

Interdisciplinarity and Stages in a Process of Engagement with Theatre Practice and Disability

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Navigating recent shifts in diversity agenda in the theatre industry and ensuring continued moves towards the accurate representation, equal participation, and valued contribution of disabled people on and off stage requires interdisciplinary perspectives. Many involved in day-to-day theatre work lack knowledge commonplace to disability scholars. They also lack understanding of lived disability experience and perspectives crucial for understanding attitudes, structures, and environments experienced in theatre settings. This article considers the most necessary aspects of disability studies knowledge to share in building, and moving forward from, disability consciousness in the theatre sector and training. It introduces stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors, and a reflective tool for personal positioning in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability. The article examines how interdisciplinary perspectives support individuals' processes of exploring new territory, building familiarity across disabled and nondisabled communities, and sharing responsibility for industry-wide change.

Introduction

An ongoing mandate in the theatre industry demands increased engagement with disability in a measurable way—for publicly funded venues, future funding depends on it. Theatre makers experience shifting diversity agenda and new engagement with disability in practice based “not only on workplace equality and an accurate reflection of disability but on the contribution of talent disabled [people] can bring to British theatre” (Fox and MacPherson 7). As Taylor says, the industry must create “an ordinary expectation that [disabled people] will be in theatre spaces as performers, writers, directors [...] and all those vital to making [...] theatre.” Recognizing a lack of shared responsibility for diversity across its organizations, Arts Council England (ACE) shifted its strategy, with annual workforce data, including those on disability, now made public (Bazelgette). Industry professionals now see positive progress with shifts in disability agenda reflected in tangible changes in theatre workplaces. Yet,

they must enact further change to embed new engagement with disability in routine theatre practice.

Long before ACE's attention to a disability agenda, the field of disability studies provided critical insight into theatrical portrayals of disabled people, casting issues, and accessible approaches to practice. Historically, scholars pursued a sociopolitical objective, taking an activist stance to misunderstandings of disability and prejudice in society. Literature focuses narrowly on two central discussions: the scrutiny and recognition of common theatrical portrayals of disability, and disability aesthetics—the signification of impairment in performance (Barnes; Garland-Thomson; Fahy and King; Koppers, *Disability*; Sandahl and Auslander). Both bodies of knowledge raise important questions about responses to disability in theatre today. Those familiar with disability studies can take for granted knowledge from classic works such as Barnes' *Disabling Imagery and the Media*, Garland-Thomson's analysis of the normate's response to disability in *Extraordinary Bodies*, Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*, or other pioneering work such as Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness*, and Bolt's more recent *Metanarratives of Disability*. Yet, in theatre practice, as disabled and nondisabled people continue to work together for the first time—navigating new territory around disability in auditions, rehearsals, and performance practice—these bedrocks to contemporary disability studies often remain unknown. This article presents these and other classic or emerging disability theories and knowledge as important starting points for change in day-to-day theatrical and directorial decisions and practices.

In considering the impact of interdisciplinary perspectives in the theatre sector and training, this article draws on a section of findings from an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study that examined lived experiences of theatre practice and disability among actors and directors (Worthington). IPA, which continues to grow in popularity in psychology and interdisciplinary studies, is “committed to the examination of how people make sense of their lived experiences” (Smith et al. 1). Its phenomenological roots are an “important reference point for many scholars and practitioners of disability theatre” (Conroy 55), and critical in dismantling oppressive “theatrical narrative” and “form” (Sandahl 21). This study demonstrates how a phenomenological lens makes implicit personal stories of theatre practice and disability more explicit. It evidences how disability studies knowledge crosses disciplines for making sense of attitudes, structures, and environments experienced in theatre. It also details specific value in sharing fundamental disability knowledge with individuals outside the disability studies classroom. Findings

discuss the most important aspects of disability studies to share in building disability consciousness in theatre, and how interdisciplinary perspectives support an individual's process of exploring new territory, building familiarity across communities, and sharing responsibility for industry-wide change.

