

**A critical investigation of how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices.**

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## **Abstract**

This study is a critical investigation of how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices. This was done through the use of three research questions: How do disabled youth work practitioners identify and conceptualise themselves in a professional setting; How do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice; and to what extent is intersectional identity experienced by disabled youth work practitioners. The research incorporated literature and ideas from a variety of disciplines including youth work, disability studies, and philosophy, due to the breadth of the subjects which contribute to the concepts being discussed. Key themes and ideas from this study include disability language and perspectives, the idea of self and how it relates to youth work, and the difference between authenticity and realness. Alongside this in order to help answer these research questions most appropriately, a qualitative research method was selected. This took the shape of eight one to one semi-structured interviews with disabled youth workers from around the United Kingdom which were facilitated by video conferencing software. The findings from this study include ideas of inclusivity and accommodations; imposter's syndrome, self and intersectionality; safeguarding; and space.

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## **Glossary and Acronyms**

**BAME** - Black and Ethnic Minorities

**LGB** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual

**LGBTQI+** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex

**JNC** - Professional qualification for youth and community work practitioners approved by the Education Training Standards (ETS) Committee of the National Youth Agency



## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale**

This research helps address an absence of contemporary literature around disability and youth work, as such, this research is academically and professionally important. There is a lack of knowledge relating to the use of self in youth work and its importance for disabled youth workers. This is mirrored by the absence of literature on the topic as will be explored in the literature review (see chapter 2). This study aims to generate empirical data on the subject of disability in youth and community work, whilst helping to bring cross-disciplinary literature together to gain a greater understanding of the topic and its implications.

Within this conversation around self, there is an exploration of the significance of realness within youth work (Rogers, 1962). This conversation helps to address another gap within the literature as usually the concept of authenticity (Rogers, 1962) is what is being discussed (Murphy & Ord, 2013). The gaps highlighted in this chapter are further explored in the literature review (see chapter 2) because they are somewhat alluded to in the existing literature, as can be seen in elements such as the vitality of relationships in youth work (Young, 2006; National Youth Agency, 2001). This use and the subsequent understanding around related topics, is appropriate because they help develop a broader comprehension of the context of youth work and the challenges and implications within the sector as well as what it is like to be disabled. This can be seen through the examination of literature relating to relational work in chapter 2 because it is

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a theme which is at the forefront of youth work practices (Young, 2006) and is applicable to this study.

The youth work focused literature often has chapters or sections around disability, equality, and inclusion rather than entire pieces of research. This literature offers information on the topic from a youth work perspective, which can be used when developing ideas, and understanding the context of the subject (see chapter 2). However, often these chapters are dated and not directly applicable to society and youth work. This is because societal norms, law, and policy all change over time, this results in literature sometimes becoming obsolete or redundant as it does not encompass key points which need discussing (this will be explored further in chapter 2). The publications by Blackburn (1990) and Smith (2001), both of whom produced important literature on disability and youth work, have noteworthy discussions within them. However, all the literature predates significant legislation and policy including the Equalities Act 2010 (HM Government, 2010) as will be explored in the literature review (chapter 2). Likewise, recent disability publications such as those by Sheppard (2020), Slater (2015), and Goodley (2011) provide sociological and practical limitations to concepts as well as implications of social norms, but do not acknowledge or outright correlate to youth work practices and perspectives. As a result, youth work literature needs to be considered alongside other disciplines like disability studies in order to develop the needed context for this research. This is important because currently, youth work in the United Kingdom offers more targeted provisions (Davies, 2013) meaning youth work provisions for groups such as for disabled young people are more prevalent

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for a variety of reasons (Davies, 2021). Therefore, ensuring that the profession understands and acknowledges the disabled experience is fundamental in developing the current landscape of youth work, and understanding the role of self within this is critical.

As will be explored in more depth in chapter 2, the reading for this area of study came from numerous disciplines, including youth and community work, disability studies, sociology, social work, and philosophy. This study draws from these varied disciplines simultaneously helping to address gaps in the literature helping provide appropriate and fundamental context to research and its findings.

## **1.2 Context**

As will be explored in more depth throughout this study, disabled people experience different and less equal social experiences to able-bodied individuals. Disabled people are less likely to have formal qualifications, are more likely to experience isolation and loneliness, and are more likely to experience sexual assault (Office of National Statistics, 2019). Disability hate crimes have also increased 149.6% in England and Wales since 2015 (Home Office, 2020), highlighting the importance in protecting disabled people in society. In the United Kingdom there are 14.6 million disabled people (Scope, 2021), meaning there is a high probability that a youth worker will either be disabled or work with a disabled young person. Therefore, youth workers need to have an understanding of the realities and experiences disabled people encounter in order to promote integration and inclusion within their practice.

The importance of this understanding has been demonstrated by researchers such as Hatton (2020) who explored LGB youth work practitioners' use of self. This study provides reasoning as to why understanding self for marginalised groups is needed. Self, as explored in section 2.3, looks at how personal experiences and realities influence professional practice (Hatton, 2020; Sapin, 2013). The ideas of self interconnect with the idea of realness and authenticity in professional practice (Rogers, 1962). Realness is an important part of youth work theory and self directly intersects with this. Most noticeably, realness entwines with the vitality of the relational work carried out by youth workers (National Youth Agency, 2020). The association between Rogers' (1962) ideas around realness for practitioners and the importance of relationships in youth work (National Youth Agency, 2020; Young, 2006; National Youth Agency, 2001), helps to demonstrate the importance of the use of self in youth work more broadly.

Youth workers help provide safe, representative spaces for young people (Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer, 1995) due to it often being defined as “the science of enabling young people to believe in themselves and prepare for life” (National Youth Agency, n.d.). In the United Kingdom, having a disability is often perceived as being burdensome and inadequate (Slater, 2013), which in turn contributes to the statistics provided previously. As a result, safe spaces for disabled people are vital. However, in order for safe spaces to be successful, youth workers are expected to “practice what they preach” (Young, 2006, p. 76), which incorporates practising honesty; this allows spaces to feel accessible and secure for young people. This honesty, which is created because

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of the openness of practitioners, allows for meaningful relationships to be built with young people (Young, 2006; Ord, 2007), not only helps to develop and shape safe spaces where youth work happens, but has the potential to influence the individuals attending sessions in a multitude of ways. For disabled youth workers, this means being themselves and using their experiences to shape the work they do. This helps demonstrate disability representation and inclusion, as well as helps the development of safe spaces for young people, by challenging compulsory able-bodied norms which abled-bodied individuals may not recognise, thus increasing overall accessibility. The concepts discussed around honesty, compulsory able-bodiedness, and relationships within youth work will be discussed in more depth during the literature review (see section 2.5).

The absence of literature which has been discussed in this chapter, and which will be explored in more depth in the literature review (chapter 2), demonstrates the importance of investigating disability and youth work. This is supported by the statistics discussed above, because it highlights the importance of disabled representation and demonstrates contemporary situations and experiences which youth workers, and other professionals, need appropriate resources about. This research aims to address an element within the gap in literature to support the development of knowledge about the disabled youth worker community and provide research which could be used to develop the needed resources for professionals.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The overall aim of this study was to address the gaps in literature and understand how disabled youth workers use self in their practice. This was guided by the three research questions:

1. How do disabled youth work practitioners identify and conceptualise themselves in a professional setting?
2. How do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice?
3. To what extent is intersectional identity experienced by disabled youth work practitioners?

These research questions helped ensure the idea of self and its implications for disabled practitioners were understood and implemented throughout the research design (see chapter 3 for methodology). Due to the complexity of self (see section 2.3 for more), to understand the extent that disability is present in self, an understanding of intersectionality is needed, therefore having a research question based on this felt appropriate. This particularly helped during the data analysis, as it assisted the process of differentiating identities and their impact on self for participants (see chapter 4). These research questions interconnect and support each other, allowing for the research to be well rounded and developed.

### **1.4 Positionality**

As a young, disabled, queer female who is a JNC qualified youth and community worker, this research is something which impacts me directly and is a topic which I am

passionate about. I have worked in a variety of youth and community work settings including for the local authority and the charity sector. From this experience, I have encountered very few practitioners like myself, and the ones I have encountered have shared stories and experiences with me about their own employment history as well as the struggles associated with this. As a youth worker, I have also had amazing opportunities and encounters which have happened because of my disability including being invited to trustee boards, working groups, and consulting with youth work organisations about how to include disabled youth workers more appropriately. England (1994) suggests that my attitudes, experiences, and values can influence my research, which it did. I chose to recruit electronically via online platforms like Twitter and Facebook (see section 3.4 for more about sampling) and I disclosed my own ability status to participants. My online presence helped with this process because not long before I recruited participants, I had a recent publication on a similar topic (Paxford, 2022). The article publication contributed to the number of individuals expressing interest in participating in the study.

Additionally, my own disabilities including my monochromatic vision (see section 3.6), influenced the way in which the data was analysed and coded. This helped decide the final selected themes in chapter 4. My disabilities contributed to the way in which my recruitment material was devised and altered (see chapter 3 for more), as well as the times they were conducted. These accessibility elements, which were incorporated for my own benefit, potentially influenced the respondents who participated. However, this

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is something I could not alter or change as without them I would not be able to conduct the research.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This study is of academic and professional importance because of the lack of relevant literature. The research questions helped ensure that the study remained focused and that the methodological approaches discussed in chapter 3 were followed appropriately. Relevant literature from a variety of sectors was examined to ensure that the research was well informed, accurate, and reliable, as outlined in chapter 2, helping address any unconscious bias in the research. This reading shaped the explored themes around perspective and language theory; the use of self; authenticity, and realness; as well as the correlation to youth work practices. The study then explores the methodology of the study, the data collected and how it links to the themes identified, and a conclusion summarising the research, any limitations, and future research.



## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explore the relevant literature associated with this study. Due to the breadth of topics this study incorporates; the disciplines used to understand quintessential aspects of the research include philosophy, youth work, social work, and disability theory. These areas of study were systematically selected through preliminary research prior to the start of the study, which adapted and expanded as the research evolved. This evolution encompassed elements which were raised in the methodology (see chapter 3) and the data analysis (see chapter 4). The literature assimilated topics such as the use of self and its implementation, the disability movement, and the difference between authenticity and realness. This inclusivity of literature and disciplines, helps to answer research questions two and three (see sections 1.3), due to the chapter looking at what self is and presenting potential reasoning as to how it is utilised by disabled youth work practitioners.

This chapter is divided into four subsections, all of which help develop the answers to the research questions (see section 1.3). These sections are perspective and language theory; the use of self; authenticity and realness; as well as the correlation to youth work practices.

Whilst this study encompasses multiple sectors, there are some parameters which need to be outlined due to the scale of the project taking place. These parameters are related to the use of self by disabled youth workers and to what extent this intersects with other

marginalised and historically disenfranchised groups. Ideas such as Kuhn's theory of evolution (Baedke, 2020; Kindi & Arabatzis, 2012), the controversy of the term disability (Thomas, 2007), and the concepts of realness and authenticity in youth work (Rogers, 1962), will all be explored in depth in order to understand the concepts being investigated in this research.

## **2.2 Perspective and Language**

When discussing marginalised groups, it is important to acknowledge the historical associations behind aspects such as perspectives and language, as well as labelling and identity theories (Bone, 2016; Corlett & Mavin, 2014; Jenkins, 2014; Machart, 2014; Wearing, 2011; Winker & Degele, 2011; Gauntlett, 2008; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2001; Butler, 1990). The historical context of language and disability includes elements such as politics, social norms, and cultural alterations overtime, these aspects need to be considered. However, the evolving nature of politics, social norms, and culture heavily influences language and literacy (Graff et al., 2009). Understanding the effects of these areas alongside the disability movement and the associated history, allows for a more appropriate and comprehensive understanding of the impact of language and perspectives to be developed. Additionally, because of the changing landscape of society, perspectives and social norms around disability and other marginalised groups frequently alter. Gernsbacher (2017) suggests that this is a contributing factor as to why there is no agreed or uniform term used by either professionals or academics relating to disability. This section aims to explain the position of the language and perspectives used in the research, as well as explore the potential aspects which occurred during the

field research. This section will examine perspectives, language, and identity theory, because they are the most relevant attributes to the research.

### ***Perspectives of Disability***

Disability perspectives entwine with multiple aspects of disability theory and sociology, as such evaluating and assessing these is vital to comprehend explored material and potential responses. This study employs the social model of disability, which is a second wave disability studies concept, which underpins a substantial amount of disability theory literature (Barnes, 1998). This model is arguably the most appropriate for contemporary research as it challenges the perspective on where the perceived “problem” of disability lies due to the separation of impairment and disability (Bertilsdotter et al., 2020; Slater, 2013; Oliver, 1990). The disability social model views disability as a failure of society rather than the individual, which other, older disability models such as the medical and functional model suggest (Thomas, 2007). This model helps identify historical contexts, other models fail to acknowledge, most noticeably when it highlights and discusses the misrepresentation of disabled individuals. This change in perspective is believed to be because the social model was developed by disabled people during the 70's and 80's (Oliver, 2004), which was the time when the disability movement was forming (Oliver, 1990). Therefore, because of the context as to how and why the social model was developed, it allows for a historical analysis of disability in the United Kingdom and its evolution over time. In relation to the research questions (see section 1.3), the social model of disability also raises questions around inclusion and integration for the disabled community, this is because it highlights areas

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such as stigmatisation, accessibility, and what constitutes a disability (Blackburn, 1990). For the research questions, this helps provide context as to why disabled youth workers use their self in the way they do, as well as how they understand the research and its aims. This is because there is a normalisation agenda within the sector when discussing marginalised groups, which in some situations can lead to further ostracisation for minority communities (Vachon & McConnell, 2018) (see section 2.5 for more information).

Overall, the origins and development of the social model make it the most suitable for the study, because it was created and championed by disabled people. Utilising this model will allow for a larger exploration of integration and inclusion for the disabled community because it alters where the "problem" of disability lies, which will benefit the conclusions and findings from the study. As such this is the most appropriate approach for the study.

The medical model uses the anglophone meaning of disability (Thomas, 2007). This means that the model uses the limited activity lens, and often uses medical certificates for conditions, as barriers to participation in society as disability is believed to be entirely biological (Creamer, 2009, Thomas, 2007). This perspective of disability was associated with the British policy Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005. These policies viewed the conditions as the problem rather than the inaccessibility of society. This model of disability comes from the history of disabled people where disabled individuals were concealed and segregated from society. This model was noticeable throughout the twentieth century as institutions were established to accommodate predominantly

visibly disabled individuals (Blackburn, 1990), with fewer institutions accommodating individuals with learning disabilities and severe mental health conditions (Rembis et al., 2018). However, institutions have been around much longer but tended to be disregarded from most historical records for a variety of reasons. Historically, the majority of facilities were inhumane and practised elements of medication contemporary society would disapprove of, including the practice of eugenics (Historic England, 2021). Prominent individuals in society saw disabled people as burdens (Slater, 2013) and often did not see the importance or the need to promote an inclusive society. This view on disability has a considerable amount of historical influence which needs considering but should not be the primary perspective used in this research because the ideas and philosophies discussed may influence answers despite generally contradicting the concepts outlined in the study. The medical model of disability believes the “problem” of disability lies with the individual and the condition itself needs to be corrected, rather than embraced by the individual or used to encourage changes in society. However, some attitudes and historical associations within the medical model will be considered as they provide a useful and unique insight into the way disability is viewed in contemporary society.

Another model of disability is the functional model, which is not appropriate for this study. This model needs to be acknowledged but not explored because it is obsolete. The functional model closely relates to the medical model of disability and as such much of what is written about the topic has been discussed (Creamer, 2009). When

considering the literature around the functional model of disability there is a limited amount which is outdated and inapplicable to contemporary society.

