those considering taking part were sent a participant information sheet. This outlined the details of the study, stating its purpose and aims and the process involved. Informed consent was obtained for the use of participants' views and experiences in the study, for audio recording, and transcription of responses by the researcher. Prior to conducting an interview, a copy of the consent form was signed by the participant and countersigned by the researcher. Participants were asked to confirm again that they are willing for the interview to be audio recorded. In addition, participants were informed they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without clarifying the reason and reassured personal information will remain confidential.

As issues surrounding disability, theatre, and professional practice are complex and sensitive, support strategies were put in place to protect participants and the researcher. Although it was unlikely that this study would place participants in a vulnerable or distressing situation, in extreme cases the interview may have triggered descriptions of difficult experiences. For this reason, all interviews took place within a workplace or organisational environment selected by the participant themselves. In most cases support was available from familiar colleagues should the participant become distressed. Participants were also advised that a companion was welcome to support them in the interview, although this offer was not taken up in any case. To maintain professionalism and confidentiality participants were asked not to disclose too much detail about personal experiences or about physical conditions. The interview schedule guided conversation away from any unnecessary or private details being revealed. Appropriate links to organisations, listed on the participant information sheet, directed interviewees to further information or advice relating to topics raised in interviews.

Ethical approval for this study was acquired from the ethics committee at Newman University. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) electronic data and information has been stored in password protected files on an organisation computer. Transcriptions are stored in password protected files and audio files will be destroyed. As the researcher I have been the only person with access to the data. In the transcription, analysis, and writing up processes personal identifying information has been removed. Any participant quotes used in the thesis have been anonymised; no real names of the participants, or names of people, organisations, and productions that might identify them, have been used. Instead, fictional names have been allocated and identifying information removed. These procedures thereby ensure confidentiality.

3.5 Researcher Positioning

It is not possible for discoveries made through interviews to be entirely outside of the position of the researcher themselves (Yin, 2016, p.129). Situation, personal connection, and cultural differences are factors that affect data and interpretations in all research (Wisker, 2008, pp.192-196). Therefore, in conducting this research it is impossible to set aside my personal perspectives entirely; instead, it is necessary to be explicit regarding my position in the research activity (Walshaw, 2012, p.63; p.67). My personal attributes as a non-disabled theatregoer, performer/practitioner, researcher, and parent of children with physical and language impairments are important factors in motivating and approaching this study. My firm belief is that factors preventing the full participation of disabled people in theatre can be removed and are primarily routed in decisions made by individuals at ground level. Nevertheless, I am also not ignorant of complexity in navigating issues of disability and theatre; in practice-based research, directing a cast of Deaf, disabled, and non-disabled people, I had first-hand experience of some of the challenges confronted in the process of casting, rehearsal, and performance. I became alert to the practical and psychological shifts required of me as a director so that effective practice could take place. Learning through personal error and successes, I also experienced the release of talent and creativity that is realised in working with a range of actors, something I would like to see reflected widely in theatre.

I am aware that my characteristics, experiences, and viewpoints may differ from the participants involved in this study and have potential to influence its findings. However, Elliot, Fischer and Rennie set out how qualitative researchers believe, ‘their self-reflective attempts to “bracket” existing theory and their own values allow them to understand and represent their informants’ experiences and actions more adequately than would otherwise be possible’ (1999, p.216). For this reason, I have designing my interview schedule and nonchalant approach to conducting interviews to guard against any attempt to convince participants of my beliefs, or to project answers they may have presumed I wanted. This is also the case during data analysis where it has been crucial to return to original transcripts continually, using direct quotes to keep the focus of this research on the experiences and views of its participants, not my own.

There is debate in the academic community over the costs and benefits of qualitative researchers being inside or outside the population they are studying and ‘a critique of researchers’ roles has developed’ (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.55). In this study data is collected from within the theatre community and from inside and outside the disabled community. The subject of the data collected is clearly disability, yet not all participants self-define as disabled people. In conducting the research, I have become increasingly aware of my own position in relation to the communities under investigation, especially when asked pointedly by some participants about my connection with disability and theatre; seemingly, they attempt to discern whether I belong to their group and my associated motivation for the study. Although I have been employed in the arts, claiming my position as an insider risks challenge as someone currently identifying as non-disabled who is collecting and analysing data concerning disability.

Corbin Dwyer and Buckle’s article, *The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research* (2009) seems relevant in this; they acknowledge as ‘qualitative researchers we have an appreciation for the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of human experience. Holding membership does not denote complete similarity within that group’ (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.60). As such, identifying as non-disabled does not mean that I have no commonality with disabled people participating in this study, or that I have whole connection with non-disabled participants. Both communities, and me as the researcher, do not hold opposing positions; rather, some views and experiences connect them despite their membership to any group. In line with this view, which allows researchers to adopt the position of both insider and outsider, I perceive myself as an ‘insider-outsider’ in this work (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). In this way, as this thesis moves to discuss lived experiences of theatre practice and disability among its actor and director participants, I leave it ‘to the reader to decide if my status would improve or impede my ability to carry out the study’ (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.56).

DISCUSSION: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THEATRE PRACTICE AND DISABILITY

PART ONE: ACTOR-PARTICIPANTS

Interviews undertaken with seven professional actors for this study give unique insight into real-life experiences of theatre practice and disability for those working in ACE's most highly funded theatre organisations. All seven actors identify themselves as disabled people in the process of taking part in this study. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has enabled key themes emerging from data collected from interviews to be identified, as is detailed in the methodology chapter. Three superordinate themes form the basis for discussing actor-participants' individual lived experiences in the context of ACE's shift in diversity strategy in this part of the thesis. The following list is taken from the *Master Table of Themes Across the Actor-Participant Group* (Appendix 5). It sets out how emergent themes are nested within three superordinate themes and the framework for discussing my findings from actors in the three chapters that follow:

A.	**Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity**
i.	Journeying with Self-identity in the Theatre Workplace
ii.	Defining Professional Identity
iii.	Necessity to Define as Disabled in Practice
B.	**Navigating Directors' Inexperience of Disability**
i.	Approaches to Challenging Directors
ii.	Dealing with Discomfort
iii.	Handling Power Dynamics
C.	**Wrestling with Authenticity**
i.	Disquiet about Professional Recognition
ii.	Trust in a Shifting Theatre Climate

The first superordinate theme, *Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity*, concerns how external incentive to increase engagement with disabled people in theatre is impacting actor-participants from an intrapersonal perspective. It exposes how increased discussion around disability in theatre practice and ACE's collection of diversity data is shifting interpretations of self-identity, personal impairment, and disability understandings. It highlights actor-participants' preferred ways of identifying themselves inside and outside the workplace and how these connect with disability politics, association with the disabled community, and perceptions of the theatre industry itself. The second superordinate theme, *Navigating Directors' Inexperience of Disability*, focuses on actor-participants' interpretations of interpersonal engagement with directors in rehearsal settings. It concerns unique responses to a perceived lack of disability knowledge among directors, and lack of skill around accessibility. It reveals perceptions of confidence, risk, roles, and authority that are relevant in responding to directors' learning processes. It exposes how actor-participants approach relationship with directors and address issues of accessibility and representation in practice. The final superordinate theme, *Wrestling with Authenticity*, connects actor-participants' intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences. It expands on how actors in this study are reconciling an overall positive outlook of progress made towards increasing engagement with disabled people in theatre with real-life challenges they are still experiencing in day-to-day practice.

Chapter Four - Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity

'As much as I might or might not perceive myself as disabled, society always does to some extent […] exposure to the industry has crafted all that' (James, p.7)

Theatre has been at the forefront of shaping our beliefs and broadening our understanding of society for generations. As a director, playwright, and campaigner for disabled people in the arts Masefield believed, 'of all the arts, drama especially can change the way the world acts' (2006, p.127). He pointed to theatre's aptitude for highlighting prejudice in society and subsequently challenging beliefs and approaches to disability. This superordinate theme concerns how lived experience of increased engagement with disability issues in theatre is shaping actor-participants' own disability views and, in turn, perceptions of identity. This chapter highlights where new disability awareness and understanding is causing a reassessment of personal and professional identity among actors in this study. It pinpoints intrapersonal responses to ACE's diversity strategy, the collection of disability data from its funded theatre organisations, and to open discussion around disability and impairment in theatre workplaces. Actor-participants' responses relevant to this superordinate theme are expressed as a series of shifting views and tensions around journeying with self-identity in the theatre workplace, defining professional identity, and necessity to define as disabled in practice. These factors of their lived experience of theatre practice and disability emerged as three subthemes shaping the discussion that follows.

Jackson describes self-identity as, 'the heart of the basic philosophical question: who am I?' (2010, p.545); a profound and personal inquiry that actors in this study describe is made more pressing in theatre. In the discussion that follows they uncover how perceptions of professional identity are also shifting; that is, how they view themselves within their occupational context and how they communicate this to others (Neary, 2014). For some actor-participants, personal and professional identity are interconnected, for others these identities appear entirely separate; a problematic issue in the current theatre climate, which is discussed in detail. Barnes stresses that disabled people's personal interpretation of impairment as a 'positive, neutral or negative' trait can influence self-identity, well-being, and participation in society (2016, p.117). Writing in *The Minority Body* (2016) she suggests that understanding disability from a phenomenological perspective, which allows for variance in lived experience of impairment, requires a shift in the prejudices of disabled and non-disabled people. Her observations seem relevant to findings discussed here; for actors in this study, questions of self-identity encompass equally complex negotiation with interpretations of personal impairment and disability viewpoints. Furthermore, it appears ACE's shift in strategy regarding disability not only influences but exposes actors' interpretations and preferences of identity publicly, with how actors define themselves becoming the business of employers. In this way, the discussion that follows considers the implications of personal, profound, and complex journeying with identity in a theatre workplace context for the individual actors in this study.

4.1 Journeying with Self-Identity in the Theatre Workplace

Altered perceptions of self-identity are discussed in this first section of the chapter in relation to actor-participants' interpretations of personal impairment and disability. James, Neil, Sophie and Lydia describe how work in theatre has shaped their identity by bringing new understandings of disability politics, theory, and discrimination to the fore in their thinking. Responding to questions about their route to becoming an actor and disability understandings, they specifically refer to connection with Graeae Theatre Company's work and ACE's targeted diversity initiatives as prompting a reassessment of how they perceive themselves. It appears these actors respond to and reposition self-identity around wider efforts to educate disability awareness and understanding in day-to-day theatre practice. Some interview responses considered in discussing this subtheme refer to experiences outside the recent timeframe for this study. Still, these appear more than memories of starting out in theatre, instead they are referred to as the start of a 'journey' with self-identity that is ongoing (Sophie, p.6; Neil, p.4); relevant experiences are expressed as fundamental to how actor-participants perceive themselves and their position in the industry now.

Six out of seven actors in this study mention Graeae in relation to career support and development. James traces exposure in theatre to opportunities afforded him in Graeae’s productions, remarking, ‘I would have had a tougher time getting seen by people […] that was a real launch pad for me’ (p.18). As is common among actors here, James refers to Graeae as an essential source of support, particularly at the onset of his career. He also recognises its strategic impact, describing Graeae as, ‘clued in with what government are doing, what the industry is doing, and they're the ones really making a difference’ (James, p.32). Graeae’s wider influence in promoting accessibility and opportunity for disabled people across the industry is acknowledged by all actors in this study and repeatedly referred to in this discussion. However, experiences of its practice are interpreted more so by Sophie, Neil and James as having a profound impact on their self-identity.

In terms of actors’ journeying with self-identity it is perhaps no surprise that the act of performing onstage itself is identified as meaningful. There is a sense that any actor, particularly those starting out, will experience challenges to their self-identity; Roznowski recognises, ‘acting is a unique occupation’, in which, ‘examination of the self is necessary […] acting forces […] this unique introspective process’ (2017, p.xiv). This may be considered part of an actors’ development; however, actors in this study describe a parallel journey with intrapersonal perspectives of impairment and disability, which adds another dimension to this process for them. As Neil reflects on starting out in the industry, he comments that, ‘becoming an actor was a really weird way of reclaiming who I was going to be and being in charge’ (p.2). It is possible he makes an obvious connection between performing onstage and self-confidence or empowerment. However, Neil describes personal discoveries that are perhaps more profound, reiterating, ‘there was something really weird going on’ (p.2). As he expands on Graeae’s influence in this process, he recalls being introduced to, ‘this amazing community of disabled actors that I had no idea about’ (Neil, p.1). Neil adds, ‘finding out about Graeae […] completely changed my world’ (p.2).

Neil credits Graeae with his decision to pursue acting further, but positive self-discovery through his experience with the company stretches beyond career choice (pp.1-2). Neil suggests meeting other disabled people working in the industry prompted a new sense of self-acceptance, individual autonomy, and disability understanding. He describes meeting one actor, ‘who is disabled and well known and doesn’t give a shit’, saying, ‘that had a real impact on me’ (Neil, p.2). It seems this actor not only modelled success but positive self-identity, impacting Neil’s view of himself and interpretation of personal impairment. Adding context to his comment about ‘reclaiming who I was going to be’, Neil seems drawn to memories of limitation to illustrate where working in theatre shifted his views to and from. Questioned about his approach to acting, Neil reflects, ‘I think becoming an actor was like… when I was younger people used to try and make me look normal, I always remember when I was 15 everyone would try and give me physio and normalise me’ (p.2). Neil’s response illustrates how experiences of theatre and disability are intrinsically linked to self-identity (p.2); at this point in his interview, he was only asked about acting, yet his journey with self-identity and disability understandings is expressed as most important in this. Neil implies early work as an actor lifted identity constraints arising from medical model beliefs, which identified disability through medical diagnosis as a disadvantaging factor (Oliver and Barnes, 2012, p.11). It seems his experience with Graeae altered his perception of disability from deficit or loss to gain as he describes his current view, saying, ‘to be disabled is to be proud of who I am […] it’s a good part of my identity’ (Neil, p.3). Neil adds, ‘I’m confident now the way I am, I had a long journey to get to where I am, and I love it’ (pp.3-4).

Like Neil, Sophie and James imply journeying with self-identity is not a simple shift in thinking or instantaneous reaction to experiences in theatre. They describe a lengthy process, grappling with personal interpretations of disability, impairment, and self-identity alongside acting work. As with Neil, initial contact with Graeae is considered a starting point in this. James describes how work in theatre made him question, ‘how much do I feel like this defines who I am’ (p.6). He describes the implications of personal impairment and disability being a new consideration, saying:

> it never really has been hugely important to me, but then […] Graeae, sort of, made me rethink all of my um […] moral code about all of that […] sort

> of thinking about it more, but kind of also come to terms with who I am and um being okay with that (James, p.6).

James implies working with disabled people in theatre prompted a new sense of self-acceptance, and that Graeae's practice challenged his view of disability beyond his lived experience. As a younger actor in this study, the challenge of realigning his 'moral code' with more complex understandings and other people's experiences of disability seems ongoing and is detailed later in this chapter section (James, p.6).

Like Neil, Sophie's memories of starting out in acting are more distant but significant in describing how theatre shaped her identity. She reflects on, 'an amazing chat with an actor […] who was like […] this is how the world sees you, this is how the industry sees you, and you are going to have to really deal with this' (Sophie, p.3). Sophie continues to explain:

> I thought I was not that disabled […] but it kind of opened my eyes up to the kind of... the politics of disability and actually I am very much disabled and the rights we have as performers or artists are very diminished. So, it kind of really was a big wakeup call (p.3).

In a similar way to James, Sophie describes the start of, 'a journey of something I really had to come to terms with' (p.6). It appears her experience with Graeae was revelatory in terms of understanding how impairment is perceived in society and in theatre, and how she interprets this regarding personal impairment. She describes this being, 'part of the reconstruction process that I really do attribute to being with Graeae, because difference is in the room all the time and it's spoken about (Sophie, p.6). In contrast to Neil, it seems for Sophie and James what started as a view of impairment being 'not in general something bad', is now balanced with awareness of disability being socially constructed; they realise that impairment can be 'bad for some people or in some circumstances' (Barnes, 2016, p.8). Sophie implies responding to new awareness of disability politics is both uncomfortable and necessary; she mentions therapy as a part of a process of reassessing her interpretation of impairment and prejudice in the industry (Sophie, p.6). The implications of what may seem a more negative perception of disability and theatre for James are discussed in more detail later.

Whether Neil, Sophie or James would be as prominent in the industry as they are now without experiencing Graeae's practice as a springboard to their career, but also as a space to journey with self-identity and interpretations of personal impairment, is questionable. Although their early experiences in the industry span more than ten years, Graeae's practice is a shared route to questioning how they perceive themselves. Being in a setting where disability understandings are shared openly has a profound impact on them. Despite implied discomfort experienced in this, challenges to personal perceptions of disability and impairment early in their careers are viewed as lasting and positive. It seems less likely their self-discoveries would have been the same without the opportunity to work with a disabled-led company. Sophie's, James' and Neil's comments highlight the importance of practice like Graeae's in creating space for actors starting out in the industry, who may or may not consider themselves disabled, to discuss disability as well as develop their craft.

Further along the journey, Neil and Sophie describe a now positive affinity with the disabled community that seems both validating and empowering. They imply a shift to social model thinking, which identifies disabled people as an oppressed social group, having positive connotations associated with activism and shared identity (Goodley, 2011, p.9). Like Neil, and describing what the term *disabled* means to her, Sophie clarifies, 'for a long time, I didn't want to be associated with that word […] now I'm very proud of it and feels like it's something that I own' (p.5). She suggests changed self-identity led to a new approach to theatre practice also, explaining:

> It was a really big… that whole process working with Graeae really helped me actually um embracing my identity […] just then gave me a different voice; I started to ask for things […] or try to set up meetings with directors and to ask them why is there such a problem, why won't you see disabled actors, why won't you have disabled actors on your stages (Sophie, p.4).

Sophie's journey with self-identity in theatre appears to have empowered her to ask questions, push doors, and challenge perceived barriers in casting. Actor-participants' personal approaches to challenging directors emerged as a separate subtheme which is discussed in the next chapter.

Writing in *Identity and Difference* Woodward suggests, ‘identities are contingent […] re-emerging and renegotiated […] at particular historical moments’ (1997, p.28). ACE’s shift in strategy can be considered a historical moment in theatre; there is new momentum to disability agenda, external motivation to share responsibility for diversity, and funding consequences of not doing so. Neil, Sophie and James recognise Graeae’s practice and their first acting jobs as ‘particular historic moments’ in which their self-identity is ‘renegotiated’ (Woodward, 1997, p.28). However, Lydia points to ACE’s recent initiatives as impacting her self-identity and disability views. New understandings of disability were opened to Lydia in this way, she explains:

> *(laughs)* disabled um, so, I only recently learnt about the medical and social model of disability um, I still don’t think I fully understand it well enough but *(laughs)*, but that really changed what disabled meant for me, so, um being disabled means that things aren’t always open to me or made to fit my world, but yeah it took me a while to realise that that wasn’t coming from me, it was something the world has to deal with […] and that’s what disables me, so, the social model yeah (Lydia, p.8).

Later in her interview Lydia details where this learning around disability theory took place, describing:

> at the beginning of […] rehearsals we just had an afternoon talking about the social model and the medical model of disability and talking about what individuals might need and we just spoke together in groups and got it out there and that was great (pp.36-37).

Reflecting on this moment, Lydia conveys no surprise at discussion of disability and access requirements being part of the rehearsal process. She implies this is now expected or common when rehearsing with disabled people as part of a production cast; also, that ACE funded initiatives are pushing to educate on disability in theatre settings outside of what has been considered specialist practice, like Graeae’s. Like Sophie, Lydia appears to welcome a head-on approach to educating and talking about disability. However, exposure to viewpoints that are elementary in disability studies seems to have lasting, positive and negative impact on her self-identity, indicating how this knowledge should not be assumed. As someone with a physical impairment, Lydia implies this was her first encounter with disability theory, learning ‘the idea underpinning the [medical] model was that of personal tragedy, while the idea underpinning the social model was that of externally imposed restriction’ (Oliver, 2004, p.19). Like Neil, Lydia’s response to this distinction has positive implications in terms of lifting intrapersonal constraints. Evidencing Kuppers’ view that the most valuable feature of the social model is the ‘instantaneous lifting of guilt’ (2017, p.7), Lydia implies new social model understanding lifted a burden of self-blame regarding her accessibility requirements and responsibility for participation in society. This shift in self-identity is expressed as a process in her remark, ‘it took a while to realise that wasn’t coming from me’ (Lydia, p.8).

For Lydia and James working in theatre appears to heighten personal consciousness of discrimination. Like Sophie they point to negative connotations of being made aware of residing prejudice in the industry; this is expressed as a new reality continuing to disrupt their self-identity. It is not just new knowledge that impacts this, they describe witnessing disparity between their own experiences in theatre and others. Talking about his positive experience of accessibility and participation in rehearsals, James comments, ‘I’ve got a biased opinion of this because my disability is mild, for want of a better word *(laughs)* […] whereas I’ve experienced other people’s rehearsal processes, them really having to fight […] to be considered’ (p.27). Lydia also describes how new social model thinking prompts intrapersonal questioning around how some impairments are, ‘really accommodated […] why is that not the same for other disabilities’ (p.8). It appears work in theatre causes her to grapple with a more negative view of how others might perceive her and interpret her impairment.

Similarly, it is James’ comment that opens this chapter, ‘as much as I might or might not perceive myself as disabled, society always does to some extent […] exposure to the industry has crafted all that’ (p.7). There is a sense of despondency in his statement; although implying increased self-acceptance through contact with Graeae, it seems exposure to disability politics and theory, and witnessing the exclusion of others, has made James perceive himself as less accepted by society. As such, his association with the term *disabled* to date is less about positive affinity with a community; instead, it seems to express a negative realisation of how others might treat or perceive him. He remarks, ‘it’s just a horrible word dis-abled […] yeah, what it means to me is um quite negative’ (James, p.7). Along with Lydia, James’ experiences in theatre seem to cause him to view his impairment as more limiting and to identify the industry as more exclusive than past, first-hand experiences had evidenced.

Parrey’s (2018) work on disorientation in the disability studies classroom connects with the journeying with self-identity James and Lydia continue with; he describes disorientating encounters as ‘moments in which our relation to disability is questionable’ (2018). Like Sophie, they experienced disorientation when new understandings of disability were opened to them. Their perceptions of self-identity are disrupted by alertness to discrimination, either through education or what is witnessed in theatre. Parrey argues such encounters ‘are vital […] Disabled and non-disabled people need them to appreciate that (and how) meanings and experiences shape bodies and lives lived in proximity to impairment/disability and through disablement’ (2016). Nonetheless, although viewed as necessary, Burch (2017) also describes anxiety, resistance and blurring of identity are experienced when pre-existing assumptions of disability are challenged. In this way, new disability understanding has brought a sense of belonging, empowerment, and political engagement for Sophie and Neil. They now appear to consider association with the term *disabled* as a positive aspect of their self-identity. However, for James and Lydia who have more recently entered the profession, a primarily positive view of the industry and society seems to have been blurred. They now journey with reconciling not only first-hand experiences of disability and impairment with self-identity, but new knowledge of the inherent exclusion of others.

Actors’ responses discussed here raise query around how disability agenda and theory is presented in theatre practice and expose real-life implications of this. ‘Examination of the self’ the ‘unique introspective process’ of acting extends further for them (Roznowski, 2017, p.xiv); it involves responding to position in the disabled community, recognition of past and existing discrimination, and interpreting personal impairment in the theatre workplace and beyond. Despite the positive connotations of open discussion around disability in theatre, as this extends across the industry and as part of ACE's targeted initiatives these factors of actors' journeying with self-identity should be examined and accounted for. It should not be assumed that disabled people working in the industry have prior knowledge of disability politics or theory that makes personal interpretations of these understandings straightforward. The lasting impact and resilience required in journeying with self-identity in the theatre workplace, alongside perceptions of disability and impairment, particularly for those starting out, should be neither presumed nor underestimated.

4.2 Defining Professional Identity

Interpreting the term *disabled* alongside professional identity has become more pressing for actors with physical impairments. With NPOs tasked with reporting diversity data, it is anticipated that those employed by ACE funded theatres will disclose impairment and identify as disabled as means of accruing workforce statistics (ACE; 2017b; Henley, 2016, p.4). This section of the chapter links closely with the next, both considering unique aspects of preferences regarding professional identity in connection with ACE's strategy. Although all actors self-define as disabled people in agreeing to take part in this study, and occurring from their journeying with self-identity, interpretations of professional identity present more dissonance. This subtheme examines meaning associated with the term *disabled* and a prevailing preference to disassociate this from professional identity, 'who I am' and 'what I do' seem separate. Actor-participants' responses also uncover how preferences in this are not only based on disability understandings; presumptions of casting, workplace and political agenda are also raised as relevant to this subtheme and opened in discussion.

In academic literature the description *disabled actor* or *artist* has often been assigned to participants in disability focused theatre, and to performers who identify with 'a wider international disability arts and culture movement' (Johnston, 2016, p.15). Historically this has categorised actors with impairments as part of activist or political practice (Darke, 2003, pp.131-134). However, the description *disabled actor* continues to gain traction outside of this. It is widely used in media articles and theatre publications to refer to actors employed in the theatre industry. It is probable this is motivated by need for clarity in distinguishing subject matter, focusing on disabled people in the acting profession, as is the case with its use in this thesis. Companies like Graeae (no date), ROTM (2018), and major theatres such as the National Theatre (no date) adopt the phrase *disabled actor,* or *artist* to describe their work, aims, or recruitment opportunities. Although these organisations are esteemed by actors in this study, this description, which links self-identity as a disabled person with their job role, seems unwelcome. Lydia and Moira are forthright in setting out a clear distinction between personal and professional identity in this way. Early in their interviews they state a choice to omit the term *disabled* when referring to the latter. Lydia explains, ‘I’m a professional actor, I never include the disabled part’ (p.7). Likewise, Moira maintains a similar separation saying, ‘I am a disabled person, but I am professional actor’ (p. 4). Their preference is to disassociate the term *disabled* from professional identity; however, the outworking of this in practice seems both complex and ambiguous.

As with all disability terminology, there is ambiguity in language used to describe professional identity. Sharing her feelings about being labelled *a disabled actor* and despite preferring not to refer to herself in this way, Moira appears keen to point out that context is relevant. She explains:

> who's using the term *disabled actor* like you know um because if it was […] somebody that I respect in the disa… disability community um I wouldn’t… it wouldn't be offensive to me, if it was somebody from, I don’t know, the Royal Shakespeare Company using it in a really patronising tone I'd be really angry (Moira, p.5).

Moira is speaking about appropriation of terms, but also who is using them. Definitions she views as fitting for use inside the disabled community are not outside of that. It seems this is a matter of trust, with this label being tolerated when assumed by those she trusts but interpreted as negative if assumed by organisations she thinks view her as inferior; she categorises a major theatre company, the RSC, as such. Moira conveys understanding of how the label *disabled actor* may have a political context; she expresses appreciation and affinity with the Disability Arts Movement (Moira, p.2). As such, she reiterates, ‘depending on who’s using it um it'll either be an empowering term or a limiting one […] I would say I don't use it for myself very often' (Moira, p.4). Moira's views point to complexity around terminology and how professional identity is assumed of actors in this study. She highlights importance in understanding individuals' personal preferences in a theatre workplace context.

Actor-participants describe how presumptions of casting and talent recognition strongly influence preferences around professional identity. Neil stands out from others in describing how identifying himself as a disabled actor is perceived as integral to his recognition and reputation in the industry. He remarks, 'I'm a disabled actor, that's how people know me' (p.13). Still, the context of this comment is Neil's interest in being considered for more 'non-disabled role[s]', characters that do not specify disability in the script (Neil, p.13). As such, although he implies identifying as a disabled actor is a means to specific theatre work, Neil also acknowledges this categorisation as restricting opportunities available to him. This perception that identifying as a disabled actor can be limiting, as Moira (p.4) also suggests, seems a common stimulus for Paul's and James' preference not to self-define in this way.

As Paul discusses challenges in getting seen by casting directors, he explains:

> I've never presented myself as disabled, I've said you know come and see me in this, let's go for coffee […] and they don't bother to see you , so, to add the… to add the other element of being disabled you know they can quite easily say I'm too busy or it's already cast (p.29).

He appears to view identifying as disabled as a barrier to casting and a further reason for casting directors to reject him. Speaking about stereotypical casting choices, Paul repeatedly refers to disability as 'the last bastion', seemingly very conscious of risk that identifying as disabled could be cause for discrimination (p.29). His preference to disassociate with the term *disabled* extends beyond professional identity; among actor-participants Paul seems most uneasy identifying as disabled in any context. Describing what the term *disabled* means to him, Paul is quick to recall childhood experiences of being excluded on the sports field; he states, 'to be disabled is not to be on a level playing field with non-disabled people'

(Paul, p.7). It appears he assumes identifying as disabled in a professional context will prompt a similar experience.

Despite working in the industry longer than most in this study, Paul indicates little exposure to political or social model understandings of disability. The term *disabled* seems to have only negative connotations regarding his identity. Finkelstein and Stuart recognise this position as common, that most disabled people are, 'non-politicised […] and identify themselves with repressive individual models of disability' (1996, p.176). Yet, Paul stands out from other actors here, suggesting for disabled people in theatre this is rare. He conveys no sense of affinity or political association with the disabled community. Rather, in terms of professional identity, this is something he seems purposely trying to avoid. It is not only Paul's fear of discrimination and lack of disability knowledge that seems influential in this; it is his recent assessment of talent levels he witnesses among disabled people. Commenting on the label *disabled actor,* Paul describes:

> *(sighs)* it does make me shudder a bit […] I've got really mixed feelings about it […] but I'll be totally honest I… I do… I do cringe sometimes at the… the… at the standard *(laughs)* of err acting um […] I want to become known as an actor, a good actor, versatile actor […] so, yeah, I do cringe a little bit when I hear that term (p.6).

Paul conveys discomfort with identifying as part of a grouping of *disabled actors*, he expresses a visceral reaction to this notion in his choice of words like 'shudder' and 'cringe' (p.6). His presumption seems to be that by identifying as disabled in practice he is associating himself with actors of substandard talent (Paul, p.6). This belief is one that others in this study and organisations across the industry seek to challenge; *Profile*, a new casting database created by the National Theatre and Spotlight is described as, 'a great tool for really seeing how much professional disabled actor talent there is available to UK theatres' (Spotlight, 2020). The essence of this initiative is to raise the profile of professionals who identify as disabled people; a difficult premise for Paul to align with a seemingly historic view of disabled actors being outside the perimeter of professional work. However, Paul is not alone in expressing some sense of disquiet about professional recognition in the industry; this emerged as a subtheme and is detailed in chapter six. Paul seems yet to experience theatre practice in which he feels he would be valued fairly if he were upfront about impairment or identified as disabled. The practical implications of his preference are far-reaching and are also expanded on in the next chapter.

As with Paul, James' preference to disassociate the term *disabled* from professional identify appears problematic in relation to ACE's collection of diversity data. James believes, 'it needs to get to the point where that's […] not necessarily worth talking about, it shouldn't be something you have to mention. It should just be professional actor and disabled actors should be under that bracket' (p.4). Like Paul, James implies unease identifying with a specific category of actors, and with a sense of this being forced upon him. However, James' motivations seem entirely different, his awareness of disability politics, and what appears to be growing appreciation for the disabled community, both shapes and complicates his position in this. James is conscious of how his journeying with self-identity, impairment, and disability in theatre connects with difficultly defining professional identity that he continues to grapple with. Reflecting on how disability is relevant in practice, James describes moving from wanting to draw attention to his impairment onstage to realising a political power in not doing so. He explains:

> my opinion of it has changed a lot over the years […] I'd want to use it for every character that I did […] and as […] I've sort of become more to terms with it […] I've wanted to drift more and more out of it being a thing, and I think also […] realising what [Graeae] are trying to do the… the less I think you comment on it in theatre the stronger the message is of having disabled people cast (James, p.9).

James is speaking about interpreting personal impairment in performance, still, this reflects a shift in professional identity also. It seems he first presented himself as an actor choosing to manipulate 'the stare', drawing to impairment as means of forcing a reaction from audiences (Garland-Thomson, 2000); a tactic still exploited by performers associated with disability arts and culture (Johnston, 2016, pp.15-35; Kuppers, 2017, p.49). However, James describes his journey with professional identity as being, 'gradually trying to just be an actor, rather than be the disabled actor on stage' (p.10). Like Paul, James makes a clear distinction between these two groupings, and implies identifying as the latter might compromise his journey with impairment. Still, he does not belittle talent in either group. Instead, it seems James' professional identity is complicated by questioning how he can best represent the disabled community in the industry whilst also balancing an optimistic view that, 'where the industry is going […] it does not need to be something that is commented on anymore' (p.6; p.11). James continues to question:

> do I feel like […] I should be represented through this […] it's kind of weird going through all of that process and figuring out how much that defines you and how much you kind of class yourself as the disabled actor, and how much you are just an actor (p.6).

The belief that *actor* and *disabled actor* are isolated identities is for James and Sophie difficult to reconcile with working in an industry in which disabled people are underrepresented. However, unlike James, Sophie's understanding of disability politics and representation appears to offer clarity rather than confusion regarding professional identity. She sets out:

> I represent people, I'm part of a kind of you know a demographic of people that don't get represented fairly um, so, I'm quite […] passionate about saying that I am a disabled actor or an actor with disability, it's something very much that I'm keen to see progress' (Sophie, pp.5-6).

Sophie and Neil are the only actors in study who describe motivation for choosing to present themselves as disabled actors outside of a perceived necessity to do so as part of ACE's strategy. Sophie expresses passion for a wider cause, to draw attention to a community historically excluded from theatre, which appears to drive her decision; her approach to professional identity seems in some way perceived as trailblazing. Yet, as with Neil's earlier comments, it is questionable if this carries professional cost in terms of opportunities available to her. Sophie implies there is personal cost involved, she makes clear this is not a preference but a sad necessity in the current theatre climate. Rather than disability going unmentioned, she believes it must be stated, saying:

> It feels like a very um important statement in the sense that it just feels sad that we have to say it you know, I'm a professional disabled actor, rather than I'm a professional actor um but I still think we live in a world where

> that needs to be said […] it feels like quite a loaded statement in the sense that err it's visibility […] I mean, I would love to live in a world where it's just *professional actor* (Sophie, pp.4-5).

Despite dissonant preferences in defining professional identity, there is common appreciation that identifying as disabled in the theatre workplace is influential in raising the profile of a minority community that is underrepresented. This is explored further as we move to the final part of the chapter. However, as actors' responses have shown, this is not necessarily a preferred, comfortable, or straightforward way to self-define in professional settings. Associating the term *disabled* with professional identity is expressed as contrary to some actors' personal disability views and agenda, ambitions, and trust in the industry itself. These themes have been raised here but are expanded in later chapters. Goodley recognises, 'the question of why people do/not identify as disabled […] requires us to interrogate culture, society, and politics for possible answers (2011, p.30). Findings from interviews here have begun to open complex intrapersonal negotiations experienced by actors as they seek to answer this question for themselves in a theatre setting. For most actors here, aligning perceptions of theatre, disability politics, and association the disabled community with professional identity is an unresolved and shifting process; still, it is one that ACE's current strategy seems to demand a definitive stance on.

4.3 Necessity to Define as Disabled in Practice

The collection of diversity data across NPO theatres, which may be presented as a simple tick box, gives rise to complex intrapersonal responses for actors in this study. Having highlighted preferences in defining professional identity, this final subtheme expands further on recognition of a necessity to define as disabled in practice. As professionals working in ACE funded theatres, identifying as disabled and disclosing impairment seems to have become a routine part of actor-participants' lived experience, even for those who prefer to disassociate the term *disabled* from professional identity. Regardless of where they are in journeying with identity, 'box ticking' is described as a necessary measure. (Pete, p.15; Lydia, p.41;

Paul, p.9; James, p.5; Sophie, p.24). Actor-participants point to individual interpretations of ACE's strategy, its advantages in tackling inequality and opening new opportunities. However, they also expose suspicions and insecurities prompted by this current situation in which they imply disability feels like a commodity. Broader themes around professional recognition and authenticity are raised in this part of the discussion and expanded as separate emergent themes in subsequent chapters.

ACE's *Making a Shift Report* acknowledges that data on disabled people working for NPOs, partly 'hinges on […] disabled employees' willingness to declare their disability on monitoring forms' (2017d, p.54). Advising on how data is collected, one interviewee for the report, explains, 'We ask a very simple question: "Do you describe yourself as a disabled person?"' (ACE, 2017d, p.56). Based on actor-participants' responses so far, this is not simple when queried in a theatre context. In line with my findings, ACE's report lists 'reasons to declare', which include advantage in opening new opportunities, making access requirements clear, and this being 'a political decision' (2017d, p.55). However, ACE data also reveals, 'high levels of non-declaration', reporting that, 'by far the most common reason [not to declare] was fear or experience of discrimination' (2017d, p.55). Adding detail to this, actors in this study uncover where personal compromise in their reasoning occurs. They express willingness to set aside preferences in how they identify in support of wider disability agenda, yet this does not diminish presumptions of discrimination in theatre. Instead, they imply any advantage in this as intrapersonal reasoning for what is perceived as an uneasy necessity.

Moira, Pete, James and Lydia express a level of appreciation for ACE's labour in holding theatres accountable for increasing disability workforce figures. Moira explains, 'I think that the Arts Council's […] general push to make people put more diversity in their shows and in their companies is a really good thing' (p.28). Asked about the biggest influence on current acting opportunities, Pete states, 'at the end of the day it's… it's down to resources […] and that's the Arts Council really' (p.25). Pete and Moira exemplify a common view of ACE's efforts to push disability agenda and influence opportunities in theatre as largely positive; they imply ACE's strategy is considered, 'a long way from the kind of box ticking we've seen in the past', it is impacting genuine change (Gardner, 2015). However, actor-participants also describe how their support is balanced with unease around having to define in a particular way in response. James repeatedly refers to defining as a disabled actor, as an ‘extreme’, short term measure (p.4; p.13; p.16). He explains, ‘we’re needing to go through that time at the moment where you need to push it to the extreme […] to highlight something to a very extreme point to include a group of people that are being massively underrepresented’ (James, p.4). James suggests how he identifies in practice supports diversity efforts. Discussing the implications of this in casting, he explains further:

> the pendulum needs to go past the middle to the extreme to […] include people that haven't had the chance before it can come back to normality, then you just go, ‘right, we know who these people are now […] they’re in the pool of actors that we know, now we can just employ the best actor for the part’, rather than having to feel like you have to fulfil the quota, which is what I find quite odd (James, p.16).

James’ mention of ‘quota’ conveys a consciousness of theatres being pressured to engage with disabled people (p.16). His repeated use of the word ‘odd’ suggests this current situation compromises both his preferred identity and comfort in the workplace (James, p.13; p.16). James clearly expresses unease with feeling distinct from other actors in casting situations; his experiences of this are expanded on in chapter six. He explains, ‘I don’t know how I feel about it because it’s all very odd um these sort of forced disability castings […] it’s very extreme and you feel very sort of like put in a group’ (James, p.13). It appears external diversity efforts that James views as important, also make him feel isolated rather than integrated in the industry. Defining as a disabled actor seems perceived as necessity yet appears contradictory to his own efforts ‘gradually trying to just be an actor, rather than be the disabled actor on stage’ (James, p.10).

Lydia describes a similar dilemma that perceived necessity to define as disabled in practice presents. Like others, she conveys appreciation for ACE’s efforts to tackle underrepresentation. But, like James, it seems there is compromise in responding to this. Lydia explains:

> I never include the disabled part in it, but then, I guess, at the same time it’s a unique selling point […] we’re a product and in a way we have to sell our product and if that’s an element of the product then we have to include it, which is sad at the moment. I think eventually we won’t have to do that […] now I think it’s important […] realistically that’s what people are looking for (p.7).

For someone who prefers to disassociate the term *disabled* from professional identity, external pressure to declare disability in the workplace seems far from ideal. Lydia’s words almost echo Sophie’s comments in the previous subtheme, describing having to self-define as a disabled actor as both ‘important’ and ‘sad’ (Sophie, pp.4-5; Lydia, p.7). As with James, Lydia shows ‘willingness’ to set aside her beliefs around professional identity, also expressing this as an uneasy but short-term measure (ACE, 2017d, p.54). However, drawing attention to disability is not just a political choice, Lydia also recognises her decision influences casting opportunities.

Repeated use of the phrase ‘unique selling point’ and ‘product’ exemplifies how actors in this study feel identifying as disabled has become a commodity in the current theatre climate (Sophie, p.21; Lydia, p.7). Actor-participants appear to support the observation of an increased ‘appetite to engage’ with disabled people in theatre (Startin, 2014). Yet, alongside external pressure to do so, having to declare disability for monitoring purposes also prompts suspicion and insecurities. Lydia admits, ‘I’m under no illusions that being disabled […] has opened up doors to me, you know as much as there are doors that are firmly closed’ (p.7). In a similar way, Paul explains, ‘I've got really mixed feelings about it because it's […] helped me to open doors’ (p.6). As with Neil’s (p.13) comments in the previous section, Lydia and Paul acknowledge casting advantages in defining as disabled as well as limitations. Still, it is only Neil in this study who suggests benefits in casting are his reason to declare disability in the way ACE’s report might imply (2017d). Lydia suggests this is something she has little choice in, it is a political and pragmatic necessity. She continues saying, ‘it’s opened some really random doors, so I have mixed feeling about *professional disabled actor* […] but at the moment I think […] it’s got to be said (Lydia, pp.7-8).

For Lydia and Paul, it appears advantages in defining as disabled in the workplace do not outweigh the personal cost of compromising preferences around professional identity. However, Paul describes how he continues to deliberate over this, describing this situation as ‘a real double-edged sword’. Speaking about the theatre climate he comments:

> the climate’s err pretty good for disabled actors because we can take advantage, I struggle with this, but I’ve been thinking about it a lot recently, you know why shouldn’t a disabled actor take advantage of that little, I don’t know I was going to say gift […] you’d hardly call it a gift, but that […] little leg up (Paul, p.13).

External pressure to declare disability prompts questioning for Paul around integrity in casting and drawing to disability as an advantage. He seems uncomfortable with this. However, in this comment Paul, who maintains ‘I’ve never presented myself as disabled’ (p.29), refers to himself as part of a grouping of disabled actors for the first time in his interview (p.13). In this way, although saying he prefers to disassociate the term *disabled* from his identity, recent casting opportunities appear to unsettle how he presents himself in practice and his understanding of the term *disabled* within that. For Paul, who has chosen to hide his impairment in casting situations and appears to have interpreted his impairment as a ‘negative’ trait, considering aspects of impairment as ‘positive’ appears valuable (Barnes, 2016, p.117). Although raising complex questions, it seems an increase in ‘reasons to declare’ disability is also challenging Paul’s self-identity (ACE, 2017d); a cause to consider what Bolt has referred to as ‘disability gains’ (2017).

Sophie, Paul and Pete describe how alertness to kudos associated with employing actors who declare disability, seems to heighten their suspicions around casting decisions. They appear to wrestle with the presumption that how they define themselves is more of a vantage point for employers than it is for them. Sophie explains:

> I feel like, in terms of this climate, my disability has become a unique selling point for them in the sense that they can get me in a room, and it will look… you know it will look good for everyone (p.21).

Aside from strong political justification for identifying as a disabled actor, Sophie implies this has little advantage in opening opportunities. Instead, necessity to define as disabled in practice seems viewed as more beneficial for others than herself. As other actors also suggest, declaring disability for monitoring purposes could be viewed as in some way sacrificial. Paul remarks that defining as disabled is, ‘helpful in that it’s a label, it’s a box that I can tick, and companies can say um, well, if they get criticised’ (p.9). Although, questioning potential benefits in this, Paul perceives the collection of diversity data as primarily a way of employers defending casting decisions. Similarly, Pete is upfront about how external pressure on theatres to engage with disability prompts suspicion in casting. He explains ‘I’m getting huge amounts of work at the moment […] you know I’m turning it away and, but yeah, you wonder kind of what that’s all about sometimes’ (Pete, p.5). Pete points to how diversity measures complicate his interpretation of employers’ integrity and motivations. This also seems to create uncertainty around how he values personal achievements in the workplace. Pete’s and others’ responses to hidden agendas in casting are expanded on as part of the superordinate theme *Wrestling with Authenticity* in chapter six.

Finally, Moira describes necessity to define as disabled linked with being upfront about her accessibility requirements. Referring to her earlier comments, Moira perceives the label *disabled actor* can be offensive if used outside the disabled community (p.5), she clearly sets out, ‘I am a disabled person, but I am a professional actor’ (p.4). Defining as disabled in practice seems contrary to preference, yet she implies this is more than a practical necessity, explaining:

> if I go in and don’t tell them who I am, and then they are not prepared to help me, that’s actually on me um, but also if I go in telling them who I am and they say, ‘we’re not going to help you’, then I kind of go ‘well then I don’t want to work with you either’ (Moira, p.11).

Moira’s upfront approach to making access requirements known is examined further in the next chapter. Like Pete, Moria seems suspicious of employers’ motivations. She implies ticking a box on a monitoring form is a necessary start in her negotiations with employers; not just to set out her needs but to expose those who are more interested in ticking a box than ‘being genuinely inclusive’ (Gardner, 2019). As with Sophie's (p.4) and Lydia's (p.7) responses, this seems a 'sad' necessity; a perception also noted by Sophie, who remarks, 'some casting directors talk about diversity, about ticking boxes, but not really changing anything, which really I found depressing' (p.24).

There is ongoing debate in the media about moving from box ticking, whether disability quotas should be enforced, and what is genuine inclusivity (Flynn, 2020; Gardner, 2015; 2016; 2019; Masso, 2018). Still, the focus of this is on organisations meeting and responding to diversity measures. My findings suggest there is, however, a need for more awareness of the individual who the tick represents and the compromises required of them in supporting the collection of disability data. This final part of the chapter has highlighted how responding to a simple tick box involves complex negotiation with perceptions of identity. In support of wider efforts to push disability agenda, actors in my study show 'willingness' to compromise personal beliefs and preferences as well as tick a box (ACE, 2017d, p.54). ACE's change in tactic to publish annual diversity data has in some way thwarted attempts to be 'just be an actor' (James, p.10). The tick box instead represents political, practical, and personal responses to the underrepresentation of disabled people in theatre. For most actor-participants, a perceived necessity to define as disabled involves taking on an uneasy identity; although acknowledged as opening specific opportunities, this seems to make them feel more separate from others, like a commodity, and suspicious of employers' intentions and motivations. Interview responses discussed here suggest in the current theatre climate this personal cost is not seen as optional. Nonetheless, there is also apparent optimism regarding ACE's diversity strategy, and that lived experience of short-term unease will lead to long-term change.

4.4 Reflection on the Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity

Journeying with perceptions of identity in practice is evidently a central factor in lived experiences of working in theatre for actors in this study. This is further accentuated by ACE's shift in strategy. Increasingly actor-participants are confronted with environments where difference is spoken about and understandings of disability are discussed openly. Their responses suggest this is welcomed, they value learning from the expertise of Graeae and recognise benefit in ACE's initiatives promoting social model understandings. However, as a result, disorientation in perceptions of self-identity, impairment, and disability is occurring (Parrey, 2016; 2018). This is meaningful in shifting views of impairment from deficit to gain, building affinity with the disabled community, and political association with the term *disabled.* Yet, disorientation caused by challenges to disability beliefs and new alertness to prejudice adds significant pressure on actors as they journey with self-identity in the theatre workplace (Parrey, 2016; 2018). In this way, this chapter has exposed important questions about how education around disability is presented in theatre. It highlights a need for further consideration of what is being presumed of disabled people who participate in this in terms of their existing understandings of disability, impairment, and self-identity. My findings here expose just some of the real-life implications of journeying with these in a theatre workplace setting.

Shifting disability agenda and strategy renders the definition of professional identity an unresolved process for actors in this study. This is embroiled with ambiguity in disability terminology, presumptions of roles and casting, and mistrust in hidden agenda of employers. All complex factors influencing a preference among actors to disassociate the term *disabled* from professional identity, which is thwarted by ACE's strategy for those who consider it necessary to declare disability. Actors' responses to this suggest the compromises they make in support of diversity measures in theatre may be underestimated in the industry. Santuzzi and Waltz advise, 'employers should be open to changes in disability identity over time […] organisations also cannot assume workers have clear disability identities' (2016, p.1130). It appears this recognition of 'disability in the workplace' as a 'unique and variable identity' is overlooked regarding actors with impairments in theatre (Santuzzi and Waltz, 2016); even by those determining strategy to positively influence the theatre climate for disabled people. Understanding how such strategies are responded to from a phenomenological perspective, as this chapter has exposed, seems of upmost importance; the impact of theatre on perceptions of identity is a continuing conversation offering the prospect of shaping diversity strategy in ways perceived as beneficial to disabled actors themselves, not just employers. Recognising the impact of theatre on perceptions of identity among disabled actors as opened in this chapter, also offers potential to shift how they are described in the wider public sphere; for the language used to reflect a preferred professional identity of those to whom it refers and shifts in the industry they are part of.

Chapter Five - Navigating Directors' Inexperience of Disability

'they know all the notes, but sometimes haven't quite learnt the tune […] I think that's something that you find, you know, now more and more directors are sort of saying, "Okay, I'm interested in casting disabled people"' (Pete, p.9)

This chapter examines how actor-participants are experiencing interpersonal engagement with directors in casting and rehearsal settings, particularly working with directors for whom disability is unfamiliar territory. With ACE's shift in strategy and initiatives to increase collaboration between disabled and non-disabled practitioners and performers, this situation is increasingly anticipated. There is shared awareness across the group of actors that directors are choosing to work with disabled people more, but they also acknowledge directors' approaches to practice as insufficient. The term *inexperience* in this superordinate theme title denotes a lack of knowledge, skill, and wisdom. Actor-participants describe lived experiences in theatre in which they appear to respond to a lack of disability knowledge, lack of skill in making work accessible, and what could be viewed as directors' innate ability to judge appropriate practice whether experience is lacking or not. How actor-participants are navigating directors' inexperience of disability has clearly emerged as a superordinate theme across the group. Distinct themes within that consider experiences of theatre practice and disability in relation to approaches to challenging directors, dealing with discomfort, and handling power dynamics. These form three sections of the discussion that follows.

Existing literature around the participation of disabled people in theatre practice often culminates in guidance for inclusion, which highlights changes in practice and environment required of the majority, non-disabled people (Fox and MacPherson, 2015; Barton Farcas, 2018). This is equally the target for much of ACE's efforts in promoting accessibility in theatre, and companies like Graeae in publishing *A Guide to Inclusive Teaching Practice for Theatre* (2009); an example of advice for directors on adjustments they can make to ensure casting and rehearsal practice is inclusive. Writing such as this provides clear and much needed information for those less experienced in working with disabled people on best supporting their full participation in the arts. Scholars also recognise the 'characteristics of inclusive practice' are not always put 'into effect' (Band *et al*, 2009, p.891). However, less attention is given to how inexperience of disability or directors' need for guidance in practice impacts the actors they work with.

Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl (2007) provide a manifesto for what they refer to as an *Ethic of Accommodation*. This extends beyond know how, drawing attention to changes in attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, and creativity that are necessary in making performance practice accessible to disabled people. They adopt the term *accommodation*, explaining, 'in US legal parlance, an accommodation is an adjustment made to an environment, an attitude or requirement so that a disabled person is able to participate' (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.228). In the UK, this term is more often substituted for *inclusion* or *accessibility*, yet it is prevalent in this chapter as it builds on existing work from an alternative perspective. Actor-participants' responses discussed here draw attention to mutual accommodations in theatre. They expose how learning about accessibility, representation, language, and effective collaboration in rehearsal is still required but not perceived as the responsibility of directors only. This chapter uncovers adjustments made by disabled actors in response to the perceived needs and insufficiencies of non-disabled directors. It points to actors' approaches to accommodating or navigating around directors' inexperience of disability as equally necessary in enabling effective practice to take place.

5.1 Approaches to Challenging Directors

In navigating directors' inexperience of disability, actor-participants describe experiences of challenging disability views, issues of representation, and accessibility in the theatre workplace. Discussion around this subtheme begins with Pete's description of how he experiences disability understandings among directors and guidance they require. It then sets out diverse motivations and approaches adopted by Moira, Sophie, Lydia and Paul in challenging directors in rehearsal settings. It draws attention to how actor-participants respond to directors' disability views and levels of experience, and how they perceive their role in directors' learning processes. It also exposes the risk and confidence they associate with choosing to voice opinions in practice, and interpretations of whether this is appropriate or not.

Along with others here, Pete sets out how experiences in practice differ with directors depending on their exposure to disability understandings. He implies this dictates the guidance or explanation required of him in working with them. Speaking about the implications of this in rehearsal, Pete explains:

> I think they just understand the position disabled people are in within society that they are regularly discriminated against […] if they have a disabled child or a family member that's disabled they know that, they've understood that, you know um and I think if they haven't then they know it, but again they know it in an intellectual way rather than having sort of experienced it […] it's like a shorthand, it becomes easier, you know, err you can assume, it's about trust as well (pp.10-11).

It seems important to Pete that directors he works with understand wider disability issues and experiences. Pete's choice of phrasing 'they know that, they've understood that' implies this is embedded within directors with close contact with disabled people; that knowledge has been processed in a way that makes his interactions with them more straightforward.

Along with Sophie and Moira, Pete expresses a need to offer guidance to directors lacking experience of disability, that it is necessary to explain disability to them in some way. Pete's comment opening this chapter, acknowledges that more directors are 'interested in casting disabled people', but observes, 'they know all the notes, but sometimes haven't quite learnt the tune' (p.9). Pete perceives new impetus among directors to engage with disabled people, yet his 'notes' and 'tune' metaphor suggests a distinction between them. He sets apart directors who know 'the notes', perhaps disability facts, policy, or appropriate language, and those who have learnt 'the tune' (Pete, p.9); it appears Pete refers to those who have embedded accessibility in their practice, as he adds, 'we talk about the creative case […] a creative response to access within theatre, within art, some directors can't quite see that' (p.9). Pete implies ACE's strategy has made his encounters with directors who 'haven't quite learnt the tune' more frequent (p.9).