Stages in a Process of Engagement with Disability in Theatre for Actors and Directors

The study informing this article culminated in the creation of stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors (see figure 1). The stages emerged from the higher-order synthesis of findings from interviews with two participant groups; these included seven actors who self-define as disabled with physical impairments, and twelve directors. All had worked in ACE's most highly funded theatre organizations. Although I recruited directors based on employment status—all artistic or associate directors of producing house theatres or companies—the fact that they all self-defined as nondisabled highlights the ongoing underrepresentation of disabled people in decision-making roles across the industry.

The study required stepping back from findings specific to actors or directors and exploring how to interpret individual experiences of theatre practice and disability across both participant groups. figure 1 illustrates four distinct stages in the process: consciousness raising, exploring new territory, familiarity, and shared responsibility. The four stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability are cumulative. Stage one, consciousness raising, begins the process of intrapersonal engagement with new encounters, awareness, and knowledge of disability in theatre. Here, shared fundamental disability studies, theory, politics, and history are a powerful starting point towards change: this stage is most relevant to this article. Stage two, exploring new territory, moves to interpersonal engagement, openness to nurturing new learning, practice, and approaches to casting. Stage three, familiarity, builds on relational engagement, with work across disabled and nondisabled communities becoming an expectation not an exception, and open communication and collaboration making effective practice possible. Finally, stage four, shared responsibility, focuses on ownership of disability agenda in theatre and active engagement in driving tangible and meaningful change in personal practice, individual workplaces, and the wider industry.

Characteristics of each of these stages reflect changes in perception (p), practice (pr), and casting (c). At each stage in the process set out in figure 1, (p)

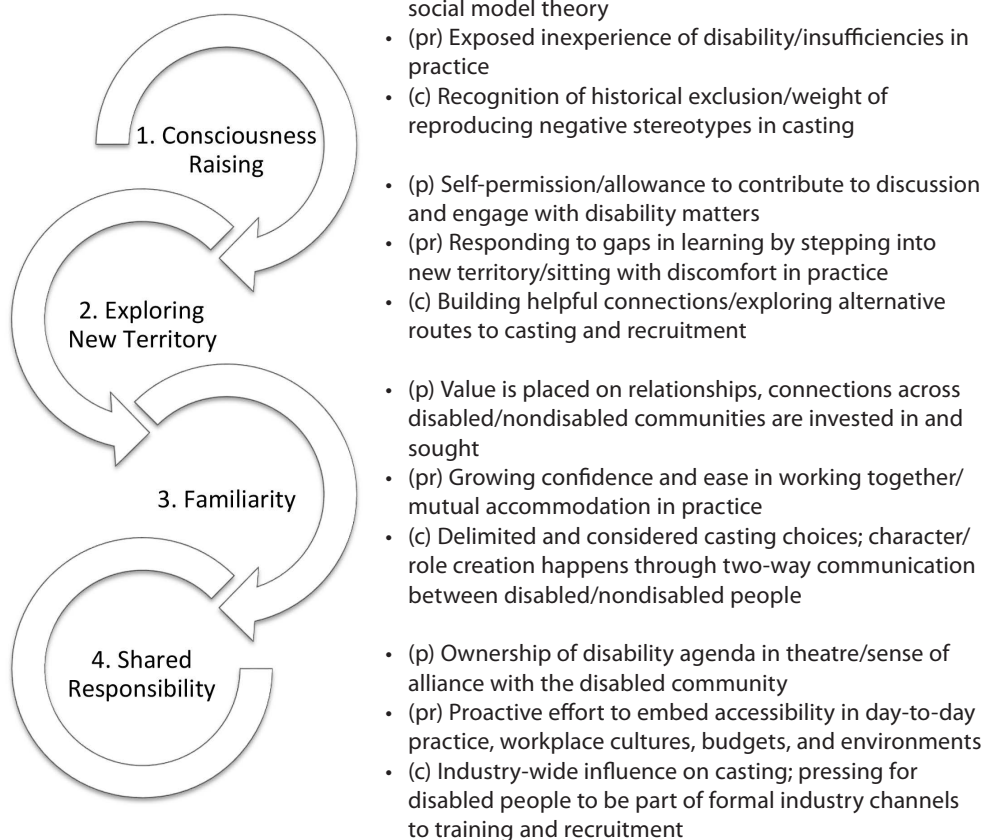


Figure 1. Stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors (Worthington 257).