As such the two primary societal lenses for this study are the social and medical model. Whilst the research was conducted through the lens of the societal model, it is important to note the medical model of disability because it has been extremely influential in shaping societal norms around disability (Thomas, 2007). This can be seen in the history of disability legislation and practises from 1870 when educational institutions excluded individuals based on their ability (Blackburn, 1990). Blackburn (1990) also describes the separation between disabled and abled-bodied individuals in personal areas of life such as leisure, youth work and employment. This separation is still noticeable today (Slater, 2013) but it presents itself in different ways. Disability justice was highlighted during the 80's after an amalgamation of injustices disabled people had started campaigning about. One of the areas of conversation which occurred as a result was about the importance of separating disability and impairment, helping with the development of the social model of disability (Vachon & McConnell, 2018). The conversation around the separation of disability and impairment was not the only conversation happening due to several grassroots organisations advocating for disability rights from the 70's. As such elements of disability were being discussed which had previously been either ignored by society or were unknown to the majority (Vanhala, 2010). These grassroots organisations helped contribute to the instigation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Rose, 2020). Many activists were unhappy with the outcome of the legislation (Fox, 2020) and as such campaigning continued helping

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contribute to the Equalities Act 2010 (Fox, 2020; Rose, 2020). There was also a significant number of activists who felt this was another piece of legislation which did not go far enough when protecting the rights of disabled individuals, however, the rise of legal and technical advances have made way for virtual activism to form (Bitman, 2021). This digital activism uses a combination of personal narrative, political awareness, and a sense of identity (Barassi, 2018). This is not uncommon for activism more generally, however, the digital accessibility available allows for more disabled activists to engage in conversations they previously were excluded from (McRuer, 2006). Whilst this digital activism is becoming increasingly prominent, often it does not encourage systematic change due to the often-ridged processes involved with law making and lobbying restrictions (Bitman, 2021). This is significant as there is a large proportion of the disabled community who criticise mainstream media around the portrayal of the community, for example the 2012 London Paralympics saw prominent disabled activists, artists, and scholars all critique the inspiring imagery and messaging attached to the games as athletes were portrayed to have overcome obstacles in their lives (McRuer, 2018). Therefore, whilst there is activism occurring currently, there is a decrease in normative methods for a variety of reasons. The pressure to influence and challenge compulsory able-bodied assumptions and societal norms has not reduced but has evolved to fit contemporary society.

### ***Language of Disability***

In disability studies there are two significant approaches to language: person-first language (person with disability) and identity-first language (disabled person) (Dunn &

Andrews, 2015). Language has changed and evolved significantly in recent years to achieve more egalitarian standards and promote inclusivity in society (Flink, 2019). As such there is an element of professional and academic preference which will be used to determine which is most appropriate, as there is no uniform term which academics use. For this study, it has been deemed that identity-first language should be used, but an understanding of context from both approaches is required due to the current uncertainty of which is most appropriate for academic publication and research (Botha, Hanlon, & Williams, 2021; Gernsbacher, 2017).

Person-first language was introduced in 1974 (Crocker & Smith, 2019; Collier, 2012) and is often used by organisations when discussing disability (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). Person-first language, on the whole, is considered to be the most offensive and least preferred approach to language for the disabled community (Botha, Hanlon, & Williams, 2021). This language approach was created as a way to be more inclusive towards the disabled community due to it being something which could be applied to everyone (Gernsbacher, 2017). However, despite these intentions, scholars argued that it took away from the unique experiences held by disabled individuals due to the person-first language being devised and encouraged predominantly by able-bodied individuals (Armstrong, Puhl, Skinner, & Kratka, 2018; St Louis, 1999). Person-first language statistically is used more for individuals who have more stigmatised disabilities such as developmental disabilities (Gernsbacher, 2017). This is an argument which is particularly noticeable in the autistic community due to person-first language wanting to separate the person from their condition, which autistic individuals feel portrays autism



as a negative thing (Collier, 2012; St Louis, 1999). Due to the language being emotive and divisive around person-first language (Collier, 2012), it is not appropriate for this study.

Identity-first language is believed to promote human dignity (Dunn & Andrews, 2015) as well as be the preference of the community (Sheppard, 2017; Slater, 2013). Whilst person-first language had noble intentions, it does fail to acknowledge the stigma many disabled individuals encounter regularly (Collier, 2012). This is because language evolves and encompasses social matters, political attitudes, as well as events and situations in contemporary society (Reali et al., 2016; Bergen, 2012), as such the disabled community wants their experiences to be considered and heard in order to promote social change as the language choice conceptualises reality (Reali et al., 2016; Collier, 2012). Whilst person-first language considers these elements, identity-first language allows for a cultural shift in a more pragmatic way because it was designed to challenge able-bodied assumptions about disability (Chapman, 2019). However, some subgroups within the disability movement are more flexible with language used on their behalf and often switch between person-first and identity-first language but groups such as the Deaf community and the autistic community tend to be more opposed to the idea of person-language due to the connotations, as previously mentioned, with their disability being a negative thing (Crocker & Smith, 2019). This entwines with the perspective of disability being used for the study, as the social model of disability and identity-first language aim to separate impairment and disability (Bertilsdotter et al., 2020; Slater, 2013; Oliver, 1990). In turn this acknowledges the social implications of

language and subsequent experiences of disabled individuals (Slater, 2013). This was a sentiment shared by the participants of the study (see section 3.4) and as such identity-first language was most appropriate.

### ***Social Learning Theory***

As previously discussed, there is an element of social norms which needs analysing. Whilst this cannot be achieved by using social learning theory independently; social learning theory can be applied to analyse the idea of able-bodied assumptions taught. Bandura (1977) discussed social learning theory and outlined the premise of learning through observation and vicarious learning. Observation is learning through watching others, and vicarious learning is learning through observing others' experiences (Bandura, 1977). These two elements are significant when considering the data, social norms, and literature because behaviours and attitudes are learnt from individuals deemed to be role models to young people, which could include parents and carers, celebrities, and their peers (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes and actions can be passed down through generations because children and young people witnessing their primary carers exhibiting these behaviours (Bandura, 1977). This is seen in intergenerational abuse statistics (Richardson et al., 2021) as children often witness violent behaviours from their primary carers and as a result often portray some of these behaviours in later relationships (Franklin & Kercher, 2012; Sellers et al., 2005) due to the individuals involved learning that violence is a solution to conflict (Murshid & Murshid, 2018; Pollak, 2004). This parallel example can be applied to attitudes and opinions about the disabled community. Historically, disabled individuals

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were seen as a burden to their family and were shunned by large portions of society (Slater, 2013), as previously discussed, these behaviours and the language used by individuals were picked up on by children and continued the attitudes demonstrating the use of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

### ***Context Behind Authors and Researchers***

When considering the context behind the research and authors there is an interesting dynamic which needs addressing and one which helps contextualise the shift in perspectives. A lot of the authors writing about the medical and functional models tend to be able-bodied individuals who are writing about disabled individuals, this is something which is also found in person-first language and the reasoning behind it (Areheart, 2008). This is connected to the educational segregation experienced by many disabled individuals. In 2001 anti-discrimination was introduced to education in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, making the legislation over 20 years old. As a result, over the last few years there has been an increase of disabled students in higher education due to the legal introduction of reasonable adjustments (Davies, 2003). This increased pool of disabled students has resulted in more disabled literature being produced from a narrative perspective (Hall, 2015; Davies, 2003). This narrative perspective is common in disability studies literature due to many writers being disabled and using their experiences in their research either to shape the perspective they are using or to provoke discussion (Thomas, 2007). This shift in power within academia has allowed for a new thread of not only thought but also discussions regarding how disabled individuals are included in society. This connects to the idea of hegemony as it

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relates to the theory that the dominant ideologies are considered common sense (Ledwith, 1997). These ideologies are often discriminatory of marginalised groups including the disabled community due to the embedded heteronormative and ableist assumptions held within social norms. In turn, the assumptions and social norms outlined because of the hegemony (Ledwith, 1997) creates a sense of othering. Othering can be understood as ostracising a group within society (Belton, 2017). This othering creates a group which, despite society's developments and assistance from allies, does not encourage systematic change. This is due to the dominant group not realising the monopoly they have on society and the level of privilege they have in comparison to the othered group (Freire, 1970). This is evident in this study and the literature associated with it because of the underlying power imbalance. The shift in social attitudes due to political and cultural changes (Thomas, 2007) have meant that disabled individuals are able to voice their experiences as such change has started in terms of legislation and in some incidences of society.

### **2.3 Use of self**

The use of self is often described as how experiences shape individuals (Trevithick, 2018). The idea of self is a complex concept and can be examined from multiple angles including sociology, social psychology, and history (Hatton, 2020; Hatton, 2014; Wearing, 2011). The use of self requires a combination of effective practice and self-awareness as well as the ability to maintain relationships to encourage change (Fox R. , 2011). As such understanding the development of the theory is useful.

The idea of self has been around since the Greeks, albeit with different names (Gergen, 2000). However, it was not until the twentieth century, the more influential concept around the idea of the 'interacting self' known as the 'dualistic tradition' was discussed (Hatton 2020; Gergen, 2015, p. 154; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 25). The idea of the interacting self is an ongoing development alongside the concepts of inner self or settled self (Hatton, 2020; Parekh, 2008, p. 10; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 47). The inner or settled self is the recognition of the self in a specific moment (Hatton, 2020). The self is believed to evolve and expand as social interactions increase (Lemke, 2008; Plummer, 2003; Weeks, 1995; Butler, 1990; Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Jenkins (2014) devised four main themes around the idea of self: the constructed self, the importance of context, reflexivity, and agency. Their first and second concepts Jenkins (2014) devised were around socially constructed self and the importance of context. Whilst these are two points, discussing them interconnectedly helps explore the literature more thoroughly.

The socially constructed self and the importance of context builds on the social constructionist belief that the self is made up of a variety of experiences including historical, personal, and social (Weeks, 2007). It is also thought that self-identities are restricted by social constrictions present in culture and historical periods (Hatton, 2020; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2001). Whilst the range of identities might be extensive (Weeks, 2007), further restrictions are implemented depending on factors including protected characteristics (Hatton & Monro, 2019; Butler, 2004). Society also has predetermined identities which also impact an individual's experiences, these include marital status,

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height, and weight (Gauntlett, 2008; Fook, 2002). Parekh (2008) outlines that self is not predetermined but rather is shaped by values and attitudes, and since these are always adapting and evolving having a final sense of identity is not possible. Another element which progresses from this is the idea that the way a person performs helps mould the person they become, even if the reasoning for this is unknown (Ma'ayan, 2011; Goffman, 1956). For the disabled community, the way they present is often different to social norms, including individuals using feeding tubes to eat, using mobility aids, and needing breaks to take medication; providing disabled people unique challenges in social situations. As outlined by Weeks (2007), the way a person behaves in a variety of different scenarios alters elements such as, how someone dresses, their relatability to other people, and how confident they are. This shift in self is something which is noticeable in youth work as youth work professionals encounter different situations regularly (Hatton, 2020), the way youth workers perform in different situations alter accordingly.

This connects to Jenkins (2014) third idea around reflexivity in practice. Practitioners who can reflect and review themselves along with their beliefs and values provide themselves with a “framework in which they view themselves and the world” (Parekh, 2008, p. 10). This concept connects and develops from the dualistic tradition previously discussed. This is because there is a reflexive inner dialogue between thoughts and expression (Smith, 1996). This dialogue helps the further development of a settled sense of self (Parekh, 2008). This is because taking time to reflect on the necessity to adapt behaviours depending on situations helps the overall perspective of a scenario

benefiting all involved (Hatton, 2020; Parekh, 2008). For disabled individuals, this could mean that their intersecting identities are seen differently depending on the situation they are in. This is because individuals establish themselves in a group as well as to the context of the situation (Machart, 2014). Whilst the data (see chapter 4) would suggest that intersecting identities are often centralised, the literature suggests that it is depending on the context of the situation the disabled person is in. Reflexivity for youth workers more broadly could be in the form of reflective practice, or supervision which are other elements which the data brought up; whether this was due to it being a helpful youth work tool more broadly or because disabled practitioners are more conscious about their self within a professional environment is unknown.

Agency is Jenkins' (2014) fourth idea and interconnects with the previous concepts. In terms of youth work, individuals like Rogers (1962) were some of the first to discuss the vitality of the conscious choice of actions made by individuals. In terms of self, agency is not always perceived as intentional (Jenkins, 2014) and often the intention behind actions are unknown (Gergen, 2000). Aspects like culture and context of settings contribute to the level of agency an individual has (Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011; Lemke, 2008; Parekh, 2008; Weeks, 2007; Bourdieu, 1993). Thus, limiting the choices available to individuals (Lemke, 2008). Goffman (1956) described individuals learning their roles rather than acting in a unique way. This is because of pressures from the viewing audience and social institutions coercing individuals to conform (Lemke, 2008; Goffman, 1956). An individual's awareness of this is dependent on their personal experiences

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(Gergen, 2000; Weeks, 2007; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011) combined with their ability and willingness to reflect on their life experiences (Parekh, 2008).

### ***Identity***

Self and identity are interconnected and could be described as interdependent. Self as previously described is an unconscious development of personal beliefs and values due to the experiences individuals have (Hatton, 2020; Parekh, 2008, p. 10; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Identity has been increasingly researched in recent years (Martsin, 2019; Brinkmann, 2010), from this it is theorised that agency is a key element within identity (Martsin, 2019; Bourdieu, 1993) and as such is a conscious decision made by individuals. Martsin (2019) highlights the fluidity of identity and the constant construction and deconstruction of identity on a daily basis. This fluidity was also identified in self (Jenkins, 2014). However, Martsin (2019) emphasises that identity is a personal choice despite its evolutionary and fluid nature. For this study identity, whilst important, it is not the focus because, whilst self and identity may intersect, this research is concerned with how disabled youth workers unconsciously use their experiences, morals and values in their practice. As such, identity is not appropriate to examine in significant depth in this research, as it is not something this study aims to explore. Nevertheless, it does need to be acknowledged that choosing to identify as disabled does come under identity and due to the sampling for this study (see section 3.4) participants did explore some elements of identity in their responses. However, these are not explored in any depth due to the research questions (see section 1.3) not incorporating this.



### ***Context Behind Authors and Researchers***

The authors and researchers I have used in this literature review are not openly disabled, but rather are part of other marginalised groups such as the LGBTQI+ community and the BAME community. Whilst there are some intersectional overlaps between these groups and disability, there are some differences in experiences faced by them respectively. Some of the literature also predated important disability movements and advocacy work, which have influenced disability acceptance in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, there are some elements of heteronormativity and compulsory able-bodiedness (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2013; Rich, 1980) and there are overlaps between the queer community and disabled community (Corlett & Mavin, 2014; Bowleg, 2013; Winker & Degele, 2011). As a result, using authors and researchers who write and study from a different perspective, is not undermining the research but needs to be noted as it is still a relevant context.

### **2.4 Authenticity and Realness**

Often in youth work the idea of authenticity is discussed in youth work, however the idea of realness is rarely debated and utilised (Murphy & Ord, 2013). This study is concerned with the idea of realness, due to the nuances which make realness more applicable to this study. However, because there is a symbiotic relationship between authenticity and realness, the differences and the importance of each concept needs to be explored, to help ensure the research questions (see section 1.3) are answered appropriately and accurately.

## ***Authenticity***

A lot can be gained from authentic interactions, most importantly trust (Edwards, 2010). Trust in professional relationships is important as it allows young people to be vulnerable in a safe space (Ord, 2007; Young, 2006). Authenticity is about unbiasedly acknowledging multiple elements of self and disclosing these elements so that others can see the real self (Brunskill, 2015). However, in a professional setting there are boundaries which help limit the information or elements of a professional, which can be used in a work environment helping keep the professional self and personal self separate (National Youth Agency, 2020a; Rosenfeld & Gilbert, 1989). Consequently, making true authenticity more difficult. Due to these boundaries, an alternative view of authenticity can be considered. This being that authenticity is acting with values which are either easy to know and difficult to realise, or difficult to know and easy to realise; making authenticity a subject of choice or knowledge (Freeman & Auster, 2011). This concept intersects with Sapin's (2013) idea that practitioners should use self, and by result authenticity carefully as complications could occur if information is shared inappropriately. Therefore, due to this underlying question of agency being involved with authenticity, identity may end up being brought into the data analysis which would move the study away from self.

## ***Realness***

Realness is part of authenticity (Hopwood, et al., 2021). Authenticity is a more multidimensional and vigorous process (Hopwood, et al., 2021; Brunskill, 2015)

whereas realness is a core feature of the larger process which encompasses more of the idea of self, specifically values and morals (Hopwood, et al., 2021). Realness allows for a sense of self to be developed which is free to grow according to experiences and as such is perceived by existentialists as the highest moral achievement (Kierkegaard, 1980; Boss, 1963; Jung, 1939; Heidegger, 1927). However, Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1962) argued that despite realness helping develop the self into becoming self actualised; there was a risk that individuals achieving this would become disenfranchised from society, because they did not prescribe as rigorously to social norms and expectations. May (1953), also acknowledged this but emphasises the strength and courage it took to reject social norms in order to express one's self in a way that was real to them. Realness is about acting as one feels (Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Rogers, 1962) despite the added complications of authenticity which are often mistaken for realness (Hopwood, et al., 2021). For professionals this can mean that whilst self-disclosure may happen during interactions, actions can still be rooted in realness despite the level of authenticity this is because realness is connecting self awareness and reflection (as discussed in 2.3) with behavioural expressions (Hopwood, et al., 2021).