In setting out responses to challenging directors around disability issues, Pete and Moira seem keen to clarify that inexperience does not necessarily hinder positive experiences of practice. However, directors' learning processes are significant. Pete clarifies he is, 'not criticising the directors who don't have that experience', and that he has, 'worked with some very fine directors' (p.11). In a similar way, Moira explains:

> Once I've actually ended up in a room with the mainstream director […] it's always good […] there's usually um a lot of keenness to do well and be supportive because usually these are people who are allies, who are really trying to change the landscape in terms of how disability is represented um, but there's always a learning curve (p.12).

Both Pete and Moira convey openness to, and experience of, working with directors with differing levels of disability experience. Still, Moira suggests that directors' learning processes present difficulty, even when working with those actively pushing disability agenda. Her use of the terms 'allies' and 'landscape' points to a battlefield mentality which is also reflected in Pete's remarks discussed later in the chapter (Moira, p.12). Moira carries this forward in describing her approach to rehearsals. She states, 'I'm at the point where I feel like […] I'm in enough control of my career not to hold any prisoners if people […] aren't doing a good job' (p.11). Like Pete, she suggests directors are perceived as being in differing groups, those who pursue genuine change and do it well, and those who do not.

Moira's head-on approach to declaring disability, noted in the previous chapter, not only serves to assess directors' motivations and whether her access needs will be met; this appears to be her way of exposing directors' disability understandings and, perhaps more importantly, whether they are willing to learn. In response to what she views as insufficient knowledge, Moira indicates that advising or teaching directors around disability has become an unavoidable part of her job as an actor. She positions herself in a central role in this process, describing, 'I always go in […] with a couple hats on I think in terms of like I understand that I'm an actor […] but I'm also there as a teacher' (Moira, p.12). She explains, 'the directors I have worked with have been quite good um if not a bit naïve in um needing to do a bit more reading' (Moira, p.12). As other actor-participants also imply, there are perceived gaps in understanding that Moira attempts to fill. She explains further, ‘as long as people listen when I tell them stuff isn’t working, or you know there is a better way to do it that means it’s more inclusive or whatever, um I really don’t mind’ (Moira, p.12). Again, Moira implies positive experiences in practice are not dependant on directors’ existing knowledge, but on whether they listen and learn. Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl also recognised this as a necessary part of an ethic of accommodation that ‘includes the politics of listening as well as the politics of speaking’ (2007, p.229). They note, ‘most minority groups maintain that they have been “silenced” by the majority and thus place speaking at a premium, disability communities often place listening on the same plane’ (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229). In this way, Moira battles against the grain as an actor positioning herself as a teacher or advisor on disability in rehearsals, expecting to be heard. As a result of her head-on approach in this she encounters positive and negative responses from directors, which are detailed later in relation to handling power dynamics.

Although Moira appears confident in that she conveys a forthright approach to challenging directors, this seems adopted out of necessity not choice. Later in her interview she clarifies:

> If you’re a disabled person and you live in the world you get people asking you stuff all the time. You get people who don't understand who want to understand […] If you want to be in a space where you're working and you're seen […] you have to contend with it, you don't have a choice […] I just understand that, like I'm gonna get asked at some point um, or what will happen is something will go wrong and I won't be able to shut up about it *(laughs)* because I won’t feel comfortable being in a show that’s doing something that I don't think is in line with good politics or best practice or whatever (Moira, p.18).

The idea that as an actor Moira feels she must ‘contend’ with directors questions and need for advice on disability seems over and above usual expectations of actors in rehearsal (p.18). She implies to preserve her own comfort and wider disability representation she must assert her opinion, even when it is not sought; for Moira, this seems a far from ideal reality of the current theatre climate, as she adds, ‘they're going in with no knowledge and expecting the disabled cast to give them all that knowledge, that's really unfair' (Moira, p.25). Although directors may view Moira as overstepping her role as an actor, as discussed later, it seems she views directors as not stepping up to their responsibility for nurturing disability understanding.

Like Moira, Sophie and Lydia express personal responsibility to represent the wider disabled community in theatre as a motivating factor in challenging directors in rehearsal. Sophie describes her experience of challenging directors' decisions around representation, saying:

> I've worked with two directors who are very aware of disability […] they've got a completely different viewpoint. However, whenever I have felt uncomfortable in a room, because a director just hasn't thought of it, I will very happily now say 'what about this?' […] there was an incident […] which I took issue with […] one of the actors, to help his character to be seen more sympathetically, he wanted to put his arm in a sling, and I was like, 'hang on a minute you know, what are you saying? You've got a disabled actor on stage and you're asking an able-bodied actor to essentially crip up, like why are you doing that?' (p.13).

Sophie implies a weight of responsibility for disability representation, which has already been noted as influencing her professional identity. Her trailblazing attitude to declaring disability is replicated in her approach to challenging directors in rehearsals. Media articles have long argued that 'cripping up' is unacceptable in theatre (Ryan, 2015; Shaban, 2015); however, for an actor to present this argument face to face with a director in rehearsal perhaps requires more boldness. Although stating she will 'happily' challenge directors when she feels uncomfortable, Sophie also implies this carries personal cost (p.13). She appears more collaborative in her approach to challenging directors decisions than Moira, but still recognises that her questioning risks causing offence. Sophie comments:

> I think I'm less scared of you know, I think most actors are like you have to toe the line to *(laughs)* get the next show, you know you're so frightened of upsetting a director or producer in case you don't work again and now I'm a bit more like fuck it […] we're not only doing this for ourselves we're doing it for future generations of actors (p.16).

It seems Sophie views the risk involved in challenging directors as worth taking, but not taken lightly. Her remark, ‘I think I’m less scared’ (p.16), suggests struggling with factors of confidence and fear regarding speaking up in practice in the past. Sophie implies that although her confidence has increased, fear of offending a director in rehearsals is not alleviated entirely, only lessened over time.

In a similar way, Lydia’s approach to challenging directors reflects an ongoing struggle. It seems she still weighs the risk of causing offence with a growing sense of responsibility for representing the disabled community in theatre. Speaking about challenging issues of access and representation, Lydia points to questions around when it is appropriate to challenge directors in rehearsal and when it is not. Like other actor-participants, Lydia shares stories of when her access requirements have been compromised at the most basic level; for example, she recalls, ‘I was having to go and ask to go to the toilet um and I […] said about that and it got sorted […] so, I am getting more confident with speaking up’ (Lydia, p.11). In retrospect, Lydia appears content with her level of confidence in challenging accessibility issues. She also recalls speaking out about disability representation for the first time. Playing a character written as disabled, Lydia challenged a director on issues of character and script. She describes:

> by the end of that process there was maybe one, maybe two […] mentions of being disabled, because as a group we sat in there thinking actually […] it doesn’t need to be constantly raised in every scene um she had other things going on in her life that were kind of more relevant […] that was the first time I had experienced that and it was really kind of gratifying to have a group of creatives come to that realisation pretty quickly […] they were like, ‘why do we keep mentioning it, we don’t need to’ (Lydia, pp.9-10).

Again, there is a sense of achievement implied as Lydia reflects on impacting perceptions of disability and the creative output of rehearsals. It appears she was able to challenge a ‘less enlightened’ presumption of impairment being a person’s overriding feature (Barnes, 1992). Instead, Lydia shaped the character she played into someone engaged in everyday life, ‘who just happen[ed] to have impairments’ (Barnes, 1992, p.18). In this way, boldness to express her views, again in what appears a collaborative manner, influenced her comfort playing the role and the portrayal of disability onstage. Furthermore, Lydia implies a positive response to her suggestions from directors. As pointed to as an ethic of accommodation to aim for, it appears ‘these changes are not made begrudgingly, but with goodwill, [and] creativity’ (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229).

In a similar way to Moira and Sophie, Lydia identifies a political power in challenging directors’ views and practice. However, she makes a distinction between her interpersonal skill in speaking up about access, or character and script, and what appears to be hesitancy to challenge directors at a personal level. She reveals, ‘there was one thing that I really regret not speaking up about at the time um, I think it was because it was more personal […] it was someone’s point of view’ (Lydia, p.11). Lydia describes a rehearsal where the director referred to her by her impairment rather than by her name. She recalls, ‘the cast members came up to me later and they were like, “are you ok with that being said?”, and I was like, “no, not really […] I should have just said”’ (Lydia, p.11). This decision not to challenge a director remains unsettling for Lydia. Interpreting this she seems to recognise the extent of risk as a factor and uncertainty about her responsibility as an actor to challenge directors’ personal views of disability. In terms of the risk, she explains:

> I think it’s a really difficult thing to do cause you can get a ramp made and you can make the food truck more accessible […] but as soon as it’s about someone’s vocabulary and it’s about someone’s actual point of view […] that’s so much more personal and you don’t want to offend someone cause you still want to get another job at the end of the day, don’t you? You want to work with that person again without them feeling paranoid about upsetting you (Lydia, p.12).

As Sophie also noted, risk of offending a director and not getting work seems real for Lydia, a reason to remain ‘silenced by the majority’ (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229). In announcing ACE’s new strategy, Bazalgette recognised, ‘it’s all about changing minds’ (2015), what Lydia seems to perceive as the greater challenge in practice. Speaking about taking on an acting role she felt ‘isn’t a good representation of my people’, she comments, ‘I don’t know how much responsibility I should you know take on with that’ (Lydia, p.9). It seems the question of how to challenge directors’ personal views whilst not compromising opportunities is an ongoing dilemma for Lydia; in the case of this role she admits, ‘I did it cause a. it’s money and b. it’s a job’ (Lydia, p.9).

In contrast to Lydia, Moira and Sophie, Paul offers no examples of challenging directors in rehearsal despite claiming, 'I explain the situation or sometimes I don't' (p.10). His stories of theatre practice centre on describing tactics to hide his impairment. Referring to raising concerns or challenging directors around accessibility, Paul remarks, 'I can blag my way completely through jobs' (p.13). In a similar way to Moira and Pete, Paul is keen to make clear his experiences with non-disabled directors are, 'all in all very good' (p.10). Yet, in rehearsals he appears hesitant to voice his most fundamental access requirements, as he states:

> I always say it's my problem, and I don't want to… I don't want it to be anybody else's problem. I hesitate to make a fuss about the wires being in the way and cables and microphone stands and bits of set, I hesitate to moan about that because I don't want it to be a big issue (Paul, p.10).

Although this approach to challenging directors may seem contrary to others, issues of fear, confidence, and personal motivation remain relevant. Paul is quick to make connection between his approach to rehearsals and negative experiences; he recalls speaking out about difficulty participating in a warmup exercise, saying to a director, 'it's impossible for me to catch a tennis ball'; the director's response was, 'Oh, for God's sake go home' (Paul, p.15). It seems Paul fears directors will respond in this way again. In contrast to Moira's head-on approach, asserting her access requirements from the onset of meeting, Paul appears to have taken on accessibility as his problem and his responsibility.

Confidence to speak up, or ability to judge when it is appropriate to challenge and when it is not, cannot be assumed of actors; as Paul confesses, 'you've got to be supremely confident in this game […] and sometimes I'm not' (p.26). However, like Sophie's political motivation in speaking up in practice, there also seems a connection between Paul's hesitancy to confront directors about accessibility and his self-identity. Unfamiliar with social model thinking, it seems Paul still considers impairment a barrier to participation, not society; hence, he places blame for inability to participate on himself. His lack of affinity with the disabled community is also relevant, seemingly giving him no reason to challenge directors aside from preserving his own comfort and safety. In practice, however, these factors alone may make his silence detrimental to his work and to those he works with; Paul describes situations in rehearsals where his safety felt compromised, referring to the theatre workplace as, ‘a very dangerous environment’ (p.16). Rather than assume directors should accommodate him, it seems Paul compromises his basic access requirements to avoid confrontation. His views highlight the benefits of social model thinking, not only in lifting self-blame for lack of participation (Kuppers, 2017, p.7); but also, in sharing responsibility for access in rehearsals, opening two-way conversation between directors and actors which benefits both. Without this it seems impossible for a director working with Paul to put an ethic of accommodation into practice, or for him to experience the kind of environment this might create (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229).

Actor-participants’ diverse approaches to challenging directors highlight questions and difficulties faced in theatre practice when disability knowledge or experience is lacking. Although they stress that inexperience of disability is not a precursor for a negative experience of practice, there are clearly complex adjustments made by actors to accommodate directors’ learning. The role of disabled actors in creating an ethic of accommodation that, ‘includes the politics of listening as well as the politics of speaking’, is highlighted here (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229); positive shifts as a result are exemplified in the way actors have been able to influence directors’ creative choices and disability views. Yet, responses here also expose how risk of a negative response from directors can be perceived as too great, and directors’ inexperience can be interpreted as a battle in practice. Actor-participants’ lived experiences of challenging issues of access, representation, and language give rise to questions around roles and responsibilities, and confidence and risk. Personal perceptions of these factors are navigated alongside inexperience of disability confronted in day-to-day practice, a precarious balance. These factors continue to be relevant as we discuss ways that actor-participants are dealing with discomfort.

5.2 Dealing with Discomfort

This subtheme concerns actor-participants’ perceptions of discomfort in rehearsal settings and their interpersonal responses to this. It recognises actors’ personal discomfort but focuses on how they are navigating presumptions of directors' discomfort in working with them. It continues to uncover how they interpret the appropriateness of speaking out in practice in response to perceived discomfort this causes directors. It also uncovers actors' differing levels of empathy with directors' learning processes and the disorientation, risk, and fear of error they presume directors confront in exploring new territory. Interview responses relevant to this subtheme expose actor-participants' individual efforts to minimise and accommodate directors' discomfort in practice. Perspectives of discomfort have already been highlighted as significant in actors' journeying with identity and challenging directors in rehearsal; these relate to issues of accessibility, representation, and language experienced as lacking or inappropriate. Lydia's and Paul's struggle challenging directors also connected discomfort with feelings of disempowerment, vulnerability, and fear, which continue to be relevant here. Overlap between subthemes is also evident as James points to his reticence to challenge access issues based on his presumption of directors' fear and discomfort in rehearsal. He comments:

> the more directors have to tread on eggshells around you and cater in rehearsal for you, unless it's a massive detriment to the way that you work um, I think it scares people off hiring people if they know that they have to really change the way they work […] if it's just tiny things with me, which ninety-eight percent of the time it is, um I just don't mention it (James, p.28).

Like Paul's approach to accessibility described in the previous subtheme, it seems James avoids raising access issues in rehearsal. However, his reason for this does not seem to be fear of insult, a lack of confidence or political responsibility. Instead, James seems preoccupied with preserving directors' comfort. The phrase 'tread on eggshells' implies a presumption widely promoted in the media and literature that directors are fearful of getting things wrong (Hammond, 2012; Hutchinson 2016c). James appears to recognise directors' vulnerability in this, particularly around accommodating access requirements. Instead of his expectation being 'the majority make difficult changes in its practices and environment' as Galloway, Nudd and

Sandahl place ‘at the core’ of their Ethic of Accommodation, James, like Paul, seems intent on minimising any necessity for this (2007, p.229).

Lydia and Sophie also acknowledge directors’ vulnerability and fear of error. Although not hesitant to assert accessibility requirements in the same way as James or Paul, both acknowledge changes in practice can be ‘difficult’ (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229). They express empathy for the learning process and discomfort they presume directors experience in working with them. Lydia comments:

> the last thing I would want to do is embarrass someone about their perhaps lack of awareness, because I think the people that are taking a chance should be applauded and should not feel they are being tested, and I think there are some disabled artists out there who are quite harsh with people um that are taking on something like that for the first time, you know I didn’t know how to… the first time I worked with a Deaf actor um looking back, I was awful […] but that wasn’t because I was being mean or anything like that it was just that I was a bit… a bit ignorant, not in a bad way, but now I’m not because people did say something to me, thank God (pp.12-13).

Rather than being judgemental of directors’ inexperience of disability, Lydia acknowledges a sense of risk they might feel in working with a disabled person for the first time. She raises a wider issue around how directors are regarded in debate around disability in theatre; in Lydia’s opinion it seems critique can be unfairly targeted at those with genuine motivation to learn. Moreover, she connects her own failings working with a Deaf actor for the first time with directors’ learning process, expressing empathy with the discomfort experienced in this.

Similarly, Sophie reflects on discomfort she felt when exposed to, ‘a whole different politic in the room’ (p.12). Like Lydia, she interprets her experiences alongside presumptions of how directors are disorientated by new disability understandings and difficulty interpreting this in practice (Parrey, 2016; 2018). Sophie explains:

> I think if you’ve never had to question the way something is viewed then when you do it's a bit scary um. If you get a classical text and you think there is no way Hamlet could be in a wheelchair […] you start to see things as literal and, actually, especially in Shakespeare, you can do whatever you

> want […] if I hadn't [connected with] Graeae I wouldn't have been exposed to a whole different politic in the room, a completely different understanding of people's needs and the way in which my unawareness… just how conditioned I am to storytelling and the way in which things are seen and done in theatre (p.12).

Sophie presumes directors fear exploring non-traditional casting choices, that casting disabled people in roles not specifying impairment is more than, 'a no brainer' (Fraser, 2017b). Sophie admits, even as a disabled person, alternative approaches to casting are not instinctive, that it is only through Graeae that her creative perspectives have broadened. As such, like Lydia, she commends directors for making what she implies are brave and uncomfortable choices, adding:

> I think courage is the main thing, you know, in terms of everyone *(sighs)* tackling this issue, it takes courage, and it takes courage for a director to take a risk on an actor, having them in their company, giving them the lead role, giving them a substantial role, it takes courage (Sophie p.33).

Sophie, Lydia and James seem to relate to perceived discomfort felt by directors as they reimagine accessibility, behaviour around disabled people, and casting approaches. Their empathy may be interpreted as a way of justifying insufficiencies they experience. Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl's Ethic of Accommodation involves 'letting go of preconceived notions of perfectibility and negotiating complex sets of needs' (2007, p.229). Yet here it is actors who are making allowances for directors' imperfections and the learning curve they are on.

As actor-participants describe personal encounters with directors in which discomfort seems more tangible, they also expose compromise as a factor in dealing with this. James, Lydia and Neil describe situations where it seems they chose to set aside their own comfort in rehearsal to accommodate or navigate around the assumed discomfort of others. Discomfort associated with inexperience of disability is observed by James and Lydia through directors' behaviour, particularly regarding questioning impairment in rehearsal. James describes how he witnesses others' discomfort in this way:

> Living as a disabled person you get err… you can tell very quickly how comfortable someone is with you […] I'm aware that it's constantly on their

> mind […] you can sometimes tell in certain professional situations when someone sort of like edging towards you to ask you a question about it, to kind of go 'so err…?' and kind of dancing around the point, whereas [director's name] is so comfortable around all sorts of people that he's got […] no hidden agenda, you know exactly what's on his mind and he's just asking you so frankly about it (p.14).

Despite his own preference of 'wanting to drift more and more out of it being a thing' (James, p.9) discussed in chapter four, it appears James encounters directors he feels cannot move past his impairment; this is what Garland-Thomson considers the normate's fixation with disability, 'reducing the complex person to a single attribute' (1997, p.12). James juxtaposes directors' 'dancing around the point', a phrase which conveys their discomfort and his, with a frank discussion with a non-disabled director about the relevance of impairment to his role. James refers to this director throughout his interview as exemplary in his approach to rehearsals, describing, 'I always feel comfortable in the room with him, I always feel brave in the room with him, I feel uninhibited' (p.3). He implies directors' comfort in asking him questions directly impacts his personal ease, confidence, and creativity in rehearsals.

Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole recognise disabled people 'find themselves caught up in interactions with non-disabled people' in which 'well known social scripts' permit 'the asking of inappropriate, demeaning and highly personalised questions' (2018, p.208). They ask, 'How are disabled people […] meant to respond emotionally to these questions?', highlighting the common response is 'accommodating non-disabled people, perhaps offering a smile, a short answer and a response that will not make the non-disabled person even more uncomfortable' (Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole*,* 2018, p.207). Lydia describes accommodating directors' in this way, pre-empting their curiosity about her impairment from the onset and attempting to satisfy it. She explains:

> for the first couple of days of meeting someone, if they've never worked with um a disabled person […] they will probably be scared about saying the wrong thing […] and they can put up their guard a bit, so, I find it really useful to have a conversation near the beginning of rehearsals and I've noticed um directors doing that without me realising, like we will be talking about the character and then suddenly we will be talking about how I'm

> disabled, which actually I don't like meeting people and the first thing they say is, 'so, how are you… what… what's happened?' um but in that scenario it's quite nice to get it out there cause […] you don't have people sat in the corner of the room thinking I wonder why she's… (Lydia, p.36).

Lydia appears to make a distinction between directors' questioning impairment out of curiosity and out of necessity for effective working; her experiences raise the question of what details of impairment are deemed appropriate to discuss in theatre practice and what are not. In terms of accommodating directors, Lydia implies even questioning she considers inappropriate when first meeting is tolerated as a tactic to diminish curiosity and discomfort. It appears she considers this the quickest route to building relationship with a director and creating a relaxed rehearsal environment. Still, Lydia also seems to acknowledge and weigh personal compromise required in this, saying:

> you don't want to make people feel awkward, but sometimes […] I think I can go too far with that […] I spend so long trying to make a new director feel comfortable about working with me that actually I haven't raised issues that are making me feel uncomfortable (p.35).

In a similar way, Neil implies easing directors' discomfort is prioritised. Unlike others, Neil makes no mention of challenging access, representation, or language issues. Instead, his stories from practice describe his interpersonal skill in building rapport with directors. Finding ways to ease presumed anxieties in working with him seems at the forefront of his thinking from the onset of meeting. Describing his experience of auditioning for a director, he recalls:

> I'm just a normal bloke, but he said, 'I haven't got a lot of experience of working with disabled actors'. I get a lot of that […] but after two days in the rehearsal room that's forgotten they're just dealing with people in the way you normally would […] the minute people realise it's not rocket science they relax (pp.16-17).

Neil seems alert to his own strategy and skill in dealing with this. He explains, 'when people meet me, they are always a little bit worried about not understanding me, like I'm very good at relaxing people, I have my own strategy I suppose' (Neil, p.17). He describes humour easing discomfort, recalling going to meet directors 'and just have a laugh' (Neil, p.1). Neil speaks of directors' 'instinctiveness' in choosing to work with him (p.5), saying, 'people either love me and want me or they don't' (p.11). Lydia also notes humour as a tactic for easing discomfort, saying 'I make light of a lot of things […] if I can't get out of a building you know I'll make a joke about it' (p.35).

Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl also recognise 'difficult changes in practice' are often made with 'a strong dose of humour' (2007, p.229). Putting this ethic in action, they describe, 'humour and patience – lifted that burdensome expectation of perfection off everyone's shoulders and emboldened them to take a risk' (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl*,* 2007, p.230). In a similar way, Neil argues his light-hearted approach to dealing with discomfort has opened more opportunities to him in the industry than his impairment; he describes an actors' ability to build relationship with a director as, 'a lot more important than whether you are disabled or not' (Neil, p.22). The effectiveness of his strategy for lifting an 'expectation of perfection' off directors is implied in his remark, 'one day in rehearsal with [the director] and I'm just a normal pain in the arse actor who can't remember their lines' (Neil, p.17; Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl*,* 2007, p.230). It seems even in environments where he has assumed directors' motivations have not been genuine, he has felt able to bring about change; In one theatre, he recalls, 'I knew *(laughs)* they were only doing it because the Arts Council had told them to, but once you get in there you can begin to make a real impact' (Neil, p.10).

There also seems an element of compromise in Neil's 'humour and patience' (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl*,* 2007, p.230; p.233). Although he has witnessed directors become more at ease working with him, like Lydia, he associates a timeframe with this process, 'two days' (Neil, p.16); Lydia implies the 'first couple of days of meeting someone' is the biggest hurdle (p.36). There is a period in which these actors feel treated differently from others, which also seems the most intense period of what Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole refer to as 'complex management of feeling and the relational politics inherent to responding in the right ways' (2018, p.207). This is described as, 'skilled emotional labour' (Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole, 2018, p.207). This reality of Neil's and Lydia's lived experience of the rehearsal process seems to be accepted by them as standard practice. As other actor-participants' have also implied, dealing with discomfort requires boldness and willingness to place themselves in uncomfortable environments to bring about change.

Instead of presuming accommodations to include everyone in theatre practice is a simple process, actors in this study are alert to complex learning that directors grapple with; they assume 'changes to practices and environment' are 'difficult' (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229). They are aware of disorientation and discomfort directors may experience in exploring new territory and express discomfort themselves in dealing with this. Actors in this study do not distinguish between disabled and non-disabled people's levels of experience or knowledge or profess to know all there is about disability in theatre themselves. Instead, they convey empathy for the position of directors; they connect their own learning in work with people with differing impairments, and exposure to new disability viewpoints, with directors' interpersonal responses to working with them. Accommodations in theatre practice are two-way, requiring compromise. Yet, using Pete's phrasing, it appears actors' efforts to help directors learn the 'notes' and the 'tune', are being prioritised over their own comfort and role in the theatre-making process (p.9). Actor Bruce Alexandra believes in rehearsals, 'actors need a good, safe environment where they feel free to take creative risks' (quoted in BBC Academy, 2016). Yet, it appears real-life rehearsal environments can feel far from relaxed or safe for actors in this study. The task of relieving directors' discomfort around disability, finding ways to ease communication, and build rapport is a shared and ongoing concern for them in the workplace.

5.3 Handling Power Dynamics

Actor-participants' perceptions of power dynamics in theatre and how these are experienced in navigating directors' inexperience of disability inform the final part of discussion in this chapter. Actors in this study express varied perceptions of hierarchy and leadership in rehearsals, which connect with their responses to directors' inexperience and discomfort around disability. Interview responses relevant to this subtheme uncover Moira's, Sophie's, and Pete's personal frustrations with power struggles in rehearsal and presumptions of directors' skills in handling issues of accessibility and representation. This final part of the chapter draws attention to how these actors feel their opinions are valued by directors and how they are regarded as collaborators in the theatre-making process.

Perceptions of power dynamics between actor and director vary. James, for example, may be considered having a traditional view of theatre hierarchy. He describes his place as an actor as serving a director's vision, 'much like a puppet', considering himself, 'a cog in a big machine' (James, p.2). It seems likely this perception of actors and directors' roles influences his approach to navigating inexperience of disability in rehearsals, as he continues saying, 'this is what […] directors crave from a good company member' (James, p.3). It seems James views his job as an actor as following not leading, perceiving it more likely he will get work if he appeases directors; this adds further detail to his hesitancy to raise issues that necessitate change in their practice. In contrast, other actor-participants appear to consider themselves equal collaborators in theatre-making alongside directors; Moira states she is 'interested in good artistic collaboration' (p.38) and Neil describes effective rehearsals as, 'collaboration with a good actor and a director' (p.20).

Approaches to navigating directors' inexperience of disability are influenced by both traditional and more collaborative views of power dynamics in theatre. In terms of challenging traditional perceptions of actor and director hierarchy, Moira's response to directors' inexperience of disability, viewing herself as 'a teacher' as well as an actor is problematic (p.12). She describes a range of responses this has yielded from directors saying, 'I've worked with good people who are really responsive […] who really get it when you give them criticism and don't take it so personally that they can't function anymore um, of course there are always exceptions' (Moira, p.12). Moira implies there are occasions when voicing her opinion has caused offence or extreme disorientation for directors (p.12; Parrey, 2018). It is questionable, whether it is her manner or the disability understanding she exposes that is debilitating, or whether her advice is welcomed or regarded as stepping beyond her status as an actor.

Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl set out, ‘at its core an ethic of accommodation means that the majority does not rule (2007, p.229); as such, collaboration between disabled and non-disabled people is key to effective practice. However, if non-disabled people are in a position traditionally viewed as having authority as directors, there is potential for conflict when actors feel they must lead on disability issues. Moira describes a scenario in which her power struggle with a director is evident, as is the responsibility she feels to continue challenging directors about accessibility. Moira recalls raising a problem she foresaw, saying, ‘I would flag this to the director and um get yelled at basically […] “we got it under control, this isn't your job”’ (p.26). Moira was not speaking up about her own access requirements; instead, it appears she challenged the director’s approach to audience accessibility. Detailing this conversation, she explains:

> The director did this in front of the entire cast when I just asked a question and I had a conversation with him afterwards where I was basically like, ‘okay, you don't want me to give information, cool, but if people come at me and tell me you know that things didn't work um I'm going to send them straight to you’, and he was like ‘don't worry, we got this, we got this, don't worry, this isn't your job, go be a performer’ and then of course it wasn't done (Moira, p.27).

Moira conveys frustration with her advice not being heeded and a belief that, unless she extends her role as an actor, accessibility errors are inevitable, which only seems reinforced in this instance. The sense of humiliation it seems she experienced in this again points to how comfort is risked by challenging directors in this way. Based on her recollection of the director’s reaction, it appears they did not consider it her place to challenge their decisions. Moira interprets the director’s response as harsh, yet it is possible the intent may have been to reassure, freeing her to focus on acting. However, it seems her presumption that the director lacked skills to make the work accessible to disabled people in the audience made this impossible.

Moira’s comments add another layer of complexity to her sense of battling in theatre practice which is echoed in Pete’s and Sophie’s comments also (pp.11-12). Power struggles in theatre not only appear to complicate her access needs but impact her ability to champion accessibility for others. It seems Moira assumes negative criticism from disabled people in the audience because of insufficient accessibility in performance will somehow be targeted at her. Also expressing a strong affinity with the disabled community, Sophie points to similar frustration with power structures and being blamed for directors' failings. Adding detail to her challenge to a director about 'asking an able-bodied actor to essentially crip up' (Sophie, p.13), Sophie describes 'a conversation that didn't resolve itself' (p.14), saying:

> instead of having his arm in a sling because I took issue with it, he had a birth mark put on his face. Now I spoke to an audience member who has a birth mark she covers up every day, and she said 'I was really disappointed […] to find out that it was make up' […] it's a lack of awareness and a lack of thought that normally trips people up (p.14).

The outcome of this conversation is clearly a frustration for Sophie. Like Moira, she foresaw the possibility of a negative response from disabled people in the audience, which perhaps the director did not. Moreover, there is a sense for both actors of failing an obligation to the disabled community; they imply an assumed expectation from others that they can sway directors' decisions, which it appears is not always a reality in practice.

Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl's Ethic of Accommodation draws attention to how, 'listening does not have to happen with the ears. Listening, here, means being taken into consideration, being attended to' (2007, p.229). In the cases of Sophie and Moira, it seems unlikely their views on accessibility or representation went unheard, but instead their contributions were not given proper consideration or value from directors they worked with. Without this, in their position as actors, they did not have authority to bring about changes they wanted; an issue it seems presents an ongoing battle in workplace settings for them. de Senna, Bowditch and Bower's chapter, *'Nothing About Us Without Us': Collaborations between Disabled and Non-Disabled Practitioners*, expands on how such practice places collaborators on 'equal footing' (2016, p.223). Yet this is not reflected in experiences of theatre practice Moira, Sophie or Pete describe. Pete explains how feeling his opinion is valued by directors is fundamental to positive rehearsals, yet, even when working as part of disability-focused initiatives, this is not always reality. Interpreting the phrase *disabled actor*, Pete remarks:

> Um *(pause)* struggle *(laughs),* yeah I suppose, is the first word that comes to mind […] even in a situation like I'm in at present […] which is you know very much geared up to working with Deaf and disabled performers, you know you still feel sometimes you're […] a little bit of a second-class citizen. It really depends on who you are working with (p.4).

Pete's interpretation of power dynamics in rehearsals extends beyond job title and status; he recognises this as determined by how directors perceive disabled people ranking in society. He points to directors' personal disability views affecting his contribution to rehearsals and the value it is given, saying:

> it's being treated like an adult, you know it's being treated like you've got some sort of contribution […] it's getting the power balance right and if the power balance is effected by the fact that the director has a passive view of disabled people, that they are generally passive consumers, useless eaters as Hitler so pleasantly put it, then that's gonna effect how they work with you, you know like I've seen directors be very patronising to young performers […] because they are Deaf or whatever (Pete, p.34).

In handling power dynamics in rehearsal, it appears Pete must navigate his perception of authority alongside directors' individual views of disabled people. His quotation of 'useless eaters' seems particularly powerful in expressing the extent to which he feels his contribution can be disregarded (Pete, p.34). In the current theatre climate, he implies still encountering directors he feels do not view disabled people as contributors to society. That he confronts age-old assumptions of disabled people as a 'burden', 'incapable of participating fully in community life' and are considered so in rehearsal settings also (Barnes, 1992). Even as part of ACE's diversity initiatives, Pete perceives disabled actors are made to feel inferior and undervalued. This sense of inferiority is expressed by Lydia; recalling her first time working alongside other disabled people in theatre, she remarks, 'I actually felt like an adult who was participating in the world' (Lydia, p.6).

For Pete, however, handling power dynamics seems more complex than negotiation between non-disabled and disabled people. Asked about the professional directors he has worked with so far, he points out:

> I've not had any major, major problems with them […] you know you can get trouble from a disabled director just the same […] one of the problems we have as disabled people is […] having to prove ourselves all the time […] I think working with some disabled directors has been almost trickier for me […] they know I do a lot and all of that, you know this sense of I've got to keep this man not under control but you know, so there's a status thing […] this internecine warfare amongst disability (Pete, p.18).

Choosing battlefield metaphors like Moira, Pete's strong description of conflict implies power struggles in his practice inside and outside the disabled community. He draws attention to competition, which is anticipated in a 'fiercely competitive industry' (Band *et al,* 2009, p.893); however, Band *et al* recognise, although challenges to recognition in the industry are shared across all actors, 'issues of value and (inclusive) philosophy, […] excellence and likelihood of employment […] are compounded for actors with disabilities who are rarely considered for roles where disability is not the focus' (2009, p.893). It appears Pete views other people's responses to his success as adding to power struggles he experiences in practice. As new opportunity opens to disabled people in theatre, it seems ACE's diversity strategy is likely to compound this further.

Pete exposes difficulty appeasing 'non-disabled critics' and those affiliated with disability arts and culture (p.12). His repeated use of the phrase 'internecine warfare' highlights a dilemma which seems prompted by a wider power struggle between the disability arts community and those pushing for accessibility in wider theatre, and his support of both (Pete, p.12; p.18). Pete explains:

> the world of disability art exists in a state of warfare, this is the trouble, there's so many different camps, you know it's probably got worse over the years […] so, you can't make a show that's gonna appeal to everybody […] what do you do? you know err where do you stand? […] and that's a problem as well cause everyone is looking for a fault (p.12).

The context of this comment is Pete's description of criticism from Deaf audience members about insufficient use of British Sign Language in a production. He also describes the approach to audio description in a production he was in as 'lamentable', adding:

> it was really, really poorly done because nobody quite took it seriously enough […] and you're kind of thinking if there was a visually impaired person you know or a disabled person who was more of a […] decision maker that maybe this wouldn't happen, we keep repeating mistakes (Pete, pp.19- 20).

Like Moira and Sophie, Pete acknowledges directors' failings in making work accessible to audiences and shares frustrations that these could be avoided if disabled people were in positions of authority more readily. However, Pete's question, 'where do you stand', also resonates with Lydia's observation of 'disabled artists' criticism being 'quite harsh' (p.12). Pete implies hesitancy to partake in this, instead placing himself in the same 'camp' as directors, saying, '*we'* keep repeating mistakes (Pete, p.12; p.20). Just as ACE's strategy implies non-disabled people must now share responsibility for increasing the representation of disabled people in the industry, Pete conveys willingness to share responsibility for the failings of those lacking experience in doing so (Bazelgette, 2014, p.7).

Darke points to this wider power struggle in his writing around the 'domestication of disability arts and disability artists' (2003, p.138); he expresses concern that disabled people who achieve mainstream success must be cautious not to diminish the activist aims of the Disability Arts Movement. Suggesting compatibility of these 'camps', to use Pete's term, is problematic (p.12). Pete, like Moira and Sophie, seems conscious of this kind of obligation and a dilemma this presents in practice. Kuppers, however, argues that in the process of trying to 'undo the history of exclusion' it is important to 'safeguard against perpetuating or erecting other exclusions' (2011, p.4). In this way, whilst Pete is 'concerned about where the control lies' in ACE's disability initiatives and the industry, he also seems mindful of acknowledging benefits of disabled and non-disabled people working together (p.20). Pete indicates that drawing away from power struggles between disability arts and mainstream practice allows him to embrace positive aspects of change in theatre, explaining:

> as an actor, it's kind of a weird thing, you don't always want to be treated as a disabled person. Do you know what I mean? [….] I need to learn skills […] so, I love working with directors I can learn from […] and that's been

> the biggest plus of things like Ramps on the Moon […] there's been this opportunity […] experience […] training from people (pp.11-12).

Unlike Moira, Pete seems conscious of not overstepping his position as an actor, speaking out when his opinion is sought. He implies this gives him more chance to learn from directors and develop his acting skills. Pete suggests being 'treated as a disabled person' limits his chance of working with 'fine' directors or to 'learn skills' (p.11), that actors engaged in disability specific theatre work can miss out on this. In this way, Pete points to a trade-off, working with good directors who lack disability experience, or missing out on professional development opportunities. Moira also appears conscious of how her head-on approach to challenging directors can be detrimental to her creative development in this way, as she remarks:

> having to go in and be teachers means we don't get to get challenged um as actors, as performers, and um it's really, it's really frustrating politically and artistically when you are continually put in that same position (p.25).

It is evident that navigating directors' inexperience of disability is problematic in terms of power dynamics in practice. There is a shared perception among actors here that directors have learning to do. However, some interpersonal approaches to assisting directors' learning appear to confuse traditional perceptions of actor and director roles. Actor-participants imply this not only risks conflict, but also compromises their value in the theatre-making process, obligation to the disabled community, and professional development. In the current theatre climate, there seems complex power dynamics for actors to navigate alongside and an expectation that their work will be accessible to a wide range of audiences. As such, it seems inevitable the kind of conflict experienced by Moira will reoccur; that actors will encounter those who feel threatened by their challenge or choose to disregard their advice. That they may feel dissatisfied with the outcome in final performance unless further steps towards resolution are considered.

5.4 Reflection on Navigating Directors’ Inexperience of Disability

Navigating directors’ inexperience of disability through challenge, dealing with discomfort, and handling power dynamics has become an implicit but ever-present part of these actors’ job descriptions. Pete’s comment at the beginning of this chapter that some directors ‘haven’t quite learnt the tune’ (p.9) is apparent in their day-to-day experiences of practice. Learning about accessibility, representation, language, and effective collaboration in rehearsal is clearly still required, a gap that actors here attempt to fill. Key aspects of Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl’s Ethic of Accommodation, their manifesto for including everyone in theatre, have been drawn on in interpreting actors’ responses relevant to this superordinate theme. Actors’ comments highlight how key aspects of this ethic are reflected in their experiences of the industry, including: ‘the majority does not rule’; ‘the majority making difficult changes in its practices and environments’; ‘a politics of listening as well as a politics of speaking’; and ‘letting go of preconceived notions of perfectibility and negotiating complex sets of needs’ (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229).

Actors appear to be pushing for these aspects of an ethic of accommodation in their interpersonal engagement with directors. This is reflected in individual approaches to promoting personal accessibility requirements, positive disability representation, and audience accessibility. However, attempting to do so whilst navigating directors’ inexperience of disability involves personal cost and compromise. Actors here are adjusting their beliefs and preferences to accommodate directors’ needs. Insufficiencies in an ethic of accommodation in the industry are pointed to in this chapter, as are the implications of this for disabled actors in the current theatre climate. As such, if the requirements of actors in promoting a mutual ethic of accommodation in the industry are set out based participants’ experiences described here, it may mean:

- Being empathetic - considering difficulty directors might experience in making ‘changes to practices and environments’, explaining disability whilst understanding the implications of personal disorientation and learning processes.

- Battling to be heard - being confident to speak out about directors' errors, whilst risking not being 'listened to or even addressed' and opinions not being taken 'into consideration' or 'attended to'.
- Remaining alert to directors' 'complex sets of needs' - weighing when to speak and when 'silence' or 'humour' might minimise discomfort or offence.
- 'Letting go of […] perfectibility' - stepping into settings that may compromise personal comfort and professional development. Looking to uphold obligations to disabled audiences, whilst forgiving personal errors and humiliations.

(Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229)

Individual strategies in navigating directors inexperience of disability are perceived as necessary; as reflected in the previous chapter, the current situation in theatre is viewed by all actor-participants as not preferable or comfortable. Sophie speaks of directors requiring 'courage' to, 'take a risk on an actor' (p.33). However, this chapter has exposed how current practice demands courage from actors to take a risk on directors, to be bold enough to engage in uncomfortable conversations and environments to bring about positive change.

There is, however, positive interpersonal engagement with directors pointed to by actors in this chapter also. Despite their struggles, they do refer to directors who are willing to listen and learn, are comfortable discussing disability and impairment, and are driving an ethic of accommodation forward in their practice. In closing this chapter, it seems fitting to note that four out of seven actor-participants refer to the same director as a positive example of navigating inexperience of disability. This director is described by Moira as, 'a um middle class, non-disabled, white dude […] and he was amazing, like he's done a really good job of putting himself in uncomfortable places because he knows he doesn't know stuff' (p.14). Pete observes, 'he's genuinely interested and he's trying to learn' (p.10), and Neil describes, 'the brilliant thing about [him] is this, he said "I don't know what I'm doing, we'll work it out together"' (p.16). There is clear appreciation for this director's willingness to recognise his own lack and effort to bridge gaps in his knowledge, to collaborate with actors in the process of theatre-making, and to make himself vulnerable in a workplace setting. Although referred to as someone inexperienced with disability, his attitude and approach to learning from actors seems to be considered exemplary in terms of how disabled and non-disabled people working in theatre can move forward together.

Relationship between actor and director will always depend on building rapport to some extent. Still, this superordinate theme has highlighted specific hurdles that need to be broached for genuine relationship between actors and directors to be established. Such detail in navigating directors' inexperience of disability can only be understood on a person-by-person basis. Hence, phenomenological perspectives are crucial in understanding disability and theatre practice going forwards. There is clearly progress needed before actors in this study feel their contribution to the theatre-making process is valued appropriately. This is still the case within ACE's targeted initiatives, so, it seems strategies need re-evaluating to engage the viewpoints of actors fully. In this way, future initiatives can ensure all participants feel comfortable in rehearsals, have suitable professional development, and are satisfied with the outcome of their creative efforts. As we move to the final superordinate theme for actor-participants, their unique interpretations of casting decisions and audition practice are exposed, as is, not only their trust in individual directors, but in the industry itself.

Chapter Six - Wrestling with Authenticity

'Sometimes the best actor gets robbed of the opportunity to play a part because you need to um meet demands, it's just a bit strange' (James, p.16)

It is evident that ACE's shift in strategy, new urgency for theatres to increase engagement with disabled people, adds complexity to seeking and measuring authenticity in theatre practice for actors in this study. This superordinate theme expands on this factor of their lived experience, examining how they wrestle with authenticity in interpreting experiences of casting, performing onstage, and the industry itself. Issues of authenticity have already been raised from both intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives in previous chapters. Perceptions of authentic identities, casting decisions, representation, and performance practices are considered here in more detail. Two subthemes frame the discussion: *Disquiet about Professional Recognition* is concerned with a sense of unease with authenticity in casting decisions and approaches, and with roles and characters performed onstage; *Trust in the Shifting Theatre Climate* expands on how actor-participants' intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of authenticity in practice influence their personal ambitions within, and for, the industry itself.

Theatre has a long history of criticism around authenticity; Billington calls it the current 'buzz word' in theatre yet notes, 'most attempts at "authenticity"' are 'mere tokenism' (2004). This perception is echoed in the concerns of actor-participants explored here as they interpret casting decisions and performance practice, and wrestle with the relevance of impairment in this. Bruno highlights, 'much of what we see on our stages […] are antiquated, inaccurate, inauthentic portrayals of the lived experience of disabled people' (2014); In this way, there is added complexity for disabled actors in interpreting authenticity in theatre that involves the pursuit of recognition and representation in the industry that is contrary to theatrical traditions. As mentioned in the literature review, when confronted with issues of authenticity in theatre and disability, Sandahl urges 'theatre people' to, 'spend uncomfortable time with representational conundrums, generate possibilities, experiment with options, make informed choices, and take responsibility for the outcomes' (Sandahl, 2018, p.132). This process appears less of a choice for actors in this study working in a shifting theatre climate; the discussion that follows exposes how wrestling with authenticity in this way is a current and ever-present part of their lived experience in the theatre workplace.

6.1 Disquiet about Professional Recognition

Disabled actors have long struggled for recognition in theatre, as was set out in the literature review and is evidenced by ACE's diversity data. Professional status is commonly measured by an individual's undertaking of paid employment in their chosen field. As people who have all been employed by major theatres across England, actors in this study can be considered as already obtaining professional recognition in the industry. However, this subtheme uncovers a sense of disquiet about the recognition afforded them as actors. It considers how they perceive talent and training are recognized alongside impairment by directors and audiences. An overarching dissatisfaction with being cast for impairment only is central to the issues raised, as is a suspicion of tick box approaches to casting; that is directors casting disabled people because there is external pressure to do so, not necessarily considering talent or suitability to a role, as raised in chapter four. Here further implications of this are discussed in relation to how authenticity is interpreted by individuals in casting processes targeting disabled people, and in performance, whether playing roles written as disabled or not.

Questioning around the impact of impairment on professional recognition in casting and onstage is common among all actors in this study. A desire to be recognised as actors aside from impairment was set out in earlier chapters, a key motivation in preferences to disassociate the term *disabled* with professional identity. However, actor-participants are aware that in the current theatre climate as much as impairment may be an obstacle for some people in recognising their talent and ability, it is increasingly perceived as an incentive for working with them. In explaining reasons for attempting to hide impairment in casting, Paul says, 'it's kind of like um a glass ceiling situation where you're never quite sure, that's why I…

that's the main reason why I hide it, I try and hide it' (pp.26-27). The glass ceiling metaphor has long been used to describe barriers preventing disabled people from being recognised fully in the workplace (Department of Work and Pensions, 2011). It points to ongoing limitations placed on disabled people in theatre and stereotypical approaches to casting that were set out in the literature review. More recently it has been used to describe significant shifts in theatre; actor Amy Trigg, who is 'a wheelchair user' described the RSC's casting of her, 'Karina Jones, who is visually impaired', and 'Charlotte Arrowsmith, who is deaf' in its summer 2019 season, as 'another massive crack in the glass ceiling' (Alberge, 2019). Paul's use of the glass ceiling appears to reiterate his presumption of discrimination in casting and fear of his acting ability being misjudged because of his impairment. The glass ceiling metaphor also points to the anonymous nature of casting processes and how actors are rarely privy to the real motivations behind decisions; an uneasy aspect of working in theatre that underpins disquiet about professional recognition described by actors here.

Experiencing uncertainty or self-doubt around why a casting decision is made and whether talent, skill, and experience have been aptly recognised can be anticipated for any actor as they negotiate the competitive realm of auditions and casting calls. However, for actors who are also considering the implications of impairment in this, personal interpretation of casting decisions appears more complex. Lydia and James add detail to how their suspicion of discrimination and hidden agenda associated with ACE's diversity strategy heightens disquiet about professional recognition when seeking acting work. This is particularly evident as they describe casting initiatives targeting disabled people and unease with how talent and training is regarded in these circumstances. Larger NPO theatres that have held open auditions specifically for disabled people were noted in the thesis introduction. James and Lydia also refer to situations where directors request actors with impairments for a specific production or role. James describes his experience of these in this way:

> I was actually thinking about this today cause there's a lot of disability castings that I go up for that are very specifically disability castings, and it's to include a wide pool of people that might not be given the opportunity

> […] the problem is that all of that happens behind the scenes, that um you never really know what's going on, you don't know why you haven't got a job then. They'll never tell you ‘we didn't give me this job because you’ve got [an impairment]’, or, […] ‘we gave you this job because you've got [an impairment] and we want to tick a box’ […] all you can do is assume and everyone sort of filters through their own experience of themselves as actors and what they feel like they're being robbed of (p.5).

James’ description of ‘very specifically disability castings’ reiterates how this approach to casting seems to make him feel separated rather than integrated in the industry as noted in chapter four (p.13). It seems ‘disability castings’ give him little sense of being recognised for talent indiscriminately or without diversity agenda (James, p.5); talent is not even mentioned as a factor in his interpretation of casting decisions in these settings. The idea of actors being robbed is echoed in his comment which opens this superordinate theme; he states, ‘Sometimes the best actor gets robbed of the opportunity to play a part because you need to um meet demands, it’s just a bit strange’ (James, p.16). Although James appears to speak broadly about views among disabled actors, it is possible he is articulating a sense of personal loss in not feeling recognised as an actor aside from his impairment, something he strives for (James, p.6). James’ disquiet in reading authenticity in casting decisions and professional recognition is obvious throughout his interview. This is emphasised by recurrent remarks about ‘what is going on behind the scenes’ (James, p.5; p.25), in phrasing like, ‘you’ll never know, they will never tell you’ (James, p.5), and his repetitive use of the terms *odd*, *weird,* and *strange*. Asides such as ‘it’s just weird’ (James, p.16) are added to descriptions of auditions and castings, suggesting some difficulty knowing how to respond to or identify his feelings towards current casting approaches.

Lydia’s perception of impairment being the main motivation behind casting decisions seems to be at the core of her disquiet about professional recognition. She discusses the implications of this in terms of how she feels talent, training, and individuality are valued. Speaking about her experiences of open casting calls aimed at disabled people, Lydia reveals:

> They make me a little bit angry um *(laughs)* […] I just find them really hard to kind of um deal with […] in a piece that I did, I’d auditioned alongside a

> blind, forty-two-year-old, black man for a part that doesn't even end up existing […] then the part is given to a man and you're a bit like why not make that decision beforehand […] I'd rather, much rather be auditioned for a character than a disability cause then I feel like […] they are gonna look at me and they're gonna be like, 'okay that's what her disability can bring to the role let's look at other disabilities', that's what it feels like for me. (p.26)

Casting calls that do not specify a production or role cause obvious frustration for Lydia and it seems she interprets this ambiguity as disregard for her talent and individuality. In this scenario roles being cast were undecided, which appears to add to assumptions that impairment is the main motivation behind casting decisions. Her interpretation of this links to historical approaches to casting disabled people as curio (Barnes, 1992). It is questionable whether a casting call in which impairment type is unspecified also belittles the distinctness of lived experience of impairment. Lydia implies this as she states, 'when a director decides that they wanna have a disabled actor they'll take any disability' (p.19). Her sentiment echoes the depersonalisation of disabled people which was common in dramatic portrayals of disability in the past; Barnes notes this would 'rob disabled people of their humanity, and so reduce them to objects' (1992). Resonating with James' observation of actors feeling they are 'being robbed' (p.5), it seems this casting experience made Lydia feel cheated of recognition of her talent, skill, and the uniqueness she can bring to a role or character. In parallel with this view, Sophie observes, 'most of the disabled actors I talk to um just want to be seen as an actor first and how their difference can lend to that role' (p.8). In Lydia's experience of casting, it seems both these aspects of professional recognition felt denied.

Lydia also suggests casting calls targeting disabled actors belittle the benefits of actor training and devalue her commitment to professional authenticity. Her frustration in this is strongly expressed in stating, 'I'm so sick of seeing "no experience required"' (Lydia, p.17). In many industries formal training is integral to professional recognition in addition to paid employment. In terms of acting, drama school may be considered a conventional route into the industry, whilst others choose on the job training (Marsden, 2018). Startin's (2014) recognition of the inaccessibility of drama schools for disabled people was mentioned in introducing this thesis. A more recent summary of diversity data collected from eight drama schools found 'just 1% of graduates from major drama schools declared a physical impairment'; disabled people are grossly underrepresented in these training institutions (Masso, 2018). As such, it seems significant that five out of seven actors in this study completed drama school, suggesting this has some bearing on their position in the industry as actors gaining employment in major theatres. Moira, Lydia, Paul, James and Sophie draw attention to being the only disabled person attending their drama training institution, the first disabled person to attend, or the first person with their specific impairment type.

Perhaps this pioneering aspect of actor-participants' training experiences makes Lydia's level of frustration with this appearing irrelevant in casting understandable. Lydia articulates a sense of injustice about the recognition received after leaving drama school from 'the big disabled actor agents' (p.18). She also expresses disquiet with how training is valued in current practice, explaining:

> I was upset […] I thought oh I've just done what you, you know you're saying should happen and there's been, I haven't had any contact […] that's a big issue cause if people aren't getting trained and then the people who are being trained aren't being picked up on […] disabled actors can probably get away with stuff because no matter what we do we're wonderful […] if I go out on stage and I do a half… a lack lustra performance then I'll probably still get a big applause at the end of it cause I'm up there, and that's really frustrating *(laughs)*, cause then the people that aren't, you know, putting in lots of work and doing a really detailed, nuanced performance […] they're getting the same amount of interest and acclaim, as people who are putting in enough work, so they've got a kind of ticket already. It's very bizarre isn't it? (Lydia, p.18).

Lydia's remarks indicate that drama school training was perceived as means of proving her authenticity as an actor, saying she had done what 'you're saying should happen' (p.18). In this way, drama school can be viewed as a political as well as career move; a response to wider debate around a lack of disabled people with formal actor training and a route around prejudices confronting them in theatre (Tracey, 2015).

Like James, Lydia's aside 'it's very bizarre' hints at disquiet with current approaches to casting and performance (p.18). Intrapersonal questioning around how to set herself apart as a professional actor when formal training seems irrelevant, appears ongoing. Lydia describes a proactive commitment to self-development, ‘reading memoirs’ (p.4), and going on ‘courses’ (p.3). Yet, she seems to feel cheated of reward for her diligence or effort to defy common expectations of disabled actors. She implies feeling this is wasted in current practice. Lydia appears uneasy sharing these views openly; she comments, ‘this is perhaps controversial, but we’re at risk of having disabled actors perform roles that either they don’t suit, or they’re not ready for, or they’re not trained for […] everyone’s a bit scared of saying it’ (Lydia, p.17). Her motivation in voicing her frustrations and what appears to be personal disappointment, however, seems less about passing judgement on other actors. Instead, she seems keen to draw attention to how current approaches to casting are promoting low expectations of disabled people in terms of levels of actor training, talent, and self-development; she clarifies the political detriment in this, saying, ‘that kind of goes against the fight’ (p.17).