describes changes in perception, such as cognitive reasoning, imagining, and problem-solving, and judgments about theatre, disability, and identity. The next (pr) describes changes in practice, such as theatre workplaces, experiences of audition and rehearsal, and performance settings. Finally, (c) describes changes in casting, such as beliefs about and approaches to onstage opportunities for disabled people, characters and roles, and recruitment processes. The stages draw attention to the individuality of actors' or directors' experiences in the study and highlight the complexity surrounding theatre and disability. Descriptions of what characterizes each stage in the process set out in figure 1 capture the real-life experiences of the study participants, whilst also providing benchmarks for individuals or organizations in this evolving process. Not all

details and factors of actors' and directors' lived experiences fit within the scope of this article; still, the verbatim quotes from interviews shared here aim to give a brief and real-life context to understanding experiences that contribute to each stage in the process.

Naming stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors in the study enables steps towards sharing responsibility for change in the industry—the accurate representation, equal participation, and valued contribution of disabled people in theatre as artists and leaders. This process maps the transformative nature of theatre as a workplace and of perceptions and practice relating to disability continually shaped and reevaluated by individuals and the industry itself. Although this process is organic and reflective, some individuals remain stuck at a particular stage, and each stage is necessary for progress; for example, participants showed discomfort, error, and frustration moving to shared responsibility for change in policy or practices in theatre without familiarity across disabled/nondisabled communities. The process matters not just because funding bodies may require it, but because positioning in this process ultimately dictates an appropriate, effective, and satisfying experience for disabled and nondisabled individuals.

Consciousness Raising in Theatre

All nineteen participants located theatre workplaces as key in their exposure to new disability viewpoints, where they first discussed, witnessed, and experienced exclusionary attitudes, structures, and environments. The twelve directors described this as revelatory; common expressions such as “opened my eyes” (Sara 14),¹ “blew my mind” (Lucas 12), “the big change” (John 5), and “something shifted” (Tim 7) showed how they transitioned toward a position of disability consciousness. Sara’s description of her first experience directing an actor who is a wheelchair user shows her growing awareness of the realities of the social model of disability; for the first time, she noticed that environmental, structural, and attitudinal issues were a greater barrier to participation than the person’s impairment. She explained:

it really did open my eyes [...] because that was a relatively new building in which we were doing the play and yet it was not at all equipped. [...] just seeing somebody ...

1. All participant quotations, pseudonyms, and page numbers are taken from interview transcripts from the original PhD study by Worthington, 2021.

it literally take their whole break to get to the toilet and back was quite eye-opening for me. (Sara 14)

Sara also explained, “it was really interesting talking to him and what he could teach us,” defining this conversation as a turning point in her awareness of accessibility issues and responses to impairment in performance. She added, “I just learnt so [...] much about [...] the experiences of a disabled actor through that” (Sara 16). Likewise, as a director, Mark perceived himself as still lacking a relationship with disabled people; he identified his first experience 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 7). He reflected on this giving him, “a greater sense of awareness maybe of some of the issues [...] the complexity of what we are talking about when we talk about access and disability, that’s multiple and complex (*laughs*)” (Mark 20).

All seven actors also located theatre workplaces as key in their learning around disability, like Sophie who noted conversations with another actor that “opened my eyes up to the kind of ... the politics of disability and, actually, I’m very much disabled, and the rights we have as performers or artists are very diminished. So, it was a big wakeup call” (3). Sophie described this as the start of “a journey of something I really had to come to terms with” (6). Similarly, James noted how his new consideration of impairment and disability in work with a disabled-led theatre company was a starting point that “sort of, made me rethink all of my [...] moral code about all of that [...] thinking about it more, but kind of also come to terms with who I am and um being okay with that” (6). What is being learnt in theatre settings is revelatory for actors and directors in terms of prompting intrapersonal reasoning, shifting perceptions of disability and personal and professional identity.