Overall, for this study realness is a more appropriate concept due to the use of self being discussed and there being a direct correlation between the two elements. There is a mutual understanding that authenticity can also be a consequence of self due to realness and authenticity being symbiotic. However, theoretically realness is a more appropriate concept for this study.

## **2.5 Youth Work and The Use of Self**

Youth work and informal education has two overarching themes in which the studies are betwixt, these being “agents of social control” (Bradford, 2004, p. 246) and seeking to empower and support young people during their transition to adulthood (Davies, 1999). Brew, an influential youth work policy figure, encouraged youth workers to be less concerned with outcomes and more focused on the relational work with young people (Brew, 1945, cited in Smith, 2001) somewhat contradicting the position youth work was in. Incorporating this flexibility within youth work, gives youth workers the space to use self in their relationships with young people (Hatton, 2020). The use of self, conducted by youth workers must be relevant to young people (Sapin, 2013) and must include listening and communicating to young people in a way that is empathetic and self-aware (Fusco, 2012). Thus, relying on youth workers to be self-aware and understanding of the implications of their experiences (Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013).

This understanding of experiences and relevant self-disclosure, allows for relationships to be formed, which in youth work is quintessential (Young, 2006). Youth workers aim to build relationships based on integrity, honesty, and authenticity (Young, 2006; Rogers, 1962). These “non-hierarchical” relationships (Blacker, 2010, p. 235) allow youth workers to become influential individuals in young peoples’ lives (Hatton, 2020). However, Hatton (2020) believes that a complete separation of personal and professional lives is not appropriate, as youth workers utilise their personal experiences

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to shape the information and advice they give to young people assisting them to develop meaningful relationships. This is supported by Blacker (2010) who conceptualised that youth workers use past experiences in their practice to be real with young people.

This flexibility is something which happens in youth work a considerable amount and is something which literature encourages (Young, 2006; Blackburn, 1990) especially with disabled young people. The boundaries between young people and youth workers are often “blurred” (Spence et al., 2006, p. 73) and can often alter overtime (Murphy & Ord, 2013). However, professional youth work bodies encourage there to be a professional distance from young people whilst being supportive and caring (National Youth Agency, 2020a; Institute For Youth Work, 2013). Whilst this might seem as though this is a conflict, it allows youth work practitioners to interpret professional boundaries independently (Hatton, 2020). This flexibility requires an appropriate amount of good supervision which is critical and careful (Spier & Giles, 2018). This reflection allows for a greater understanding of self, especially when considering one’s own social, cultural, and economic position (Katz-Wise & Keller, 2001). This increased understanding of self helps practitioners understand their own relevance and perspectives as well as the impact of these (Fook, 2002).

However, in recent years how youth work is delivered has changed due to a more neo-liberal perspective on how a youth worker role should be structured (Davies, 2021). This is due to policy changes and austerity measures being put in place meaning that traditional open access youth work had to adapt to become more targeted (Davies,

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2021; Thompson & Shuker, 2021). The effects this has had on the forming and maintaining of relationships for youth workers has been noticeable. This is because the focus of youth work has changed from relational work (Brew, 1945, cited in Smith, 2001) to more targeted and rigid working with tangible outcomes (Davies, 2021; Thompson & Shuker, 2021). Consequently, the way in which youth workers form relationships has changed as the nature of their role has adapted to be more session based, focused work.

Despite these changes to youth work, disabled practitioners need to acknowledge and have awareness of how their disability shapes their choices and opportunities (In Defence of Youth Work, 2014). Hatton (2020) believes that when practitioners understand experiences and elements of themselves, they can assist young people more constructively. This is because the reflection involved to understand the use of self allows for a greater sense of self-awareness (Jenkins, 2014). Reflection for practitioners allows for unconscious biases to be addressed (Moffatt, 2019; Fook, 2002), promoting anti-oppressive practice and a more progressive field (National Youth Agency, 2020b). In addition to this, having conversations about a topic can also cause change, this can be done by engaging in dialogue around promoting “inclusion, equality, and the valuing of diversity” (National Youth Agency, 2020b). This is directly correlated to anti-oppressive practice. These conversations can be based around Thompson’s (2012) PCS model. The PCS model is an anti-oppressive practice model which considers personal, cultural, and structural influences in people's lives (Thompson, 2012). This model can be either directly or indirectly utilised to address values, attitudes, and

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ideologies. The impact each of the elements of the PCS model has are equal, mutual, and can impact each other. This can be seen from the political and cultural developments over the years regarding disability (see section 2.2). As a result, disabled practitioners who use self effectively promote the positive inclusivity and valuing of diversity outlined by the sector's occupational standards (National Youth Agency, 2020b).

There is an added layer of complexity, to the question of who delivers youth work with marginalised groups and what that work looks like. This is relevant because it highlights the attitudes and opinions within society and the field more broadly. This is because whilst a growing amount of youth work is being delivered by religious organisations (Thompson & Shuker, 2021), the general direction of what youth work should look like comes from government direction who work with the National Youth Agency to develop appropriate curriculums (National Youth Agency, 2020a). This is relevant as the last piece of policy the government wrote about disability is the Equality Act 2010 (HM Government, 2018). Thus, demonstrating the political attitudes around disability. Therefore, understanding youth work within this context is important as well as the social attitudes and history previously outlined (see section 2.2). There is limited youth work exclusively for disabled young people, and there is no evidence to suggest that disabled youth workers are more likely to work with disabled young people. An example of disabled youth work in the United Kingdom is Phab. Phab youth groups were established in 1957 at a conference in the New Forest where a disabled young person asked for opportunities for disabled young people (Phab, 2021a). Currently, Phab has

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disabled trustees (Phab, 2021b) and encourages both abled-bodied and disabled individuals to associate, bringing communities together (Monk, 2012). This is an example of youth work trying to be inclusive and promoting integration. This is important because as youth work becomes more targeted there is a concern that young people are less likely to meet young people who aren't the same as them whether this be socially, culturally, or politically. This has the potential to further influence young people not having a safe space to develop and challenge their own attitudes and opinions outside of spaces which have a direct personal, cultural, or structural connection to them (Thompson, 2012). Therefore, having groups like Phab in order to promote integration is fundamental.

The youth work elements discussed throughout this section, help practitioners utilise self as an assumed concept, despite there being little research on the topic (Hatton, 2020; Fusco, 2012; Lum, 2002). Youth work is a relational job, as discussed previously, in which professionals use many ideas of self, including their values, beliefs, and empathy (Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011). In addition to this, social and cultural factors contribute to the relationships formed by youth work professionals and young people (Ganzer, 2007). The use of self interlinks to what Rogers (1962) described as realness for practitioners (see 2.4 for more about the ideas of realness). The connection between Rogers' (1962) idea about realness for practitioners and the importance of relationships in youth work (Young, 2006; National Youth Agency, 2001) helps explain the need for the use of self in youth work. As such, discussing its importance within a disabled practitioner's capacity, needs to be historically informed. This is because to understand



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the extent of self which is used by disabled practitioners, the evolution of disability rights and social acceptance needs to be understood. This needs to be assisted by the use of youth and community work literature as this will also provide additional information about potential behaviours and actions demonstrated by disabled youth workers. This is because youth work has specific elements within it which make it unique and different to formal education. These aspects include an increased amount of flexibility within the sector, more relational work with young people, and professional boundaries which allow for youth workers to expose and use relevant elements of their lives to benefit young people. Therefore, due to the concept of self being complex in nature, in order to gain a balanced understanding about the impact of disability for disabled youth workers, considering youth work literature and practices is essential.

All of the discussed literature and theory are underpinned by the National Occupational Standards (National Youth Agency, 2020b) and the Institute for Youth Work's Code of Ethics (Institute for Youth Work, 2013). These quintessential policies specify the expectations and parameters of youth work. The specific clauses most appropriate to this piece of research are "inclusion, equality, and the valuing of diversity" (National Youth Agency, 2020b) and "We work in a fair and inclusive way, promoting justice and equality of opportunity, challenging any discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or practice" (Institute for Youth Work, 2013). These two statements promote the same attitudes and ways of working for practitioners, but also include and promote aspects such as unconditional positive regard for young people, and not holding their mistakes against them (Rogers, 1962); flexibility within youth work practices (Young, 2006;

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Blackburn, 1990); and relational work with young people (Young, 2006; Brew, 1945, cited in Smith, 2001; Rogers, 1962). All of these elements make youth work accessible regardless of the protected characteristics a young person may have as it puts all young people at the same starting point, as practising in an inclusive way removes some of the difficulties young people have regarding engagement including disability, religion, and social class.

When considering the use of self alongside the National Occupational Standards (National Youth Agency, 2020b) and the Code of Ethics (Institute for Youth Work, 2013), particularly for disabled practitioners, these aspects help promote who they are as people as well and helps to remove the focus from their disability to their practice. Additionally, because self is unconscious it is possible that disabled practitioners are drawn more to these elements within the documents and naturally represent them because they understand what it is like to be ostracised in society. As a result, ensuring that these are understood in the literature before exploring other elements of the research is fundamental.

### ***Safeguarding***

Safeguarding was a theme which was raised in the data analysis (see section 4.4). Whilst other themes interconnect with elements of literature, adding and finding literature which helped explain the data retrospectively helped develop the data analysis (see chapter 4). Understanding safeguarding from a youth work practitioner's perspective is the focus because there is little to no literature around safeguarding and

what this means for disabled people broadly, especially those trusted with safeguarding roles. Therefore, adding it as a section within this chapter section seemed most appropriate due to it relating most heavily to youth work practices.

In the document, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (HM Government, 2018, p. 6) it is set out that safeguarding is: “protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children’s mental and physical health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes”. The *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (HM Government, 2022) explains that safeguarding children and young people is the responsibility of everyone. However, safeguarding and the processes behind it are always evolving as professionals learn from both young people and tragedies (Holmes, 2022) which occur despite guidelines being in place. Holmes (2022) explains that “current policy discourse is focused on ‘youth-violence’ rather than ‘youth safety’” (Holmes, 2022, p. 11) which he describes as a trend which is also seen in educational facilities, with the focus being on behavioural elements. As such the narrative of the safeguarding conversation has shifted and as such there has been an emphasis on “creating coherent and intersecting narratives rather than enforcing uniform terminology” (Holmes, 2022, p. 11). There is also an “unhelpfully directed attention and resources away” from safeguarding concerns which need as much awareness as concerns such as child criminal exploitation (Beckett & Lloyd, 2022, p. 63), this is something which is not helped by the media representation of young people and safeguarding incidents which occur (Holmes, 2022; Beckett & Lloyd, 2022).

These narratives and challenges mean that there is an added focus on practitioners (Holmes, 2022). However, from the data presented in chapter 4, there appears to be challenges and pressures which have led to an understanding of what risk management is, what health and safety is, and what safeguarding is. Whilst there are policies in place to protect young people, as seen with the Working Together to Safeguard Children policy (HM Government, 2018) and The Keeping Children Safe in Education policy (HM Government, 2022), there appears to be an absence of how practitioners use and understand these policies in their practice as is discussed in section 4.4. Both policies break down the terminologies as well as processes which workers should follow should they encounter a safeguarding incident (HM Government, 2022; HM Government, 2018). Regarding safeguarding there is an added complication within youth work when young people disclose information such as recreational drug usage either to a youth worker or another young person and it is overheard the complication is added when considering how and where that information goes, and who is informed of this (Morgan & Banks, 2010). This added complication is not uncommon in youth work but can result in the building relationships element of youth work (National Youth Agency, 2020b; Rogers, 1962) becoming more difficult due to trust being perceived as being broken by the young person or people involved.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The use of self uses multiple different theories to explain itself, all of which can be explored in depth and examined within youth work. All these aspects are valued by the code of conduct and are encouraged in the occupational standards (National Youth

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Agency, 2020b). These all overlap despite the disciplines varying depending on the theory. When the use of self is considered alongside the history of disability and the disability movement in the United Kingdom, it raises a question about the extent of which the use of self is used within youth work and the positive and negative associations of this. The methodology (see chapter 3) explores how the study went about trying to answer the research questions (see section 1.3) as well as bridge a gap in literature on the topic.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The research purpose was to help identify and form an understanding around the use of self by disabled youth work practitioners as illustrated by the research questions:

1. How do disabled youth work practitioners identify and conceptualise themselves in a professional setting?
2. How do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice?
3. To what extent is intersectional identity experienced by disabled youth work practitioners?

These research questions are discussed in more depth prior to this section (see section 1.3) and the methodological approaches and decisions were selected to address these questions, as will be considered below. A variety of multi-discipline literature allowed for an understanding of not only the topic, but also methodological approaches relevant to this study as different disciplines use various approaches. This chapter will explore the ontology and epistemology in particular the use of the interpretivist paradigm; research approach; research strategy; participants and sampling; data collection and data analysis methods; validity and triangulation; and ethics. Key points from this chapter include the use of the qualitative data, thematic data analysis, and the ethics behind the research.

### **3.2 Ontology and Epistemology**

Ontology and epistemology when combined create a research paradigm which changes depending on how it is interpreted by an individual and the methodological approach used (Pretorius, 2018). Ontology is a way of explaining assumptions about the nature of reality; epistemology is involved with the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing and learning about reality (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). The use of research paradigms has evolved since Kuhn formally introduced the idea of paradigms in the 60s (Kuhn, 1962) as different disciplines utilised and adapted the concept (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). As such, Kuhn's (1962) paradigm has evolved and expanded, thus creating the domination of research paradigms within social sciences (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Blaikie and Priest (2017), highlight the importance of making ontological and epistemological assumptions explicit in research, this is because these assumptions can influence the outcomes of the research and as such need to be highlighted. Research paradigms are important within this social science research because it argues that objective truth is based on a range of views and perspectives rather than scientific law (Bryman, 2012; Crotty, 2003). Therefore, since this research is based on perspectives, having a comprehensive understanding of paradigms helped ensure the overall research was cohesive as well as reliable. This understanding of research paradigms ensured that the chosen methodological approaches were complimentary of one another as well as ensuring that the research represented the participants accurately and fairly. This means that, ethically the research was consistent with the methods which were selected, helping the overall cohesiveness of the study.

This study aimed to understand how disabled youth workers use the idea of self (see chapter 2) in their practice as outlined by research question 2 (see section 1.3), thus incorporating an element of why people choose to identify as they do, as well as understanding their own experiences, attitudes, and values. Crotty (2003) and Martsin (2019) both had ideas around the social construction of identity and its evolutionary nature overtime, which overlaps with the concepts discussed in the literature review (see chapter 2). These overarching concepts combined with the political, cultural, and social contexts allow for an understanding of how self can impact youth work practices based on experiences, values, and morals. Thus, using the correct paradigm was essential. The chosen research paradigm was an interpretive research paradigm because it complimented the research aims and objectives most appropriately as well as encompassed the range of socio-political contexts which were apparent in the data, resulting in more unified research overall.

Interpretivism is used for qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Crotty, 2003) because it allows for an investigation of social contexts within data (Crotty, 2003). Crotty (2003) further divides this paradigm into symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. Whilst the study uses elements of phenomenology due to it basing research on the data rather than theoretical assumptions (Bryman, 2016), the researcher's positionality (see section 1.4) could influence the paradigm and data analysis. Additionally, this research started due to a theoretical concept (Bryman, 2012) along with conversations held with colleagues. As such whilst phenomenology



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influences the research and challenges the preliminary theoretical assumptions, symbolic interactionism was the more prominent paradigm.