Describing the theatre climate for disabled people, Startin states, ‘those without training are unlikely to get past any audition’ (quoted in Tracey, 2015). However, Lydia’s recent experiences suggest external pressure on theatres to employ disabled people has created an opposite situation. In wider debate around access to actor training for disabled people, it seems greater consideration must also be given to how those who acquire formal training feel it is acknowledged and reflected in their position in the industry. It seems ironic that initiatives aimed to open opportunities to disabled people in theatre could make actors like Lydia and James, already established in their careers, feel cheated of authentic professional recognition and the sense of value they deserve. James and Lydia, however, do convey appreciation for incentives to engage disabled people in theatre more, despite this making authenticity in casting more difficult to ascertain. Lydia describes this as something she must ‘deal with’ (p.26), implying a sense of wrestling to weigh both positive and negative aspects of casting experiences, as does James. He remarks, ‘disability callouts […] as tentative about them […] and as strange as I find them, they get you in the building’ (James, p.15).

Disquiet about professional recognition is not only apparent as actor-participants discuss the process of getting a job; they seem to experience disquiet related to understanding the relevance of impairment in the roles they play onstage and professional recognition received from audiences in response. It seems that personal and professional authenticity and satisfaction in playing a role are compromised when a disconnect between their impairment and onstage role is perceived. Paul reflects on his experience playing a character with a different impairment to him, saying, ‘I was acting more […] impaired than I am, so sometimes I feel, you know, am I cheating (p.7). His comment relates to a wider debate about actors ‘cripping up’ (Shaban, 2015; Ryan, 2015). It also highlights how Lydia’s previously mentioned observation, ‘when a director decides that they wanna have a disabled actor they’ll take any disability’, is problematic in performance as well as in casting (p.19). Although Paul was cast as a character written as disabled in the script, it appears he still experienced the role as ill-fitting and inauthentic in performance. In contrast to Paul, Moira speaks about being *asked* to hide her impairment in playing an onstage role. Reflecting on this, she notes, ‘the things that I’ve done I’m really proud of always have my disability as it stands […] represented in some way […] it’s not something that’s ignored or […] over-performed’ (Moira, p.8). Moira links personal satisfaction and achievement as an actor with playing roles that acknowledge but do not focus on her impairment. Based on the following experiences described by Neil, Pete and Sophie this seems a difficult balance to ascertain and a root to their disquiet about professional recognition experienced onstage.

Neil’s disquiet about professional recognition also seems rooted in questioning the relevance of impairment to his onstage roles. He implies unease with the level of attention directors choose to give to impairment in performance, suggesting they are fixated with emphasising this in characters he plays (Neil, p.14); a perception of directors shared by Lydia and James and discussed in the previous chapter also. In Neil’s opinion, ‘this bears no resemblance to reality […] people want to bring out caricature rather than character, and I’m really not interested’ (p.14). Neil stands apart from others in acknowledging his impairment is central to his recognition in the industry so far, as discussed in chapter four (p.2; p.13). Neil speaks more often about being cast in roles intentionally written as disabled characters and is one of two actor-participants without a drama school background.

Both these factors seem to heighten his disquiet about professional recognition as he explains, ‘I’m a disabled actor, I’m a… I mean I always feel like an imposter, one day *(laughs)* I’m gonna get caught, people you know will be, “what on earth is he doing here?” *(laughs)*’ (Neil, p.3). Although lacking formal training, the idea of impairment being a ‘ticket’ to recognition in the industry seems no more tolerated by him than by any other actor in this study (Lydia, p.18). Neil maintains, ‘If my impairment is the only thing that made me right for the job, there’s a complete conflict’ (p.14).

In discussing the relevance of impairment to his roles, Neil appears keen to point out his innate talent, skill, and achievements in creating convincing characters onstage. Reflecting on roles played, he remarks, ‘any characters I’ve played that have been disabled, I really hope the way I’ve played it is not about the disability but the personality’ (Neil, p.15). He also explains, ‘my role is to become the character rather than impairment and […] that’s the way I see acting’ (p.18). It seems Neil’s disquiet about professional recognition onstage is not only rooted in whether he feels able to create a realistic portrayal of disability, he also wants roles that allow him to fulfil his fundamental purpose as an actor; roles that display his ability to create authentic characters onstage. Pickering recognises, ‘how an actor goes about creating a character probably remains the most vexed question about acting’ (2005, p.71). The role of the actor to transform into character is a multifaceted process; for actors like Neil and Pete, however, considering the relevance of personal impairment onstage seems to add another dimension to the challenge.

Pete sheds light on aspects of playing one character that seem particularly vexing for him regarding his impairment, authentic performance, and recognition from the audience. In contrast to Neil, disquiet about professional recognition is expressed as he describes playing a role not specified as a disabled character in the script. Reflecting on this, Pete identifies a disconnect between aspects of the character and his own impairment, remarking it ‘doesn’t really fit’ (p.8). The period in which the play occurs, and the societal status of the character, is described by Pete as problematic. He notes, ‘at that time it would have been a huge struggle for anybody [with his impairment] to get in the position’ (Pete, p.8). As Neil and Moira have also implied, understanding how his impairment connects with his character seems crucial to his satisfaction in playing the role. Pete continues to say, 'that's always an early discussion with the director, is about whether they see this character as disabled and you know whether that's important in why they want to cast me in this role' (p.9). This comment might suggest suspicion of box ticking in terms of impairment being the motivation for hiring him. However, Pete implies greater concern with what roles demand of him, and of the audience, in terms of suspending belief to accept the character he plays as believable. He implies this consumes his thinking in practice, that 'the debate is always whether […] a character I played [has the same impairment as me…] or […] am I an actor [with an impairment] and you ignore [the impairment] and you see the actor' (Pete, p.8).

This is theatre, a place of imagination, yet disquiet about how impairment connects to aspects of his role appears to make Pete doubt the plausibility of his performance and professional recognition onstage. Pete appears to wrestle with notions of disability-blind casting in describing his common queries to directors and disquiet about playing a character he assumes would not have a physical impairment. The re-appropriation of colour-blind casting, which 'ignores the appearance of an actor […] anchored in the belief that talented actors can play any role', was examined in relation to disability in the literature review (Young, 2013, p.56). Elements of this concept may have delimited roles available to Pete, his impairment being overlooked in casting and the director making a non-traditional casting choice. However, in this case Pete seems uncertain that audiences can overlook what he identifies as 'a huge struggle' in portraying the character realistically (p.8). He conveys no sense of doubting his skill to take on the scope or complexity of the role, yet his reliance on spectators to overlook his impairment is expressed as heightening disquiet onstage. In turn, reflecting on how these presumptions influenced his interpretation of audience reactions in performance, Pete explains:

> there was a shriek from the audience you know, and then [character name] mounts me and we have sex […] there was quite a lot of laughter you know, um now it may be that they were just a bit uncomfortable with what was going on, which may have had nothing to do with the fact that I'm [impairment type], it could be cause I'm old and [character name] is very

> young […] you mustn’t always take the negative on these […] it can feel to me like the response is because I’m disabled (pp.27-28).

Pete’s comments suggest that already wrestling with authenticity in playing a role intensified the sense of vulnerability he experienced onstage and influenced his assumption of what others may consider authentic. Accounts of vulnerability among disabled people are widely critiqued in disability studies, exposing how these can be shaped by prejudice and misunderstanding (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2014). Yet, accounts of vulnerability among actors in playing a character onstage are documented as integral to the acting process; for example, director Di Trevis recognises vulnerability experienced by actors in developing a character and points to a ‘lack of understanding of this as a delicate process’ (2012, p.83). Just as interpreting the relevance of impairment adds to uncertainty in audition settings for Lydia and James, it seems contemplating audiences’ responses to impairment adds uncertainty to the already complex demands of acting itself for Pete.

Personal assumptions of the capability of audiences to see beyond impairment seem to contribute to disquiet about professional recognition for Pete, Sophie and Neil. Responses to disabled people in performance were considered in the literature review, along with Garland-Thomson’s theory that ‘the disabled body summons the stare, and the stare mandates the story’ (2000, p.335). There was suggestion that this view needs revising in response to the increased visibility of disabled people in theatre. However, Pete’s disquiet seems based on the view that audiences are still preoccupied with impairment rather than other aspects of characters he plays. In the quote above he implies wanting to personally revise this thinking, to move from automatically assuming a ‘negative’ response and a lack of professional recognition from audiences (Pete, p.28). Still, in the current theatre climate, he believes:

> audiences really still find it the hardest thing to adjust to, you know just sort of to see somebody come on stage […] there’s always an assumption made […] and you hope through your performance that they see you and they don’t see [impairment] (Pete, p.5).

Pete is not alone in assuming that that his presence onstage is still perceived by audiences as remarkable and that ‘the stare’ as inevitable (Garland-Thomson, 2000, p.335). Sophie describes how she feels spectators are drawn to her impairment, stating:

> I’m really, I’m really aware that… that when you go on stage it is still rare, people do have to look at you and it can be um… it can be a very liberating experience and a challenging one at the same time (p.28).

Sophie’s phrasing ‘I’m really aware’ stresses how audience responses to impairment are prominent in her thinking whilst performing onstage. Similarly, Neil comments:

> when they saw me come on stage, ‘oh, my god, oh, my god’, and they only see the impairment they don’t see the character […] I’m really aware that every time I go on stage like audiences might never have seen someone like me on stage, I love it, it’s funny […] but, as an actor by the end of the play or whatever I will end it as a character rather than an impairment, and I think I do that very well (p.18).

Like Pete (p.5), Neil assumes audiences must ‘adjust’ to him being on-stage; however, whether impairment distracts from the character he creates is debatable. Neil appears to believe that impairment only momentarily distracts audiences. Both Neil and Pete imply it is part of their job and skill as actors to shift the audience’s preoccupation with impairment to recognising their character portrayal as authentic. In terms of disquiet about professional recognition, there seems personal challenge involved in this for actors. Although Neil implies this is a part of his acting process he enjoys, it does seem their job as actors in creating an authentic transformation into character demands far more with added responsibility felt to expand audiences’ imaginations as part of the process.

The concept of disability-blind casting certainly seems to have potential to delimit the onstage roles available to disabled people. However, assertions such as Sealey’s mentioned in the literature review, that ‘ethically, it should never be a problem if any character is played by a deaf or disabled actor’ (2017), can be reconsidered here from the actor’s perspective. Presumably Sealey is encouraging casting directors to be more open-minded about promoting casting calls to disabled people; an argument it seems unlikely any actor-participant here would dispute.

Nevertheless, feeling convinced of authenticity in playing any onstage role, written as disabled or not, seems of upmost importance to actors in this study. Their disquiet about professional recognition in casting and performance suggests that belief that *any* actor can play *any* role is insufficient in practice. Instead, discussion around this subtheme has inferred four key factors of authenticity sought by actor-participants in feeling satisfied in playing a role onstage. These are that the opportunity would allow for:

- Personal authenticity: for actors to feel their lived experience of disability and impairment is valued and at ease with the portrayal of disability in roles they play.
- Professional authenticity: for talent and training to be reflected in the scope and complexity of the role and demonstrated in transforming into and creating convincing characters onstage.
- Collaborative authenticity: for actors to work with transparency and understanding of directors' vision for how impairment connects to their role, and the anticipated interpretation of this by audiences in performance.
- Authentic progress: for the role to expand audiences' subjectivity and to advance wider acknowledgment of disabled people as professionals working in theatre.

In a theatre climate in which actor-participants assume their presence onstage disturbs audience presumptions, wrestling with authenticity as an actor has added complexity. As such, these four factors contributing to satisfaction with being cast in a role seem reasonable and justified in their demands on decision makers. Actor-participants' disquiet about professional recognition has highlighted how these factors are often lacking in the opportunities they acquire; as such, along with open-minded views of casting, there is a need for greater understanding of how actors' processes in creating a character onstage are impacted by considering the relevance of impairment to their role. It seems crucial this is reflected in detailed thought given to how casting calls are promoted to disabled people through to actors' debrief after final performance.

Interestingly, having raised concerns with being cast in a role Pete felt 'doesn't really fit' (p.8) with his impairment, he begins to list characters in plays he refers to as 'classically disabled' (p.9). Pointing out characters with a similar impairment to him, he comments, 'that's a good character, you know, I could do that' (Pete, p.9). It seems sad having talked about playing a wider range of roles that Pete's thoughts on future opportunities so quickly default to traditional casting choices. It is unlikely this reflects limits placed on his acting ability; instead, it is possible this is a reaction to the more complex thought, skill, and vulnerability experienced in performing roles currently considered non-traditional casting choices. Traditional casting options, although not progressive in terms of broadening opportunities or shifting theatrical assumptions, may still feel a safer option for Pete and others in practice. This and further perceptions of safety and risk in the current theatre climate are expanded upon as actor-participants' trust in a shifting theatre climate is considered.

6.2 Trust in a Shifting Theatre Climate

This final subtheme emerging from actor-participants' lived experiences of theatre practice and disability considers how they are wrestling with authenticity in relation to industry-wide change. It exposes interpretations of their career position and future ambition alongside weighing authenticity in shifts in practice; that is whether the changes they witness in theatre can be trusted as long-term progress. Anyone who has experienced any kind of drama training will be aware that trust is considered key to effective practice. It is likely they can recall well known exercises used in building trust between actors and director in a rehearsal room; the classic warm-up of taking it in turns to fall back into your partner's arms or being passed around a circle of people with your eyes closed. In considering actor-participants' responses relevant to this subtheme, I am reminded of observing a drama workshop with Deaf participants in which the director decided to take the role centre-circle playing this game. Not heeding the advice from a BSL interpreter that one participant also had a mobility impairment, the director insisted ‘don’t worry I’ve done this many times before’; the workshop ended abruptly when, with his eyes closed, the director launched himself towards this participant knocking her to the floor.

This is my experience, an alarming picture lodged in my memory, yet it may serve as a metaphor for what it might mean for actors in this study to trust in a shifting theatre climate. In this scenario, there was funding made available to a regional theatre to expand engagement with the Deaf and disabled community. There was an enthusiastic director inexperienced with disability, and a hesitancy to take advice or to move from familiar ways of working. This picture links back to Pete’s observation that directors ‘know all the notes, but sometimes haven’t quite learnt the tune’ (p.9). Actors in this study identify signs of progress in removing barriers to disabled people’s participation in theatre that are impacting their day-to-day experience in the workplace. Still, there are specific aspects of practice that make it difficult for individuals to trust in a shift in attitude, structure, and environments. In their responses it seems that throwaway remarks and parting comments of actors in interviews reveal detail in this. In discussing issues of trust, observations of overall progress in the theatre industry are outlined first. Actors’ personal experiences of shifts in practice are then considered, along with how these are interpreted in terms of personal career position and ambition.

As already evidenced in this discussion, the current theatre climate poses considerable day-to-day challenges for actors in this study. Current approaches to theatre practice seem far from idyllic and appear to add significant pressure to the routine demands of their job. Nevertheless, when actor-participants express perceptions of the overall theatre climate their views are largely positive. There is mutual sense that approaches to working with disabled people in theatre are shifting and positive progress is being made. Actor-participants make specific observations and general comments on industry-wide improvement in casting, representation, and attention given to disability agenda in theatre. Moira believes, ‘the landscape has really changed’, pointing to increased onstage opportunity for disabled people (p.9). Specifically noting the National Theatre as a major influence, she remarks, ‘it’s growing […] the amount of disabled people that have been put onstage […] there is a shift happening in that building (Moira, p.16). Moira connects the impact of decisions made in this NPO theatre with a wider shift in representation. Sophie comments, ‘I do think people are judged on more on their merits and their ability, more than they were a few years ago’ (p.29). She praises ROTM’s influence on the theatre climate, describing this ACE funded initiative is ‘definitely affecting everyone in the industry and especially disabled actors because they are being represented […] in a way that they never have’ (Sophie, p.22). Sophie implies ROTM is having a positive industry-wide impact. Neil also remarks that ‘casting agents are getting a lot more open now’ (p.12), and Pete mentions, ‘I talk to some of the disabled actors here […] a few of them have got really decent agents and that wouldn’t have happened a few years ago’ (p.15).

James describes how he is ‘living in a time that is very um… very open, more so especially in the arts’ (p.26). He perceives a shift in attitude to dialogue around disability as well as casting practice, commenting, ‘It’s really getting somewhere […] there’s been some huge milestones […] and the right people are starting to listen um, which is great’ (James, pp.12-13). James seems positive about practical and attitudinal progress he is witnessing. Sophie also describes how ‘people are becoming more open to um to the conversation’ (p.18). She believes that external pressure on theatre makers is influential in this, stating:

> Now we live in a climate where it’s inescapable you know, diversity has become this word that people are frightened of because if they don’t get it right […] they get criticised […] directors are more exposed it that now and the conversation’s broadened (Sophie, p.13).

Sophie’s observation aligns with Gardner’s statement following ACE’s decision to publish annual diversity data from NPOs, that, ‘no artistic director […] can hide any longer behind lack of knowledge […] people will be on your case’ (2016). Actor-participants’ remarks also support notions of an increased ‘appetite to engage’ with disabled actors (Startin, 2014). ACE’s annual data reports show little change in the number of disabled people employed in NPOs since its shift in strategy (2016; 2019); however, actors here perceive substantial change in conversation, casting, and the visibility of disabled people onstage. Sophie and Pete regard this as recent progress, which in Pete’s case is tangible in his interactions in the workplace (p.15).

Furthermore, they view these shifts as unprecedented. It seems ACE's efforts, including ROTM, are regarded as part of accelerating progress during the initial funding round following its shift in strategy in 2015.

These opinions may seem overly broad in comparison to the personal and specific aspects of practice that have been expanded upon in discussing findings from actors so far. However, they clarify their wider perspectives of the industry and a shared positive outlook for disabled actors in general; this seems important in discussing how actor-participants interpret the theatre climate in relation to their own careers and ambitions. Actors here do share personal stories that identify how they perceive wider progress is impacting them day-to-day. James, for example, remarks that more sizable roles are opening to him. He explains, 'I have played a couple of parts that felt very much in the forefront […] I think it's happening more and more that people are… are trusting' (James, p.26). James details a shift in attitude and casting practice. He also comments on how working with disabled people is becoming more familiar to directors, impacting his experience in rehearsals, saying:

> I'm gradually experiencing it more and more that pretty much every director I work with now, even if I haven't worked with them before, that they've worked with a friend of mine, another disabled performer, and they have experience now of that, and um and it's great because it's becoming less and less of a daunting thing to a director (James, p.29).

James seems to perceive progress in directors' level of comfort working with him and a lessening of his own discomfort in practice. He adds, 'that seems to be happening more and more, so, I feel very comfortable in the room a lot of the time (James, p.17). Reflecting on his experience in one rehearsal, he comments:

> I was just another guy in the room um which was lovely um not that I'm sort of craving being normal or anything like that but like I think it's… it's, it's a sign of where the industry is going […] yeah, gradually starting to feel less… less and less like a box tick which is good (James, p.11)

James certainly seems to perceive a positive shift in his day-to-day experience of casting and rehearsals, and in his encounters with directors. Repeated use of phrasing 'more and more' (James, p.17; p.26) and 'less and less' (p.11; p.29) points to this as a continuing process and emphasises the extent of change he notices. James implies his suspicion of hidden agenda in casting is decreasing. However, after describing progress he makes the following remark: ‘but, as I said earlier as well, you never know what's going on behind the scenes as well, so, who knows maybe it's getting worse and I'm just not seeing it *(laughs)*, but, I’m sure it’s not’ (James, p.13). It appears this comment is intended as an aside in jest. Yet this and similar throwaway comments from actor-participants points to something of personal difficulty trusting that progress is authentic and long-term. Despite the positive change James sees, his niggling disquiet with hidden agenda in casting seems to make it difficult for him to trust his own interpretation of progress. His parting comment in his interview is, ‘I’m much more of a sort of sheep. I’m just sort of coasting along going, okay, I hope I get another job *(laughs)* (James, p.32). Of course, this may be a light-hearted response to the highs and lows of an acting career, yet in context James is speaking about Graeae who he sees as driving change forwards. As such, what appears a nonchalant attitude about the future more likely exposes genuine uncertainty in potential opportunities, which he implies are reliant on others paving his way (James, p.32). If James and other actors cannot ascertain where authentic change is happening in the industry, it is less likely they will be able to envision what their future might look like in it.

In terms of envisioning the scope of acting opportunities that may be open to them in the future, Pete and Lydia convey a sense of wrestling with trusting a shift in casting practice. Their questions around the insufficiencies of being cast in *any* role, mentioned in the previous subtheme, cause them specific difficulty in this. Broadly, Pete thinks the outlook for disabled people in theatre is, ‘promising really, I mean I think it’s the most open the profession has ever been *(pause)* um yeah, it’s the most open the profession has ever been’ (p.14). Starting out he speaks of being told, ‘you can’t be an actor’ (Pete, p.1); he now recognises, ‘compared to when I started, you know, there was nothing, you wouldn’t get near a main stage’ (Pete, p.15). More specifically, Pete explains how a shift in the industry impacts him personally, saying:

> It’s giving me an opportunity to play a much greater variety of roles […] all I’ve done is the same role over and over again […] a cripple […] a saint […]

> I’m going to be seen for […] the main stage, all that sort of stuff, a lot of stuff coming in now […] so, it makes my life easier in terms I can get work and also when I get work there’s an understanding that, you know, that I, I need some level of support to sort out things like accommodation and um assistance and things like that (p.16).

Pete clearly identifies a shift in attitudes, structure, and environment. What was denied in terms of his career choice, roles, performance spaces, and practical access in theatre he now seems to view as open to him. He is not a novice in theatre and so his views seem significant in that recent positive change is unique to his lengthy experience in the industry.

Pete’s positive experiences appear to make him revaluate beliefs and ambitions around characters he wants to play and stages he wants to be on. However, like James, after describing the range of work opening to him, Pete’s aside is, ‘it may all be a fad, it may all be, you know, a great new thing that won’t last very long, but *(pause)* it feels some of the roots are in’ (p.16). Pete implies uncertainty that new openness to casting disabled people is long-term yet senses some degree of permanence in changes he sees. It is possible his doubt in the longevity of progress feeds into his limited vision for roles he might play. In this way, despite the ‘variety of roles’ opening to him, nearing the end of his interview he states, ‘No, I don’t think we’ll ever… I don’t get too many lead roles’ (Pete, p. 16; p.30). In the previous subtheme Pete’s comments expressed wanting to move from automatically assuming a ‘negative’ response to impairment in performance (Pete, pp.27-28). Here he appears to stop himself from automatically assuming lead roles are unattainable. He implies wanting to be optimistic about future opportunities, but his level of trust in positive change is not yet enough to expand his ambition for onstage roles, which he is not unique in.

Considering characters she might play in the future, Lydia also appears to struggle, saying, ‘I’m trying to think of another part in theatre, if I saw it and it was actually played by a disabled [actor] maybe I would be like “oh no, I could possibly do that”’ (p.30). Like Pete, Lydia’s vision for the future seems influenced by perceptions of what is denied or allowed in current casting practice. It is not only whether roles are suited to her or not that appears to dictate her ambition, but also her pragmatism about where she sees the industry right now. When asked if she is only looking to play characters written as disabled, Lydia explains:

> I could play anyone and everyone, yeah it's quite frustrating really, um I mean yeah *(pause)* pretty much and I think it's less about what I think and more about the reality of it […] it is a bit upsetting, still, that that's how it is (p.40).

Whatever Lydia's and Pete's true ambitions for future acting opportunities are, it seems for Pete belief that there are a wide range of onstage roles now open to him is still growing. For Lydia, the prospect of playing a range of roles is clearly considered within her ability, but, like Pete, not in the scope of her ambitions; it seems until she witnesses other disabled actors doing the same, this is not perceived as realistic for her. It seems further progress is needed in casting before Lydia and Pete feel able to trust that playing a range of role-types is a possibility and can broaden their ambitions for roles they would like to play accordingly.

In the current theatre climate, it seems career position and ambition are largely viewed as reliant on individual directors who are perceived as key influencers in positive progress made so far. Raising the question, not of what practices or structures actors trust in for future opportunities, but *who.* The term *lucky* is prevalent across actor-participants' interviews. Lydia, James, Moira, Sophie and Neil imply a different dynamic in its use than a simple break in talent recognition. Lydia attributes success getting an agent, into drama school, and her first theatre job to being 'lucky' (p.5; p.22), 'really lucky' (p.1), 'luckier than I think' (p.2). She later explains, 'I've personally been quite lucky in playing some quite chunky roles, but that might be kind of luck of the draw, I've had some really nice directors' (Lydia, p.37). Speaking about directors' comfort in working with him, James notes, 'professionally it might be I've been quite lucky […] extraordinarily lucky in certain situations' (p.15). Regarding directors taking her views on accessibility onboard, Moira comments, 'I've been pretty lucky in that I've worked with you know good people (p.13). Sophie notes, 'I've been really lucky' speaking about conversations with directors about role-types she can play (p.26). Finally, Neil refers to, 'directors who've given me a go […] and go "bloody hell, let's give it a go"' (p.5). Neil adds, 'My career has been with maverick directors who are up for challenges and yeah… and can see a bit wider than normal lens of directors' (p.5).

Identifying luck as a factor in career position and a variable in future work is not in itself unusual. An ACE funded charity supporting young people in the creative industries, sets out, 'Determination, hard work and luck are as important as talent […] A "lucky break" is relatively rare' (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2019). However, for actors in this study it seems that the term 'luck' is not just referring to talent recognition but to the attitude of the directors they encounter. Based on their comments here, a break leading to success is about finding directors who are affable, open to change, comfortable with disability, and willing to explore new territory; these are factors in considering future work not every actor has to contend with. As this study only represents actors who have been employed in major theatres, the lack of ownership of their professional achievements in the industry so far seems alarming. It appears that in the current theatre climate, trusting that talent, 'determination, hard work and luck' are enough to secure work is still not a reality (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2019). In this way, Neil conveys deep concern that without the individual directors he trusts as allies of disabled actors, progress might be reversed. After describing positive progress in theatre, his aside is, 'a lot of the advances we've made have been very individual rather than organisationally […] when they leave it might go back' (Neil, p.10). A positive attitude towards working with disabled people is still not something these actors can take for granted.

Despite expressing doubts around the lack of change at organisational-level, Neil describes how recent positive encounters with directors cause him to revaluate future possibilities of his acting career. Referring to his experience in one theatre, Neil describes:

> When I went there 2 years ago they were just 'oh my god, the Arts Council have said we need to have some training by this bloke, we don't really want to do it', but last year I played [character name] at [theatre name] and this year I'm playing [character name] so, once people are the room it's easier (p.11).

Neil points to a shift in the director's attitude to working with him in an environment that seemed previously hostile; he goes on to explain how this recently led to, 'the first time I've had a proper lead role' (Neil, p.19). After describing this scenario, Neil explains how until now it has been necessary to bolster his income as an actor by doing what he calls, 'banging on about diversity' (p.3). There is stark contrast in how he describes acting in comparison to this additional work; Neil repeatedly refers to acting as a 'bonus' (p.15), a 'lovely bonus' (p.3), 'a joyful bonus' (p.23). He adds, 'I love acting, I'd love to be reliant on acting but I just don't get the opportunities' (Neil, p.13). Neil also interprets his expectation that acting work will be insufficient, saying, 'I deliberately go to acting to be a bonus, when it comes up, I love it' (p.13). He implies acting is his preferred career choice, but his low expectations of acquiring regular acting work have served as a coping mechanism, avoiding disappointment. However, reflecting on the industry now it seems this feels more feasible, as Neil states:

> I'd love to be […] younger and starting again, I mean it would be a better climate to start now and I'd probably get more work and be an actor rather than banging on about whatever I bang on about *(laughs)*, do you know what I mean? (p.6).

Neil cannot turn back time, yet it appears new relationships with directors and theatres are perceived as inroads to future work; he explains, 'I can now go to them and say, have you considered doing this play […] now I have those connections […] I could make it happen maybe' (Neil, p.16). As with the detail in other actors' comments here, Neil's 'maybe' is telling; it implies a raised expectancy of opportunity but remaining hesitancy to assume that there is sufficient change in the industry to make this dependable.

Finally, for Moira there is a similar sense of wrestling with new hope in a widening of theatre environments in which she feels accepted. Like Pete and others further on in their careers, Moira conveys distinct awareness of living through climate change in the industry. She appears to be reconciling past discrimination with more recent positive experiences and reassessing the scope of her ambitions in the process. Moira speaks about how she has, 'always had a really difficult relationship with the mainstream stuff' (p.3), and explains:

> I was really kind of gunning for more mainstream stuff and I wasn't getting anywhere, and so I really kind of gave up on trying that um because […] I was going for auditions that felt really soul… soul destroying and sometimes doing jobs that felt really soul destroying (Moira, p.33).

As a result of disappointment in ‘mainstream’ theatre, Moira implies pushing aside certain aspirations as an actor (p.4; p.33); she had steered her ambitions away from the type of text-based acting work in producing house theatres this study is primarily concerned with. However, this is where she is finding opportunity and appears to be revaluating her relationship with the wider theatre community as a result. She remarks:

> as I made a decision to kind of move away from that stuff err it kind of ended up running around finding me again, because I think the landscape has changed a little bit and now there are mainstream directors who ask for disabled talent (Moira, p.34).

There is a sense of renewed ambition for spaces and roles open to her as an actor, still, Moira repeatedly refers to the theatre climate as ‘tenuous and uncertain’ (p.27; p.35). She specifically notes funding as problematic, saying, ‘something that's deemed a risk, which a disabled actor in a lead role is at the minute, […] people are less likely to take it’ (Moira, p.35). It seems Moira’s trust in future opportunities in major theatres is dependent on a further shift in beliefs around casting and funding to support this. Nearing the end of her interview she concludes, ‘in my more hopeful moments I think things are kind of blossoming into the landscape little bit more’ (Moira, p.36). Moira echoes Pete’s hope that ‘some of the roots are in’ (p.16) and a residing uncertainly in the future that is common to all actors here.

There are signs of wider positive progress across the industry and first-hand stories of how this has moved from external policy, or the mantra of companies like Graeae, to being experienced in actor-participants’ practice. For those further on in their careers, the level of engagement with disability in current theatre is considered unprecedented. Findings discussed here point to positive change as tangible in their conversations with directors, increased comfort in the workplace, and in the scope and scale of casting success. However, this subtheme has also exposed how they wrestle with weighing authenticity in the progress they see, and personal difficulties placing trust in an industry in which change is still needed. Actor-participants are reassessing personal beliefs about theatrical roles and environments within their reach; however, there is also a sense of needing to witness further openness in casting before they can expand hopes and ambitions for characters they want to play and stages they aim to be on. In this way, shifts witnessed so far only scrape the surface of what is possible for them in the industry.

Similarly, actors' responses suggest there are genuine, influential allies of the disabled community; directors who are considering actors for complex roles, are at ease in working with them, and willing to listen. However, encountering a positive attitude and willingness to adapt practice is still perceived as fortunate; it seems responsibility for the representation of disabled people in theatre is yet to feel shared across the industry in the way ACE's strategy aims for. Perceptions of the current theatre climate expose a raised expectancy that positive changes will last, but there is also uncertainty in this hope. Actors here suggest this is largely viewed as reliant on ongoing support from ACE, key influencers like Graeae, and individuals who are helping drive long-term change forward. Hence, there is no room for complacency in terms of disabled people feeling they can pave a way to a successful acting career in professional theatre. It seems there is a long way to go before actors in this study feel they can merely contend with routine highs and lows of securing their next acting job, and for their trust in the industry to grow.

6.3 Reflection on Wrestling with Authenticity

Wrestling with authenticity is certainly complex, with actor-participants interpreting authenticity regarding their identity, representation of disability onstage, directors' motivations and decisions, their acting process, and audience responses. The underlying question in their intrapersonal reasoning of these factors could be viewed as being, how much of a shift in theatre has really taken place? The themes discussed in this chapter do not offer any definitive answer to this, but instead highlight a dual narrative in how actors describe lived experience of disability and theatre practice. There is an explicit story of positive progress in the industry, optimism around increased representation, dialogue, and shifts in practice. There is also an implicit story: disquiet with hidden agenda in casting and with the relevance of impairment in performance; a lack of ownership of professional achievements, and reliance on decision makers and funding bodies; and uncertainty in the future which limits professional ambitions. In this way, it appears an additional and integral part of actor-participants' wrestling with authenticity involves effort to give attention to positive progress made, whilst also being realistic and upfront about aspects of practice that remain problematic.

It is possible actors in this study choose to celebrate positive change and efforts towards progress. However, the explicit story perhaps also feels right thing to say, more comfortable to tell or to hear than the implicit, which might raise a challenge of, 'how can what you say about [the theatre industry] be true', you are a professional actor now. 'How does that fit?' (Ahmed, 2007, p.165). Ahmed notes how the expectation of research on diversity and equality, 'involves a desire to hear 'happy stories of diversity' (2007, p.165). Instead, Ahmed values how phenomenology 'brings what is behind, what does not get seen as the background to social action, to the surface'; noting, 'it is by showing how we are stuck, by attending to what is habitual and routine […] that we can keep open the possibility of habit changes' (2007, p.165). In this way, actors' descriptions of wrestling with authenticity broaden existing perspectives on theatre practice and disability. Their implicit stories offer insight into a detailed reality of the current theatre climate for disabled actors that can be overlooked in pursuit of 'stories of diversity', not giving definitive solutions to what is needed in practice but keeping open the possibility of change (Ahmed, 2007, p.165).

PART TWO: DIRECTOR-PARTICIPANTS

This second part of the thesis discussion examines findings from interviews undertaken with twelve professional directors. All director-participants refer to themselves as non-disabled people. All were employed in ACE's most highly funded theatre organisations between 2015 and 2018, the funding round following ACE's shift in diversity strategy. In keeping with the idiographic commitment of this IPA study, the discussion continues to direct attention to how each participant makes sense of their experiences and explores patterns within the group. Just as my analysis process involved 'bracketing' ideas from a previous case to move to the next, I aim to suspend acquired understanding based on actors' responses (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.100); to consider director-participants' experiences on their own terms and do justice to their individuality. Observations across groups are reserved for the final thesis section. In this way, IPA has enabled unique themes emerging from directors' data to be identified. These provide a structure for discussing their individual experiences of theatre practice and disability. The following list is taken from the *Master Table of Themes Across the Director-Participant Group* (Appendix 6). It shows how emergent themes are nested within three superordinate themes and sets out the framework for discussing findings from director-participants in the three chapters that follow.

- **A. Disability Consciousness**
  - i. Becoming Disability Consciousness in the Theatre Workplace
  - ii. Positioning Disability Consciousness with Professional Identity
  - iii. Nurturing Disability Consciousness
- **B. Narratives of Caution and Confidence**
  - i. Managing Assumptions of Impairment in Performance
  - ii. Presumptions of Error in Rehearsal
  - iii. Transparency and Communication with Actors
- **C. Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting**
  - i. The Significance of Funding
  - ii. Perceiving a Lack of Experienced Disabled Actors: A Catch-22
  - iii. Insufficient Processes and Alternative Routes to Casting

The first superordinate theme, *Disability Consciousness*, is concerned with how directors interpret initial encounters with disabled people in theatre alongside increased discussion around disability in theatre and ACE's collection of diversity data. It considers how perceptions of disability, professional identity, and approaches to practice are shifting in response. The second superordinate theme, *Narratives of Caution and Confidence*, focuses on director-participants' interpersonal engagement with actors. It focuses on interpretation of impairment in casting, rehearsal, and performance, and individual approaches to issues of accessibility and representation. The third superordinate theme, *Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting*, expands on how directors in this study are reconciling necessity to increase engagement with disabled people in theatre with perceived limitations in funding, recruitment, and casting processes. It exposes the real-life and imagined challenges directors experience in this.

Chapter Seven - Disability Consciousness

'if I'm you know advocating and um singing all of this change, well also it's got to be reflected in my own work. I can't just kind of say this is worth doing but then actually not change anything myself' (Sara, p.20)

This first superordinate theme for director-participants examines personal and professional implications of increasing disability consciousness in theatre practice. This chapter is concerned with shifts in their awareness and understanding of disability within the current theatre climate and considering ACE's diversity strategy. In *Researching Lived Experience* van Manen describes, 'all that we can ever know must present itself to consciousness. Whatever falls outside of consciousness therefore falls outside the bounds of possible lived experience' (1990, p.9). This chapter offers insight into how disability presents itself to directors and is interpreted in thought processes, relational engagement, and action in the theatre workplace. The discussion is structured around three subthemes emerging from the data. First it focuses on *Becoming Disability Conscious in the Theatre Workplace,* detailing encounters with disabled people that directors identify as initiating intrapersonal disability consciousness. The second subtheme explores how directors are *Positioning Disability Consciousness with Professional identity*; it uncovers the impact of disability consciousness on how they view their job, in terms of their position, influence, and responsibility for the representation of disabled people in theatre. Finally, a third subtheme, *Nurturing Disability Consciousness*, examines directors' proactive responses to key learning from disability; it considers their challenges to disabling attitudes, structures, and environments, and how tangible change is developed personally and organisationally.

As all directors in this study self-define as non-disabled people, disability consciousness has not presented itself in the form of journeying with personal impairment. Rather, this chapter opens discussion into their interpretation of experiences witnessing disability and engaging with disabled people in training, rehearsal, and performance settings. It is worth being reminded that use of the term *disability* in this thesis does not refer to physical impairment; it draws on a social model view of disability as environmental, structural, and attitudinal barriers preventing an individual’s full participation in society (Finkelstein, 1980, 1981; Barnes, 1991; Oliver, 1990; 1996). For a non-disabled person, perhaps the closest experience of disability could be assumed of those living with someone with an impairment; it seems relevant to note that no director in this study reveals any experience of disability as part of their family background.

Only four out of twelve directors describe any contact with disabled people before working in theatre. Sara (p.7), Dawn (p.9) and Sue (p.8) are the only directors who describe childhood experiences. Lucas is keen to mention working with disabled people prior to directing, he comments, ‘I always have to say […] I chose to work with disabled people’ (p.4). Sara refers to her encounters with disabled people prior to theatre work as ‘formative experiences’, saying, ‘from quite an early age I would […] meet lots of other children […] all of whom had a disability […] where a kind of relationship with disability started’ (p.7). Dawn describes growing up with ‘young people who had Down’s syndrome […] people at school who used crutches […] smaller disabilities that were just part of my life’ (p.9). Still, even for these directors there is little implication of close relationship with disabled people; instead, Dawn describes her experiences prior to working in theatre as ‘sights of disability’ (p.9). Similarly, Sue remembers, ‘looking over the wall […] seeing people with Down’s syndrome […] thinking, oh my God, these people are so very much… […] separated’ (p.8); yet she recognises, ‘I never […] knew anybody disabled’ (p.8). In this way, all director-participants identify key discoveries around disability as taking place whilst working in theatre, with disability only recently seeming significant to their lived experience.

Encounters with disability in a theatrical environment can be linked to Garland-Thomson’s *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997). Building on Goffman’s (1963) classic work on stigma, Garland-Thomson’s work resonates with directors’ initial encounters with disabled people and the ongoing responses to disability they describe. Referring to non-disabled people as the ‘normate’, Garland-Thomson points to the normate’s fixation with disability, as noted in chapter five; she describes, ‘perhaps most destructive to the potential for continuing relations is the normate’s frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute' (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p.12). Bolt expands upon this view, adding that the normate's assumption not only reduces a disabled person to their impairment but, 'there is a consequential but apparently immediate invocation of extraneous details' (2014, p.10); that is, the story disabled people often find themselves defined by relates to historical tropes and stereotypes in cultural representation. This superordinate theme builds on these aspects of existing research from the perspective of non-disabled people, or the normate. It considers how real-life encounters with disabled people in theatre are interpreted today; exploring the meaning, or 'metanarrative of disability', directors within NPOs attach to those experiences and their consequential actions (Bolt, 2014).

7.1 Becoming Disability Conscious in the Theatre Workplace

Where van Manen links what is 'outside of consciousness' with lived experience (1990, p.9), this first section of the chapter explores what director-participants view as significant encounters with disabled people that caused disability to fall inside of consciousness. Experiences in theatre discussed here are identified as prompting initial interest, understanding, or awareness of disability and how it is experienced. The extent to which directors present as disability conscious varies, as do levels of engagement with disabled people; this subtheme offers some insight into the scope of directors' individual positions in this and how both factors are intertwined. Director-participants describe how observing, meeting, and working with disabled colleagues, artists, or companies has been revelatory regarding disability; expressions like 'opened my eyes' (Sara, p.14), 'blew my mind' (Lucas, p.12), 'the big change' (John, p.5) and 'something shifted' (Tim, p.7) are common in responses pertinent to this subtheme. The term *encounter* implies a casual meeting rather than a relationship, being faced with or experiencing something unexpected, hostile, or difficult. These factors of encountering disability are relevant as directors interpret distant and relational engagement with disabled people as crucial in transitioning them from a position of disability being unknown to becoming disability conscious.

Workplace encounters with people who self-define as disabled are described as transformative by director-participants in terms of disability consciousness. Historically there has been limited opportunity for this as disabled people have been so rarely employed by theatre organisations. For Mark this remains reality, he comments, ‘I’ve not been surrounded by many disabled people in the workplace um and that is still the case […] my relationship um with disabled people is still at one remove rather than as direct colleagues’ (p.5). Similarly, Dawn explains, ‘I haven’t worked particularly with people with um disabilities’ (p.11). Based on ACE’s (2019) figures, only five percent of the workforce of its NPOs are disabled people; it is hardly surprising, therefore, that most directors here have had limited contact with disabled people in a workplace context. Only three out of twelve director-participants, John, Tim and Sara, mention disabled colleagues in long-term employment in their workplace. Only John identifies ‘my first experience of working alongside a disabled colleague’ as the point when disability became relevant to his lived experience (p.5). More often encounters perceived as impacting directors’ disability consciousness involve specific productions or projects with actors with impairments, or distant contact with disabled people via training or watching a performance.

Tim and John are the only directors who refer to relationships with disabled people as ‘friends’ (Tim, p.4; p.7, John; p.5). It is the beginnings of these meaningful relationships that they interpret as initiating disability consciousness for them. Tim’s and John’s first encounters with disabled people in theatre are a distant memory that they recall in considering what influences their directing approach. Tim describes now having ‘lots and lots of friends with varying disabilities’ (p.5). He explains, ‘something shifted, something changed, and I suddenly found myself with more friends and colleagues and associates and students and participants in my room who had a range of abilities’ (Tim, p.7). Reflecting on what promoted this shift, he recalls how working in theatre ‘introduced me to companies like Graeae’, recognising its artistic director as, ‘the first person I kind of met who was […] Deaf’ (Tim, p.4). Tim implies this casual meeting was significant, causing new awareness of disability that appears to have developed into genuine interest in disability issues, which is discussed later in the chapter. Tim describes this encounter as, ‘key like to a kind of… a world that had been invisible or had been um obscured previously' (p.4).

Both Tim and John identify first conversations with Jenny Sealey, artistic director of Graeae, as pivotal in transitioning them from disability being unknown to a new awareness that impacts their practice today. Although John mentions disability first becoming relevant through work with a disabled colleague, he clarifies, 'the big change for me was um, was developing a relationship with Jenny Sealey at Graeae which started when we went to see um their production' (p.5). Something in these first conversations appears to spark a change in personal perceptions of disability. Based on John's interpretation of the significance of his experience, there is a distinction made between merely encountering a disabled person in the workplace and personally engaging with someone at a level that transforms their thinking. This is what John believes prompted 'the big change' in him, meaningful connection with Jenny, who identifies as Deaf, that shifted his views of disability and theatre (p.5); how this is evidenced in his practice is also discussed later.

It feels important to highlight again the influence Graeae is having on individuals working across the industry, in this case its impact on disability consciousness among non-disabled directors. Names of individuals and companies mentioned by participants have been removed from transcripts quoted in this thesis. However, as all participants mention Jenny Sealey and Graeae, it is unnecessary to remove these details by way of retaining anonymity. Instead, it seems important to recognise that eight out of twelve director-participants reference Graeae in connection with awareness and understanding of disability. Five of these credit connections with Jenny or Graeae as first prompting disability consciousness in them. Not all have close relationship with the company, but as Anne recognises, 'my early um influence like, same for a lot of people, would be the work of Graeae' (p.9). Graeae's impact on directors continues to be prominent throughout this discussion.

As most director-participants do not have close relationships with disabled people, experiences of working on specific productions are identified as transforming disability views. Sara, Mark and Felix describe realisations of how disability is experienced in the lives of others; they identify work with disabled actors as a starting point in learning about accessibility and barriers to opportunities in theatre. Mark's earlier comment that his relationship with disabled people is 'still at one remove' is explained further as he describes disabled artists 'coming into' his workplace, 'co-producing […] or we're commissioning a piece from that company' (p.5). Mark perceives himself as lacking relationship with disabled people but identifies hosting and organising performances for a visiting artist as revelatory for him. He describes negotiating with theatres about accessibility on behalf of an artist with a physical impairment as, 'a huge learning curve for me […] a bit of a nightmare' (Mark, p.7). Mark reiterates, 'the project was brilliant but everything around it was really difficult […] transport and accommodation err and access' (p.18). Reflecting on realising that 'access is not necessarily being thought about', Mark notes, 'it was very stressful for [the artist] and […] for us' (p.7). Mark suggests the difficulties they confronted together prompted new understanding of disability in theatre, which he again refers to as 'the big learning for me here' (Mark, p.6). He perceives this giving him 'greater sense of awareness maybe of some of the issues and also the complexity of what we're talking about when we talk about access and disability, that's multiple and complex *(laughs)'* (p.20). How this learning continues to influence his work is expanded on later in the chapter.

Mark's, Sara's and Felix's experiences of working with actors with impairments can be viewed as alerting them to the realities of the social model of disability; the first time they witness it is not a person's impairment that limits their participation in theatre but environmental, structural, and attitudinal barriers (Finkelstein, 1980, 1981; Barnes, 1991; Oliver, 1990, 1996). Like Mark, Sara expands on becoming disability conscious in this way:

> it really really did open my eyes to… because it err he's a wheelchair user, that was a relatively new building in which we were doing that play and yet it was not at all equipped […] it had a lift, but you know the rehearsal room was on one floor the disabled toilet was up a floor […] you know just seeing somebody… it literally take their whole break to get to the toilet and back really was quite eye-opening for me (p.14).

Witnessing the inaccessibility of her own workplace and the impact on this actor, who she describes as having ‘an extreme physical disability’, seems so distant from Sara’s lived experience that it is shocking and unexpected (p.6). Still, it appears this made her aware of environmental barriers faced by disabled people in theatre and a need for change, as she refers to practical steps taken to resolve access issues (Sara, p.15). Sara also interprets her experience as prompting new awareness of the kind of responses to impairment that actors contend with. She explains:

> It was really interesting talking to him and what he could teach us […] for example he said to us ‘look when I go on stage […] people will respond […] young people will say “what is that?”’, like about him […] finding it really shocking, and he was absolutely right but hopefully perceptions were changed through that performance (Sara, p.15).

Sara implies this was her first opportunity to talk with an actor about accessibility and audience responses to impairment, and, like Mark, consider these collaboratively. Sara also expresses this as a turning point, recognising, ‘I just learnt so, yeah so much about um yeah the experiences of a disabled actor through that […] it taught me a lot’ (p.16). Just as Sealey encourages directors inexperienced with disability to, ‘talk to actors about what they need’ (2017), it seems Sara’s willingness to connect relationally with the actor and learn from them was significant in this. This first time working with a disabled actor seems valued as broadening her understanding of environmental and attitudinal barriers to participation in theatre based on real-life. However, this is an opportunity not all directors in this study have had, are as open to, or comfortable with; an issue opened in more detail here and in following chapters.

Felix also identifies his first experience directing an actor with a physical impairment as opening new disability perspectives to him, these seeming two-fold. Firstly, he implies new recognition of the social barriers that compromise an actor’s participation in the industry in a similar way to Mark and Sara; secondly, it seems his experience prompted awareness of his own attitude as implicit in this. Reflecting on his learning, Felix comments, ‘what became really clear […] is that she’s just a really great actor […] obviously her… her disability informs her life, informs her work, her practice, her person […] to a degree’ (p.19). It seems this actor’s level of talent was a revelation for Felix, challenging his assumptions which was unexpected. He is not alone in this, Lucas describes a similar first-time experience, saying, ‘to be honest I have only worked with um one actor who has a clear disability (p.5). In first meeting them, he recalls ‘the audition just blew my mind and I… I really forgot the [impairment] I was just going wow’ (Lucas, p.12). Both directors express surprise at actors’ abilities, but also at their own ability as spectators to recognise something other than impairment as the person’s overriding characteristic.

Recognising talent, Felix goes on to describe how he chose to recommend this actor to theatre agents, saying, ‘she’s really great, so I think you could get ahead’ (p.28). He remarks, ‘no one even replied to me’ (Felix, p.28). Felix interprets this as, ‘an insight momentarily into how difficult it must be […] one experience of it […] of how hard it is’ (p.29). It seems he witnessed first-hand how attitudes towards disabled people are a barrier to opportunity in theatre. However, despite what seems to be a generous response in promoting this actor’s work, the term ‘momentarily’ seems poignant (Felix, p.29). Whether this experience continues to impact Felix’s response to disability is questionable. Despite shifting his expectations of one actor, Felix refers to his ‘own mindset’ as one such barrier today (p.32); this observation seems reflected in his practice and detailed later in this chapter. Nonetheless, Felix’s and Lucas’ first encounters with actors with physical impairments challenge what Garland-Thomson refers to as ‘the normate’s frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities’ (1997, p.12). These encounters appear to be the first time they have identified a disabled person as having multiple attributes, viewing their acting skill as their dominant feature not their impairment. Felix explains this changed the way he refers back to this production, saying, ‘I often say… I go to say, “oh and one of the actors was a disabled actor”, and then I go, “no, one of the actors is a really good actor who happens to have a disability” *(laughs)*’ (p.7).

Simon and Jack have only encountered disabled people in theatre at some distance, yet this has still impacted disability consciousness. As they attempt to interpret where their views of disability originated, it seems they become mindful of their lack of engagement with disabled people to date. From the onset of his interview Jack draws attention to this, setting out, ‘in all those 30 years I’ve been working, I’ve never worked with a disabled actor’ (p.2). He is speaking specifically about directing practice here and in this way is not unique; Jack is one of six directors in this study who is yet to direct a theatre production with a disabled person in the cast. As a result, he appears to rate his level of disability consciousness as nil; when asked about his understanding of the term *disabled*, he replies, ‘that assumes that I do have an understanding *(laughs)*’ (Jack, p.4). Jack does, however, say he is thinking about how his practice might be accessible to disabled people, believing, ‘the story is beginning to turn’ (p.2), and reiterating, ‘I am just now at that turning point’ (p.9). He interprets this starting point as prompted by recent contact with Graeae, explaining:

> to be honest, it’s quite recent […] Graeae have come in […] who also sort of do seminars and workshops in how you work with disabled artists […] so, I’ve had relatively recent contact with people who know what they are talking about in terms of actual practice (Jack, p.4).

In terms of knowledge and understanding of disability it appears Jack has a lot of learning to do. He openly admits, ‘I’ve always had a problem which is about my ignorance as to how you make a work with disability […] I just don’t know how that works’ (Jack, p.3). Despite this, it is not acquiring practical knowledge from Graeae that Jack suggests is significant in moving him forwards. Instead, he describes ‘talking to Jenny Sealey was an important steppingstone’ (Jack, p.6). Like Tim’s first contact with Jenny, simply having a conversation with a Deaf person for the first time is viewed as most significant in his learning process. However, this is Jack’s current position, only recently becoming open to the idea that he can, with some level of comfort, engage relationally with a Deaf or disabled person. This seems a far cry from developing any close relationship with disabled people in theatre being on Jack’s radar.

Linking to Parrey’s (2018) observation of how initial consideration of disability perspectives can create personal moments of disruption, Simon conveys how new disability consciousness causes him difficulty and discomfort. Simon is less blatant about feeling inexperienced in working with disabled people than Jack; he says he has ‘worked with a lot of actors who’ve been err… who’d registered as disabled’

(Simon, p.7). But he only mentions experience in practice with one actor ‘who’s physically disabled’ and does not detail work with them (Simon, p.11). Instead, reflecting on what shapes his disability views he only speaks of ‘events, symposiums […] Graeae coming in and doing training’ (Simon, p.8). Simon reflects on this, saying:

> I remember Jenny Sealey from Graeae coming in and doing training […] it was those individuals who were um incredibly knowledgeable and quite provocative and challenging about how we are operating as companies, as individuals that um would make ones… would sort of allow ones whole brain to shift in terms of perspective […] would just force your brain to […] acknowledge or sort of be aware of (p.9).

Simon refers to Graeae as ‘provocateurs’ (p.9), hinting at the extent of challenge presented to him by new disability consciousness prompted through their training. This is not a recent experience, yet it appears to cause ongoing cognitive dissonance. Simon’s phrasing supports this view as he repeatedly refers to how encounters with disabled people, ‘allow one’s whole brain to shift’, ‘just force your brain’, ‘again forces you to be aware of all the work you see where there are no disabled actors’ (p.9). In this way, Simon raises an unsettling dilemma, how to reconcile disability consciousness with his familiar beliefs and practice, and with gaps in his connections with disabled people. For Simon, even describing his feeling in this seems difficult. He struggles to articulate his views, for which he is apologetic, saying, ‘I’m sorry my thoughts are all over the place, I’m trying to order them’ (Simon, p.13). Although, it seems Simon wants to appear knowledgeable, later in his interview, like Jack, he admits, ‘I feel that I’m starting from a position of real ignorance and […] slowly starting to try and get better at it’ (p.27).