The social model is still being explained for the first time to actors and directors in one-off training sessions in theatres or rehearsal settings. Graeae and ACE-funded initiatives, like Ramps on the Moon, purposed to promote the talent of disabled people, influence this greatly. Neither disabled nor nondisabled people were necessarily familiar with this bedrock of disability studies. Actor Lydia explained:

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*) that really changed what disabled meant for me. So, 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 realize that that wasn’t coming from me, it was something the world has to deal with. (8)

Detailing where her learning around disability theory took place, she added:

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. (36–37)

Lydia took for granted that open discussion around disability occurred when rehearsing with disabled people in a production cast—also, that ACE-funded initiatives push to educate on disability theory and politics in theatre outside of what might be considered specialist practice. In contrast, as a director, John was familiar with this theory as worth sharing across his organization. He was the only director who identified “working alongside a disabled colleague” as a turning point in his thinking and practice (5) and explained “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” (4).

Increased discussion around disability adds a new dynamic to theatres’ role in challenging disability perspectives, not just through onstage portrayal, but through everyday encounters, conversations, and training in the workplace. Disability scholars already recognize that initial consideration of disability perspectives can create personal moments of disruption and disorientation for students starting out in disability studies (Parrey, “Being”; “Embracing”); resistance, anxiety, and blurring of professional identity can occur when preexisting assumptions of disability open up to alternative ways of thinking (Burch). Learning in theatre settings also disorients personal perceptions of disability among actors and directors. New learning creates affinity with the disabled community that seems both validating and empowering; a shift to social model thinking is associated with notions of activism and shared identity (Goodley 9), and an “instantaneous lifting of guilt” (Kuppers, *Theatre* 7). Describing what the word “disabled” now means to her, Sophie added “for a long time I didn’t want to be associated with that word [...] now I’m very proud of it and it feels like something I own” (5).

However, grappling with a new reality of disability theory, politics, or history in theatre is not always straightforward. For example, James, who noted “my disability is mild,” also stated, “as much as I might or might not see myself as disabled, society always does to some extent [...] exposure to the industry has crafted all that” (7). There is a sense of despondency in his statement; although implying increased self-acceptance through what he learnt from disability in theatre, it seems new knowledge of historical discrimination made James perceive himself as less accepted by society. We should neither presume nor underestimate the lasting impact and resilience required in reconciling new disability understandings with self-identity and recognition of the inherent exclusion of others, particularly for those starting out in the theatre industry.

Moving from Disability Consciousness to Proactive Change

A new understanding of the most elementary disability theories appears impactful in moving individuals towards a position of shared responsibility for change in the industry. For some actors and directors, new disability understanding means more than just basic awareness; it opens communication to engage with disability matters, eases relationships with disabled people, and alters personal positioning in pursuing change in practice. It starts a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability that moves from stage one, consciousness raising, to stage two, exploring new territory, or further still. As mentioned, shifts to social model thinking lift a burden of blame for a lack of participation in theatre from actors, but also weigh heavily on directors in creating a belief that *should* be acted upon. Activist responses to learning from disability in theatre are evident in actors' and directors' accounts of practical and emotional labor involved in nurturing disability consciousness and driving change; Hochschild introduced the concept of emotional labor as an extension of the physical and mental labor performed in the workplace. Goodley et al. refer to efforts exerted by disabled people to accommodate nondisabled people's misunderstandings, inappropriate language, or behavior in workplaces as a form of "skilled emotional labour" (2007). Actor participants also highlight how moving forward in a process of engagement with disability in theatre demands key emotional competencies, constantly adapting to make allowances for others' lack of disability understanding (Worthington; Worthington and Sextou). Yet, the directors' and actors' responses shared here also demonstrate labor towards change as a shared endeavor across communities.

Actor Sophie linked her exposure to disability theory and politics in theatre to her proactive efforts to challenge discrimination among directors. She stated:

[it] 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 4)

Expanding on her first disability encounter, director Sara described how, in her position as a decision maker, she is now "driving" change "in a political way" (9–10). She detailed ownership of disability agenda that impacts decisions around logistical access in her workplace. John described, similarly, "disability training that made us think hard about [...] were we accessible enough [...] it um led to [...] changes backstage in terms on accessibility" (10). In addition to learning about social model theory and accessibility, John noted new personal

resonance with the phrase “nothing about us without us,” a common phrase in disability studies that he says, “really became strong for me” (12); he proactively engages with what for disability scholars and artists has been a long fight to move “beyond ‘cripping up’” (Fox and Sandahl 121). John credits disability training, his opportunity to explore new territory by coproducing work with a disabled-led company, and his growing familiarity through continued relationships with disabled people as powerful factors in shifting recruitment and casting processes in his theatre. He described being “happily able to organize the bolts of the jigsaw” to ensure a disabled person could take the lead in his flagship production, “which he did” as “it’s really important that disabled actors get the opportunity to play in those kinds of shows” (John 25). In this way, John conveyed a sense of alliance with the disabled community and a position of shared responsibility for change in the industry. Experiencing a new level of disability understanding and proactively embedding it in practice is, of course, only part of participants’ shared story.

Despite experiencing increased disability agenda and change in some settings, lack of disability knowledge or experience raised a significant issue for actors and directors. In this way, shared interdisciplinary perspectives of theatre and disability do not just bolster organic processes of learning; they also expose gaps in learning and insufficiencies experienced as jarring pressure to influence change, not always manifest in practice. Lack of disability knowledge or experience is referred to by actors and directors as making auditions or rehearsals uneasy, error or offence more likely, and guidance necessary. The interdisciplinary approach taken in the IPA study enables insight into how this plays out in real life. The approach revealed a shared urgency to address gaps in knowledge and experience, involving uncomfortable conversations, or challenges around issues of language, access logistics, and representation. Recalling rehearsals, James mentioned:

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. (14)

Moira described her response to directors exploring new territory, saying, “I’m an actor [...] but I’m also there as a teacher” (12); an approach and situation she also described as causing conflict, as “really unfair,” and “really frustrating politically and artistically” (25). Directors like Sue acknowledged a move to exploring new territory, describing “a sort of caution [...] oh, I’ve never done

this before” (13); when querying an actor’s access requirements, Sara noted “I remember that I was a little bit nervous” (16).

Shared willingness to sit with discomfort experienced in exploring new territory in theatre practice to build familiarity across disabled and nondisabled communities appeared across participants—a sense of individuals in both groups normalizing discomfort as an expectation of working together with some choosing to step out of their comfort zone. Sara also noted “conversations get easier [...] the more you’re doing it” (18). Describing his error around accessibility in rehearsals, Tim commented on how the actor was “gracious enough to forgive me” (32). Sue also recalled her first day working with actors with a range of impairments, saying “I was very open about saying ‘okay [...] how are we going to do the read-through, I have no idea’” (12). As an actor, James also pointed to this position of unease and vulnerability as being valuable in moving forward in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability:

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. (29)

Actors’ and directors’ experiences support existing calls for redefining accessibility beyond logistics. As in Mingus’s notion of “access intimacy,” actors like James value “that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets your access needs’; this definition of accessibility that involves factors of comfort, safety, communication, and connection is equally important to actors and some directors. Some participants in both groups exhibited proactivity towards exploring new territory and moving to familiarity in their engagement with theatre practice and disability. Like Mingus, both recognized this is “not easy to build” but necessary.

Some nondisabled people working in theatre still evidence Garland-Thomson’s view that “normates” are incapable of responding to impairment beyond initial shock or surprise, expressing fixation with impairment, a position she regards as “most destructive to the potential for continuing relations, reducing the complex person to a single attribute” (*Extraordinary*, 12; “Staring”). Fear of causing offence, protective compassion, and assumed global vulnerability remain prominent responses to a lack of disability knowledge or experience; these are detrimental in extending progress but are also shared not just by nondisabled participants. Speaking about a hesitancy to voice his fundamental access requirements, Paul stated “I always say it’s my problem [...]

I don't want it to be anybody else's problem" (10). His position resonates with medical model perspectives. It is a position that director Tim interpreted as inhibiting his progress forward; remarking on work with an actor who chose to hide his accessibility requirements, Tim reflected "I'm trying to understand and help you [...] if you're embarrassed about something that you can't discuss, it just makes it quite tricky" (12).

Directors in the study who appear stuck at stage one in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability have not necessarily experienced a lack of opportunity to learn from disability or to explore new territory in their practice. Instead, their position may be what Bolt refers to as "critical avoidance of disability" in theatre (*Social*). Attending "seminars and workshops in how you work with disabled artists," even codirecting a production in his theatre with a disabled-led company, appears to have had little impact on Jack (4). He maintained, "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 3). Simon also referred to "doing training," encountering "individuals who were incredibly knowledgeable and quite provocative and challenging about how we are operating as companies, as individuals" (9). He spoke of this as allowing "one's whole brain to shift in terms of perspective," and this would "force your brain to acknowledge or sort of be aware" (Simon 9). This raises an unsettling dilemma for Simon in how to reconcile new learning with his familiar beliefs and practice and continued lack of relations with disabled people. Although it seems he wanted to appear knowledgeable about disability, like Jack, later in his interview, he admitted "I'm starting from a position of real ignorance and [...] slowly starting to try and get better" (Simon 27). An individual's starting point in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability is relevant. Yet, routes to shared responsibility for change are a process, a live dynamic that most actors and some directors convey personal willingness, confidence, and resilience to engage in.

Interdisciplinary Futures for Theatre Practice and Disability

As mentioned, the stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors are not a neat solution nor a route around complexity brought to the surface by participants in the study. However, this process captures a shared story of what needs solving through collaboration. Further consideration of how shared interdisciplinary perspectives might support this process is important here and problems with casting approaches

and processes are also relevant. Experiences of casting among actors and directors raise complex questions about revising traditions and authenticity. They raise logistical issues; the current pool of disabled actors poses shared difficulty personally and professionally in moving progress forward. John stated, “the big thing for me is finding more disabled actors to... in that [...] pool of talent we draw on” (32). They raise issues with access to formal theatre training for disabled people, with director Tim believing “they haven’t had the training [...] and it’s because of the dinosaurs who won’t let them into their drama schools” (19). 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.

Personal dissatisfaction exists with industry casting processes and what some may consider casting solutions; referring to theatres’ use of general or open casting calls to recruit disabled people, James spoke of being “robbed” of professional recognition (5) and Lydia remarked, “I’m so sick of seeing ‘no experience required’” (17). There are many directors in this study who will only consider casting disabled people if this is “a key part” of the role (David 18), believing “you have to justify why you cast someone with a disability because that’s not written in the text” (Lucas 7). However, when pressed on roles they envisage playing, some actors assert similar views; for example, when listing future possibilities, Pete was drawn to characters he referred to as “classically disabled,” which limits his ambitions in the industry (9).

Actors and directors share a view that an “any actor any role” approach to casting is insufficient. They share a desire for authenticity in performance that requires a level of interdisciplinary engagement with disability that seems lacking in current theatre practice. Actors suggest it is unsatisfactory to ignore or overlook impairment, that their authentic performance requires sincere consideration of the relevance of their impairment to a character or role; they do not mean to draw attention to impairment in performance but acknowledge it in the process of character development. This is where open castings fail. This is where directors’ lack of disability knowledge heightens unease in discussing impairment and “aesthetic nervousness” is evident but not often acknowledged in practice (Quayson). Directors like Tim, however, who imply a position of familiarity in working across disabled and nondisabled communities, also described their approach to casting as acknowledging “difference,” asking “what does it tell you now about this role, this part, this set of relationships” (28–29). Uneasy experiences of casting decisions resonate more with directors like Felix who has directed an actor with a physical impairment in a major role yet expressed difficulty discussing impairment or disability, and a leaning

towards creative choices that masked rather than embraced the uniqueness that the actor brought to the role (8–9; 11–13). Actors and directors suggest open communication, and knowledge shared across disciplines does not just solve 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 in creating them.

In terms of stage one, consciousness raising, in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability, views on casting suggest a need to better support the recognition of historical exclusion and weight of reproducing negative stereotypes in casting. We should not underestimate the value of sharing classic disability studies such as Barnes's, or Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis* in theatre practice or training. However, progress in theatre, like in the field of disability studies, requires more than barrier recognition or consideration of disability from an "overtly politicized aesthetic place," as has been a mainstay of theatre and disability studies in the past (Kuppers, *Theatre* 36; Shakespeare). Like actors and directors in this study, those working across disciplines of theatre and disability must engage with complex disability matters, and grapple with what this means for them and where control lies in finding solutions. In this way, sharing recent and emerging disability studies knowledge in theatre may also support industry change. Discussion in theatre that engages with concepts such as "aesthetic nervousness" may assist theatre makers in considering their own feelings and responses to impairment, and to counter an impulse to creatively manipulate narrative to restore order when encountering disability causes anxiety, dissonance, or disorientation (Quayson 15–17). Likewise, sharing Bolt's *Metanarratives of Disability* in theatre settings may enable directors and actors to identify the prominent story defining disabled people in their own consciousness—that is, to respond to their own "assumed authority and the normative social order from which it derives" to make sense of disability in their awareness and its interpretation in creative practice (Bolt, *Metanarratives*, xviii).

Possibilities for future interdisciplinary knowledge sharing are reciprocal. Shared lived experiences of professionals working in theatre may support disability scholars in considering critical studies where the individual experience of disability is acknowledged, aligning with the recent shift in the field towards "autocritical disability studies" (Bolt, *Metanarratives*). This may enable more objective readings of interpretations of impairment, identities, and shifts in prejudices across communities. Phenomenological perspectives of theatre may support future work concerned with the complexity of disability from the viewpoint of disabled and nondisabled people, drawing attention

to their position in a process of engagement experienced together. 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. (131)

Whilst not presuming the negation of ableist mindsets, the brief IPA findings shared here, and the stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability may assist exploration that accepts nondisabled identities as transient and varied. This work does not assume the normate is fixated with impairment, or that it is “a lens through which everything [is seen]” (Garland-Thomson; Gardner qtd. in Johnston 83); instead, it asks what about disability, and actors’ and directors’ interpretations of working together, might be relevant to future theatre practice and individual lives.

This article and the stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors shared here also raise questions about how and where interdisciplinary theatre and disability knowledge is shared and by whom. Being in a position of shared responsibility for change in theatre means lifting a burden to educate on, or challenge disability matters from disabled people in the industry. Progress towards shared responsibility in theatre, however, requires continued space for individuals to not only reconsider accessibility in theatre practice, organizational structures, and policies but also their position in this process. This space may take the form of a classroom, a rehearsal room, or a training setting.

Figure 2 is a reflective tool that may help in this. It sets out the four stages in the process. An arrow signifies a sliding scale which can indicate personal positioning in this process. It offers a list of prompt questions based on actors’ and directors’ lived experiences that may aid others in making sense of their own experiences as part of a process. Some questions may appear outdated or overly researched for disability scholars yet are only emerging in theatre and can be supported through interdisciplinary knowledge sharing. The tool is intended to be used alongside figure 1, which first gives a picture of the characteristics of each stage in a process of engagement, with figure 2 assisting individuals to identify where they are positioned.

Actors, directors, and other theatre professionals could utilize this reflective tool, as could those training or researching in theatre to consider perceptions, practice, and collaboration. It may aid intrapersonal and interpersonal communication around how they encounter, understand, explore, relate, and

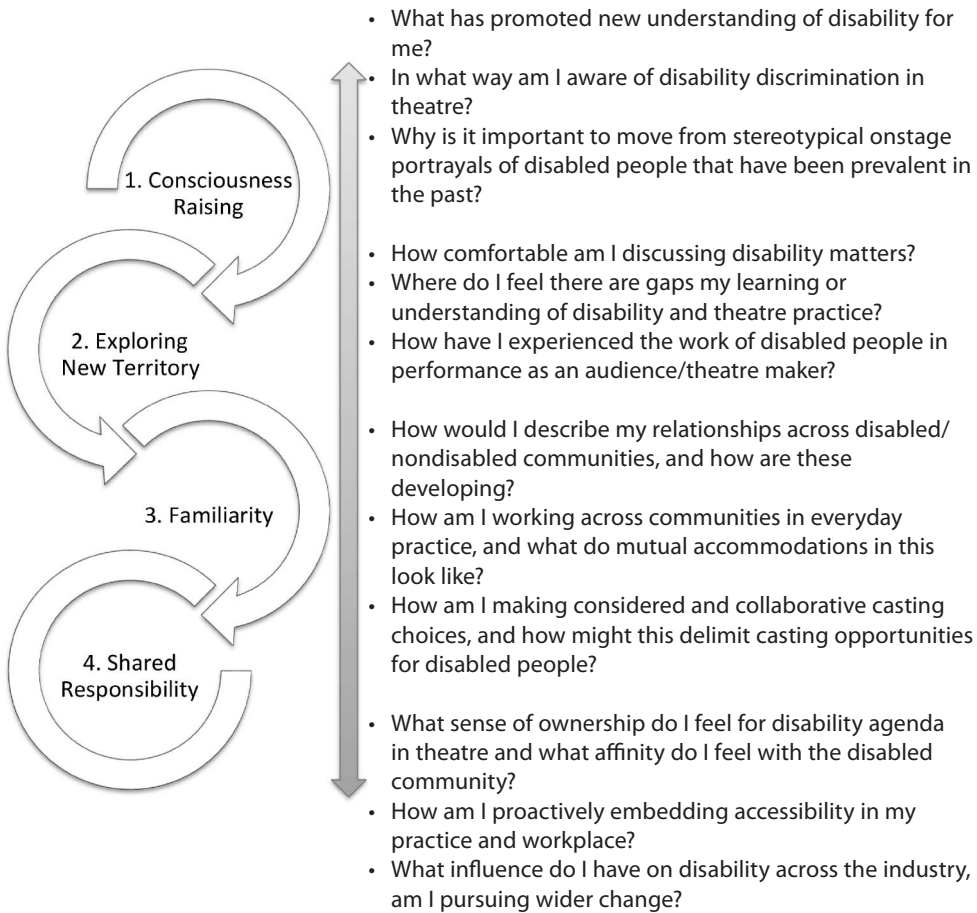


Figure 2. A reflective tool: Personal positioning in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability (Worthington 265).

respond to theatre practice and disability. For individuals, this reflective tool may help 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 an 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 lead to open discussion, vulnerability, and mutual accommodation of disabled and nondisabled people's needs. It is a repeatable, adaptable tool, important to a live, dynamic process evolving in mostly helpful ways. Titles of the four stages alone may be useful for reflection or to create prompt questions focused at an individual, group, or organizational level. Value in this

reflective tool lies in its transient and evolving features. It may also be adapted for interdisciplinary practice and research in other settings, for example, to respond to disability in other arts industries, education, or healthcare. Relating to disability experiences as stages in a process may facilitate lasting change across a range of individuals, practices, and environments.

Conclusion

The stages in a process of engagement with theatre practice and disability for actors and directors are useful in representing a dual narrative of progress and ongoing necessity for change in the industry. This concept is not just about reimagining casting or solving accessibility issues, although this is an important part of it. Instead, the emphasis is on an effortful process, rooted in interdisciplinary learning, proactive exploration, and relationships that will benefit from extension way beyond theatre. Through this work, I have realized more fully the value of connections across disciplines, how we can draw on knowledge taken for granted in one field to increase understanding of others. Those continuing in theatre and disability studies must not assume predictable or characteristic responses to disability from a particular community; but, instead they should recognize the value, sensitivity, and implicit nature of our lived experiences, which can be overlooked in practice and research. Ongoing complexity experienced in the theatre industry may prompt further interdisciplinary research and benefit practice. Those positioned to influence interdisciplinary perspectives in theatre as audiences, practitioners, teachers, and researchers must keep informed, open, and honest conversations going.

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