Symbolic interactionism suggests that social interactions take place in conditions where people have meaning usually around actions and objects, therefore affecting other's perceptions of us (Bryman, 2016) for this study this is extremely useful because it allows for the socio-political contexts of disabled individuals to be considered allowing for a well-rounded analysis of collected data. For this study this is significant because socio-politically the disabled community have a complex history which influences their lives, (Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Oliver, 1990). This intricate history is acknowledged through symbolic interactionism through the social preconceptions the disabled community encounter daily (Slater, 2013) and removing these assumptions and social norms would not be a realistic portrayal of the community. Therefore, whilst the concept of being non-judgmental within the research was used, external preconceptions based on the literature were also used to help ensure the research was relatable and applicable for both disabled and able-bodied individuals. These external preconceptions were the language used being identity-first, and the sociological perspective being the social model of disability.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

The research used qualitative approach methods due to focusing on the experiences and opinions of participants (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010) because the aim of the research was to understand if and how practitioners use self in their practice. Whilst

experiences and opinions are subjected to interpretivism by the researcher (Goldkuhl, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) qualitative data is often rich and deep in information which can be powerful and useful especially when wanting to create change (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010) due to the narrative qualitative data generates. Elliott (2005) explains that in recent years there has been an increase in narrative within qualitative interviewing by respondents, due to researchers wanting to rectify power discrepancies. Within the disability community this is particularly noticeable because they are an “othered” group (Freire, 2000) which has been oppressed by abled-bodied individuals for a significant period of time (Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Oliver, 1990). Elliott (2005) explains that bringing the respondents’ lives and experiences to the forefront challenges normative assumptions made about marginalised groups. However, responses are also dependent on the day of the interview and uncontrollable aspects which might influence the respondents, for example, sleep quantity, general mood, and personal affairs. This was considered when analysing the data and to help ensure reliability of the data, other interview findings and literature were used when selecting themes. Due to this study starting a conversation around disability representation in youth work, ensuring the power is shifted towards the respondents through the use of narrative within the qualitative research is particularly important.

Additionally, my positionality (see section 1.4), helps emphasise the narrative within the research. This is because as someone who identifies as disabled, it has been more noticeable to me that there is limited literature about disability within youth work and no literature which is relevant for contemporary youth work practices (see section 1.3).

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Furthermore, historically research done about the disabled community has been done by able-bodied individuals who have not experienced disability or disability culture, which to many disabled individuals is quintessential (Thomas, 2007). The limited use of voice and understanding of disability culture means that often literature and resources are written and devised about disabled individuals rather than with them (Slater, 2013), completely ignoring youth work's professional responsibility to work with individuals and promote equality and diversity for marginalised groups (National Youth Agency, 2020). Thomas (2007) explains that many professionals do not have a clear understanding of models and perspectives of disability and consequently identify disability as a negative thing or unknowingly practise in an ableist way. Therefore, by promoting perspectives and experiences from the marginalised group being researched a distinct tone can be devised which promotes the disability narrative in a positive way.

### **3.4 Participants and Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used during this study because the research was centred around the disabled youth workers and their thoughts, experiences, and choices (Sharma, 2017). Consequently, parameters were outlined for participants these being: over 18 years old; identifying as disabled; and being a youth work practitioner. The term youth work practitioner was left deliberately vague and there was no requirement for a JNC status. This was because a varied selection of participants were wanted and I did not want to exclude people with years of experience based on the requirement to be JNC certified. Additionally, using the literature review it was decided that it would not be appropriate to put this specification in place. This is because the legislation and

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educational accommodations for disabled people until the turn of the century, often meant that disabled people did not attend university until quite recently, therefore the research could potentially exclude disabled people without meaning to. Purposive sampling was most applicable for this study (Clark et al., 2014), to appropriately respond to the research questions (see section 1.3).

The parameters of disability were open to interpretation by disabled youth work practitioners because the research was focusing on the use of self by these practitioners, which interconnects with identity. It was not the aim of the research to gatekeep the term disability, nor was it appropriate to, as a key object within this research was around promoting inclusion. Limiting the sample due to disability types would have altered the aim of the research and would have been counterproductive for the research aims and objectives (see section 1.3).

The concept of inclusivity was emphasised in the recruitment online material (see appendix A). This was done by using the font Comic Sans which is dyslexic friendly (Severs, 2020; Connare, 2015) coupled with pale colours behind the text, not only to be aesthetically pleasing but to help individuals with dyslexia and other learning difficulties access the information to participate in the research. There was a small biography about the researcher and the aim of the project to help recruit participants as well as provide an honest positionality to potential respondents. This could have influenced some of the individuals who responded as the research was conducted by me, a

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disabled individual, which historically has not been standard practice for disability research (Slater, 2013; Thomas, 2007).

For the research eight participants were recruited:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age Demographic</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Geographic Location</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Youth Work Experience</b>
Daphne	50s	White British	Liverpool	Local Authority	Came into youth work at 39 as a volunteer and qualified a few years afterwards, was previously in a band. Now specialises in the disability groups.
Peter	30s	White British	Doncaster	Supported Housing	Started working in youth supported housing about 10 years ago.
Charlotte	30s	Black British	Sussex	Charity Youth Organisation	Been a youth worker 6 years and came from being a volunteer for the organisation.
Alice	20s	White British	Somerset	Charity Youth	Been a youth worker 6 years and has always

				Organisatio n	worked in youth clubs and schools.
Leanne	40s	White British	Essex	Community Interest Company	Been a youth worker for 4 years, previously worked in the arts.
Sadik	30s	Pakistani British	Preston	Local Authority	Been a youth worker for 15 years, professionally qualified 11 years ago. Always worked for the local authority but has gone from part-time to full-time.
Zoe	40s	White British	Edinburgh	Freelance	Been a youth worker for about 20 years, used to work for organisations and has since gone freelance.
Stephen	50s	White British	Cardiff	Local Authority	Been a youth worker for 25 years, has worked in hearing and Deaf settings.

The participants were recruited through twitter and the online youth work forum In Defence of Youth Work, as well as past and present colleagues (see appendix A). This was appropriate due to the increased use of social media by the disabled community

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(Barassi, 2018) (see section 2.2) as well as wanting to interact with disabled youth workers from a wider social circle. Consequently, a larger demographic of disabled practitioners were able to be recruited. This demographic was encouraged as it provided the research with a variety of ideas and experiences which previously could have been missed due to geographical and social limitations of the researcher. Thus, the research sample enhanced the richness and overall quality of the collected data. This was complemented by using online conferencing software (see section 3.5) as it allowed for participants from across the United Kingdom to participate and access the study, which helped diversify the sample of participants.

### **3.5 Research Strategy**

The data was collected using eight semi-structured interviews, all of which were between thirty to forty-five minutes in length. These parameters helped avoid a data surplus whilst providing usable and reliable data which was valuable to study.

The interviews took place via Zoom due to the accessibility features available especially for the Deaf and hard of hearing community (Bui, 2021) in comparison to other video conferencing applications like Microsoft Teams. It was decided that the accessibility and inclusion aspects of the video-conferencing applications were the priority due to the research wanting to include a wide demographic of disabled participants. The priority of inclusion did mean that the video-conferencing application selected had arguably weaker security measures, however, alternative security measures were implemented to protect participants and the collected data (see section 3.8). Implementing security

measures was more tangible to achieve in comparison to implementing inclusivity features because various software is not compatible with programmes such as Microsoft Teams (Bui, 2021). For this research it was paramount to practise inclusivity throughout as it was a research aim and could have potentially undermined the research overall due to limiting the participant base.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for more authentic and detailed responses compared to structured interviews or questionnaires (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, & French, 2003) because conversations naturally occurred rather than it being forced, manufactured, and inorganic. Semi-structured interviews can lack structure and as a result can deviate from the subject, therefore interviewers need to be more alert and conscious of the desired outcome to avoid this (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Galletta and Cross (2013) also highlight that whilst semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewer to adapt the conversation depending on the context of what is being discussed, the interviewer also needs to be aware that as they become aware of themes because of the quantity of the interviews taking place, the approach they take and the questions they ask adapt overtime to fit the themes they are noticing. For this research this was controlled by having a standard set of questions which were used as a starting point for the conversation and additional questions were limited to ensure consistency across all eight interviews which took place. In addition to this, the interviews took place in a limited time frame of ten days to help avoid subconsciously adapting or changing questions to benefit previously identified themes, as there was no piloting of the research due to the time constraints associated with the study.



Despite this, semi-structured interviews provide a method to explore lived experiences (Galletta & Cross, 2013) which is what this research aimed to do. The authentic and detailed responses (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, & French, 2003) gained from this method around lived experiences and the use of self for disabled youth work practitioners allowed for data to have a complexity of layers alongside the practical implementation of theoretical concepts (Galletta & Cross, 2013). This meant that systematic analysis of the data could occur and helped provide potential explanations where possible for mutual occurrences from the disabled community. The ability to do this helped an understanding of existing practices to be formed. In turn benefiting the data analysis (see chapter 4) because it provided a framework to work within. Therefore, giving a structure to a potentially disorderly process (Schreier, 2013).

However, the interviewer's effect could have influenced the authenticity of the responses. This is because participants could have felt obligated to say what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) regardless of the relationship between the interviewer and participant. Aspects such as the interviewer's gender, race, and assumed ability status could have influenced the responses gathered (Zoch, 2021; West & Blom, 2017) as such during the recruitment process (see section 3.4) there was disclosure of disability status, gender, sexuality, and professional youth work qualification status. Disclosing this information could have influenced the participant sample due to identifying in a similar way and thus assumptions around shared experiences could have been made by participants, negating part of the experiences disabled youth work practitioners. Additionally, West

and Blom (2017) illustrate that the place the interviews take part in is equally as significant regarding the interviewer's effect. This is because there is an element of unease for participants due to where the power lies during interviews (West & Blom, 2017). Whilst interviewers aim to put their participants at ease during the process, this cannot always be achieved because of factors outside of the interviewers control. Nevertheless, during the interviews for this research all the interviews were conducted privately on Zoom, and were held at times most appropriate for participants. These measures helped reduce anxieties for participants and aided the overall authenticity of the research.

### **3.6 Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods**

Thematic analysis was used for this study due to wanting to stratify commonalities in themes throughout the interviews (Caulfield, 2020) which compliments the symbolic interactionism used during research (see section 3.2), as well as allow for flexibility within the data analysis to allow the study to be context-driven (Braun & Clark; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The themes were derived from the data predominantly with the assistance of the literature review, which was a combination of transcriptions from the interviews and the video recordings to help intonation and body language be analysed alongside quotations. The inductive thematic method of data analysis aligned with the interpretivist research paradigm selected for the research (see section 3.2) and helped promote the voices of the participants. This approach also allowed for the empirical data to answer the research questions as well as promote a group who have historically been disenfranchised by research (Thomas, 2007). This is beneficial for

qualitative data because it allows for an organic development of common themes instead of pre-emptive assumptive themes based primarily on literature (Schreier, 2013), meaning results are more accurate to the data rather than a hypothesis. Thematic analysis is best applied in contexts where themes and ideas are based on the data received because it provides a logical and meticulous structure which can often be lost in qualitative data (Caulfield, 2020; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Morton-Williams, 1985).

However, thematic analysis has disadvantages including the amount of literature around thematic analysis in comparison to other approaches used to look at qualitative data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2012) this can result in this approach being carried out to a lower standard in comparison to other methods. To help address this concern, the literature available was used to help guide the analysis process and best practices from the literature were used including carrying out the analysis multiple times and coding the data. Additionally, the flexibility within thematic analysis could have allowed for inconsistencies when developing ideas and themes (Caulfield, 2020; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Morton-Williams, 1985) because of the quantity of data being analysed. This was addressed by doing the thematic analysis process twice, which helped eliminate anomalies and inconsistencies in the data, helping the overall reliability and consistency of the data analysis.

Alongside the thematic analysis, a coding frame method was used. The coding frame method interconnects with thematic analysis as it is at the heart of the overall approach (Schreier, 2013). A coding frame has a minimum of one primary theme and two

secondary themes, whilst the complexity of the framing may vary depending on the study the structure overall remains the same (Schreier, 2013). For this study, due to the various possible themes available, the literature was used alongside the data, to help select appropriate and relevant themes if no obvious themes were apparent (Belotto, 2018). The themes around self and intersectionality were selected from the literature, as the examples were used throughout the data but not explicitly, therefore using the themes from the literature gave more structure to the data analysis process even though the themes were primarily content driven. Belotto (2018) highlights the popularity of using software such as CAQDAS. CAQDAS allows researchers to analyse vast quantities of qualitative data (Belotto, 2018) whilst simplifying the data analysis (Gibbs, 2014; García-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, 2009). However, it neglects the interpretive paradigm used in this research (see section 3.2) due to elements of human language and expression not being accessible to computer software (García-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, 2009). Thus, a manual coding system was implemented helping to ensure human elements of the data were not discarded. This coding system complemented the data analysis method by bridging the literature and the data (Braun & Clark, 2019) without positionality (see section 1.4) influencing the selection of the themes. However, there were individualistic portrayals of themes, which were not uniform across the board for a variety of reasons, but when considered together the individual portrayals had commonalities or the individual portrayals had significant weight and as such were explored further. As a result, the selected themes included inclusion and accommodation; imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality;

safeguarding; and space. This dual approach within the data analysis allowed for the data to reflect the research paradigms most effectively and allowed for the designed power shift towards the respondents to take place.

The process followed for the data analysis had to be mindful of my own limitations as a disabled researcher due to having monochromatic vision as part of my disabilities. This meant that the process was based on shapes rather than colour and as such different kinds of sticky notes were used. This included the use of the usual square sticky notes for key themes which were then separated into the selected themes for this data analysis; duck shaped sticky notes were used for tone and emotions; and rainbow sticky notes were used for body language. These notes were made through transcriptions and the video recordings from the interviews. The smaller sub-themes were initially identified through this method as similarities in data were easier to identify. The sub-themes were then examined individually and considered in broader terms to place them in a coding chart (see appendix B). The coding chart was then used to develop the findings and explore experiences and statements in more depth and detail.

Overall, the combination of methods used theoretically as well as how that worked in practice created a cohesive process which allowed for relevant and consistent themes to be analysed and examined in an appropriate depth helping shape the research overall. Whilst there were some limitations to the extent of how much data could be examined due to the size of the research project, there were significant themes which were considered and investigated using a combination of literature as well as the raw

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data in the form of words, body language and intonation. As a result, the data analysis (see chapter 4) is a true and fair representation of empirical data.

### **3.7 Validity and Triangulation**

The validity of the research was maintained through the triangulation of results which was done through a combination of literature, and interviews, as discussed in the previous sections. This ensured that all the data collected was consistent and reliable in terms of being a similar length in time, covering the same areas of conversation, and the participant leading the conversation. Thus, helping answer research questions accurately.

The purpose of triangulation for this study was not focused on proving results as experiences were a key focus, but rather confirming and understanding complex phenomena which are not based on statistical data. Therefore, a systematic and logical method of triangulation was required (Clarke et al., 2014). Triangulation is a complex and intricate process (Hasselt, 2021) however, it has allowed for further coverage of the target community in this study, disabled people, and has saved resources by using existing literature and research (Lohr & Raghunathan, 2017).

Triangulation within qualitative research is done through the “observation of research from (at least) two different points” (Flick, 2004, p. 178). For verbal data, such as interviews, triangulation can be based on visual data like body language (Flick, 2004) as well as the information and experiences of other respondents. Therefore, using

individual perspectives, which were gathered from the interviews, provides triangulation for the data.

Triangulation was used alongside other methods which included using accurate transcripts from interviews, analysing data twice, and using a coding process to categorise data (see section 3.6) these other methods allowed for the validity of data to be discussed and evaluated (Flick, Hirseland, & Hans, 2018). This evaluation of information allowed for a higher level of scrutiny of the produced data and has allowed for the overall results to be of a better quality.

### **3.8 Ethics**

Ethics are always important when working with people, due to researching the disabled community there was an added layer of scrutiny of the ethical practices used because the study focused on a historically disenfranchised group (Slater, 2013; Thomas 2007; Oliver, 1990).

The ethics of this study were split into three main themes:

- Potential harms and inconveniences
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Information and informed consent

These areas were selected primarily because they were the most obvious in the study as well as being areas which can have clear parameters and risk assessments which were implemented in the study, as ethics often relies on context. Whilst these were the main areas overall, there was an acknowledgement that situations could have occurred

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which were not expected and therefore a copy of the British Educational Research Association guidance (2018) was kept on hand and the School's Research Integrity and Ethics Committee were informed about the research and gave the study ethical approval.