Although referring to race rather than disability, Ahmed offers parallels with directors’ positioning of disability consciousness, noting how ‘we inherit proximities’ to people who are different to ourselves (2007, p.155). Ahmed clarifies, ‘this is an inheritance that can be refused, and which does not fully determine a course of action’ (2007, p.155). In this way, non-disabled directors’ family backgrounds, and inherited theatre environments could be viewed as dictating distance away from disability; hence, an obvious correlation that disability consciousness is lacking in directors who have had less opportunity to engage with disabled people. Certainly, even with this group of directors who work in organisations with a clear mandate from ACE to increase disability representation, encountering disabled people is still a rare phenomenon. Linking with Fahy and King's acknowledgment that, 'disability is so often hidden from view […] most able-bodied viewers have no frame of reference for responding to it' (2002, p.x). It seems directors here have responded with shock and surprise when first encountering disabled people in training, audition, rehearsal, and performance settings. This is not the kind of shock response to physical impairment that Garland-Thomson assumes of the 'normate' (1997); it is a sudden realisation of exclusion and prejudice that exists in theatre environments and within themselves. There are directors like Jack and Simon who still appear baffled as to how relational engagement with disabled people in theatre is possible. Their views demonstrate that shifting ingrained personal assumptions of disability in theatre is not straightforward, for directors like Jack and Simon this is a process in its infancy.

Directors' perceptions of becoming disability conscious support Bazalgette's observation, 'it takes effort to challenge one's assumptions and the innate tendency to default to the choices we are most comfortable with. But the right decisions are not always the comfortable ones' (2015). In this way, although initial encounters with disabled people in theatre may be circumstantial and unexpected, disability consciousness in the theatre workplace is, in part, a director's choice. Based on experiences described here, it seems the more relational directors' first encounters with disabled people are, the more likely they are to respond to disability in a way that impacts their personal beliefs and practice. However, even in early encounters with disability in theatre, it seems Tim, John, Sara and Felix chose to refuse their 'inheritance' of distance, to move towards disability experience in some way (Ahmed, 2007, p.155). For example: John and Tim chose to build on what could have been a passing conversation to develop ongoing relational and professional engagement with a Deaf director; Sara chose to listen to and collaborate with the actor she worked with in resolving access issues and considering audience responses to impairment; and Felix chose to demonstrate his recognition of an actor's talent by recommending them to theatre agents. Decisions made by these directors played a part in determining the extent to which encounters with disabled people in theatre influenced their continued engagement with disability.

Wider acknowledgment that relationships between non-disabled directors and disabled actors are powerful in impacting change, such as ACE's decision to extend funding to ROTM, are supported by my findings here (ACE, 2018b). It is not opportunity to learn theory of disability or practical knowhow that is perceived by director-participants as significant in shifting disability understandings. Instead, it is personal connection with disabled people, even if distant, that begins a change in their thinking and practice. As Norris noted in casting, 'the theatre industry needs to work to get deaf and disabled people into directors' inner circles […] it becomes personal - and that's the way the industry works' (quoted in Hutchinson, 2016a). This is still a necessity, not just to bridge gaps for casting purposes; but to build relationships that expand directors' disability knowledge and understanding based on valuing the real-life experiences of disabled people. As discussion in this chapter moves to consider how directors' disability consciousness impacts professional identity and is developed, the relevance of their decisions and motivations to engage with disabled people in theatre is considered further.

7.2 Positioning Disability Consciousness with Professional Identity

This subtheme expands on how director-participants are connecting disability consciousness with perceptions of professional identity and what are motivating factors in this. Increased engagement with disabled people and awareness of industry-wide disability agenda is shifting how they refer to their role as a theatre director. Changing perceptions of professional identity relate to how directors view personal influence on, and responsibility for, increasing the representation of disabled people in theatre as part of their job. Interview responses relevant to this subtheme expose how director's perceptions of professional identity are being disorientated and reshaped in response to disability in various ways. Some describe now viewing their role in the industry as seeking to effect change, being proactive in recruiting and promoting disabled actors in their workplace. Others are still weighing personal responsibly in, and implications of, opening theatre opportunities to disabled people. Director-participants point to views of disability as changing the focus of their job description, a funding obligation, or as an aspect of theatre practice that requires specialist input. This part of the discussion explores these viewpoints and the extent to which disability has become part of their professional identity as a result. Neary explains how, 'Professional identity is not static but fluid; it is strongly influenced by how we see ourselves, how we perceive others perceive us, and how we are viewed by society at large' (2014, p.15). This variable nature of professional identity is pertinent here, as is the influence of self-perception, and what directors assume others expect of them regarding engagement with disability in practice.

For most director-participants feeling any sense of responsibility for the representation of disabled people in theatre is a recent addition to their lived experience. The timeframe they refer to in describing feeling a change in responsibility in this way, largely aligns with ACE's shift in diversity strategy, from 2015 onwards (Bazalgette, 2014). It seems that accelerated disability agenda in theatre, ACE's strategy, and, for some, involvement with ROTM is impacting how director-participants view their jobs. For example, Sue notes disability is 'on the radar now in a way that it wasn't five years ago […] you can see it everywhere you look' (p.11). Anne recognises, 'there being um a louder conversation about access generally' (p.10), and Dawn comments:

> I think that even five years ago no one was… well people were, Graeae were making work, but very few people were talking about actors with disabilities within mainstream theatre […] at the moment it's something that we're all thinking about and talking about in a very conscious way (p.8).

There seems recognition among directors in this study that others view them in positions of power, that there is a wider expectation they should effect change around disability. This sense of external pressure is not only instigated by ACE. As mentioned in introducing the rationale for my study, media and literary discourse continually situates directors as having responsibility in this. Writers make public the opinion that directors are key in creating opportunity and choosing who it is open to, holding them responsible for shifting barriers to the full participation of disabled people on and off stage (Bano, 2017; Johnston, 2016, p.2; Fraser; 2017a). Most directors in this study seem well-versed regarding recent online disability and theatre discourse. So, it seems likely public opinion such as this adds to pressure felt in responding to disability as part of their job. Some directors describe the implications of this as beneficial for their practice; Sue (p.11), Dawn (p.47) and Anne (p.24) all choose to describe increased disability agenda in the industry as 'exciting'. For others this seems to add uncomfortable pressure to their job. For example, Simon explains, 'I'm quite new to being in a position of power so um *(pauses)* it's *(pauses)* I feel there's a lot of responsibility, quite rightly, on me to change this organisation and our working methods' (p.22). As mentioned in the previous subtheme, Simon perceives himself as 'starting from a position of real ignorance' (p.27). As such, having increased responsibility and authority in his job appears to add to his unease with disability agenda. Simon implies a weight felt in needing to respond to this, which, as he is senior in his organisation, seems compounded by his awareness of external opinion and initiatives calling for directors like him to act.

Linking back to Gardner's remark that 'diversity, of every kind, has to be core to any theatre organisation and what it does' (2015), Sue's opinion is that ACE have made this non-negotiable, implying that anyone working in an NPO at level of directors in this study must consider disability part of their professional agenda. Sue states:

> You've got to take responsibility for this yourself as somebody working in a building um […] we know many more disabled [actors] than we ever did four years ago […] I think the Arts Council *(sighs),* I think they are doing their best to keep all the NPO, you know funded organisations, they're clear about what their priorities are, they're really clear about saying what we have to do […] it's clearly on their agenda, so therefore, it has to be on ours (p.19).

Sue implies guidelines from ACE are clear motive for positioning disability consciousness with professional identity for her. Also, that 'working in a building' is significant in shaping the level of responsibility she feels in this (Sue, p.19). She implies feeling a duty and obligation associated with awareness of ACE's policy and with working in a publicly funded building. This is also a factor in how other director-participants describe changes in their perceptions of professional identity.

Sara and Anne describe in more detail how assumptions of what is expected of directors working in ACE funded theatre buildings have repositioned disability consciousness with professional identity for them. Working as freelance directors in the past, both identify having increased influence in the industry and greater responsibility to consider disability now they are based in a building. Like Simon, Sara is new to a position of power as a director based in a large theatre organisation. She describes how disability has swiftly become relevant to her job role and decisions she makes, in that:

> career focus has shifted because rather than being an independent freelance artist […] I'm suddenly err kind of tasked with heading up all of our artist development, I'm suddenly part of programming decisions, I'm suddenly part of driving the artistic agenda of an entire organisation and quite a large one, and so I think it's shifted quite a lot actually in the last year because of all of that. So, whereas before I'd absolute… I'd worked with disabled actors um I can't say that it was something that um had particularly err been something that I was massively aware of in my own practice, or kind of like really kind of err driving in a kind of political way I suppose (Sara, p.8).

Sara interprets her new position in a theatre building as offering greater potential to effect change; she is not only responsible for directing productions but is involved in wider organisational decisions, as are all directors here. She points to how new obligation to consider disability is linked with funding, describing, 'it's a privilege the position that I inhabit, to have this role within such a large arts organisation that has you know vast amounts of public funding feels… I am very aware of […] responsibility I have in that' (Sara, p.10). Her raised status and assumed requirements in response to public funding are expressed as motivating factors in disability becoming part of her professional agenda.

In addition to funding obligations and recognising her authority to instigate organisational change, Anne points to facilities and support available in her workplace being a factor in repositioning professional identity for her. In parallel with Sara, Anne believes her choices as a director have more resonance now that she is based in a building. She explains, 'when you're a freelance director […] you can always be in charge of who you put on stage but […] you can effect things slightly err in less of a way than when you're part of a big organisation' (Anne, p.9).

However, rather than attributing ability to effect change around disability to her rising professional status, Anne describes the relevance of having access to ‘resources […] expertise […] rooms […] a building to fill, and stages that need filling with work’ (p.9). She implies feeling obligated to share these publicly funded assets. It also seems that within an NPO theatre that is linked with ACE’s diversity initiatives Anne feels better equipped and supported to explore new territory around disability herself, as she reflects:

> I think being in this building galvanised that for me and I think prior to that […] I hadn’t even, if I’m honest, considered casting a disabled actor. It was just not a conversation I was part of and that’s changed a lot since being here (Anne, p.10).

Being in an ACE funded theatre building enables Anne and Sara to connect disability with professional identity in a new way. Their comments suggest feeling more powerful, obligated, and supported in doing this. There is a sense that external pressure on theatre organisations has permitted these non-disabled directors to consider disability part of their creative domain in a way that felt beyond them in the past. Anne’s reflection on past response to Graeae’s work supports this, she reveals, ‘what I probably thought was, ‘oh this is really interesting but that’s the sort of thing that Graeae does […] that wouldn’t influence the way I made work […] it didn’t’ (p.13). In announcing ACE’s diversity strategy, this problematic assumption is offered as a reason why responsibility for diversity has not been shared across the industry; the central motivation for its ‘fundamental shift’ in approach (Bazalgette, 2014, p.7). In this way, it seems that ACE’s new direction has been powerful in shifting this belief. For Anne, it seems increasing the representation of disabled people in theatre is a responsibility she now feels she can and must engage with.

Sue, Anne and Sara are open about disability being on their professional agenda partly due to funding obligations, expressing this as a part of their job dictated by ACE not a personal choice. The fact that Sara nor Anne had considered disability or casting a disabled person before working in NPO theatre supports this view (Sara, p.8; Anne, p.9). Nevertheless, there are also signs that what may have felt initially enforced upon them, something ‘you have to’ do, has become personally motivated (Anne, p.10). Anne repeatedly refers to inequality in theatre as something she 'should' address (p.10; p.11). But she also remarks, 'I guess I've become really conscious of wanting to do that […] since I've been in this building' (Anne, p.12). Sara's comments about now 'driving' change 'in a political way' also imply a level of self-motivation and deeper understanding of disability agenda, which is more than a funding obligation (p.8). Driving change is a theme repeated throughout her interview, also stating she is 'doing everything to drive it much more strongly' (Sara, p.10). As someone who viewed herself as not 'massively aware' of disability previously, considering herself at the forefront of change is a significant shift in thinking (Sara, p.8). In just one year working in a building there are signs that challenging disability in theatre has become a genuine interest as well as professional agenda.

Elmoutawakil believes, 'Collaborating with artists […] and marginalised communities are brilliant ways for the process of inclusion to become more natural, as they become the fabric of your own identity' (2018). In terms of changing how they view professional identity, directors in this study are at differing stages in this process, with John's experiences most strongly reflecting this journey. He overviews an organic and collaborative process that has led to change in his practice and professional identity. Further in this process than others like Anne or Sara, his motivation for aligning disability consciousness with professional identity seems to be relationship and commitment to the disabled community above anything else. Speaking about disabled actors' fight for recognition and the pitfalls of phrases like *professional disabled actor*, John remarks, 'what we're all working towards is a situation where that label disappears […] how do we improve the situation' (p.4). He aligns his professional agenda as a director with that of disabled people working in theatre, owning a shared purpose to effect change.

Like Sara, John's comments reflect a self-perception of being someone driving change strategically. They are not alone in professing an activist approach to changing the industry as being entwined with their professional identity. Tim states he is, 'really keen on changing the face of British theatre and who can work in the sector' (p.6), asserting this as his primary objective as a director and central to his professional identity. He adds, 'my politics are the very first reason I make art […] I hope generates empathy and understanding and compassion for difference' (Tim, p.8). Also, speaking about inequality in the theatre industry, Sue remarks, 'our role as theatre makers is to address that in every form' (p.10). Both Sue and Tim, acknowledge intersectionality in describing disparity in the industry and what appears to be a personal drive to effect change. They refer to personal issues of race and gender that impact them, but, along with Tim, Sue points out she has come to 'see that disability is part of that as well' (p.10).

It is questionable whether activist statements like these genuinely reflect directors' professional identity; if they truly share responsibility for increasing the representation of disabled people in theatre or are empty words. As Elmoutawakil points out in *How to Avoid Tokenism*, there is often effort to appear diverse in theatre that does not always reflect genuine 'commitment and determination that will prove that your inclusion moves beyond tokenism' (2018). How John, Tim, Sara, Sue, and others support their views with tangible efforts to effect change organisationally and personally is explored as we move to the final section of this chapter. Certainly, John makes few references to what *should* be done, and gives many examples of steps he is taking to make change happen. Still this idea of *appearing* diverse is apparent in responses from directors who continue to distance disability from their professional identity. This seems true of Felix who highlights pioneering casting choices; he directed an actor with a physical impairment in a lead role. He expresses fulfilment, pride even, describing it 'felt the most… my most successful […] it felt really like proper work […] it allowed [the actor] to be [cast…] nothing to do with her disability' (Felix, p.9). It appears this experience shapes his professional identity in the sense that he views it as a significant accomplishment. Felix recognises his power to influence change in the industry, explaining how the actor he worked with, 'now works in the mainstream', and 'what it categorically did is it gave [the actor] opportunities she would not have had previously' (p.17). However, there is little sign of him taking any long-term responsibility for the representation of disabled people in his theatre; this is a four-year-old success story that Felix states, 'we've not been able to recreate' (p.17). This seems convenient in terms of Felix feeling able to identify as a director who is disability conscious but has minimal effect on his ongoing professional agenda.

Juxtaposed with this scenario, it also cannot be assumed if a director has not cast disabled actors that they lack integrity claiming to align disability consciousness with professional identity; other relevant factors of directors' experiences of casting are discussed in chapter nine. How directors interpret responsibility for representation alongside perceived lack in their own disability experience is also relevant. For example, Mark has welcomed disabled artists and specialist companies into this theatre workplace and connects this with his professional identity as a director. Yet, when he speaks about his role in this, he describes, 'creating a disability positive space […] it's not me trying to cast a show' (Mark, p.12). He adds, 'we've done our bit […] that is those artists absolutely driving something' (Mark, p.12). Mark's phrasing, 'we've done our bit' (p.12) may seem tokenistic, yet he does appear proactive in driving long-term change in his organisation. In this way, it seems likely Mark has placed limitations on himself in terms of what he feels he can do as a non-disabled director; to date, he has chosen to effect change by creating spaces that are 'led, managed, run, directed by a disabled person' (p.23). Mark does not convey a lack of interest but a hesitancy to work directly with disabled performers himself. He implies a belief this requires specialist skills and input that he cannot offer, a view common among directors in this study and expanded on later in this chapter.

Returning to Simon's unease aligning disability consciousness with his professional identity, he describes being 'in no man's land with it' (p.31) and having the 'least handle on it' (p.32). Like, Mark, Simon implies inexperience around disability, and difficulty knowing how to move forward in this, are reasons for distancing disability consciousness from his professional identity. In this way, he explains:

> I want ACE, I suppose, to do two things, one is to hold us to account more, but part of that is also to be more helpful around […] training opportunities […] being honest, is I feel that at the moment that if I wanted to ignore what was being put out from ACE […] it would be easy to' (Simon, pp.30-31).

It can be assumed that ACE's stipulations on diversity are the same for all theatre organisations represented by directors in this study, all being in receipt of major funding. Yet, directors like Sue, Anne, Dawn and Sara have come to view engagement with disability as a non-negotiable part of their job; a responsibility connected with funding, that is also recognised as beneficial for their practice and personally motivated. Others, like Felix, seem able to ignore disability in their ongoing work, or like Mark feel ill-equipped to direct disabled people themselves, or like Simon are waiting to be forced by ACE to respond.

In considering how directors are positioning disability consciousness with professional identity, their responses put forward the following presumption: the more highly funded and equipped a theatre organisation is, the greater the expectation of directors working in it to engage with disability and bring about change. However, in practice this belief disregards the diverse experiences and understandings of disability, personal motivations, and interests among directors. Directors may claim pioneering casting choices and collaboration with disabled performers, but this does not always equate to them having genuine interest in disability issues or desire to effect change. This cannot be enforced. Still, findings here do suggest that external pressure from funding bodies like ACE is a starting point in a 'process of inclusion', which for some directors in this study is becoming naturally entwined with personal and professional identity (Elmoutawakil, 2018). Discussion here has exposed how directors like John, Tim and Sara seem passionate about influencing a process of change in their own workplaces and the industry. How this process is experienced and outworked in directors' personal practice and organisations is explored in this next and final subtheme of the chapter.

7.3 Nurturing Disability Consciousness

From considering what prompted disability consciousness and how it shapes professional identity, this final subtheme explores how director-participants' learning from disability is developed and responded to as action in practice. It considers their attitudes and practical approaches to nurturing disability consciousness on a personal level, organisationally, and beyond. Learning required of directors in working with disabled people in theatre is contested. As mentioned in the thesis introduction, there is recognition of a need for directors to develop skills and understanding, and counter argument that working with disabled people in theatre does not require specialist knowledge. ROTM aimed to offer directors 'toolkits […] for participation' (2018), and Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl suggest, 'commitment to include everyone is not easy' (2007, p.232). Contrastingly, Sealey asserts, 'making your auditions accessible is simple' (2017), and Taylor believes it is a myth 'that it requires particular skills and experience' (2017). Directors' responses relevant to this subtheme reflect the complexity and ease of learning from disability apparent on both sides of this debate. As such, this subtheme enables consideration of what directors perceive are key factors of learning relating to disability theory, accessibility, and adapting practice. It uncovers how individuals are experiencing practical responses to learning and perceived gaps in knowledge. It also expands on their proactive effort or inaction in challenging disabling attitudes, structure, and environments in personal practice and their theatre organisations.

In terms of developing disability understanding, directors in this study are at varying points of learning. As pinpointed at the start of this chapter, early experiences of working with disabled people in theatre have exposed some to the realities of the social model of disability (Mark, p.7; Sara, p.14; Felix, p.28; Anne, p.12). Its benefits in mobilising action and personal reflection are notable here. Director-participants remark that disability was not mentioned in formal director training (John, p.5; Dawn p.10), but social model perspectives have been nurtured through experience and training in their workplaces. Anne asserts:

> I'm big fan of the sort of social model of disability […] it is society who disables them […] that's a very helpful model to work with […] it empowers you to change things, cause we are all part of this group of people who form society' (p.7).

Sue recognises, 'to be disabled is not to be able to participate in whatever it is as fully […] because other people haven't thought about […] what might make that possible for you' (p.7). Also, Tim describes, 'your environment disables you ultimately […] it's the place's responsibility to let you know you are welcome in this space um, so, I very much kind of ascribe to the social model of disability' (p.5). These directors clearly have some grasp of disability theory and imply this impacts levels of responsibility to effect change and their thinking about practice.

Understanding the social model of disability appears to have led to changes in practice and greater connection with disabled people. Or perhaps this process is reversed, increased connection with disabled people has nurtured new theoretical perspectives of disability among directors here. Mark and John imply this thinking has been extended across their organisations and that they played a role in nurturing this in others. Mark explains, ‘we have spoken a lot […] about […] the social or the medical models of disability’ (p.4). Also, John mentions, ‘we’ve done a lot of work around the social model of disability and the fact that […] it’s society that effectively disables people rather than their own impairment […] I fully believe that’ (p.4). In addition, John explains how this has been key in moving towards improved accessibility in his workplace. He describes having, ‘lots of disability awareness training that made us think hard about […] how our customer facing service worked […] were we accessible enough […] it um led to […] changes backstage in terms of accessibility’ (John, p.10).

Directors are at different stages in learning about accessibility and nurturing disability conscious environments and approaches to practice. Some, like John, describe active involvement in improving access on and off stage. Having identified witnessing the inaccessibility of theatres as prompting disability consciousness in him, Mark reflects on there now being:

> a place for that learning to go which is into the next production, and then the one after that um and err we’re casting err Deaf and disabled actors in that […] a fully integrated show with BSL within the performance (p.8).

Mark interprets his learning from disability as key in decisions about future productions in his workplace now. It seems what he learnt from planning a tour for a disabled artist began a process or offered a new lens for action in his own workplace. Sara also describes in detail her involvement in influencing future productions, explaining:

> I've just had the opportunity to be part of […] programming […] now putting myself to the test really, it’s like okay […] put your money where your mouth is um. So, for example err I've had long discussions with the designer […] about how we might start to now um increase creative access within our productions, and […] the next show […] we're going to have um

> the cast um doing live audio description […] I’ve also […] been in really long discussions with um a local learning disabled theatre company […] about partnering with them […] and err we have auditioned a number of disabled actors […] I suppose it has impacted […] me trying to think as a kind of individual artist […] if I'm you know advocating, and um singing all of this change, well also it’s got to be reflected in my own work. I can’t just kind of say this is worth doing but then actually not change anything myself (pp.19-20).

Sara’s comment here was used in opening this superordinate theme. It links her claims of considering disability in a new way with action in practice. It suggests she is holding herself accountable to act on learning from disability. That she is pressing for better access for audiences and increasing connections with disability specific companies and artists. Like Mark, these efforts appear to be impacting on stage work in a way that seems far from tokenistic and is gaining momentum. Sara refers to long discussions, implying change is not straightforward but is continually invested in. She mentions further action to pursue ‘a process over a long period of time to ensure that disability is factored in’ (Sara, p.23).

Aside from in John’s workplace it appears that action towards nurturing opportunities for disabled actors is only recently gaining momentum in directors’ day-to-day practice. Sue describes recent change towards making auditions accessible to Deaf and disabled people. She says, ‘we always now audition in accessible spaces, which we never used to do actually […] even this time last year I was still auditioning in spaces with stairs’ (p.21). Sue mentions actioning ‘really simple practical things’, learnt in work with actors, giving the example that when ‘auditioning Deaf actors you need to have a music stand so the script can go on that and they can sign’ (p.21). It is unclear if improved access in auditions is Sue’s choice or a by-product of her being in a theatre linked to targeted initiatives with disabled performers. Sue shares tips like those Sealey refers to as ‘simple’ (2017), practical recommendations to ensure accessibility that have been key learning for her. She seems keen to pass these on, even to me during the interview process, to share this as tools for good practice. Mark, Sue, Sara and John imply changes to environments and structures in their workplaces have led to increased engagement with disabled people. Sue, like others notes, ‘we know many more disabled actors than we did four years ago’ (p.19), a significant shift in her lived experience.

John is more blatant about how his learning from disability directly impacts casting decisions and is powerful in nurturing a workplace culture that is open to disabled performers. He explains:

> You know that phrase that um disabled performers use about nothing about us without us, and that really… after my experience of working with disabled performers that really became strong for me, like there was no chance of people cripping-up to do a performance in a […] show that had a disabled character in it (John, p. 12).

‘Nothing about us without us’ is a mantra for the disability rights movement and common rhetoric in disability studies, emphasising disabled people must be valued as contributors in every sector (Charlton, 2000). In theatre, this appears powerful in John’s approach to environmental and structural change, impacting recruitment and casting processes in his workplace. John implies he will no longer cast a non-disabled person as a disabled character. This is not itself rare, as previously mentioned ‘cripping-up’ is widely acknowledged as unacceptable (Shaban, 2015; Ryan, 2015). Tim expresses this as key learning for him also; he explains his casting decisions are now driven by, ‘my own conscience *(laughs)*’ and ‘[a disabled practitioner] shouting in my ear, you better not let someone crip up on that stage err *(laughs)’* (p.14). Tim also suggests this has motivated recent action to cast actors who define as disabled in his productions whether the roles are specified as disabled characters in the script or not.

John’s effort towards change extends even further, he seems tactical in pursuing opportunity to cast disabled people in major roles and flagship shows in his theatre. In one of many examples of action taken in this way, he reflects how, ‘we were very happily able to organise the bolts of the jigsaw so that [an actor with a physical impairment] could play [the lead role], which he did’ (John, p.14). He adds, ‘this is a really big show for us […] the one we sell the most tickets for […] it’s really important that disabled actors get the opportunity to play in those kinds of shows’ (John, p.25). As a non-disabled person, John implies a sense of allyship with the disabled community, which is supported by his efforts to promote talent and challenge perceptions of disabled actors in theatre. John’s approach reflects Kuppers’ view that:

> I do not think that disability culture is closed to non-disabled allies […]. To me, disability culture is not a thing, but a process […] disability cultural environments can suspend a whole slew of rules, try to undo the history of exclusions [and…] safeguard against perpetuation or erecting other exclusions (2011, p.4).

John seems to be developing an organisational structure that values disabled people in prominent roles and ensures accessibility as standard practice. His comments suggest he is pressing towards a workplace culture, where casting disabled people becomes ‘a no brainer’ (Fraser, 2017b). He also describes nurturing this in others in the industry, talking about ‘mentoring’ another director ‘through that process […] that was a really big deal for them’ (John, p.12).

These are just a few examples of how some director-participants describe learning from disability is implemented in personal practice and workplaces in a tangible way. Still, it is also recognised that a lack of social model thinking or contact with disabled people is a cause of inaction for others. Jack, David, Lucas and Simon show minimal understanding of disability as anything other than impairment being a barrier to participation, a medical model perspective (Oliver and Barnes, 2012, p.11). Describing his understanding of disability in the context of theatre, Jack believes it is, ‘impairment […] that complicates […] ability to fully have access to the performing arts’ (p.3). David’s response is similar, saying:

> to be disabled hmm is to be looking at the world in a slightly different way from *(pause)* […] very quickly we start to get into difficulties with language *(laughs)* […] there are different needs […] to enable them to do what everybody else does (p.3).

For Lucas *disability* means, ‘you are not able to do something someone else does […] like blind or deaf actors […] your gut reaction is they cannot see hence they cannot do this’ (p.6). Simon’s first response to questioning what the term *disabled* means to him is, ‘oh gosh, um would you read that one again, sorry’ (p.7).

Simon goes on to describe, ‘to be disabled I suspect is to be living in a world where um it’s exceptionally challenging to do with how one is treated and the opportunities one's given' (p.7). It seems this question catches Simon off-guard, again exposing his struggle articulating disability views. Simon shows some understanding of disability as a societal issue, although this may be something he avoids responding to, as will be discussed. Still, predominantly these directors attribute blame for lack of participation in theatre to 'a problem population who possess conditions needing amelioration or cure' (Sandahl and Auslander, 2005, p.7). Outside of ACE's push for diversity in theatre, lack of social model thinking absolves directors from responsibility to change thinking, values, routine practice, or workplace environments (Kuppers, 2017, p.9). In terms of negotiating calls to increase the representation of disabled people in theatre this is problematic. These directors seem conscious of a gap in their knowledge and least comfortable articulating disability views. Moreover, they are less empowered by social responsibility to effect change, having less cause for nurturing disability consciousness in their practice or organisations.

Like others, David is keen to describe access solutions in his workplace. These are witnessed rather than driven by him in the way implied by directors like John and Sara. His learning from disability does seem to cause a reassessment of who he believes can work in his theatre but seems yet to impact action to make this possible. He describes a recent success story that challenges his perceptions in this way, saying:

> for a long time, we felt that this building was not accessible um it was built in the 1970s […] then we started working with a disabled artist and we were very concerned because we thought, I don't actually know how we're going to able to physically get them on to the main stage, it's actually not possible […] but we spent a long time reimagining […] and I think we found some really interesting solutions (David, p.4).

David moves between use of 'we' and 'I' in this comment, seeming to shift blame for presuming it is impossible for a disabled person to work in his theatre between himself and his organisation. He goes on to give an example of, 'very simple things that we came up with together […] how to open doors […] in a wheelchair […] she couldn't actually physically get to the handle […] we came up with kind of a rope system' (p.11). Although individual theatre buildings present specific accessibility challenges, he appears to recognise his own tendency to problematise impairment as a barrier also. David notes, ‘the instinct is to say, this isn’t possible, and to blame something’ (p.4), adding, ‘the danger is there’s always an excuse’ (p.11).

In a similar way to Felix’s seeming lack of response to learning from disability in ongoing work (p.29), David implies a tokenistic approach to accessibility. He admits, ‘at the moment we’re probably more reactive’ (p.18), suggesting the access solutions he described responded to a specific situation, implemented by ‘an access manager’ not himself (p.11). However, it does seem he is becoming conscious that excuses, blaming theatre buildings, and claims of impossibility are less acceptable in the industry, that he is behind the curve in this. David refers to awareness that, ‘the creative industries are beginning… well and for some time, have realised that it’s not a… a problem it… it is an opportunity’ (p.7). He recognises, ‘people […] are making that shift’ (David, p. 6). These excuses are also contrary to what he witnessed is possible in his workplace. Towards the end of his interview David offers what appears a more honest description of his current position in making it ‘more feasible for somebody to work with us more regularly’, saying:

> I don’t think we’re… we’re there yet, that it’s *(pause)* it’s not a non-issue yet […] if we’re going to employ a disabled actor, it does require us to think very carefully and adjust working processes […] in a way that isn’t straightforward (p.33).

In contrast to Simon, having a story to tell and witnessing workplace and industry change seems to offer David the safety to name his own thought processes and position regarding disability in theatre. For him, this may be a step towards being able to reimagine work with disabled people in his theatre as a long-term possibility.

The idea of being not there yet is replicated in responses from other director-participants regarding gaps in their knowledge and accessibility in their workplaces. For David, Jack and Simon these gaps and insufficiencies are expressed as reasoning for resistance to working with disabled people in practice. As noted in the previous subtheme, Simon reveals disability is ‘the area that me, my staff […] most people we work with […] have the least handle on’ (p.32). The reasoning he seems to give for this is, ‘I feel in regard to disability it’s so specialist’, implying work with disabled people requires skills that are out of his reach and those he works with (Simon, p.32). Simon also explains, ‘I wish I had more training’, suggesting this is considered a bridge from inaction to working with disabled people more (p.26). Like Simon, Jack repeatedly refers to his need to be ‘sufficiently trained’ (p.9; p.16). It seems he also considers work with disabled people in theatre as specialist practice, currently unreachable for him. As mentioned in discussing disability consciousness, Jack draws attention to gaps in his knowledge around, ‘practicalities, access, um the realities of what it means to have disability in the rehearsal room’ (p.18). He states, ‘before I did cast, I would like to feel sufficiently trained as to […] how you rehearse […] I have no idea frankly’ (Jack, p.10). Jack implies this perceived insufficiency is his reasoning for not being able to, ‘address that inequality of access’ (p.5) or cast a ‘disabled artist’ (p.16). In terms of learning being reflected in action towards increasing diversity in theatre, it seems Jack’s and Simon’s knowledge gaps translate in their practice and organisations as distance from and resistance to engagement with disabled people.

As with directors’ diverse responses to addressing accessibility on and off stage, there are those who appear to respond to gaps in learning proactively and others who imply even nurturing their personal disability consciousness is someone else’s responsibility. Where learning is lacking, director-participants expressing a proactive response to disability in their practice point to where expertise can be found in companies like Graeae and the ROTM initiative. Tim describes, Graeae are a godsend for this (p.32), and Sue asserts it is common sense that ‘you learn from people who’ve done it before’ (p.22). ROTM is perhaps an obvious starting point to learn from others, as Sara explains:

> I’ve watched all of the ROTM productions […] What I always find when I'm watching those productions, me as a kind of individual director, I sit […] thinking how would I do this, like actually how can my practice change to both be more accessible in terms of working with more disabled artists, but also the creative access element of those productions (p.19).

Sara expresses openness to continued learning from others. Even as an audience member it seems she challenges her own thinking about how accessibility can be improved in practice. Referring to the possibility of working with actors with a range of impairments, Sara speaks of needing to ‘give myself the best chance of being kind of match fit’ (p.20). She describes plans to learn British Sign Language, ‘to kind of top that up’ to ‘get myself prepared really’ (Sara, p.21). Despite already pressing for change in casting and accessibility within her organisation, she perceives room to increase her engagement with disabled people. She expresses this as dissatisfaction with her current position, suggesting a need to be more proactive in nurturing personal disability consciousness as part of ‘keeping on pushing myself as an artist’ (Sara, p.40).

A need for ongoing learning may be recognised by directors at all levels of experience with disability; however, there is a distinction between those who pursue this and those assuming learning will be deposited in a way that requires no effort from them. Jack seems to fit the latter. It is remarkable that having had Graeae work in his theatre, and hosting or attending its training, Jack feels he has learnt so little; he perceives significant gaps in understanding disability and accessibility. Graeae seem part of Jack’s organisational success story but, unlike David, he seems unable to name a process of learning from what was witnessed through this experience. Jack remarks on, ‘buying into their expertise and abilities as a disabled-led company’ (p.3). Also, referring to a disabled person newly employed in his workplace, Jack notes he is waiting to see, ‘what they will come up with (p.6); he adds, ’they are the motor […] to change’ (p.7). Even with the prospect of working with a disabled colleague in his workplace, Jack shows no intention or sense of responsibility to develop his own learning around disability. Instead, he speaks of needing to be, ‘given the skills to… to do it’ (p.5), a perception that aligns with Simon’s sense of wanting to be forced into a response (pp.30-31).

It seems relevant that neither Jack, David, Lucas or Simon say they have watched a ROTM production. They present as being least comfortable talking about disability in theatre among participants and most conscious of gaps in understanding. All but Lucas specify difficulty knowing how to approach accessibility issues, but even as audience members, like Sara, they are not pursuing what seem to be obvious routes to learning. Jack (p.10) and Lucas (p.15) say they have never heard of ROTM. I outline the initiative to them during the interview. It is difficult to believe, and extraordinary, that as directors in senior roles in NPO theatres they have avoided any awareness of such a major theatre initiative; ROTM has the largest ever grant as part of ACE's strategic touring programme (Hutchinson, 2015a), and was awarded Best Touring Production 2017 for *The Who's Tommy* by the leading theatre and performing arts membership organisation (UK Theatre, no date; ROTM, 2018). It seems even when obvious opportunities to nurture disability consciousness are available to directors these can be either grasped or avoided.

Just as choice is a factor in directors' experiences of becoming disability conscious and positioning this with professional identity, nurturing disability consciousness requires personal motivation. It is recognised not all ACE's most highly funded theatres are involved in ROTM, only four out of twelve directors in this study are based in participating theatres. As such, it can be assumed that opportunity to learn from disability is more readily available to some. Still, Dawn's approach to nurturing disability consciousness demonstrates that when obvious sources of expertise or training are lacking, routes to learning can be sought. Dawn conveys a similar position to Jack, Simon, Lucas and David in terms of understanding disability. She attempts to define the term *disabled* with a similar apologetic difficulty, describing, 'I don't know what the right phrase is err um […] I'm really woolly um *(pause… whispers question to herself)* I guess, yeah, but your body doesn't work in the same way as the mainstream expects' (Dawn, p.9). Dawn adds, 'I don't have very much experience working with disabled actors' (p.47), implying gaps in learning and no mention of Graeae or ROTM in her workplace. However, Dawn is not inactive, she describes effort to develop her learning and experience. She notes finding, 'other people who have done that in order to get some tips', doing 'a lot of googling', speaking with other practitioners and companies, and connecting with an arts charity that supports Deaf and disabled performers (Dawn, p.13). Dawn identifies, 'I guess myself […] have done quite a lot of research' (p.25). Dawn has cast a Deaf actor in her upcoming production, is beginning to connect with disabled actors more, and seems to be driving changes to make auditions and casting processes accessible in her theatre (p.22). It is not her learning, but her actions that have necessitated a process of change, seeking out ways to bridge gaps in personal development and accessibility in her workplace.

Having considered directors' experiences and views of nurturing disability consciousness, it seems important to re-examine Taylor's view that it is a myth, 'that it requires particular skills and experience to work with D/deaf and disabled people' (2017). Findings discussed here suggest there are skills, knowledge, and experiences that make increased connection with disabled people possible for directors in practice. There is obvious correlation between knowledge of the social model of disability and director-participants' proactivity towards increasing opportunities for disabled people in theatre. Experiences and training with disabled artists and companies are powerful in nurturing disability conscious environments and cultures; this has moved directors like John to adopt a tactical approach to ensuring disabled people are part of routine practice on and off stage. Mark's and Sara's specific experiences of witnessing inaccessibility in theatre buildings have fed into a process of long-term change in their workplaces. Also, as Sue suggests, 'simple' (Sealey, 2017) tips have opened her auditions to a wider range of actors. In this way, findings here support the initial aims of ROTM, suggesting value in empowering directors with knowledge and skills 'for participation' (2018). It seems unlikely Taylor's (2017) comment, or Sealey's remark that it is 'simple' to audition disabled people (2017), is intended to belittle benefits or processes of learning from disability that might lead to action such as those uncovered here. It is likely they intend to highlight that lack of skills, training or knowledge should not be an excuse for inaction, nor a reason to abandon responsibility for the representation of disabled people as 'best left to those who know how' (Taylor, 2017).

Practical, proactive responses to nurturing disability consciousness in theatre described by director-participants here support Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl's opinion that 'commitment to include everyone is not easy' (2007, p.232). My findings suggest personal effort and motivation are required from directors in pressing for personal and organisational change. Some directors in this study are far from being 'there yet' (David, p.33). As Taylor also states, belief that disability is 'so specialist' (Simon, p.32) 'supports inaction because organisations are waiting to be sure they can get it right before they do anything' (2017). This is evidenced in my findings and discussed further in the next chapter. Not being there yet remains a chosen route of protection from feeling a need to respond to ACE's strategy around disability for some. The belief that working with disabled people is the domain of specialists appears most destructive in contributing to what is or is not happening in theatre practice. But this opinion should not be assumed of all theatre directors as is often the case in public discourse; this is revealed as a minority view in findings here. Dissatisfaction with levels of engagement with disabled people in theatre is more prominent among directors in this study and is provoking proactive effort to effect change. There are signs that those 'singing all of this change' are reflecting it their work (Sara, p.20). Specialist skills and experience should not be considered a requirement for action; nevertheless, directors here with a genuine desire to nurture disability consciousness by learning from others are facilitating greater movement towards accessibility and openness to casting disabled actors in practice.

7.4 Reflection on Disability Consciousness

There is in a sense a new metanarrative of disability written by ACE for directors to negotiate, which is made explicit in this superordinate theme. Disability scholars have long-noted the story defining disabled people in theatre as the 'frequent assumption that disability cancels out other qualities' and 'immediate invocation' of historical tropes and stereotypes (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Bolt, 2014). But looking in detail at directors' lived experiences of grappling more or less with ways of making sense of disability in their awareness and professional practice, an external metanarrative promoting change is added. The prominent story defining disabled people in theatre among directors here assumes: an expectation of working together; requirements of disability knowledge and understanding; the ability to solve access issues; and action towards wider industry change. Themes in this chapter have revealed the complex makeup of director-participants' experiences in this; what is happening when external metanarrative, outside-in influences, impact an inside-out view of intrapersonal and interpersonal processes of engagement with disability.

This collision of familiar stories of disability and a new call to action is experienced by director-participants as they encounter disabled people as theatre professionals in auditions, rehearsals, training settings, onstage, and as co-workers.

Findings in this chapter have exposed how these encounters bring personal and organisational insufficiencies to the fore in their thinking, highlighted disability but not always prompting action. Rather than assume directors working in NPO theatres are ready for action, this chapter points to stages of change in their thinking and behaviour around disability, which diversity targets may not allow for. Processes and stages of change set out by Prochasha and DiClemente (1983), suggest director-participants' responses to disability represent stages of: 'precontemplation', avoiding changes in thinking and behaviour; 'contemplation', thinking seriously about change; and 'action', commitment to making change happen. Based on this model of change, directors here are in the process of 'consciousness raising', gathering information from disability, which for some this has led to: 'self-liberation', telling themselves it is possible to work with disabled people; 'self-reevaluation', feeling dissatisfied with personal views and approaches to disability in practice; 'environmental reevaluation', considering disabling aspects of their workspace; and 'helping relationships', having companies and individuals who support and advise them in changes they are making (Prochasha and DiClemente, 1983).

In this way, what Garland-Thomson describes as 'potential for continuing relations' with disabled people in theatre remains diverse among directors in this study (1997, p.12). This chapter has highlighted disability consciousness as a live dynamic, changing through increasingly frequent encounters with disability in theatre. What moves one director, like John, to casting disabled actors and not another, like Simon who seems to feel stuck in this process, is unclear. Still, this superordinate theme has made it possible to identify assumptions and responses to disability that are damaging and beneficial in this. There is value in disability consciousness being viewed as part of directors' professional development, in terms of learning from disability and about accessibility (ROTM, 2018); disability training is valued by directors here as part of a process of change in this way. However, where change is actioned most disability consciousness is sparked in working with disabled people; ACE's attention on increasing workforce representation of disabled people and its funded initiatives are powerful in this way. Moreover, significant change is happening where directors are placing value on lasting relationships, not on acquiring new skills or momentary fulfilment. This appears to be where disability and ACE's strategy moves from being 'a set of problems', to a relationship and personal agenda that is integral to the process of theatre-making itself (Finkelstein, 1990, p.1). In the next chapter discussion around assumptions of roles, casting, and aesthetics adds to findings here, detailing further the 'potential for continuing relations' with disabled people in directors' day-to-day practice (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p.12).

Chapter Eight - Narratives of Caution and Confidence

'The thing that's worth mentioning is the err lack of confidence that can err, fear isn't quite the right word, but a sort of caution and a, "oh I've never done this before"' (Sue, p.13)

This second superordinate theme emerging from directors' interview responses explores assumptions and lived experiences of theatre practice with disabled actors in more detail. It points to how ACE's diversity strategy is negotiated alongside their perceptions of the relevance of impairment in rehearsal and performance and approaches to exploring new territory. It considers what directors here view as potential pitfalls of working with disabled actors regarding representation, accessibility, aesthetics, and ethics. Narratives of caution and confidence discussed in this chapter also reveal director-participants' views and experiences of criticism, resilience, vulnerability, and hierarchy in relation to working with disabled actors in rehearsals. Three subthemes structure the discussion, these are, *Managing Assumptions of Impairment in Performance*, *Presumptions of Error in Rehearsals*, and *Transparency and Communication with Actors*.

Public discourse surrounding the underrepresentation of disabled people in theatre has promoted a widely held assumption that fear is the most common response to disability in theatre among directors. For example, actor Lisa Hammond asserts that creative practitioners are afraid of employing disabled people for several reasons including, 'feeling they might get it "wrong" […] or that the story would have to be centred around the impairment', 'how audiences might react […and] what "statement it would be making'' about the drama', and 'costs and access requirements' (2012). Gould also believes hesitancy to engage with disabled actors is due to, 'fear that audiences will not be attracted to the work, fear that we can get the access part of it wrong for the audiences, and fear that the work will not be very good. Fear over health and safety issues' (quoted in Hutchinson 2016c). This chapter adds detail to public views such as these by exploring how director-participants experience and respond to impairment and disability in practice. It offers a nuanced view of what for some director-participants may be interpreted as fear that remains a barrier to engagement with disability; but for others seems to be more calculated caution, more often experienced alongside growing confidence to explore non-traditional casting choices and increased accessibility in their practice.

Gould believes fear around disability in theatre has been costly in terms of limiting opportunity for disabled people in the industry (quoted in Hutchinson, 2016c). This chapter extends this view by considering how directors' presumptions of disability in theatre may also be costly to their practice. It draws attention to an unsettling intrapersonal dichotomy of caution and confidence for directors for whom exploration of new territory is believed to be fundamental to the process of theatre-making. Early in their interviews director-participants are quick to present an ethos in which openness and exploration are central to their practice. For example, Felix says 'what I've learnt over the years is to be really adaptable' (p.5). David states, 'a really good starting point of rehearsal is the director saying I'm not sure how we do this' (p.1). Dawn believes 'the rehearsal room should be a safe space in which dangerous things can happen' (p.6), and Simon asserts 'working outside your comfort zone […] that's the whole point, for me of theatre' (p.22). However, these views are not necessarily reflected in responses or approaches to work with disabled actors. Director-participants' personal perceptions of impairment and disability both prove and challenge their views on exploring new territory. How this is experienced in their practice is opened further in the discussion that follows.

Interpretation of impairment in literary narrative has been widely examined by disability scholars including Quayson in his book *Aesthetic Nervousness* (2007). His work offers insight relevant to narratives of caution and confidence examined in this chapter. Building upon Garland-Thomson's (1997) concepts of the normate's initial responses to impairment, Quayson refers to encounters between disabled and non-disabled people as 'a primal scene of extreme anxiety' (2007, p.17). Quayson explains, 'Aesthetic nervousness is seen when the dominant protocols of repetition within literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability' (2007, p.15). In this way, non-disabled dramatists' common impulse to manipulate narrative to restore order where encounters with disability cause anxiety, dissonance, or disorientation is highlighted (Quayson, 2007, p.15). Bolt's (2012) writing on *Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance* also seems relevant to directors' presumptions and work with actors discussed here. He examines how encounters between disabled and non-disabled people are 'duplicated in the academy' (Bolt, 2012, p.287). Like Quayson, Bolt acknowledges experiences of disability may cause friction, but also avoidance of critical engagement with disability in academic output. This work is referred to as appropriate, with 'aesthetic nervousness' and 'critical avoidance of disability' seeming relevant in considering how directors' narratives of caution and confidence are replicated in their practice (Quayson, 2007; Bolt, 2012).

8.1 Managing Assumptions of Impairment in Performance

This subtheme examines how director-participants' awareness of a call to increase engagement with disabled people in theatre is managed alongside personal assumptions of how impairment signifies in performance and connects with dramatic text. Relevant interview responses uncover narratives of caution and confidence among director-participants regarding casting disabled actors in scripted plays. These first open a brief overview of their experiences and assumptions of audiences, then expand on individuals' perceptions of writers' intentions for dramatic text and the impact of impairment on narrative and character. This part of the chapter then considers how director-participants' views on making non-traditional casting choices and challenging audiences' expectations are creatively managed in practice.

Director-participants convey varied assumptions about audiences' responses to non-traditional casting choices and interpretation of impairment in performance. In terms of audiences' familiarity with disabled people onstage, some like John believe 'it's improving rapidly […] there's real sea-change happening' (p.7). Sara remarks that 'visibility of actors who have physical disabilities […] that's definitely changing […] it's kind of a bit cool' (p.11). They imply a presumption of increased openness among audiences, and even kudos associated with casting disabled actors. John describes reactions to disabled performers in his theatre, saying, 'for the first two minutes they were going, oh God *(laughs)* I didn't expect all these strange shapes to be on the stage, and after that two minutes in they forgot about it' (p.9). It seems his assumption is, although audiences are drawn to impairment momentarily, they quickly adjust and accept disabled actors in any role; a view that is reflected in the confidence he conveys around employing disabled actors in prominent onstage roles in his theatre.

Tim and Sue describe mixed responses to impairment from audiences experienced in their practice. They acknowledge that a negative response to disabled actors in performance is possible, yet this does not seem to deter an open view of roles disabled people can play in their productions. For example, Tim elaborates on hostile reactions from audience members, 'that just said the most horrific things […] I did not want to see that […] this sort of thing is all well and good in the studio, but not in the main house' (pp.24-25). Sue also remembers, 'a patron who was outraged that there was an actor in a wheelchair' (p.18). Yet, this experience does not seem to dissuade her belief that 'anybody can, strictly speaking, play anything as long as they've […] got something in them […] that fires with the character' (Sue, p.25). Sue seems merely frustrated by this negative audience feedback, recalling her modest response in this case was, 'well, okay I just don't know what we can do for you *(laughs)*' (p.19). Tim also appears able to balance negative feedback with his more common experiences of audiences accepting disabled actors. He explains, 'I've also been in rooms and seen people go on journeys […] not because of [the actor's] disability, but because of their character's story […] I've seen people go on that journey much more than those shitty letters' (Tim, pp.25-26).

Director-participants express varying degrees of confidence and caution in discussing how audiences might respond to disabled actors and interpret impairment in their work. Anne and Tim seem unfazed by the idea of audiences interpreting impairment alongside dramatic text. They acknowledge that casting a disabled actor will raise questions about narrative and character but express easiness with this being part of the audiences' process of reading a performance. Anne explains:

> everything on stage is a sign of something […] I don't think you filter out a wheelchair at all […] you see it and you add that to […] whatever narrative you've built […] but I also I don't think we'd be bothered by it (p.36).

Like John, Anne acknowledges audiences are drawn to impairment, but this is not problematic. However, she does not assume 'they forget about it' (John, p.9); in line with Johnston's observations, she implies impairment will 'inform', 'enhance' and 'layer' the playing of a character in a classic text (2016, pp.83-88). It appears this view is shared by Tim, who not only seems at ease with impairment layering narrative but wants difference onstage to be recognised and interpreted as meaningful. He explains:

> I don't believe in […] blind casting, cause what we're doing is asking whoever that actor is to become the default human, I'm not gonna see your colour, I'll pretend you're white, I'm not gonna see your disability, I'll pretend you've got two legs. And I'm asking them to acknowledge my difference and what does it tell you now about this role, this part, this set of relationships […] if it's there for you to see then you should acknowledge it, cause like I say, everything you put on stage is a statement (Tim, pp.28-29).

There is little sense of caution regarding casting disabled actors implied in these comments from Anne, Tim, John or Sue. In some way their management of assumptions of how impairment signifies in performance bolsters openness and confidence to engage with disability in their practice. However, for others the presumption that casting might be questioned or perceived as a statement about disability is expressed as a problem, critique that should be avoided. David says if a disabled actor auditioned for his show he would 'want to take a view on that person as an actor […] in terms of any role that an actor couldn't play […] it's hard to imagine that there wouldn't be a solution' (p.23). Yet, this desire for openness does not seem mirrored in practice. David's assumption of audiences is expressed as a factor in his reasoning for this. He remarks, 'I think you'd probably still get the question "why was that actor in a wheelchair?" if you know… if that was not clearly a disabled role […] it's still worthy of comment' (p.27). Unlike directors' attitudes to audiences already mentioned, David implies this kind of query or critical engagement with disability is unwanted. Along with Lucas and Felix he opens conversation around why casting a disabled actor in a role not specified as a disabled character in a script is problematic for him in this way.

What Sealey points to as a common concern among directors, that if a character is played by disabled person ‘this means my play will suddenly become a disabled play’ (2017), resonates with David’s and Felix’s assumptions. David explains, ‘one of the challenges is that […] we don’t want to be saying this is a disability project’ (p.19). This remark seems to extend further than the belief that casting a disabled actor may layer dramatic text, instead suggesting this would place his work in a specialist category; a ‘project’ rather than performance (David, p.19). The fact that David has not seen ROTM’s productions, nor describes witnessing disabled actors playing roles traditionally viewed as non-disabled characters, seems relevant in this. It appears he is yet to experience disabled people’s onstage work that he feels is not focused on disability issues; he states, ‘being brutally honest […] it’s rare to see a disabled actor in… in a show that […] doesn’t have a specific disability focus’ (David, p.29).

David’s response also points to a common fear noted by Gould, that ‘audiences will not be attracted to the work’ (Hutchinson 2016c). Yet, he shows less concern about how to promote work with disabled actors and more about how he will be viewed as a director. It seems the idea of his work being regarded as a ‘disabled play’ is distasteful, having connotations of charity and diminished quality (Sealey, 2017). He adds:

> the worst thing, the worst thing you can do is…is try and put on something that’s worthy, where it’s about… it’s about the disability and it’s just trying to preach, or you know… that’s just gonna be dull art however you go about it (p.25).

This perception of theatre with disabled people as a form of charity is fiercely contested by disabled artists and companies like Graeae (Mühlemann, 2018; Graeae, no date). It links back to historical stereotypes of disabled people as ‘dependant’ and ‘pitiable’ (Barnes, 1992; Riddell and Watson, 2003). Yet, still seems at the forefront of David’s thinking regarding the implications of casting disabled actors in his work.

Like Tim and Anne, Felix believes audiences are drawn to impairment, but indicates this has negative connotations in terms of how his work is critiqued. Along with David, Felix appears to presume if he casts disabled actors in roles not specifying disability in the script, audiences will assume his work is about disability, rather than him having hired the best actor for the job. Although he directed an actor with a physical impairment in a classic role that does not specify impairment, this was as part of a long-term company. Felix suggests in a routine scenario this decision would be viewed differently. He states, 'if I had cast [name removed] in a standalone production […] it would have been perceived, I imagine, by the sort of critics and the world as "ah, it's the disabled [character name]"' (Felix, p.8). He reiterates, 'the trouble with our world, the way things are reported, and audiences think, then very quickly it will be "oh that's the disabled Hamlet"' (Felix, p.35). Again, the implication is attention drawn to impairment and audiences' interpretation of this is problematic for him personally.

Felix, David and Lucas all appear cautious of drawing attention to disability onstage, and, as Hammond noted was a common response to employing disabled actors, seem concerned what '"statement it would be making" about the drama' (2012). Bolt's label 'critical avoidance' connects with how this caution is managed in practice (2012). Expanding on his assumptions of audiences, Lucas implies casting a disabled actor is a brave move. Reflecting on watching a performance at the National Theatre, he remarks:

> the bravest thing I… I think when I saw [production title…] there was an actor who had a severe disability […] and I thought wow that is really… that is… that is… makes people feel uncomfortable probably as well, but it's very bold to go that route […] you immediately go through a different lens […] I'm sure there are people sitting in the audience going "what is this?" (Lucas, p.7).

Lucas expresses personal unease watching disabled actors onstage and suggests challenging audiences' comfort or expectations around disability is also avoided in his practice. He explains casting 'all depends on the text', and regarding casting disabled actors he notes, 'with these more traditional texts, I haven't done that' (Lucas, pp.18-19).