### ***Potential harms and inconveniences***

To help ensure that there were minimal potential harms and inconveniences the participants were treated fairly, and discrimination was not tolerated (British Educational Research Association, 2018), for this research the only limitations to participation was being over the age of 18 and identifying as a disabled practitioner therefore anything other than that could not be enforced. This also aligned with the aims of the research (see section 1.3) because it focused on inclusion. Additionally, all participants were required to give informed consent (see appendix C), to ensure accessibility, the consent forms were offered in a variety of ways including large font and being read to the participant to help broaden the inclusivity of the research data sample. As a result, along with a written synopsis of the research outline participants were welcome and were invited to ask questions to ensure they were comfortable participating (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Participants who required additional support accessing the research due to external factors such as lack of internet, mobile access, and adjustments for interviews due to their disabilities were given appropriate support to ensure that the research was accessible to everyone who was wanting to participate. Additionally, the flexibility in meeting in person or online allowed for interviews to be adapted based on the individual and their needs, for example if practitioners were



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shielding or lived in a remote location, adaptations were implemented, it also meant that individuals who required subtitles could use them to participate in the research fully. In addition to this, during the interviews participants were given multiple opportunities to take a break to help preserve their mental health and wellbeing. This was because the topic which was being discussed was sensitive and potentially could have brought up harmful and traumatic memories for participants as such these elements needed to be considered during the research design and process. In addition to this, all participants will receive a copy of the research to ensure they were aware of how their experiences and participation were used at the end of the study. This helped to empower the participants and show them that their voices and experiences matter and demonstrate how they had been portrayed. Furthermore, the coding chart of the data was included in the appendix (see appendix B) to help with the transparency and accessibility of data. This was done through the coding techniques used for the study being straightforward and clear. This was necessary to protect the rights and thoughts of the participants to the highest availability as well as address the historical subjective assumptions made in research about the community.

### ***Privacy and confidentiality***

All names and personal information of participants were anonymised to keep the confidentiality of participants and ensure their safety if any sensitive information was disclosed during the study (British Educational Research Association, 2018). The anonymisation of participants helped participants feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive and personal information. All information gathered was kept in a safe space,

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due to the way the data was gathered the information was stored on an encrypted hard drive to make sure nobody other than the researcher had access to identifiable data or personal records and data was disposed of after use. Any physical notes were kept in a locked cabinet and were shredded after use. This links directly to minimising potential harm and inconveniences because individuals might not have wanted information disclosed associated with them, for a variety of reasons and it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that it is stored safely.

### ***Information and Informed Consent***

Additionally, only individuals who had completed all the relevant consent forms were interviewed, the consent forms included information sheets about the research to ensure all consent was voluntary and informed (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Informed consent was particularly important for this research due to the nature of the study possibly highlighting distress for individuals. Ensuring individuals did not feel pressured to participate alongside providing all information relevant to the study, helped to promote voluntary, informed consent (Gray, 2004). Furthermore, if participants became uncomfortable during any part of the process and no longer wished to partake in the study, the option to withdraw at any point was made apparent, had this occurred this would have led to their information being excluded from the study and their data being deleted from the hard drive and the notes destroyed (Clarke, et al., 2014).

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Overall, the research was conducted in a way which ensured the British Educational Research Association guidance (2018) was central and paramount. This was done by focusing on the areas discussed previously because these areas affect the research directly and most noticeably. It must be noted that ethics are not always clear cut, and this was considered throughout the research project. A copy of the British Educational Research Association guidance (2018) was on hand during the research; however, this was not used due to no unexpected occurrences happening.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The methodological approach selected for this study has allowed information and experiences to be gathered from a variety of different demographics, and the subsequent data analysis to be as true to the transcripts and raw data as possible. This can be seen in the data analysis and findings (see chapter 4). The overall methodology was as initially envisaged, however, there were small obstacles along the way including participants not showing up, and unforeseen illness, which required additional attention during the transcribing stage. However, the research paradigm kept the consistency of the research ongoing, and allowed for it to be focused.

## **Chapter 4 – Data Analysis**

### **4.1 – Introduction**

The research aimed to understand the use of self by a group of disabled youth work practitioners. This was conducted by semi-structured interviews (see appendix D for the questions) with eight youth work practitioners (see section 3.5). The practitioners had a variety of experiences, were of diverse ages, ethnicities, and religions, and were from several geographical locations (see the biographies of the youth work practitioners at appendix E). The data was then thematically analysed (see section 3.6) using accessible methods for myself as a disabled practitioner. From this analysis, the four predominant themes which emerged from the data were inclusion and accommodation; imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality; safeguarding; and space. Whilst the data brought a lot to the forefront and raised a variety of different questions about the use of self for disabled practitioners, these themes seemed the most appropriate as well as the ones which could answer the research questions (see section 1.3). The breadth of the research limits the depth of discussions around areas which are not in line with the research questions or research area, and these debates are highlighted throughout as further research possibilities will be discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter will explore the identified themes in more depth and narrate as well as explore key concepts which have been brought out in the data. These explorations will aim to help gather an understanding of the realities for disabled practitioners and help

form conclusions about next steps which will in turn be elaborated on in the conclusion chapter (see chapter 5).

## **4.2 – Inclusion and Accommodation**

The largest and most obvious theme from the data was inclusion and accommodation, as it was visible in all interviews. This was not a surprising or unexpected theme as there is a lot of literature especially around the disabled community and how their experiences changed overtime, as illustrated most obviously in the perspectives and language section (see section 2.2), as well as the youth work profession (see section 2.5). These have been demonstrated through the professional guidelines for practitioners (National Youth Agency, 2020b) as well as the disability activism which has happened in the United Kingdom. However, within this study inclusion and accommodation was visible within four sub themes which will all be explored in this chapter:

- Flexibility in approach to youth work
- Non-judgemental attitudes
- Empathetic practices
- Visibility and awareness

Whilst these are interconnected themes, there is a respective difference in the points illustrated by the subthemes, as will be explained and clarified throughout. This subcategorisation of the themes has allowed for the overarching theme to be

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strengthened as well as the complexity of the topic to be highlighted in an appropriate and detailed manner.

### ***Flexibility in approach to youth work***

Whilst this is a sub-theme, this was one of the most common responses during the interviews. On the surface the responses appear to be more around physical inclusion without directly mentioning the element of flexibility as seen in the extracts below:

*It makes you think more about how you can accommodate someone*

- Alice

*The hearing managers didn't sign, didn't really know Deaf culture, didn't know Deaf identity. They don't know about the failings of mental health for Deaf people.*

- Stephen

*What I found when I started working in policy was particularly, all young people, but particularly disabled young people were excluded from consultation processes because disability-based consultations would say we don't know how to deal with young people, and youth-based consultation opportunities don't know how to work with disabled young people.*

- Zoe

Superficially these themes highlight the importance of inclusion within the profession for young people, however, when examined further highlight the importance of practising in an adaptable and flexible way whilst acknowledging professional limitations personally. In all the quotations around this theme there is an underlying tone that youth workers, either in the participants' lives or in the workplaces they are in now, understand inclusion and its importance. However, Stephen phrases it as “*not integration*”. Stephen,

who is Deaf, explained about past projects he had worked for which were mixed spaces, where he described a clash of cultures especially between hearing and Deaf people. Stephen explored the idea that inclusion and integration are different things and require different variables. In the interview Stephen explained that hearing people in his old youth club would not use sign language, nor would they learn it, and Deaf people would not communicate in an accessible way to hearing people. Stephen's example demonstrated the potential issues associated with lack of flexibility within youth and community work and demonstrated that the space was in theory accessible to all the young people who attended the youth club, there were significant issues which needed to be addressed for both meaningful integration and meaningful youth work to take place. Stephen's experience highlights the importance of acknowledging personal limitations as a practitioner as shown when he discusses hearing workings or knowing about Deaf identity. This highlights the importance of knowing about the group you are working with as a practitioner so that youth work with young people can be meaningful and impactful. Stephen illustrates this through explaining the club failed based on lack of flexibility from both the Deaf individuals and hearing individuals involved with the youth club.

Zoe's example supports this idea. Although there is a difference in the work Stephen and Zoe do, there are clear parallels in the experiences they have. Zoe discussed a noticeable lack of consultation opportunities for disabled young people due to professionals either youth work based, or disability based seldom having the experience or knowledge to integrate the two groups successfully. The absence of experience and

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knowledge in the youth work sector around how to engage with disabled young people is interesting as youth participation is a key element of youth work (National Youth Agency, 2020b), however, if marginalised groups within this are being excluded, then questions around what level of participation is occurring are raised. In turn this indicates that there is an alternative factor which is not apparent or is hidden within the data.

Nevertheless, all three extracts which have been discussed in this subsection demonstrate a flexibility in the participants' ways of working because of the initial concerns illustrated. However, this may not be due to their disability identity but could be due to their youth work training and profession. This is because the idea of flexibility in youth work is not unusual (Blackburn, 1990; Young, 2006), and is a skill which is encouraged through the National Occupational Standards for youth and community work in the ethos of around promoting “inclusion, equality, and the valuing of diversity” (National Youth Agency, 2020b, p. 12) as well as the concept of starting where young people are at (Davies, 2005). These extracts highlight this concept in a way which considers disability. Whilst the quotations above demonstrate two different ways flexibility within youth work practices can be used, both have the same outcome – inclusion and integration. This can be seen through the respondents noticing that either something could potentially be inaccessible, or that something is not accessible already and changing or challenging that. Both approaches encourage the concept that youth work practitioners should “promote inclusion, equality, and the valuing of diversity” (National Youth Agency, 2020b, p. 12) within their work and demonstrate different ways this can be achieved.



The literature would support the idea that disabled individuals would be more likely to challenge ableist norms and assumptions made about society (Vachon & McConnell, 2018; Slater, 2015; Slater, 2013; Thomas, 2007; Blackburn, 1990). This could be for a couple of reasons, namely the positive and negative experiences of the disabled practitioners, or the advocacy movement for disabled people which many members of the disabled community are part of. Whilst these elements are somewhat entwined, they provide an understanding as to why this could have been a predominant theme within the data. Furthermore, this is supported by the idea that just under half of the respondents openly discussed that they also identified as intersectional feminists (see section 4.3 for more about this), demonstrating political awareness around equality. This could potentially be connected to the preferred use of the societal model of disability within the disabled community, which views society as the “problem”, rather than the impairment (Oliver, 1990; Slater, 2013; Bertilsdotter et al., 2020). Therefore, respondents could be more aware of how to make society more accessible as they have personal experiences of being excluded. This is something which is also discussed in other themes identified in the research (see section 4.4 and 4.5) and as such demonstrates an interconnectivity around the identified themes overall.

Additionally, because the practitioners are addressing concerns around inaccessibility and then implementing change, they are challenging social norms, and breaking the cycle of negative social learning theory associated with disability (see section 2.2). This has been done through changing the observations disabled and able-bodied individuals will have (Bandura, 1977) about youth work practice and inclusion more broadly.

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Consequently, these changes whether that's seeing hearing youth workers sign or learning to sign to communicate with Deaf young people, or offering consultation sessions for disabled young people, challenges and potentially changes the dialogue young people and practitioners are exposed to. As a result, this also brings the national occupational standard of promoting inclusion, equality, and diversity (National Youth Agency, 2020b) to the forefront.

Therefore, whilst the data shows that disabled practitioners promote inclusion and the accommodation of disabled young people in their work, they also adapt their work to be more accessible for disabled young people. This is because they are more aware of the issues they face or because they have personal experience of being excluded.

### ***Non-judgemental Attitudes***

The participants were also explicit about the need to be open-minded and approach youth work with non-judgemental attitudes (Rogers, 1962). This was discussed in the youth work literature during analyses of authenticity and realness (see section 2.4) and youth work literature (see section 2.5). Whilst participants did not read any literature to take part in the research, it is likely that they are aware of Roger's (1962) work as it is quintessential in the profession. Therefore, participants being open and explicit about their non-judgemental attitudes in their practice is not surprising.

*Embrace the sense of like, let's have a conversation and looking at the situation*  
– Charlotte

*Don't judge people, nobody knows what's going on behind the cover*  
- Alice

*Inclusivity and then being open because young people come from all walks of life*  
- Sadik

These quotes illustrate the importance for participants of being non-judgemental about young people, other practitioners, and their situations. Many of the youth work practitioners who participated in the research shared that they acknowledged that often there was more to a situation than the preliminary issues which were presenting. Practising with a non-judgemental attitude is considered a core component of youth work (Rogers, 1962) and therefore is expected in youth work, as it helps youth workers start where the young people are at (Davies, 2005). This theme is noteworthy because it highlights the impact of negative encounters and prejudices on disabled practitioners. Therefore, the data would suggest that disabled practitioners potentially emphasises this component of youth work more; whether this is a conscious decision or not is unknown but is an intriguing outcome from the data.

The practitioners demonstrate this in different ways and the way they communicate this whilst being direct with their answers, also indicates a flexibility and understanding in their work as youth work practitioners. The use of the words *“let's have a conversation and looking at the situation”* helps develop this understanding further. The understanding that there is something else going on alongside any presenting behaviours or challenges signifies the understanding disabled practitioners have about young people not always feeling able to discuss their issues, concerns, or problems with professionals. However, the knowledge demonstrated by Charlotte shows that young people respond well to being spoken to as an equal. This not only shows Charlotte, a

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youth worker who works in the charity sector, to be an empathetic practitioner, but also one that is aware of the young people she works with needs which potentially comes from the fact she was a young person at the organisation she now works for. This ability to remain non-judgmental is an important skill as it allows practitioners to apply the core component of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1962) which in turn allows practitioners to build a rapport with young people, due to a development of trust from the young person towards the worker.

Alice explains that *“nobody knows what's going on behind the cover”*. During Alice's interview she also explained that her youth workers were the first people to identify something was wrong when her mental health was impacted due to her disability and loss of her friend. It is reasonable to conclude that Alice's explanation of people not knowing what is going on in someone's life is because of personal experiences of this. This awareness of knowing that young people's lives are complicated and that there are parts of young people's lives that youth workers are not aware of is fundamental, because it reminds practitioners to be aware of this blind spot when working with young people. Additionally, that acknowledgement of practitioners not knowing everything about young people allows the opportunity to further develop relationships with young people. This is because it is easy to become complacent as a practitioner, especially when you have known young people for a long period of time, however, knowing that there are elements of young people youth workers are unaware of for multiple reasons could act as a catalyst for further exploration in the lives of the young people youth workers work with.

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Sadik recognises that *“young people come from all walks of life”*. When considered alongside the other two quotes above it highlights not only the breath of the young people practitioners encounter, but also how much understanding is required for each young person around elements such as culture, sexuality, religion, race, class, ability etc. Therefore, Sadik raising that young people come from many different backgrounds demonstrates that he is aware of the complexity of the lives of the young people he works with, but from a different perspective to that which Alice raised. Sadik’s quote shows the underlying factors young people have when it comes to how they see and interpret the world around them. This is interesting because Sadik was the only participant to acknowledge their cultural and religious beliefs during the interviews, and whilst he did not explore these in any depth due to not wanting to, this is notable. Sadik’s overall intonation and body language seemed defeated during the interview and a lot of the comments he made were self-critical and pessimistic. Whilst there is a direct connection between the quote about *“young people coming from all walks of life”* and the way in which youth workers understand the young people they work with; it can be concluded that, either growing up or as a practitioner, Sadik’s other identities have been excluded, this is a theme which will be explored in more depth later in this chapter (see section 4.3). This exclusion of Sadik’s intersecting identities from other people, could potentially be the reason he has raised this during his interview. This is because it demonstrates Sadik potentially wanting to challenge and change how young people are understood, particularly in terms of disability identity.

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When this is considered alongside other quotes from the data, this idea around understanding judgement and prejudice is made more apparent as participants identified situations when people including young people have been judgemental towards them.

*Young people tend to take advantage of my disability and I am generally patronised by most people. Some young people pretend that they can't understand me, or they think I am stupid. Obviously, that annoys me, as they are playing me, and my disability and management are aware of this.*

- Sadik

*All of my grades are pretty much C's, which is average. And I refuse to believe that I'm perfectly average at everything. I have to be good at something.*

- Peter

*I use a wheelchair, I have a physical impairment. That is what led me to being in a special school to start with. At the same time at university, someone dared to suggest and this is my fourth moment moments dared to suggest that I might have dyslexia and it basically shattered my world. Because growing up I had consistently been told, even in mainstream school, you might be disabled, but at least your brain works. Then to suddenly be told your brain might not work was just like, overload. So that shaped how I understood myself, how I understood disability and access more broadly*

- Zoe

These experiences could relate back to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) because historically disabled individuals were perceived as a burden and assumed to be less educated compared to their able-bodied peers (Slater, 2013; Thomas, 2007; Blackburn, 1990). This dialogue has changed overall since approximately 2012 with the broadcasting of the London Paralympics (BBC, 2021). However, whilst this generally challenged ableist attitudes, the individuals who hold influence in peoples' lives such as

immediate family and social network might still hold and vocalise negative attitudes which could be passed on (Berk, 2015), as explained in the literature review (see chapter 2). In this study this could be seen through the outlined examples above because individuals highlighted either things which had been said to them or actions which others had done to or around them. An element which is not explored in the data is that shift in narrative around challenging ableist assumptions, which was raised in chapter 2. Nevertheless, the data demonstrates the advocacy of the disabled practitioners regarding non-judgemental attitudes.

Whilst non-judgmental attitudes are explored in youth work literature more generally (Davies, 2005) coupled with the need for unconditional positive regard whilst practising youth work (Rogers, 1962), evidence of its importance when considering disability is less apparent. This is similar to the use of flexibility in youth work practices as there is minimal literature around this element of youth work. Whilst interviewing participants, this was something which was poignant because when considered adjacently to disability history and sociology the way disability, especially neurodiverse conditions, were understood was that of people not wanting to conform (Thomas, 2007). This is important because a significant majority of respondents were neurodiverse (see appendix E). Whilst this finding might be heavily influenced due to the sample, it does raise other questions around disability and conformity, which there is not space within this study to explore further.

Additionally, Peter's quote around his academic performance was something which was intriguing. The reasoning for this is due to the last section of the phrase "*I have to be*

*good at something*". When this is combined with the understanding of disability hierarchy and the attitudes that some people still hold like that shared by Zoe, "*you might be disabled, but at least your brain works*" a different understanding of non-judgemental attitudes can be developed. This is one relating to how disabled practitioners, in this incidence, practitioners with invisible disabilities are understood, included, and made to feel valued in the workplace. The intonation Peter used whilst talking about his grades at school was also noteworthy as there was an underlying tone of annoyance coupled with pain. This combination of feelings suggests that this is something which still to this day feels relevant for Peter despite his other academic achievements and employment history. Whilst this study does not explore individual disabilities but rather the disabled youth workers' community experience focusing on the use of self, this hierarchical attitude around disability is something which became apparent during the data. The reason for this is unknown, but the attitude was noticed as an underlying theme in a lot of the interviews as well as being alluded to by participants. The understanding of the hierarchical differentiation of disability varied based on the participants, but generally there was a feeling that whilst all disabilities had their challenges, disabilities which affected neurological aspects of a person were worse than those which were purely physical. This was seen in the pride of participants generally when discussing university as well as their professional accomplishments. The impression given across the board was that of people trying to justify why they were good at their jobs. This could have been down to the other experiences the participants had had in life where they needed to justify or demonstrate that despite their disability,



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they were still capable of whatever task they were given. For those who had both a physical and a neurodiverse condition, especially when diagnosed in later life, like Zoe, this experience was described as being an “*overload*” due to the attitudes that “*you might be disabled, but at least your brain works*”. Therefore, the idea of non-judgemental practice needs to also address this underlying concept of hierarchical disability due to this also impacting the experiences and subsequent use of self in youth work.

### ***Empathetic Practices***

Inclusion and accommodations were also demonstrated though practitioners highlighting the importance of empathy in their practice, sometimes unambiguously:

*Empathy it's a very important skill*

- *Stephen*

Other practitioners were not as direct in their illustration of empathy but rather stating how they used it as a youth work practitioner:

*I'm very, very mindful and which has come from my vulnerabilities mentally and physically. I'm very mindful of the*

- *Leanne*

*The third thing is empathy. If you try to understand the person's point of view, even if you can't or even if you don't get there, but at least you try*

- *Peter*

These examples of empathetic practice highlight the various ways that empathy can be portrayed in youth work as well as its importance for disabled practitioners. Empathy allows for relationships between young people to be formed, which in youth work is vital

(Young, 2006) (see section 2.5). This relationship building and empathy allows for realness to be brought into youth work (Rogers, 1962) and for impactful change to be made. Additionally, this helps promote the supportive and caring elements of youth work (National Youth Agency, 2020b; Institute for Youth Work, 2013) which are vitally important. The reasoning for empathy being highlighted in the research was due to the consistency of its appearance within the data. Respondents were not all as direct or as illustrative with their responses about empathy, but all touched on the necessity to try and understand a situation or what a young person was going through before acting on something. This is reflected in the section around non-judgemental practices as well as the recurring idea of starting where young people are at (Davies, 2005).

The idea of “*words*” as discussed by Leanne, was something which was poignant. All the participants were somewhat hesitant about the language they used and some, such as Sadik, apologised for swearing during their interviews, whilst some were mindful about how they worded things before saying anything and taking a moment before exploring answers. Consequently, whilst Leanne was the only participant to discuss her awareness of the “*importance of words*”, there was a uniform demonstration of this, albeit in a non-verbal manner. This was seen in the interviews through small pauses before responding, and their open body language. Whilst these are not immediately obvious aspects, when considered within the context of knowing the value of words, these elements carry significant weight. This is because they support the ideas shared by Leanne and demonstrate them in a tangible way. From a literature perspective this correlates to ideas around disability perspectives and language (see section 2.2) and

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this may help provide an understanding as to why this is significant in the research. However, it does not develop an understanding of why this concept was largely communicated nonverbally. Therefore, this is an area which has the potential to be explored in greater detail in further research due to the study not having the available space to explore this despite this contributing to the general understanding of self for disabled youth workers.

Additionally, Peter explains that people should “*try to understand the person's point of view*”. This idea is one which relates to listening to young people and understanding where they are coming from, considering other factors in their lives which have led them to these ideas. This is an idea that was highlighted by Sadik when he explained that “*young people come from all walks of life*”. Peter’s quote highlights that practitioners do not always know best, and that everyone is always learning and developing. This idea of trying to understand different perspectives underlines the idea that practitioners should not be enforcing their ideas and values onto young people, but rather helping them form and create their own with guidance and support in a safe space. Peter’s quote demonstrates that challenging young people and discussing ideas with them further supports their growth as individuals, as well as allowing them to form healthy voluntary relationships with practitioners and can help ensure sessions and activities are inclusive and accessible.

Therefore, the idea of empathetic practice is essential because it helps develop and form meaningful relationships with young people. As a result of this, the work youth work professionals can do with the young people is more relevant, impactful, and

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meaningful to the young people because the youth worker understands more about the individual they are working with.

### ***Visibility and Awareness***

Inclusion and accommodation is also demonstrated through the visibility and subsequent awareness of disability of the disabled youth work practitioners who participated in the research.

*The young people in my like support worker job, they love it, they love my crutch and they love the fact that I'm the same as them in a way*  
- Alice

*A sense of visibility as well as knowing that oh there a staff member like oh yeah okay. She's she's also like she's black. She's also Jewish, she's got a disability, she's queer as well. And she's a total geek at the same time.*  
- Charlotte

Whilst these extracts touch on the importance of identity and intersectionality (see section 4.4), they also acknowledge the importance of visibility in their places of employment. For example, Alice who works with disabled young people said that “*they (the young people) love my crutch and they love the fact that I'm the same as them in a way*”. For Alice her crutch is something she needs to get around and access the world, so she has no choice in disclosing this information. However, the intonation and body language used whilst she was discussing this was happy and positive as shown by her tone and her smiling a lot. This happiness was especially obvious when she said, “*they love the fact that I'm the same as them in a way*”. This quote implies that seeing a visibly disabled practitioner is a rarity in youth work in her experience, especially for

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disabled young people. This raises concerns about the representation of the sector and whether there are underlying reasons as to why disabled people are not becoming youth workers, or if they are why this is not apparent especially within disabled spaces.

Charlotte supported this idea as well when she disclosed “*she's black. She's also Jewish, she's got a disability, she's queer as well. And she's a total geek at the same time.*”. Much like Alice, Charlotte was very positive and happy when discussing this element of herself and her practice. Charlotte, who is neurodiverse and works in a mixed ability space, was very open about how she felt being her full self in the youth work space was important and how she felt that it improved her practice. This idea of being her whole self and being true to her identity provides visibility for disabilities which are hidden. This difference between Alice who has a physical impairment and Charlotte who is neurodiverse raises a question about disclosure of disability for practitioners. For practitioners like Alice, who have a physical impairment which requires the use of a mobility aid the choice of disclosure is somewhat removed, obviously the extent of what they disclose is still their prerogative but the fact they are disabled is apparent. Whereas for practitioners like Charlotte, this choice to disclose to young people is entirely down to them. Therefore, it raises a question, which we do not have the capacity to explore in this research, about the difference between disclosing disability identities between disabled people with hidden disabilities and those who have visible disabilities.

These ideas correlate to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and challenging social norms through visibility and exposure, even if it is an unconscious by-product. The In Defence of Youth Work (2014) concepts highlight the importance of disabled

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practitioners acknowledging and having awareness of their disability. Jenkins (2014) suggests this is only achieved by practitioners having self-awareness of the importance of their visibility. This self-awareness helps enhance the realness of their practice (Rogers, 1962) because they understand their self and can appropriately challenge the values, attitudes, and ideologies of the young people they are working with based on their own identities. This challenging of attitudes and values is done through exposure to disabled people and allowing young people to ask questions and be curious in a safe space, as demonstrated by Alice and Charlotte.

However, whilst this is generally a consensus that the disabled practitioners are open and accepting of their own disabilities, there was an exception to this. Daphne, who is visually impaired, was very honest about her resistance to being described or identified as disabled:

*I never wanted to be labelled as disabled, I never wanted to admit that I had additional needs or that might need a bit more help*

- Daphne

However, Daphne, who works with the youth justice team and came into youth work later in life after being in a band, did also express that she was trying to accept this needed to change:

*Two years ago, and it's only two years ago, I said, like, I need to, I need to admit to myself and to everyone else, that I am a disabled person. And there are going to be times when I'm going to need a bit more help*

- Daphne

For Daphne to accept that she is “*going to need a bit more help*” was something she found challenging to admit and whilst she came across as composed and calm during the interview, there was an underlying tone of defeat. This will not be addressed in this research due to it relating more to identity than self, this quote provides an understanding of what disability looks like for different people, as well as how the language used is accepted within the community.

Whilst Daphne was alone with this reluctance to identify as disabled in this study, Daphne represents a group who take longer to accept and understand what being disabled means for them. This is because they do not see their disability as making them disabled. This is important to explore because much like Alice and Charlotte, who are open about their disabilities in their workplace, they are still the minority within their place of work as they both shared. However, Alice and Charlotte are both young youth workers, whereas Daphne is an older practitioner. This is significant because when Daphne was growing up and forming her identity, disability was much more of a taboo (as discussed in chapter 2) whereas Alice and Charlotte were brought up in a society where disability was more accepted. This could explain the possible differences in when and why each participant initially chose to identify as disabled.

Overall, this theme around inclusivity and accommodation covers a significant amount of content and ideas. However, they are all interconnected through the general theme of inclusion as well as the research questions (see section 1.3). It specifically addressed research question two, how do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice. The question was answered due to the use of personal experiences

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from a variety of timeframes and points in the respondents' lives. This suggests that the values and core attitudes held by the practitioners have evolved due to life events. Therefore, in terms of inclusion and accommodation, the self is used by disabled practitioners in a variety of ways, all of which are contributing to the overall integration of disabled people within youth work.

#### **4.3 – Imposter's Syndrome, Self, and Intersectionality**

Imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality are all heavily intersecting thus creating this theme. Like the last theme this theme has subthemes within it:

- Imposter's syndrome
- Self and intersectionality

These two subthemes both connect and complement each other. This section is most obviously related to research questions two, how do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice? and three, to what extent is intersectional identity experienced by disabled youth work practitioners? This theme was both implicit and explicit within the data as some practitioners openly shared their struggles with imposter's syndrome as well as how their other identities shaped their lives and practice. Other practitioners used more indirect examples which once analysed helped develop ideas brought up by other respondents.



### ***Imposter's Syndrome***

Imposter's syndrome was not expected in the results; however, it was something that many practitioners shared in their responses.

*I sort of have that mindset, always make sure I do more, to make sure I'm on the same level*  
- Charlotte

*Because working there, it sparked, sort of a thing like, am I good enough? Is my neurodiverse profile going to hinder me from doing this work? Am I going to make the right decisions, I'm not going to make too many mistakes.*  
- Charlotte

*I need to admit to myself and to everyone else, that I am a disabled person.*  
- Daphne

*I had a bit of an identity crisis really*  
- Sadik

These quotes stuck out due to the consistency of the occurrences in the transcripts and due to the intonation used by respondents. The respondents were very to the point with the sentences where they disclosed feeling as though they needed to do more or accept themselves to do their role to the same level as their colleagues. This preciseness with the language used and the consistent questioning on whether they were competent at their respective roles raised questions as to why this was occurring. Due to the number of participants who disclosed feelings of inadequacy it would be negligent to disregard this as coincidence.

Understanding why this occurs is difficult as there are potentially countless reasons, some of these potentially not relating to disability. However, using the literature review

and the history of disability in the United Kingdom, it is fair to summarise that the imposter's syndrome experienced by some of the participants could be related to internalised ableism within society (Slater, 2013). This raises questions around if disability practitioners are disproportionately affected by burnout due to overcompensating in roles to feel as though they are competent to have the jobs they do. This is somewhat alluded to generally by Sadik as his entire interview was very self-critical. Sadik also mentioned reflection a lot during the interview and explained that what he believed to be his inability to connect with young people made him a bad youth worker. On its own, Sadik's experience does not support this. However, within the context the data has given, it is plausible to suggest that when considering the need to overcompensate by other participants, such as Charlotte, and the struggle to identify with being disabled like Daphne; Sadik is one of many disabled practitioners who experience burnout because they feel as though they need to do more to be recognised the same as their colleagues.

Another reason for this could be because of the split in the use of the medical model and the social model that disabled people experience. Whilst the social model of disability is the preferred model of disability by disabled people, medical professionals still use the medical model (Thomas, 2007). The medical model focuses on trying to "fix" disabled individuals (Thomas, 2007) rather than embrace differences in people based on perceived ability. These models are contrasting and somewhat contradictory which can cause an internal conflict for disabled people. The psychological implications of medical professionals trying to cure or control illnesses or impairments can be

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substantial and can cause long term concerns which could explain disabled people feeling inadequate in everyday life.

Charlotte's quote "*always make sure I do more*" to make sure "*I'm on the same level*".

The part which is most prominent in this quote is the "*same level*" element. This is because it suggests that there is a difference in ability and competency based on disability. Charlotte highlights the concept that disabled practitioners feel as though they need to earn the respect of their managers and colleagues through doing more. Whether this feeling as though they need to compensate has any foundation is unknown and the exact reasoning behind why imposter's syndrome is present in this data, we do not know. This is because able-bodied individuals also experience imposter's syndrome and thus it is not strictly related to the disabled experience. Therefore, knowing the exact reasoning as to why this might occur is difficult because reasonings might alter depending on the individual. Reasonings may also be interconnected, complicating the understanding of why this occurs further.

The idea of imposter's syndrome is overly apparent in the transcripts, the intonation, and the body language. The reasoning behind this is unknown but conclusions can be drawn using the literature review (see chapter 2). These conclusions help develop an understanding of what it means to be a disabled youth work practitioner. The combination of reasonings and the quotations given by the practitioners allow for justifications to be explored and for summaries to be relevant to the overall study.

### ***Self and Intersectionality***

The ideas expressed around imposter's syndrome also connect to the idea of self and intersectionality. This is due to some of the reasoning behind why imposter syndrome is present connecting to self and experiences, as well as how people understand their identity through their intersectionality. Participants explained that multiple elements of their identities interconnected and helped them understand themselves. This in turn helped them comprehend how it influences their practice.

*Everything is connected to each other, isn't it? You cannot separate one and have the same person*  
- Peter

*My experience is always defined by all of my identity, which means it's always intersectional*  
- Zoe

*I'm just myself. And because youth work is really about self. And you use your skills and experiences, and I perhaps do more than I realise, and to inform your work.*  
- Daphne

These quotes answered the second research question; how do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice. Zoe explained that “*my experience is always defined by all of my identity*”. The use of the phrase “*all of my identity*” was said with some authority. The authoritative tone used whilst talking about this, helped the overall tone come across in a factual way. This tone provided an understanding that this was something which Zoe experienced frequently, and it can be implied that people often did not see past her disability. Zoe, who is a wheelchair user and a youth work

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practitioner who focuses on consultation with disabled young people as well as human rights programmes, suggests the concept that disability identity is perceived as the primary identity for disabled people. Zoe explained that *“I’m in spaces with young people my identity is a centralised, to disability identity.”* This idea of centralisation, whilst an interesting and possible conclusion, could also be more of a disproportionate stress on the disability aspect of identity. This conclusion is more accurate due to quotes in other sections exploring ideas such as imposter’s syndrome, empathy, and non-judgmental attitudes.

Daphne and Zoe also discuss their feminist identities and the associate passions with it. This can be seen through Zoe's quote which was very direct in her identifying and Daphne's quote where she is discussing her core values and how they have formed.

*I identify as an intersectional feminist*  
- Zoe

*And my core values. So equality when it comes to diversity when it when it comes to racism, or homophobia, or disability. I'm just as passionate just as angry about any type of inequality. And it's great to work with people who pretty much hold the same values. And probably the biggest thing that nobody really seems to talk about much, although is getting more coverage now is around gender and feminism.*

- Daphne

Both Zoe and Daphne acknowledge different aspects of their identity in this section in a positive way. Zoe identifying as an intersectional feminist is particularly noteworthy, because intersectional feminism acknowledges other elements of social injustice, this can include aspects such as social class, race, and ability status (Brewer & Dundes,

2018). Throughout Zoe's interview, she was very vocal about the injustices she had faced as a disabled woman, as well as the opportunities she has had because of her disability. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Zoe discussed her feminist identity as her interview reflected an awareness of a plethora of social injustices. Furthermore, much like Daphne, during the core values discussion both participants discussed the importance for equality in practice. Daphne explicitly makes reference to issues which she is vocal on, which includes feminism, whereas Zoe mentions her feminist identity later in the interview, but does have equality as one of her main values as well.

Furthermore, the data suggested that the way social class is understood for disabled youth workers is complicated and is often perceived differently to the individual's actual social class. Whilst this was not a unanimous experience it is one which helps answer research question three which is concerned with intersectionality for disabled youth workers.

*Because I have an air of vulnerability about me, I tend to find that my social class can be very misunderstood.*

*- Leanne*

*(Referring to social class) It kind of makes you feel lower*

*- Alice*

Neither Leanne nor Alice disclosed their social class during the interviews, but their perceived social class was middle class due to their educational status, the articulate way they spoke and the way they spoke about people they knew. This perception was based on my own understanding of social class in the United Kingdom, and considered

perceived social capital, as well as monetary capital (Savage, et al., 2013). Social class and disability identity can be related to the literature review and the social movement for disabled people (see section 2.2). The idea that respondents brought up the idea that they were made to “feel lower” when it comes to social class. This supports the literature around the evolution of disability acceptance and inclusion in the United Kingdom. Historically disability was perceived as something which was not spoken about and pitied (Slater, 2015; Thomas, 2007). This resulted in segregation occurring in places where socialisation occurs for young people and children such as schools (Rembis, Kudlick, & Nielsen, 2018) or in the media (McRuer, 2018). This contributes to the idea around social learning theory and people learning through observation (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, if disabled people are always perceived as being helpless (Slater, 2015) then these attitudes are likely to continue. The perceptions of social class interconnects with the idea of helplessness which Slater (2015) describes. This is due to social class sometimes being related to professions as well as economic, social, and cultural capital (Savage, et al., 2013). When all these elements are considered together, disabled individuals are at a significant disadvantage compared to able-bodied individuals when it comes to social class perception. Thus, the data would suggest that disabled people’s social class can be misunderstood by able-bodied people because of able-bodied assumptions about disabled people as a result they are made to “feel lower”. Both participants who shared experiences around their social class being perceived as lower said this in a tone which was both annoyed and sad. This implies that this is something which affects them psychologically and impacts their daily lives.

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However, the pause before both responses suggests that they had not thought about this in much depth. What this means for social class understanding for disabled youth workers is unknown because there was no context given to support these statements. As such conclusions made are based on the data and what literature there is on the topic.

Overall, the ideas of imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality all interconnect because they influence and shape each other. This section helps address the two research questions: how do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice; and to what extent is intersectional identity experienced by disabled youth work practitioners. Whilst the research questions are answered there are still a considerable number of unknowns within this section. Conclusions, which have been drawn from an accumulation of the data and literature, have provided an insight into how self is used by the disabled participants, as well as some of the struggles they have as a result. Whilst these conclusions have found their foundations within the literature where possible and appropriate, further exploration around the topic has been highlighted throughout, as have areas which require additional research.

#### **4.4 – Safeguarding**

This section was unexpected because there is no direct literature around safeguarding and the impact for disabled practitioners. Whilst it is not directly connected to any of the specific research questions, it does provide some context to some of the responses especially around feelings of imposter's syndrome and could help develop an



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understanding of why other themes have emerged. As discussed in the literature review (see section 2.5) safeguarding is heavily influenced by the media and tragedies (Holmes, 2022), therefore, there are comprehensive resources on the topic. As a result the findings of disabled youth workers not being trusted requires further exploration because it is unforeseen and has potentially considerable consequences which could impact youth work generally.

*I've also had in a number of job interviews, particularly not in disability spaces, questions raised about how I would manage a group of teenagers, or a group of young people. So some, like ableist assumptions about what it takes to care for or safeguard groups of young people.*

- Zoe

*... families, especially parents, I have supported as a family support worker also do not think I am capable and won't let their children work with me as they don't think I have the skills and that profoundly impacts me.*

- Sadik

*so I was always suggesting that I write risk assessments at my last job. I said Oh I like doing them and then I was never taught, I was never given chances to do them, they were taken away from me.*

- Peter

Whilst it is illegal to discriminate against someone based on their disability under the Equalities Act 2010, this is somewhat limited to the “provision of services and public functions” (Her Majesty's Government, 2010). As a result, outright acts of discrimination are less frequent and obvious, however, some of the more indirect actions which when disclosed were alarming and need exploring. Peter's disclosure around risk

assessments being “taken away” from him was on which resonated from the data because it is an internal issue. This is something which for Peter, who is dyslexic, and has worked with young people for approximately ten years, appeared to anger and frustrate him. This was communicated through his intonation as well as the body language which could be seen on the online video platform recording. As previously discussed, this was something which was not highlighted in the literature prior to the research being carried out, however, general literature around safeguarding was explored (see section 2.5). Due to the literature, which was found retrospectively to the theme being devised, conclusions can be drawn based on multiple elements of the literature (see chapter 2). The fact that risk assessments were the main aspect of Peter’s quote raises more elements of enquiry about whether employers can be more protective and cautious around allowing disabled practitioners take a lead on safeguarding and risk assessments based activities because of their perceived ability due to their disabilities.

These ideas around cautiousness for disabled practitioners are demonstrated by other practitioners and their experiences. Sadik’s comments were particularly noticeable. Sadik has many years’ experience working for the local authority and is currently a manager. His quote which stood out was regarding the parents of young people he works with: “*won’t let their children work with me as they don’t think I have the skills*”. Whilst this isn’t a direct correlation to safeguarding, it does further demonstrate the idea of cautiousness and lack of awareness around disability more broadly in the sense of capability for disabled people. Sadik goes on to say that it “*profoundly impacts me*” this

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correlates to the section around imposter's syndrome (see section 4.3) due to the impact that these comments and actions have on practitioners. The idea that people think that a disabled practitioner doesn't have the "skills" to work with young people links back to the idea that there is a cautiousness around trusting disabled practitioners to make good choices around safeguarding and helping young people.

Zoe also explores the idea that in able-bodied spaces there were "questions raised about how I would manage a group of teenagers, or a group of young people" which Zoe went on to explain as *"ableist assumptions about what it takes to care for or safeguard groups of young people"*. Zoe highlighting the idea that these were *"ableist assumptions"* which occurred in primarily able-bodied spaces raises the idea about whether there is a lack of understanding and communication around what safeguarding is and how it is carried out, which directly impacts disabled practitioners. This unexpected finding has raised questions which the research does not have the space to address in the depth it deserves but by not acknowledging it other understandings about previous themes are voided. These questions which have been raised led to literature being found to understand these findings more thoroughly (see section 2.5 for more information). The questions gathered in the data include gaining an understanding about how safeguarding is taught and communicated to practitioners, and how organisations deal with ensuring that institutional issues are addressed in due course, as well as how safeguarding is more than carrying out emergency first aid or breaking up fights. This is because the data signifies that these are the areas which require further investigation as the data alone provides no context and some examples seem to

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contribute to risk management instead of safeguarding. As a result there appears to be a general confusion about what safeguarding means and what it looks like for youth work practitioners, as such additional research could benefit this.

Overall, whilst this was an unexpected theme which has come out of the research and there are a lot of unknowns and variables as to why this has occurred; this theme has supported the subtheme around imposter's syndrome as it provides further reasoning as to why imposter's syndrome was and is experienced by most of the participants. The theme itself is worthy of exploring and discussing in relation to other themes as well as the general concepts. However, this is an area which needs further in-depth analysis so that it can bring important reasoning about this issue to the forefront.

#### **4.5 – Space**

The use of space has also been discussed in two different ways. The first way that this was illustrated was in the literal sense of how disabled people access space and understand its capabilities.

*I do perhaps find that I have a broader, a broader understanding of what needs might arise in a particular setting.*

*- Daphne*

*Think more about how we can access spaces and what kind of different things that we can do in this space*

*- Alice*

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Alice and Daphne both describe their awareness of issues regarding space itself being inaccessible for aspects like mobility aids and not being overstimulating as well as how we can make it accessible in a variety of different ways. Whilst neither practitioner elaborated on how they did this in great depth, they did both explain that it was a way of thinking and considering space beyond what is seen. This is something which could fall into the flexibility section of the data (see section 4.2) because it could be considered as thinking in an adaptable way about the spaces used by youth work practitioners. This adaptability is spoken about often in youth work practices when it comes to considering how sessions are run and how we include people generally (Young, 2006; Blackburn, 1990) therefore by extending the thought process to space, the overall inclusivity of the way youth worker practice increases which is inline with the national occupational standards for youth work (National Youth Agency, 2020b).

When combined with the ideas around how space is held by practitioners, ideas around understanding and using space can be explored further. Zoe expressed that she used space as a way of allowing people to feel vulnerable and help them give themselves the permissions to be their true self.

*it is not fair to expect people to share their experiences, their ideas, their personal stories, whatever it might be, if you're not willing to do the same thing.*

- Zoe

This idea that in space practitioners need to be vulnerable, whilst operating within the parameters of professional boundaries, could allow for realness in youth work (Rogers, 1962) to become more prominent. This realness in youth work (Rogers, 1962) is

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something which has not been really explored (Murphy & Ord, 2013) as such this is something which is discussed in the literature review (see section 2.4). However, space falls within this, especially when considering vulnerability in spaces.

However, this understanding and use of space helps develop an understanding around how inclusive youth work practice is combined with how self, and identity can influence this. When considering the other themes identified within the research, in particular inclusion and accommodation, space interconnects with this almost seamlessly. This is due to space being an obvious accommodation which people often identify especially around including individuals with mobility aids. Consequently, this is something which when thought about in a literal sense is well documented in policies such as the Equalities Act of 2010 and other policies across a plethora of sectors including education, housing, and transport. How space is held and used by practitioners is not as well documented, as such the themes explored above all interweave and influence each other as can be seen with the idea of space. Space and how it has been explored in this research demonstrate how disabled youth workers experience life and acknowledge their own limitations. These acknowledgements can impact their awareness of issues as well as assist in the way that disabled practitioners present and communicate, both verbally and non-verbally. Non-verbal communication is what is being described in all these quotes and is a product of self directly in practice.

The quote from Zoe which stood out in the research from when she was discussing the use of self in youth work spaces was *“I am going to bring to spaces that someone that wasn't disabled”*. This quotation helps to consolidate the conclusions which have been

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drawn. These conclusions form and support some of the central ideas which need consideration overall as they help answer research questions one, two, and three because of the complexity of the theme. The conclusions also help develop an understanding of the overall use of self by disabled practitioners.

#### **4.6 – Conclusion**

Overall, the themes: inclusion and accommodation; imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality; safeguarding; and space; illustrate some of the challenges and realities associated with being a disabled youth worker. Whilst some of the findings were unexpected, the research provided empirical data and content-driven findings demonstrating not only the need for this research, but also a need for conversations around areas such as burn out for disabled youth workers, imposter's syndrome, and what safeguarding means for both disabled youth workers and the profession overall. These findings have highlighted an interwoven theme of complexity when trying to separate aspects of identity. This has been noticeable due to the participants expressing an emphasis on the disability aspect of their identity. Whilst these findings help develop the overall understanding of how disabled youth workers use self in their practice there are areas which require further exploration. These areas along with future research possibilities and conclusions will be outlined in the next chapter, as will the research limitations which have been alluded to throughout the study.

## **Chapter 5 – Conclusion**

### **5.1 – Introduction**

This study focused on addressing the research questions:

- 1) How do disabled youth work practitioners identify and conceptualise themselves in a professional setting?
- 2) How do disabled youth work practitioners utilise the idea of self in their practice?
- 3) To what extent is intersectional identity experienced by disabled youth work practitioners?

To address these a qualitative research project was devised and carried out. This was achieved by using literature from a plethora of sectors and disciplines (see chapter 2) alongside eight one to one semi structured interviews with disabled youth work practitioners (see chapter 3 for more information on the methodology). Whilst some themes were in line with what the literature suggested, others were unexpected due to the use of thematic data analysis which allowed the findings and conclusions to be content-driven (see section 3.6). The themes in the study included: inclusion and accommodation; imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality; safeguarding; and space. All the themes selected had elements which were unforeseen and because of this the literature review was updated as the project developed. This was most apparent for the theme around safeguarding (see section 2.5) because before the data was analysed this was an area which the study had not identified to be relevant. Therefore, this development within the literature helped the overall understanding of the data and



its findings. This chapter will look at the findings within the research, the limitations of the research, and what research as a result of this study.

## **5.2 – Findings**

This study's findings, which were discussed in chapter 4, answered the research questions (see section 1.3) by examining how disabled youth workers used self in their practice and looked at the extent that intersectionality contributed to this. The findings can be categorised into four themes:

- Inclusion and accommodations
- Imposter's syndrome, self, and intersectionality
- Safeguarding
- Space

Using these themes from the data, the following conclusions to the research questions can be made:

Disabled youth work practitioners like and prefer to acknowledge who they are and what different experiences they bring to youth work, due to the experiences they have had influencing their perceptions. Research question one focuses on this, and is addressed by the language used by participants, as well how the participants explored the idea of space.

Research question two was addressed multiple times within the research. The data suggested that disabled youth workers are good at utilising their self in their practice, which makes them more flexible and non-judgemental practitioners, who understand

that they bring something unique to the space they work in. These findings were not surprising and were supported by the literature (see chapter 2), despite gaps being present. However, for some participants this consensus took longer for them to come to terms with, this is because they struggled with their own disability identity.

There were a significant number of practitioners who explored the idea of imposter's syndrome and feeling the need to overcompensate at work. Additionally, practitioners shared that, based on their disability, they were questioned or not trusted in safeguarding roles at their places of work. These findings were unexpected based on the literature review and allowed for questions to be asked about why these findings have occurred. The participants were open and honest about these experiences they had encountered, which has led to questions about why or how this happens (see section 5.4). Conversations held around these findings, have been interesting and have raised queries about society generally and their acceptance of disabled people. The study has also raised questions about how youth work understands inclusion and integration for disabled practitioners in the sector without them feeling the need to overcompensate or as though they are not trusted.

These findings allowed for a balanced insight as to how disabled youth workers understand and use their self-perceptions in their practice. This empirical data has helped form an understanding of the challenges disabled practitioners face in both their personal and professional lives, as well as how the sector can be more inclusive. The study has found that disabled youth workers are using their self in their practice in a variety of ways which is something they are proud of. Therefore, finding a way to

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promote this in the sector whilst addressing the challenges highlighted is an important element which needs considering.

Research question three was concerned about intersectionality. This was a difficult question to answer due to the lack of general understanding about the term and what it entails. As a result, many participants either did not answer the question or the examples they used did not acknowledge the complexity or flexibility of identity and self in relation to other aspects young people have going on. Nevertheless, the idea of feminism was raised in this area, as was the idea that social class for disabled youth worker was misinterpreted.