David also explains he would only consider disabled actors if this was ‘a key part, […] so for example […] the central character was blind, […] searching for somebody for that particular role’ (p.18). His vision for casting disabled people seems limited to roles specifying impairment. Acted on in practice, this avoids any need to question how impairment impacts dramatic text otherwise. Similarly, Felix presumes he avoided scrutiny over casting choices in the past, as critics understood he was limited to actors within a company (p.35). Regarding increasing opportunities for disabled actors in theatre, he explains, ‘the single biggest thing that would change it, I think, is long-term companies. Because then […] actors with disabilities are in all your shows without having to think about it’ (Felix, p.35). As his work is no longer company-based, this solution also seems to enable him to avoid critical engagement with disability and casting implications as part of his routine practice.

Considering ACE’s diversity strategy, ‘critical avoidance of disability’ in theatre practice is a problem (Bolt, 2012). Felix and Lucas acknowledge this as a personal dilemma in managing their assumptions of impairment in performance. Felix notes, ‘You know there’s always a thing clashing […] between the absolute recognition that disabled actors are underrepresented […] at the same time there’s another thing which is […] you can’t ignore the disability (p.13). Lucas also expresses how calls to increase opportunities for disabled actors sit uncomfortably with what he considers authentic casting choices, saying:

> It seems like there are two movements going on, one is do what the writer intended, so that means in Tennessee Williams you should not cast a black actor, […] probably that also refers to disability because you would say that’s not the authors intention so… But then the same time you have a very progressive political movement which says […] that’s just not right because we live in a society which is very diverse […] so, what do you do with that […] that needs to be reflected on our stages (Lucas, p.7)

Lucas’ and Felix’s dilemmas seem heightened by awareness of industry-wide disability agenda and their assumption, shared by David, that disabled people do not fit with what Fox terms ‘the theatrical normate’ (2016, p.122).

Explaining his views on casting in more detail, Felix remarks, ‘one of the barriers to properly representative casting is literalism […] our theatre tradition is that the writer writes the play, and the director and actors deliver the writer’s vision […] writers historically haven’t written disabled characters’ (p.15). Blame for underrepresentation seems shifted onto writers by Felix, and on the rigidity of theatre traditions. Lucas echoes this, saying, ‘What you encounter is a theatre tradition which is so routed in realism and um naturalism […] you have to justify why you cast someone with a disability because that’s not written in the text (p.7). These comments point to more than presumptions of directors’ freedom to interpret text beyond what is stated by playwrights, they imply a belief that casting disabled actors in roles not specifying impairment compromises the preferences of British audiences.

Quayson notes, ‘realism itself is a cultural construction’ (2007, p.20). As such, what directors consider realistic or authentic in performance most likely reflects personal views of what constitutes an ‘average citizen’ (Quayson, 2007, p.20). As Quayson examines historical approaches to literary narrative and disability, he explains, ‘the assumed representation of reality depended upon unacknowledged views of social order deriving not just from an understanding of class relations but from implicit hierarchization of corporeal differences’ (2007, p.20). An argument for ACE’s creative case for diversity and shift in strategy is recognising value in audiences experiencing theatre that accurately reflects their communities (ACE, 2013). The suggestion being that diverse casting enhances realism in performance rather than lessens it. However, if disability and impairment is experienced as something other than day-to-day reality by directors, it will not fit with their ‘assumed representation of reality’ onstage (Quayson, 2007, p.20). In the cases of Felix, Lucas and David it seems impairment is perceived as otherness, not celebrated in the way promoted by ACE, and, therefore, ‘demands an explanation’ (Garland-Thomson, 2000, p.334).

Sara describes moving away from feeling she should explain impairment in performance as her understanding and experience of disability increased. She remarks:

> disabled actors that I’ve worked with when I was quite a bit younger […] it really felt like we had to address this thing that they have a disability […] I’m kind of almost embarrassed when I look back […] it wouldn’t be a thing

> at all now like just be an actor on a stage, but actually we went through this stage where […] we had to justify why that person was playing that part (Sara, p.14).

Sara implies feeling no need to make a statement about disability, or to justify or disguise her choice to cast a disabled actor to appease audiences in any way. However, as Felix and Lucas expand on their experiences they suggest otherwise. They point to how presumptions of impairment and authenticity in performance have been managed creatively in their practice. Lucas explains:

> It is also the director's role, as I said I think you need to create a frame where you say very clearly this is the world we are in now and if you make that clear […] I think you help people with that. If you're casting purely for so called political reasons […] then I think you will struggle […] there is a responsibility that goes beyond the policy […] into an artistic framework one needs to provide (Lucas, p.23).

Lucas' idea of needing to create 'a frame' to 'help' audiences accept disabled actors connects with Quayson's description of 'aesthetic nervousness' (2007). Quayson notes how tensions experienced in encounters with disability 'persistently leads to the idea that the disabled body is somehow a cipher of metaphysical or divine significance' (2007, p.17). In this way, dramatists take an abstract approach to narrative and character in response to anxiety or disorientation experienced when encountering disability (Quayson, 2007, p.15). This leaning is evident as Lucas and Felix describe directing disabled people. Lucas explains his approach to staging, saying, 'we cast actors who I would say were slightly different, but we gave them massive masks […] so it was abstracted' (p.11). Working with a deaf actor, Felix describes staging choices that 'heightened everything because it wasn't trying to be real […] nothing was real, or nothing was naturalistic' (Felix, p.13). Directing an actor with a physical impairment, Felix's staging, 'stripped layers and layers away […] where it's almost like the production is saying [the actor…] she's […] not [character name…] but I'm presenting the character' (pp.8-9).

Taking a fresh approach to staging is surely part of being creative as a director and possibly a factor motivating the choices these directors made. However, they also suggest assumptions of impairment were managed in this way. Lucas explains using masks was a response to parts of the narrative he felt were ‘tricky’ or ‘sensitive’ around disability (p.11). It seems abstract staging covered his nervousness around issues of representation. Felix describes the motivation for his choices, saying, ‘if you shift the language, where you go this is not trying to be absolute naturalism, it’s not literalism […] then people go “yeah, great, I accept that”’ (p.36). It appears his choices covered his nervousness that audiences might question the casting of disabled actors and the relevance of impairment to their roles, which for Felix seems unwanted critique. In this way, caution around the signification of impairment in performance is costly for these directors. Not only is a response to ACE’s strategy inhibited by critical avoidance of disability, in scenarios where they have worked with disabled people it complicates their creative choices. As Gould recognised, directors’ ‘fear’ or caution is also costly to actors, it limits casting opportunities (Hutchinson, 2016c); but in the case of Felix, it seems caution that avoids critical engagement with disability to the point where a play is merely ‘presenting the character’ also strips away the actor’s opportunity to tackle well known roles in any realistic manner (Felix, p.9).

As mentioned in the literature review, Siebers predicts disability will ‘exert even greater power over art in the future’, and so, ‘it is worth asking how the presence of disability requires us to revise traditional conceptions of aesthetic production and appreciation’ (2010, pp.10-11). Considering participants’ responses here, it seems any revision of traditional approaches to disability in theatre by directors only reflects their personal assumptions of impairment in performance. Anne, Tim, Sue and John express openness to challenging traditional casting and production approaches, linked with a belief that audiences adjust and appreciate disabled actors and the roles they play. They recognize impairment may give multiple readings of narrative and character onstage, which they seem open and confident to engage with. However, as responses from Lucas, Felix and David have dominated discussion around this subtheme, it is also apparent how directors’ caution around impairment can overshadow any challenge of tradition. They still seem to experience impairment in performance as surprising, uncomfortable, pitiable, or second-rate. Their responses reflect limited vision for actors or for audiences to interpret their work through an alternative lens. Increasing engagement with disability in theatre presents challenges for these directors that they struggle to confront in practice. A text-by-text approach that only considers disability if specified by a playwright or a one-off project, enables critical avoidance of disability in their day-to-day practice (Bolt, 2012). However, this subtheme has exposed this position is uncomfortable and costly; Felix, Lucas and David seem torn between necessity to increase engagement with disability and perceived need to mitigate against unwanted and unmanageable critique of their work. This distances them from their own belief that openness and exploration is an integral part of theatre-making, and from the new territory they see other directors connecting with across the industry.

8.2 Presumptions of Error in Rehearsal

Narratives of caution and confidence also uncover director-participants' experiences and assumptions of working with disabled people in rehearsal. Rather than focusing on how impairment is interpreted by others in performance, this subtheme shifts attention to how they perceive approaches to rehearsal impact disabled people and reflect on them as directors. As director-participants describe theatre practice they point to personal error and finding solutions as an inevitable part of the rehearsal process. However, they also highlight perceived pitfalls associated with rehearsing with disabled people; these relate to how directors interpret their own ability to meet accessibility requirements and danger of causing offence or discomfort to actors. Interview responses discussed here reveal contrasting attitudes towards error around disability. Some directors imply a focus on avoiding what they imagine could go wrong, whilst others make it possible to consider value given to experiencing error in rehearsals, and how this develops their confidence and practice with disabled people.

There is common recognition in media and disability studies that fear about getting things wrong can debilitate exploration of new territory regarding disability in theatre. In her chapter on *Staging Inclusion* Johnston refers to a symposium on accessibility aimed at theatre practitioners with the title 'Being Alright with Getting it Wrong' (2016, p.69). Johnston notes motivation behind this was acknowledgment from policymakers that, ‘moving forward with an inclusive and accessible arts community means a change in practice, being alright with sometimes getting it wrong along the way’ (2016, p.69). This resonates with responses to working with disabled people in rehearsal revealed in my findings also, the suggestion being some theatre makers find it easier to adapt practice for disabled actors than others. Also, whilst some directors in this study interpret ‘challenges and errors along the way’ as positive experiences, for others, presumptions of error in rehearsal are a barrier to engagement with disabled people (Johnston, 2016, p.70). In a similar way, describing the creation of *ProFile*, Bevan, who led its development, reveals:

> we learned a lot in the process - not only about the practical elements of access requirements, communication, language and so on, but about our own assumptions, prejudices and fears about getting things wrong. We began to understand that the latter had proven historically as much of a barrier to the inclusion of many of these actors in our industry as the former (2017).

As we consider how directors in this study interpret error in lived experience of theatre practice and disability, detail is added to this wider view of a struggle to adapt practice and risk mistakes in doing so. Narratives of caution and confidence overviewed here get under the surface of what is shaping the views of directors who are ‘alright with sometimes getting it wrong’ and those who are not (Johnston, 2016, p.69).

Just as encounters with disability may increase directors’ confidence to work with disabled people, it seems these can heighten caution about what rehearsals might entail. With less experience of disability in theatre than some, Jack, Lucas and Simon point to how watching performances or stories heard in the workplace contribute to presumptions of error in rehearsal. It seems caution of not supporting disabled actors sufficiently influences openness to exploring new territory in practice. Jack’s perceived need to be ‘sufficiently trained’ (p.9; p.16) was discussed in the previous chapter. Gaps in knowledge were noted as a reason for resistance to work with disabled people. Like Simon, Jack conveys a view of disability being ‘so specialist’ (Simon, p.32); a view that supports inaction, ‘waiting to be sure they get it right before they do anything’ (Taylor, 2017). These presumptions continue to be relevant here. Jack refers to rehearsals being ‘much more daunting’ (p.19), saying ‘as a director I don’t quite know or I’m nervous about the practice’ (p.4).

Asked about strategies or initiatives around disability in theatre and how these are impacting him, Jack recalls being ‘at a big conference […] and there was a disabled artist who was talking about their experiences’ (p.6). Jack relays a story from this, shedding light on where his presumptions of error have emerged. He recalls:

> It was very simple that the lift broke down […] it was impossible for him to get to the rehearsal room to erm do the work err, and that sort of *(pause)* detail of what is involved and what is catastrophic in that context […] because our lift broke down when I was last in rehearsal […] but we were all able-bodied so we could all traipse up […] it is utterly impossible if you were in a wheelchair, you just couldn’t get to the rehearsal (Jack,pp.6-7).

This story of a broken lift appears to have lasting impact on how Jack perceives the risk of failed accessibility. Jack interprets how this could translate as error in his rehearsals, and in response explains his plan going forward is ‘to focus on things that are practical and simple’ (p.7). He repeatedly uses the term ‘simple’ to refer to accessibility issues (Jack, pp.6-8). Just as Sealey refers to accessibility as ‘simple’ (2017), he implies basic access requirements, such as a working lift, are straightforward. However, Jack interprets ‘detail’ also (p.7); it seems what stands out in his thinking are wider implications of getting access wrong. Jack’s use of the term ‘catastrophic’ implies a presumption of extreme damage caused in a situation like this, which it seems is responded to with extreme caution (p.7). This story seems to raise a question echoed in responses from Lucas and Simon, *what if this happens to me*?

Asked to think of an image that captures his views on ACE’s diversity strategy, Jack’s story of the broken lift is revisited and reframed. This time referred to as:

> That story of entering an organisation with passion and drive and then becoming completely thwarted for a simple, stupid thing you know that took weeks to rectify, probably not through the theatre’s fault you know ours was out for weeks (Jack, p.8).

The broken lift seems to act as a symbol that personifies error for Jack, a wrong that cannot be hidden because it took so long to mend. Jack conveys empathy with the theatre’s position and suggests this story has bearing on his response to ACE’s strategy, or lack of response. His interpretation here suggests ‘nervous[ness] about the practice’ extends beyond accessibility (Jack, p.4); Jack raises the issue of blame for mistakes and damage caused to the actor (p.8). It seems to overcome caution of getting things wrong Jack requires more than practical know-how or a reliable lift (p.4). Describing what working effectively with disabled actors in rehearsals might look like for him, he lists the following:

> The right conditions […] sufficient self-confidence in my dealings with them as a director […] that I’m being appropriate […] considerate […] really understand the hurdles. […] I would want the whole company to buy into it […] or the able-bodied actors start getting frustrated that the […] time is being taken up. […] that I’m completely confident that I’m not trampling on, not misunderstanding […] providing the conditions to genuinely make it a creative experience’ (Jack, pp.17-18).

This list adds detail to personal sufficiency and assurances that Jack thinks are beyond him currently and are conditional to casting disabled people. It seems Jack is describing his ideal scenario, aspects that would make up ‘the right conditions’, building towards imagined perfection (p.17). Speaking about how disability compares to working with other minority groups, Jack makes clear, ‘I don’t feel like I’m really on top of it […] so, it’s self-defeating unless it’s a glorious […] successful enterprise, otherwise I’m just not interested, cause I think you can do more harm than good’ (p.19). It is possible Jack’s view of perfection enables avoidance of disability in practice. It is also possible that what is ‘self-defeating’ is not just having the right conditions, but that Jack’s psychological process of imagining these has created immobility. Jack begins his interview saying his preferred approach to rehearsal is ‘though trial and error’ (p.2). Yet, wanting to be ‘completely confident’ and assured of success suggests he is unable to apply this approach to disabled actors (Jack, pp.18-19).

Presumptions of error in rehearsal are also uncovered by Lucas and Simon as they recall watching or hearing about the work of other directors. Like Jack, it seems their experiences influence views on the kind of support disabled actors require in rehearsals and whether this is pursued. Reflecting on ‘the first time I’ve ever seen an actor with Down’s syndrome onstage’ Simon points to a host of questions raised for him, saying:

> Being really honest […] it’s a really complex thing to talk about […] what was very complex in this situation is that the subject matter of the play was… was about a relationship between someone who was non-Down’s and someone who was Down’s asking real questions about the ethics of that […] and you were in constant awareness […] the health of that performer was paramount […] is that person safe […] has all due care been taken to their experience of […] the rehearsals of it […] really, really necessary questions, and became really necessary questions when […] you’re there as someone […] to go “could we put this on? […] I suppose one looks at one’s own implicitness in that situation (pp.15-17).

Simon implies personal unease with themes explored in the play. It appears the narrative challenged stereotypical portrayals of disabled people as asexual that have been prominent in dramatic text historically (Barnes, 1992; Shakespeare, 1996). It is possible this unsettled Simon’s own assumptions of disabled people and drew attention to issues of disability representation. He adopts a genuine and complex position that perhaps feels superior, protective, and compassionate; this may also mask or protect Simon from engaging with personal discomfort around disability. Nonetheless, he presses that the safety or well-being of the actor was prominent in his thinking; it is caution about the ‘health’ of the actor, whether they are ‘safe’ and if ‘due care’ was taken in rehearsals that Simon implies forced the decision not to pursue involvement in this production (p.16). Simon repeats these are ‘really necessary questions’, implying they are relevant to continued consideration of disability in his practice (p.16).

Questioning ‘one’s own implicitness’ suggests Simon is also cautious of how decisions around disability reflect on him, that his work might be perceived as insensitive or inappropriate (p.17). Simon’s responses support this interpretation as he recalls another director’s work being critiqued in this way, saying:

> I heard about a production with a disabled actor where people were very concerned about the jokes were being made at the expense of that actor, character […] I remember a lot of people being really uncomfortable about

> it […] I didn't see it […] that was something that I heard a lot… a lot from audience members who felt there wasn't due care taken (p.17).

Simon seems awkward about discussing a production he did not attend, still, like Jack's lift, this story appears to have left a lasting impression on him. Again, the question of whether 'due care' was taken in considering the actor's experience is raised (Simon, p.16; p.19). This query seems to shape Simon's presumption of how rehearsals with disabled actors must be prepared for, which is discussed later.

Similar questions spring to mind for Lucas when watching disabled actors; he asks, 'have they got the tools', 'is it also exploiting' 'are they framed enough or are they protected enough' (Lucas, p.8). Reflecting again on watching an actor with a physical impairment at the National Theatre, Lucas remarks, 'I felt this is very bold and it's really bold […] but is the actor as well, is he protected enough or am I constantly thinking about his disability' (p.8). Lucas appears to query the resilience of the actor, presuming, like Simon, there is additional protection or care required. He seems to connect his own fixation with the actor's impairment, with presumed discomfort or exploitation. Lucas' view that casting a disabled actor is a 'bold' choice for directors, raised in the previous subtheme, is reiterated here (p.7; p.8). It also seems he questions if challenges to audiences' expectations add to pressure placed on the actor. Like Jack, Lucas indicates this also has bearing on his response to diversity policy. He explains:

> if you want to […] cast disabled actors in your production you need to think about them […] not just […] cast because that's a policy now, but what does […] that experience [do] for this person, this actor, you don't wanna stretch someone (Lucas, p.6).

It is questionable who might feel stretched by this process, the actor or Lucas himself.

Presumptions of error in rehearsal highlighted by Jack, Lucas and Simon do raise caution that may be considered essential in terms of increasing opportunities for disabled people in theatre. It is unlikely any director in this study would disagree that rehearsal spaces must be accessible, that representation needs negotiating sensitively, or that the well-being of actors is important. However, it also seems important to consider alternative ways of reading assumptions that disabled people have ‘special, more, or different vulnerabilities that set them apart from non-disabled people’ (Leach Scully, 2014, p.206). Concepts of vulnerability are critiqued by disability scholars who acknowledge increased vulnerability can be fundamental to factors of impairment itself or social disadvantage; however, as noted in chapter six, it is also recognised this can be shaped by prejudice and misunderstanding (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2014).

Leach Scully observes, ‘a tendency on the part of the non-disabled to extrapolate a genuine vulnerability in one area of a disabled person’s life (e.g., physical weakness […]) to a globally increased vulnerability over the entirely of that person’s life’ (2014, p.209). In the case of Lucas and Simon, it is possible actors’ impairments are translated as global qualities of ‘immaturity […] victimhood and humiliation […] and exploitation’ (Leach Scully, 2014, p.2011). They appear to assume disabled actors experience extremes of what are already highly vulnerable emotional states in the process of acting. But it is also possible presumptions of global vulnerability link to dominant approaches to disability in arts practice historically. Theatre with disabled people is has more readily been placed in the realm of health and well-being; ‘traditional paternalistic approaches believe that disabled people are incapable of communicating their thoughts and feelings through the arts, except perhaps as a means of individual therapy or part of a process of rehabilitation’ (Barnes and Mercer, 2003, p.107). Whilst there remains value in therapeutic arts practices, it is possible this view has more resonance with Jack, Lucas and Simon than ‘an ordinary expectation that [disabled people] will be in theatre spaces as performers’ (Taylor, 2017). It is conceivable their presumptions of error in rehearsal are shaped by beliefs that have not entirely shifted to consider disabled people in the industry as competent, experienced theatre professionals.

Particularly for Simon, query around the care and protection of disabled actors seems to add to discomfort regarding disability, presenting a personal dichotomy of caution and confidence. As a director he implies wanting to be open to work outside his ‘comfort zone’, ‘the whole point of theatre’ (Simon, p.22). But he appears to grapple with how to prepare for rehearsals with disabled people in a way that ‘mitigates against’ error (Simon p.24). Even in the interview Simon is processing how these factors might translate in future practice. He explains, ‘ones had to negotiate incredibly difficult questions around representation’ (p.19), pressing that he chose ‘to tackle’ complex and sensitive issues of ethnicity and race in the past (Simon, p.19). Describing this at length, he remarks, ‘sorry I will move onto other stuff in a minute, it’s just really helpful to use this as an example’ (Simon, p.20). Simon reflects:

> that didn’t make me go ‘oh you can’t do that’, it just made me go ‘if we are going to do this we have to absolutely be so careful and rigorous’ […] my hope is that [disability] is exactly the same, and I suspect for too long people have used the excuses of going ‘I don’t know how to do it and I could get it wrong’ (pp.21-22).

Simon’s perceived need for ‘specialist’ input does not seem exclusive to disability issues but a proven route to past success (p.21; p.32). He clarifies, ‘the only reason I was able to direct that […] there was a practitioner […] who at every step of the process was able to hold my hand and hold the actor’s hands’ (Simon, p.20). Relating this experience to disability Simon continues saying, ‘you have to really find those people around you who are experts […] before one even gets into the rehearsal room’ (p.21). Unlike Jack and Lucas, Simon does describe ‘engaging […] with directors’, ‘talking about projects’ (p.26), and has ‘begun to find some of those people that will […] help’ (p.27). Simon also remarks, ‘I would have loved for us to have been part the ROTM consortium’, a repeated sentiment in his interview (p.28). He seems to assume this would reduce his risk of error in rehearsals and help manage his caution and discomfort. Stepping outside his comfort zone regarding rehearsing with disabled people seems dependent on finding and developing helpful connections. It is recognised that work with actors with differing impairment types does raise unique issues in rehearsals, which may benefit from knowledge or preparation. Nonetheless, before working with any actor with an impairment it seems Simon wants the comfort of an assured route to getting it right.

Although overlapping with themes explored in the previous chapter, approaches to learning are relevant to presumptions of error described here. Differing from Jack and Simon’s position, Dawn’s proactive learning appears to bolster her confidence to explore new territory. About to embark on rehearsals with a Deaf actor for the first time she remarks:

> Oh, it's completely terrifying *(laughs).* Like so much of my work as a director is about making […] quiet connection with each individual actor and really talking to them and understanding what they need […] I won't be able to do any of that […] and I sort of haven't got a clue how that works. Um I know the play really well […] we've done this [research and development], we explored some of the issues […] I've talked to a lot of people […] in the audition we had a chat through an interpreter and um in the same way we do with any actor and I really felt like I could work with [actor's name…] I'm really excited and, of course, terrified (Dawn, p.43).

Dawn is open about acknowledging caution or fear around how practicalities of access will work in rehearsal and how she will move from familiar ways of working. Still, there a dual narrative that implies confidence in the actor, in her own preparation, and in her ability as a director to handle unknowns that arise. Dawn seems non-defensive and sits with complexity around working with a Deaf actor for the first time. It is exciting and terrifying, a response she points to as fundamental to directing, saying:

> I guess fear of the unknown and everything's up in the air and I don't know what these people need is a regular part of my job as a director. So, yes, absolutely there's an added level of the unknown working with an actor with a disability but it does feel like a heightened version of what I'm doing anyway (Dawn, p.45).

Lucas' earlier comments suggested questioning the resilience of disabled actors, yet it seems directors' resilience to work outside their comfort zone is an important factor raised by Dawn and Simon also. In his article, *Empowerment, Self-advocacy and Resilience*, Goodley does not view resilience as a personal characteristic but as a political response to disability and discrimination (2005). Although referring to disabled people, it seems possible this view of resilience has become relevant to non-disabled directors working in theatre. It is perceivable that their willingness or flexibility to step into situations that may be new, uncomfortable, or scary is also shaped by their understanding and experiences of disability. In this way, resilience to acknowledge, confront, and adjust to presumptions of error in rehearsals may not be a natural characteristic of directors like Dawn more than Simon for example. Instead, this may have developed as a political response to the underrepresentation of disabled people in theatre; this being viewed as more urgent and personally relevant to some directors than others.

John, Sue, Anne and Tim have had opportunity to both prove and challenge their presumptions of error in rehearsals, to discover answers to the question, *what if this happens to me?* These directors describe how a sense of resilience to respond to error has developed. They acknowledge caution as a prominent part of their experiences with disabled actors but appear to have become ‘alright with sometimes getting it wrong along the way’ (Johnston, 2016, p.69). For example, Anne remarks, ‘your main fear is that you don’t want to get it wrong […] the main anxiety you have’ (p.17). She continues, ‘you’ve got to let yourself do that and then you won’t I think’ (Anne, pp.21-22). John comments the ‘barrier for most people is will they get it wrong’ (p.28), adding ‘it’s liberating once you get past that fear’ (p.30). They imply caution of error in rehearsals has somehow shifted to increased confidence.

Sue’s remark headlines this chapter: ‘the thing that’s worth mentioning is the err lack of confidence that can err, fear isn’t quite the right word, but a sort of caution and a, “oh I’ve never done this before”’ (p.13). She is describing her experience of rehearsing with actors with a range of impairments. Sue seems open about caution felt in confronting aspects of rehearsals she presumed would be new, different, or risk error, and explains:

> we worked out […] how to work the rehearsal room together, and I think that's really, really important, but that's kind of the same as any process actually, you work out as the director what the needs of the group are, and you work according to those needs (p.13).

Sue implies she met practical challenges along the way and that these were solved collaboratively. But, as Dawn and Tim are also keen to highlight, this is anticipated with any company of actors. Sue notes it was ‘kind of the same, kind of different’ (p.13). In this way, what appears to stand out, or as she repeats is ‘worth mentioning’, is not how different the process was. Instead, it is the intrapersonal narrative of personal insufficiency that she confronted, which Simon and Jack have also drawn attention to. It seems Sue's presumption of failure and of the process being vastly different, was challenged through this experience. Sue reflects:

> you have to have faith that you'll work it out, if you're a creative practitioner who's experienced you'll work it out […] that's worth mentioning and I think that's the thing that I've really, really gained from this process, apart from just practical things like how to do it better next time […] is the confidence to think actually if you cast nice people, whether they're disabled or not […] people who are good, people who are skilled […] actors, it's just really good fun, you know, it'll be really, really interesting (pp.13-14).

Sue sets out that rehearsing with disabled actors is about directors 'Trusting their abilities and just getting over that fear thing' (p.28). This appears to be her discovery, assurance of personal capability that was only acquired once outside her comfort zone in rehearsal.

Anne and Tim are both upfront about what they seem to perceive as failure to meet accessibility requirements in rehearsals, and the personal and practical repercussions of their error. Tim recalls:

> the first show I had actively employed [a performer with a physical impairment…] and playing some warm up game and she just suddenly went I can't see that, and I suddenly felt like shit, because I hadn't thought through the exercise enough to make sure that everybody could access it […] so I just cast the game aside, but that mistake wouldn't happen now […] there would always be thinking about what do we need to do to enable you to be the best performer you can possibly be, which is what I'm doing with all other performers (pp.7-8).

Like Sue, Tim presses that demands of rehearsing with disabled people are not dissimilar than with others, suggesting this also challenged his expectation; a discovery that contests presumptions like Jack's that 'able-bodied actors' will 'start getting frustrated that the […] time is being taken up' (p.18). Tim does not hide that making mistakes around accessibility was an uncomfortable experience for him, yet this seems valued as an impetus for change in his practice. Tim also seems keen to point out how expertise and preparation, like that sought by Simon and Dawn, including 'a bit of […] training though Graeae', was valuable (p.32). However, in terms of increasing his confidence directing disabled actors Tim suggests experiencing error has been most significant, saying:

> By doing it and letting it be eggy and shit, that's how we learn anything by getting it wrong by failing at it a couple of times by… by putting a foot wrong, by saying the wrong thing. I certainly had that with [actor's name] um and she was gracious enough to forgive me if I ever said anything that was offensive, or crass, or wrong (p.32).

Tim implies error is uncomfortable for both him and the actor but not 'catastrophic' as Jack presumes (p.7). Rather, in this instance, Tim appears to presume maturity and resilience as characteristics of the actor, and these being enough to work through and move on from error or offence.

Value in allowing yourself to experience error regarding disability in rehearsals as a director was pointed to in Anne's comment, 'you've got to let yourself do that' (p.22). Anne seems to acknowledge personal willingness to risk mistakes, which she links with moving away from 'being scared of getting stuff wrong' and increased creatively in practice (p.21). Describing how familiar rehearsal methods proved insufficient in her work with actors with a range of impairments, she comments:

> There are some exercises I do that I know are really helpful and that always work. I could not use any of those with... and like, I do a lot of work with text and text is no good for all of the [artists] who use BSL […] the blind [artist] always [needed…] notice because he has got a thing on his computer that reads text to him, so you couldn't just spring something on him […] So, all of those things, you think, 'Oh God, I can't play Zip Zap Boing, I've got nothing' *(laughs),* this is my bag of tricks and none of them can work (Anne, p.24).

Despite her theatre having links with ROTM, Anne stepped into rehearsals with what could be interpreted as insufficient skills or awareness. This connection may have increased her engagement with disabled people but did not shield her from getting things wrong along the way, as Simon assumes it might (p.28). Anne jokes that without common warmup games she was at a loss for ideas; despite this light-hearted aside, this is unlikely to have been a comfortable position to be in as a director. However, it is expressed as a positive experience, again, not 'catastrophic' but valued as forcing new creativity (Jack, p.7). Referring to warmups Anne recalls, ‘one of our challenges was to try and create one between us’ (p.18). She notes they ‘got rid of the scripts and did something else and that was really interesting’ (p.23), adding:

> it is the best thing to be put in that position because you just have to think of new stuff to do […] that’s the amazing thing about working in um rooms where you have different sets of needs is that all that stuff that you rely on, like doing ten-years’ worth of […] workshops, I can’t use anymore. I’m like ‘oh’ but, it makes you create […] slightly new ways of doing things, and that’s gr... that’s got to be good (Anne, p.24).

Notions of resilience and the idea that directors must be ‘bold’ to cast disabled actors as Lucas appears to believe (p.8), do seem relevant to Sue’s, Tim’s and Anne’s experiences and responses to error in rehearsal. They imply that confidence in working with disabled people was only gained by stepping into situations that have caused some level of personal discomfort to them, and perhaps actors also. Finding solutions to error in rehearsal has required flexibility, an openness to change and adapt plans. Yet, this also seems to require vulnerability, as these directors acknowledge mistakes and show willingness to collaborate with actors to remedy them. John shares these characteristics, or as suggested earlier, it seems likely he shares a political response to disability and discrimination (Goodley, 2005). Speaking about presumptions of error in his early work, John identifies with those ‘who are worried about saying the wrong thing’ (p.29). He describes ‘my confidence in working with disabled performers has improved a lot over the years’ (John, p.28); he adds, ‘the rough and tumble of the making a show process is what kind of knocks all of that out of you’ (John, p.30). Like others, John acknowledges rehearsals are not always comfortable, but what he perceives as ‘liberating’ for him is not just learning how to get accessibility right; it is learning ‘that the only thing to do is to ask and […] find out and put your foot in it’ (p.30). The ‘rough and tumble’ of exploring unknowns in rehearsal is valued by John as increasing his confidence and ability to learn from actors, even if this is perhaps uncomfortable or humiliating (p.28; p.30).

It seems that ‘being alright with sometimes getting things wrong along the way’ regarding disability is not something some directors simply find easier than others (Johnston, 2016, p.69). Rather, it is more likely error in rehearsals is valued differently. Findings discussed here have uncovered shared experiences of caution among directors relating to failed accessibility, misrepresentation, and causing offence or damage to actors. For some director-participants the presumption that error in these areas might expose personal insufficiency, blame, humiliation, and discomfort remains debilitating in terms of engaging with disability in practice. For others, these factors of error in rehearsal have been experienced by stepping into rehearsal situations with disabled people. Clearly, getting it wrong along the way has not been an easy position to be in. It is, however, viewed by Sue, Tim, John, Anne and Dawn as a valuable one, considered as: a necessary response to inequality in theatre; impetus for improved accessibility their practice; reassuring of capabilities to adapt to new territory as a director; confidence-building in engagement with disabled people; and a force for renewed creativity. Openness and attitudes towards error in rehearsal continues to be relevant as the final subtheme of this chapter consider directors' communication with actors in detail.

8.3 Transparency and Communication with Actors.

This final subtheme exploring narratives of caution and confidence considers directors' approaches to open and clear communication with actors, remaining focused on lived experiences of rehearsal processes. Interview responses uncover director-participants' caution and confidence around questioning actors about the implications of their impairment and accessibility requirements. Directors raise issues around drawing attention to difference in rehearsal, the actor's role in asserting their needs, and promote a necessity for two-way transparency between actors and directors. Issues of vulnerability and hierarchy are also raised as directors here describe moving towards openness and increased confidence to ask questions of actors, recognising them as experts in their own impairment and experience of disability.

Caution around communication with disabled people in theatre practice has already been pointed to in this chapter. Communication and language have been significant barriers to the inclusion of disabled people in theatre historically (Bevan, 2017). Tim noted offence he caused by ‘saying the wrong thing’ in rehearsal, suggesting error in approaching communication as much as practical accessibility (p.32). In the previous chapter, difficulty around language was noted as prominent in director-participants who lack understanding of the social model of disability; it was suggested that new knowledge around disability theory provides grounding for directors to communicate and engage with disability issues confidently.

As noted in introducing this thesis, revaluation of advantages and failings of disability language is commonplace within disability studies (Kuppers, 2003; McIntyre, 2013). The ambiguity of disability terms seems to be something director-participants are conscious of. For example, David remarks, ‘of course, there’s a huge amount of… of fear around conversation about disability’ (p.13). David frames his own struggle with articulating disability views in this way:

> I was stumbling earlier on just thinking… cause […] you start tripping over language very quickly and what you should and shouldn’t say […] everybody does have to be very sensitive around language but […] if you’re too sensitive you… you… you just can’t communicate properly. So, you have to… you have to be a little confident about that (p.13).

David seems to recognise that caution around saying the wrong thing is a barrier to open communication, which is necessary to move from. With little training or experience of disability, knowing how to communicate disability views appropriately even to me as a non-disabled researcher seems difficult for him; it is likely with disabled people this may be even more problematic.

Like David, Felix perceives a need for sensitivity in communication around disability issues and expresses difficulty in this that seems inhibiting. He seems less concerned with terminology and more with the appropriateness of drawing attention to impairment, not just onstage, but in conversation. Recalling his past work with a disabled actor, Felix comments, ‘the reason I find directing tiring is because I’m aware of people […] of all the different people in the room’ (p.22). He pinpoints this as, ‘the thing you notice […] about managing people in an inclusive way’ (Felix, p.22). Felix seems to be promoting himself as a director who is sensitive to the individual needs of actors yet implies a different dimension to this when working with disabled people. He comments, ‘it’s just about [making] people feel they're not being treated differently, but you're not trying to also pretend that there's no different needs' (Felix, p.23). How to find this balance when communicating around impairment or disability is expressed as an ongoing query, as he continues explaining:

> probably [as] a director, what you don't wanna do is go 'oh god, you know you've got a disability um what do you… *(tails off)'* […] though the person may want that, I don't wanna treat… I don't wanna… *(tails off)* this is interesting, like I don't wanna come across as patronising and I don't wanna come across like […] my instinct is to treat you different to anybody else (p.24).

It appears Felix recognises the importance of understanding actors' needs but repeatedly refers to what he does not want to do; that is, single people out as different, or, as noted previously, be insensitive and cause offence. Despite directing Deaf and disabled actors in his productions, he still ponders how open communication with them is possible. Felix's reference to sensitivity being 'tiring' suggests pressure felt in negotiating this balance in the past; perhaps this is further reason why replicating these past casting choices is not expressed as a long-term plan (p.22).

Anne and John detail similar caution to that raised by Felix and David, yet they suggest experiences in their practice led to difficulties around communication with actors diminishing. Anne points to her dilemma being:

> not wanting to talk about someone's disability because you're worried you'll draw more attention to it um and actually what you want to do in any creative process is create a space where people are on an equal footing […] if you draw attention to something that makes someone different from someone else does that fly in the face of that, and I think my fear was it did (p.19).

Like Felix, Anne expresses concern that talking about impairment or disability might single out actors in a way that devalues them in rehearsals and is patronising. However, Anne and John speak of caution around communication with actors as past concern, initially eased though discovery that impairment and disability are far from taboo subjects for disabled people. Anne explains, 'I realised […] that people do talk about their disability and that it's alright to ask […] you can mention that people are disabled and that's ok *(laughs),* and I think I have been worried about doing that' (pp.18-19). John notes:

> you quickly learn […] that disabled performers can kind of make […] the most outrageous disallowed gags about themselves and their disability […] that kind of breaks down all kinds of barriers […] there is something about that that is freeing for us who are worried about […] are we going to use the wrong terms, are we going to offend people (p.29).

John expresses this discovery, that disabled people are not reluctant to discuss impairment and disability even in jest, as being most significant in 'liberating' him from caution of saying the wrong thing (p.30). Likewise, the discovery that disabled people 'talk about their disability' may seem simplistic, yet Anne refers to it being 'quite revelatory' (p.17). These realisations are interpreted by John and Anne as releasing them to be more confident broaching conversation with actors.

Notions of growing in confidence to question actors about impairment and disability are echoed by Sara also. Like others, she acknowledges initial caution around communication and causing offence. Sara believes this is, 'a British thing […] we don't want to ask people, you know what help they might require or pry […] we get ourselves worked up that we are going to offend' (p.16). It appears she questioned the intrusiveness of discussing personal impairment and accessibility requirements with actors; recalling raising these queries with an actor with a physical impairment before rehearsals, she remarks, 'I was a little bit nervous' (Sara, p.16). However, connecting this with more recent conversations with a disabled colleague, Sara notes:

> I think those conversations get easier […] the more you are doing it the more it's not scary […] as a result of that first experience um of that actor, [discussions] have been much more frank […] I've not felt those nerves in the same way […] I think I've got practiced at it (p.18).

Sara expresses a shift from caution to confident communication with disabled people in her practice; she implies conversation around accessibility has become straightforward, unpressured, and familiar.

Interpreting the root of this shift, Sara points to the actor as central in easing her concerns and promoting open conversation, noting:

> he’s an older actor, so, he’s been a massive disability kind of activist. He was part of [theatre company name…] because of […] his experiences through life, he is actually brilliantly adept and um fantastic at putting people at ease, at being quite forthright in what he tells you he needs […] which was massively useful […] a real learning thing for me […] we were always just quite honest with each other (p.16).

As Sara describes this experience, it seems there are several factors she identifies as significant in bolstering her confidence around communication and disability; these are relevant to experiences of other directors also. Sara notes the maturity of the actor and his experience of disability issues; she implies valuing his knowledge as extending beyond her own. Sara recognises the actor’s competency in asserting his own accessibility requirements, and this being a tactic to ease her discomfort and caution to ask questions. Sara also implies openness became two-way, that both actor and director were ‘honest’ about their needs (p.16).

The role of the actor in transparent communication is raised by others also. Like Sara, Tim expresses appreciation for a forthright approach from actors in communicating access requirements, implying effective practice requires this. Tim describes problematic implications for him when this is not the case. Directing two actors with similar impairments in separate productions he notes contrasting experiences. Tim explains one actor ‘was very clear and upfront and direct about what she needed, support she wasn't getting, the support she needed […] she was very, very specific’ (pp.10-11). The other actor ‘wasn't upfront about it, he didn't talk about it […] he'd use quite kind of um dismissive terms […] without ever saying, “that's what I need”’ (Tim, p.11). For Tim, the latter prompted difficulty in practice. In Tim’s view one actor ‘owns her disability’ and the other ‘feels like he can pass for non-disabled’ (p.10); he interprets a connection between the actors’ disability beliefs and effective communication in rehearsal. Describing how it felt working with the actor who ‘wasn’t upfront’ about impairment or access issues, he recalls:

> I’m trying to understand and help you […] If you’re embarrassed by something that you can't discuss, it just makes it quite tricky for us to motor on, and I actually felt *(pause)* I don’t know, what did I feel like, I just… I often felt like he wasn’t paying attention, he wasn’t in the same room as everyone else, he wasn't working at the same pace as everyone else *(pause)* and I think that's... I feel like had he said, ‘it’s because of this I

> can't', 'I didn't know this', 'I'm not listening to', 'I didn't follow this', I couldn't… I just want to be able to help […] we all have to do our very best work […] and I can't facilitate it if people aren't giving me their everything […] that's what I need from every actor, there is no difference between being disabled and not being disabled, I just kind of require commitment and honesty ultimately (Tim, pp.12-13).

Tim implies a sense of helplessness and frustration in this situation. He appears to interpret the actor's approach to communication as a barrier, creating distance between them in a way that he felt hindered effective practice. The actor's apparent dismissal of his impairment and access requirements is expressed by Tim as detrimental creatively, compromising his work and that of others in rehearsal. In contrast, asked how it felt working with the actor who spoke openly about what was needed and things not working, Tim comments:

> yeah, it feels brilliant, it feels clear, I'm a big fan of clarity and transparency, and people just saying what they need […] I want to make your, your journey […] as clear and easy and useful and practical as possible, so, yeah, I need that, it's what I would prefer (p.13).

In collaborations between disabled and non-disabled practitioners, de Senna, Bowditch and Bower highlight 'the need for openness and dialogue in the creative process' as crucial to performance-making (2016, p.222). They believe this 'hinges upon the acceptance of […] multivocality' (de Senna, Bowditch and Bower, 2016, p.230). This view resonates with Tim's and Sara's experiences and preference for upfront communication from actors; they appear to accept and value the opinions and experiences of disabled people as a crucial part of two-way communication. However, these directors also imply effective practice has hinged on the maturity, disability experience, and level of confidence of actors they have worked with. For Tim, who appears confident discussing disability himself, the assertiveness of actors is viewed as giving clarity in how to facilitate best practice. For Sara, this protected her from tackling what she thought of as intrusive questions and built her confidence to raise disability issues in conversation. Still, as Tim's experiences exemplify, even if actors' views are valued by directors, their confidence to raise accessibility issues is not necessarily assured.

For those in this study still cautious about how to communicate with actors like Felix, uncertainty around whether actors will lead conversation around impairment and disability may add to their caution. Like Tim, Felix has experienced rehearsals where he felt the actor was hesitant speak out about accessibility, noting 'what she would do is not wanna be a fuss' (p.21). This scenario is expressed as an ongoing concern; Felix continues saying, 'I hate the idea of somebody needing something and not feeling able to say it […] I'd rather just know […] it feels like it's about you being aware of what needs to happen' (p.24). Felix suggests his strong preference for upfront communication from actors may be about more than valuing 'multivocality' (de Senna, Bowditch, and Bower, 2016, p.230). Instead, with the onus for leading conversation on actors, he may also be preferring to avoid a more vulnerable position as a director; that is, having to ask for help and exposing his uncertainty approaching impairment and disability. This is a position both Anne and Sue describe has become a necessary starting point for transparent communication with actors in their practice.

Anne and Sue point to the role they have played in open communication in rehearsal. Like Sara, being honest about their needs as directors is expressed as a factor bolstering their confidence around communication. Adding detail to her discoveries, Anne comments:

> you can be really honest about what the process might be […] I remember that working with some disabled artists here, that you could sort of say 'what do you need?', rather than pretending that they weren't in a wheelchair and just hoping that it would all be alright, which I think is an instinct that we all have (p.17).

Anne implies there is a tendency as a director to avoid asking questions of disabled actors, a view that resonates with other directors here. Being upfront with actors in conversation seems considered preferable to 'pretending', or as she reiterates, 'hoping that it would all be alright' (Anne, p.17; p.28). Anne describes communication with actors now involves owning her position regarding disability; that is admitting what the unknowns of theatre practice and disability are for her as a director. An approach that may still contradict her instinct. Anne describes this more vulnerable starting point, saying, 'that's a great way to start. Just go, I dunno what this is, I'm sure at some point between us we'll just find it out (p.22). Sue describes a similar introduction to actors in her practice, saying, 'I was very open about saying "okay", on the first day um, "so, how are we going to do the read-through, I have no idea"' (p.12).

In their consideration of arts practice involving disabled and non-disabled practitioners de Senna, Bowditch and Bower also propose how dialogue encouraging collaboration will 'inherently disperse authorship' and 'dilute authority' (2016, p.222). They highlight such collaborations are, therefore, 'inherently political […] they place disabled and non-disabled people on an equal footing' (de Senna, Bowditch, and Bower, 2016, p.222). They are referring primarily to companies co-producing work, rather than the scenarios described here; where a director is working with a company of actors, one or more of whom has an impairment. Still, as directors in this study imply valuing disabled actors' knowledge as extending beyond their own, how communication shifts authority in rehearsals seems relevant here also. Sara's, Tim's, Anne's and Sue's reflections on practice do imply a shift from traditional perceptions of hierarchy in theatre, with the director being led by the actor. However, there is little suggestion from Sara or Tim that actors' upfront communication around impairment and accessibility is viewed as detrimental to their position, it is preferable. Neither is there a sense that Anne and Sue consider acknowledging their need for guidance to weaken their leadership. Instead, sharing experience and insights around disability is only expressed as mutually beneficial for practice.

Both Anne and Sue imply advice from actors is welcomed and heeded, and vulnerability in asking for help has opened this communication. They detail how actors respond with practical guidance. Following Sue's upfront introduction to actors, she explains, 'they just said "oh, well, we need to do this" (p.13). She gives examples of guidance offered including how to improve communication between Deaf and hearing actors, and her response to this (Sue, p.13). Similarly, Anne describes practical advice following her opening to rehearsal which was, 'you're [disabled], I'm not […] tell me what you need to make things work' (p.21). She explains, 'a lot of those things come up in conversation […] the guy who was blind was like "this is really helpful…" […] He just asked people to wear hard bottomed shoes “so […] I know where you are”’ (Anne, p.21). Anne continues saying, ‘If I hadn’t have asked that, I would never have known’ (p.21).

Anne and Sue suggest honest communication with actors and confidence to ask questions has developed their knowledge around accessibility. Yet, for Sue there is another dynamic to this that aligns with John’s position mentioned earlier, ‘you learn the only thing to do is ask’ (p.30). Open dialogue with disabled people in rehearsal is expressed as more than necessity for learning and effective practice. Sue and John imply it is a position of integrity, that as non-disabled directors their authority to explore disability in theatre is limited without collaboration with disabled people they work with. Sue explains:

> you're not the expert you're just the ally of people who are trying to, you know, enter this profession and work um and that's how you need to see yourself, so I… so, that's very much how I saw myself, it's like okay, well I know lots of things and I think I'm a good director, but there's something I just don't know and you'll know them better than me, so help me out here […] it's the only wise thing to do otherwise you're bullshitting liar and you're not actually engaging with the people who are right in front of you […] people who are disabled they are the experts in their condition […] you have to, let them be the experts and say […] ‘how this going to work for you?’ […] because I can only imagine it, and it's not as good as actually talking to and finding it out. (pp.15-16).

Sue’s attitude to communication connects with John’s claims of allyship with the disabled community discussed in the previous chapter, linking with Kuppers’ description of ‘non-disabled allies’ (2011, p.4). de Senna, Bowditch and Bower, also note how, ‘collaborative processes between disabled and non-disabled practitioners offer the opportunity for alliances’ (2016, p.227). Ostrove, Kornfled and Ibrahim’s study of what disabled people view as ‘effective nondisabled allies’, describes, ‘people who offered appropriate help, were trustworthy in their understanding of disability identity, made personal connections, advocated and acted against ableism, were willing to learn, and communicated effectively’ (2019, p.924). Sue’s approach to rehearsals reflects some of these qualities. She expresses self-respect in her identity as a ‘good director’ and respect for the expertise of disabled people and their unique identity which is beyond her; she suggests the contributions of both are equally necessary in practice.

Directors’ views on communication in practice suggest transparency requires confidence and vulnerability from them and disabled actors they work with. Some directors in this study remain cautious of using inappropriate terminology, being insensitive, drawing attention to impairment, and causing offence. This seems to be a barrier and pressure moving forwards. Yet, the dominant pattern in my findings is that when directors embark on work with disabled people in theatre for the first-time caution around communication diminishes. Realisation that disabled people are open to talk about disability issues has caused directors to become less scared, more upfront, and familiar with asking questions around impairment and disability. Actors’ approaches to communication play a part in this and findings here expose a preference among director-participants for actors to be forthright about their views and access requirements. Instinct to dismiss impairment or insufficiency by actors or directors is highlighted here as detrimental creatively, relationally, and practically in rehearsals. Yet, directors who have moved to initiate open and honest conversation themselves, appear to view vulnerability in communication with actors as necessary and beneficial. Directors who are willing to share leadership in rehearsals in a way that embraces guidance, expertise, and experiences of disabled people are developing confidence and competency to engage with disability in theatre themselves. Moreover, it seems they are upholding integrity in doing so.

8.4 Reflection on Directors’ Narratives of Caution and Confidence.

Public perceptions of directors being afraid of employing disabled actors are supported by responses of some participants examined in this chapter. Still, narratives of caution and confidence also challenge the idea that fear is the most common response to disability among theatre directors, or that queries around impairment and disability are debilitating for all. What is clear is that ACE’s diversity strategy is bringing questions about casting, script, audiences, and access to the fore in directors’ thinking, and forcing a realisation that thinking about impairment and disability is not enough. Caution about practice that remains a barrier to working with disabled people must be rectified and directors’ experiences here suggest that pressure to confront this is mounting. For some, the effort or discomfort involved or presumed in avoiding pitfalls of disability representation and critique is too great. As such, casting disabled actors remains an exception and caution is costly. For now, narratives of confidence shared by some directors in this study only point to one-off productions and a leaning to sensitivity in past work. These stories may be viewed by them as enough to hold on to claims of openness to new territory; they manage day-to-day critical avoidance of disability whilst still exhibiting some openness to work with disabled people. Yet, their narrative is quickly becoming outdated; a divide between directors who are stuck and those moving forward in their engagement with disabled people in rehearsal and performance is emphasized in my findings here.

There are directors here who are moving towards increased collaboration with disabled people. Open communication with actors in rehearsals has become a solution to perceived gaps in their skill or knowledge. This is building their confidence to engage with disability issues. For director-participants in this position connection with ROTM is common. This suggests those stepping outside their comfort zone, in an environment where mutual learning can take place, are supported in some way. This is still costly for individuals, ROTM or connection with Graeae has not shielded directors here from experiencing discomfort, criticism, or error in practice. In this way, ACE’s diversity strategy demands vulnerability and resilience, which seems a common characteristic among directors supported by its disability-focused initiatives.

This chapter raises query about the integrity of public and private narratives of caution and confidence regarding working with disabled actors, and how these are voiced and responded to. There is caution about rehearsals and performance that it seems some directors here feel incapable of bridging themselves or even articulating without support; in this way, there is scope for ACE’s initiatives like ROTM to include more directors in this position. There is also confidence gained by directors in working with disabled actors that suggests shifts in their personal views and practice are long-term. The future decisions of these individuals, their continued stepping out in casting and rehearsal practice regarding disability, will determine if their experiences have genuine impact on change in theatre going forwards.

Chapter Nine - Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting

‘if you were to ask me today, I’d say that it would be quite hard for a disabled actor to find their way to us or for us to kind of find them’ (Simon, p.42)

In discussing director-participants’ responses so far, the focus has been on intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of theatre practice and disability. This final chapter discusses a superordinate theme concerned with lived experiences they situate outside these perspectives. Director-participants pinpoint what they perceive as financial, historical, and structural constraints within their organisations or the theatre industry that limit their current opportunity to cast disabled actors. These are expressed as a series of difficulties associated with funding accessibility requirements, the availability of actors, and the process of casting itself. These factors emerged as the three subthemes that shape discussion in this chapter. Perceived constraints on casting connected with these aspects of theatre practice are interpreted by director-participants as a reality thwarting individual views, desires, and motivations. Yet, directors’ interview responses also make it possible to consider how they grapple with these perceived external constraints on casting and are searching for routes around difficulties they present.

The psychological concept of locus of control is a lens through which directors’ perceptions of external constraints on casting can be viewed. This concept differs from motivation, it is concerned with where individuals place responsibility, cause, and control for what they achieve and experience. Locus of control is divided into two categories internal and external (Joelson, 2017). A person with an internal locus of control more often attributes outcomes in life to their own efforts and abilities, a person with an external locus of control situates failure and success outside of themselves; rather than believing they are responsible for what happens in their practice, blame is placed on outside sources or circumstances that determine end results (Joelson, 2017). In the context of discussing director-participants’ lived experiences of theatre practice and disability here, an external locus of control is prevalent. Interview conversation shifts for some directors from expressing personal disability understanding and motivations to helplessness, blame and difficulty; individuals shed light on what they perceive as beyond their control in responding to ACE's diversity strategy and casting disabled actors in their day-to-day practice. Through this lens, it is possible to consider what individual directors are telling themselves about external constraints on casting and how this adds to perceptions of how difficult casting disabled people in the current theatre climate is. The concept of locus of control layers discussion around why directors' working in similar workplace circumstances might locate future possibility for casting actors with impairments in their practice differently; it assists in questioning if perceived constraints in casting are shaped by personal beliefs, misunderstandings, or literal difficulty.

9.1 The Significance of Funding

Director-participants point to funding work with disabled people as a challenge. Some imply perceived funding constraints are the deciding factor in whether they consider disabled people in casting searches or not. There is an assumption among directors in this study that additional strategic funding is needed to support actors' accessibility requirements in the current theatre climate. Interview responses relevant to this subtheme point to how they interpret the extent of funding required, how it is accessed, and its sustainability. This subtheme considers how director-participants make sense of personal perceptions and experiences of funding and how this shapes what they view as realistic or feasible in work with disabled people in future practice.