### **5.3 – Limitations to the Research**

This study, as explored in the previous chapters, had a limited capacity to explore everything the practitioners shared due to the scale and width of the research project. However, this focused approach allowed for the data which was analysed to be done so to an appropriate depth which helped answer the research questions.

The main limitation of the study was the scale. A larger-scale study would have helped to develop ideas raised in the study as well as increase diversity of the practitioners involved. This limitation was necessary in this study to avoid a data surplus based on the research width. However, the additional practitioners would have increased the diversity as well as enhance the findings within the study. This is the first element which any study looking at this topic needs to alter because it would allow for themes and

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ideas to be trialled across a wider range of participants, with different experiences and intersectional identities helping to strengthen the ideas raised.

#### **5.4 – Further Research**

As highlighted throughout this chapter, as well as others, there are elements which were brought up or alluded to which could not be examined in this study due to the scale but has the potential to be explored in other studies moving forward. The main two areas this was applicable for were: the use of crip time theory within this study from a methodological perspective; as well as practitioners' understanding of safeguarding and its implication for disabled youth workers.

Crip time theory was implicit within this research especially during the sampling section of the methodology (see section 3.4) due to participants choosing specific times based on their own routines. This is something which as a research project could examine crip time theory as not only a theory which is applied to the physical elements of the role of a youth worker and general inclusion but also as a methodological approach. This concept could lead to a better understanding of how to include disabled people in research across a variety of sectors, not just youth work.

Safeguarding and how it is taught and understood by practitioners regardless of their ability status, is another element which requires additional research. The complexity of this subject would interconnect to other areas of further research such as crip time theory and as such additional research could provide more concrete and reliable conclusions as to why this was a finding in this research project. This area of study

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could also help shape the youth work profession more broadly as findings could impact the way that safeguarding is taught to youth workers as well as understood. Therefore, this is an area which needs to be considered in more depth.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A - Recruitment Material

# Call For Research Participants

**For a Master's By Research Project**

<div style="background-color: #FFB6C1; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><b>Participants Wanted:</b></div> <div style="background-color: #FFDAB9; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"><p>Aged 18 or over Identifies as disabled Is a youth work practitioner in any provision Is willing to participate in 1 to 1 interviews</p></div> <div style="background-color: #FFFF00; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><b>Contact Information:</b></div> <div style="background-color: #FFFF00; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Email: <a href="mailto:Toni.Paxford@hud.ac.uk">Toni.Paxford@hud.ac.uk</a></div>	<div style="background-color: #ADD8E6; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><b>Details of Study:</b></div> <div style="background-color: #ADD8E6; padding: 10px;"><p>This study aims to understand the use of self in youth work practices by disabled practitioners. Questions will be based on the topic above Interviews will be approximately an hour in length and will take place over zoom or in person Interviews will be arranged depending on availability of participants All interviews will be anonymised</p></div> <div style="background-color: #00FFFF; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"><b>Researcher Information:</b></div> <div style="background-color: #00FFFF; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Toni is a disabled, queer, JNC qualified youth worker who is studying at the University of Huddersfield</div>
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Toni Paxford is a Master's by Research student at Huddersfield University under the School of Education and Professional Development. Her studies are supervised by Professor Paul Thomas and Dr Raj Patel

## Appendix B - Coding Charts

Theme	Subthemes	Quotations	Body Language and Intonation
<b>Inclusion and Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility in approach to practice</li> <li>- Non-judgmental attitudes towards others</li> <li>- Empathetic practices</li> <li>- Visibility and awareness</li> </ul>	<p>"It makes you think more about how you can accommodate someone" - Alice</p> <p>"It also means they've got some really cool adaptations to different games" - Alice</p> <p>"what I found when I started working in policy was particularly, all young people, but particularly disabled young people were excluded from consultation processes because disability-based consultations would say we don't know how to deal with young people, and youth based consultation opportunities don't know how to work with disabled young people." - Zoe</p> <p>"the hearing managers didn't sign, didn't really know Deaf culture, didn't know Deaf identity. They don't know about the failings of mental health for Deaf people." - Stephen</p> <p>"Don't judge people, nobody knows what's going on behind the cover" - Alice</p> <p>"Embrace the sense of like, let's have a conversation and looking at the situation" - Charlotte</p> <p>"Just treating me as just a person" - Charlotte</p> <p>"That's really about understanding,</p>	<p>Alice - very matter of fact, honest and open, took time pausing for answers</p> <p>Zoe - self-awareness, self-assured</p> <p>Stephen - took time to think about answers, passionate but also annoyed</p> <p>Charlotte - bubbly, open, energetic</p> <p>Daphne - matter of factual, open body language, pauses between answers</p> <p>Peter - annoyed, irritated, very to the point and matter of fact like</p> <p>Sadik - self-critical, took pauses to think, closed and shielded body language</p> <p>Leanne - calm, collected, took pauses before replying, spoke very to the point</p>

		<p>empathy, support, and encouragement" - Daphne</p> <p>"it is to acknowledge that there is an underlying cause to things." - Peter</p> <p>"Inclusivity and then being open because young people come from all walks of life" - Sadik</p> <p>"Young people tend to take advantage of my disability of my disability and I am generally just patronised by most people" - Sadik</p> <p>"All of my grades are pretty much C's, which is average. And I refuse to believe that I'm perfectly average at everything. I have to be good at something." - Peter</p> <p>"I use a wheelchair, I have a physical impairment. That is what led me to being in a special school to start with. At the same time at university, someone dared to suggest and this is my fourth moment moments dared to suggest that I might have dyslexia and it basically shattered my world. Because growing up I had consistently been told, even in mainstream school, you might be disabled, but at least your brain works. Then to suddenly be told your brain might not work was just like, overload. So that shaped how I understood myself, how I understood disability and access more broadly" -Zoe</p> <p>"Then to suddenly be told your brain might not work was just like, overload" -Zoe</p>	
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		<p>"I'm very, very mindful and which has come from my vulnerabilities mentally and physically. I'm very mindful of the importance of words" - Leanne</p> <p>"the third thing is empathy. If you try to understand the person's point of view, even if you can't or even if you don't get there, but at least you try" - Peter</p> <p>"Empathy it's a very important skill" - Stephen</p> <p>"The young people in my like support worker job, they love it, they love my crutch and they love the fact that I'm the same as them in a way" - Alice</p> <p>"A sense of visibility as well as knowing that oh there a staff member like oh yeah okay. She's she's also like she's black. She's also Jewish, she's got a disability, she's queer as well. And she's a total geek at the same time." - Charlotte</p> <p>I never wanted to be labelled as disabled, I never wanted to admit that I added additional needs or that might need a bit more help – Daphne</p>	
<p><b>Imposter Syndrome, Self and Intersectionality</b></p>	<p>- Imposter Syndrome</p> <p>- Self and intersectionality</p>	<p>"I had a bit of an identity crisis really I suppose because I knew that I was qualified in a professional capacity but other professionals didn't recognise me as that." - Sadik</p> <p>"because I have an air of</p>	<p>Leanne and Alice both seemed quite upset and frustrated about the social class point, as if it was a regular thing</p>

		<p>vulnerability about me I tend to find that my social class can be very misunderstood." - Leanne</p> <p>"I need to admit to myself and to everyone else, that I am a disabled person." - Daphne</p> <p>"because working there, it sparked, sort of a thing like, am I good enough? Is it my neurodiverse profile going to hinder me from doing this work? Am I going to make the right decisions, I'm not going to make too many mistakes." - Charlotte</p> <p>"I have this bad habit of always wanting to do more because I feel sometimes that my profile hinders me" - Charlotte</p> <p>"I sort of have that mindset, always make sure I do more, because to make sure I'm on the same level" - Charlotte</p> <p>"Being conscious of like, am I right for the job, and it's sort of like very close to imposter syndrome. And so I would have doubts of like am I right for this job? Or am I presenting a model for young people to feel that they can" - Charlotte</p> <p>"the whole self is the person that's there in front of us everything that they were and everything they're going to be is a contradiction in terms" - Peter</p> <p>"everything is connected to each other isn't it? You cannot separate one and have the same person" - Peter</p>	
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		<p>"because disabled people's identities are often centralised, a lot to disability, often when I'm in spaces with young people my identity is a centralised, to disability identity." - Zoe</p> <p>"my experience is always defined by all of my identity, which means it's always intersectional" - Zoe</p> <p>"I guess in the I, in the respect of using self I use myself experience" - Leanne</p> <p>"I'm just myself. And because youth work is really about self. And you use your skills and experiences, and I perhaps do more than I realise, and to inform your work." - Daphne</p> <p>"I'm very quite vocal with my identity" - Charlotte</p> <p>"because I have an air of vulnerability about me I tend to find that my social class can be very misunderstood." - Leanne</p> <p>"It kind of makes you feel lower" (Referring to social class) - Alice</p> <p>"I identify as an intersectional feminist" - Zoe</p> <p>"And my core values. So equality when it comes to diversity when it comes to racism, or homophobia, or disability. I'm just as passionate just as angry about any type of inequality. And it's great to work with people who pretty much hold the same values. And probably the biggest thing that nobody really seems to talk about much, although is getting more</p>	
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		coverage now is around gender and feminism." - Daphne	
<b>Safeguarding</b>	- Ableist assumptions	<p>"I've also had in a number of job interviews, particularly no in disability spaces, questions raised about how I would manage a group of teenagers, or a group of young people. So some, like ableist assumptions about what it takes to care for or safeguard groups of young people." - Zoe</p> <p>"families, especially parents, I have supported as a family support worker also do not think I am capable and won't let their children work with me as they don't think I have the skills and that profoundly impacts me." - Sadik</p> <p>"so I was always suggesting that I write risk assessments at my last job. I said Oh I like doing them and then I was never taught, I was never given chances to do them, they were taken away from me." - Peter</p>	<p>Peter - annoyed and upset</p> <p>Zoe - Lassiez-faire as if she has spoke about this countless times</p>
<b>Space</b>	- Understanding space capabilities - Holding and using space	<p>"I do perhaps find that I have a broader, a broader understanding of what needs might arise in a particular setting." - Daphne</p> <p>"Think more about how we can access spaces and what kind of different things that we can do in this space" - Alice</p> <p>"Access to information" - Charlotte</p> <p>"it affects how I think through how I hold space, but it also affects how space is held as well. Because there are things that I am going to bring to spaces that someone that</p>	

		<p>wasn't disabled, wouldn't bring equally their limitations that I bring to space." - Zoe</p> <p>"but it's me being like, stop hiding. Acknowledge yourself, you can do this." - Peter</p> <p>"it is not fair to expect people to share their experiences, their ideas, their personal stories, whatever it might be, if you're not willing to do the same thing." - Zoe</p>	
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## **Appendix C - Consent Forms**

### **Participant Information Sheet (E3)**

**Research Project Title: A critical investigation of how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices.**

Thank you for reading this. I am inviting you to take part in my research project. This sheet gives you a little information about it. Please ask me if something isn't clear.

#### **What is the purpose of the project?**

I am doing a project for my research project for my masters. I am interested in finding out how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices. This is to help understand the impact and significance of previous encounters on youth work practices and choices.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen due to identifying as a disabled youth work practitioner in the United Kingdom who is over the age of 18 and willing to participate in an interview.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No, not if you don't want to. You can also withdraw at any point – you don't need to say why.

#### **What do I have to do?**

A critical investigation of how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices.  
Toni Keni Paxford

You will be invited to take part in an 1 to 1 interview with the researcher, Toni Paxford. This should take no more than an hour of your time.

**Are there any disadvantages to taking part?**

No, as far as we know. If you are worried, please talk to me (the researcher) or get in touch with either of my supervisors

Professor Paul Thomas: [d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk](mailto:d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk)

Dr Rajesh Patel: [r.r.patel@hud.ac.uk](mailto:r.r.patel@hud.ac.uk)

**For the MA Dissertation:**

Dr Liz Bennett: [e.bennett@hud.ac.uk](mailto:e.bennett@hud.ac.uk)

**Will all my personal details be kept confidential?**

Yes. Any information about you which is collected will be strictly confidential. Data will be anonymised before being used in my writing. It will comply with the GDPR and ethical research guidelines and principles.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this research will be written up and presented for assessment at the end of the project. If you would like a copy please contact me.

**Who has reviewed and approved the study, and who can be contacted for further information?**

For the MA Dissertation: Dr Liz Bennett, Director of Teaching and Learning, School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield ([e.bennett@hud.ac.uk](mailto:e.bennett@hud.ac.uk))

Toni Paxford ([toni.paxford@hud.ac.uk](mailto:toni.paxford@hud.ac.uk))

**Participant Consent Form (E4)**

A critical investigation of how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices.

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant Information sheet related to this research, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

I understand that all my responses will be anonymised so nobody will know who I am.

I give permission for members of the teaching team to have access to my anonymised responses.

I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant: .....

Signature of Participant: .....

Date: .....

A critical investigation of how disabled youth work practitioners use their experiences to shape their youth work practices.

Toni Keni Paxford

Name of Researcher: Toni Paxford

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

## **Appendix D - Interview Questions**

### **Interview Questions**

- Welcome & thanks
- Explain process of interview, explain if they need to take a break at any point they are more than welcome to
- Any questions before we start?
- Where do you work? What are the aims of the setting? What is the setup of the organisation?
- How long have you been a youth worker? Have you always worked in a similar setting?
- Why do you work where you work? Have you ever felt pressured to work in a particular youth work setting?
- Before the interview I asked you to note down 5 life events which you felt had impacted how you identified, particularly around disability. Would you be able to share these with me and what their importance is? Is the order these events happened in important?
- Could you explain some of positive and negative attitudes you have encountered during your time as a youth worker based on your disability?
- How do you use the idea of self as a youth worker? Do you think it helps your practice?
- What would you say are your 3 main core values as a youth worker? How did you develop these?
- Can you give any examples of how experiences you have encountered as a disabled youth worker intersect with other elements of your life such as sex, religion, sexuality, gender, social class etc.?
- How do you think your experiences due to your disability have impacted on your dialogue and work with young people? Can you give any examples?
- Do you have any further comments or questions for the research?
- Thanks for participation
- What will happen next
- The publication will be sent once the research is completed to all participants



## Appendix E - Practitioner Biographies

Name	Biography
Stephen	Stephen is a Deaf youth worker in his 50s and is a JNC qualified practitioner. Stephen has always worked in Wales and has worked for both hearing and Deaf youth clubs and organisations. Stephen has worked for the local authority as well as the charity sector. Stephen is an advocate for hearing and Deaf integration and believes that there is work which needs to be done by both communities to make this happen successfully.
Peter	Peter has worked for the charity sector for most of his life. He has 10 years working in the housing sector for young people and before this had a variety of jobs. Peter is not JNC qualified but one days wants to be. He fell into youth work after completing a degree in Philosophy. Peter has dyslexia and anxiety.
Sadik	Sadik is a JNC qualified youth worker and is a manager at an England local authority. Sadik has been professionally qualified for 10 years and has experience as a youth worker for longer than this. He is currently rethinking his career but has done this a few years, but doesn't know if it is for them. Sadik is an Asian man who has physical disabilities. Growing up Sadik was never made to feel as though he had a disability, but as he grew up it became more apparent.
Leanne	Leanne is not a JNC qualified youth worker, she has her own company which helps young people and did so due to her own struggles as a teenager which lead to her physical and mental disabilities. Leanne is in her 40s and has recently become a youth worker after a career change.
Daphne	Daphne is in her 50s and has been in youth work since she was 39. She did not disclose her JNC status. Daphne started as a volunteer then qualified as a youth worker and now works for the local authority. Daphne found it hard to adjust to using the term disabled despite having a glass eye and other disabilities in addition to this.
Zoe	Zoe is a wheelchair user and has been a youth worker for 20 years. Zoe is based in Scotland and does a lot of consultation and human rights work with young people. Zoe identifies as an intersectional feminist and believes young people should take charge on sessions.
Charlotte	Charlotte identifies as a queer, black, Jewish, disabled youth worker.

	<p>She trained 6 years ago and works for the organisation she used to attend growing up. Charlotte is in her 30s and is a strong believer that youth workers should use non-judgemental attitudes with young people as much as they can.</p>
Alice	<p>Has been a youth worker for 6 years and works for the charity sector. Alice has physical disabilities and has mobility aids she has openly disclosed. Alice works with disabled and non-disabled people and offers a variety of support.</p>