In the period following ACE's shift in diversity strategy, from 2015 onwards, substantial cuts in arts funding are widely recognised as a challenge across the theatre industry due to central and local government responses to austerity (Harvey, 2016). Sealey implies there are additional consequences of this for disabled people; looking to the future of Graeae's work, she remarks:

> the economic climate is brutal. Much of our funding is at a standstill and, twinned with cuts to Access to Work support, this feels like a double whammy. But it is vital that we do not thwart our ambitions at these difficult times (Sealey, 2018, p.359).

As a director actively employing disabled people, Sealey points to funding as an ongoing battle, worsened by cuts to the government's Access to Work scheme; this is 'a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work' (GOV.UK, no date). Sealey suggests funding issues have potential to limit vision for future theatre work, yet she determines not to let this constrain vision for Graeae's work going forwards. Gould also suggests funding is a greater concern for those considering accessibility in their practice, she states, 'as someone who is doing disability and deaf arts, we put access at the heart of everything we try and do, and that takes resources and money […] we need more than ever to learn how to make those creative links' (quoted in ACE, 2014). This section of the chapter adds detail to a similar acknowledgement among directors in this study, that funding is both precarious and vital in considering casting disabled people and accessibility in their practice.

Director-participants shift conversation from how casting disabled actors is influenced by personal views and experiences, to how funding impacts casting choices. For example, Jack and Dawn acknowledged personal insufficiency as a deciding factor in whether they work with disabled people; as noted, Jack perceives a need to be 'sufficiently trained' (p.9; p.16), and Dawn remarked on work with a Deaf actor saying, 'we didn't want to do it unless we knew how to properly support them' (p.25). In previous chapters these comments exposed how learning and error impact directors' engagement with disability. However, Jack and Dawn also acknowledge funding as significant in their decisions. Dawn notes her first experience of auditioning Deaf actors was, 'a really positive experience', but 'the cost of the interpreter was the thing that really made a difference' (p.24). It seems her query about supporting Deaf actors is not just about her skill as a director, but concerns funding also; Dawn reveals, 'we got Arts Council […] funding to do that', suggesting this was pivotal in her casting decision (p.25). A contrary position is exemplified as Jack describes his response to the presumed cost of doing the same; he explains, 'it necessitates quite a significant cost to get signers in […] a rehearsal room […] that's why […] I've never done it' (Jack, p.3). It appears director-participants' views, caution, or confidence in casting disabled actors can be overshadowed by perceived funding issues; like Dawn and Jack, others also reveal how they perceive funding to facilitate and limit opportunity to work with disabled people in everyday practice.

The financial implications of actors' accessibility requirements are significant to director-participants' experiences of theatre practice and disability so far. Like Dawn, others note the cost of hiring a BSL interpreter as striking. Anne refers to this being 'unbelievably costly, quite rightly because it's a very specialised… but god it costs a lot, like it's so expensive, it's so expensive' (pp.40-41). It seems costs involved in working with Deaf actors were shocking and are prominent in Anne's thinking even when referring to actors with different impairments. Sue also comments that auditioning for a production involving actors with a range of impairments was 'hugely expensive' (p.23), suggesting this is more costly than usual. However, she is not just referring to accessibility costs here, but the number of actors auditioned as part of an ACE funded initiative. Speaking about an event involving disabled and non-disabled performers, Mark says, 'interestingly, it cost as much for [disabled artists to be involved] as the entire budget of the rest of the event, so it doubled the budget for that event' (p.11).

In a similar way that Sue felt it was important or 'worth mentioning' that she experienced 'fear' or 'caution' about aspects of rehearsal that she had 'never done' (p.13), Felix points to 'extra cost' in his work with disabled actors as what stood out to him (p.20). He explains:

> it's worth saying, there is just a consideration as… because it's extra cost isn't it […] I know there's some money to support a BSL interpreter, but it doesn't really, you know... […] as a producing theatre you have to think, 'ah, yeah right there's a cost there and we have to be aware of that and budget for that' (Felix, p.20).

Although Felix points to 'extra cost' being 'just a consideration', he also implies funding sourced externally was somehow insufficient. Felix is cautionary that extra costs in working with Deaf or disabled people must thought through and planned for in advance by directors and their organisations.

Directors in this study were all employed by theatre organisations receiving more than two million pounds of funding from ACE between 2015 and 2018; the funding round following its shift in diversity strategy. NPOs in this funding bracket are required to demonstrate how they contribute to the Creative Case for Diversity over the course of their funding agreement, having an action plan that includes disability (ACE, 2017a). It seems ACE's expectation is that plans to support work with disabled people are set out within theatres' core funding. The looming threat of funding cuts for NPOs not complying suggests if disability workforce figures in theatres are not increasing core funding has not been distributed as ACE intended (Brown, 2020). Despite these circumstances, most directors in this study seem to have only experienced work with disabled people that is supported by funding acquired in addition to their theatres' core funding.

In 2016 ACE launched 'four new strategic funding programmes' to 'ensure the Arts Council champions […] diversity' (ACE, 2017d, p.11). Dawn, Mark, Tim and David point to these and other funding initiatives as enabling their opportunity to work with disabled people in theatre so far. Mark mentions Unlimited, a commissioning programme funded by ACE, that 'supports, ambitious creative projects by disabled artists' (Unlimited, no date). He comments that access to funding 'to support artists, um create platforms for disabled artists' has got 'better and easier' (Mark, p.11). Like Dawn, Mark implies his work with disabled people has been dependent on securing additional funding, explaining:

> it was only because we were able to work with Unlimited to really access that funding to enable um those performers to be able to be supported […] but it feels like there is within Arts Council, then Unlimited, and others, that there's at least the possibility to do that if there's the will to do it (p.11).

Similarly, speaking about relationships with disabled people, Tim remarks on working with people funded by ACE's Change Makers; a fund he believes, 'is about actively putting money to change the face of British theatre' (Tim, p.6). Change Makers closed in 2016, the fund was 'to help address the lack of diversity in arts leadership […] to support both disabled and Black and minority ethnic leaders' (ACE, 2017d, p.11). It appears, in part, Tim views his openness in casting now as a knock-on effect of this initiative, and of the Regional Theatre Young Director Scheme (RYTDS) which financially supported another disabled colleague he worked with (p. 6).

RYTDS is ‘a professional artist development programme for new and emerging theatre directors’ funded by ACE (2020). As David describes access solutions in his workplace, he notes this funding was able to ‘help an organisation like us accommodate […] a disabled director’ (p.15). He also remarks on the government’s Access to Work scheme, saying ‘that’s the... that’s the scheme isn’t it? I mean... that has been useful in terms of getting additional funding to support people’ (David, p.16). David suggests it was not just knowing how to make his building accessible that made it possible for a disabled person to work in his theatre; like Dawn, it was also having funding to do so. It seems that funding aimed at supporting disabled people in employment, and specifically in theatre, is having a positive impact on these directors. This has facilitated accessibility in their workplaces, opened connections with disabled people, and opportunities in casting. However, their experiences of funding also point to a common view that casting disabled actors is only possible if additional support, external to theatres’ core funding, is acquired. This situation raises questions around how perceived routes to funding impact directors’ long-term vision for casting and the longevity of shifts towards accessibility in theatre they describe.

David suggests external funding was pivotal in enabling accessibility in his theatre in the past and is the deciding factor in whether he casts disabled actors in the future. Towards the end of his interview, he explains:

> if working with this set actor meant that it had to be a [longer] rehearsal period then, yes, that could be challenging financially […] we might also have to look at bringing in additional financial support to accommodate that and where would that come from […] it all starts with the money *(laughs)* yeah […] but I think we are beginning to think about how we address that […] to maybe be able to you know make it more feasible for… for somebody to work with us regularly […] running an organisation like this, we have to be pragmatic about what we can and can’t do (David, pp.32-33).

Although David laughs off his remark that ‘it all starts with the money’, it points to how perceived availability and uncertainty of funding controls his casting choices. His question, ‘where would that come from?’, resonates with responses of others also (p.32). David is imagining the funding implications of casting an actor whose accessibility requirements extend his usual rehearsal schedule. In his view this ‘could be challenging’, but not financially impossible (pp.32-33). Perceptions of funding may influence his choices, yet David can see possible routes around this going forwards. In contrast, Anne, Felix and Jack describe possibilities for funding actors’ access requirements in their day-to-day practice as much more difficult to imagine.

Having not worked with disabled people, Jack can only imagine costs involved and assumes this is unmanageable for him. In all his uncertainty about what might be required in work with a disabled actor, it seems one thing he is sure of is increased expense. Just as Jack exposes accessibility costs as reason for not working with Deaf actors (p.3), he is equally upfront about money being a wider concern regarding disability, explaining:

> It’s responding to the realities and if we are going to make a sort of step change in disabled access […] let’s be honest about it […] that’s the bottom line, you’ve got to make a living, that’s what I mean about being sustainable […] it’s got to be a project that’s sustainable […] probably fully disabled access rehearsal rooms are about quadruple the price of the ones […] I use that have got a staircase (pp.11-12).

Accessibility costs seem magnified in Jack’s thinking. He seems focused on factors he assumes will far exceed his usual costs and, unlike others, implies little awareness of additional funding to support this. Having ROTM explained to him in the interview, his interest is not in ROTM’s practice or productions but how it is funded. Jack’s first response is, ‘I’d be interested to know who attracted that funding […] or whether the Arts Council have put aside a lump of money for this context that NPOs can have access to’ (p.12). Jack implies funding is at the forefront of his thinking regarding disability in theatre; he appears bereft at the thought of others accessing funding he may have missed but shows little sign of looking for it.

Listing fears about working with disabled actors, Hammond includes ‘the costs and access requirements of employing a disabled actor’ and ‘costs of running a disability aware audition process’ (2012). Meager and Higgins also note if employers lack ‘personal experience of disability’ they are ‘more likely to be concerned about costs’ (2011, p.15). Jack’s position on funding supports these observations. It seems being ‘nervous about the practice’, as mentioned in the previous chapter, may be as much about fearing the cost as his inexperience (Jack, p.4). Both seem interconnected. Jack repeatedly queries if work with disabled people can be ‘sustainable’ (p.9; p.11). Linking to his broken lift story discussed in chapter eight and claim to be focusing ‘on things that are practical and simple’ (p.7), Jack remarks, ‘to be absolutely honest, I have to date had a sense that you couldn’t […] I couldn’t see how it could be sustainable’ (p.9). Like David, his comments reveal uncertainty around funding, but, for Jack, this overshadows possibility of working with disabled people going forwards. He clarifies, ‘as cuts have bitten it all increasingly militates against, cause I’m pretty sure whatever… whatever’s needed will require investment, it just will […] and that becomes difficult to… to imagine’ (Jack, p.10). Jack’s views on funding suggest the story of the broken lift is more than a symbol that personifies error, a wrong that cannot be hidden; it also personifies financial investment in accessibility that he presumes is impossible to sustain.

Although Felix and Anne have worked with disabled people, they also share difficulty imagining how actors’ accessibility requirements can be funded in everyday practice. Felix initially implies funding is unproblematic but later in his interview shifts attention to industry-wide funding issues. It appears these also hinder his vision for casting disabled actors in the future. Felix explains, ‘the other thing I think […] it’s really tight at the minute, our funding’s been stuck’ (Felix, p.29), and adds:

> As we said before, there’s an extra cost if you have Deaf actors […] if you have people with other disabilities there’s a need, other support […] that’s just a factor in decision making as well. I wonder, you know I’m not saying I’d never… we have never… I have never not cast someone because of that. I’m not saying that, but I’m saying I imag… (p.30).

Felix tails off from what may be an acknowledgment that although funding did not prevent him casting disabled people in the past, the costs involved limit his imagination for repeating this. His idea that long-term companies would solve underrepresentation is thwarted by what he refers to as ‘the economics’ (Felix, p.35); funding appears a further block to considering disabled people in his productions inside or outside a company scenario.

Anne also shifts conversation from personal views and approaches to work with disabled people, to funding; like David, Jack and Felix, this seems the overriding factor shaping her thinking about future casting possibilities. Anne moves from describing work with disabled people as freeing creativity and confidence-building to, like David (p.32), describing the need for extended rehearsals as a financial challenge. As well as additional time involved in BSL communication, she recalls realising, ‘oh we need to take that into account actually that she can’t just move as quickly as other people’ (Anne, p.39). Anne speaks of, ‘all of those things you don’t have to consider at all if you’re working with able-bodied actors […] how you allow for that?’ (p.39). Towards the end of her interview, asked if routine timeframes for productions in her theatre allow for access considerations, Anne responds saying:

> the reality is… is to get extra time on anything here costs more money, like if you would need an extra week of rehearsals, that’s a lot of money […] I think here, if it’s not [a] production that comes with a huge additional budget to allow for more time, more support […] it’s much harder at other productions is the reality. And I think we all feel sad about that but that’s the reality […] another factor why people feel anxious about working with disabled actors […] there’s just no way we would be able to do that. I just don’t think that… I can’t see… even on the big shows that make a lot of money […] I just don’t think that’s going to be possible […] if I’m really honest (pp.40-41).

Anne paints a bleak picture of funding and possibilities for casting disabled actors in future practice. Maybe her remark, ‘there’s just no way we would be able to’ is a harsh reality based on literal knowledge of finances in her theatre (Anne, p.41). It seems wider funding cuts mentioned by Jack and Felix are a concern as she remarks, ‘we are all […] in the throes of austerity’ (Anne, p.41). However, it also seems relevant that what she repeatedly refers to as ‘the reality’ is interpreted alongside her experience of large-scale productions by ROTM; with this initiative receiving ACE’s largest ever strategic touring award, its scale appears to magnify her estimation of costs needed to work with disabled people, and a sense of helplessness moving forwards (ACE, 2018b). Anne continues saying, ‘we need to restructure a lot […] if we’re ever going to hope to get to a fifty/fifty split anytime soon is the reality’ (p.42). She implies this is what theatres should be aiming for, half the cast of productions being D/deaf or disabled and half non-disabled; however, this would far exceed the accurate representation of disabled people in the UK, which would account for around nineteen percent of the workforce on and off stage (Annual Population Survey, 2016). In this way, it is not just accessibility costs that seem exaggerated in Anne's thinking, but the scale of what is being asked of her as a director.

In a review of costs and benefits of employing disabled people it is noted that overestimating costs is a common response among employers (Needels and Schmitz, 2006, p.73). In Anne's case it seems important to consider why. Her presumptions of funding raise questions about the long-term impact of ROTM; how such highly funded initiatives are translated by directors in everyday practice. It is unlikely any theatre could, or is expected to, replicate productions on the scale of ROTM regularly; however, in her interview Anne was not asked about this possibility, only if 'timeframe' and 'flexibility' in her theatre allow for accessibility considerations (p.40). It is possible, like David, she thinks she is being 'pragmatic' about financial possibilities (p.33). Perhaps the scale of ROTM makes the idea of casting disabled actors more daunting. It is also possible ROTM may offer Anne a route to claiming impossibility, so, she avoids genuine consideration of smaller scale, less costly, achievable routes to casting a disabled actor in her work. Like Jack, exaggerated costs may cover Anne's anxieties about funding and casting disabled actors outside of targeted initiatives. Perhaps this is what she 'can't see' as a possibility going forward (Anne, p.40).

Sealey asserts that funding accessibility requirements is as much about mindsets as understanding routes to funding. She believes:

> everyone can make shows accessible […] It comes down to attitude and a concern that employing deaf and disabled actors […] is going to cost more. It does cost more, but that is when Access to Work comes in, this government scheme supports the cost (Sealey in Flynn, 2020).

Like directors here, Sealey acknowledges accessibility costs present literal challenges; she notes, the 'cap on how much is paid out' by Access to Work 'is very limiting' for her (quoted in Flynn, 2020). However, she argues funding accessible practice is not impossible, employers attitudes and concerns about funding are more problematic in moving towards this. In this way, it seems important to note John, Tim and Sara, who seem proactive in opening opportunities for disabled actors in their practice, do not mention funding being a significant issue. This may not mean they did not experience the funding challenges noted by others; but like Sealey, and Mark expressed in his comment mentioned earlier, it can be assumed they discovered there is ‘the possibility to do that if there’s the will to do it’ (Mark, p.11; Sealey in Flynn, 2020).

Exploring new ways to sustain funding that enables casting disabled actors in routine practice is described by David and Sara as in early stages of consideration and action. As already noted, David describes ‘beginning to think about how we address that’, and continues saying:

> we have started adding things into budgets which weren’t there before. So, for example it might be additional accommodation or transport costs, working on the assumption that there may be a disabled actor within the company (p.32).

David suggests financial certainty pre-empts any attempt to cast a disabled person, a chicken and egg situation. Nonetheless, unlike Jack or Anne, it does seem he is actively pursuing routes around perceived funding constraints; a further sign David is beginning to consider employing disabled people as a long-term possibility.

In a similar way, Sara has worked with a disabled actor and does not mention funding as a significant challenge. She acknowledges a need to plan and to adapt budgets in a similar way to Felix; but rather than suggesting this prevents attempts to cast disabled people, Sara suggests funding routes that assume their ongoing participation in her theatre. She remarks, ‘we talked about this actually in the last week, is putting into our creative budget an access… a creative access line’ (Sara, p.22). Like David, Sara appears to be seeking solutions to the constraints of short-term funding. Her repeated reference to ‘put your money where your mouth is’ was earlier linked to *Nurturing Disability Consciousness* (Sara, p.19; p.40). Yet, it seems this is not just a metaphor describing moral responsibility to act on what she says, it is literal. What she describes as, ‘broadening creatively what’s possible’ (Sara, p.40). It appears not just Sara’s disability consciousness that is motivating change in her workplace, it is where she locates control over funding. Although her organisational position seems less senior than some in this study, Sara implies personal responsibility to influence the distribution of core funding in her workplace and drive long-term change (p.10).

Findings discussed here suggest casting disabled actors is not just ‘a great opportunity for directors to reimagine roles’ in theatre, it requires them to reimagine funding structures also (Fraser, 2017b). ACE’s strategic initiatives and other funding routes are having a positive impact in terms of financially supporting accessibility in practice and increasing director-participants’ work with disabled people. However, if directors continue to look to these as controlling whether they cast disabled actors in productions, the opportunity to do so will continue to be an exception not routine. It seems necessary to consider how theatres’ core-funding can be distributed in a way that assumes the day-to-day involvement of disabled people on and off stage. Although all directors in this study carry weight in organisational decision making, shifting theatre budgets to allow for this is, for some, still far from their thinking. ACE’s report, aimed to ‘identify actions […] to improve workforce representation of disabled people’, raised an immediate need to ‘promote appropriate budgeting for access and support costs within all of its funding schemes’ (ACE, 2017d, p.63). My findings support this priority, which may ease misunderstandings and anxieties around costs involved in working with disabled actors like those expressed by Jack and Anne.

However, my findings also suggest presumptions of funding are more complex than awareness of costs or budgeting skills. If directors are unable to imagine the possibility of disabled people’s long-term employment in theatre, it is unlikely any route around literal funding constraints will be sought and vice versa. As such, short term funding grants or initiatives seem to offer some in this study a convenient way to avoid consideration of disability in day-to-day practice. The perception that casting disabled actors is an exception is most likely constraining casting opportunities more than any real funding challenges in theatres or the industry. For director-participants with a mindset towards making accessible practice a long-term reality, an open, creative, and proactive approach to theatre-making appears just as necessary financially as theatrically. Those, like Sara and David who perceive possibility for shifting funding structures are still searching for solutions.

9.2 Perceiving a Lack of Experienced Disabled Actors: A Catch-22

It is not only funding that director-participants perceive as an external constraint on casting disabled people in their productions; the following two subthemes explore perceived difficulty searching for disabled actors, as director-participants describe failure and success in their casting experiences. This subtheme focuses on how director-participants consider recruitment is hindered by a shortage of actors who define as disabled people, and levels of experience and training among them. Interview responses relevant to this subtheme uncover directors' personal views on the ability of disabled actors to tackle major theatrical roles. The discussion that follows also exposes how directors in this study externally locate blame for difficulties in casting alongside the historical exclusion of disabled people in theatre and actor training. It considers how they interpret a current catch-22 situation for disabled actors, which it seems directors also feel trapped in and view as constraining casting choices in their practice.

As mentioned in the literature review, theatre and disability scholars have long-examined the exclusion of disabled people in theatre, detailing how actors have been limited to stereotypical role-types in the past (Kuppers, 2003; Barners and Mercer, 2003; Sandahl and Auslander, 2006; Conroy, 2009). Disability activists and artists have campaigned against limitations in casting, with institutional and physical barriers to training and performance venues recognised as a factor in this (Startin, 2014; Snow, 2016). In her article, *Are there enough professional disabled actors?* Tracey questions how historical barriers to the acting profession affect new diversity targets (2015). She queries how a lack of disabled people with formal actor training might challenge the ability for targets to be met and suggests barriers to training have casting repercussions in terms of disabled actors' level of skill and adaptability (Tracey, 2015). As noted in chapter six, Startin also believes, 'those without training are unlikely to get past any audition […] because of the standards and prejudices of mainstream theatres' (quoted in Tracey, 2015). Director-participants' perceptions of the availability of experienced disabled actors both echo and expand on public discourse such as this. Their responses make it possible to consider what may be literal recruitment difficulties that complicate moves to increase engagement with disabled actors in casting. They also give insight into where wider exclusion or prejudice in the industry, and directors' individual assumptions, might still constrain casting opportunities.

There is common assumption among director-participants that there are not enough disabled actors in the industry. In this way, underrepresentation of disabled people in theatre is perceived as an external factor constraining their casting choices. For John, who seems personally invested in making theatre accessible and opening opportunities for disabled people in casting, this is expressed as his biggest challenge going forwards. Asked what would make it possible for him to work with disabled actors more, he says 'the big thing for me is finding more disabled actors to… in that kind of pool of talent that we draw on when we're casting' (John, p.32). Recalling her experience of auditioning disabled people, Sue also comments, 'it's a small world um I think all the actors know each other' (p.23). Like John, Sue implies the scope of her casting search is limited when considering disabled people.

The perception that the pool of disabled actors is small is expressed as a problem for directors in this study; perceptions of recruiting disabled actors being 'not easy' (Lucas, p.23) or 'not straightforward' (Dawn, p.35) seem shared. Yet, this is not just an issue of numbers but about recruiting disabled people they consider experienced actors. Lucas' 'text-by-text' approach to casting meant he was searching for an actor with a specific impairment. He remarks, 'the role demanded that, and I have to say it was not easy' (Lucas, p.18; p.23), and adds:

> it was really not easy, the pool was quite reduced, and then, yeah, the big famous guys and then the rest in a way. That was not easy I have to say. I was thinking I would have at least 10 or 15 people in the space, but it didn't work out like that (p.24).

Lucas implies it is not just the size of the 'pool' that surprised him and complicated his search, but the availability of actors he rates highly (p.24). He points to a distinct gap between disabled actors with vast performance experience and those without. Sara shares a similar perception, saying, 'the pool is much smaller […] you can kind of find that the absolutely amazing actors in that pool have been snapped up (p.28).

Dawn describes in more detail how difficulty recruiting actors played out in her practice. She notes how the casting director in her theatre 'did a load of open auditions for disabled actors just to see… before I got here' (Dawn, p.20). Recalling casting a production, Dawn explains, 'we actively tried to invite some of those people who she thought were good from that initial audition and none of them were available *(laughs)*' (p.20). Asked if she has other casting stories to share, Dawn replies with 'no, apart from trying to get some disabled actors to come in and failing to' (p.21). Later in her interview she revisits this situation, saying:

> we were also really keen to meet disabled actors, and we failed to meet any […] the casting director did a bit of extra work trying […] and people weren't available or weren't interested or weren't around which often happens here […] that's the only play where I am… where we've kind of talked about it and gone yeah it would be really great and there is none of these characters where it would particularly be an issue, and we failed to meet anyone (Dawn, pp.33-34).

Dawn's repeated use of the term *failed* implies personal disappointment in what may have felt like a progressive casting decision being thwarted (p.21; pp.33-34). Dawn's laughter suggests she sees a sense of irony in this, that effort to recruit disabled people was rejected by actors themselves, contrary to what she expected. There appeared to be no issue finding actors to invite to audition, only that those 'thought' to be 'good' were unavailable (Dawn, pp.33-34). Dawn adds, 'I will probably try to see them another time for another show um but yeah it's not straightforward' (p.35).

Director-participants' common use of the term *pool* also implies a sense of distance from this grouping, the pool being where directors go to select an actor. Dawn's, Lucas' and Sara's experiences suggest when they got there, it was not as expected. They refer to a pool that is clearly separate to a general pool, suggesting in casting terms director-participants' categorise actors with impairments differently to others. In contrast, writing on non-traditional casting, Crook notes how 'colorblind casting has become the norm in most theatres […] and because of this the talent pool has greatly broadened from what it was' (2017, p.69). He presents a view that actors from other minority communities have now filtered into a wider talent pool, expanding directors' casting choices. Directors' responses here suggest disabled people are not yet considered part of this wider grouping. Director-participants' references to a pool of disabled actors does, however, indicate recognition of them as established in the industry. As a professional term associated with casting, the pool of actors can refer to, 'readily available talent', or a 'pool filled with people you want to work with' (Lift Off Global Network, no date).

In line with this view, as directors interpret their casting experiences, they appear keen to stress that difficulty recruiting disabled people is not due to lack of talent. Even those who present more charitable or patronising attitudes towards disabled actors express high regard for talent witnessed in performance. David refers more often to disabled actors as 'inspiring' (p.2), expressing the kind of rhetoric rejected by disability scholars and activists as objectifying and devaluing the achievements of disabled people (Young, 2012; Grue, 2016). Still, his later remark on talent among these actors is, 'essentially, it's […] of a very high standard' (David, p.20). As mentioned in chapter seven*,* disabled actors' talent was a revelation for Lucas (p.12) and Felix (p.17), and referring to an actor he watched in performance, Jack states, 'she's got a disability but she's fantastic […] an exceptional actress' (p.15). Dawn describes how watching a ROTM production raised her expectations of talent, saying, 'it felt like everyone was just expected to be brilliant in all areas […] like it was going "look at all these options, look at all these talented people"' (p.17). What appears as genuine praise for talent exhibited by disabled people in theatre, and eagerness not to be seen to belittle that, is expressed time and time again by directors in this study. John, who is perhaps most connected with disabled people working in the industry, notes, 'there are particular disabled actors um that I've worked with and whose work I rate' (p.3). However, John also explains:

> I think there are some extraordinary un disabled performers […] I think the standard of err disabled actors is probably no different from the standard of any actors um but they... they are often less experienced, obviously given their age comparatively, because they've had fewer opportunities generally (p.19).

Like John, others also attribute blame for casting difficulty to historical exclusion of disabled people in theatre, rather than talent recognition being a problem. Director-participants expand on how they perceive barriers to formal training and onstage experience influence opportunities to cast disabled actors now. As Sara interprets difficulty recruiting actors, the ‘much smaller’ pool and the problem of ‘amazing actors’ being ‘snapped up’, she states it is ‘because of lack of representation’ (p.28). She explains:

> trying to speak honestly, where […] actors have been asked to play a range of things and maybe their versatility has been exploited and honed and those muscles, I think my experience is that hasn’t been the case […] with um err actors with disabilities in quite the same way (Sara, p.28).

Sara acknowledges a historical context to this situation, that roles offered to disabled actors have been limited in the past. In line with Tracey (2015) and others here, she sets out a presumption that, therefore, they lack experience and adaptability in playing a range of roles. Stating effort to ‘speak honestly’ Sara implies this view is often unspoken (p.28). However, the notion that disabled actors lack ‘muscle’ is repeated in her interview (Sara, p.28; p.30; p.37). The same term is chosen by Anne, and the sentiment shared by others, particularly in response to a question about Fraser’s belief, that ‘there aren’t many directors who trust a disabled actor in a lead role' (2017a).

In response to this, the importance of acting ‘muscle’ is reiterated by Sara, as she explains:

> people need to have flexed their muscles, their acting craft um certainly to lead a show and what we haven’t… because we haven’t employed and pushed disabled actors historically, we don’t have lots and lots of disabled actors […] who have been able to practice their craft enough to do that, and I hope that the more we work with disabled actors […] to do parts that they would never have been historically considered for […] the more then we should absolutely be able to trust erm disabled actors in lead roles […] I like to hope that I would absolutely trust a disabled actor […] why wouldn’t they be the lead for a show? (p.37)

Sara seems quite matter of fact that she has no difficulty envisioning a disabled actor in a lead role, but not yet. Although Sara seems hopeful this may change, she suggests this process starts with disabled people being considered for roles that challenge traditional casting choices. Responses from directors in this study suggest this is still rare. As such, although Sara says she is open to casting disabled people, in the current theatre climate it seems there is a limit to the size of roles she feels she can consider them for.

The perception that disabled actors lack muscle is also raised by Anne, yet she attributes blame for this to historical barriers to training; a view shared by Felix and Tim. Anne explains, ‘there aren’t disabled actors with the muscle and the training that able… able-bodied actors have, but that’s through a lot of very complex invisible barriers that exist for dis… for disabled actors going to drama school’ (p.37). Anne suggests access to drama school has a direct impact on actors’ capabilities to play lead roles and her consideration of them. She notes, ‘it’s not essential but it… I think it does make a difference’ (Anne, p.37). Linking to Startin’s belief that ‘those without training are unlikely to get past any audition’ (quoted in Tracey, 2015), Anne implies actors lacking formal training will struggle to measure up to her casting standards. In a similar way, Felix reflects on how a perceived lack of actor training among disabled people adds to difficulty casting disabled actors, explaining:

> drama schools are the gate keeper of who becomes actors […] they’re not necessarily […] having the conversations that we’re having now, so then as a director you go, ‘well, where are all the actors with the disabilities who’ve come through RADA or LAMDA or Central?’. So, then I’m meeting somebody who hasn’t trained, which might be alright for some certain… a certain… and it’s interesting that um both [names actors he worked with] have trained, you see […] that’s part of the difficulty as well (p.30).

Felix seems to consider himself more forward-thinking than these institutions, even in discussing this topic as part of my research, yet locates control for the range of actors he meets with them. Felix notes both actors with impairments he has worked with had formal training, and states, ‘the problem is there aren’t enough of those people’ (p.32). Like Anne, it seems there is far less chance of Felix finding a fit for actors who lack formal training in his practice. Tim is also blatant in blaming training institutions for a discrepancy he perceives between disabled and non-disabled actors. He comments, ‘they haven’t had the training, they haven’t had the opportunity […] the acting can be not as good as… as other actors [….] and it’s because of the dinosaurs who won’t let them into their drama schools (Tim, p.19).

Director-participants seem to have their eyes open to wider challenges facing disabled actors in terms of accessing training and opportunity. In this way, their perceptions of a shortage of disabled actors accurately reflect a reality backed by statistical evidence. ACE’s (2019) figures make clear disabled people remain underrepresented in the theatre workforce; the pool of actors is small. As noted in chapter six, data also suggests, ‘1% of graduates from major drama schools declared a physical impairment’ (Masso, 2018); there are few disabled people entering the industry with formal training. However, as with funding, although directors here may confront the same historical legacy in the industry, individual responses to this as an external constraint on casting disabled people vary greatly. Linking to the previous chapter, directors’ confidence, comfort with new territory, and adaptability in working disabled people plays a part in this also. Anne and Felix describe no recent attempts to cast disabled actors; their views on how training issues impact casting do not seem based on attempts to do so. Instead, as with funding, Anne points to how lack of training can add to directors’ fears. Again, it seems possible her broader observation may reflect her own position, as she explains:

> people are scared of disability and they’re scared of giving that responsibility, it’s probably fine to wheel around in the background, but […] I think we’re a long way away from people going, ‘oh well, if Glenda Jackson can play King Lear, I don’t see why a disabled woman couldn’t’ (Anne, pp.37-38).

Dawn seems more open personally admitting, ‘casting someone who is not that experienced […] feels quite scary […] and at the moment most of our professional disabled actors don’t have a huge amount of experience’ (p.46). Dawn recognises implications of casting less experienced actors. However, like her response to a ‘failed’ attempt to recruit disabled actors, that she will ‘try to see them another time for another show’ (pp.33-35), Dawn conveys a sense of resolve in this. She implies lack of training or experience would not dictate her casting choices, saying, ‘I might um... have concerns, it wouldn’t stop me’ (Dawn, p.46). Dawn adds, ‘everyone has to play their first massive part, so, you do… do it, but you’re aware of it and you work out how you can support them’ (p.46). Similarly, as

Sue reflects on her work with disabled actors, she describes how self-assurance in her ability to support those with diverse levels of experience was a necessary part of the process. She remarks:

> because disabled actors have been given so few opportunities historically and compared to the general actor pool, um because many of them haven’t been trained in a conventional way as well, you've got to be really confident in your own ability to work with people who might be a very different levels of experience (Sue, p.23).

Sue implies additional demands were placed on her in accommodating actors lacking formal training or new to the industry, as well as seasoned professionals. It appears she is offering advice to me or others that when casting disabled people this must be anticipated. However, based on Anne’s and Felix’s remarks, it seems not all directors are flexible or confident to bridge a gap between inexperience and new opportunity for disabled actors in this way.

Rather than view historic exclusion of disabled people as controlling casting choices available to him, John appears to view this as a problem to be solved. His observation of a shortage of experienced or trained actors is expressed as a troubling dilemma in driving disability agenda in his theatre. Like Dawn, John conveys a resolute attitude in his response. In his view, the presumption that he would not ‘trust a disabled actor in a lead role’ is ‘absolutely not the case’ (Fraser, 2017a; John, p.26). This is supported by his decision to cast an actor with a physical impairment in a lead role. However, John also describes how a shortage of experienced or trained actors has thwarted efforts to repeat this, what seems a literal difficulty for him going forwards. Reflecting on rehearsals, John has perhaps witnessed more closely what Sara and Anne may perceive as lack of acting ‘muscle’ (Sara, p.28, p.30, p.37; Anne, p.37); he remarks, ‘part of the lack of experience sometimes is the… the lack of that kind of um rigour in a rehearsal process that… that other err non-disabled performers kind of get battle hardened to’ (John p.20). In this scenario, John, like Sue and Dawn, seems to recognise a need for flexibility and self-assurance as a director, knowing how to support actors and adapt his standards and processes. He describes mutual benefits in directing less experienced actors, noting how he has felt able to extend their performance experience in line with the demands of producing house theatres; but also considers benefits for him in learning how impairment impacts individuals' abilities in rehearsal and how to adapt his process accordingly (John, p.19).

Like Sue and Dawn, John seems open to working with less experienced actors. Nevertheless, it seems training issues have presented difficulty casting larger roles, as he explains:

> It's kind of technical training […] because, you know, a lot of disabled performers have been excluded from that kind of training they don't necessarily come to the party um with three years of voice work at drama school behind them, um they've had to make it up as they've gone along in a way um. We were desperate to find um a disabled performer […] finding a disabled [character name] was a real problem […] That was the kind of major flaw that we didn't really find a disabled actor in those circumstances that had the kind of the weight and the charisma and experience to really do that role justice, um is the truth (John, pp.27-28).

In this situation it appears John felt his standards were compromised. He expresses a sense of regret in his casting choice, unlikely to be something he wants to repeat. Although John is referring to a specific and complex role here, the issues he faced seem unresolved. He has since attempted to offer a second lead role to the actor he previously cast, which was not taken up. Just as Sara found actors were 'snapped up' (p. 28), John notes, 'probably he doesn't need it badly enough' (p.18).

It is perhaps instinctive for directors to offer roles to actors they are familiar with. However, with John's desire to expand opportunities for disabled people in theatre, this more likely illustrates the extent to which he feels casting choices are limited, not a preference. This approach to casting will only make it more difficult for directors to recruit disabled actors they consider experienced and rate highly. It will not widen the pool, or develop levels of experience among actors in it, an issue John, Sara and Mark recognise is a sticking point going forwards. As John reflects on ACE's diversity strategy, which he feels is 'requiring people to change more […] than they have in the past' (p.7), he comments:

> there is a catch-22 that people get locked in… in this stage of the process where […] disabled actors need the experience in order to improve their skills and technique and how do you get that experience unless you're

> employed. So, there's a kind of *(laughs)…* how to get out of that circle (pp.7-8).

John implies this catch-22 is a problem for directors in responding to ACE's diversity requirements, and in retaining his standards for casting major roles. Sara acknowledges the same situation, saying, 'there's a chicken and egg of we haven't done it, so then there aren't those people, so then we haven't done it' (p.37). Mark also recognises:

> if you're not getting the opportunities, then how do you prove that you can do it, um and that's the catch 22 that many err... artists, and I'm sure especially disabled artists feel themselves in, which is that someone's not prepared to take the leap of faith to give them the break (p.17).

John, Sara, and Mark imply the route out of this catch-22 is personal. They acknowledge historical exclusion has shaped the current situation but place directors in a position of influence moving forwards. In this way, John has moved on from Tracey's (2015) question, '*Are there enough professional disabled actors?'* to contemplate 'how to get out of that circle?' (John, p.8). However, even in writing this chapter this is a sticking point; there are no neat solutions or stories of routes around this situation to add as the discussion moves to the process of casting itself. John's openness to casting disabled actors in major roles has brought complexity surrounding inexperience and training to the surface. Rather than this being reason to stop seeking to recruit disabled actors, he seems to sit with difficulty experienced in this as a personal issue. For others who continue to tell themselves that a shortage of disabled actors is outside their control, the route out of this catch-22 is perhaps a waiting game; a wait for directors, like John, Sue or Dawn, who seem more confident or willing to offer disabled people who are new to the industry or lack formal training an opportunity to 'practice their craft' (Sara, p.37). Or a wait for external bodies like ACE to shift its strategy in a way that broadens the pool of disabled actors, or perhaps broadens the pool of directors opening onstage opportunities to them.

9.3 Insufficient Processes and Alternative Routes to Casting

This final subtheme regarding director-participants' experiences of theatre practice and disability gets under the surface of what is happening in the process of casting itself. In addition to perceived funding issues and a shortage of experienced actors, formal casting routes are expressed as an external constraint on casting. This part of the discussion uncovers how director-participants locate control for difficulty recruiting disabled people with casting directors and Spotlight; part of a familiar process they suggest complicates a search for actors with impairments. Directors' responses here point to alternative casting routes. They give insight into reliance on personal recommendations and attempts to sidestep formal processes to delimit contact with disabled people, including open casting calls. Interview responses relevant to this subtheme make it possible to consider if alternative routes to casting are extending directors' work with disabled actors and how structural constraints influence their responses to ACE's diversity strategy.

Director-participants' describe how their routine casting processes involve either freelance or resident casting directors associated with their theatre organisations. As a casting director himself, Rutherford describes, 'the key responsibility of a casting director is to suggest actors to […] directors […] the role of the casting director has become important within the creative process for most professional productions' (Rutherford, 2012, p.15). Use of Spotlight, an online casting directory with sixty-five thousand registered members, is also considered by directors here as a familiar part of this process (Spotlight, 2020). However, as they share stories of casting disabled people, these usual routes to recruitment are perceived as proving insufficient or sidestepped entirely. Director-participants point to difficulty promoting casting calls and where gaps in personal connection with disabled people are being bridged in practice. For example, Sara describes, 'in a way there is a massive detective kind of… […] you are having to go… have recommendations […] it's not anywhere near as straightforward as the normal […] call out that might go on Spotlight' (p.28). Sara's comment illustrates a common view among directors here, that the process of recruiting disabled people is significantly more complex than usual casting routes. Her description of this as ‘detective work’ also illustrates a shared perception and experience that extra effort is required of directors in this (Sara, p27).

Simon and John, at seemingly opposite ends of the scale regarding engagement with disability, describe similar experiences of working with casting directors. In his only description of attempting to recruit a disabled person, Simon explains:

> the first show actually I did here […] the character in that had… had just had a stroke and so was in a wheelchair, so, um that was a… was a really complex situation […] there was a desire I know, to find a disabled actor and when we came to do… and it’s a really interesting thing that […] it became um a really *(pause)* complex moment working with the casting directors around how that happened and we ended up with an able-bodied actor playing that role, um and I would hope that we would never be in that situation ever again (p.14).

Like others, Simon’s familiar casting process involves a casting director and a search for actors via Spotlight. In this scenario, an attempt to recruit a disabled actor to play a disabled character was unsuccessful. As Simon returns to the story later in his interview, he explains:

> we err were met with lots of resistance […] there was a lot of um ‘oh well, it’s really hard to find those actors, um there aren’t very many’, ‘yes, we’ve put it out on Spotlight, but we haven’t had anyone come back’ (pp.25-26).

Simon implies his casting breakdown on Spotlight yielding no response, so, the task of finding a disabled actor was considered too complicated. Simon repeatedly refers to complexity around disability in his interview, but here he distances himself from this. He expresses embarrassment about the outcome of the process and blames the casting director for this. Simon does acknowledge some influence, however, as he explains, ‘I was very new in the job, so I didn’t… I didn’t deal with it properly’ (p.26). He suggests this would end differently now and continues saying, ‘of course, we are totally open and we’re trying but it’s not… you know, that’s coming from, to be honest, from the casting directors’ (Simon, p.26).

Simon suggests this experience was not a one-off, that, despite his efforts, casting directors control his ongoing lack of engagement with disabled people and response to ACE's diversity strategy. He explains how, 'every single show we're casting we're saying to casting directors we'd like to see disabled actors […] but um… […] I don't know the last show here that we would have had a disabled actor on' (Simon, p.28). Simon cannot recall any inhouse production or audition involving a disabled person; a position he seems aware is unconducive with ACE's aims and funding requirements. He appears reliant on casting directors to fix this. He notes, 'talking about the Arts Council, and, in my experience, […] this is not trying to pass blame, but I think there's a lot for casting directors to learn' (Simon, p.36). Simon goes to some length to explain why casting directors and formal casting processes limit his choices and, therefore, why he is disadvantaged in recruiting disabled people. Reasons include not having 'a casting director on staff', and, therefore, not having 'a growing pool of actors that they are knowing' (Simon, p.36). He also explains casting directors 'have a very short time' and 'all kinds of areas around that make the whole system very unconducive to taking real care and really making sure one's giving fair opportunities' (Simon, p.36).

The idea that casting directors need to shift their personal assumptions of disabled actors, and that the system itself is insufficient for recruiting disabled people is echoed by John. Although John has cast disabled people, he shares a similar experience to Simon regarding his requests not being heeded and casting directors constraining his choices in this way. John explains:

> there is a long way to go in terms of casting agents […] we've had a lot of not useful experience saying, you know when we put out a casting breakdown, and we say all of these parts are on offer to anybody basically, but unless you specifically say that this part will be played by a blind person or this part must be played by a wheelchair user then disabled actors aren't put up for those parts […] so, part of it I think is about educating casting directors […] getting them to put their… those who have them, getting them to put their disabled clients up for parts that aren't specific err about the need for disability' (pp.14-15).

John and Simon highlight a necessity to specify to casting directors that they are open to seeing disabled people, that this is not assumed. Also, even when spelt out, this proves unfruitful. In his many years as a director, John thinks he has only ever met ‘one or two’ disabled people through formal casting routes in his theatre (p.16). Dawn makes a similar observation, saying:

> I’ve never had a situation where a disabled actor has um been submitted or come… just rocked up without um… for a show. I think agents um self um censor in terms of who they submit for things if you don’t write all over something (p.34).

Like John, Dawn notices disabled actors are not automatically put forward in casting unless she sets this out. Tim’s experience is similar. Although he has had some success meeting disabled people via casting directors, he considers himself the driving force in this, saying, ‘it comes from me talking, like pushing casting directors to make sure that we see people’ (Tim, p.16). Tim implies a level of persistence and personal motivation is required in this.

These directors share a presumption that casting directors only put disabled actors forward for certain roles, and when pressured to do so. It seems they consider this a general misunderstanding and an external constraint in recruiting disabled people. However, it is important to consider what is being set out by them in briefing casting directors; a question that is returned to at the end of the chapter. John describes significant consideration of how disabled people fit into casting processes and upfront dialogue with casting directors about this. In contrast, Simon’s claim that he is asking to see disabled actors for ‘every single show’ appears not entirely accurate. Later in his interview he remarks, ‘I’m not saying for every single role I want to see a disabled actor’ (Simon p.37); he also clarifies, ‘that thing I was saying about saying to a casting director that I want to see a disabled actor for every role has only just happened on the show that I’m doing now’ (Simon, p.42). In this way, it seems there are literal constraints associated with casting directors not suggesting disabled people, but that blame located externally can also cover directors’ own lack of consideration of disabled people in their casting process.

As with all participants in this study, casting directors will each have unique lived experiences and understanding of disability and theatre practice; these are beyond the scope of this study but would further discussion on its findings in the future. Consequently, not all directors here perceive formal casting routes constraining or have perhaps questioned how disabled people fit into them. Anne expresses a contrary view to John, Dawn and Tim saying the casting director she works with is, ‘amazing at just getting actors in, regardless of what their ability or disability is […] that’s just working with a good person who knows […] the Deaf and disabled acting community (p.24). Anne seems unique in not having to request to see disabled people; she reiterates, ‘I’ve never had to have that conversation […] It’s just a given’ (Anne, p.31). Anne implies having a casting director who is open and well-connected is an advantage in meeting disabled people in day-to-day casting practice. However, it is not obvious how this distinguishes her work from others; Anne still has limited stories of auditions or work with disabled people outside of what appear to be disability focused initiatives and is yet to direct a disabled person in her productions. In this way, directors’ perceptions of casting also raise query around their expectations; perhaps, unlike John, some are satisfied that meeting ‘one or two’ disabled people as part of the casting process is enough (John, p.16).

As David overviews his usual casting process, like Anne, he describes casting disabled people as straightforward; however, how disabled people fit into his process seems to have been given little thought. David explains, we use Spotlight a lot […] that’s the main tool […] we’d send out a casting breakdown to agents […] I’m not sure that it’s necessarily different with disabled actors’ (p.18). Asked if disabled people respond to his casting calls, however, David responds with:

> that’s a very good point […] we do get disabled actors um applying, which is great, whether we’re getting enough I’m not sure […] I suppose it… unless you’re actually reaching out, you… you may well not be getting the range of people […] that’s maybe something we do need to think about going forward (p.19).

Rather than casting disabled people being easy, it seems David has made little attempt to do so yet. For others, like Dawn and Sara who have, Spotlight is perceived as another insufficient casting route.

Sara adds detail to her comment that casting disabled actors is not ‘as straightforward as the normal […] call out that might go on Spotlight’ (p.28). She highlights a further chicken and egg scenario in casting; that directors have not been actively recruiting disabled people, as such, there has been little motivation for them to register with Spotlight. In practice, Sara implies this complicates her ability to connect with actors she hears of or watches in performance, saying:

> a lot of disabled actors haven't bothered… of course paying the money to go on Spotlight because actually it's not a tool through which lots of disabled actors get work. So, um what err I have found is that […] somebody will say 'oh there's this brilliant…' […] and I'm like 'oh brilliant tell me her name and I'll look her up on Spotlight', and she's not there, she doesn't exist on Spotlight' (p.27).

Sara implies it is not just the availability of actors that limits casting choices, it is finding a way to contact those she encounters that causes frustration.

Dawn perceives a different constraint on her search for actors via Spotlight around how disabled people are choosing to specify personal impairment. She describes her first experience of searching for a Deaf actor, saying:

> we put out a casting call through Spotlight, as you normally would, making it really clear we wanted a Deaf actor, and I would say two thirds of the people who were submitted were not Deaf. I spent a lot of time contacting agents saying 'hello, it doesn't say your client is Deaf anywhere on their CV' […] some just don't put it on their CV um, I'd done a search of everyone on Spotlight […] and contacted some of them who weren't submitted to see if they were available (Dawn, p.21).

Dawn pursued her usual casting routes which appear unfruitful; like John and Simon, she implies a request for Deaf actors was ignored by agents who considered it appropriate to suggest hearing actors instead. It seems personal effort to search online was also complicated by actors choosing not to specify impairment on their CV, as she adds:

> it was interesting to then discover […] that not all Deaf actors say they are Deaf on Spotlight, and um that's really annoying when you are looking for a Deaf actor, but then […] should you have to declare it? […] I don't know (Dawn p.35).

With formal casting routes perceived as insufficient, the question of where to find actors with impairments is responded to in various ways by director-participants. Some, like Dawn, recognise complexity around specifying impairment as part of the process, others express difficulty knowing where to search or have found alternative casting routes more viable. Wider issues around self-definition in casting and specific registries for disabled people in theatre are also mentioned by Sue. Like Dawn, she expresses concern about separating disabled people from a general pool of actors in casting. But she also points to a common view among directors here that this is a current necessity. Sue explains:

> [It's] a great shame […] institutions like Spotlight […] you've got a special disabled register as well […] to have another category, disabled actors, smacks of quotas […], although […] at the moment where are you going to find disabled actors […] too many people in the industry are invisible […] how do you address that apart from having a register, you know somewhere you can go to find them (p.6).

In 2017 when Spotlight and the National Theatre launched *ProFile* the database included 'over 100 performers with more waiting to be filmed' (National Theatre, no date). Bevan describes *ProFile* as 'a resource to increase our own knowledge of this talented and diverse group of actors […] and we quickly realised the whole industry was craving this knowledge' (Spotlight, 2020). Impetus for creating *ProFile* supports the view of directors here, that usual routes to casting constrain opportunity to meet disabled actors and there is necessity to specifically search for them as part of the process. With interviews for this study conducted almost a year after its launch, the extent to which directors are 'craving this knowledge' is, however, questionable. Sara, who is proactive in engaging with disability issues in her theatre is aware of this new resource. She describes this as a 'massive database of disabled actors […] which has got kind of videos of them, and you know, their CVs […] a kind of resource um that particularly focuses on disability um and that's great' (Sara, p.27). Others like David and Simon seem less clear what it offers them. Simon notes Spotlight, 'have added on a section that allows one to specifically search I think, which I think has had a big impact and I try… I can't remember if I've confused that with something else' (pp.35-36). David comments on 'a database of creative actors […] I can't remember what it's called' (p.14). It seems a database like *ProFile* has potential to make directors' search for actors easier. Yet, for Simon and David there is little sense they are 'craving this knowledge' or intend to draw on it soon (Spotlight, 2020). As with Anne's unique position of having disabled actors routinely suggested by her casting director (p.24), it seems even when routes to casting disabled people are made easier, they are only impactful if directors are willing to pursue them.

In this way, directors who have chosen to cast disabled actors in productions describe how they diverted around perceived constraints in the casting process. As with Tim's persistence in pressing casting directors, it seems personal effort is involved in finding alternative ways to promote work and build connections with disabled people. In response to difficulty finding a Deaf actor via Spotlight, Dawn explains how she extended her search, saying, 'we also did a lot on social media […] to get the word out, and also with various clubs […] a bit more broadly than we probably would if we were casting able-bodied… a non-Deaf actor (p.21). It appears her effort was beyond what is routinely necessary, that she was also persistent in chasing agents and highlighting the opportunities available. In his work Mark describes casting calls were 'put through Unlimited, through DadaFest, through Disability Arts Online and the places where we know disabled performers are' (p.12). Although, as with much of his practice, Mark relied on collaborators to lead on this, it seems this experience expanded his view of ways to reach disabled people with casting opportunities.

Lucas, John, Felix, Tim and Sara describe personal recommendations as their route to finding disabled actors. Searching for actors with impairments, Lucas recalls, 'someone else said to me he's […] great […] so, it was like inside knowledge' (p.24). Speaking about an actor with a physical impairment in his production, John explains, 'the reason I've worked with him is because [director's name] knew him' (p.17). Graeae, with its reputation as a company experienced in casting disabled people, is also viewed by Felix and Tim as a viable casting resource. Felix notes, 'when we did the um the casting […] we went through Jenny at Graeae […] we got a list of people to meet through her […] people she's worked with (p.31). In a similar way, Tim explains he 'was very very keen' to meet disabled people in casting and his casting director recommended, 'a slightly different angle with disabled actors […] let's get in touch with Graeae who have the very best catalogue' (p.15).

Casting via recommendations is not unusual; Norris acknowledges personal relationships play a huge role in his casting choices, saying, 'it becomes personal -

and that's the way the industry works' (quoted in Hutchinson, 2016a). Discussing 'the lack of disabled actors cast in mainstream theatre', Norris believes that disabled actors 'could be being excluded because they do not have the right connections' (in Hutchinson, 2016a). In this way, it appears directors in this study rely on companies like Graeae and others who have worked with disabled people to bridge personal gaps in their connections in the industry. Norris also acknowledges, casting 'my mates' is common practice, but this is not yet an option for most directors here when seeking disabled actors (in Hutchinson, 2016a). Only John describes having a network of 'disabled actors um that I've worked with and whose work I rate', to draw on in casting (p.3). For others, it seems casting other people's 'mates' is considered the next best option so far (Hutchinson, 2016a).

It is likely recommendations give assurance to directors here regarding their casting choices, particularly around the perceived lack of training and experience among disabled actors detailed in this chapter. As such, there is no mention of Lucas or Felix attempting to find disabled actors via formal casting routes; recommendations from others were perhaps thought preferable or to carry less risk. This route sidesteps necessity to press casting directors to reach disabled people in the way John and Tim describe, or to sift through Spotlight like Sara and Dawn. Sara's earlier comment, 'you are having to go… have recommendations', however, suggests this is again viewed as a necessity not a preference for her (p.28). She explains:

> it's really exciting when someone goes 'oh my god there's this brilliant actress' […] I'm literally like 'right, okay I'll write that one down' […] It's kind of […] keeping that antenna […] this web that we build […] then being able to recall where those threads lead […] it has its challenges (Sara, p.30).

Sara suggests building connections with disabled actors via recommendations is not easy but is her only route around failings in familiar processes. As mentioned, she repeats, 'there's much more detective work', implying effort and proactivity to recruit actors in this way (Sara, p.27). There is a sense she is 'craving this knowledge', that she wants to build a network of disabled people to draw on in casting (Spotlight, 2020). Asked how she feels about extra work involved, she says, 'it is more work and I think that's okay. I think we have to work harder; we have to work harder as an industry' (Sara, p.30). Although Sara perceives difficulty, this is not a reason to stop her search for actors; instead, finding casting solutions is expressed as a personal and industry-wide responsibility. Sara settles, 'casting I think is an interesting one', implying, as with long-term funding and the current catch-22 situation, she is yet to see a clear way forward (p.24).

In a similar way, John implies recommendations are a viable route to casting with formal routes failing, but one-off solutions on a production-by-production basis are not enough. John's vision for casting disabled people seems to extend beyond diversion around formal routes, he remarks, 'how to move it from that to the […] more formal industry channels has been the question' (John, p.17). John expresses personal effort to uncover where sticking points in meeting disabled actors really are. He explains, 'the solution to that is something we are moving towards […] to try and get past that filter […] it's really tricky you know, it's really tricky that' (John, p.16). John describes his next steps in personally broaching this are an open casting call for disabled actors and monitoring how actors find their way to auditions in his theatre (pp.16-17). John implies this is his way of taking control of constraints in casting, sidestepping casting directors and gaining first-hand knowledge of the range of actors available to him.

John seems aware open casting calls have been explored by other theatre organisations as a way of connecting with disabled actors, but, like Sara's 'detective work' (p.27), also implies this is not ideal (p.16). As mentioned in introducing this thesis, the RSC and the National Theatre were among the first to hold general auditions for Deaf and disabled actors. On announcing this, playwright and dramaturg Kate O'Reilly wrote, 'I'm at least encouraged' but 'time will tell if this is lip service' (2013). Startin's response was similar, saying, 'It felt like a sticking plaster on a gaping wound, but it might end up as the start of something' (2014). It is possible these auditions were a springboard for casting disabled people in seasons with the RSC and the National Theatre; but, even for John, who seems proactive in finding casting solutions, ways forward have not moved beyond this. O'Reilly's (2013) and Startin's (2014) mixed reactions to open castings resonate with John's repeated remark 'it's really tricky' (p.16). In closing his interview John emphasises again, 'they are not really coming through the standard audition process is the truth […] that’s the barrier that we need to overcome (p.32). Just as Dawn and Sue expressed unease with separate registers of disabled actors, John promotes a necessity for disabled people to be part of ‘formal industry channels’ (p.17), the wider pool of actors. He and Sara somehow sit with their realisation that familiar casting routes fail in this and continue to grapple with their position in influencing structural change towards making this possible.

Findings discussed here highlight how directors’ desires, motivations, and expectations can be more limiting than any literal constraints in casting processes. Nonetheless, they also raise issues surrounding formal casting routes that need resolving. It is likely learning is necessary for some casting directors and agents, and further thought into how new registries of disabled actors can be effectively integrated into formal casting processes is needed. Directors wanting to cast disabled actors have found ways to do so, promoting calls via new channels and bridging gaps in connections with disabled people via recommendations. But some directors in this study are unsatisfied with this current situation; for those wanting to broaden ongoing casting choices, significant personal effort and persistence is required to recruit, with no clear way forward. It seems important that conversations around how formal casting routes connect with disabled people are extended across the industry. Even during interviews for this study directors imply there are aspects of the casting process they have not considered; moreover, those blaming external factors for their lack of engagement with disabled people are unable to separate entirely from personal responsibility in this. Like Simon’s admission already mentioned, that he is ‘not saying […] I want to see a disabled actor’ (p.37), Felix and Lucas also suggest talking about casting illuminates something new about their influence on the process.

Towards the end of his interview, asked how he promotes casting calls to disabled people, Felix comments ‘it’s a good question […] if I was being critical, self-critical […] I don’t think I’m active enough despite all my fine words and occasionally fine actions […] in terms of disabled actors being properly seen at audition’ (p.31). Felix seems to admit paying lip service to genuine openness to casting disabled people in his practice. Asked what might change this going forwards, he says, ‘I could get better […] we tend to work with two specific casting directors […] so, we could encourage them to encourage us to think in those terms' (Felix, p.33). Changing what he communicates to casting directors seems to be viewed as a potential next step forward. Similarly, it is Simon's comment that opens this chapter, 'if you were to ask me today, I'd say that it would be quite hard for a disabled actor to find their way to us or for us to kind of find them' (p.42). Nearing the end of his interview this seems a more honest assessment of his current position. Like Felix, Simon shifts his view to suggest this is not just the fault of casting directors, but 'it's me as a director, and other directors like me, saying "I want to"' (p.37). He adds, 'you're absolutely right, I need to have a more um knowledge of disabled actors who are in my sort of network of people that I'm regularly going to (Simon, p.42). Finally, asked if it is necessary to specify to casting director that he wants to see disabled people, Lucas offers a similar response, saying:

> you're right in a way, I'm probably not progressive enough […] we did not discuss err disability, we did not say *(pause)* bring everyone in and I'm not quite sure […] why that's the case, maybe it's true the director has to state from the beginning um, I think it's interesting, I never thought about that actually (p.19).

It is possible discussing casting processes causes these directors to revisit where they locate control in casting and view this in a new light. However, in the current theatre climate and with ACE's diversity strategy, it seems hard to believe what they communicate to casting directors about disabled people has not been previously thought about. It is likely their reaction is also promoted by what they perceive as implicit criticism from me; the fact that disability and theatre practice is being researched suggests to them they are not doing enough. As O'Reilly perceives, 'time will tell if this is lip service' (2013). Directors' comments here do, however, draw attention to how shifting mindsets and practice around casting disabled people is an ongoing process. For some directors in my study personal effort to extend casting to disabled people is thwarted by wider issues of exclusion and rigidity in the industry; others are only just considering what opening casting to disabled people could look like. Lucas' parting comments imply taking part in the interview for this study has also created what may be valuable space for him to consider what a next step in this process might be. He concludes:

> I think while we were talking, I think… I think you really… you got me onto something to say actually to my casting director… to say let's really open that pool […] I think I should take from this talk to say, 'hold on, I've got to open that discussion more' […] that really is gonna stick with me […] I'm also thinking wow, okay, I just really started while we were talking really reflecting on what do I actually set out to a casting director and how is that being communicated to agents and who are the people they target um that's really good (Lucas, pp.26-27).

9.4 Reflection on Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting

In writing this final chapter on director-participants there is a sense of disillusionment with the picture of the current theatre climate they paint. On the surface there are a series of financial, historical, and structural hurdles still faced in considering disabled actors in day-to-day practice. Gardner's response to ACE's shift in diversity strategy was that 'no artistic director […] casting a show can hide any longer behind lack of knowledge […] people will be on your case' (2016). In this way, wider agenda in the industry has increased director-participants' awareness of disability; however, it seems external constraints in casting disabled people still offer a hiding place for directors in this study who want it. Director-participants locate control in casting with uncertainty around funding, a lack of training among actors, and insufficient casting processes; this makes it possible to disguise lip service as genuine openness to casting disabled people. Findings here expose how external constraints in casting continue to cover directors' lack of consideration, rigidity in casting practice and processes, and fear or anxiety around extending opportunities to disabled people.

It feels somehow reassuring to believe external constraints in casting are surmountable for those with a mindset to increase opportunities for disabled people in their theatres; that 'it is all about changing minds' (Bazalgette, 2015). Directors' attitudes and beliefs have long been blamed for slow progress increasing the representation of disabled people in the industry. However, my findings suggest reasons for this are even more complex; directors like John, wanting to see disabled people play major roles in his theatre, and Sara, actively pursuing connections with disabled actors, are having trouble doing so. It also appears those like Dawn, open to casting a Deaf or disabled actor for the first time, are reliant on securing short-term funding to do so and are met with a recruitment process more complex than anticipated. If moves to increase the representation of disabled people in theatre are to continue forwards, long-term, practical solutions to wider issues of funding, training, and recruitment are just as necessary as shifting directors' personal beliefs and values.

Discussion in this chapter further highlights benefits for directors in involvement with initiatives like ROTM and Unlimited, RYTDS and Change Makers, and contact with Graeae. These ACE funded initiatives and companies have been a source for supporting accessibility costs, unlocking the availability of actors, and work with disabled people in their theatres. However, these routes are mostly considered by director-participants as short-term and distanced from day-to-day casting decisions. Long-term approaches to casting disabled people require the reimaging of:

- how core-funding in NPO theatres is distributed in a way that assumes the ongoing employment of disabled people.
- how opportunities for extending levels of performance experience are offered to disabled actors by individual directors in day-to-day theatre practice.
- how formal casting channels are made viable for disabled actors and the directors searching for them.

Director-participants' personal responses to casting difficulties show signs of practical moves towards this. Those with an internal locus of control are starting to factor accessibility costs into theatre budgets. They continue to question how to bridge gaps in experience and training among actors and casting processes, grappling with solutions going forward. However, the more dominant external locus of control means this is still just the 'start of something' (Startin, 2014). Not all directors here are at a point of taking ownership of constraints on casting they raise; practical ways of opening casting to disabled people in day-to-day practice are not, or are only just, being thought about. ACE's strategy has contributed to shifting perceptions and experiences of theatre practice and disability among directors in this study; but it is yet to resettle these in a position where disabled people's routine involvement in theatre is assumed. If ACE's continued aim is 'great art and culture for everyone' (ACE, 2013) extending industry-wide efforts, as well as personal conversations among directors about how 'to get out of that circle' (John, p.8), is a crucial part of moving this forward.

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

Chapter Ten - Synthesis of Themes and Conclusions

10.1 Summary

This thesis has presented findings about experiences of theatre practice and disability among two participant groups. These are actors who self-define as disabled people, with physical impairments, and directors who consider themselves non-disabled. All were employed in ACE's most highly funded theatre organisations between 2015 and 2018; this is the funding round following its shift in strategy, the decision to publish annual workforce diversity figures, including disability, for its NPOs (ACE, 2015b). Through interview analysis I have conveyed participant-led stories about experiences of working in theatre and drawn these together with my own interpretations. This approach aimed to add detail to issues surrounding the underrepresentation of disabled people in theatre. It also aimed to expose day-to-day, real-life implications of ACE's strategy regarding disability, and get under the surface of how theatre practice and disability is interpreted by individual actors and directors in the workplace. I intended to draw these, often implicit experiences, to the fore by designing a study where lived experience of theatre practice and disability was an explicit dual focus.

In the *Background to the Study,* I wanted to show the theoretical, political, and professional terrain from an industry perspective. I explored how implicit, personal experiences of theatre practice and disability can be considered more explicitly through a phenomenological lens. I argued that knowledge that has become the bedrock of disability studies is crossing disciplines and relevant to interdisciplinary principles for making sense of attitudes, structures, and environments experienced in theatre. This was followed by an overview of existing research in relevant fields through a literature review. This pointed to gaps in theatrical discourse within disability studies, how the voice of actors and directors is lacking in existing work, and how the fields of theatre and disability are developing. The review highlighted a necessity for those making casting decisions in theatre to recognise the cultural weight of reproducing disability stereotypes and discover alternative approaches to casting. This queried the significance of personal understandings of disability and how knowledge of its history and politics is interpreted in practice. I suggested if NPOs aim to increase onstage representation of disabled people, actors with impairments must be considered for a range of roles, not just those specifying a disabled character. Whilst acknowledging ableist mind-sets and that impairment might impact narrative and character, possibilities for revising traditional concepts of theatre and disability were considered as timely and necessary. Notions that disability always signifies in performance and that 'the stare mandates the story' were questioned, suggesting shifts in theatre now make it possible to take a more nuanced approach to understanding theatre practice and disability (Garland-Thomson, 1996; 2000). I outlined my researcher positioning and ethical considerations. Finally, I showed how the implications drawn from the literature review and the theoretical principles adopted for this thesis, together, lead to the study design and methodology selected. This was outlined in chapter three.

In the second section of the thesis, *Discussion: Lived Experiences of Theatre Practice and Disability,* I aimed to draw out implicit and explicit meaning in interview data. This was represented through verbatim accounts from actor and director participants purposed to offer detailed insight into real-life experiences of theatre practice and disability. Each interview analysis chapter focused on a superordinate theme. I did this by selecting participants' individual responses and merging them together with others within the group and relevant literature. Each chapter culminated with stepping back and reflecting on key experiences of participants and wider personal, professional, and industry-wide implications for each group. *Part 1 – Actor-participants* revealed positive and negative implications of open discussion and training around disability for actors' self-identity. I suggested ACE's strategy demands a definitive stance on shifting identities and forces an uneasy professional identity for actor-participants. 'Willingness' to 'declare disability' in practice was pointed to as a sacrifice, a political move, not ideal but necessary in the current theatre climate (ACE, 2017d, p.54). Navigating directors' inexperience of disability was exposed as an integral part of actor-participants' job descriptions. As such, mutual accommodations in theatre were pointed to; how actors' empathy and tolerance is making room for directors' learning and insufficiencies, which is opening collaboration in practice. This indicated how effort to help directors is prioritized over actor-participants' own comfort and professional development; also, that personal strategies in this are precariously balanced with difficulty changing minds as well as practice. A dual narrative was highlighted among actors in this study: an explicit story of positive progress that is shifting trust and ambitions for and within the industry; and an implicit story of positive attitudes to disability not yet taken for granted, reliance on key influencers to make regular and satisfying acting work feasible, and dissatisfaction with casting approaches. I suggested an 'any actor any role' approach to casting is insufficient, compromising desire for authenticity in performance and devaluing talent and training. I argued the implicit story of actor-participants is what needs to be said to open possibility of change.

Part 2 – Director-participants set out how encounters in theatre transform directors' thinking about disability, accessibility, and talent. I indicated, however, that moving towards disability, valuing relationships, listening, and learning, is what shifts thinking to action and personal agenda. I suggested assuming higher funding equals higher expectations of disability engagement among directors disregards their unique stages in the process of change, which is a live dynamic. Social model understandings were highlighted as powerful in this, as is a new metanarrative of disability for directors prompted by ACE. It was also suggested that ACE's strategy still allows those who want to 'hide […] behind lack of knowledge', skill, or tokenism to do so (Gardner, 2016). Assumptions of impairment were pointed to as shaping directors' responses to revising traditions, revealing how disabled people are not yet an 'assumed representation of reality' onstage for some (Quayson, 2007, p.20). I highlighted how directors' imagined perfection of practice, caution of error, blame, or humiliation is immobilising; yet, this is masked with protective compassion, in which global vulnerability is assumed of disabled actors rather than professional capability and resilience. Proactive learning, seeking helpful connections, was considered to bolster directors' confidence to explore disability, with some sitting with discomfort and complexity in doing so. I indicated how owning personal insufficiencies is a vulnerable starting point for director-participants that opens two-way communication, values actors' views, and integrity, which is necessary for effective practice. Finally, attention was given to structural issues of funding, training, and recruitment, which hinder vision for casting. Benefits of funding initiatives were noted, but reliance on short-term funding, overestimated costs and expectations also indicated realistic steps towards change are avoided. I suggested directors wanting to reimagine casting are faced with literal difficulty, which is a convenient route to inaction for others. I argued that equal effort is required to widen the pool of experienced disabled actors as to widen the pool of directors willing to offer significant opportunities to them.

10.2 Higher-Order Synthesis

At this point in the study, I aim to step back from findings so far and explore how these experiences may be interpreted across participant groups. To do this, I have created a written summary of key experiences of theatre practice and disability for each participant group. From this I searched for interconnections, identifying shared themes across actor and director participants, in some cases also shared experiences (see Appendix 7). As with raw data from interviews, themes were then grouped, creating higher-order themes. To ensure an audit trail rooted in raw data, I returned to the master tables of themes to consider how new themes connected with superordinate themes for each group (Morrow, 2005, p.252). Three higher-order themes emerging from this process are first outlined alongside corresponding superordinate themes for both groups in the table below and then expanded upon:

Higher-order Themes Across Participant Groups:	*Superordinate Themes for Actors:*	*Superordinate Themes for Directors:*
Learning the Notes and the Tune	Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity	Disability Consciousness
Not There Yet: Responding to Inexperience of Disability in Practice	Navigating Directors' Inexperience of Disability	Narratives of Caution and Confidence
A Neatened End: Wider Pools, Glass Ceilings, and Inner Circles	Wrestling with Authenticity	Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting

10.2.1 Learning the Notes and the Tune

Chapter four opened with Masefield's belief, 'of all the arts, drama especially can change the way the world acts' (2006, p.127), acknowledging theatre's aptitude for shifting perceptions of disability. As a workplace, increased discussion around disability has added a new dynamic to theatre's role in this for all participants. As superordinate themes *Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity* and *Disability Consciousness* interconnect, it is apparent there are shared experiences of theatre as disorientating and resettling personal disability views across both groups. Actors and directors locate theatre workplaces as key in their exposure to disability theory and politics; this is where exclusionary attitudes, structures, and environments are first talked about, witnessed, and experienced. Actor Sophie describes a conversation that, 'opened my eyes up to the kind of... the politics of disability and actually I am very much disabled' (p.3). Working with a wheelchair user for the first time, director Sara explains, 'just seeing somebody… it literally take their whole break to get to the toilet and back really was quite eye-opening for me' (p.14). What has been learnt in theatre settings seems revelatory for actors and directors in terms of prompting intrapersonal reasoning with, and shifting of, perceptions of disability and identity.

For both groups new theoretical understanding of disability appears powerful in shifting a weight of responsibility for participation in theatre. The social model has been explained to actors and directors in training or rehearsals, with ROTM and Graeae being key in this. This bedrock of disability studies is still being discovered in theatre, not necessarily more familiar to one group more than the other. Actor Lydia explains, 'I only recently learnt about the medical and social model of disability, I still don't think I fully understand it well enough but […] that really changed what *disabled* meant for me (p. 8). Director John is familiar with this as a theory worth sharing across this organisation, saying, 'we've done a lot of work around the social model of disability […] it's society that effectively disables people rather than their own impairment […] I fully believe that' (p.4). Across participants new disability understanding is moving from just head knowledge, it has opened communication to engage with disability matters; for some directors this also eases relationships with disabled people, which, alongside theory, has altered their positioning in pursuing change in practice. Social model thinking has lifted a burden of blame for a lack of participation in theatre from actors, it weighs heavily on directors as a belief that should be acted on, and alongside ACE's strategy and new relationships in practice it serves as a call to action across both groups.

Shared responsibility for the representation of disabled people in theatre is experienced as an organic and reflective process; new disability understanding has developed into personal and political agenda for some participants in both groups. This is expressed as a continued reshaping of professional identity and affinity with the disabled community. Despite her preference, Sophie states, 'I'm part of […] a demographic of people that don't get represented fairly um, so, I'm […] passionate about saying that I am a *disabled actor*' (pp.5-6). Like other actors here, acceptance of what seems viewed as a less-than-ideal label reflects ownership of, and a political response to, disability agenda and ACE's collection of data. Activist approaches to disability in theatre are shared across actors and directors and backed by descriptions of practical and 'emotional labour' to influence change (Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole, 2018, p.207). Director Sara states she is 'driving' change 'in a political way' (pp.9-10), she implies new ownership of disability agenda that is reflected in proactivity towards change in her workplace culture and practice. John expresses similar, saying he was 'happily able to organise the bolts of the jigsaw' as a disabled person took the lead in his flagship production; he believes, 'it's really important that disabled actors get the opportunity to play in those kinds of shows' (John, p.25). Participants' resilience in the workplace is also expressed as a political force driving disability agenda forwards. Individuals in both groups suggest sharing responsibility for disability in theatre not only requires adjustments in perceptions of disability and identity, but willingness to step into uncertain and uncomfortable settings to pursue change in individuals and practice. New disability understanding, 'learning the notes', and proactively embedding this in practice, having 'learnt the tune', is, of course, only part of participants' shared story (Pete, p.9).

10.2.2 Not There Yet: Responding to Inexperience of Disability in Practice

Inexperience of disability is raised as a significant issue in theatre practice across participants. In this way, ACE’s strategy is not just bolstering organic processes of learning being embedded in practice; it exposes gaps in learning, and so, is also experienced by actors and directors here as a jarring pressure to influence change, which is not always manifest in practice. Notions of being not ‘there yet’ are relevant to directors’ and actors’ responses to inexperience of disability and insufficiencies in practice (David, p.33). This is expressed by both groups as making auditions or rehearsals uneasy, making error or offence more likely, and guidance necessary. Interconnections across superordinate themes *Navigating Directors’ Inexperience of Disability,* and *Narratives of Caution and Confidence* expose how these consequences of inexperience are playing out in real-life across participants. There is shared urgency to address gaps in knowledge and experience, involving uncomfortable conversations or challenge around issues of disability language, accessibility, and representation. Recalling rehearsals, actor James speaks of directors ‘edging towards you to ask you a question […] kind of dancing around the point’ (p. 14); actor Moira describes her approach, ‘I'm an actor […] but I'm also there as a teacher’ (p.12), as causing conflict and frustrations ‘politically and artistically’ (p.25). In their practice as directors, Sue acknowledges ‘a sort of caution and a, “oh I’ve never done this before”’ (p.13); when querying an actor’s access requirements, Sara says, ‘I remember that I was a little bit nervous’ (p.16).

In response to inexperience of disability, there is added discomfort and vulnerability in the workplace on and off stage experienced across participants. In this way, Pete’s view that working with directors who have more than intellectual knowledge of disability as ‘like a shorthand, it becomes easier’ (p.11) resonates with actors and directors; both recognise inherited distance from disability is relevant, a gap needing to be bridged (Ahmed, 2007, p.155). However, as the starting point for most directors is a lack of relationship with disabled people, there is shared acknowledgment of routes to effective practice as a process. Director Sara also notes ‘conversations get easier […] the more you are doing it’ (p.18). Actor James also comments, ‘pretty much every director I work with […] they’ve worked with […]

another disabled performer and they have experience now […] it's becoming less and less of a daunting thing' (p.29). Responding to inexperience of disability is a live dynamic for all participants. It is a process requiring mutual accommodation that most actors and some directors convey personal willingness, confidence, and resilience to engage in.

In this way, supporting ACE's strategy around disability is requiring mutual accommodation that is expressed as difficulty and compromise. It is not just the majority, non-disabled people, directors in this case, who are 'making difficult changes to its practice and environment' (Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl, 2007, p.229). Actors and directors are seeking ways to navigate insufficient understanding and approaches to disability. This involves listening as well as speaking, responding to error with empathy and forgiveness, valuing relationships, and vulnerability in asking for guidance or adjustments in practice. In describing his error around accessibility in rehearsals, director Tim comments that the actor was, 'gracious enough to forgive me' (p.32). Sue describes her introduction to actors saying, 'I was very open about saying "okay", on the first day um, "so, how are we going to do the read-through, I have no idea"' (p.12). Dawn's comment about embarking on work with a Deaf actor is, 'it's completely terrifying', but 'we explored some of the issues […] talked to a lot of people' (p.43). Actor Neil comments, 'when people meet me, they are always a little bit worried about not understanding me, like I'm very good at relaxing people, I have my own strategy I suppose' (p.17). Across participants there appears shared willingness to sit with discomfort in theatre practice as a route to building bridges across disabled and non-disabled communities; a sense of individuals in both groups normalising discomfort as an expectation of working together but some going there anyway.

Actors and directors describe growing confidence in addressing issues of disability and accessibility openly and appropriately in auditions, rehearsals, and performance settings. Participants in both groups support James' view, 'it's happening more and more that people are… are trusting' (p.26). Still, fear of causing offence, protective compassion, and assumed global vulnerability remain prominent responses to inexperience of disability, which are also shared and detrimental in extending this progress. Actor Paul believes accessibility is 'my problem […] I don't want it to be anybody else's' (p.10) and actor Lydia recognises, 'I spend so long trying to make a new director feel comfortable about working with me that actually I haven't raised issues that are making me feel uncomfortable' (p.35). Describing an actor's hesitancy to voice problems with accessibility when working with him, director Tim remarks, 'I'm trying to understand and help you […] If you're embarrassed by something that you can't discuss, it just makes it quite tricky' (p.12). Actors' caution around communication with directors inhibits their practice and those they work with. From the counterview, directors like Jack (p.8; pp.17-19), Simon (p.5; p.9), David (p.27), Felix (pp.8-9) and Lucas (p.7) appear to presume the outcomes of their inexperience of disability will only damage others, and their own reputations; a reason for 'critical avoidance of disability' in their practice (Bolt, 2012). It is likely these are some of the directors that actors in this study are yet to have any opportunity to meet.

10.2.3 A Neatened End: Wider Pools, Glass Ceilings, and Inner Circles

Shared questioning around revising casting traditions draws together how actors are *Wrestling with Authenticity* and directors' *Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting.* Reflecting on the latter, I suggested there are no neat solutions or routes around complexity brought to the surface by directors around casting disabled people. However, what is perhaps more valuable than a neat ending to my study is unravelling participants' shared story of what needs solving to work together more. Problems with casting approaches and processes are most relevant in this. The current pool of disabled actors poses shared difficulty personally and professionally. All directors and some actors consider the size of the pool and levels of performance experience and training within it problematic. John states, 'the big thing for me is finding more disabled actors to… in that […] pool of talent that we draw on' (p.32). Also, actor Lydia remarks, 'we're at risk of having disabled actors perform roles that either they don't suit, or they're not ready for' (p.17). Shared frustrations with casting bring to the surface not a perceived lack of talented disabled people, but the lasting impact of their historic exclusion from performance and training settings. Both groups continue to grapple with what this means for them and where control lies in finding solutions.

In terms of routes around a perceived shortage of experienced actors, general, or open, castings aimed at disabled people are offered by directors and some actors as a solution. However, actor-participants are also blatant in describing dissatisfaction with this approach, experiencing it as perpetuating feelings of separation, and being ‘robbed’ of professional recognition (James, p.5). James states, ‘it’s very extreme and you feel very sort of like put in a group’ (p.13), and Lydia remarks, ‘I’m so sick of seeing “no experience required”’ (p.17). Director-participants also acknowledge casting solutions that separate disabled people from a wider pool of actors as inadequate. Sue describes, ‘a great shame […] institutions like Spotlight […] have another category, disabled actors […] although […] where are you going to find disabled actors […] how do you address that?’ (p.6). Along with other directors, Sue shares the view of actors that a current necessity to associate with a grouping of *disabled actors* is both ‘important’ in terms of ACE’s strategy and promoting disability agenda, and ‘sad’ (Sophie, pp.4-5; Lydia, p.7). Actors imply little sense of feeling able to alter this less-than-ideal situation, unlike director John who implies now contemplating, ‘how to move it from that to […] more formal industry channels’ (p.17).

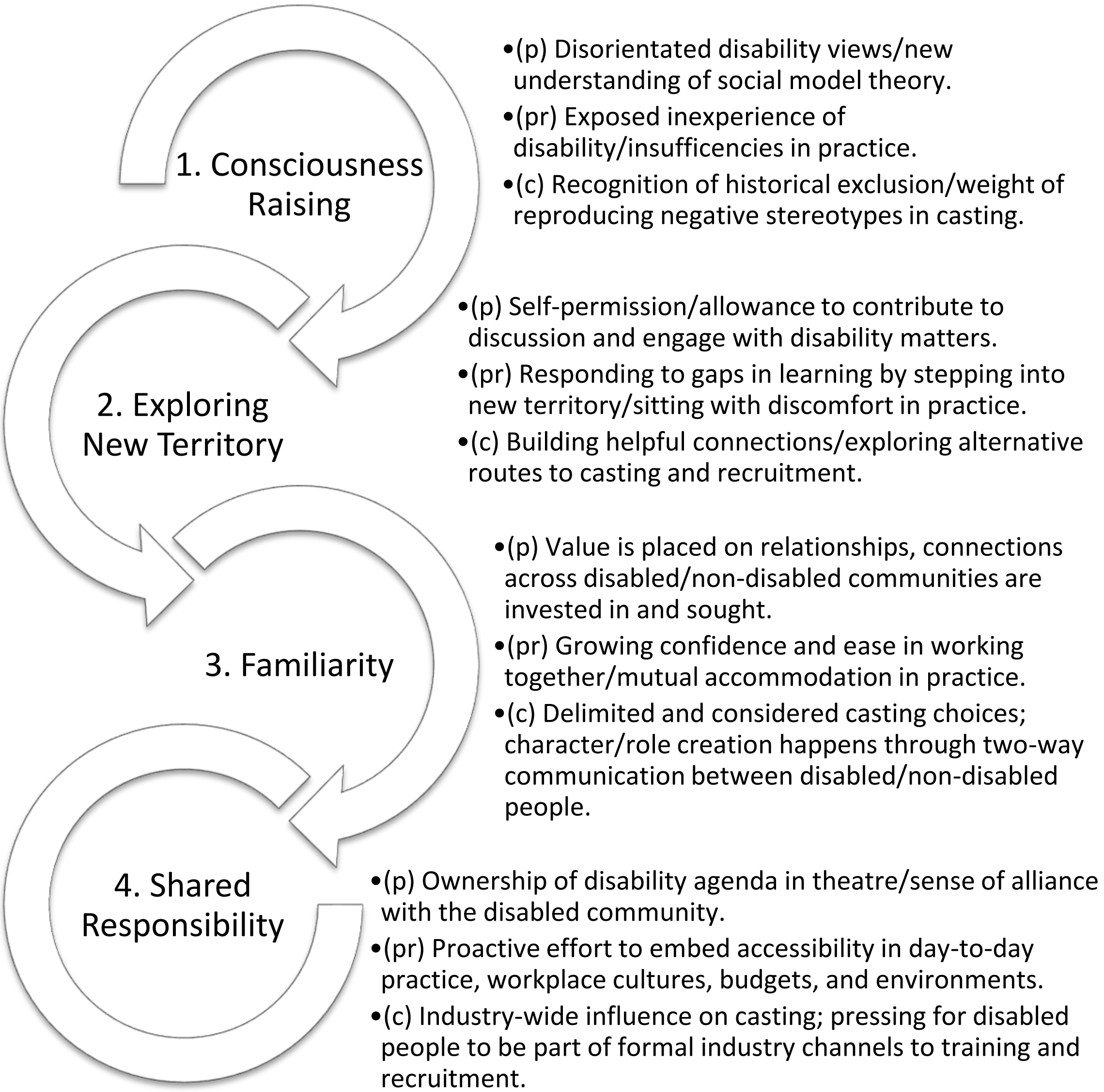
A glass ceiling in casting remains a problem for actors and directors here. Pressure on NPOs to increase diversity adds to actors’ struggle interpreting casting decisions based on acting merit not hidden agenda. James states, ‘the problem is that all of that happens behind the scenes […] you never really know what's going on […] why you haven't got a job’ (p.5). Director-participants wanting to recruit disabled actors suggest literal difficulty doing so; Dawn comments, ‘we were also really keen to meet disabled actors, and we failed to meet any’ (p.33). As well as being externally influenced by ACE and difficulty with formal casting routes, a glass ceiling in casting is also determined by participants in both groups; held in place by individuals’ limited imagination for casting possibilities. Certainly, many directors here still only consider disabled actors if this is ‘a key part’ of the role (David, p.18), and believe, ‘you have to justify why you cast someone with a disability because that’s not written in the text’ (Lucas, p.7). However, when pressed on roles they envisage playing, some actors assert similar views; for example, listing future possibilities, Pete is drawn to characters he views as ‘classically disabled’ (p.9). This is not just about rigid perceptions of the type of theatrical roles open to disabled people, it seems a protective tactic; actors avoiding disappointment, basing ambitions on what feels realistic in the current theatre climate (Neil, p.13; Moira, p.33; Lydia, p.40). Whereas some directors appear to protect themselves from presumed unmanageable critique of their creative choices (David, p.27; Felix, p.8; Lucas, p.7). Participants in both groups suggest creating characters that have traditionally been played by non-disabled actors still feels an unsafe position to be in.

There is a shared view that an ‘any actor any role’ approach to casting disabled people is insufficient. There is shared desire for authenticity in performance. This extends beyond participants’ limited vision for casting, rigidity, and caution to challenge traditions. Actors suggest it is unsatisfactory to ignore or overlook impairment, rather, that their authentic performance requires sincere consideration of the relevance of their impairment to a character or role; this is not about drawing attention to impairment in performance but acknowledging it in the process of character development. This is also where open castings fail. This is where directors’ unease with discussing impairment and ‘aesthetic nervousness’ is also problematic in practice (Quayson, 2007). Pete comments, ‘the debate is always whether […] a character I played [has my impairment] or […] you ignore [my impairment] and you see the actor’ (p.8). His experience resonates more so with directors who describe relationship with disabled people, like Tim; in considering casting choices he acknowledges ‘difference’ asking, ‘what does it tell you now about this role, this part, this set of relationships’ (pp.28-29). Actor-participants’ suggest where such questions are avoided, brushed over, or unshared, acting itself becomes a more delicate, vulnerable, and unsatisfying process in rehearsal and performance (Pete, p.8; Moira, p.8). Such uneasy experiences of casting decisions resonate with directors like Felix; he directed an actor with a physical impairment in a major role, yet expresses difficulty discussing impairment in practice and suggests leaning towards masking rather than embracing the uniqueness they brought to the role (pp.8-9; pp.11-13). In this way, participants in both groups suggest two-way, open communication is not just a solution to gaps in disability understanding; it is central in making considered casting choices that open the scope of roles available to disabled people, and to mutual satisfaction creating them. Actors and directors suggest routes forward in casting rely on extending their inner circle across communities, so that familiarity in working together allows complex questions around impairment, casting, and performance to be tackled collaboratively.

10.2.4 Summary of Higher-Order Synthesis

This higher-order synthesis has drawn attention to a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors. Its findings make it possible to propose four stages in this process, capturing the lived experiences of my participants. I am suggesting each stage is characterised by distinct changes in perception (p), practice (pr), and casting (c). Stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors, and changes characterising each stage, are first set out in the diagram below and then explained in detail.

Figure 1 - Stages in a Process of Engagement with Theatre Practice and Disability for Actors and Directors



- (p) Disorientated disability views/new understanding of social model theory.
- (pr) Exposed inexperience of disability/insufficencies in practice.
- (c) Recognition of historical exclusion/weight of reproducing negative stereotypes in casting.

- (p) Self-permission/allowance to contribute to discussion and engage with disability matters.
- (pr) Responding to gaps in learning by stepping into new territory/sitting with discomfort in practice.
- (c) Building helpful connections/exploring alternative routes to casting and recruitment.

- (p) Value is placed on relationships, connections across disabled/non-disabled communities are invested in and sought.
- (pr) Growing confidence and ease in working together/mutual accommodation in practice.
- (c) Delimited and considered casting choices; character/role creation happens through two-way communication between disabled/non-disabled people.

- (p) Ownership of disability agenda in theatre/sense of alliance with the disabled community.
- (pr) Proactive effort to embed accessibility in day-to-day practice, workplace cultures, budgets, and environments.
- (c) Industry-wide influence on casting; pressing for disabled people to be part of formal industry channels to training and recruitment.

The four stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors can be understood as cumulative. Stage one, *Consciousness Raising,* begins the process in intrapersonal engagement with new encountering, awareness, and knowledge of disability in theatre. Stage two, *Exploring New Territory,* moves to interpersonal engagement, openness to nurturing new learning, new practice, and approaches to casting. Stage three, *Familiarity*, builds on relational engagement, working across disabled/non-disabled communities becoming an expectation not an exception, with effective practice made possible through open communication and collaboration. Finally, at Stage four, *Shared*

Responsibility, there is ownership of disability agenda in theatre, active engagement in driving tangible and meaningful change in personal practice, individual workplaces, and the wider industry.

Changes that characterise each of these stages reflect my three higher-order themes, which were first considered as separate processes of change in perceptions, practice, and casting (see Appendix 8). From this developed the concept of a whole process of engagement with theatre practice and disability, as proposed here. In *figure 1, (p)* describes perceptions, changes in cognitive reasoning, imagining, problem solving, and judgments about theatre, disability, and identity that take place at each stage in the process. (pr) describes practice, changes in theatre workplaces, in experiences of audition, rehearsal, and performance settings. (c) describes casting, specific changes in belief and approach to onstage opportunities for disabled people, characters and roles, and recruitment processes. It would be possible to review the discussion in this thesis and add extensive detail to changes that characterize each stage. However, this is unnecessary, as, in part, changes in perception, practice, and casting at each stage of a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability are unique to each person's lived experience.

In this way, this concept is not intended to minimise the individuality of actors and directors in this study, but to draw attention to it. It is not intended as a neat solution to complexity surrounding theatre and disability surfaced in this study, but to highlight it. Descriptions of what characterises each stage in the process set out in *figure 1* are intended to capture the real-life experiences of my participants, whilst also acting as helpful benchmarks for considering where individuals or organisations are positioned in this evolving process. Naming stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors in this study enables their experiences to be likened to steps towards sharing responsibility for the accurate representation of disability in theatre; the lack of which was key motivation for ACE's 'fundamental shift' in strategy (Bazalgette, 2014, p.1).

My findings highlight the nuanced nature of this as a shared and unfolding endeavour for all nineteen participants in this study and for ACE; as such, this process can be explored through the transformative nature of theatre as a workplace, and of perceptions and practice relating to disability, which are continually shaped and re-evaluated by individuals and the industry itself. Although a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors can be understood as organic and reflective, it is also acknowledged that some participants here seem stuck at a particular stage, some at the first stage. In addition, my findings suggest each stage is necessary; for example, moving to shared responsibility for accessibility in theatre without familiarity across disabled/non-disabled communities has been a cause of my participants' discomfort, error, and frustration in workplace settings.

This process matters in theatre practice not just because ACE funding may require it; but because positioning in this process seems to be dictating experiences in theatre as either more or less appropriate, effective, and satisfying for actors and directors. Therefore, naming a process of engagement that understands individuals as having a particular distance from disability, and naming stages towards disabled and non-disabled people routinely and effectively working together in theatre, may be beneficial in moving progress towards the accurate representation of disabled people in theatre. How this concept and *figure 1* may be useful to theory, policy, practice, and research will now be considered as part of the implications of the study.

10.3 Implications of the Study

Here I intend to look at what all this might mean, and for whom it is relevant. I want to consider where we have been and what the implications of stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors may be for theory, policy, practice, and research. This will also involve an exploration of the strengths and limitations of my study and some personal conclusions; we may perhaps still await sea-change and for casting disabled people to be considered routine practice in theatre, but with greater insight to move towards this.

10.3.1 Theoretical Implications

The concept of stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors is a useful addition to existing cross disciplinary theoretical literature relevant to my subject. It seems valuable in capturing nuanced perceptions and experiences of disability and a shifting theatre climate. It is also useful in representing a dual narrative of progress and ongoing necessity for change experienced in the industry. This is not a concept that begins with barrier recognition or considers disability and theatre from an 'overtly politicized aesthetic place', as has been a mainstay of theatre and disability studies in the past (Kuppers, 2017, p.36; Shakespeare, 2005); it is concerned with the complexity of disability as phenomenon from the viewpoint of disabled and non-disabled people working in theatre, drawing attention to their position in a process experienced together. As in Lewis (2006), this concept assumes theatre makers must position perceptions of disability and impairment alongside creative decisions. I suggest this is as relevant to actors as directors. Fox values 'a wide space in which we can move across the disabled and nondisabled boundaries' as offering nuanced understanding of disability in cultural and literary history; my concept emphasises the importance of occupying this space in theorising disability in theatre practice and in future research (2015, p.131).

This is not a concept that assumes responses to disability in theatre are predictable or characteristic of a particular community or group. It brings together more objective readings of interpretations of impairment, identities, and shifts in the prejudices of disabled and non-disabled people. As in Barnes' theory of a *'Value-Neutral Model'* of disability, emphasis is on disability as socially constructed but vast lived experiences among disabled people are acknowledged (2016); in this way, impairment can be viewed as 'positive, neutral or negative' depending on an individual's circumstances, and changing over time (Barnes, 2016, p.117). Likewise, whilst not presuming ableist mind-sets are negated, my concept accepts non-disabled identities as transient and varied. It does not assume the 'normate' is fixated with impairment, that their 'stare […] mandates the story' in theatre, nor explanations of impairment demanded in performance (Garland-Thomson, 1996;

1997; 2000, p.335). In a shifting theatre climate, this concept challenges theoretical anticipation of ‘physical difference’ being ‘unexpected’, and there being ‘no frame of reference for responding to it’ (Fahy and King, 2002, p.x).

Instead, the concept assumes increasing familiarity and engagement with theatre practice and disability in which impairment might ‘inform’, ‘enhance’ and ‘layer’, theatrical interpretation (Johnston, 2016, pp.83-88); as scholars such as Conroy (2010) also argue, it is not necessarily ‘a lens through which everything’ is seen (Gardner cited in Johnston, 2016, p.83). Afterall, we saw in the literature review that multidimensionality is a significant factor in the accurate representation of disabled people onstage, not limiting individuals to a single characteristic. In a way, this is symbolically replicated in my assumptions of actors and directors. I have already stated theatre must move from historical assumptions of disabled actors. Here, I am saying the role of the normate in theatre, directors in this case, should also not be reduced to stereotype. As in de Senna and Bowditch, stages in a process of engagement proposed here encompass movement towards shared responsibility for disability in theatre that ‘hinges upon the acceptance of multivocality’ and its value in effecting change (2016, p.230).

Complexity surrounding theatre practice and disability that has surfaced in findings across this thesis is navigated by disabled actors and non-disabled directors. Hence, the concept of a process of engagement is not just about reimaging casting or solving accessibility issues, although this is an important part of it. Galloway, Nudd and Sandahl set out their ethic of accommodation ‘often necessitating that the majority make difficult changes in its practices and environment’ (2007, p.229). I argue that disabled actors are minimising the weight of this expectation of directors through personal strategies to accommodate insufficient attitudes, practice, and environments. The emphasis of my concept, therefore, is on an effortful process of mutual accommodations, which is rooted in shared learning, exploration, and relationships; this involves compromise, as well as empathy, forgiveness, valuing one another, and vulnerability. In this way, my findings also suggest refusing inherited proximities from a particular community is the choice of actors and directors (Ahmed, 2007, p.155). As such, common rhetoric of dissonant experiences of theatre among disabled and non-disabled people is added to by a new metanarrative of disability about working together in theatre towards industry-wide change.

I have already stated that relationships between actors and directors, disabled and non-disabled people, are powerful in increasing onstage opportunities for disabled people and bolstering calls to action. Here I am saying stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability reflect how this relationship is interpreted intrapersonally and interpersonally, not just on a person-by-person basis but across the industry. However, actors and directors are relating to more than relationships across communities, or lack of them; they are relating to external pressure around diversity, shifting funding requirements, the accessibility of theatre buildings and rehearsal spaces, and unique workplace cultures, for the first time, over time and in recollection. Personal positioning in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors, therefore, has a temporal context; like theatre making itself, a satisfying, positive outcome in workplace settings involves a process of engagement being returned to as pertinent to every new creative opportunity. The concept of stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors is, therefore, a useful addition to the interdisciplinary theoretical field exploring theatre and disability. It is important because theatre making itself is a creative and relational process, relating to each other and to audiences (interpersonal), and to ourselves (intrapersonal). This concept can, therefore, be used in academic debate to explore what it is about disability, and actors and directors' interpretations of disability in working together, that might be relevant to theatre practice. There was not a particular concept that captured this idea in theatre or disability studies discourse, and so, this may be a useful theoretical tool going forwards.

10.3.2. Policy Implications

In describing the concept of a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability in the synthesis, I drew attention to its final stage of *shared responsibility* as a common goal of my participants and ACE, setting out stages towards this. Underpinning features contributing to this process are ACE's policy and funding requirements; NPOs are expected to demonstrate ‘how they contribute to the Creative Case for Diversity through their work’, and ‘provide correct and comprehensive [workforce diversity] data’ (ACE, 2016, p.4; 2017b). Findings across this thesis have exposed real-life implications of this policy, pointing to its success and shortcomings in terms of disability engagement. I suggest here that acknowledging distinct stages towards shared responsibility for the accurate representation of disabled people in theatre, and this as a nuanced and unfolding endeavour, may be helpful to policy makers in considering these. As suggested in chapter seven, this means policy makers not assuming all individuals or organisations are ready for action.

In setting out ways to ‘reduce barriers’ to disabled people in ‘the arts and culture workforce’, ACE’s *Making a Shift Report* recommended action to ‘promote appropriate budgeting’, develop ‘entry routes’, ‘peer networking mechanisms’, and investing in ‘disabled leaders’ (ACE, 2017d, pp.8-10). It also advised reviewing ‘recruitment practices’, ‘action plans’, ‘training’, ‘governance’ and ‘opportunities to spread good practice’ (ACE, 2017d, pp.8-10). Policy implications that may be drawn from a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability which evolved in this thesis also point to the relevance of these issues. However, this concept also points to the role of policy in individual decision making, and actions to facilitate movement through this process for disabled and non-disabled people together. Common dispute with policy is that blanket approaches to change do not account for individuality. I am saying engagement with theatre practice and disability is a unique intrapersonal and interpersonal process which policy has potential to reflect.

There are three ways in which understanding stages in this process may be helpful to policy makers. Firstly, as individuals, policy makers may stop to consider their positioning in this process, which may have bearing on policy decisions. Secondly, policy makers can utilise this process to understand the position of individuals, organisations, or bodies they represent. In terms of ACE’s research so far, on the ground conversations have pointed to action needed across organisations (2017d). I am suggesting there is scope for ACE to consider the position of each NPO theatre in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability. There is scope to utilise the four stages, and benchmark characteristics of each stage, to make sense of unique theatre environments and cultures in the here and now; to ask how they engage with disability at each stage, and where people in each NPO are stuck or moving to and from in this process. If policy makers can work with this idea overtly it will raise awareness, not just of what is happening in organisations; it may also create routes to sharing, not only responsibility, but conversations, experience, and resources across the industry.

Thirdly, it is possible to consider the positioning of policy itself; to ask how policy connects with all four stages in this process. In terms of ACE's strategy and findings across this thesis this seems important. My findings point to factors that may be helpful in this. At stage one and two in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors current policy seems most effective. I have already stated that it bolsters disability agenda and disability consciousness. New understandings, onstage opportunities, and chances for actors and directors to work together are attributed to ROTM and other strategic schemes. My findings demonstrate ROTM's success and continuing value in terms of promoting disability understanding, participation, and best practice. There is clearly scope for extending learning gleaned from this beyond its current form and the six consortium theatres involved. However, policy also adds complexity to this process. As ACE also identified, there are issues with the collection of diversity data (2017d, p.54). I have argued this is compromising actors' professional identity, requiring a definitive stance on 'disability in the workplace' which is a 'unique and variable identity' (Santuzzi and Waltz, 2016). My findings point to how supporting disability initiatives can also compromise comfort, satisfaction, recognition, and creative development in the workplace.

Findings here suggest value in reviewing how policy reflects diverse starting points in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability, and how varying professional identities among disabled people can be expressed as preferred not prescribed. There is value in acknowledging mutual accommodations in disabled and non-disabled people's work together in policy approaches; strategic opportunities to learn, question, explore, to develop practice and casting approaches should not assume the positions of disabled or non-disabled participants. Instead, policy-based initiatives can support both to explore what may be new territory; aiming to equip both to navigate, communicate, and address insufficient disability understanding and theatre practice. Current policy is effective in opening minds and doors; a position resonating with what Startin described as increasing an ‘appetite to engage’ (2014). Still, there is room for strengthening it, to move on from this stage to lasting change.

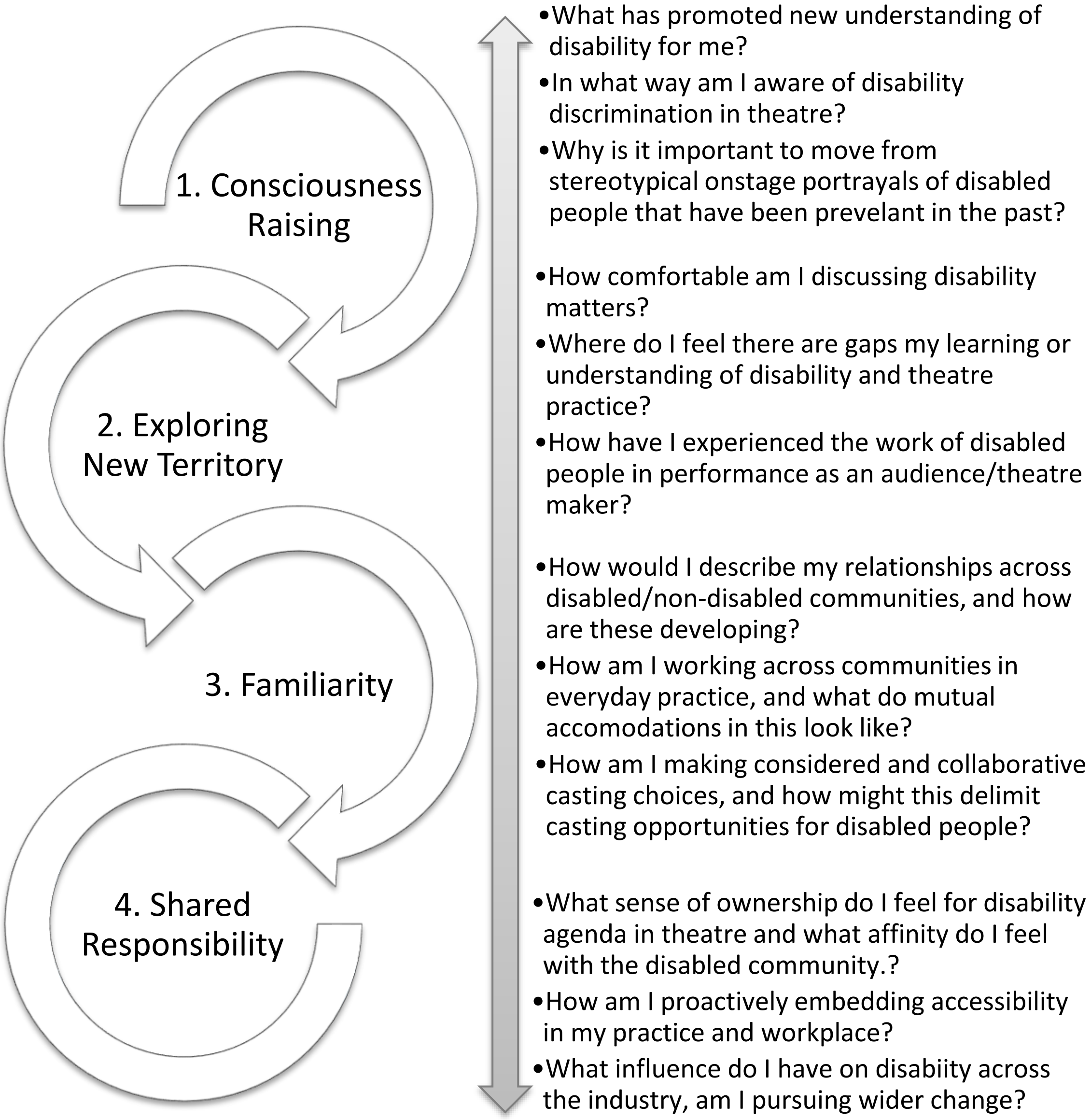
Stages three and four in the process of engagement suggest possibility for policy makers to consider how reliance on short term funding, key influencers, and initiatives might be overtaken by new policy based on expectation of non-disabled and disabled peoples’ ongoing work together. Reviewed policy and distribution of theatres’ core-funding may better facilitate disabled people’s regular employment in theatre. There is scope for policy that creates space for new relationships in theatre to deepen and be part of embedding new learning in everyday practice. Participants here have mentioned mentoring others through a process of casting a disabled person in a lead role for the first time, and personal strategies that are easing communication and difficulties in practice. They expose a wealth of experience among individuals, suggesting effective communication, accessibility, and casting may be shared through relational mechanisms; not just connecting peers, but within and across professional roles, communities, and stages of engagement. This may be a cost-effective way to build on large scale initiatives, increasing day-to-day connections across communities and personal ownership of change in everyday practice. Hence, new policy-based strategy for engagement with theatre practice and disability may be as much about enabling hands-on opportunities to explore practice together as it is about keeping open and honest conversations going.

10.3.3 Practical Implications

As I write these final suggestions, the UK is again in national lockdown. Theatres doors are closed, performances cancelled, staff furloughed, and freelancers struggling. The long-term impact of this pandemic on theatre is unclear, yet there is concern that the industry’s position in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability may step back. This has promoted the #WeShallNotBeRemoved campaign (Graeae, no date), and organisations have joined to produce the guide *Working Safely Through COVID-19 Seven Inclusive Principles for Arts & Cultural Organisations*; the focus of this is ‘to ensure deaf, neurodiverse and disabled people are not discriminated against as creative work begins again and as venues re-open’ (ROTM, 2020). This thesis has already highlighted difficulty actors experience trusting a shifting theatre climate, now it seems progress interpreted as long-term change may again seem fragile. However, there is also a view that the pause in day-to-day business in theatres, offers a unique opportunity for reflection. That this may be beneficial in reimagining ‘tired, clichéd, [or] at worst ignorant and […] offensive’ theatrical traditions and practices (Fraser, 2017b). As Gardner acknowledges, in the busyness of theatre ‘we are always going to be more inclusive tomorrow’ (2021); resonating with my findings, she points to space for reflection, often lacking in theatre, as central to lasting change.

Instead of stepping back in progress made, the concept of stages of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors may assist in reflecting not only on policy, but on personal positioning in this process. The diagram below is a reflective tool that may be helpful in this. It sets out the four stages in the process. An arrow signifies a scale on which personal positioning in this can be indicated. There is a list of prompts based on my findings that may help with making sense of personal experiences as part of a process. This tool is intended to be used alongside *figure 1,* which first gives a picture of what characteristics of each stage in a process of engagement might be, with *figure 2* assisting individuals to identify where they are positioned in this.

Figure 2: A Reflective Tool: Personal Positioning in a Process of Engagement with Theatre Practice and Disability



- What has promoted new understanding of disability for me?
- In what way am I aware of disability discrimination in theatre?
- Why is it important to move from stereotypical onstage portrayals of disabled people that have been prevelant in the past?

- How comfortable am I discussing disability matters?
- Where do I feel there are gaps my learning or understanding of disability and theatre practice?
- How have I experienced the work of disabled people in performance as an audience/theatre maker?

- How would I describe my relationships across disabled/non-disabled communities, and how are these developing?
- How am I working across communities in everyday practice, and what do mutual accomodations in this look like?
- How am I making considered and collaborative casting choices, and how might this delimit casting opportunities for disabled people?

- What sense of ownership do I feel for disability agenda in theatre and what affinity do I feel with the disabled community.?
- How am I proactively embedding accessibility in my practice and workplace?
- What influence do I have on disabiity across the industry, am I pursuing wider change?

This reflective tool could be utilised by actors, directors, or other theatre staff and professionals working on and off stage to consider their perceptions, practice, and work together. It may aid intrapersonal and interpersonal communication around how they encounter, understand, explore, relate, and respond to theatre practice and disability. For individuals this reflective tool may assist in bringing difficulty to the surface and sitting with it, normalizing the complexity of a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability and giving it a language. In a team setting this may create understanding of nuanced disability views and what is experienced as more or less progressive, so that changes can be made. It may also support thinking about effective practice, and how this can embrace open discussion, vulnerability, and mutual accommodation of disabled and non-disabled people's needs. It is also a repeatable tool. This is important as this process is a live dynamic evolving in more or less helpful ways. This tool can, therefore, be used to draw out current messages that a specific step change may be inadvertently conveying, and to which theatre makers are implicitly responding. It is also an adaptable tool. Titles of the four stages alone may be useful for reflection, and prompt questions can be adapted and focused at an individual, group or organisational level. This tool may be useful outside of the disciplines of theatre and disability. Its value lies in its transient and evolving features. It may also be adapted for research in other settings where engagement with disability is a central component of practice, for example in education, media industries, or health services. Relating to experiences of disability as stages in a process may also facilitate lasting change in practitioners and practice in these environments.

10.3.4 Research Implications

Increased representation of disabled people on and off stage, and disability agenda in theatre, can build bridges and new approaches to research knowledge around theatre and disability. There is ongoing complexity experienced in the industry that may prompt further research and benefit practice, keeping open and honest conversation going. The concept of stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability and the reflective tool have value in this. These could be used as part of further qualitative studies into experiences of disability for different professionals and theatre settings. For example, casting directors, production teams, or those working in independent theatre companies and venues. This concept and reflective tool could inform a study design from the outset. Research paradigms where this would have utility for all participants is in practice based or observational research. Stages of engagement with theatre practice and disability could be used to inform interview schedules for qualitative studies exploring different participants' perceptions of the same production or initiative, to form a coherent picture of engagement with disability throughout a creative process. This may then lead to suggestions for changes or adaptations to alter less helpful characteristics of the stages and reflective tool I have suggested.

The participants in this thesis offered rich accounts of their experiences. A similar approach could also be taken to get under the surface of what is happening in other arts sectors; to explore what stages of engagement with disability participants tell stories about, allowing comparisons across industries to be made. The concept could be utilised in studies where one factor of theatre is explored; for example, qualitative studies that explore audition processes or actor training and the phenomenological, relational, and interpretative features that contribute to lived experiences of disability in these. This may enable further reflection about whether notions of openness to diversity are supported by real-life experiences of change. Finally, I have realised more fully, through interpretative phenomenological analysis of data in this thesis, the value of connections across disciplines; how knowledge take for granted in one field can be drawn on to increase understanding of others. I have realised the value, sensitivity, and implicit nature of our lived experiences, which can be overlooked in disability and theatre research. Further studies that aim to explore creative practices and relationships across communities can draw upon these methodological approaches to uncover detailed experiences and make sense of them.

10.3.5 Reflexivity

Here I will reflect upon the strengths and limitations of this study and my own place as a researcher within it. Strengths of the study include its contribution to research about theatre practice and disability. This is because it is one of few studies to date that includes data collected within the theatre community and from inside and outside the disabled community. It is one of few studies focusing on lived experiences of disability among actors and directors in a workplace context. Intersections across disciplines and theories used in the study provided a most suitable approach to exploring this phenomenon. This has provided clear structures for the principles underpinning the study, for its design, and for detailed analysis. The numbers of participants who joined the study in both groups was also strength.

This will also be referred to as a limitation. A range of actors and directors of differing ages, career stages, and levels of engagement with theatre practice and disability took part. It was also helpful to be able to recruit artistic directors who have organisational responsibility within their unique theatre workplaces. All participants took part in interviews lasting around an hour, allowing space for reflection and stories from practice, adding further value to the concept I have outlined in the synthesis.

Limitations of the study can be likened to my own experiences of disability and theatre: from negotiating my personal and family experiences, to recognising the vast range of understandings and complex issues surrounding disability in theatre that are relevant to me, my practice, and my research. The number of participants who took part in the interviews was a limitation as well as a strength, particularly during the analysis, as I was the only researcher carrying out this process. Allowing an idiographic focus on each participant meant that data was weighted on directors' experiences, which I had not originally planned. It would have been useful to assess the benefits of recruiting equal group sizes at an earlier stage because of this. It does, however, also feel like a strength of the study to have data from a large group of participants. Recognising their unique positions in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability, it seems important that all those willing to take part, or perceiving this a part of their process, were able to do so.

As a non-disabled theatregoer, performer/practitioner, researcher, and with disability experience in my family, I positioned myself as an 'insider-outsider' in this work (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). This meant I felt some affinity with a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for both actors and directors. This could have meant that I did not appreciate the perspectives of each group afresh. However, in terms of my experience and beliefs I had a foot in both camps and a position of difference that was in neither. Still, I noticed how particular aspects of my own experiences were reshaped by psychological experiencing in the analysis of interviews. I have moved from shouting about positive change and open doors of opportunity for disabled people, to seeing this position as weighty. Rather than assuming ACE's shift in strategy brings inevitable change, I am more aware that outside-in influences only add momentum to the individual struggle of those pursuing change in their day-to-day work. A battlefield mentality to theatre expressed by some actors seemed farfetched in starting this study. Yet, this now feels a most fitting description for a career in an industry that is being made possible through more than shouting about change, but through a delicate process of mutual accommodations, vulnerability, increased understanding, and relationships.

Conclusions to this thesis were not inevitable or predicted part way through the study. Instead, in a similar way to participants themselves, as my understanding has grown so has my awareness of difficulty finding solutions. Only a concept reflecting stages in a process of change seemed able to capture the range of participants' experiences without undermining the uniqueness of them as people and as professionals working on the ground in theatre. Through my own intrapersonal process completing this study, I have been conscious of not letting my desire for 'a happy sign', to detract from realities uncovered by actors and directors here (Ahmed, 2007, p.164). The expectation of research on diversity to be 'useful', and 'provide techniques for achieving equality' (p. 164), is pressure I have allowed myself to feel under. It would still feel amiable to offer a neat conclusion. Instead, my tendency to search for a quick fix has been replaced with recognising value in bringing unresolved issues in theatre for actors and directors to the surface. With them, I now sit with the complexity and discomfort that has been uncovered here; rather than burying this, I will continue to grapple with what sharing responsibility for the representation of disabled people in theatre means for me in my personal life, work, and future research.

10.4 Conclusion

Before pressing record in my first interview for this study, an artistic director explained the reason he had chosen to take part (despite having never worked with a disabled person) was this subject is most talked about when he meets other directors, and the questions raised are ones he feels least able to answer. Taking part in the study is unlikely to have given him the answers, yet, simply discussing the subject of this thesis was perceived as a move towards making sense of his own process of engagement with theatre practice and disability. In the end, making sense of lived experiences of theatre and disability matters. Theatre is a deeply relational experience, centred on the communities making or receiving it. Theatre making is an exploratory, proactive, and emotional intrapersonal and interpersonal experience. Working with psychological disorientation, challenging tired or narrow narratives, is often the purpose for pursuing new territory and creativity. Inside this sometimes-uncomfortable industry climate, is a struggle to find a way forward, where disabled actors, non-disabled directors, and policy makers are attempting to work together towards a particular goal, 'great art and culture for everyone' (ACE, 2013).

One thing I noticed in both participant groups during the interviews, was the value placed on working together no matter how near or far they are to pursuing this, or how difficult or easy this may seem. Enough value to engage in interviews with me and reflect deeply on their experiences inside and outside the theatre workplace. I have been surprised by participants' honesty and openness and by the personal stories they have shared. I have worked hard to capture participants' feelings and meanings in the stories I have now told, in the analysis and drawn together in the synthesis. As the reader, you too have placed value on engagement with this study. Returning to the words of my participants, perhaps, like director Mark, we have been 'discovering as we went along, questions we needed to ask' (p.20); or, like actor Pete, we are wondering, 'what do you do? […] where do you stand?' (p.12). Like Lydia, we may feel, 'if it's said and it's out there it feels like less of an issue' (p.37). But this is not a place to settle. Along with the value I too place on theatre reflecting our communities, I hope this thesis points towards the value of sharing perceptions and experiences of disability across communities. I hope it also points to the resonant importance of moving towards shared responsibility for the accurate representation of disabled people in theatre, which is sea-change.

As director David realises, we are not 'there yet' (p.33).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule for Actors

(Preamble)

My name is Nina Michelle Worthington; I am a post-graduate researcher at Newman University in Birmingham. I am investigating experiences of theatre practice and disability among directors and actors. I am going to ask you about your experience of working in theatre, about life as an actor, and about your perspective of working with directors. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in your experiences. Your name will not be used in any write ups of the research and I will make sure that quotes cannot be identified with you. I would like to audio record this interview in order to transcribe it later. Nobody else besides me will listen to these recordings or read the transcripts. Is this all OK?

Before I ask you some questions about your work, I wondered if you would…

1. …start by giving me a brief description of your journey to becoming a professional actor?
   Prompt: What experience has most significantly shaped your personal approach to acting?
2. …share with me the first thing that comes to mind, a word, an image, thought or feeling, when you hear the phrase 'professional disabled actor'.
   Prompt: Can you say a bit more about that?

Before we chat more about theatre, I'd like to ask about your experience of disability itself.

3. There is no right or wrong answer, I'd just like to hear about what the word 'disabled' means to you. Can you have a go at finishing this sentence for me, 'to be disabled is…
   Prompt: Can you share any stories about where understanding has come from? (friends, family, personal disability, work, things read, watched, been part of).
4. In what way has disability been relevant in your experience of theatre so far?
   Prompts: characters in scripts, disability storylines, performances watched, training, acting? Have you noticed a difference working with directors with personal experience of disability and those without?

I am now going to ask some questions about your work in theatre. There are lots of discussions around increasing the participation of disabled people in theatre and yet it seems that the voice of the actors is often missing. It would be great to hear about your thoughts and experiences. Particularly in relation to working alongside directors.

5. If you were to write a sentence describing the current climate for disabled actors in theatre, what would it say?
   Prompts: What do you think are the main reasons for this? Where have your views come from? How does this make you feel as an actor?
6. How would you describe your own experience of working with directors in theatre so far?
   Prompts: Can you share some stories of work you have been involved in?
7. Can you describe any strategies or initiatives aimed at increasing onstage opportunities for disabled people in theatre that are impacting you personally?
   Prompts: How do you feel about these? Where do you think those feelings come from? How have you experienced the impact of these in your work with directors? Can you think of an image that captures your feelings towards ACE's current strategies around disability?
8. Can you share any stories from your casting experiences?

Prompts: How well do you feel you fit into casting processes used by directors? How have you experienced directors' casting choices? Who has the greatest influence on your opportunities as an actor? Do you feel that you are considered enough/fairly?

9. After taking the lead in *Richard III* at Hull Truck Theatre, Mat Fraser *(show picture)* was quoted saying 'there are only a few Shakespearean roles that a disabled actor can play' (2017a). How would you respond if he had said this to you?
   Prompts: Can you describe some of the roles you have played? Do you feel that your talent is reflected in roles you are offered? How do you decide whether to consider a role or not? Are there any roles you feel that you cannot play/audition for? How have you experienced directors' views on casting and roles?
10. How have you experienced audience responses to your performances?
    Prompt: To what extent do you believe that audiences overlook impairment in performance? Can you describe how director's perception of how audiences respond to disability or impairment has influenced their work with you?
11. Mat Fraser is also quoted saying 'there aren't many directors who trust a disabled actor in a lead role'. How does this kind of comment make you feel?
    Prompts: Does it connect with your experience? How fair/unfair is it? Why do you think he might believe this about directors? How have you experienced a director's trust in you? Can you describe ways this is reflected in your decisions?
12. What might effective work with a director in rehearsal and performance look like for you?
13. Can you describe practical factors that have or might limit or help your opportunities in this?
    Prompts: Environment, organisational structure, other people, access. When have you felt most/least able to participate fully in rehearsals/practice?
14. How confident do you feel in your own ability to work with directors?
    Prompts: What makes you think that? Do you feel directors' own skills and knowledge of working with disabled people aids or limits you in anyway? Can you give an example of when you have felt confident working with a particular director? What about asking for help? What approaches to working together have been most helpful?
15. How realistic/feasible is it for disabled people to be employed in onstage work on an ongoing, regular, basis?
    Prompts: Would like to see/are seeing this happen? What would make it more/less likely? How have you experienced directors' responses to this?
16. Looking ahead, what are the benefits and challenges of non-disabled directors and disabled actors working together more? For you?
17. If *you* were to write a sentence about how you, as an actor, feel about working with directors what would it say?

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for Directors

(Preamble)

My name is Nina Worthington; I am a post-graduate researcher at Newman University in Birmingham. I am investigating experiences of theatre practice and disability among directors and actors. I am going to ask you about your experience of working in theatre, about life as a director, and your perspectives of working with disabled actors. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in your experiences. Your name will not be used in any write ups of the research and I will make sure that quotes cannot be identified with you. I would like to audio record this interview in order to transcribe it later. Nobody else besides me will listen to these recordings or read the transcripts. Is this all OK?

Before I ask you some questions about your work, I wondered if you would…

1. …start by giving me a brief description of your journey to becoming a professional director?
   Prompt: what experience has most significantly shaped your personal approach to directing?
2. …share with me the first thing that comes to mind, a word, an image, thought or feeling, when you hear the phrase 'professional disabled actor'.
   Prompt: Can you say a bit more about that?

Before we chat more about theatre, I'd like to ask about your experience of disability itself.

3. There is no right or wrong answer, I'd just like to hear about what the word 'disabled' means to you. Can you have a go at finishing this sentence for me, 'to be disabled is…
   Prompt: Can you share any stories about where that understanding has come from? (friends, family, personal disability, work, things read, watched, been part of).
4. In what way has disability been relevant in your experience of theatre so far?
   Prompts: Characters in scripts, disability storylines, performances watched, training, directing?

I am now going to ask some questions about you work in theatre. There are lots of discussions around increasing the participation of disabled people in theatre and yet it seems that the voice of directors is often missing. It would be great to hear about your thoughts and experiences. Although, I recognise that not all impairments are obvious, for this interview I'd like you to think particularly about actors with physical impairments.

5. If you were to write a sentence describing the current climate for disabled actors in theatre, what would it say?
   Prompts: What do you think are the main reasons for this? Where have your views come from? How does this make you feel as a director?
6. How would you describe your own experience of work with disabled people in theatre so far?
   Prompts: Can you share some stories of performance work you have seen or been involved in?
7. Can you describe any strategies or initiatives aimed at increasing onstage opportunities for disabled people that are impacting you personally?
   Prompts: How do you feel about these? Where do you think those feelings come from? How have you experienced the impact of these in your work with actors? Can you think of an image that captures your feelings towards ACE's current strategies around disability?

8. Can you share any stories from your casting experiences that relate to actors with physical impairments?
Prompts: How do feel disabled actors fit into casting processes you use? What has been your experience of casting choices and disabled actors? What influence do you have on who you work with? Do you feel that disabled actors are considered enough?
After taking the lead in *Richard III* at Hull Truck Theatre, Mat Fraser *(show picture)* was quoted saying 'there are only a few Shakespearean roles that a disabled actor can play' (2017a). How would you respond if he had said this to you?
Prompts: How have you experienced disabled actors' views on casting and roles? How was that for you? How might you decide whether an actor is suitable for a role or not? Are there roles you feel cannot be played by a disabled actor?

9. Can you share you experience of audience responses to disabled actors?
Prompts: What has been your response watching disabled actors as part of the audience? How does this impact you as a director? Do audiences overlook impairment in performance? How does this influence your thinking/work?

10. Mat Fraser is also quoted as saying 'there aren't many directors who trust a disabled actor in a lead role'. How does this kind of comment make you feel?
Prompts: Does it connect with your experience? How fair/unfair is it? Why do you think he might believe this about directors? How would you describe your trust in disabled actors? Can you describe ways this is reflected in your decisions?

11. What might effective work with a disabled person in rehearsal and performance look like for you?

12. Can you describe practical factors that have or might limit or help your opportunities in this?
Prompts: Environment, organisational structure, other people, access. When have you felt most/least able to facilitate disabled people's full participation in practice?

13. Can you describe how confident you feel in your own ability to work with actors with physical impairments?
Prompts: What makes you think that? Do you feel own skills and knowledge aid or limit you in anyway? Do you have an example of when you have felt/might feel confident directing a disabled actor? What about asking for help? What approaches to working together have been most helpful?

14. How realistic/feasible is it for disabled people to be employed in your productions onstage on an ongoing, regular basis?
Prompts: Would like to see/are seeing this happen? What would make it more/less likely? Would you have any concerns, or questions about this?

15. Looking ahead, what are the benefits and challenges of non-disabled directors and disabled actors working together more? For you?

16. If *you* were to write a sentence about how you, as a director, feel about working with disabled actors what would it say?

Appendix 3: Sample Transcript with Annotations

Placing blame and justification	1	a company, erm … and … but I've always had … erm … a	Explains why - reasons: ensemble/company, no need for *'guest actors'*, not knowing 'how'. Does he view disabled actors as *guests* in theatre? Guests are not routine, they visit.
	2	problem which is about my ignorance as to how you	
Owning a problem	3	make a work with disability, now certain disabilities are	
	4	clear, you know if they're, if they're in wheelchairs or	His on-going 'problem' is 'ignorance', He's *'always'* had it. Where is he placing the blame for not working with disabled actors, on himself? Disabled actors longstanding problem is *'underrepresentation'*, his longstanding problem is lack of knowledge (ignorance). How does it work? *'How you make a work with disability', Impersonal, not 'with' a person, with a structure.*
Unknown practice/Gaps in knowledge	5	whatever, that's one thing, but, if they're blind then I, I	
	6	just don't know how that works, erm … and if they're	
Ranking impairment – most/least feasible in practice	7	deaf, deaf, it necessitates quite a significant cost to get	
	8	signers in to work with you full-time in a rehearsal room,	
	9	erm … so it … that's why I, I, it, it, … I … I've never done	
Personal responsibility for actions	10	it, but, so update, my commitment has been over the	
	11	last few years, we've worked with Graeae, er … [detail	Recognises different impairments and aware of access requirements. He has thought this through. Ranking impairment, what are the 'costs', needs, some impairments are *'clear'* - others are not, Deaf actors are costly. Does he have more knowledge than he thinks? Is not knowing 'how' an excuse? He doesn't know *'how that works'*. What is unknown? a person, a process, a cost? or an access requirement?
	12	removed], in other words, I'm buying into their	
	13	experience and abilities as a disabled-led company, erm	
Buying in expertise as a solution/Sharing space but not experiences	14	… and we've just appointed a place changer, a disabled	
	15	artist, who's on the payroll, whose gonna come in, um …	
	16	advocate for disability in the work we make, but, also to	*Moves from 'I' to 'it, and back to 'I',* Slips between the issue being internal, why 'I', or external why 'it'. It's about self ('Why I've never done it'). Time frame – past to *'last few years'.*
Shifting from disabled 'guests' to employees	17	input into the organisational structures, board level	
	18	down to front of house, to see how we can improve, er	
	19	… access for disabled artists.	
Time frame – change is recent	20		He has worked with Graeae, but this is not interpreted as first-hand experience, as he has *'never'* worked with a disabled actor. He is sharing a building, costs, with a disabled-led company but not experience.
	21	I: Can you describe what the word disabled means to	
	22	you? If it's easier, you could have a go at finishing the	
	23	sentence, 'to be disabled is…'	*'Buying' into others experience and ability.* Can increased representation be purchased?
	24		
Medical model views – impairment is the problem	25	J: Well, yes, um … I mean to me it's there is an	Disabled person is *'on the payroll'.* Is this surprising? Paid to advocate for disability and theatre. Does he want/need inclusion to be enforced?
	26	impairment at play, that, er … that complicates their	
	27	ability to fully have access to the performing arts, erm …	
	28	and I go back far enough where you could not even	Disabled person influencing at all levels.
	29	participate as an audience member, um … because the	*'At play' - impairment is active, to be negotiated, moved around.* Medical model thinking, impairment is to blame. No concept of social model thinking. Contact with Graeae has not grown his understanding. What has he learnt?
	30	buildings were just, just not fit to cope with wheelchair	
	31	users, people with carers, um … but that's all changed	
	32	over the last few years, er … but that, I suppose, sums it	
	33	up, it's just an impairment at play.	

Appendix 4: Sample Table of Themes for an Individual Participant

Pete – Table of super-ordinate themes and themes

Themes	Page/line	Key Words
Concerned with authenticity		
Portraying believable characters	9.6	with directors […] whether they see the character as disabled […] whether that's important in why they want to cast me in this role
Sincere efforts to change	10.5, 11	There's a lot of lip service paid […] I think he's genuinely interested and he's trying to learn
Feeling talent is recognised honestly	5.26-28	I'm getting huge amounts of work […] you wonder, kind of, what that's about sometimes
Finding genuine understanding	11.1-3	They know it in an intellectual way rather than having […] experienced it
Assumptions in performance		
Awareness of hostility	5.3-5	Audiences really still find it the hardest thing to adjust to […] there's always an assumption made
Fighting assumptions	28.2	You mustn't always take the negative […] It can feel to me like the response is because I'm disabled
Risk in a safe place	29.9	It still goes on […] we usually perform in fairly safe places but sometimes you don't know
Criticism within the community	12.18-25	The world of disability arts exists in a state of warfare […] You can't make a show that's gonna appeal to everybody […] where do you stand?
Hierarchy in rehearsals		
Feeling inferior	4.30, 5.1	at present […] you still feel […] you're a little bit of a second-class citizen
Contributing	34.6	It's being treated like an adult […] like you've got some sort of contribution
Internalised struggle	18.23	One of the problems we have as disabled people […] is having to prove ourselves all the time
Valuing disability perspectives	20.30	I'm concerned where the control lies […] If there was a disabled person […] this wouldn't happen
Expecting equality, not advantage	17.30	It's not a charitable institution […] it's about successful shows […] that are going to make money
Living through climate change		
Past exclusion	1.9	I got laughed out of court really, you know, 'You can't be an actor'
Increased casting opportunities	15.24	Compared to when I started […] you wouldn't get near a main stage
Improved accessibility/awareness	16.24	It feels easier […] when I get work there's an understanding that I need some level of support
Trusting the 'roots'	16.21	It may all be a fad,[…] a great new thing that won't last very long but it feels some of the roots are in

Appendix 5: Master Table of Themes Across Actor-Participant Group

A. Impact of Theatre on Perceptions of Identity

i. Journeying with Self-identity in the Theatre Workplace

Sophie: I didn't want to be associated with that word […] now I'm very proud of it (p. 2, l. 16).
Lydia: really changed what disabled meant for me (p. 8, l. 20-28).
James: I might not perceive myself as disabled, society always does […] exposure to the industry has crafted that (p. 7, l. 13-20).
Neil: Becoming an actor was a really weird way of reclaiming who I was […] I had a long journey to get to where I am, I love it (p. 2, l. 24; p. 4, l. 19).

ii. Defining Professional Identity

Lydia: I'm a professional actor, I never include the disabled part (p. 7, l. 5-6).
Paul: I've never presented myself as disabled […] it's the last bastion […] of discrimination (p. 29, l. 1-8).
James: figuring out how much that defines you […] how much you class yourself as the disabled actor and how much you're just an actor (p. 6, l. 21).
Neil: I'm a disabled actor, that's how people know me (p. 13, l. 9).
Moira: I was told to not put that I'm [impaired…] the things that I've done, I'm really proud of, always have my disability as it stands (p. 8, l. 13; 27).

iii. Necessity to Define as Disabled in Practice

Lydia: we're a product […] we have to include it, which is sad (p. 7, l. 9-12).
Paul: The climate's […] pretty good […] we can take advantage; I struggle with this but I've been thinking about it a lot (p. 13, l. 25).
James: it's very extreme and you feel […] put in a group (p. 12, l. 25).
Sophie: My disability has become a unique selling point […] it will look good for everyone (p. 21, l. 28-32)
Moira: [if] I go in and don't tell them who I am, and then they're not prepared to help me, that's actually on me (p. 11, l. 16).
Pete: I'm getting huge amounts of work […] you wonder, kind of, what that's about sometimes (p. 5, l. 26).

B. Navigating Directors' Inexperience of Disability

i. Approaches to Challenging Directors

Sophie: I'm less scared of […] upsetting a director (p. 16, l. 11).
Moira: there's always a learning curve […] I'm an actor […] but I'm also there as a teacher (p. 12, l. 20-28).
Lydia: I really regret not speaking up […] it was more personal (p. 11, l. 15).
Paul: I explain the situation, or sometimes I don't […] it's my problem […] I don't want it to be anybody else's (p. 10, l. 10).
Neil: I'm very good at relaxing people, I have my own strategy I suppose (p. 17, l. 14).

ii. Dealing with Discomfort

James: it scares people off […] if it's just tiny things […] I just don't mention it (p. 28, l. 2-8).
Lydia: Disabled artists […] quite harsh with people […] I didn't know how (p. 35, l. 3-9).
Sophie: I wouldn't have been exposed to […] a completely different understanding […] my unawareness (p. 12, l. 15-19).
Moira: I'm in enough control of my career to not hold any prisoners (p. 11, l. 27).
Neil: it's about relaxing them […] I'm very good at relaxing people, I have my own strategy I suppose (p. 17, l. 14-18).

iii. Handling Power Dynamics

James: like a puppet […] a cog in a big machine […] this is what […] directors crave from a good company member (p. 2, l. 30; p. 3, l. 2-5).
Moira: I would flag this to the director […] get yelled at […] 'we got it under control, this isn't your job' (p.

26, l. 21).
Lydia: I don’t know how much responsibility I should […] take on (p. 9, l. 16).
Pete: I’m concerned where the control lies […] If there was a disabled person […] this wouldn’t happen (p. 20, l. 30).
Sophie: We’re not only doing this for ourselves, we’re doing it for future generations of actors (p. 16, l. 18).

A. Wrestling with Authenticity

i. Disquiet about Professional Recognition

Paul: it's kind of like um a glass ceiling situation where you're never quite sure […] that's the main reason why I hide it (p. 26, l. 32).
James: the problem is that all of that happens behind the scenes […] you don't know why you haven't got a job (p. 5, l. 9-13).
Lydia: I’m so sick of seeing ‘no experience required’ (p. 17, l. 26).
Sophie: this doesn’t specify disabled […] something I’ve had to fight for (p. 18, l. 30).
Moira: we don't get […] challenged as actors […] frustrating politically and artistically (p. 25, l. 19; 22).

ii. Trust in a Shifting Theatre Climate

Lydia: it’s less about what I think and more about the reality of it (p. 40, l. 12).
Neil: My career has been with maverick directors who are up for challenges and, yeah, and can see a bit wider than normal lens of directors (p. 5,l. 23).
Moira: the landscape has changed […] directors who ask for disabled talent […] the climate is tenuous and uncertain (p. 34, l. 11; p. 35, l. 26).
Sophie: I do think people are judged more on their merits and their ability, more than they were (p.29).
James: I’m just sort of coasting along going, okay, I hope I get another job *(laughs)* (p.32, l. 22).
Pete: it may all be a fad, it may all be, you know, a great new thing that won’t last very long, but *(pause)*, it feels some of the roots are in (p. 16, l. 21).

Appendix 6: Master Table of Themes Across Director-Participant Group

A. Disability Consciousness

i. Becoming Disability Conscious in the Theatre Workplace

Tim: Did I make the decision to surround myself with more people with disabilities […] something shifted […] (p. 1, l. 7).
Dawn: Even 5 years ago […] few people were talking; we're all thinking and talking about in a very conscious way (p. 27, l. 7).
Felix: What became really clear […] is that she's just a really great actor (p. 19, l. 7).
Jack: In all those […] years I've been working I've never worked with a disabled actor (p. 27, l. 2).
Lucas: the audition just blew my mind and I… I really forgot the [impairment…] wow (p. 12, l. 12).
Simon: Graeae coming in; would make […] one's whole brain to shift; these provocateurs (p. 33, l. 8; p. 9, l. 11).
Sara: did open my eyes […] not at all equipped for […] take their whole break to get to the toilet (p. 28, l. 14).
Anne: My early influence like, same for a lot of people, would be the work of Graeae (p. 9, l. 2).
John: The big change for me was […] developing relationship (p. 5, l. 26).
Mark: The project was brilliant but everything around it was really difficult (p. 18, l. 21).

ii. Positioning Disability Consciousness with Professional Identity

Tim: really keen on changing the face of British theatre and who can work in the sector (p. 3, l.6).
Felix: gave […] opportunities she would not have had; changed her career (p. 9, l. 17).
John: we're all working towards is a situation where that label disappears […] to be seen alongside other professional actors (p. 30, l. 3).
Mark: We've done our bit […] but that rehearsal process would be run […] by [disabled people] […] not me trying to cast a show (p.16, l. 12).
Sara: suddenly […] the position I inhabit […] I can really drive change (p. 10, l. 10).
Simon: I'm quite new to being in a position of power […] there's a lot of responsibility quite rightly on me (p. 22, l. 25).
Sue: Arts Council (sighs) […] they're really clear about what their priorities […] it's clearly on their agenda, so, therefore, it has to be on ours um we report back to them (p. 19, l. 19).
Anne: I hadn't even […] considered casting a disabled actor […] not a conversation [...] I was part of […] that's changed a lot since being here (p. 10, l. 3).

iii. Nurturing Disability Consciousness

Tim: very aware that your environment disables you ultimately […] I […] ascribe to the social model of disability (p.17, l. 5).
David: how to open doors […] in a wheelchair […] we came up with a kind of rope system; if we are going to employ a disabled actor […] that isn't straight-forward (p. 21, l. 11; p. 22, l. 33).
Dawn: a lot of googling […] have done quite a lot of research […] took it seriously (p. 17, l. 24).
Jack: If I can be given the skills to… to do it, then I'm more than happy to address that inequality of access (p. 18, l. 5).
Anne: I'm a big fan of the sort of social model […] it empowers you to change things (p. 6, l. 33).
Simon: I wish I had more training (p. 21, l. 26).
Mark: there's been a place for that learning to go which is into the next production (p. 8, l. 4).
Sue: we always now audition in accessible spaces, which we never used to do (p. 21, l. 14).
John: Involved us looking at our practice […] customer facing service […] were we accessible […] changes to backstage (p. 15, l. 10).
Sara: if I'm you know advocating and um singing all of this change, well also it's got to be reflected in my own work (p. 20, l. 5).

B. Narratives of Caution and Confidence

i. Managing Assumptions of Impairment in Performance

David: One of the challenges is that […] we don't want to be saying 'this is a disability project' (p. 11, l. 19).
Tim: letter […] said the most horrific things […] a prejudice […] I've also been in rooms and seen people go

on journeys. it can be unsettling because it's new (p. 15, l. 24).
Felix: if you shift the language […] not trying to be absolute naturalism, it's not literalism […] people go 'yeah great I accept that' (p. 27, l. 36).
John: The first 2 minutes they were going 'oh God…' […] after that […] they forget about it
Lucas: the bravest thing […] an actor with severe disability […] wow that […] makes people feel uncomfortable […] very bold (p. 19, l. 7).
Sara: felt like we had to address this thing that they have a disability […] almost embarrassed when I look back at that (p. 9, l. 14).
Sue: we had a patron who was outraged that there was an actor in a wheelchair […] you just think 'well, okay, I just don't know what I can do for you' (laughs) (p. 9, l. 18).

i. Presumptions of Error in Rehearsal

Tim: The first show […] I suddenly felt like shit because I hadn't thought through the exercise enough (p. 27, l. 7).
Dawn: Oh, it's completely terrifying (laughs) like so much of my work as a director […] I sort of haven't got a clue (p. 7, l. 43; p. 17, l. 45).
Jack: The lift broke down […] detail of what is catastrophic; becoming completely thwarted for a simple, stupid thing (p. 1, l. 7; p. 7, l. 8).
Lucas: have they got the tools […] Is it also exploiting their […] if someone can't be on stage in a way […] they are comfortable (p. 7, l. 8).
Simon: it's a really complex thing; you were constantly in awareness […] is that person safe […] has all due care been taken (p. 5, l. 15; p. 9, l.16).
Sue: the thing that's worth mentioning is […] lack of confidence […] fear isn't quite the right word […] a caution […] slightly anxious about 'I'm not sure (pause) I know how to do this' (p. 30, l. 13).
Anne: you just have to think of new stuff to do […] that's the amazing thing about working in um rooms where you have different sets of needs (p. 24, l. 5)
John: that the only thing to do is to ask and […] find out and put your foot in it (p. 30, l. 3).

ii. Transparency and Communication with Actors

Tim: that's what I need […] to understand and help you […] if you're embarrassed […] can't discuss […] makes it quite tricky (p. 7, l. 12).
David: I was stumbling […] cause you start tripping over language very quickly and what you should and shouldn't say (p.25, l.13).
John: You learn that the only thing to do is ask […] and find out and put your foot in it […] it's liberating once you get past that (p. 30, l. 1).
Mark: More confident […] but [..] in context here, that would […] be a space that is being led, managed, run by a disabled person (p. 28, 23).
Anne: You can just ask stuff […] be really honest […] that's quite revelatory […] rather than pretending (p. 13, l. 17).
Felix: What you don't wanna do is go 'oh God […] you've got a disability what do you…' […] my instinct is […] to treat you different (p. 17, l. 24).
Sara: as a result of that first experience […] much more frank […] not felt those nerves […] I've got practiced at it (p. 5, l. 18).
Sue: we worked out […] how to work the rehearsal room together, and I think that's really, really important (p. 13, l. 7)

B. Perceptions of External Constraints on Casting

i. The Significance of Funding

David: it all starts with the money […] we have to be pragmatic about what we can and can't do (p.15, l. 33).
Mark: 'interestingly, it cost as much for [disabled artists to be involved] as the entire budget of the rest of the event, so it doubled the budget for that event' (p. 11, l. 9).
Dawn: we wanted to work with a Deaf actor, but we didn't want to do it unless we knew how to properly support them (p. 25, l. 25).

Jack: to be absolutely honest, I have to date had a sense that you couldn't […] I couldn't see how it could be sustainable (p. 8, l. 24)
Felix: not been able to recreate; because we changed the structures (p. 9, l. 17; p. 24, l. 33).
Anne: extra time costs money; we all feel sad […] but that's the reality […] just no way […] that's going to be possible (p. 40, l. 19).
Sara: money where your mouth is […] increase creative access within our productions; got to be reflected in my own work (p. 18, l. 19; p. 4, l. 20).

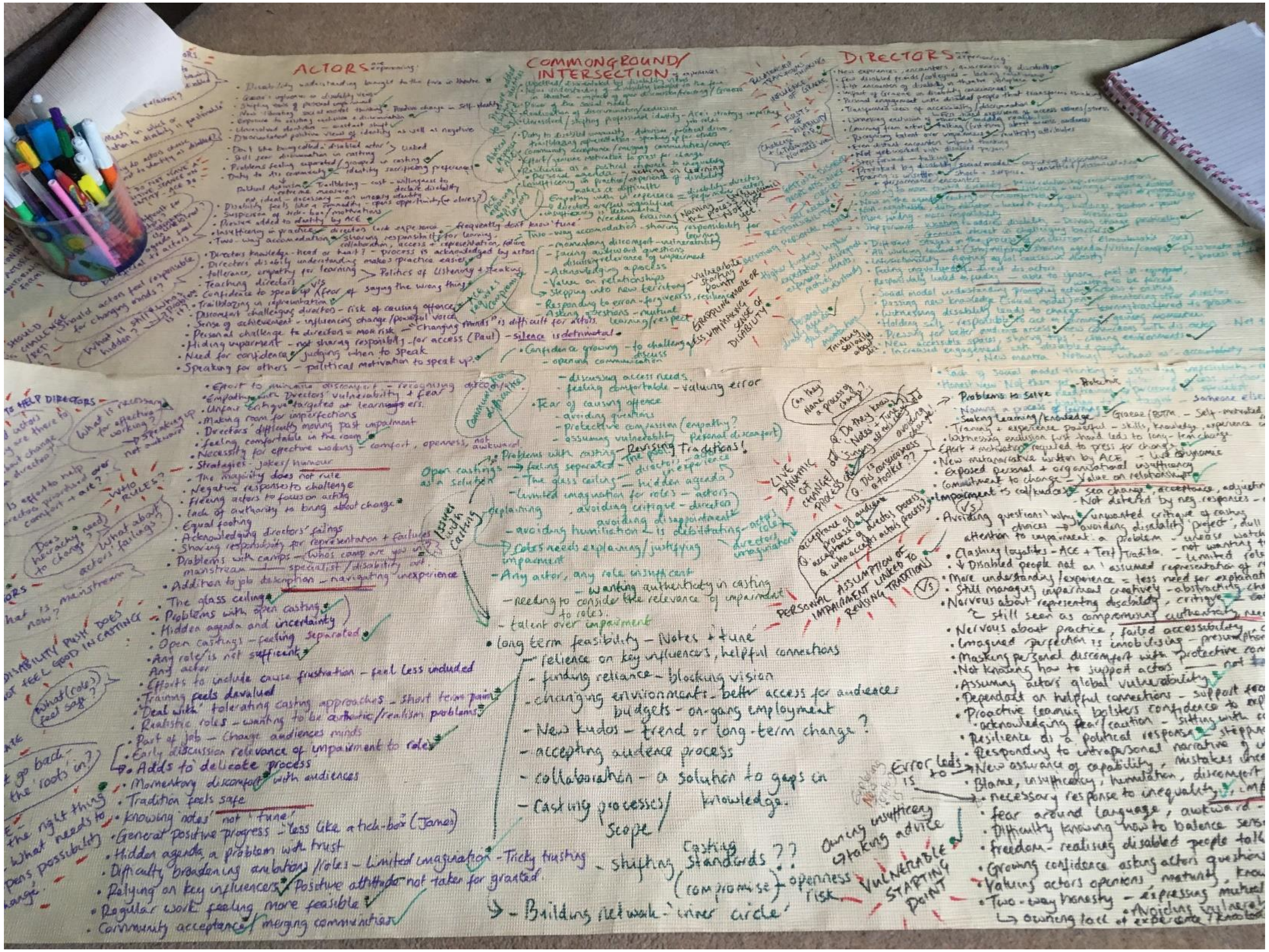
ii. Perceiving a Lack of Experienced Disabled Actors: A Catch-22

John: the big thing for me is finding more disabled actors to… in that […] pool of talent […] that's the barrier (p. 6, l. 32).
Dawn: really keen to meet disabled actors, and we failed […] weren't available (p. 9, l. 33).
Lucas: The pool was quite reduced […] it was not easy (l. 14, p. 24).
Sue: many of them haven't been trained in a conventional way […] you've got to be really confident in your own ability to work with people who might be a very different levels of experience (p. 6, l. 24).
Tim: Often the acting is subpar […] we have to start from why; you have to have lots of experience a carrying shows (p. 26, l. 18; p. 25, l. 26).
David: if someone is […] living with disability and brave enough to go on stage, whatever it is they're doing; inspired and full of admiration for the achievement as much as […] the quality (p. 28. 25).
Felix: where are all the actors with the disabilities who've come through RADA […] there aren't enough of those (p. 30, l. 20).
Anne: There aren't disabled actors with the muscle and the training […] it does make a difference […] a tiny grain of truth (p. 37, l. 1).
Sara: barrier to joining the profession […] people need to have flexed their muscles […] there's been chicken and egg (p. 31, l. 29; p. 28, l. 36).

iii. Insufficient Processes and Alternative Routes to Casting

Sara: I'll look her up […] she doesn't exist on Spotlight […] much more detective work I would say; not […] straightforward (p. 19, l. 27).
Tim: It comes from me talking, like pushing casting directors to make sure we see people (p. 31, l. 16).
John: the solution […] we'll just do an open casting call […] just to try and get past that filter […] it's really tricky that (p. 8, l. 16).
Dawn: I think agents um self um censor in terms of who they submit for things if you don't write all over something (p. 34, l. 12).
Felix: a good question […] being self-critical […] I don't think I'm active enough (p. 31, l. 13).
Lucas: I just really started while we were talking really reflecting on what I do actually set out to a casting director (p. 11, l. 27).
Simon: It's me as a director […] saying I want to, I'm not saying for every single role 'I want to see a disabled actor' (p. 37, l. 5).
Sue: It's] a great shame […] institutions like Spotlight […] you've got a special disabled register as well (p. 6, l. 4)

Appendix 7: Notes Exploring Higher Order Themes



ACTORS are experiencing:

- Disability understanding brought to the fore in theatre
- Graeae – influence on disability [illegible]
- Shifting [illegible] of personal impairment
- New 'liberating' social model thinking – Positive change in self-identity
- Exposure to existing exclusion + discrimination
- Unresolved identities – constant shift
- Disorientated positive views of identity as well as negative
- Don't like being called a 'disabled actor' > Linked
- Still fear discrimination in casting
- Problems feeling separated / grouped in casting
- Duty to dis community – identity sacrificing preferences
  - Political Activism – Trailblazing – cost – willingness to declare disability
  - 'extreme measure' – not ideal – necessary – an uneasy identity
- Disability feels like a commodity – opens opportunity (+ closes?)
- Suspicion of tick-box / motivations
- Pressure added to identity by ACE
- Insufficiency in practice – directors lack experience – frequently don't know 'tune'
- Two-way accomodation – sharing responsibility for learning, collaboration, access + representation, failure
- Directors knowledge – head or heart? – process is acknowledged by actors
- Directors' disability understanding makes practice easier
- tollerance, empathy for learning > Politics of Listening + Speaking
- Teaching directors v/s
- Confidence to speak up / fear of saying the wrong thing
- Trailblazing in representation
- Discomfort challenging directors – risk of causing offence
- Sense of achievement – influencing change / powerful voice
- Personal challenge to directors = more risk – "Changing minds" is difficult for actors
- Hiding impairment – not sharing responsibility for access (Paul) – silence is detrimental
- Need for confidence / judging when to speak
- Speaking for others – political motivation to speak up?

COMMONGROUND / INTERSECTION of experiences

Pressure added to identity by ACE

- Unsettled / disorientated by disability virtues
- New understanding of disability brought to the fore in theatre – impact of [illegible] / Graeae
- Power of the social model
- Realisation of discrimination / exclusion
- Unresolved / shifting professional identity – ACE's strategy impacting job roles

Political purpose + ACE

- Duty to disabled community – Activism, political drive, trailblazing representation – speaking up for others
- Community acceptance / merging communities / camps
- Effort / genuine motivation to press for change
- Resilience as a political response to inequality
- Personal agenda – acting on learning

ACE exposing deficiency

- Insufficiency in practice / experience of disability makes it difficult
- Empathy with lack of experience = disability – directors – actors
  - directors are / feel unqualified
- insufficiency is detrimental
- Needing training

Naming the process – 'live dynamic' – Not there yet.

ACE requires compromise

- Two-way accomodation – sharing responsibility for learning
  - momentary discomfort – vulnerability
  - facing awkward questions
    - discussing relevance of impairment
  - Acknowledging a process
  - Value on relationships
  - Stepping into new territory – Vulnerable starting point
  - Responding to error – forgiveness, resilience
  - Asking questions – mutual learning / respect
- Confidence growing – to challenge / discuss
  - opening communication

GRAPPLING MORE OR LESS WITH MAKING SENSE OF DISABILITY

RELATIONSHIPS TRANSFORM THINKING

INFLUENCE OF GRAEAE

FIRSTS OF DISABILITY EXP

DIRECTORS are experiencing:

- New experiences, encounters, awareness of disability
- few disabled friends / colleagues – lacking relationships
- first encounters of disability in theatre workplace
- Impact of Graeae on disability consciousness
- Personal engagement with disabled people that transforms thinking
- Transformed ideas of accessibility / discrimination – first hand experience of access issues / stress
- Witnessing exclusion of others – sudden realisation
- Learning from actors – talking (first time) about access, audiences
- Recognising talent over impairment – multiply attitudes
- Even distant encounters impact thinking
- Not yet worked with disabled person
- Step forward – talking
- Provoked by disability social model – cognitive dissonance / unsettled / disorientating
- Training is unsettling – shock + surprise + performance encounters
- [illegible]
- Different 'stages in the process' [illegible]
- All working towards [illegible] shared agenda / vision / campaign
- Intersectionality – fighting equal causes in diversity
- Feeling unqualified [illegible] dis actors
- Responsibility linked to funding – able to ignore, feel un-engaged, waiting to be forced
- Social model understanding prompting actor [illegible] + casting
- Passing new knowledge (social model) on – mentoring other directors
- Witnessing disability leads to change – learning transferred to practice
- Holding self – responsible to act on learning – gaining momentum
- Pressing for better audience access – new connections with dis actors
- New accessible spaces, sharing tips – changing environments
- Increased engagement with disabled people
  - New mantra 'Nothing without us' – accountability

Higher funding, higher expectation – disregard experience, talents, motives

Personal disability agenda

Thinking seriously about dis

TO HELP DIRECTORS

What is necessary for effective working? → Speaking up, not awkward

Is effort to help directors prioritised over comfort + art?

WHO RULES?

Does hierarchy need to change?

What about actors' failings?

What is mainstream now?

DISABILITY PUSH DOES NOT FEEL GOOD IN CASTING

What (roles) feel safe?

go back – the 'roots' in?

- Effort to minimise discomfort – recognising directors
- Empathy with Directors' vulnerability + fear
- Unfair critique targeted at learners
- Making room for imperfections
- Directors' difficulty moving past impairment
- feeling comfortable in the room
- Necessity for effective working – comfort, openness, not awkward
- Strategies – jokes / humour
- The majority does not rule
- Negative responses to challenge
- Freeing actors to focus on acting
- Lack of authority to bring about change
- Equal footing
- Acknowledging directors' failings
- Sharing responsibility for representation + failures
- Problems with camps – Whos camp are you in? mainstream — specialist / disability art
- Addition to job description – navigating inexperience
- The glass ceiling
- Problems with open casting
- Hidden agenda and uncertainty
- Open castings – feeling separated
- Any role is not sufficient / Any actor
- Efforts to include cause frustration – feel less included
- Training feels devalued
- 'Deal with' tolerating casting approaches – short term pain
- Realistic roles – wanting to be authentic / realism problems
- Part of job – Change audiences minds
- Early discussion relevance of impairment to roles
- Adds to delicate process
- Momentary discomfort with audiences
- Tradition feels safe
- knowing 'notes' not 'tune'
- General positive progress – less like a tick-box (James)
- Hidden agenda, a problem with trust
- Difficulty broadening ambitions / roles – Limited imagination – Tricky trusting
- Relying on key influencers / Positive attitude not taken for granted
- Regular work feeling more feasible
- Community acceptance / merging communities

Communication difficulties

- discussing access needs
- feeling comfortable – valuing error
- Fear of causing offence
  - avoiding questions
  - protective compassion (empathy?)
  - assuming vulnerability, personal discomfort
- Problems with casting – Revising Traditions!
  - feeling separated – The pool? – directors' inexperience
  - The glass ceiling – hidden agenda
  - Limited imagination for roles – actors
  - avoiding critique – directors
  - avoiding disappointment
  - avoiding humiliation – is debilitating – actors
  - roles needs explaining / justifying impairment – directors' imagination (roles)

Open castings as a solution

Issues with casting – explaining

- Any actor, any role insufficient
  - wanting authenticity in casting
- needing to consider the relevance of impairment to roles.
- talent over impairment
- long term feasibility – Notes + tune
  - reliance on key influencers, helpful connections
  - funding reliance – blocking vision
  - changing environments – better access for audiences, budgets – on-going employment
  - New kudos – trend or long-term change?
  - accepting audience process
  - collaboration – a solution to gaps in knowledge.
  - Casting processes / scope /
  - shifting Casting standards ?? (compromise) openness risk
  - Building network – 'inner circle'

Can they name a process of change?

Q. Do they know 'Notes + Tune' is this learned / avoiding change!

Q. Dis consciousness is a toolkit??

LIVE DYNAMIC OF CHANGE / PROCESS

Q. acceptance of audience process

Q. acceptance of directors process

Q. who accepts actors process?

PERSONAL ASSUMPTION OF IMPAIRMENT LINKED TO REVISING TRADITIONS

V/s

Owning insufficiency – taking advice

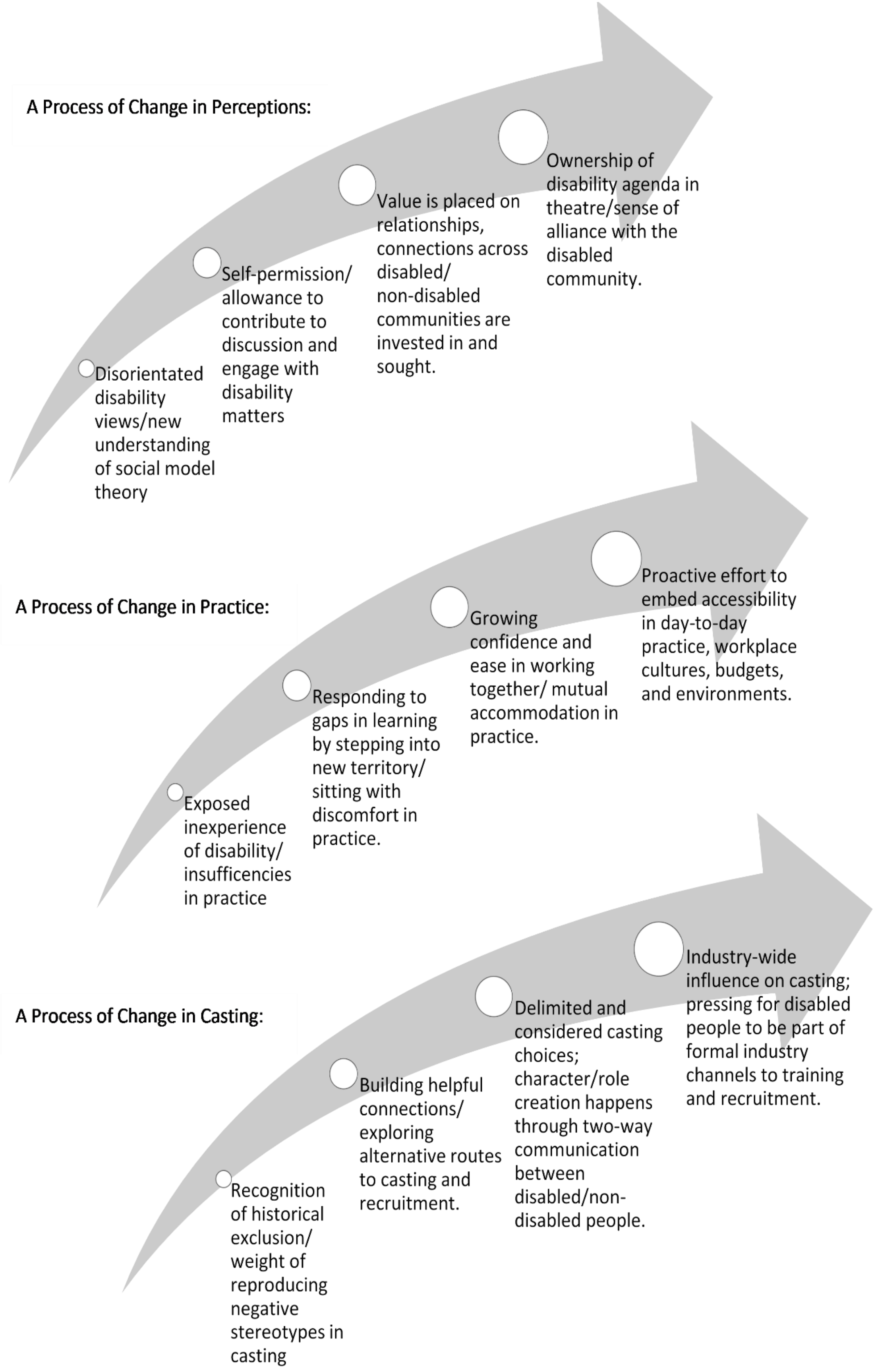
VULNERABLE STARTING POINT

Error is / leads to

→ Problems to solve

- Naming a process of learning
- Seeking learning / knowledge – Graeae (BOTM – Self-motivated
- Training + experience powerful – skills, knowledge, experience
- Witnessing exclusion first hand leads to long-term change
- Effort + motivation required to press for change – live dynamic
- New metanarrative written by ACE
- Exposed personal + organisational insufficiency
- Commitment to change – Value on relationships
- Impairment is cool / kudos – sea change, acceptance, adjective
  - Not deterred by neg. responses
- Avoiding questions 'why' – unwanted critique of casting choices → avoiding disability 'project', dull attention to impairment a problem – unease watch
- Clashing loyalties – ACE + Text / Tradition – not wanting – limited roles
- ↓ Disabled people not an 'assumed representation of
- More understanding / experience = less need for explanation
- Still managing impairment creatively – abstracting
- Nervous about representing disability, critique
  - still seen as compromising authenticity
- Nervous about practice, failed accessibility
- Imagined perfection is imobilising – presumption
- Masking personal discomfort with protective
- Not knowing how to support actors — not
- Assuming actors' global vulnerability
- Dependent on helpful connections – support
- Proactive learning bolsters confidence to
  - acknowledging fear / caution – sitting with
- Resilience as a political response – stepping
- Responding to intrapersonal narrative
- New assurance of capability, mistakes
- Blame, insufficiency, humiliation, discomfort
- necessary response to inequality
- fear around language, awkward
- Difficulty knowing how to balance
- freedom – realising disabled people talk
- Growing confidence asking actors questions
- Valuing actors opinions, maturity
- Two-way honesty – expressing mutual
  - Avoiding vulnerab
  - → owning lack of experience / knowledge

Appendix 8: Separate Processes of Change in Perceptions, Practice, and Casting for Actors and Directors



A Process of Change in Perceptions:

A Process of Change in Practice:

A Process of Change in Casting: