Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries:

Supporting papers

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Introduction

These supporting papers accompany the published report *Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries.* The two papers were written at an early stage in the research process to help shape and guide RCMG's thinking, and open up issues for discussion with the Think Tank and nine museum partners.

Rethinking Disability Representation in Museum and Galleries (shortened here to RDR) was a large-scale, experimental action-research project which developed new, politically-aware approaches to the representation of disabled people's lives and experiences in museums and galleries in the UK. Working with nine partner museums the project resulted in exhibitions, displays and educational programmes which offered to visitors, and to society more broadly, alternative (non-prejudiced) ways of thinking about disability, drawing on the social model.[1] A significant part of the project was the inclusion of a Think Tank of disabled activists, artists and cultural practitioners who played a key role in supporting and guiding the museums in their experimental practice. The aims of RDR were:

- To uncover material evidence held within wide-ranging collections that can contribute to a broader public understanding of disability.

- To develop narratives that draw on historical and contemporary material to engage audiences in rethinking attitudes towards disability and open up possibilities for engaging with contemporary disability-related issues and debates.

- To develop innovative approaches to display, interpretation and audience engagement.

Working Paper 1 is a literature review which addresses the key theoretical concepts, issues and debates in the disability studies literature. Written early on in the project, it helped to shape the background thinking to the nine museum projects and identify key areas for discussion by the research team, museum partners and Think Tank. It forms a theoretical background to RDR and locates the project in the wider context of research into the social and cultural understanding of disability from the perspective of disabled activists, academics, writers and researchers. This includes a discussion of the individual or medical model and social model which frame how disabled people are represented in wider society and culture; cultural and historical perspectives of disability and impairment, and how these have changed over time and space; and how language is used (and has been used) to discriminate and stereotype disabled people.

Working Paper 2 presents an overview of the evaluation of visitor responses to the nine museum projects, which was built into the research process. It details the methodology used and the rationale behind it; the research tools used to capture responses from visitors (response cards, interviews and focus groups); how the data was collected, processed and analysed; and a preliminary analysis and interpretation of visitor responses prepared for the research team. A selection of visitor comments was included within the paper to give a voice to visitors and

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[1] The Social Model of disability is explained in Working Paper 1.

demonstrate the diversity and richness of responses to the nine projects.[2] The themes by which these comments are organised relate to categories which emerged from analysis of the visitor comments themselves, and are discussed in relation to key theories where appropriate in an attempt to understand the context of the visitor and their response to the projects. All names of visitors have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

These supporting papers are working documents, intended to inform and enrich the research process, rather than fully resolved articles. Their presentation reflects this, showing the emerging thoughts and ideas of the research team. They reveal the (often messy) process of analysing and interpreting qualitative data. The use of theoretical concepts (such as the social model of disability), and the analysis and interpretation of the visitor responses, were further refined and developed in discussions with the research team and the Think Tank before their presentation in the finished publication, *Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries*.

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[2] This working paper was compiled from three separate working papers prepared for the research team which included a much larger selection of visitor comments – the identifying numbers have been retained for reference.

Working Paper 1

Literature review: the representation of disability and disabled people

1.0 The social representation of disability: an introduction

This working paper presents an overview of the literature on the representation of disability and disabled people in society and culture. It addresses how representations of disabled people are historically and cultural situated and how social changes have affected and shaped attitudes towards disabled people – in particular, the development of the individual or medical model. It introduces how disability activists and researchers have responded to these largely negative and discriminatory representations with the development of the social model. Rather than focus on impairment (a medicalised and individualised social attribute) the social model looks at the barriers in society which prevent disabled people from having the same rights and equality as non-disabled people. It is society which 'disables' people not the impairment. This paper introduces the key concepts and theories that will be critical in understanding the role that museums can play in challenging persistently negative, stereotypical or prejudiced views of disabled people.

Work on the representation of disabled people has established a number of key themes within disability studies. For example, Oliver argues, 'Throughout the twentieth century, whether it be in the novel, newspaper stories or television and films disabled people continued to be portrayed as more than or less than human'(Oliver 1996:61). He goes on to say that 'These portrayals see disabled people either as pathetic victims of some appalling tragedy or as superheroes struggling to overcome a tremendous burden' (Oliver 1996: ibid). While for Thomas (1982) the public perception of disability has ranged through the emotions of 'imaginative concern, mawkish sentimentality, indifference, rejection and hostility' (1982:4), other writers have interrogated the religious myths, ascriptions of evil to disabled people and the cultural devaluing of disabled people (Selway and Ashman 1998, Dovey & Graffam 1987 and Miles 2002). Barnes (1992) identified commonly reoccurring stereotypes as: the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic, an object of violence, as sinister and evil, as a curio, as a super cripple, as an object of ridicule, as their worse and only enemy, as a burden, as sexually abnormal, as incapable of participating in community life and the disabled person as 'normal' (Barnes 1992). Barnes' findings were based on a detailed content analysis of previous research as well as questionnaires to disabled peoples' organisations, media organisations and advertisers. The focus was on disabling imagery however, there was recognition that other issues including race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality intersected disability.

More recently, Haller et al (2006) examined American newspaper terminology regarding disability using the method of content analysis over a period of ten years. The New York Times

and Washing Post were selected primarily because of their large circulation. The analysis of the terminology looked at the ways in which the terms were used, such as 'The disabled', 'disabled person/people', disability as a noun, 'people with disabilities', 'handicapped', 'cripple' or 'crippled'. The study did not pretend to give an all-encompassing picture of disability terminology but hoped to show trends in the use of the terms. A separate analysis looked at three other terms, specifically; 'confined to a wheelchair', 'wheelchair-bound' and 'wheelchair user'. The analysis of these terms covered the entire years of 1990, 1995 and 2000. They found little improvement in the derogatory terms used to describe disabled people, beyond the lessening in the use of the term 'cripple' and 'handicapped' and noted that issues of tragedy often accompanied such terms. This paper will elaborate on the connection between disability and 'tragedy' in the following sections.

1.1 The social model and medical/individual model

In the UK, social scientists and disabled activists promote the social model (Oliver 1996). The social model is a heuristic device that makes the distinction between disability which is attributed to social organisation, and impairment which is a medicalised and individualised social attribute. The Social model suggests that those who view the problems of disability as located exclusively in the body develop a personal tragedy view and do not take into account the social factors that can disable people with impairments viewing the impairment as the problem, whilst negating the social and political conditions of disabled peoples' inequalities. A great deal of criticism within social sciences is directed towards non-disabled professionals and 'experts' who write about issues of disability with little understanding of the tenets of the social model. For example Oliver states:

> When I began to read some of the things that able-bodied academics, researchers and professionals had written about disability, I was staggered at how little it related to my own experience of disability and indeed most other disabled people...Over the next few years it gradually began to dawn on me that if disabled people left it to others to write about disability, we would inevitably end up with inaccurate and distorted accounts of our experiences. (Oliver 1996:9)

This has been a continuing cause within the disability movement and for academics within the disability field. The Union of Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) produced the Fundamental Principles of Disability document at a time when little attention was being directed towards issues of disability. The document emerged from attempts by disabled people to build their own organisations. Key players in the writing of the document were Paul Hunt, a sociologist, and Vic Finkelstein, a psychologist. Two important distinctions were contained in the UPIAS document. Firstly, the distinctions between experts and amateurs and between organisations controlled by disabled people (organisations 'of' disabled people) and those that were not (organisations 'for' disabled people) and secondly the distinction between impairment and disability. Oliver took the principle division of disability as a social and attitudinal phenomenon from the Fundamental Principles document (UPIAS 1976) which contained the following definition of impairment and disability:

Impairment: Lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body;

Disability: the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation that takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities. (UPIAS 1976:3-4)

The term of physical impairment was later refined to include all impairments including sensory and cognitive impairments (Barnes et al 1999). The UPIAS document states that:

Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments; by the way, we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society... It is a consequence of our isolation and segregation, in every area of life, such as education, work, mobility, housing, etc.' (UPIAS 1976: 4)

The UPIAS document is clear that impairment and disability are interlinked and interdependent. Thus, the interdependency of disability as a social restriction of activity and impairment as a physical, sensory or cognitive attribute provide the primary concepts. While impairment is accepted as an individual ascription, disability is not. Disability is something that people with impairments experience through social relations, attitudes and subsequent exclusion in areas such as education, employment, inaccessible transport systems and inadequately designed housing and buildings. An additional and complimentary feature of social model perspective is the right to self-determination, or independent living in relation to social services and 'care' directives (Priestley 1999, Campbell and Oliver 1996, Morris 1993). For Oliver (1996)

I wanted to put this distinction into a framework that could be understood by professionals with a limited though expanding knowledge of disability issues. The individual model for me encompassed a whole range of issues and was underpinned by what I called the personal tragedy theory… But it also included psychological and medical aspects of disability, the latter being what I preferred and still prefer to call the medicalisation rather than the medical model. (Oliver 1996:31)

Table 1 outlines the opposing positions taken towards disability as seen through the perspective of the individual and social models (following Oliver 1996:34).

Finkelstein (1993) is a staunch advocate of the social model, having been one of the principle authors of the UPIAS document. Yet he has questioned the ability of the social model to fully explain the position of disabled people and suggests a further 'social death model' alluding to the metaphorical death of those who are disabled resulting from exclusion, and a 'social barriers' model which would focus more on the significant social barriers that are in place. However, he suggests that both of these would be subsumed by the administrative model –a state welfare and rehabilitation model that operates 'cure or care forms of intervention' (Finkelstein 1993:37). Finkelstein is suggesting that social services, the state organisation of benefits and medical intervention remain key problems in the exclusion and dependence of disabled people, rather than promoting a critique of the social model.

Table 1: The Individual and Social Model

Individual Model	Social Model
Personal tragedy theory	Social oppression theory
Personal problem	Social problem
Individual treatment	Social action
Medicalisation	Self-help
Professional dominance	Individual and collective responsibility
Expertise	Experience
Adjustment	Affirmation
Individual identity	Collective identity
Prejudice	Discrimination
Attitudes	Behaviour
Care	Rights
Control	Choice
Policy	Politics
Individual adaptation	Social change

Barnes et al (1999) claim that at a time when different groups were beginning to forge new civil rights movements during the nineteen sixties the individual model prevailed unchallenged:

> To have an impairment was clearly regarded as a 'personal tragedy'- a conclusion which united service providers, policy makers and the wider public. It seemed to dictate life as a passive 'victim' characterised by social exclusion and disadvantage, and by dependency on assistance from family and friends and a 'safety net' of state welfare benefits and social services. (Barnes et al 1999:10)

These writers have highlighted situations and belief systems that continue today, but the beginnings of the myths surrounding disabled people can be traced further back to anthropological writings, religious, church and state practices, confirming that the processes of disability are both historically and culturally specific.

1.2 Historical and contemporary attitudes towards impairment

Barnes et al (1999) develop several key historical and comparative sources which review literature and data from historical and international perspectives. The review problematises the 'impairment as tragedy' view while helping to explain the ways in which it came about. The account suggests that impairment is regarded differently at different times and within different cultures. The findings denote the historical and cultural specificity of views of perceived impairment and thus of what it is to be disabled. For example, a study of early pre-industrialised societies and groups indicated that those with any perceived impairment were often revered, with such individuals participating fully in the social and communal life of their societies without prejudice. As Barnes et al (1999) states:

> The value of this cross-cultural perspective is that it challenges our universalist assumptions about what is 'normal' in respect of impairment. The presumption that

impairment is a commonly agreed condition and that it automatically generates negative reactions is contradicted by comparative research. This demonstrates how the concept of disability is historically specific. (Barnes et al 1999:16)

The section on Medieval Christianity and 'impairment as sin' develops the notions of ancient Judaism which regarded impairments: 'as a sign of wrong doing, and a justification for separating people because of their supposed uncleanness and ungodliness' (Barnes et al 1999:17). For example, a missing limb was amongst the conditions that precluded individuals from participating in religious rituals.

The different ways that cultures and religions regard impairment are addressed by a number of writers including Selway and Ashman (1998) and Dovey & Graffam (1987). Examples include the ancient Spartans, who hurled infants and children with impairments from cliffs or simply left them to die, and the Northern Salteaux Indians, who shot impaired people with arrows or strangled them and burned their bodies because they believed they were possessed by demons. Conversely, Dovey & Graffam (1987) found evidence of cultures (e.g. in Russia, central Asia, the Himalayas and Cambodia) where individuals with perceived impairments were imbued with religious significance. Miles (2002) also develops a large bibliography on pertinent issues of religion and disability from Middle East, South and East Asia providing a review of the negative ascriptions of disabled people in ancient religious texts. Inconsistent cultural attitudes heralding impairment as either a blessing or a curse were also highlighted by Buscaglia (1975) who noted that the Masai Indians murdered children with any perceived impairment, while the Azand tribe loved them; the Chagga of East Africa used disabled people to ward off evil, while the Jukun of Sudan believed impairment was caused by evil spirits and left people to die. Further evidence of the inconsistent treatment throughout history was noted by Ashman (1990) who found that during the Middle Ages people with an intellectual impairment were either viewed as possessed by the devil and persecuted, or cared for and sheltered in monasteries. Others found their place as court jesters, `pets' or as companions for noblemen, for they were believed to possess special skills as oracles. Selway and Ashman (1998) also identify contemporary references to religious interpretations regarding impairment:

> The challenge to Biblical stereotyping of people with a disability [*impairment*] was also taken up in a BBC documentary, The Fifth Gospel (Evans et al., 1989). The narrators pointed out that the Bible integrally linked sin with sickness and that disability [*impairment*] was depicted as God's curse, as punishment for sins. The documentary illustrated that in the New Testament, in particular, disability [*impairment*] was something to be healed, not accepted. The message people with a disability [*impairment*] inherited from that was: a person was not whole until they were healed and able-bodied. (Selway and Ashman 1998:433)

Notions of witchcraft and sinful practices were also signified by impairment: 'Impairment was a source of fear, ridicule and mockery. During the sixteenth century, the birth of an impaired child was accepted as proof that the parents were involved in witchcraft, sinful practices, or had simply had wicked thoughts' (Barnes et al 1999:18). Christianity continued to view impairment as a punishment for sin. Ironically, those rejected by their families and communities had little

choice but to accept the charity of the church and alms giving for their sustenance or for care and cure.

1.3 From Church to State

The sociological movement from Church to State organisation and the twin social movements in the eighteenth century of medicalisation and industrialisation provide further issues that have repercussions for disabled people in terms of care for the 20th and 21st century. The English Poor Law of 1601 is the first official recognition of state intervention to control people with impairments. It is also formally accepted as the first state location of disabled people within the category of the 'deserving poor' (Stone 1985), in other words as deserving of aid and help. The process of state administration set up what would become known as the administrative model according to Stone (1985). Thus, the emergent divide between church and state powers signified new forms of control, myth and dependency for disabled people which persevere today.

The eighteenth century saw the development of both industrialisation and medicalisation. Industrialisation was said to mark the movement from a perceived life of slow moving subsistence to a factory-based system requiring speed, physical and mental agility. Oliver (1990) characterises this period of change as denoting a new era in which disabled people are seen as a 'social problem' due to a lack of integration into the economic system and a simultaneous drain on the public purse. These macro-dynamics were complimented by what has been referred to as the rise of the scientific medical profession 'characterised by professional dominance, and expanding segregation in institutions' (Barnes et al 1999:19). Moreover, this led to an increasing range of strategies to 'identify, classify and regulate' (ibid). It heralded what Barnes et al (1999) term 'the therapeutic state' with its novel and polarized conceptions of normal and abnormal, sane and insane, healthy and sick:'

> Disabled people came increasingly to the attention of new medical specialisms and professionals. A whole field of rehabilitative medicine and allied professional intervention was gradually established 'for' disabled people. It became the 'natural' way to deal with disabled people, just as impairment became the dominant explanation for what happened in their lives…This medicalization of disability represented the establishment of an 'individual' model of disability that became the professional, policy and lay orthodoxy through the twentieth century. (Barnes et al 1999:20)

Throughout this account, we have seen how it is impairment that forms the focus for the control and myths that surround disabled people. The ascription of religious notions that detail elements of myth, sin, witchcraft and fear are clearly evident in early religious examples of the prevailing social attitudes. At the same time, those rejected by their families needed to rely on the very organisation that contributed to the mythology through relying on church hand-outs. The English Poor Law signified another mechanism designed to stigmatise and separate, a process that was further enhanced through industrialisation, institutionalisation, and the rise of medicalisation. In conclusion, Barnes et all (1999) suggest that these factors taken together

produced what could be termed an individual model, that is one that focuses on impairment, stigma, cure and social control (See also Oliver 1990, Oliver 1996, Oliver and Campbell 1996).

1.4 Tragedy model, charity model and heroic survivor

For French and Swain (2004) the persistence of the individual and tragedy model can be seen in most representations of disabled people in the media:

> This view is so dominant, so prevalent and so infused throughout media representations, language, cultural beliefs, research, policy and professional practice that we can only hope to cover a few illustrative examples. In relation to language, for instance, 'suffering/ sufferer' is perhaps the most widely used terminology in tragedy discourses to characterize the experience of disability. In the media, personal tragedy underlies representations of disability in numerous ways for different dramatic purposes, such as being bitter and twisted (e.g. the character Potter in It's a Wonderful Life) or pathetic (e.g. Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol). Perhaps the most intrusive, violating and invalidating experiences, for disabled people, emanate from the policies, practices and intervention which are justified and rationalised by the personal tragedy view of disability and impairment. The tragedy is to be avoided, eradicated or 'normalised' by all possible means. (French and Swain 2004:1-2)

Moreover:

> The erroneous idea that disabled people cannot be happy, or enjoy an adequate quality of life, lies at the heart of this response. The disabled person's problems are perceived to result from impairment rather than the failure of society to meet that person's needs in terms of appropriate human help, accessibility and inclusion. There is an assumption that disabled people want to be 'normal' although this is rarely voiced by disabled people themselves who know that disability is a major part of their identity. (French and Swain 2004:3)

The persistence of the tragedy model is explained by Shakespeare (1994) as a reflection of non-disabled people's fear of impairment and death. Oliver (1993) suggests that the prevailing cultural views of impairment/disability persist entirely because of demeaning social attitudes, prevailing cultural constructions and associations with dependence and abnormality. A third type of explanation is put forward by French and Swain (2004):

> Unlike within other social divisions, such as between men and women or between members of different races, non-disabled people daily experience the possibility of becoming impaired and thus disabled (the causal link being integral to the tragedy model). It can be argued that so-called 'irrational fears' have a rational basis in a disablist society… Thus, the personal tragedy view of impairment and disability is ingrained in the social identity of non-disabled people. Non-disabled identity, as other identities, has meaning in relation to and constructs the identity of others. To be non-disabled is to be 'not one of those.' (French and Swain 2004:5-6)

They feel that this fear and anxiety can explain the continuance of the impairment/tragedy continuum. In addition, other common ascriptions to disabled people based on impairment such as bravery and over-compensating, or disabled people as cheerful people 'putting on a brave face' and overcoming their problems with heroic resolve extend the tragedy model. While French and Swain claim that all are understandable in view of the media, charity and attitudinal representations of impairment, these issues contribute to a problematic series of representations that devalue disabled people, their views and their ownership and understanding of their own situations:

> Indeed, within the disabling context we have outlined here, the expression of a non-tragedy view [held] by disabled people flies in the face of dominant values and ideologies. It is likely to be denied as unrealistic or a lack of 'acceptance', distorted as an expression of bravery or compensation, or simply ignored. The tragedy model is in itself disabling. It denies disabled people's experiences of a disabling society. (French and Swain 2004:7)

They argue that disabled people have directly challenged the tragedy model of disability by taking disability as a political identity. This is supported by offering quotes from research. For example:

> At my special school, I remember one of the care staff loudly telling me that I should never give up hope because one day doctors would find a cure for my affliction, and I loudly told her that I did not want to be 'cured'. I remember this incident because of the utter disbelief this statement caused amongst all the non-disabled people present, and the delight this statement caused amongst my disabled friends. The school decided that I had 'The Wrong Attitude' and that I should indeed go to Lourdes so that Jesus, the Virgin Mary and St. Bernadette could sort me out. (Mason 2000:8)

1.5 The issue of cure

The issue of cure for those perceived to be tragically impaired is one that continues to infuse cultural belief systems. Hahn and Belt (2004) attempt to develop the issue of cure and identity through a quantitative research paper which they suggest examines core issues of identity, political affiliation and disability. Both are American writers who due to the differences between UK social model and American civil rights model use the term disability or disabilities to refer to what the UK social modelists would term impairments. They introduce the article by outlining from the US perspective the problems and tragedy of impairment and disability:

> Many participants in this movement have made the difficult transition from a self-image filled with shame and denial to an understanding of disability as a source of dignity and pride. At one time, the visible indications of a disability were so heavily stigmatized that persons bearing these traits simply remained indoors or in "back bedrooms" to avoid the humiliation of appearing in public. Hence, many became isolated or reclusive. Others who manage to venture into the public gaze still hide their

own disabilities. These factors might provide additional incentives for disabled people to seek a cure for their disabilities. (Hahn and Belt 2004:454)[3]

The study uses individuals from a politicised organisation of disabled people called ADAPT or Disabled for Assistance Programs Today. The study produced a total of 156 questionnaire respondents over two separate periods, the first in 1995 and the second in 1998. The questionnaires were administered at two social action events which involved the members of ADAPT.[4] In the surveys, the researchers used a seven-point Likert-type item to indicate the degree to which the respondents would want to be cured. The main question asked how strongly the respondent agreed or disagreed with the statement, 'even if I could take a magic pill, I would not want my disability to be cured.' Responses ranged from a value of one (strongly disagree) to a value of seven (strongly agree), with points in-between. The authors argue that:

> The sense of positive identity with disability is a position that does not receive extensive cultural support in society. In fact, disabled people must defy the heavy weight of social customs and conventions in order to espouse this position. Although general views of disability are changing continually, statements expressing a favorable view of disability and disability pride still seem relatively radical. As a result, respondents who advocate these opinions could be expected to endorse unconventional opinions about other subjects such as the wish for a cure. (Hahn and Belt 2004:263)

Hahn and Belt (2004) suggest that the age of onset of impairment may be a small factor in the rejection of treatment; yet experience and the importance attached to disability identity were assessed as of greater importance. However, they conclude that:

> [T]he prospect that an individual might be "cured" of disability does not seem to pose a great enough threat to an individual's communal attachments to the disabled minority to warrant treatment rejection. Thus, acceptance or rejection of a cure is best understood as a deeply personal issue that is related to personal life experience, and thus, identity. (Hahn and Belt 2004:461)

The scope, epistemological basis, methodological underpinning, methods and questions used by Hahn and Belt provide us with a clear case of methodological individualism that identifies impairment as tragedy seeking either cure, or distraction in 'individual communal attachments to the disabled minority.' The paper suggests that along with woman's health issues and terminal illness, sources of resistance to treatment seeking by disabled people could pose a challenge to tradition models of medical care, cure and treatment.

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[3] One flaw with the research is that the authors do not think to test this assertion with the disabled people involved in the study.
[4] The authors do not provide an explanation for the two tier collection of data and we must assume that the process was carried out in this way to facilitate what the authors' believed to be an adequate number of questionnaires for statistical analysis. However, this does not ameliorate the known methodological problems associated with studies which take as their base a positivistic statistical method without engaging in additional qualitative methods to develop the themes.

1.6 Victims or superheroes: media and charity representations

As previously noted, at the opposite end of the continuum of the tragedy model are the images of the 'heroic survivor' and 'special people' who overcome impairment. These cultural viewpoints can often contribute to the ascription of 'supercrip' regardless of type of impairment. According to Roper (2003), 'Supercrips are people who conform to the individual model by overcoming disability, and becoming more 'normal', in a heroic way.' Oliver (1996) also contrasts the extreme stereotypes offered to disabled people in the media, who's 'portrayals see disabled people either as pathetic victims of some appalling tragedy or as superheroes struggling to overcome a tremendous burden' (Oliver 1996:61). The notions of normality and non-normality, of tragedy and fear are seen most clearly in charity advertising which seeks to perpetuate the representation of the tragedy model in a quest to maximize donations and the brand of the charity. According to Hevey (1992: pages unnumbered):

> The agency must find an image which gives the impairment a symbolic yet social identity. The body of the person with an impairment becomes both the essence and the symbol of disablement. The body is fragmented and the major fragment - the impairment - becomes the centre of attention. Disability charity advertising is almost always in black and white, while commercial ads are almost always in colour. Charity advertising sells fear, while its commercial equivalent sells desire. Charities promote a brand not to buy, but to buy your distance from.

Hevey discusses examples of several charity advertising promotions identifying issues of tragedy, dependency and helplessness. He concludes with a plea for rights not charity:

> It [*charity advertising*] confuses 'disability' (which is the product of social discrimination) with 'impairment' (which is the product of a medical condition). But mostly it fails because it is the visual flagship for the myth of the tragedy of impairment. It is the higher ground to which all non-disabled society looks to unburden its guilt and its 'able-bodied' anxiety. What appears to be the heart of a heartless nation is itself one of the great bastions of the oppression of disabled people. The real 'tragic flaw' of this form of disability representation is the existence of impairment charities themselves and the way in which society substitutes charities as the alternative to giving disabled people our civil rights. (Hevey 1992: pages unnumbered)

It appears that religious, cultural, social economic and medical values all contribute towards different views of people with perceived impairments. These have ranged from sinful, demon-possessed and unclean; the deserving poor to be helped through state aid or charity; to the tragic victims waiting to be fixed or cured by medics or those that are perceived to overcome the tragedy to become brave, cheerful survivors and an inspiration to all. This can hinder the focus on the real issues which means that social barriers such as travel inequalities and access to direct payments which can enhance or limit disabled people's equality can be overlooked (Jolly 2006 et al; Jolly et al 2008).

1.7 Ambivalence and issues in disability research: measuring attitudes towards disability

How is the representation of disabled people reflected in the views of audiences and research participants? Three views are discussed here. Sodar (1990), who establishes two models in his analysis of research around disability and disabled people, the contextual model and ambivalence. The BBC conducted a survey into audience responses to disability and disability representation in 2004, the findings of which are briefly summarised here, and a Social Trends survey (2007) which looked at attitudes towards disabled people in the UK.

1.7.1 An overview of research on disability

Sodar (1990) argues that the type of research carried out on disability and disabled people shapes audiences responses, giving contradictory views and perspectives when comparisons are made across different types of research study. Much research on disability, and quantitative research in particular, starts from a point of prejudice and stereotype towards disabled people thereby pursuing research topics or questions with these attitudes already inbuilt. In particular, quantitative questionnaire studies confront participants with statements or questions about a group of persons who are identified and defined by one characteristic alone, their disability. Sodar quotes Finkelstein (1980) who (discussing the disability factor scale) says:

> The questionnaire, and the whole context of exercise, is far from neutral. It performs a social act by giving a class of human beings (people with physical impairments) a social meaning, a specific social position-they are the focus of attitude research. In taking up the questionnaire and putting pen to paper the person completing the questionnaire makes a contract, as it were, to follow certain rules . These rules regulate the range of possibilities that the person filling in the questionnaire can perceive for disabled persons. The focus of the questionnaire on disabled people exactly echoes the status society has already assigned to disabled people. (Finkelstein 1980: 20)

An overview of sociometric studies shows that methods and outcome ignore social context and therefore concentrate on obtaining an individualistic concept of attitudes from the perspective of the respondent. This negates the contribution made by 'values and structures in the surrounding social environment' (Sodar 1990: 233).

On the other hand, evidence from political opinion studies presents an alternative perspective to attitude surveys because attitudes towards disabled people are much more positive when the allocation of resources is called into question. For example, Kamieniecki (1985), analysing data from US election studies, found that a majority of Americans said that too little money was spent on disabled people. He discovered that people were more willing to spend taxes on disabled people compared to other racial and ethnic groups. In addition, the willingness to do this (or claim to do this) was independent of political affiliation which was not the case for those making decisions regarding racial and ethnic group resources. UK government surveys also highlight the theoretical willingness of UK citizens to confer higher monetary benefits and resources upon disabled people within communities. For Sodar, such responses are the antithesis of what he calls the 'prejudice-interpretation' studies and he notes that other

researchers have identified 'sympathy positions' for disabled people. However, from another perspective it can be argued that these perspectives are still founded on the personal tragedy model e.g. disabled people are more deserving than others because of the nature of their impairments.

Sodar's final analysis of existing research concentrates on 'disability in social encounters,' what happens in encounters between disabled and non-disabled people. This type of quasi-experimental study often posits the disabled person as what is termed 'novel stimuli'. Sodar quotes Langer et al (1976) to explain the situation more clearly:

> Their basic assumption is that a novel stimulus confuses the situation and that the behavioral outcome is dependent upon the norms that guide the actual situation. It is hypothesized that much of the discomfort evident in interactions between handicapped persons and normals exists because one's desire to explore a novel stimulus arouses the fear of violating a social norm against staring. Stated differently, discomfort arises when there is a conflict between the "desire to stare" and the "desire not to stare." (Langer et al 1976: 452)

In three experiments in this vein the situation was manipulated to enforce the norm of not staring (for example by letting the person know that he was being watched) or to reduce the effects (for example by letting the person see the disabled individual through a two way mirror before the encounter began). Sodar reports that:

> The results indicated that the discomfort experienced by the respondents was really a result of the hypothesized conflict between novel stimulus and the felt relevance of the norm not to stare. The conclusion drawn is that avoidance responses are not necessarily a result of devaluing the person with a disability because he possesses some stigma, but can be interpreted as a reaction to a novel stimuli in a specific social situation. Such reactions have also been noticed in similar research. (Sodar 1990:233)

Similar experiments show that interactions with disabled people tend to be shorter with the non-disabled person supposedly distorting their opinions to fit with those of the perceived situation of the disabled person. This is not explained in any more detail but it leads the author to conclude that in spite of criticisms of generalisation, these types of experimental study show that contextual factors play a large part in the interactions and attitudes of non-disabled people towards disabled people (the contextual model). Sodar concludes from his overview of the studies that depending on the type of survey conducted, an ambivalent response to disabled people emerges overall:

> People are ambivalent because of conflicting values that are both deeply felt and not easily handled in concrete situations.[5] Ambivalence means that people have no fixed cognitive presumption or emotions. (Sodar 1990:236)

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[5] The tension between the 'common-sense' attitude that 'we don't want impairments and we don't envy people with impairments' and the sympathy and altruism which disabled people evoke from non-disabled people.

Sodar quotes a classical study analysis by Myrdal (1964) regarding beliefs around African American groups in the 1960s. The study indicates the ways that cultural notions of fairness and freedoms mingle with economic and political interests and notions of fear to produce what he terms moral dilemmas. Myrdal (1964) suggests that the moral dilemma is the conflict between societal ascription of worth and the individual ascription, the outcome is what amounts to a rationalisation by people trying to deal with this ambiguity which can be commonly known as a stereotype. Sodar argues that this should not be understood as prejudice but the working through of ambiguity and moral dilemmas:

> Instead they should be seen as expressions of the real dilemma that lies at the root of the problem and which is just as much a cultural dilemma as an individual one. This conflict of values can be found in the ideological heritage of American culture, in its economic and political institutions and in the minds of its citizens. (Sodar 1990:238)

Sodar concludes that ambivalence could be used as a sensitising concept for researchers to develop issues related to conflicts identified in individual encounters on the one hand and institutional and cultural discrimination on the other. However, this needs to be understood within the context of contemporary policy and the advancement or otherwise of disabled people within particular societies, as well as the persistence of historical and mythical ideas that surround impairment within that society. As such, in those areas or spaces where criticism and policies regarding the alleviation of discrimination are considered advanced - with people more likely to be aware of discriminatory language and what would be perceived as discriminatory attitudes - the term 'anticipatory compliance' (Hilberg 1961) could come into play to describe the ambivalence of responses towards issues of disability and disabled people.[6] In this respect, the term of 'anticipatory compliance' is used to describe a situation where fear of being seen as discriminatory towards a particular group (in this case disabled people) would mean that a respondent would choose a response that was 'just and worthy' and adhered most closely to society's democratic rights and equality model. Thus, individuals within a research situation regarding disability and disabled people would comply with the more positive values of a society and square them with their own values. If we take this concept in unison with Sodar's contextual view and the notion of ambiguity, it is reasonable that when individuals are asked about disability they offer an ambiguous answer not only because of conflicts in their attitudes towards impairment but because they want to be seen as 'good' people. In this way, the concept of 'anticipatory compliance' could be used to explain a mechanism employed 'to say the right thing.' At the same time the respondents will be dealing with issues of difference, fear and myth producing potentially ambiguous statements in which disabled people may be recognized as 'human', 'normal' or 'the same but different.' In other words, responses to disability and disabled people may consist of seemingly contradictory statements as people move between the different positions.

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[6] The term 'anticipatory compliance' was originally used by Hilberg (1961) to describe the perceived compliance of Jewish leaders in the Second World War, and is often used to describe a situation where a minority complies with a majority view or group because they perceive greater negative results if they do not comply.

1.7.2. Study by the BBC into disability representation on television: a summary

One study that matches substantive data and conceptual ideas linked to disability and disabled representation without any apparent ambiguity was carried out on behalf of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission by Sancho (2004). The research sought different people's views regarding disability representation on television:

> This research sheds light on viewers' different expectations with regard to disability representation and offers indicators to assist program makers and broadcasters in making judgments about material to ensure that, as far as possible, it does not cross the offence boundary. The findings are not prescriptive directions to program makers, but are offered as a resource tool. (Sancho 2004:8)

The key issues to emerge from the study were:

- Accuracy in portrayals is extremely important to disabled viewers;

- The provision of aspiring role models for young disabled people is vital;

- Barriers to acceptance exist for some non-disabled viewers, which need to be reduced in order to facilitate acceptance;

- The industry recognizes that disability, as a political concern, is not yet as advanced as others issues such as ethnicity or gender equality, and that senior management must be at the helm of any initiative to effect change;

- Progressive thinking broadcast professionals consider it crucial that disabled people need to be at the heart of the creative process to move things forward.

The study highlighted five groupings of viewers through the research:

Issue driven (14%) focused on the existence of prejudice and saw television as an influential medium for education, wanting a 'tell it like it is' approach. This group was sensitive to inaccuracies and tokenism and complained if they thought television had 'got it wrong.'

Transformers (9%) saw 'disability a fact of life, but not the primary determinant of their identity.' They were looking for television to provide more role models and wanted more opportunities for disabled people at every level. This group recognised that there had been progress and were less critical than the older 'issue driven' grouping.

Progressives (36%) made up the largest proportion of those involved in the study. This group was described as more educated than others and early adopters of changing attitudes and behaviour. They were aware of the diversity of disabled people and saw the role of television to educate. At the same time they recognised the importance of not misleading or mis-educating the public.

Followers (26%) were described as having no particular interest in disability and being unaware of the diversity of disabled people, viewing disability as mainly connected with wheelchair users

or physical impairments. This group failed to notice 'normalization or incidental inclusion' in television programmes and were surprised by more hard-hitting portrayals of disability issues.

Traditionalists (15%) as their title suggests had embedded firm beliefs, exhibited prejudice and stereotyping of minority groups and saw disabled people in limited ways e.g. as victims or disadvantaged. They were shocked by hard-hitting portrayals of disability.

The study identified two barriers to the representation of disability on television: society's obsession with physical attractiveness and cultural conditioning. Professionals who work in broadcasting tend to believe that viewers expect actors and presenters on television to be traditionally good-looking. The small sample of broadcasting professionals included in the survey (including producers, commissioning editors and casting directors) were reluctant to admit it but said that disabled people can make for uncomfortable viewing. They described them as being 'un-televisual.' However, this study indicates changing attitudes among the viewing audience, suggesting that television is lagging behind cultural shifts. The second barrier is related to the notion that when people are confronted by something other than themselves, their initial response can be one of discomfort or even fear. Rather than seeing past the difference, they reject it out-of-hand. This research highlights the fact that for some attitude types it is important to reduce the sense of 'difference' between disabled and non-disabled people, in order to facilitate acceptance. One of the unintended consequences of this report, however, is the overwhelming view that impairments are always visible, when in fact they are not. The focus on disabled people as always having visible impairments is a widespread misconception that limits notions of equality.

1.7.3 Social Trends: prejudice, discrimination and disabled people

Social Trends, a well-known annual survey carried out in the UK by the National Centre for Social Research, has explored attitudes towards disabled people using evidence from the 2005 Social Trends Survey (Jasonson et al 2007). The research is interesting in that it is an objective collection of secondary data which would seem to confirm that negative and stereotypical views of disabled people persist in the UK. Three-quarters of people who responded to the survey believed that there was prejudice against disabled people and most discrimination against disabled people had been witnessed in the workplace and in the street. A person using a wheelchair and a blind person were most frequently associated with the image of a 'disabled person,' and most people would feel comfortable with a disabled person living next door, provided they were a wheelchair user or a Deaf person. However, very few respondents would feel comfortable with a close relative marrying a disabled person, and few people thought that they could accept a disabled person as their boss. More significantly for this paper, over 50% of respondents thought that disabled people needed to be cared for (Jasonson et al 2007). These factors are also evidenced in policy-orientated statistics which show that 50% of disabled people are unemployed compared to 10% of non-disabled people and 80% of disabled people want to work but face attitudinal and access barriers in workplaces. Equal access to health care is similarly denied due to widespread neglect of access and communication needs within the health sector (Jolly 2000, Jolly 2008).

1.8 Theories on decoding disability representations

The focus on reading text or image has also developed a literature that investigates disability representation – two examples are given here from Wilde (2004) and Devenney (2004).

Wilde (2004) asserts that disability and impairment are still identified as 'otherness' in the reading of a text[7] and draws on the work of O'Donnell (1999) to interrogate the messages that disabled characters can evoke. She describes the ways in which reading and understanding operate on several different levels - the micro, meta and macro narrative. Wilde introduces the micro-narrative as a search for sameness and normality, empathy or disapproval. Almost a background reading on the mundane of everyday life, micro-level reading can evoke universal appeal and collective identification regarding disabled characters or representations. However, if engagement does not occur then further readings are not taken resulting in a narrow view of the text or representation. Readers are likely to fall back on existing ideas, negative stereotypes or myths surrounding disabled people. If, however, the reader develops from the initial engagement, they move next to the meta-narrative. The meta-narrative reflects an engagement with current social and political issues and is connected to their understanding of current social or political issues. When fed to the reader through the 'discourse of difference' it may potentially lead to more negotiated, tolerant and political readings of disability. The micro- and meta-narratives contribute to the macro-narrative (the third level of reading) where the implicit values of the text are to be found including, for example, social democracy and individualism. Representations of disability need to work, therefore, at the level of recognition or familiarity at the first reading (micro), developing social and political knowledge (meta) and finally linking to wider issues of social democracy and individualism (macro).

Devenney (2004) uses social representation theory to interrogate and understand different perspectives on disability. The primary role of social representation is to make the unfamiliar familiar, to connect with issues that were previously little known or unknown and to reclassify and interrogate them. Social representation, therefore, is never static but fluid and contextual. Key processes include anchoring and objectification (Mosccovi 1981). The process of anchoring is to assimilate the unfamiliar or unknown into the familiar realm of experience, whilst objectification is a process that transforms abstract notions, ideas and concepts into concrete ones to provide meaning where meaning was formally absent. Three types of social representation have been identified:

The hegemonic - common representations replayed through the media, discussion and prevailing types.

The emancipated - ideas belonging to sub-groups which are reified by perceived scientific knowledge and 'specialized expertise.'

The polemic - representations generated because of conflict or controversy which may be seen as a minority viewpoint.

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[7] Text and reading here does not only refer to the printed word but in the widest sense including exhibitions, displays, images etc.

Devenney breaks down the representation of disability into three distinct groupings – the social, charity and medical models. Social and individual representations of disability are based on both facts and myths about disabled people: facts are those things which have evidential knowledge attached while myth develops as hearsay, creating cultural understandings that can be erroneous. Thinking about the three types of social representation, in this respect the hegemonic is akin to the charity (or tragedy) model; the emancipatory is akin to what Devenney calls the medical model; and the polemic is akin to the social model, disabled people's views and social disability theory. Further, he claims that the development of stereotypes consists in the mixture of ambiguity and fear of the unknown which can make new objectifications and polemic representations difficult. Therefore, the messages between the media and the receiver are always dependent on a number of different processes and contexts. The importance of the media (in this case the Rethinking Disability Representation project) and the receiver (the museum visitor) is that the receiver will adapt information in the context of their existing knowledge. Message reception of social representation is dependent on the dialectic process of a range of stimuli and pre-existing notions, a concept central to the theory of social representation and social disability theories.

1.9 Conclusion

This paper has given an overview of seminal literature in the disability studies field which helps to explain some of the key underlying concepts that will shape the Rethinking Disability Representation project. Namely, representations of disabled people are shaped by the social, cultural, and political context: these are not 'static' representations but are socially and culturally situated. These social and cultural representations have shaped the attitudes of the non-disabled majority. Attitudes, prejudice and discrimination against disabled people are very real in the UK in the 21st century but these are not rigid ideas and, as the social model suggests, there is the potential to change those attitudes through changing the way in which disabled people are represented and treated by society.

An overview of research into attitudes towards disabled people has revealed some of the challenges of framing research so that it does not reflect prejudiced and discriminatory views against disabled people inbuilt into the methodology, but also suggests reasons for the sometimes ambivalent or contradictory attitudes towards disabled people that are uncovered by research. Coupled with theories of 'reading' text and images, what emerges is a simultaneous fear/sympathy for disabled people – fear of becoming impaired oneself at the same time as feelings of altruism and benevolence towards disabled people. These perspectives emerge from the wider social and cultural context (meta-narrative or hegemonic) but which may be modified by closer proximity to disabled people through personal stories and experiences (micro-narrative or polemic). The importance of the values used to frame narratives and representations of disabled people are illuminated by the examples given here. However, the literature also reminds us that museum visitors will bring their own understandings of disability into the museum, shaped by the wider social and cultural context as well as their own experiences of disability and disabled people, which, in turn, will shape their response to the representations offered.

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Working paper 2

Visitor responses to the nine Rethinking Disability Representation museum projects

2.0 Introduction

Working Paper 2 outlines the collection of, and preliminary analysis and emerging findings from, visitor responses gathered as part of the evaluation of Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries (RDR). It combines three working papers and a report on the methodology which were prepared for the research team in 2008 for further discussion and refining of the analysis and interpretation. This paper outlines the initial reflections on the visitor responses and does not seek to resolve issues but to raise questions and issues for debate and discussion with the research team and Think Tank.

The evaluation was designed to answer two questions in respect to visitor experiences of the nine RDR museum projects:

- In what ways do audiences respond to, and engage with, the projects they encounter in RDR?

- To what extent – if at all – have attitudes towards disability and disabled people been changed?

Initial findings revealed that visitors were, on the whole, very positive about the nine museum projects and openly gave their support to addressing the representation of disability and disabled people in museums. Many visitors reflected on their learning as a result of the project they encountered, in particular their attitudes towards disabled people, the language they use, and their understanding of the social barriers which prevent disabled people from participating fully and equally in society. The more ambiguous responses from visitors suggest that social and cultural representations of disabled people as vulnerable, needing care and as tragic victims of their impairments continue to persist within UK society. A small minority of visitors also objected to museums being used to promote contemporary issues or give attention to disabled people – it was 'not the kind of thing' they wished be confronted by during a visit. These findings will be elaborated upon in the sections that follow. Throughout the text examples of visitor responses have been given (with reference numbers provided for alternative examples), presented within a framework which emerged from a content analysis of the responses and was further refined using theory from the disability studies literature and the Generic Learning Outcomes.

2.1 Research methodology, data collection and analysis of visitor responses

In order to answer the research questions (see Introduction) the evaluation of visitor responses to the nine RDR museum projects used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A response card was designed to be used across the nine projects, to give an overview of visitor responses as well as collecting basic demographic information. To explore visitor responses in greater depth, observation, interviews and focus groups were used with selected projects.

2.1.1 Response cards

To give an overview of visitor responses across the nine projects, a response card was designed with a single over-arching question: 'How does this (intervention e.g. exhibition, display, workshop, film, audio interpretation) change the way you think about disability?' The question was designed to be appropriate for the context for each site but using the same question so the cards could be analysed collectively. The purpose of the question was to encourage visitors to reflect on their attitudes towards disability. It was a leading question (assuming that visitors would change the way they think) but from RCMG's experience of visitor studies we knew that visitors could quite confidently disagree with a statement rather than being led into a positive response.[8]

The response card was designed to look appealing to visitors (Figure 1) and collect demographic data on the reverse side. Visitors were given the choice to provide the following information:[9]

- Gender (male, female)

- Age (categories from under 16 to 76+)

- Ethnic origin (Asian, Black, Chinese, Mixed, Other, White)

- Place (Village / Town / City and Postcode)

- Disability (Disabled, non-Disabled)

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[8] This proved to be the case, visitors responded to the question on their own terms.
[9] Visitors were also asked to supply their name and telephone number if they were interested in being involved in further research. This information, however, was not used.

Figure 1: Example response card for Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
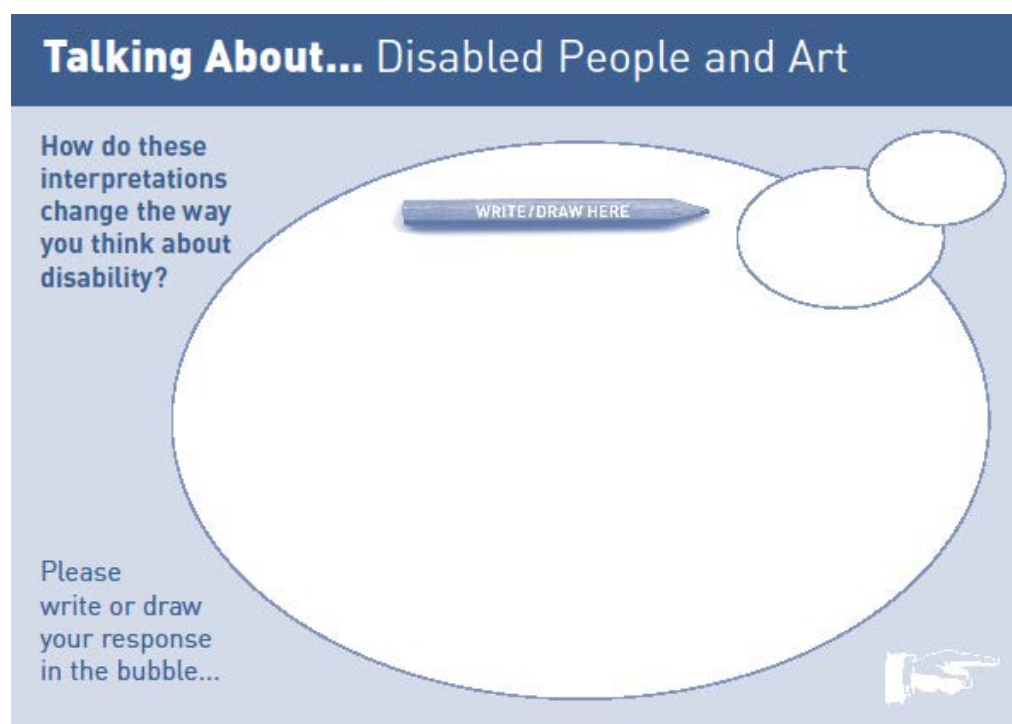
2.1.2 Distribution and collection of the response cards

The response cards were collected by the museums throughout the evaluation period (2007-2008) and sent to RCMG in batches. When received by RCMG, cards were categorised by museum and given a unique number. Each card was given a suffix determined from the name of the museum:

BM	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
CM	Colchester Castle Museum
GM	Glasgow Museum of Transport
IWM	Imperial War Museum
RLH	Royal London Hospital Museum
SM	Stamford Museum
TWM	Tyne and Wear Museums
NM	Northampton Museum
WM	Whitby Museum

The target number of response cards for all nine projects was 1500-2000 based on the maximum capacity for analysis and interpretation. Target numbers of response cards for individual museums were agreed in advance according to the size of the project, site, and estimated visitor numbers. For the 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' film (Royal London Hospital Museum) additional response cards were completed during focus groups with students from Leicester and Leeds Universities and at an evening reception organised at the Imperial War Museum.

Table 1 shows the target number of response cards and final number collected for each museum. Some museums did not find it possible to meet the targets set for them at the

beginning of the evaluation. Where possible, RCMG used project officers and research staff to administer the response cards, which resulted in a higher response rate from visitors.

Table 1: Target and final number of response cards for each RDR project

Museum	Target number of response cards	Final number of response cards
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery	350	181
Colchester Castle Museum	400	493
Glasgow Museum of Transport	500	165
Imperial War Museum	300	195
Royal London Hospital Museum	100	61
Stamford Museum	150	97
Tyne and Wear Museums	450	144
Northampton Museum	150	428
Whitby Museum	100	20
Total	**2500**	**1784**

In total, 1784 response cards were completed across the nine museum projects, 71% of the original target number established at the outset of the project. This was a very positive response for this kind of research; usually response rates can be as low as 30-40%. Four museums were very close to or surpassed their target of response cards (Colchester, Royal London Hospital, Stamford and Tyne and Wear) whilst the remaining museums ranged from 65% – 20% response rate.

2.1.3 Analysis of the response card data

Two databases were developed to manage the data collected in the response cards – visitor comments and demographic data. An EXCEL database was used to log the response card and its number along with the written information from the open question. Where the respondents had drawn their response this information was also logged in the form of an interpretation of what the drawing showed. A second SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) database was used to record the demographic data and generate statistical information and cross-tabulations. The unique number given to each response card enabled links to be made between the two databases and to ensure that response cards had all their information captured in a systematic, through manner by research staff entering the data.

A third computer package was used to analyse the qualitative data from the response cards, QSR N6, (also known as NVIVO), which enables documents to be coded to descriptive categories called 'nodes.' The large volume of data generated by the response cards, interviews and focus groups meant that a computer package was essential for ensuring a systematic and thorough analysis. Initially, a content analysis was carried out on the response cards. The way in which participants talked about disability and their experiences of the museum projects shaped the themes (or free codes) emerging from the response cards. Responses were also multiply coded so that one response card might have any number of codes attached to it, depending on the content. Seventy-nine free codes in total emerged from the content analysis. These were then developed into a 'coding tree' through discussion and pairing similar themes (nodes) into 'parent nodes.' This created sub-categories, or 'umbrella' categories, that reflected the

strongest theme coming from several of the original free codes. These sub-categories were further grouped into three over-arching themes to represent the predominant ways in which audiences engaged with the nine RDR projects. These themes then formed the framework for analysis and interpretation. The coding categories have been used flexibly and changes have been made to the codes if they were felt to fit better with other categories to the one in which they had originally been assigned.

Table 2 represents the 'coding tree' with its three over-arching themes, sub-categories and initial free codes which emerged directly from the data. The number of documents assigned to each theme or node is included in the table to give a sense of the scale of visitor responses in each category. Although this was primarily a qualitative study, the numerical data gives a broad view of how visitors responded to the topic of disability representation. The multiple coding of response cards and interviews means that percentages must be extrapolated with care. A response card or interview may appear in one or all three of the key themes so where percentages are given these will be used for discreet categories rather than for comparison purposes.

After the initial content analysis, the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) were used to analyse the response cards to explore the learning impact of the museum projects. The GLOs take learning in its broadest sense, capturing outcomes in the following five dimensions:

- Knowledge and understanding

- Skills

- Attitudes and values

- Enjoyment, inspiration and creativity

- Action, behaviour and progression.

This framework was used more as a guide to ensure that the five dimensions of learning were considered in their fullest sense rather than a systematic attempt to discern the number of instances that a particular GLO occurred within the data.

Table 2: Coding Tree

Over-arching theme	No. of documents	Sub-category	No. of documents	Free codes
How people engaged with disability: framing the messages	828	Equality	247	Equal rights and opportunities
				Same as or equal to non-disabled people
				Disabled people are 'normal'
				Disabled people are the same but different
				Treat disabled people the same or equal to non-disabled people
				Shouldn't discriminate against disabled people
				'Could happen to anyone'
		Debating the concept of disability	113	People are just different
				See the person not the impairment
				We are all disabled in some way
				What is 'disability'?
				Disabled people should not be singled out
		Recognition of social barriers	258	'It's hard being disabled'
				Little has changed for disabled people
				Society creates disability
				Disabled people are marginalised by society
				Society marginalises those seen as different
				More needs to be done to overcome barriers or include disabled people
				Accessibility or barrier identification
		Tragedy or Deficit?	184	Feel lucky not to be disabled
				'Always someone worse off'
				Technology or surgery can help disabled people
				Expresses pity, feels sorry or sympathy for disabled people
				Disabled people need our help and support
				Disability as personal tragedy
				Spare a thought for the carers, families and other people affected by disability
				Disabled people should make non-disabled people aware of their disability
				Isolation

Over-arching theme	No. of documents	Sub-category	No. of documents	Free codes
		Heroic survivors / admiration	132	Disabled people should be proud of who they are
				Non-disabled people take things for granted
				Non-disabled people cannot understand what it is like to be disabled
				How disabled people can overcome, cope with or adapt to their impairment
				Disabled people are 'special' 'brave' 'strong' etc
				Hopeful
				Being disabled 'does not ruin your life'
				Disabled people see or feel things differently
		Prejudice, stereotypes and stigma	90	How the non-disabled view disabled people
				Examples of prejudice, stereotypes and stigma
Approach to the topic	860	Support for the aims of the exhibition	517	Positive comment about the exhibition, workshop, display, interpretation, film, workshop etc
				Good to educate other people about disability
				Good to raise awareness of disability issues
				Positive messages of disability
				The museum is an appropriate place
				Challenging stereotypes
				Well balanced, objective display or interpretation
		Media specific comments	212	Comment on the exhibition etc not related to disability representation
				Not all experiences are represented in the museum
				Representation of disabled people
		Affective response	81	Empathy
				Other emotional response
				Enabling dialogue about disability
		Museums are NOT appropriate places for these issues	30	The museum is NOT the place
				Preaching, propaganda or bias
		Understanding through personal experience	149	Personal experience
				Deaf politics
		Value authentic, unmediated experience of disabled people	132	Voice or lived experience of disabled people
				Different ways of seeing

Over-arching theme	No. of documents	Sub-category	No. of documents	Free codes
Learning impact and change	812	Thinking differently about disability		How attitudes towards or life for disabled people has changed over time
				Learnt more about disabled people or disability
				Thought provoking or eye opening
				More sensitive or aware
				Link to contemporary issues
				Inspired to do something (action)
				What is acceptable language and behaviour?
		Attitudes towards disabled people	249	Change in attitude
				Respect for disabled people
				More than meets the eye to disabled people
				'Not their fault they are disabled'
				Shouldn't feel pity for disabled people or see them as victims
				Disabled people are part of society
				Disabled people can achieve and have talents like non-disabled people
				Identity
		Reinforcement of message	215	No change in attitude
				Reinforced attitudes

2.1.4 Other evaluation tools

Qualitative evaluation tools were used to explore visitor responses in greater depth at selected sites. These were selected to meet the specific needs and context of each project - the focus of qualitative research is to understand particular events in specific settings, with an emphasis on developing a holistic understanding of phenomena and their contexts. Possible methods included observation, focus groups, interviews and accompanied visits.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with members of the public and invited participants to three of the museum projects - Colchester Castle Museum, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and Tyne and Wear Museums – and with two schools attending workshops at the Imperial War Museum. Table 3 gives the number of interviews conducted at each site – participants were interviewed individually, in pairs or in small groups. Interview themes covered visitor's reactions to the displays, key messages (what is being communicated by the museum), museum context (how the RDR display or intervention fits in with the rest of the museum) and final thoughts (e.g. has it made them think any differently about disabled people). Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 3: Number of interviews conducted at each selected RDR site

Museum	Number of interviews
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery	20 interviews – visitors and invited participants
Colchester Castle Museum	8 interviews – visitors and invited participants
Imperial War Museum	1x museum staff / Graeae Theatre company Teacher and 2 pupil groups from School 1 Teacher and 2 pupil groups from School 2
Tyne and Wear Museums	6 interviews at Discovery Museum 3 interviews at South Shields Museum and Art Gallery

Two focus groups were held with Museum Studies postgraduate students from the University of Leicester (16 January 2008) and postgraduate students at the Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds (23 January 2008) to elicit their responses to the 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' film. Reflections were written up by the facilitators of the focus groups and participants were asked to complete a response card.

A check on the reliability of the content analysis for the response cards came from a separate analysis of the interviews. Researchers in the team were allocated a number of interviews each and analysed them using the codes developed from the response cards while looking out for instances where additional codes might be developed. There was a remarkable similarity between the themes emerging from the interviews and the categories developed from the response cards – no additional coding categories were felt to be necessary. The preliminary analysis and interpretation of the response cards was written up in detail, drawing on examples from the response cards and interviews so that the voices of

the respondents could clearly emerge. These findings form the main content of this Working Paper.

2.2 Who took part in the evaluation?

It was planned to reach a variety of groups through the evaluation including the general public, schools, disabled people and BSL language users. In practice this was achieved through the response cards, interviews and focus groups. Response cards were used with schools in Colchester, Tyne and Wear and a separate response card was designed for schools visiting the Imperial War Museum for a workshop. Two focus groups were carried out with postgraduate students from two universities. Interviews were held with teachers and pupils from two schools visiting the IWM. Disabled people were invited to take part in interviews and complete response cards at Birmingham, Colchester and Tyne and Wear, and the general public were reached through the response cards and interviews across the museum projects.

2.2.1 Analysis of the demographic data (response cards)

Demographic data was collected through the response cards, from which we can establish a basic picture of who completed a response card. The majority of museum visitors who completed a response card were women (62%) (Figure 2). This pattern was repeated across the nine museums, except for the Imperial War Museum and Glasgow Museums where the percentage of cards from both genders was more evenly distributed. In particular, Northampton Museum and Art Gallery (83%) and Royal London Hospital Museum and Archive (80%) stand out as having very high numbers of female respondents.

Figure 2: Who completed a response card? Gender
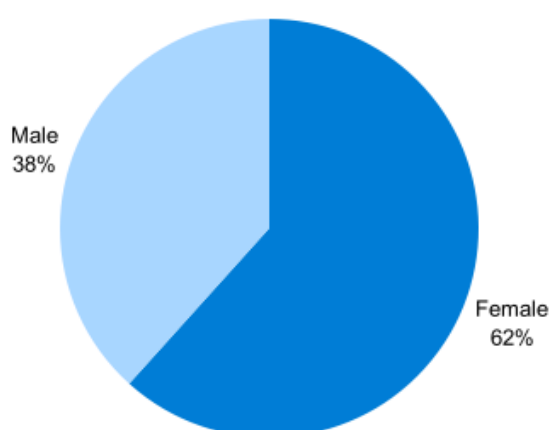
N=1542 (excludes missing, 242 responses)

The largest proportion of cards were completed by young people aged under 16 years (37%), followed by those aged 16-25 (18%). The smallest proportion of cards was completed by visitors aged 76 years and over (1%). It is not directly possible to compare these findings with general statistics for museums and galleries in the UK as different age categories are used, and children are often omitted. However a recent poll by MORI for England showed that the older age groups tended to be under-represented in museums (for example 65+ years represents 20% of England's population compared to 12% of visitors to museums and galleries) and the age groups that were over-represented were 35-44 years and 45-54 years (MLA 2005). The numbers of children and young people completing response cards across the nine museum projects can be attributed, for instance, to high returns from the Imperial War Museum (96% of respondents aged 16 years and under, excluding missing), who worked exclusively with school groups, and Tyne and Wear Museums (68% of respondents aged under 16 years, excluding missing) who had a number of school groups attending workshops around the exhibition 'One in Four' alongside family visitors. There were also some instances where adults completed cards for the children accompanying them.

Figure 3: Who completed a response card? Age
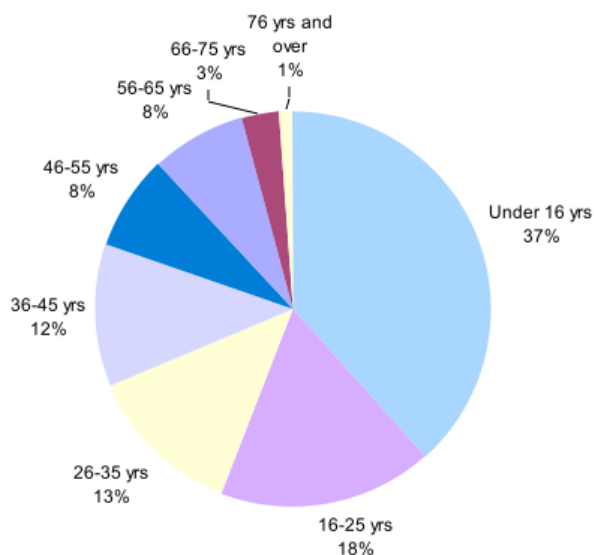
N=1489 (excludes missing, 295 responses)

The majority of visitors to the RDR museum projects completing a response card (excluding the IWM) identified as White (90%). There were much smaller percentages of respondents who identified as Asian (4%), Mixed (2%), Black (1%), Chinese (1%) and Other (2%) – Figure 4. These findings correspond very roughly to the ethnic make-up of the United Kingdom as based on the 2001 Census: 92.1% of the UK population were classed as White; 4.0% classed as Asian or Asian British; 1.2% classed as Mixed; 2.0% classed as Black or Black British; 0.4% classed as Chinese; and 0.4% classed as Other (National Statistics 2005).

Figure 4: Who completed a response card? Ethnicity
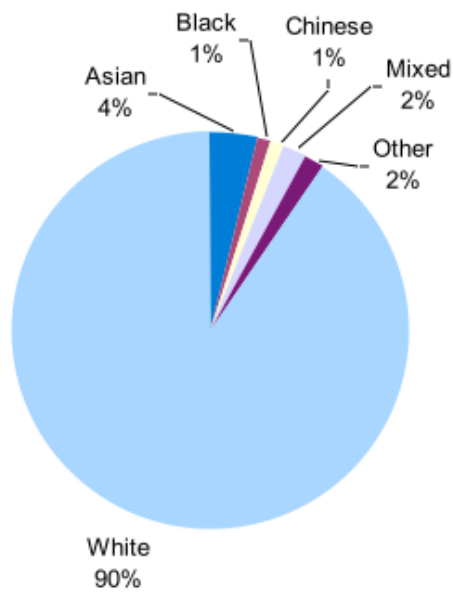
N=1259 (excludes missing, 330 responses)

With relevance to the theme of disability representation, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were disabled or non-disabled. Across the museum projects (Figure 5), the majority of respondents identified as non-disabled (91%).[10]

Figure 5: Who completed a response card? Disability
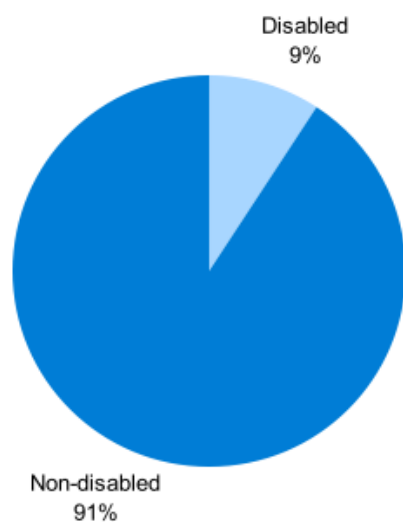
N=1386 (excludes missing, 398 responses)

According to the latest Government figures, in the United Kingdom there are around 6.9 million disabled people of working age, so one-fifth (20%) of the total working age

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[10] Three hundred and ninety-eight (398) respondents declined to respond to this question, noticeably more than for Age or Gender, although there was a similarly high decline rate for Ethnicity. It may be that respondents did not see the relevance of the question or found it too intrusive.

population (Disability Rights Commission 2007). It was not possible to find any reliable statistics on how many disabled people visit museums and galleries in the UK, but it is acknowledged that disabled people are an under-represented group in museum audiences. It is likely that numbers of disabled visitors to museums is generally very low.

Finally, during the analysis of the response cards a note was made as to whether the respondent made a comment or only completed the basic details on the back. It was incredibly positive that almost all visitors who completed a response card left a comment (Figure 6). The richness of the data was possibly linked to the question, the design of the card (which showed it was valued by the museums) and administering the card at selected sites.

Figure 6: Who completed a response card? Number of comments
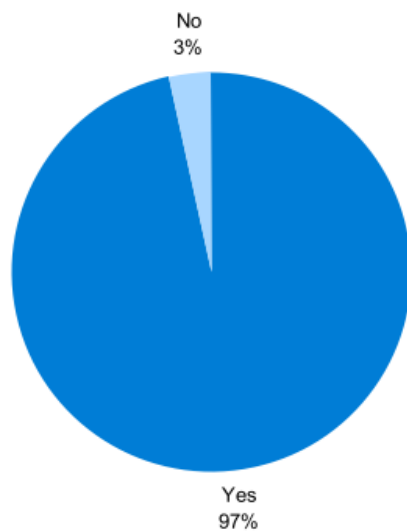
N=1589

Visitors were asked to provide information on their postcode and place where they lived.[11] Based on previous research projects, place and postcode are useful for providing information about the levels of deprivation experienced in the area a visitor lives. This can help to create a picture of the types of people visiting the museum and completing a response card during the nine museum projects.

One thousand, one hundred and sixty five (1165) respondents indicated where they came from on the response card. Figure 7 gives an overview of where respondents came from by country. Most of the visitors to the eight museums came from England (87%), suggesting the local nature of the museum audiences contained within this study (seven museums were located in England). The inclusion of Glasgow Museums can be attributed to the 9% of visitors from Scotland, with much smaller numbers of 'Other UK' (Wales and Northern Ireland) (1%) and Non-UK visitors (4%). Non-UK visitors came from Australia, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Eire, France, Germany, Norway, New Zealand, Turkey, Taiwan and USA.

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[11] The Imperial War Museum were excluded from this information as it was felt inappropriate for school pupils to give their location or postcode.

Figure 7: Who completed a response card? Place
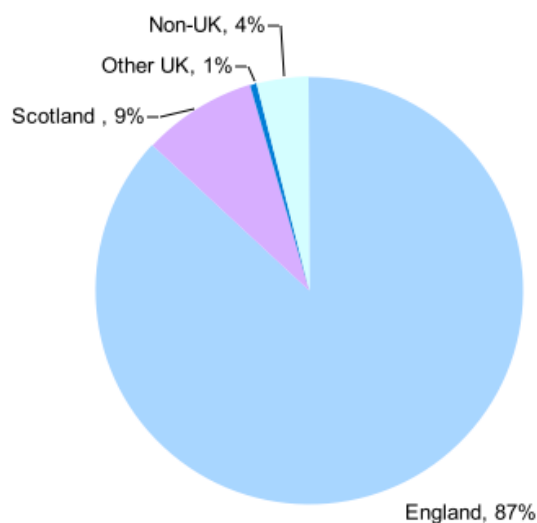
N=1165 (excludes missing, 619 respondents)

As well as place, visitors were asked to provide a postcode in order to estimate the levels of deprivation experienced by the area in which the visitor lived. Previous research studies by RCMG[12] have taken the postcodes of school pupils and project participants in the UK and analysed them using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation produced for the UK, which are subject to continuous revision, are based on the premise that individuals ultimately experience deprivation. They are composite indices derived from a number of sub-indices including health, education, crime and barriers to housing and services. There are some limitations to this method. There are separate indices for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the way in which these Indices are constructed means that it is not possible to make comparisons between them. Furthermore, social exclusion and deprivation are multi-dimensional problems which even multiple criteria indices may fail to represent adequately. The levels of deprivation identified by an individual's postcode may not necessarily represent the levels of deprivation experienced as it assumes characteristics are shared across a specific area determined by those who construct the indices.[13]

The English postcode data was analysed using the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 (Communities and Local Government undated). The IMD 2007 measures multiple deprivation at Lower Super Output Area (SOA) level (aggregates of Census output areas with units of, on average, 1500 individuals) with the intention of identifying smaller pockets of

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[12] This method has been used previously in RCMG studies such as *What did you learn at the museum today? Second Study. Evaluation of the outcomes and impact of learning through the implementation of the Education Programme Delivery Plan across nine Regional Hubs* (2005), and *The Madonna of the Pinks: Evaluation of the Education and Community strategy for the Madonna of the Pinks* (2008).

[13] Challenges of using the IMD 2004 have been accounted for in detail in previous research studies; see Hooper-Greenhill et al, (2006), *What did you learn at the museum today? Second Study*, p69-73

deprivation which might otherwise be hidden at the larger ward level. The IMD 2007 is a composite index derived from 37 different indicators which cover specific dimensions of deprivation including Income, Employment, Health and Disability, Education, Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Services, Living Environment and Crime. These indicators are weighted and combined to create the overall IMD 2007. In England there are 32,482 LSOAs and these have been ranked from 1 for the most deprived to 32,482 for the least deprived LSOA. The guidance for the IMD 2007 makes the important point that the IMD 2007 is not a measure of affluence:

> The indicators which have been used have been chosen because they represent different aspects of deprivation. A lack of deprivation does not necessarily equate to affluence. Therefore, the LSOAs with the highest ranks (i.e. close to 32,482) are not necessarily affluent, just less deprived.

For each English postcode, the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) and IMD 2007 rank was found using the Neighbourhood Statistics website.[14] Each ranked postcode was sorted into 10% categories (calculated from 1 - 32,482 to include all LSOAs in England) to give an overview of how the analysed postcodes represent the deprivation experienced by respondents. Those postcodes falling into the Top 10% and 10%-20% categories could be seen as the individuals most likely to experience significant deprivation, with postcodes falling into the Bottom 10% to be the least likely to experience deprivation. There was a fairly even distribution across all of the categories with no overall picture to show that visitors to the RDR sites were more likely or less likely to experience deprivation.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2006 is used in Scotland to identify the deprivation of individuals from their postcodes, using the same small area analysis as the IMD 2007. Like its English counterpart, the SIMD 2006 provides a relative measure of deprivation by providing a ranking from the most deprived (rank 1) to least deprived (rank 6,505) data zone. The Scottish Government's website explains that the SIMD 'is used to identify Scotland's most deprived small areas on the overall index and each individual domain, commonly by applying a cut-off such as 10%, 15% or 20%. The percentage should be informed by whether it aims to target areas with the very highest concentrations of deprivation or to be wider ranging.'[15] Like the IMD 2007 the SIMD is a weighted sum of scores from seven domains, which are made up of thirty-seven indicators. The seven domains are Current income, Employment, Health, Education, Skills and training, Housing, Geographic access and Crime. Similarly to the English postcodes the SIMD 2006 rank was identified for the 55 Scottish postcodes supplied by RDR audiences. Following the Scottish Government's website, the 'cut off' of 15% was chosen as this is felt to represent the highest concentration of deprived areas. Fifteen per cent (15%) of 6,505 (representing the number of 'data zones' in Scotland) was calculated to be 975; all postcodes falling under this range were categorised as the top 15% of deprived data zones in Scotland and postcodes above this range were categorised as the 'less deprived' data zones in Scotland. Figure 8 shows

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[14] http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/ [accessed 24 07 2008]
[15] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/BackgroundMethodology [accessed 24 07 2008]

that from the postcodes identified from visitors living in Scotland, 27% can be categorised as being located in the top 15% of deprived data zones in Scotland. This is almost a third of visitors in Scotland.

Figure 8: Who completed a response card? Postcodes in Scotland
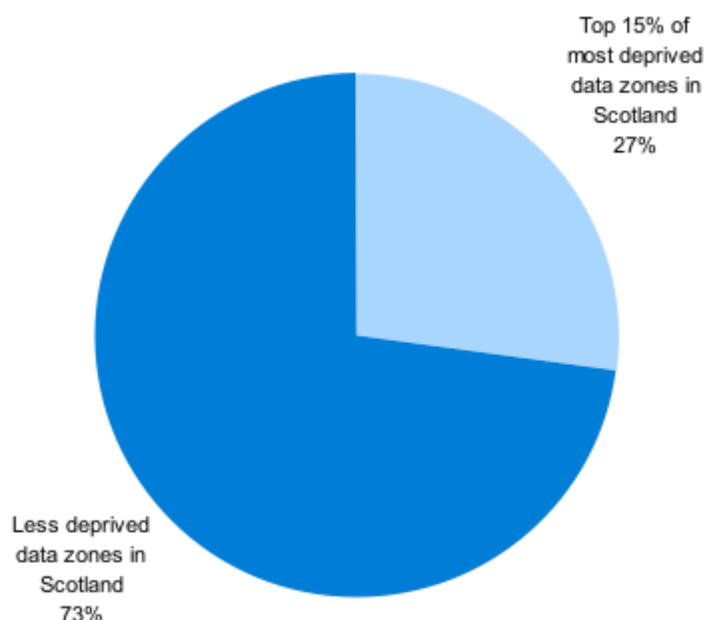
N= 55

The majority of Scottish postcodes (50) were supplied by visitors to Glasgow Museums and, within this, 12 of the 15 postcodes which make up the Top 15% of deprived data zones in Scotland are located in Glasgow. This is likely to be a reflection of audiences to Glasgow Museums which are popular with visitors from a wide social spectrum.

There were very few postcodes from other areas of the United Kingdom – eight postcodes from Wales and Northern Ireland – and it was felt that a postcode analysis of these would reveal little useful information.

2.2.2 Conclusion

Data methods were chosen to yield rich and substantial evidence of visitors' experiences of the nine RDR projects. The response card provided an overview across the projects whilst semi-structured interviews and focus groups provided in-depth information for particular sites and projects. The high response rate and quality of visitor responses (shown in the range of topics covered in the Coding Tree, Table 2) could be attributed to the overwhelmingly supportive response to the nine projects, a question which provoked responses from visitors, the appealing design of the response card and administering the response card directly to visitors where possible.

Excluding the Imperial War Museum, most museum visitors who completed a response card were female, white, non-disabled and from England. It was more difficult to ascertain their age and the levels of deprivation which they may have experienced where they live, however high numbers of young people aged from under 16 to 25 years old completed a response card (55%) and in Scotland, almost a third of visitors (27%) were living in the Top 15% of deprived areas. Further statistical analysis would be needed to ascertain the significance of this data.

When combined with the in-depth data from the interviews and focus groups, the comments made by visitors on the response cards give a valuable overview of how people engage with disability, their approach to the topic raised in the museum, and evidence of change in attitudes towards disability and disabled people. It is to the analysis of the comments that we now turn.

2.3 Emerging findings from the visitor responses

The following sections pull together the preliminary findings from 1615 response cards, 43 interviews and 2 focus groups. The two research questions framing the research were:

- In what ways do audiences respond to, and engage with, the projects they encounter in RDR?

- To what extent – if at all – have attitudes towards disability and disabled people been changed?

The initial coding and discussion of visitor responses to the nine projects resulted in three over-arching themes which describe how visitors respond to, and engage with, the nine museum projects (Table 2):

- How people engaged with disability: framing the messages

- Approach to the topic

- Learning impact and change

A summary of the key emerging findings is given here - the following sections provide more detail and examples of visitor comments from which these findings are drawn.

2.3.1 A positive response to the nine museum projects

Looking across the response cards emerged a very positive response from visitors to the nine RDR projects which suggest that most visitors supported the aims of RDR. This is a very encouraging finding which validates the approach of the nine museums - the consensus seems to be that disability is a topic that most museum visitors will be interested in, can identify with and can engage with. Direct references were categorised as 'support for the aims of the museum and its message' which make up 60% of the total documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic' (see Table 2). Another category 'positive comments about

the exhibition, workshop, display, film, workshop etc' can be regarded as a 'catch-all' category for all responses which conveyed some kind of explicitly positive comment about the way in which the museum had approached the topic of disability representation. A total of 455 documents were coded to this category, 53% of documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic' (860 documents).[16] Included in this category were visitors who felt the museum reinforced their attitudes rather than changed them yet were still pleased to see this information included within the museum.

The positive response from visitors appeared to be connected to the way in which they perceived the museum as a site of learning or a forum for discussion of potentially 'controversial' or contestable topics. It seemed from quite a few of the responses that visitors came into the museum expecting to learn some kind of information; that as a site used by the public the museum was a place that could help to spread awareness of issues such as the representation of disabled people. This was expressed in visitors' comments that reflected the theme of 'It is good to raise awareness of these issues' or 'It is good to educate others about these matters' – this response was also evident where respondents felt that although they already were well informed on this matter it was a good thing to educate or inform others. The interviews seemed to shed further light on this phenomenon; that the museum as a public site validates the information within its displays because it confers authority upon it. By enabling disabled people to become the focus of the exhibitions, displays and films, this authority is conferred upon them and their lives. Even when visitors did not expect such issues to be confronting them directly in the museum, the unexpected nature of the exhibition, display or interpretative method (and again this is more a finding from the interviews rather than the response cards) sometimes worked in its favour, with visitors having to take notice of a topic they would not expect to see in the museum. Certainly amongst the response cards and interviews there were a number of highly affective responses to the exhibition or display, some respondents writing or talking at length about their experiences, suggesting that their interaction with the 'topic' had sparked off some emotional reaction, often highly charged depending on the respondents' engagement with (or personal experience of) the topic.

The success of the visitor encounter with the topic is also in respect to the way in which the topic has been presented to visitors – although this varies from museum to museum, a feature common to all is the inclusion of the voice and 'real' experiences of disabled people. Whilst the support for this approach can be seen in the general levels of support for the way in which the topic has been presented in the museums, visitors talked about how they valued the inclusion of the personal experiences of disabled people. Where this issue was explored in greater depth in the interviews it can be seen that for some visitors these experiences are compelling because they confer authenticity upon the exhibitions; they show real life – they are about the real experiences of real people. In return, some visitors felt very happy to share their own experiences (through the response cards and the

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[16] 517 documents coded to 'positive comments' can appear to be limited when expressed as a percentage of the total documents coded (31% of 1658). This may have been because the question on the response card was designed to invoke a response from the visitor around change in how they think about disability rather than their opinions on the display, like more conventional evaluation methods?

interviews) of either being disabled or knowing disabled people through their professional or family lives. The open-ness of the exhibitions and displays in terms of the feelings of disabled people and how they engage with society perhaps encouraged respondents to be equally open, or engendering emotions such as anger, sympathy, righteous indignation (for the ways in which disabled people are marginalised by society) or hopeful optimism (for how things might improve) in response to the stories told in the museum.

2.3.2 Recognising social barriers – how visitors engaged with the message

The museums and galleries involved in the Rethinking Disability Representation (RDR) project applied the philosophy of the social model to their work. The nine RDR museum projects intended to offer to visitors and to society more broadly, alternative (non-prejudiced) ways of thinking about disability. Museums are seen as playing a role in shaping and framing the conversations which visitors have about difference so that alternative ways of thinking may have the potential to change the way in which visitors perceive the lives and experiences of disabled people. However, disability and impairment have a long history of religious, charitable and welfare based stigma which can evoke pity or prompt views of impairment as synonymous with tragedy. Such sentiments are often encouraged and promoted by contemporary media with impairment being viewed as a tragedy or deficit needed to be fixed, cured or put right. These types of views also tend to dehumanise disabled people, often without the knowledge of the commentator who offers what they feel is an empathetic or sympathetic view on the position of disabled people which can often veer between individual and social perspectives, but places the individual medicalised foci as the signifier of greater importance (see Working Paper 1). At the same time, disability issues may be seen as social justice issues related to the equality and the full civil rights of all people including those who are disabled to enjoy an active life, free from attitudinal prejudice, environmental and social barriers. Many visitors recognised a number of social barriers that disabled people face through visits to the RDR exhibitions while others drew on attitudes, issues of prejudice, stereotypes and stigma to identify their dislike and recognition of the societal rejection of difference. It was also clear that many visitors had not considered issues of disability from a social perspective previously and that the exhibitions prompted some of them to think about this for the first time as each of the museum projects were believed to promote new knowledge and raise awareness of the social issues facing disabled people on a daily basis. This was in part linked to the different themes of the museum projects at different sites. However, there was also a certain amount of contradictory-ness and ambivalence in how visitors talked about disability as they remained on the boundary between the tragedy and social models, or questioned the new ways of thinking offered by the museum.

As Table 2 shows, the highest proportion of visitors within the theme of 'How people engaged with disability' connected with the recognition of social barriers for disabled people (31%) and equality issues (30%). Issues of tragedy and deficit were discussed by 22% of visitors but these were not straightforward and many comments revealed an underlying social bias when taking into account the contextual factors present. Evidence of prejudice, stereotypes and stigma were discussed by 11% of visitors, however, these comments often referred to the dislike of such attitudes offering more views that are positive. Debating the

concept of disability (14%) produced some ambiguity and opened up interesting debates on the status of the issue of disability and individual reactions to the concept of disability itself. The final grouping was a complex grouping which questioned the extent to which the disabled person as 'heroic survivor' may be developed to offer a social barriers approach for commentators (16%).

2.3.3. An opportunity for learning

The research methods were designed to capture evidence of that change in terms of the impact that the nine RDR projects had on visitors, particularly through the response cards which asked the question 'How does this [intervention] change the way you think about disability?' Many responses suggested that a change had taken place in the visitor's thinking about disability,[17] and 812 documents were coded to the theme 'Learning impact and change' which represents 49% of the total number of response cards and interviews (Table 2).

As the response cards were multiply coded, there were crossovers with other themes and categories. Particular elements of the nine RDR museum projects were attributed by respondents to changing their views on disabled people and disability, such as the inclusion of disabled peoples' voices and real life experiences in the exhibitions and displays, which visitors felt enabled them to see disabled people in new ways and enhanced their understanding, whilst the framing of the exhibitions and displays using the social model enabled them to recognise the barriers in society that prevent disabled people living full and independent lives.

The largest proportion of documents within this theme (56%) was coded to 'Thinking differently about disability.' Visitors appreciated the new perspectives offered on disabled people and these appeared to be catalyst for a change in their attitudes or perception of disabled people. Visitors broadened their conception of what disabled people are capable of, discussed how stereotypes had been challenged and reflected on earlier mis-conceptions. There was evidence from visitors of increased knowledge and understanding e.g. how society creates barriers that 'disables' people rather than impairments. There seemed to be a realisation amongst some visitors that it is the attitudes of people 'like them' which can also have an impact on disabled people's acceptance and quality of life, which often expressed itself in the visitor's stated desire for greater awareness and education to combat stereotypical views. Some visitors were driven to question the language they used or their behaviour towards disabled people, whilst other visitors stated that they would put into action some of the thoughts and ideas stimulated by the RDR museum project.

Thirty-one per cent (31%) of response cards and interviews expressed a change in attitudes towards disabled people compared to 26% of visitors who considered the museum reinforced or did not change their attitudes towards disabled people. This response was

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[17] Whilst some visitors referred directly to the change taking place this is not always the case. However, the direct-ness of the question asked of visitors through the response card suggested that some visitors were implying that their thinking had changed even if they had not explicitly stated 'my thinking has changed because…' There was a certain amount of interpretation necessary to unpick the meaning behind some visitor's comments and this will need to be discussed further.

given even if the response card showed that the visitor had learned some new knowledge or gained a greater understanding of disabled people. There was a distinction, therefore, made between attitudes and awareness – it seemed that some visitors considered awareness of issues could be increased without having an impact on underlying attitudes. Some of the responses from visitors seemed quite defensive in that the response card question, by directly seeking evidence of change, was suggesting that their attitudes towards disabled people were 'wrong' or at fault. It was also evident from the responses categorised in this section that visitors had particular conceptions of learning which impacted upon their understanding of the question – what does it mean to change one's thinking around disability? Some visitors commented that whilst they had learnt new information or increased their awareness of disabled people and their experiences, it had not changed their underlying attitudes and opinions towards disability and disabled people. Again this may stem from the understanding that the question was assuming that the public have ways of thinking about disability that need to be changed and the visitor is 'performing their own tolerance' by suggesting that their way of thinking about disability does not need to be changed?

2.3.4 The complexity of visitor responses

A significant narrative emerging is the museum can communicate messages around a topic which visitors will identify and incorporate. However, visitors do not enter the museums as 'blank slates.' They have their own prior knowledge, experience and ideas surrounding disability which have been shaped by the social and cultural context in which they live. Representations from other media (television, film, radio, newspapers, magazines) play a role in creating and sustaining ideas about disability and visitors will all have been exposed to these representations at some point. The messages communicated by the museum will be 'framed' by visitors' prior experiences and expectations. What are the implications? Visitors will exhibit a range of views. Some visitors used the museum projects to reinforce ideas that they already hold, some of which seemed to be unintended by the museum. The response cards and the interviews reveal deeply-seated stereotypes, representations, fears and prejudices which continue to frame the ways in which disabled people are perceived. Some responses contain ambiguous or seemingly contradictory attitudes towards disability and disabled people or may appear 'negative' in that they repeat or sustain conventional attitudes (based on the individual or tragedy model) towards disabled people. Whilst attitudes towards disabled people may be 'less commonly expressed with the malevolence and vitriol that other groups may experience' (Sandell, 2007:142) there exists a form of 'benevolent prejudice' which is expressed through the language of care, normality and sameness, and rejects a political independent identity for disabled people – this is a topic which needs to be discussed in greater detail with the Think Tank.

Some visitors did not appreciate seeing the topic of disability representation in the museum or, conversely, felt that it was a worthy topic which had been mis-handled by the museum or gallery. Criticisms included the layout and way in which the message had been presented (dislike of the presentation, not interactive enough, in-accessible); the tone of the message being conveyed (too confrontational, too preachy, objection to what appeared to be propaganda); and the use of the museum for something which the respondent felt it was

not intended for. Even if they cushioned their disapproval with the idea that the exhibition was worthy in conception, the fact that they went on to say that the museum 'is not the right place' for such an exhibition seemed to demonstrate that the visitors' conception of what a museum is and what it does conflicted with the approach taken by the museums – whereas the unexpected nature of the exhibitions and displays appealed to some visitors, for some it effectively prevented them from engaging.

In some respects, the analysis reveals the limitations of the response card method because we can only interpret as far as the text (and not the intention behind it). Whilst the response card gives a broad overview of visitor responses, only the initial response is captured and the visitor response might be quite different after an opportunity for reflection. However, the interviews carried out at various venues sought to overcome this limitation and develop the ideas further. Through this combination of methods, it emerged that the issues identified in the response cards were not dissimilar to those identified within the interviews, thus vindicating the two approaches. The disability literature (and to an extent, the museum studies literature) can further illuminate visitor responses to the topic in question. But we must be careful not to (instead) perpetuate the idea of the 'not good enough visitor' who has not picked up the 'right message' from the exhibition or display. There are discussions to be had with the research team and the Think Tank when unpicking the complexity of visitor responses to the nine projects.

2.3.5 A note on language

Drawing on the disability studies literature, it emerges that the language used by visitors is not always appropriate or 'correct.' Disability is often used when the visitor means impairment, and there are instances of outdated terms such as 'handicapped' being used. This is perhaps understandable in the context as people work through their ideas about disability. We will present the language used in the response cards and interviews un-edited but acknowledge the power of language and how it can be (mis)used to discriminate and stigmatise.

Throughout the text, participant's names have been changed in order to protect their confidentiality.

2.4 A positive response to the nine museum projects

On the whole, visitor responses to the nine museum projects were very positive, suggesting that most visitors supported the ways in which the museums approached the topic of disability representation. Words such as 'worthy' 'worthwhile' 'powerful' 'inspiring' and 'commendable' conveyed the importance that respondents placed on the public exposure to issues around disability representation: (e.g. BM106, CM1035, GM79, NM37, RLH1001, SM56):

> I liked the promotion of the 'social model' of disability. Exhibition very well designed – hats off to the designer it's obvious a lot of hard work went into this. Nice to have stories from people too. (TWM319 Female, aged 16-25, non-disabled)

The way in which the nine museums and galleries approached the topic of disability representation appealed to visitors of all ages, from small children to elderly adults. From Tyne and Wear Museums in particular come a number of positive responses from schoolchildren who had attended workshops themed around disability representation (e.g. TWM356):

> I've learnt lots of things about disability. I think this will help me when I grow up it was actually fun learning about it all thank you. (TWM27 Male aged 6, white, non-disabled)

For respondents who accept disability and disabled people as an essential part of life, they had reason to applaud the clear message that they saw emerging from the museums involved; whether for them it was that disabled people are an integral part of society and should be displayed as such rather than hidden away, or that people should not be labelled or judged because of difference in their appearance or ability:

> By exposing all visitors to art about and art done by disabled persons it conveys the message that they are welcome and accepted members of the community, as they should be. Perhaps an exhibition of art done by disabled people would help expose the wider community to the talent in the disabled community. (BM117, male, aged 16-25, non-disabled)

The interaction with the exhibition or display also afforded visitors new perspectives on the topic that they found positive or enjoyable (e.g. CM268, SM142):

> I thought I was clued up on disability but this small exhibition opened my eyes to areas I had not realised. (GM12 Male, aged 56-65, white, disabled)

On a more personal level, for some visitors their support of the exhibition seemed to be linked to their identity as a disabled person (e.g. CM24, RLH6, TWM116):

> Not here….. I'm here ….. At last. (BM1, female aged 36-45)

Respondents with disabled family members and friends or experience of working with disabled people in their professional lives were pleased to see a concern that was close to them addressed in the museum or gallery:

> Helps open my mind even more so to disability which is something that is within my regular life within my family. So therefore is brilliant to see things developing, makes me feel happier and better that things are changing and improving relating to something that is close to home. (BM179 Female aged 16-25, white, non-disabled)

The film 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' seemed to be particularly effective at enabling viewers to empathise with the stories of the disabled people and engaging them in their life stories.[18]

> Familiarising – overcoming old fears. Replacing with positive and complex images of real lives. (RLH66 Female, aged 46-55, white, non-disabled)

The way in which the topic was approached in terms of the display or exhibition layout and media used with which to interpret and convey the message to audiences were also received positively by respondents. The use of mixed media, including films, interactives, visual images, appealed to visitors and the multiplicity of perspectives offered, such as at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery where the opinions of art curators were presented alongside the views of disabled artists, was appreciated by visitors:

> I think initially you wouldn't necessarily know much about disability. I think the information you've got at the side is nice because it makes people have a think about different contexts and how people make it. (Irene*, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Views from the response cards also pointed to the increased opportunity for engagement that the interpretation or display developed by the museum offered for visitors, enhancing their capacity (as they describe) for meaning making. Even for those visitors who had prior links to disability, interpretations helped them to understand the lives of disabled people in new ways (e.g. BM147, RLH49, TWM47). In their responses visitors sometimes used the language of the exhibition as a means of articulating their thoughts about it, e.g. from the 'Life beyond the label' exhibition. This may show a degree of support for the exhibition or display in that visitors are incorporating the language used as their own - this phenomenon has also been reflected upon by Sandell (2007).[19]

> Gave a wider view and insight into feelings of everyday people! Explains how people are easily labelled. (CM229 female, aged 16-25, white, non-disabled, visitor to 'Life Beyond the Label')

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[18] It should be noted that where this film was shown in focus groups it was the only focus for the audience, whereas with an exhibition or display there may have been competing elements.

[19] This phenomenon was also noticed in RCMG's research around the National Gallery's exhibition and workshops to accompany the Madonna of the Pinks, particularly by visitors to Bowes Castle Museum who incorporated language used in the exhibition in their responses to researchers.

2.4.1 Giving disabled people a voice

The inclusion of real lives and voices of disabled people in the nine RDR projects invited the audiences to approach the topic of disability representation from the point of view of disabled people. Visitors responded positively to the inclusion of disabled peoples' voices and stories within the exhibition and displays, woven into the exhibitions, displays and other interpretive media, providing as it did a new, authentic perspective to the issues being presented. It 'personalised' the topic of disability representation, lending faces, names and evidence of real, complex lives to disabled people. These personal narratives and experiences of disabled people drew people's attention and sustained their attention, often because they were unexpected in the museum (e.g. CM4, CM108, CM18, CM1069, CM2021, NM27, SM35, SM139, TWM1006, TWM109, TWM159, TWM16, TWM63):[20]

> It was great to hear the voices behind the objects especially the different sides of disability (from birth vs developed). A lovely exhibition. (NM28)

This positive response from visitors supports research elsewhere that the presence of multiple voices in the form of personal stories around a topic enables a connection to be made between the experiences of the individual in the exhibition and the understanding of the visitor. This is especially pertinent when the individuals in the stories and narratives have the attribute of a particular experience that may be different from the lives and experiences of the majority of visitors to the museum. Sandell describes this in relation to visitors at St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life in Glasgow:

> [S]everal visitors commented on the presence of multiple voices (linked to specific named individuals) within the exhibition… The contemporaneity of these personal testimonies further reinforces the possibilities for visitors to make connections with their own lives and experiences… [T]he exhibitions in St Mungo's, by depicting diverse cultures as coevally resident within the city of Glasgow, serve to narrow the distance between viewer and subject… (2007:115)

The use of personal narratives and testimonies can 'facilitate empathetic connections between viewer and subject' (Sandell, 2007:117). Authentic experience seemed to be valued by visitors seeking to understand something which may be outside of their conception, and

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[20] 'Value (valuing) the authentic, unmediated experience of disabled people' was included as a category in the original analysis of the response cards and interviews. In the original analysis this category was conceived of reasonably narrowly so where a visitor explicitly stated (either in the response or interview) that they valued the inclusion of disabled peoples' experiences or voices within the exhibition or display, or it had enabled them to view the topic of disability representation from a new perspective. In total 132 documents were coded in this way, representing 15% of the documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic.' However when reading the response cards to construct this paper it emerged that the strength of the use of disabled peoples' voices had been under-estimated through only looking for explicit examples. Threaded throughout visitors' responses to the exhibitions and displays were suggestions and implied connections with the lived experiences of disabled people, enabling them to express views which perhaps were only possible because of their inclusion, so the impact of personal stories seems much greater.

even those who understand and may experience the same perhaps obtain a significance that their experience is represented in the museum; it obtains value because the museum is a public place. Through the incorporation of real life narratives, museums have demonstrated that they are serious about the subject, engaging with disabled people in developing the exhibitions and displays, working with real people and presenting real lives.

Representing real lives: Sarah (Colchester Castle Museum), who worked with disabled children and young people, found that the personal stories of disabled people in the exhibition enabled to see the young people that she worked with in a new light, as people first and foremost:

> It brings it down to a personal level, whereas a lot of the time disability's talked about on a general level and… a personal experience of it is much more hard hitting than something that's generalised I suppose.

The stories presented in 'One in Four' (Tyne and Wear Museum) contrasted favourably for Joe with the essentially negative stories that people come face to face with in 'everyday' life about disabled people:

> Normally people don't get the chance to talk to a person, a disabled person, face-to-face, and the only stories they hear is… probably negative ones in the papers. And to see them on, like on screen or on paper or on walls, it's a very powerful … like a powerful story.

Abigail, who attended the same exhibition at the Discovery Museum, thought the stories were powerful because they emphasised that there was the possibility for change. One video in particular showed a woman isolated because of her impairment and Abigail considered that by showing people the treatment of disabled people they would see how it could be "put right." Also, through the personal stories Abigail was able to reflect on her own relationship with disabled people, which she felt was important to raising awareness of the subject in peoples' minds. The authenticity of the stories was therefore critical to this process of empathy, as was giving disabled people a voice; they are not spoken for (by parents, carers, charities, politicians, pressure groups) such as in the charity model. William (Colchester Castle Museum) agreed it was vitally important that disabled people were able to represent themselves as they would like to be seen not as others see them (e.g. CM319):

> You look at how [disabled people] presented themselves in those three images. I imagine it's themselves, because the feeling I get is that they have been… active, not passive. It's not been done to them, but they've collaborated.

Disablism = lack of understanding: For many visitors with experience of disability there was a sense that ignorance and prejudice against disabled people ('disablism') is caused by lack of experience or understanding about their lives because of the dominance of the tragedy model (see Working Paper 1) e.g. RLH16, RLH54. The inclusion of the voices and involvement of real disabled people helps to challenge traditional stereotypes because it shows the life of disabled people in their complexity and from different perspectives (e.g. BM63, CM1067, CM1077, CM299, NM19, RLH41, SM73):

And the point of view from a person with a disability… I think that was very unique, I've not heard of that very often before. And as a person with a disability it is nice to know other people are actually getting this (Louisa*, Colchester Castle Museum)

That's what I like, is 'this is how I see myself, this is how I think others see me, this is how I'd like to be seen. That's really important that third bit. (William, Colchester Castle Museum)

Abstract concepts become 'real': At the Imperial War Museum, the session 'Necessity breeds invention' school pupils approached the topic of disability representation through the story of Jack Toper of the Guinea Pig Club, a pilot in the Second World War who underwent extensive surgery to reconstruct his face and body after sustaining massive burns from an aircraft explosion. Jennifer, a Secondary School Teacher, explained how it helped students to engage with the topic through the focus on the story of one individual, a concrete example which made the abstract concept of a disabled person more real:

With this particular session [Necessity breeds invention] that we went to, it brings it home… makes it more alive. You can empathise with it.

The students also valued the focus on real life experiences, immersed in the museum and its collections rather than learning about it in the classroom or from a book:

I think it is good because they have got real life evidence of what was there… if people in history can get more trips and stuff in, they would learn a hell of a lot more than what they would do in a classroom, because you're there and you know what it feels like. (Noah, Student)

For students and their teachers who took part in another session, 'Disability Rights', there was great value in meeting a disabled person and hearing about their experiences of being disabled first-hand "because it brings the message home, somebody talking from personal experience" (Vanessa, Secondary School Teacher).

Other visitors felt that the RDR projects they encountered could be enhanced with the support of disabled people in person to talk about their experiences (e.g. GM132). The most powerful element of the exhibition 'One in Four' for Joe was transforming the abstract concept of a 'disabled person' into something real and tangible through the inclusion of personal lives and experiences. He considered that real stories and experiences have the power to 'change peoples' minds' about disabled people:

Like for normal people who do come… I think it's like a wow factor because… they've heard of disabled people but they've never known all about the disabled people themselves… they get into what the persons were like… They'll watch these stories and… they'll think how can that person go through that?

Historical figures: The powerful role played by the inclusion of real lives also worked for individuals who lived in the past e.g. Daniel Lambert at Stamford Museum and Joseph Merrick at the Royal London Hospital:

> Thank you. I think it says that you are what you are and it doesn't matter what you look like. The display is very good and shows us what [Daniel Lambert] was really like. It also gave us a lot of information. (SM35 Female, aged 13, white, non-disabled)

The film 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' seemed to be particularly effective at enabling viewers to empathise and 'connect' with the lives of disabled people (e.g. RLH1002, RLH72, RLH75, RLH8, RLH17, RLH23, RLH30, RLH66, RLH69, RLH76, RLH78):[21]

> This is a courageous approach – uses real people against a historic background to humanise disability and creates empathy rather than sympathy – which is good. (RLH81 male, aged 66-75, white, non-disabled)

For some visitors this 'change' in the way in which the museum presented such iconic figures was not always welcomed as new perspectives challenged familiar contexts but it provided visitors with much to consider (e.g. RLH43, RLH62, SM1, SM142, SM55, SM73, SM79, SM80, SM94, SM99):

> Challenges your motives for wanting to see Daniel Lambert exhibition! (SM77 Male, aged 46-55, white, non-disabled)

Confrontation and provocation: In representing the real and complex lives of disabled people, the nine RDR projects did not always present positive and comfortable experiences; some could be seen as provocative or confrontational. In the main visitors responded to these aspects positively (e.g. RLH9):[22]

> The wheelchair that was covered in all of the [forms]… I think it was just people's feelings about how to fill in a lot of the forms and things to do with getting their money… but I found that fascinating. I sat and had a little look at what had been written and things. And that was really interesting because I've just never, ever thought that that was a massive issue for disabled people, and it quite clearly is… And just seeing it, the language, how they feel and some of it was really negative but I thought good for them for sort of having that voice to be able to say that. (Jessica, South Shields Museum)

For visitors like Jessica a confrontational approach was effective in drawing their attention to the experiences of disabled people but for some visitors this made them defensive. Sandell draws attention to research by Bagnall (2003) and Riegel (1996) where visitors object to the 'personalisation' of exhibitions and displays, preferring 'to maintain an emotional and cognitive distance from the material and stories they encounter in order to avoid unpleasant memories or discomfort' (2007:115). One visitor to Colchester Castle Museum for instance complained about the 'hostility' from disabled people which he saw as being directed to

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[21] It should be noted that where this film was shown in focus groups it was the only focus for the audience, whereas with an exhibition or display there were many competing elements which may have resulted in a broader response from visitors.

[22] Those visitors who did not respond positively to representations of disabled people have been discussed earlier in (SECTION) which explores criticisms of the exhibition.

non-disabled people like himself who tried to break down barriers, only erecting more barriers in their place.

2.4.2 Raising awareness of disability issues

Visitors supported the aim of the projects in raising awareness of issues around disability and the representation of disabled people.[23] There was a general belief amongst these visitors that exposure to such messages through museum exhibitions could help increase understanding and so potentially impact on how disabled people are viewed by society. In some cases this was linked to visitors who already knew about or had experience of disability so they felt that the museum would be a good opportunity to raise awareness amongst those who did not have the same experiences. (e.g. CM1048, TWM229, BM20):

> For somebody like my husband it definitely would [change his perception]… He's never had to cope with disability at all… But he would go in there and he would take it in and say oh, I didn't know that, because it's not something he would have been interested in and not something discussed in his family at all. (Ashley, Colchester Castle Museum)

There was a sense from some comments that some personal or professional experience of disability was critical for understanding the issues. In Ashley's opinion, it was part of the culture in the UK to avoid issues around disability. Exhibitions like 'Life Beyond the Label' which confronted visitors head-on were effective because they 'forced' people to engage with the subject: "I think it's the subject matter and I think that people reject it unless they've come into contact with it. They just do not want to cope with it at all and I think it's endemic within British society." Visitors differed in whom they felt would benefit from the exhibitions and displays; some were general or non-specific, whereas other visitors were more specific in the particular audiences that they felt would benefit from the exhibition or display (e.g. CM1058, CM2, RLH62):

> I think… raising the awareness for older people as well, because I think like my mum's generation, she would think it's okay to say deaf and dumb and things like that. And she still does. (Jessica, South Shields Museum)

It was important to reach the younger generation because they will become the society of the future. Young people, like the teenagers who visited the Imperial War Museum, felt that it was important to educate their peers about topic because otherwise they would not really understand what it meant to be disabled. Education was seen as an important means of combating ignorance (also see interview with Vanessa, their teacher):

> I think that people my age don't really understand to a greater level to be able to respect it and it's something different and they'll either torment it or just shy away from it… I think they should be taught more. And since going I've learnt a lot more

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[23] Overall 136 documents were coded to the two separate categories of 'Good to educate other people about disability' and 'Good to raise awareness of disability issues', representing 26% of the sub-category 'Support for the aims of the exhibition' and 16% of documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic.'

and I've got a different outlook. And I think every person my age should have that experience because you just need it. (Abby, Student, Imperial War Museum)

A few visitors, whilst they recognised the value of the exhibition, were ambivalent as to whether it would reach other people or not. Whilst some responses also seemed to imply a deficit view of the public in that the exhibition's message would not reach everyone, it may also be a sense of pragmatism:

> No change. Have great respect for all people with disabilities, in fact have someone in my family. May be good for people who have not had or known people. But only if they give it the time to look! (CM289 female aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

2.4.3 Representing disabled people in the museum

Visitor's responses to the representation of disabled people in the museum can be divided into two loose categories; visitors who had an opinion on how disabled people had been represented or visitors making a comment about the representation of disabled people that they saw in a particular display, painting or object. At some points, the visitor linked the representation in the museum to wider social concerns.

Positive views of disability: Connected to the ways in which the museums involved sought to combat stereotypes of disabled people were the positive messages that visitors identified were being conveyed about disabled people through the nine projects.[24] Some visitors in this category liked how the exhibition they saw had been positive because it showed how people lived with their 'disability' ('real' lives) rather than more negative (charity) images of disabled people as dependent and needing help - there was a sense that disabled people were active and independent (e.g. CM2025, TWM1009):

> It's great that disability is not presented as an obstacle to living full, exciting, & enriching life. Great exhibit. (CM206 male, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

Other visitors felt that the exhibition or display had enabled them to feel more positively about 'disability' – that it was not an essentially 'negative' aspect of a person (e.g. SM11)

> Very good exhibition. Highlights a positive approach and social inclusion. (TWM33 Male aged 76+ white non-disabled)

The positive affirmation that things were being done to help disabled people, an exhibition that described action – a narrative of progress – appealed to Veronica (Discovery Museum): "I think it was interesting that it looked at the historical perspective and how things have moved on… So starting from the point and then moving through a timeline to bring you to modern times of what disabled people can do, if that was the message, I thought it was very

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[24] Whether or not these overtly positive messages are appropriate is important in respect to the disability studies literature; a positive 'stereotype' – for instance the 'super-crip - might be regarded as mis-representative as a negative image of disabled people (see Working Paper 1). Furthermore, an overtly celebratory approach to disability and disabled people may also downplay the very real exclusion that disabled people experience in society, an issue that has been discussed with the Think Tank.

good." It was the link made between past and present which was so compelling for Veronica the highlight on change suggesting as it did ways forward for the future. Visitors were pleased that such positive messages about disability and disabled people were being displayed so prominently in a public place (e.g. GM26):

> It's refreshing to see an exhibition on disability which is so positive and in so public a place. I hope it helps people to understand the issue + be a little more ready to help + care (CM209 male, aged 46-55, white, non-disabled)

Visitors appreciated that that it was up to them to decide how they felt about the issues involved:

> Well I'm pleased first of all that there is an exhibition which looks at people, who, in terms of a label, see themselves or are perceived in society as being disabled. It's actually up there open for you to get their direct views as well as you can then make your mind up about how you feel about the words and the way they describe themselves. (William, Colchester Castle Museum)

Representation in art: Because of the nature of the exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, it specifically drew attention to the way in which disabled people are represented in art and this was picked up in the response cards and interviews with visitors (e.g. BM89).

> The first one I went to was the blind girl… And I found it really jumps out at you the things of how they're treated in society… how the perceptions of if you're blind therefore… you can't tell colours or know that there's a lovely rainbow at the side… There's a lot of misconceptions. (Izzy, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

> What isn't talked about is the lack of genuine representation of disabled people. So it's saying that actually there is, there you are, I'm waving my hand here, this whole idea that disabled people are put into situations to create a story and send a message… They're metaphorical, they're symbolic, but not necessarily just a picture about them in the situation and why they're in the situation. (Jason, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

More ambiguous responses: One visitor to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery did not like the expressions of anger shown by disabled people in the paintings: "Whilst I try to understand a disabled person's perspective looking at their art gives me negative "vibes" (BM158 Male, aged 56-65, white, non-disabled). A small number of responses alluded to the idea that the museum or gallery exhibition or display had not represented the experiences of all disabled people, or had focused on particular groups at the expense of others (e.g. BM168, RLH18):

> I just don't think it gave enough of a balanced view of all disabilities. There was a little bit on learning difficulty, quite a lot of physical disability, a little bit on deafness, covered mental health very briefly, just touched on certain aspects, but some conditions were never touched on other than it gave a little overview of what the DDA 2005 said, and it talked about HIV, cancer, multiple sclerosis being covered,

but never delved into conditions like that. And I think it's too easy to think of disability in terms of those few things that were picked out. (Abigail, Discovery Museum)

2.4.4 Emotion and empathy (affective responses)

When working through the response cards it became evident that some visitors were describing emotional reactions to the exhibitions. These emotional responses were not always positive, e.g. anger and frustration could be expressed at the social barriers faced by disabled people, but they suggest that people were able to engage deeply with the material on display.[25] This was particularly the case for 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' (film) which appeared to elicit emotional responses from audiences by the challenging manner in which the topic of disability representation was presented.[26] For Ashley (Colchester Castle Museum) the exhibition 'Life Beyond the Label' was bound to provoke an emotional reaction because it was "displaying things that are still wrong or have gone too far within society." Similar sentiments were expressed by Jason (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery):

> The violence of... the violence of oppression is so powerful and I mean equally powerful to bombs. And you know it might not maim in a physical sense but...

Some of the emotions that the exhibitions and displays evoked included compassion, empathy, horror, pleasure, gratefulness, understanding, and reflection, conveying the very personal nature of visitor engagement with the nine projects (e.g. CM3054, CM72, IWM107, IWM108, IWM71, RLH5, TWM297, TWM301):

> It made me feel really angry actually because they wouldn't even consider doing such a thing now, but in them days that was acceptable to make fun of somebody because they had a particular disability or physical flaw. (Christine, Discovery Museum)

Some emotions appeared to be linked to the respondent's own personal experience of disability or impairment:

> It shows the darkness of how disabled people see the world around them, and us as we see disabled people ... through my own disability (mental health / depression) I have many dark and sorrowful moments and see life no different as anyone disabled; we are pretty much all in the same boat thought most disabled people are in a way a lot worse off, from other peoples' prejudices. (BM14 Male, aged 46-55, non-disabled)

People could be affected deeply by their experience of the exhibition or display, and were prompted to share sometimes painful personal experiences with others:

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[25] These comments do not include visitors who expressed negative emotions towards the intervention or display itself which will be discussed later.
[26] Overall 81 documents were coded to this category, 9% of documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic.'

> As I lost my daughter of 36 3 years ago from a Brain Tumour and chronic epilepsy I know how a disability can effect lives and the way in which people see these people. It was a very understanding display and made a lot of sense. People need to be educated on this matter and I think the display will help in a small way. (CM293)

The open and accessible way in which the nine interpretive projects approached the topic of disability representation meant that, for some visitors, they enabled a dialogue to take place around a topic that people felt could be difficult, might be seen as taboo or might cause discomfort (e.g. NM41):

> We were generally moved to discuss society's perception I think of disabilities and I was obviously relaying what I knew as a child and also as having a child that's recently had problems… And so it did move me to have those conversations with [my friend] which I'd probably have steered away from, because as a parent I didn't really want anyone to know (Ashley, Colchester Castle Museum)

2.4.5 The museum as an appropriate place to engage with disability representation

General to all these comments is an understanding or belief (to some extent) that the museum is an organisation that can promote learning and education, and can change minds. Respondents also attributed wider social impacts to the exhibition, display or film that they saw, perhaps having an impact on institutions or wider society (e.g. CM194, GM38). It is an important category in that museums and galleries often become 'contested' spaces over the topics and subjects that they display or the way in which they interpret (Sandell, 2007). How visitors react to the display of 'contentious' and unexpected topics in museums and galleries can provide guidance on how such topics may be approached in the future.[27]

There was a clear sense emerging that for some visitors the way in which the museum approached the topic of disability representation was appropriate (and therefore positive) not only because it was a suitable and worthy topic but because it connected with their conception of what a museum is for and what it does. Where this convergence between attitudes towards the topic, agreement with the message and the idea of what is possible in a museum took place (and possibly this can happen even if visitors have never considered disability representation in the museum previously), visitors were happy to engage with what the museum was trying to do. This was articulated through positive comments about the way in which the museum had approached the topic (agreeing with the idea even if in practice there were some criticisms): in this category are included visitors who agreed that the museum was an appropriate space in which to present contemporary social issues, that they presented an opportunity to raise awareness or to educate the general public (and particularly the younger generation) about issues around the representation of disabled people. However, there does not seem to be a simple link between agreement with the 'message' and agreement that the museum is an appropriate place to engage with the

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[27] Whilst only 6% of documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic' directly engaged with this topic, far more visitors implied that their positive reaction to the RDR projects stemmed from an acceptance of the museum's capacity to engage with disability representation.

message. Although it is not always clearly articulated, it seemed to be that the conception of the museum held by respondents needed to be compatible with the notion that it could engage audiences in potentially challenging social issues:

> I think particularly it's because museums are sort of like an archive of history and so they are perfect that way also for putting things into context. So disability is one angle. I mean it's not unusual for issues around racism and colonialism and all of those histories being brought into contemporary contexts through museums. So disability's just another one. (Tom, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Museums can change minds: For Peter (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) the museum was appropriate because by presenting different perspectives on a theme (in this case the use of disabled people in art) the opportunities for interaction could change minds and make people think more broadly about their relationship with disability:

> I think the message is there that there is another way of looking at the symbolism of disability in paintings. There's another viewpoint there that you may not have thought about, and that if you thought about that viewpoint, you may actually start thinking differently about the world around you and your own vulnerabilities and your fear of impairment.

He appreciated the way in which the inclusion of new perspectives through the audio interpretations in the gallery demonstrated that there was, in fact, a multiple of perspectives from which to look upon art, which challenges the view that the museum / gallery represents one perspective of 'normality' through its collections, instead "it's a hotch-potch of a history."

Giving disabled people a voice: Tyler (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) felt strongly that the museum was "a good forum for where people … who are disabled can have a voice." It seemed to be him to be "on the edge of discrimination" for museums or galleries to have to highlight work by disabled artists, as for him it seemed obvious that it should already be on show more generally: "I mean if every painting in here was by a disabled person, I mean I'd think to myself well what difference would it make?" Because museums as public spaces are (in theory) for everyone and are about everyone, respondents extended that belief as a reason why disabled people ought to be included within the museum:

> There is no other place that you get exposed to this sort of thing. (Louisa, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

> Disabled people visit museums just the same as everybody else does and it's a good way of highlighting it. (Christine, Discovery Museum)

Subjects like history and art, which museums and galleries deal with, are essentially about life so some respondents could see the relevance of this in relation to the representation of disabled people:

> I think it's got a place in a museum because of the changes that have been made. It may seem more of a modern history type thing but it's still history, it's still a museum, it's still a place to show something. (Richard, Colchester Castle Museum)

Addressing a contemporary issue: This visitor to Colchester Castle Museum actually preferred the exhibition because it presented a contemporary subject, which was perhaps more relevant:

> Interesting to see that life is lived in many different way. Normal is a silly concept. Great idea to have exhibitions like this in a museum – gets your head out of the past! (CM262)

Engaging non-disabled audiences: Using the museum was a critical way to convince non-disabled audiences to engage with issues related to disability:

> I think it's very good and I think if you could get some non-disabled people to engage in listening to it, then that would be very … a good thing, because often people think that disability art, well that's for disabled people. Jason, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Other visitors suggested that because the museum reached a range of different visitors that it was a good way of reaching a wide audience:

> And I suppose a museum is the kind of place, especially this kind of museum where you can get a whole spectrum. You're going to get the tourists, you're going to get the different age groups, children and old people etc. So I suppose in a way it probably is quite a cross section by putting it somewhere like this. (Jasmine, Colchester Castle Museum)

Respondents also talked about museums and the positive role that they might play in the representation of disabled people in comparison with other public venues. Ashley (Colchester Castle Museum) felt that museums might be more effective than other venues because of the way in which they are used by visitors – they encourage open-ended looking and learning rather than "for a certain purpose." Abigail (Tyne and Wear Museums) had a similar conception of the museum, it was somewhere that "people make a special effort to go to." However there were some reservations about the impact one exhibition could have, although the museum is clearly part of the process of change:

> To me the exhibition's a snapshot. I just wonder there's so much more that we do and say and it cannot be represented there today or during the exhibition. So it really made you think about the breadth of discrimination against disabled people. So it's a great pointer. (Sam, South Shields Museum)

Lizzy (student, Imperial War Museum) compared museums favourably with other forms of popular media (in this case television) feeling that the session she attended at the Imperial War Museum (Necessity Breeds Invention) presented what she felt to be a far more appropriate message about disabled people than television would:

I think on television it's a lot more commercial and it makes out that they [disabled people] want you to feel sorry for them, almost by the stories. Whereas in the museum you understand they don't want you to feel sorry for them, they want you to try and see the struggle and the pain that they went through, not go ahhh … I think the museum … portrays it a lot better.

Confers authority and value: A few respondents put forward the idea that it is important to have exhibitions like 'Life beyond a label' and 'Talking about disabled people and art' because of the way in which museums confer authority and value. For instance, Nick (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) felt that, in the public's eyes, something that appeared in a museum would be more trustworthy and valuable as information because:

They look upon a museum as somewhere they can go and better themselves if they like. That's terrible isn't it, that's [a] really non-PC thing to say. But yeah, it has some kind of authority stamped upon it, kind of something that's like not on the level with everything outside… they'll give it more credence than if they saw it in a bar or a café or something. So it just gives it more authority and more power.

This sentiment, that museums can validate what is displayed within their walls through the authority they wield with their audiences, is echoed by Tom (Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery) although in a slightly different way – because the museum has "status" it extends that status and thus validates the experiences of disabled people through their inclusion:

I think any marginalised group, by coming into a place that has some sort of status like Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and by being invited in and being given a status is a great oomph to people. It sort of lifts their status, it gives them a feeling like okay, we've been acknowledged as having some value.

Unexpected in a museum: The sometimes unexpected nature of finding disability representation in a museum appealed to some respondents who felt that self-discovery would be more effective for conveying the message than signposting it more obviously - "on a sign board outside a theatre, having a talk say on disability, you'd be surprised how many people walk past" (Larry, South Shields Museum). Tom (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) expressed a similar conviction that by introducing it to visitors subtly they were more likely to engage with it:

I think that's great… you could go round the gallery and not know it was there, and I think that's a positive because I think the discovery of it would be more interesting than if it had big neon lights saying 'disabled people'…

So whilst some visitors were surprised to see disability addressed in the museum, on reflection they felt that this worked to the exhibition's advantage because visitors would have to take notice of it (like they had):

I think [exhibitions are effective] because you come to a museum to see something particular and then like we didn't know what was there, so we went in... it sort of hits you and you think oh I'll go in and have a look, and then it makes you think afterwards. (Christine, Discovery Museum)

Even where the interpretation could be viewed as challenging or controversial this was also viewed positively by some as it encouraged people to think about issues they might not otherwise have to engage with – such as this visitor to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery:

> Because you are challenging somebody not only just to stand there and read what's said, but also to take on board, oh right, I've not thought about the way … people are portrayed in the media or she'll never see her daughter's face, which was one of the things that stood out. So I think those sort of hard hitting comments that was coming out throughout the whole exhibition, gives it another dimension of what could have been a straightforward nice painting.[28]

Some visitors were provoked into engaging with the exhibition or display despite (or because of) its unexpected nature: "I was confused as to why there was such a display in here, but then realised its importance. There will always be a race for equality" (CM252).

Museums as spaces for learning: For visitors who felt that the museum was a place of learning, of finding out information on subjects (be it history or art or science or society) they seemed comfortable for the museum to be a place where issues related to disability representation could be raised. But despite feeling strongly about the topic, this visitor who completed a response card at Colchester Castle Museum was more circumspect about the impact that the museum might have:

> I feel very strongly about this important part of our society. This exhibition is scratching the surface of the 'hidden sector.' To be more than myopic would be a huge undertaking. Good luck. (CM105 Female, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

2.5 Recognising social barriers – how visitors engaged with the message

Social barrier identification contained a wealth of commentary concerning transport, attitudes, media, government policy and law, all commentaries identified societal issues needing to be challenged, closely linked to the theme of equality. The identification of social barriers and equality issues by the majority of respondents may show that attitudes towards disability and disabled people may be changing for the better. At the same time, it is clear that people are more able to connect with the more concrete issues such as transport allowing an understanding of social barriers, also issues such as history of policy and the continuance of discrimination, in many ways both themes developed issues relate to the concepts of anchoring and objectification, and development of the micro, meta and macro narratives which connect with wider issues of social democracy. The polemic representation appeared to resonate with many. The hegemonic was also in evidence, however, this was not always a straightforward reading process of identifying tragedy (see Working Paper 1).

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[28] It is interesting to contrast this response with Adrian's response who considered that the audio interpretations were not controversial at all: "I didn't find it very contentious in any way; I thought it was relatively safe. But in a way that's a good thing, it's sort of introducing the topic… I didn't think it was revolutionary or anything like that. It wasn't even that political."

2.5.1 Recognition of Social Barriers

As noted in Working Paper 1, the social model is a heuristic device that suggests disability, like sexism, homophobia and racism, comes from a lack of knowledge, fear and the construction of a societal discourse of what is considered 'standard' or even 'normal', categorisations of non- standard continue to evoke prejudice and ignorance. Thus for those deemed different through history, religious, state and medical discourse there have been concrete impacts and interventions that have led to the colonising of particular groups. Many people identified in the response cards and interviews their recognition of social barriers. For some it was a new realisation, for others the projects allowed a reflection of their own known realities, while attitudes and the invisible or hidden mechanisms of issues of disability are maybe more difficult to recognise, access issues continue to remain uppermost for many people when thinking about disability. Within the theme 'How visitors engaged with disability, the highest proportion of visitors connected with the recognition of social barriers for disabled people (31%).

In some sites such as Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery the separation and discrimination against disabled people was recognised and referred to directly by visitors. Issues around attitudes and stereotypes towards disabled people were brought to the surface through the audio and text narratives that accompanied the selected paintings. This visitor identified that social model thinking was the basis of the project and correctly recognised that this philosophy was produced in a sophisticated way in order to weave through the artworks included:

> One of the things I really liked was the language that people used, that it was very straightforward. It wasn't academic and especially there was very little arts speak used, which is, I think, good for something you want to be widely accessible… everyone who was working on that would have been working with the social model of disability where it's society that creates disabled [people].

Another visitor commented that the issues raised around the positions of disabled people in the paintings, and through the audio descriptions, evoked many pertinent contemporary themes related to social barriers today:

> Well I was particularly thinking around all the issues of religion and charity and the position of disabled people now… [D]isabled people's access to society… is still not brilliant. And so by bringing in that context into paintings that are actually quite old or dealing with old issues and bringing it up to date is like this isn't just a piece of old artwork, this is something also relating to the situation of people now.

There was also an understanding that the rarity of such exhibitions proved that disability issues understood through social model philosophy continue to remain largely hidden and invisible despite disability being a factor everywhere and throughout time. This highlighted the importance of the project and the continuing issues that pervade cultural sites in relation to disability as history, as an equality issue, and as a European human rights issue.

> I think I'd agree with all the messages really… And that's why it's welcome… because it's so rare that that viewpoint is presented. And yet we live in a world… where disability is everywhere and it is used symbolically… to not only oppress disabled people… but also it oppresses other people as well, because it makes them feel negative about themselves. (Izzy, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

The segregation, either physically, socially or psychologically of disabled people was recognised from the comments on the paintings:

> The painting 'Figures in a landscape' shows how people in society section-off disabled or differentiate them This is wrong. Disability is often seen as a taboo subject and is either frowned upon or pitied. (BM89)

Or simply:

> Marginalised, segregated, horrified. (BM155)

For one disabled visitor the messages from the exhibition resonated with his own experiences as a disabled person and his recognition of the marginalisation and the lack of value that can be attributed to disabled people by others:

> I think that a lot of the messages are that we shouldn't be marginalised. We're not there just to get hand-outs from the state, we're not sort of a strain on everyone's budget, we are actually here to create something new and give something back and we're as good as the next guy really… Because I was disabled at an early age… you've got to be 120% at whatever you do, otherwise they'll only look at you as less than normal. So most of us always put in loads of work, which doesn't get recognised by a lot of people.

This seemed to resonate with many visitors, not only in Birmingham (e.g. BM133):

> Absolutely brilliant. Sends a positive message for change and shows what can be done despite obstacles. (GM151, male, aged 26-35, white, disabled)

Many visitors believed that the exhibitions made clear statements relating to the challenges faced by disabled people and the ways society can de-value and exclude disabled people. For example, many identified social barriers for the first time and through their comments indicated the difference between a social approach recognising social barriers and a medical approach. This respondent identifies that disabled people are often faced with hostility, disinterest or sympathy, at the same time they recognise the challenges that the built environment, negative attitudes and inequalities can pose for disabled people:

> A powerful statement on the challenges facing the disabled and the admirable ways in which they address these challenges. We who are not disabled need to be more aware and sensitive to the needs of those who are; those who need our encouragement and support and NOT our sympathy, hostility and disinterest. Well done all involved. (CM1035)

Others identified this in different ways (e.g. CM148, CM194):

It helps people's awareness that disabled people are real people and that the environment disables them (CM95)

Labelling: Many visitors said that the exhibitions had presented them with new knowledge on the social issues of disability. Some museums in the project concentrated on particular multiple themes. For example, one of the multiple themes Colchester focused on was labelling and attitudes in their display and in the title of their exhibition, 'Life beyond the Label.' These foci often led audiences to connect more readily with particular messages and themes from particular exhibitions (e.g. CM2003):

The exhibition has changed the way I think about the word 'disability' & how quickly people are 'labelled.' (CM244)

The displays, interactives and films and stories also made people aware of the issues that disabled people face, as well as provoking some anger that not enough was being done (e.g. CM218):

The display makes people more aware of people with disabilities- of the struggle. (CM292)

Disabling attitudes: Attitudes towards disabled people were referred to many times by visitors regardless of which exhibition or media type they attended:

Glad that display is prominent. Helps to highlight the problems and attitudes that disabled people may face. Hopefully the public will see people with disabilities in a more positive light. (CM3080)

One commentator cleverly drew on the prevalence of disability as normality: 'I would like to think that it will change people's perception of disability, sadly there will always be people to 'disabled by ignorance' who will never accept anything 'normal'' (CM66).

The film 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' was produced to highlight attitudes to disabled people based around the story of Joseph Merrick. This produced some insightful comments based on the ways in which we view issues of difference and can view disabled people as spectacle (e.g. RLH11):

It made me realise that in many ways things haven't changed since Merrick's day. People are seen as spectacles, not people. This needs to change! (RLH25)

Some viewers of the film attempted to put themselves in the place of a disabled person and how they might experience society:

It's very clear of the need to look beyond the disability at the person - a person is much more than a physical representation It is quite humbling. I couldn't help but think that if I was disabled how angry I would be that people would make judgments based purely on personal appearance - I am much much more than my physical appearance. Times have changed since Merrick but frighteningly attitudes haven't. (RLH26)

Other respondents identified the historical and contemporary convergence of attitudes towards disabled people:

> It made me think about the history & the continuity of disabled peoples' experiences from then to now… it seems like in some ways there hasn't been much change for the better. (RLH52)

T**ransport:** While attitudes, labelling and an awareness of challenges proved to be strong messages coming from visitors, one clear and tangible barrier has and continues to be access to transport for disabled people. The RDR project was fortunate to have Glasgow museum of transport as one of the participating museums and their exhibition raised many comments on the messages around transport and disability. At Glasgow Museum of Transport the history of protest by disabled people for accessible transport was recounted along with oral and film experiences of disabled people in Glasgow itself. Many visitors found it surprising to learn about transport issues. At least one visitor recognized that there may be little point in being able to use public transport if other barriers persisted and called for more enforcement of the Disability Discrimination Act or DDA (1995) which was passed in 1996 to cover the UK. However, the transport element of the DDA was not put into practice until 2006 and the DDA claims that all transport systems will be fully accessible by 2030. While advances have been made, many areas of exclusion remain. This was evident to some of the visitors who also identified other disabling aspects of UK society. Many commented on the responsibility of government to do more and to ensure that existing laws are reinforced:

> The present efforts to help the disabled should be continued but with a far greater input from the government to ensure that the present facilities and designated laws that affect the disabled are rigorously enforced and if possible upgraded. This goes for housing / shopping and leisure / physical aids. (GM140, male, aged 56-65, white, non-disabled)

For others, new laws were needed to ensure that those things which non-disabled people may take for granted are available to disabled people too, again this exhibition, like others raised a new recognition of the social barriers that disabled face on a day-to-day basis (e.g. GM162, GM79):

> I think it is amazing. It has made me to think that the powers that be need to be listening more. I am deeply concerned, but more aware from what I have seen. Excellent work (GM38, male, aged 46-55, white, non-disabled)

The exhibition highlighted for visitors that further change was needed. Many people were shocked by the information that wheelchair users must give 24 hours' notice if they wish to travel by train (e.g. GM117, GM123):

> It highlights how long it took for progress to be made to include people with a disability to be included in the plans for public transport and public life in general. Although great improvements have been made it is obvious that there is still a lot to be done to allow disabled people to be fully integrated into the general transport scheme in our country. (GM113, female, aged 56-65, white, non-disabled)

Issues regarding transport more generally raised more questions about government and local government commitment to disability issues. These were most apparent when people had heard examples of barriers and restrictions from disabled peoples' stories, which were integrated throughout all the museums:

> Just I think possibly the lady that was… delivering the sessions, just her own experiences... She can't get on the bus with her friend… [T]he government I'd say are trying to be a bit more understandable and give more access to people with disabilities, they've got a long way to go. It's like a little bit of access, but not for everybody, just a little group of people. (Vanessa, Secondary School Teacher, Imperial War Museum)

Inequalities: Some of the projects used educational sessions as opposed to exhibitions. The Imperial War museum provided a session to secondary school pupils on disability rights, noting the historical and contemporary issues that disabled people continue to face. The session was complemented with a trip to the houses of Parliament for the pupils to speak with their local MP. There were positive comments from these sessions from participants, who felt that the sessions brought the subject to life allowing them to identify more closely with the messages that were being put forward. For all involved, there was a realisation of the inequalities that disabled people faced through the sessions. Many of those taking part in the sessions became aware of the ways in which their own school excluded disabled pupils through its design or lack of facilities (e.g. IWM145, IM17, IWM22):

> This session has made me think about how little facilities we have in our school and also in our environment for disabled people to use and also help them. (IWM137, female pupil aged 12)

Whilst some focused on the lack of rights and the inequality of the position of disabled people, students also pointed out the power and potential a community has to make people feel accepted:

> It made me appreciate the difficulty and strength needed to overcome disability in society. But also the power and potential a community have to make people feel accepted. (IWM195)

The representation of disabled people was also challenged through a critique of the media. Although no exhibition or project highlighted the representation of disabled people in the media, it appears that many made the link of negative attitudes and representations to mass media portrayals of disability issues. Some commentators recognised that the representation of disabled people in newspapers was more likely to be a negative one. This realisation conflicted with the message communicated by RDR projects and was noted by teachers and pupils:

> I would say with the media you'd get a lot of more negative messages… they need to improve their communications and their representations of disabled people. (Secondary School teacher, Imperial War Museum)

Northampton Museum held an exhibition highlighting the lack of choices disabled people can face in other ways, through a limited choice of footwear and fashion (e.g. NM46):

> This display challenges assumptions we all make about disabled people. It also highlights how limited resources restrict people's choices & therefore impacts so much on people's everyday lives & quality of life. (NM40)

Understanding Histories: One of the many ways that the history of policy and disability was approached was initiated by Tyne and Wear Museum. Tyne and Wear produced a timeline that gave various points of change for disabled people. Many visitors were surprised at the way disability policy lagged behind other rights based equality policies for example gender and race anti-discrimination acts. There was more surprise at the segregation of disabled people in institutions (e.g. TWM129, TWM20, TWM0):

> I think it was shocking, it was striking to see what society allowed at certain stages. You know, like the asylums and workhouses and how different legislation wasn't specific enough to help. In fact, some legislation segregated disabled people. (Sam, Tyne and Wear Museums)

Access issues: While the social model critique stretches much further than access issues, many visitors commented positively on the access available to the RDR museum projects. Formats included British Sign language, sub-titles, Braille, audio and large text. In addition, all information was presented in a clear non-complicated way for audiences:

> I think in practical terms it was well done, it was obviously a lot of careful thought had been put in. I liked the display texts, it moved down the screen at a speed which I would have thought most partially sighted people could manage. That was all very well done. (Kurt, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

> I think several different formats have been looked at and very carefully thought about before the exhibition went ahead. (Veronica, Tyne and Wear Museums)

Larry (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) supported the multiple interpretations offered alongside the paintings because for him it promoted the idea that disabled art was equal to conventional art forms. The juxtaposition of the objective curator and subjective artist interested and encouraged him to question his own attitudes towards art. Other visitors appreciated the 'tone' of the exhibition or display, which helped them to engage with the messages of the exhibition. Mainly this was expressed in terms of there being an 'objective' or 'well-balanced' approach to the interpretation. The term 'objective' brings with it a whole host of connotations, particularly the way in which an objective, disinterested 'tone' is seen as conveying authority, neutrality and truth, as opposed to a subjective 'tone' which, coming more from personal experience, may sometimes be viewed as partisan and biased. Some museums were praised for the "objectivity" (BM53, Male, aged 66-75, white, non-disabled) or "non-confrontational manner" (NM46 Female, aged 16-25, white, non-disabled) of their approach. For Sarah (Colchester Castle Museum) the way in which the museum had approached the topic gave disabled people a voice without there being an agenda behind it:

I think because it's important to see it in that perspective… when you're reading a novel or reading an article and say something like the Sunday Times magazine, it's always presented from one perspective and it's interesting to see just their views without any sort of other, you know, agenda with it.

George appreciated how the interpretation at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery had, in his opinion, presented an objective and well-balanced viewpoint, which he felt was usually missing in respect to disabled people. In these cases it seems to be that respondents are using the terms 'objective' and 'well-balanced' to mean a perspective that comes across as fair, even reasonable, so presenting disabled people more accurately than other more stereotypical perspectives would do.[29]

2.5.2 Equality

The theme of equality was the second highest percentage within the theme of 'How visitors engage with disability' at 30%. The previous section highlighted issues around social barriers and the surprise of many people when they realised the disabling factors in the UK - underlying each comment was a moral commitment to equality. Equality appears to be a straightforward concept for most, but what happens when a group has endured years of marginalisation and are often still not recognised in museums or society? The difficult process of wanting equality but needing to retain a group identity and continue to control that identity is explained by one disabled visitor:

I mean it's a very funny one because it is a sort of dichotomy… it's a sort of Catch 22 because it's saying we want to be part of the mainstream but we want to be acknowledged as a separate group. So it's saying we want to be, we want you to involve us in, but we also want our identity, we don't want our identity taken away. (Tom, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

However, this relates to a history of disabled people being refused their own choices and control, for example in the past self-appointed experts would make decisions for disabled people about where they lived, the income they'd receive, the opportunities they were allowed. This situation has not ceased, but as disabled people are still excluded from many areas of cultural and public life, giving up the identity that has powered the disabled peoples movement to help change the inequalities disabled people face is something that many disabled people refuse to do. Some non-disabled visitors gained a better understanding of access and equality issues through the exhibitions which gave them the impetus to think things through in relation to issues of access and equality (e.g. CM104):

When you actually come into contact with an exhibition like this… it does reinforce… the need to treat everyone as an individual really and for everyone to have equal rights. (Sarah, Colchester Castle Museum)

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[29] The issue of tone and objectivity does not directly relate to access issues but it helped these visitors to engage with the messages presented so can be associated with accessibility?

All the projects used terminology preferred by disabled people and a few integrated language issues and terminology. Some visitors said that there was often a fear of using incorrect language and terminology; one thoughtful comment identified wider issues:

> It reminds me of how much I have in common with disabled people emphasising our similarities. It shatters my inhibition about using politically correct words to avoid giving offence, since a failure to communicate openly is far more offensive. (CM1074)

While some focused on the inhibitors to individuals realising their potential because of the inequalities and barriers that disabled people face (e.g. CM109, CM35, IWM81)

> So I think the session was… saying, everybody has a voice, disabled people have a voice, they're entitled to as much as everybody else and we've had to fight for it. (Vanessa, Secondary School Teacher, Imperial War Museum)

> It just basically reinforced my own feelings about it, you know, that disabled people should have the equal opportunity all the way down the line. (Larry, Tyne and Wear Museums)

This visitor developed a more concrete view of disabled people as people and seemed to be engaging in the micro-narrative of recognition and acceptance highlighted by Wilde (2004) - identification of disabled people as beyond a two-dimensional stereotype who have feelings, positive emotions and can be content with themselves, or even like themselves:

> Makes me appreciate that like me, people with disabilities have a huge range of emotions, not just sadness and happiness. We don't often think of people with disabilities having positive emotions & feelings and being content with themselves & their inner lives - They like themselves. (RLH3)

2.5.3 Tragedy or deficit model

Tragedy views were often not straightforward. While most identified individualised ascriptions as opposed to social or discrimination views, all contained an element of social understanding. Most connected with emotive understandings, while some were clearly connected with the context of the social representation and the different signifiers connected with the larger representation, for example the war hero undergoing reconstructive surgery. Moreover, while some commentators identified the 'need to help' disabled people such views could be read as an understanding of the social barriers that disabled people endure. Many of the visitors responses did, however, draw on the mythical or medical representations of disability.

There is clearly a difference between calling for rights and recognising barriers and pitying or feeling 'lucky' that 'you are not one of them' (see Working Paper 1). The quote below refers to the Bomberg painting, and issues of mental health - the cliché of art 'as therapy' discourse is employed here, as art easing suffering:

> That one I find quite disturbing. I think, gosh what must that poor man have been thinking when he produced that… And maybe if he doesn't express himself through a painting he would be even worse state. So at least maybe he can express himself in some way and maybe not be quite as depressed as he obviously was. (Michael, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Lucky or feeling grateful themes tune into temporary states such as fear and the realisation that 'there for the grace of God go I.' Such comments exhibit a recognition of the devalued disabled subject and a fear of the perceived tragedy of impairment but also the 'appreciation of disabilities' and the partial reassurance that 'there are so many helpful things for them' (e.g. CM172):

> Makes me feel fortunate not to have disabilities & am glad there are so many helpful things for them. (CM11)

In identifying tragedy, some contradictions did arise. For example within the language of care and help, and making a difference to 'a disabled person' comes the claim that they are same so why treat them differently. This may identify a person who is moving from one frame of understanding to another: that is the stereotype of the disabled person as needy, a burden, needing help to a cognitive reconstruction of recognition and sameness. It may suggest a shift towards a more sympathetic objectification. This comment from Colchester Castle Museum typifies this seemingly contradictory response:

> It made me realise a lot more about disabled people and how much more care and help they really need. I would love to get involved or to help to make a difference to a disabled person they are the same as non-disabled people so why treat them any differently. (CM2031)

Comments also identified that impairment and thus disability can happen to anyone at any time of life, tuning into issues of fear, but also the unknown:

> Fortunate that I don't have a disability yet. (CM88)

This next quote may suggest fears are uppermost, but is also mixed with a partial social perspective as opposed to a pure medical tragedy perspective:

> I think it is good to see more being done to help all types of disabilities so that all people are helped to enjoy life without hold backs. And any more help that could be given all the better! I just feel fortunate I am not in the same situation but who knows what is round the corner of life. (GM111, female, aged 56-65, white, non-disabled)

This comment appears to be a clear rejection but is this related to impairment or barriers? – 'I don't want to be disabled' (GM8). Disabled people would not need to rely on others if social barriers were removed, however this quote is interesting in its connection with medical and society issues, but it also tunes into either support or burden themes:

My wife who is disabled finds it ok. She suffers with blindness and deafness so I explain most things to her. (GM158)

Some disabled commentators were concerned that particular exhibits or media could be viewed as promoting the tragedy of impairment (e.g. RLH55):

The film concerns me - it was far too tragic - reducing people to their impairments and not allowing people to be valued… Why a person with a particular impairment should romantically (?) one person with the same impairment as a hero is beyond me. (RLH67, Male, aged 46-55, white, disabled)

Medical views and context: The Imperial War Museum ran several sessions looking at attitudes towards disabled servicemen. One session focused on attitudes towards those who were formally pilots in the Battle of Britain, and had sustained injuries, often severe burns, in the context of their service. The session concentrated on the town of East Grinstead where pilots waited for reconstructive surgery to rebuild their faces. The town was known as 'the town that never stared' highlighting how important attitudes to difference are. The pilots and staff held open days for the townspeople and some of the pilots married the nurses that were attending them. The pupils were in awe of the servicemen. However, while the attitudinal messages did appear successful, some commented on the medical aspects and 'feeling lucky'. This should not be viewed as negative and represents a rational and empathetic understanding of the situation of returning servicemen, introducing issues of difference and attitude. However, many pupils took an initial reading or surface reading concentrating on the experiences of the servicemen merged with the social attitudes towards difference. In short, they identified that medical advances of reconstructive plastic surgery had made life better for the servicemen because of the negative attitudes that the servicemen might have received had reconstructive surgery not taken place. Moreover given their age and the intense focus on appearance, which may be greater today than in the late 1940s, they also identified how lucky they were not to be disabled (e.g. IWM164, IWM31, IWM32):

It makes you think about how horrific it can be and shows the ways in which medicine has changed to make it better for them and try to get back to how their lives were beforehand. It has also expanded our knowledge of the many different types of disability and how it affects the body in different ways. (IWM14, Male pupil, aged 16)

This commentator identified the message from the workshops and spoke of courage of those men and feeling humble. In the context of the session this provides an empathetic view but out of the context it could be understood very differently:

I feel with the Imperial War Museum that the focus really was on disability and people's reactions to them, how they overcome their disability, the courage that they need, the support that they have, and really how humbling it is to see what these people have gone through. (Jennifer, Secondary School Teacher, Imperial War Museum)

Responses from the students identify respect and bravery and could not be considered patronising, again, considering the context (e.g. IWM12):

> It has made me think about how brave disabled people are as they have to endure a lot of pain and suffering but they still live their lives as the normal people they are. I also makes me feel great respect for those who suffered from a disability due to the war. (IWM103, female pupil aged 15, non-disabled)

For other students, there was a security in knowing that impairment could be overcome and that positive things could happen as opposed to purely negative. This may also be related to making the unfamiliar and the feared familiar (see Working Paper 1) as the first step towards a concretisation of abstract ideas and concepts and developing alternative constructs: (e.g. IWM159):

> It gave new hope that if I or anyone else I loved were to be disabled there are people to look up to and/or talk to. (IWM127, female pupil aged 14, non-disabled)

This was most evident in comments that identify the journey between the unknown of disability and the fears attached to it towards a more enlightened view which offered security (e.g. IWM122):

> This session made me change the way I think about disability a lot. First I thought it was something that ruined your life if you had it, but now I think that if you have a disability you can still live your life how you want to. (IWM82, female pupil aged 15, non-disabled)

Pity: Pity is an emotion connected with the tragedy model. However, this comment identifies that the emotion the writer felt was maybe not the emotion the filmmaker had intended, thus showing a cognisance of wider issues:

> A very interesting and thought provoking film. It has certainly made me think differently about disabled people - I feel sorry for the people in the film and I am glad I am not disabled, although I am not sure this is what the filmmakers intended. (RLH27, Museum Studies student)

This young person was explicit that equality was connected to regarding disabled people as 'human beings' rather than someone to pity:

> This session has changed my views about the war because it's not just you who suffers it's your family and you don't always have to pity disabled people because they are human beings and most of them want to be treated the same. (IWM61, female pupil aged 15, non-disabled)

Yet, messages about attitudes were often not read beyond the emotional level. This commentator want to know what they can do 'to help' disabled people. This compares differently to the reception of messages, about issues of transport where people were more able to identify structural and systematic barriers and would criticize the systems of transport or the government for not enacting or enforcing laws on discrimination. It

identifies a difference in the cognizance of receiving the message when it is connected to something they know such as transport systems in comparison with subjects that are more abstract and they may have little familiarity with. At the same time this commentator does identify issues of access showing some attention to the social systems of discrimination and exclusion of disabled people

> If there is an exhibition with the film. I hope someone can tell me what I can do for these people. (RLH38)

And another identifies 'helping' but connects this with the power of the message and the message as 'really opens your eyes and makes you think' maybe this shows a preliminary movement from anchoring to objectification and towards a more polemic social representation

> It really makes you think and want to help people more, if you see anyone disabled and needs help, or you think you could help them in some way. It opens your eyes and makes you think, like the advert on the TV did. (TWM213)

Another exhibits the 'helplessness' of not knowing the 'correct' language but feeling 'useless' because they feel they cannot communicate with deaf people, this is in the context of a helping scenario and raises many contradictions, mainly it appears to be linked to fear and could be read psychologically as being made to feel bad about disabled people because of a lack on the commentators part-sure there's a psychological ref here that shows this attitude can become one of outright rejection of disability to avoid bad feeling about the self.

> Uh oh! Some of the terms I use are wrong, now I know the correct terms but I still feel useless because I still don't know how to help or communicate deaf if they needed help. (TWM94)

Some commentators developed poetic language (the language of otherness possibly connected to literary representations?) while this comment reveals an aspect of the film (the veil) it also develops the outsider group of disability and the reification of 'not being one of those' (see Working Paper 1). The comment also reveals compassion and admiration:

> Through the veil of disability we perceive a lesser person not whole - but how wrong we are. It is opening our heart and mind to know that this is not a perfect world and to show awareness and compassion to those less fortunate to ourselves - Merrick showed real courage and fortitude. Remember a little help from our friends. (RLH71)

The theme of luck resurfaces here with a concentration on impairment aspects, rather than social aspects of disability, however to understand how lucky you are to be able to see, hear and walk is a partial recognition of the social problems that disabled people face in everyday life:

> It makes you think Just how lucky you are to be able to see and hear and also walk. I hope that everyone understands how lucky they are. (TWM102)

While this comment focuses on the social barriers on transport it also adopts a tragedy model of helplessness, it is clear that this comment merges both social and individual issues but concludes by focusing on helplessness and tragedy. This was the only comment relating to transport issues that developed an individualized viewpoint.

> You are unable to take a wheel chair on a bus but you can take a baby's pram and countless shopping bags. A person who cannot walk is as helpless as a child and is more vulnerable as they don't a mother's protection. (TWM14)

Although this comment also focuses on the individual, it is a mixed message identifying disabled people as the same.

> People in wheelchairs, or the People who have a Disability, are just the same as us, But Just have something wrong with them. (TWM284)

Hate crimes and prejudice: Comments with tune in with contemporary issues and 'hate crimes' against disabled people, developing issues of difference, fear, vulnerability and lack of value. This is particularly pertinent in light of the well-publicised murders of disabled people recently (e.g. Kevin Davis an individual with learning difficulties and epilepsy who was tortured and murdered in 2006 and many others with learning difficulties and sensory and physical impairments where crimes have been shown to be related to impairment status) plus the Scottish parliaments current bill to recognise 'hate crimes' for all minority groups in 2008, the alterations to the British Crime Survey to incorporate hate crimes and the admission by police that much hate crime towards disabled people goes unreported. This comment tunes in with contemporary issues identifying tragedy within a social attitudes framework:

> But inclusion in the society where you've got, let's say, two Downs people who go out and they live in a community in Yorkshire and they get married and… they want to have a normal life. It's not them, it's everybody outside who might decide that it's quite good fun, some teenagers torment them and do cruel things. So I do think that there needs to be an element, more an element of care than just kicking them out into the community. (Ashley, Colchester Castle Museum)

Heroic survivors and 'new perspectives on disability': Disabled people are often referred to as brave, 'wonderful' or inspiring. While this is often meant kindly as a compliment to the ways that people cope, it usually focuses on impairment (what is seen as their problem), rather than the myriad societal barriers on people overcoming the odds, or their particular 'problems' to be a lesson for those who are non-disabled. The section on heroic survivors shows how important context is when interpreting visitor responses. Although the heroic survivor is perceived by disability studies literature as at the opposite end of the continuum to the tragedy model, the comments here show that context and unfamiliarity lend towards identifying admiration. More importantly the responses also identified the process of making the unfamiliar familiar, lessening fear and threat and enabling acceptance and security with disability issues at a meso (or meta) level of understanding (see Working Paper 1).

For example, viewing film clips of disabled and Deaf people talking about their lives and achievements often prompted comments of humility in light of achievements. While on the surface this can appear celebratory, the reality is that it can be patronizing – why are disabled people described as inspiring while non-disabled people might be impressive? What about men and women disabled by war? Disabled war heroes should be celebrated by their country, but history tells us that disabled people are often rejected by their own countries where they cannot use the transport, be accommodated in accessible housing, attend local schools or follow their talents in a career they choose. At worse, they can be institutionalised against their will. This attitude reflects a passive reading of the messages towards disabled people, rather than an active attitude towards changing attitudes and environments. However, as with the tragedy commentaries the comments on heroic survivors were not straightforwardly negative with many inscribing social understandings in their comments (e.g. CM1038):

> A powerful statement on the challenges facing the disabled and the admirable ways in which they address these challenges. We who are not disabled need to be more aware and sensitive to the needs of those who are; those who need our encouragement and support and NOT our sympathy, hostility and disinterest. Well done all involved. (CM1035, Male, aged 56-65, white, non-disabled)

Like the tragedy model, the quote below may relate to bravery, strength and individual will or to overcoming the disabling aspects of social barriers (e.g. CM124):

> It makes me realise how hard it can be for people with disabilities. But respect how strong some individuals are, and how they overcome hard day to day challenges. (CM150, Female, aged 16-25, white, non-disabled)

Some felt that the challenges that disabled people faced allowed them to become stronger people in some mythical or biblical way, at the same time it recognises the difficulties of disability:

> Hasn't changed the way I think, as I always knew they were capable beings. I know they don't have easy time, but makes them stronger people. (CM18, Female, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

Admiration for coping: The admiration for coping and being happy, cheerful , special and brave tunes into the tragedy approach. Commentators are surprised by the identifications they pick up on considering the low status and tragedy of impairment (e.g. CM283, CM287, CM3052):

> I find it very informative and a very good insight into the problems that everyday life cause people less fortunate that we take for granted. It hits home that despite these disadvantages they still live their lives as normal people and make something of themselves. (CM2030, male, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

Other comments related to the sessions at the Imperial War Museum – see section on **medical views and context** above.

2.5.4 Prejudices, stereotypes and stigma

This section looks at those comments that deal with the issues of prejudice, stereotypes and stigma directly. It develops views on stereotyping and other versions of labelling and represents a number of themes ranging from: new understandings of the notion of cure; how disabled people see themselves; the objectification of otherness and the special; critiques of stigma; and changes or sameness in prejudice levels. It is likely that an understanding and recognition of how disabled people are stereotyped is necessary in order for visitors to recognise how the museum projects worked to combat these or perhaps the presentation of new perspectives was enough to provoke such a response?

For this visitor to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the audio interpretation connected with her world view and understanding of disability - however she could see how it might be challenging for others:

> Provocative, not really, but then that's just me personally… if it was to be say a member of my family coming along and reading it, about the concept of society and how they treat disabled people and the stereotypes, I think that would have been a lot more challenging [laughs]. Whereas for me it was like yes it's nice to see that. (Izzy, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Stereotypes of cure and challenges: One of the pervading stereotypes is that disabled people all want, need to be, or can be cured (see Working Paper 1). This is often seen as a non-disabled imposition by those who cannot see why anyone would want to remain disabled if they did not need to and is strongly connected with a medical model understanding of impairment. However, one of the audio interpretations by a disabled artist at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery challenged the issue of 'cure.' It set up a clear challenge to the stereotype and was readily taken on board by visitors:

> I have worked with blind people on several occasions and some of them are very, very proud of being the way they are. They don't want to be fixed. And similarly with people that I've worked with that are deaf, won't have cochlea implants and things like that because they think that's messing with their heads and that they don't need to be fixed… The [painting] where they've got Jesus healing the two blind men. That made me think well, you know, why should they need to be healed?

George and Louisa (Birmingham Museum and Gallery) responded very positively to this aspect of the project. They were pleased that the art gallery had confounded their expectations by successfully avoiding most of the usual clichés and stereotypes that they could have fallen into, as Louisa explained:

> Actually I was waiting for it because it's absolute classic… especially with the idea about blind people having extra-sensory perception because they're blind… They can hear sort of for miles, but there was none of that.

How non-disabled people view disabled people: Other comments from Birmingham identified stereotypes from the polemic view of those disabled artists working with the

social model, raising awareness of disabled voices and views and highlighting the differences between the common view and the views of disabled people (e.g. BM63):

> The most strong thing is that people who aren't disabled have a different view of people who are disabled than the disabled have. (Pat, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

The one that clearly connected with social model themes was, however from a disabled person:

> It's the rest of society's job, if you like, to take the time to actually try and understand what [disabled people] want, rather than them having to fit in with everything else, which is what I've had to do in my life as a disabled person too. (Nick, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Another disabled commentator, George (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) agreed with the museum's depiction of issues of stereotypes and the 'narrow views' on disability issues:

> But the opinions were good, I enjoyed the opinions, it was nice to hear an opinion, especially a well-balanced one, because sometimes… people have some strange opinions of people with disabilities. I've disabilities myself… some people have a very narrow view and don't really understand what disabilities are about… They have a label and they forget that people are behind these disabilities.

Where disability art is seen as special, or therapy, that tunes into the model of the stereotype which sees the disabled person making art to make themselves feel better about being disabled or singing songs about how miserable it all is. This is not always the case but an assumption, and a whole host of disabled comedians have taken such stereotypes and placed them in their acts. Another disabled commentator notes:

> I mean, it is so difficult for anyone to take the music of disabled artists seriously, because again they think oh it's just going to be… people singing about themselves and feeling sad and not actually taking on-board that in the same way, it's art… in lots of areas it's still simply seen as therapy. (Jason, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Disability, difference and 'the other': The focus on mysticism and 'otherness' associated with blindness was also raised with a comment on the 'other world of the blind.' Despite the audio commentaries from disabled artists, this commentator had regularly been to visit the painting and therefore exemplified the notion of Mosccovi (1981) who claims that 'everyone creates stereotypes. We cannot function in the world without them. They buffer us against our most urgent fears by extending them, making it possible to act as though their source were beyond our control':

> I have visited 'the Blind Girl ' since I was a child and now bring my children to see it. I love the way she touches the girl… and holds an accordion. It highlights the other world of the blind. (BM41)

'The other world of the blind' or what Bolt (2006) calls 'beneficial blindness' highlights the dangers of positive stereotyping:

> The point to emphasize is that so-called positive stereotyping of people with impaired vision is no better than the overtly negative formation, for either way an object position is being defined; the subject position is necessarily held by someone with unimpaired vision. Indeed beneficial blindness is only beneficial to prejudiced people who wish to maintain the binary logic of 'the blind' and 'the sighted', them and us. (Bolt 2006:27)

Disability as a blessing, intensifying feeling or suffering, presumed to be good for the artist is another stereotype mainly of the suffering of persecuted artist (suffering for their art). However, it also tunes into the notion of disabled people feeling and experiencing things more intensely than non-disabled people, another myth:

> The interpretations points out that disabled people do feel compromised and their disability is inspiring them on the other side. Disability for an artist is blessing (as it inspired and is creative spirit) and on the other hand it is hell and means suffering. In any way disability intensifies feeling. (BM43)

A further notion is that disabled people 'see more art than we do' meaning perhaps that suffering leads to greater creativity. Further analysis of this comment shows several other hidden signifiers of difference and outsider groups:

> Art is for all. It is a great thing to highlight disability in art. We need more work to be done in this field: freedom of form, thinking outside the box. Disabled people can probably see more art than we do. (BM6)

Difference as a signifier is highlighted again as something individually special and almost biblical (e.g. CM111):

> It doesn't personally change the way I think of disability because I have always respected disabled people to be no different to myself and if anything more unique and gifted as they are so much more experienced in how precious life is and how you can do anything in life you want if you really want to. (CM147, Female, aged 13, white, non-disabled)[30]

Social issues and stigma attached to disability: Some visitors identified the stigma that can be attached to disability from their experiences of the RDR projects(e.g.BM67):

> Teaches me the struggle to get beyond stigma and hostility to disabled people. And about the hate in the human heart which shows itself in the hostility. (CM145)

Views on whether prejudice has improved or stayed the same: Different media produced views on whether prejudice had improved or stayed the same. Some of these were prompted by the context, for example the film 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' developed a

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[30] This needs to be discussed in context of the age of the visitor.

story-line in which contemporary disabled actors spoke about attitudes towards them against a backdrop of the story of Joseph Merrick (e.g. RLH31):

> The film made me more aware of people's reactions to disabled people and how those with disabilities can be affected. Even in 2008, disabled people are looked down upon, judged etc. similar to Merrick was in the 19th century. Aside from looking at solely objects, the video made a strong impact, giving people's views on disability. (RLH1)

However, other projects also prompted commentary on sameness and differences regarding prejudices over time (e.g. IWM54):

> It's very good because it sort of highlights prejudices... you think about the prejudices that people have and in the past how they'd be sort of called a freak, for want of a better phrase, you know, and it's how attitudes have changed over the years. It's good. (Christine, Tyne and Wear Museums)

Some experiences and views of disability from disabled people gave varied responses as to how effective the projects were at drawing attention to prejudice and stigma, or perpetuating it (e.g. TWM52):

> Deeply ambivalent about portrayals - why non-speaking camera work with voice-overs? (but not the curator!) If this is a strategy it is too subtle for non-disabled viewers - reinforces romanticised - melancholic + super cripple stereotypes. Oh dear. (RLH65 Female, aged 46-55, white, disabled)

Possible prejudice?: Openly stigmatising or prejudiced views of disabled people were rare to non-existent in visitor responses. However, as we have seen the persistence of the tragedy model is one form of prejudice, this comment may reflect another. Asked how the projects changed people's views on disability, one commentator exhibited what can only be described as inverted prejudice, identifying impairment as a learning experience and subtly suggesting that disabled people can take advantage of other people's sympathy or guilt:

> It doesn't [change my attitudes towards disability], there is much disability in the family through inherited illness; there are certain types of people who just get on with life and use their disability to learn about themselves and grow from it; Stumper doesn't look like he took advantage of others' sympathy or guilt. (WM133, Female, 46-55, white, non-disabled

2.6 An opportunity for learning: thinking differently about disability

This section brings together responses from visitors which allude to a change in their way of thinking about disability and disabled people from a result of their exposure to one of the nine museum projects. The way in which visitors responded to the exhibitions and displays results in a very diverse picture of the learning impact that the nine museum projects had. This is partly because visitors conceive of 'change' very differently, some being careful to

make the distinction between a change in knowledge or awareness, or a change in attitudes. Young people were also more likely to refer directly to their learning experiences, particularly the students visiting the Imperial War Museum because they had specifically been involved in a learning-related workshop at the museum. Also it is worth noting that running through the comments from visitors as a constant theme was the importance of the use of real people, real lives in enabling a 'change' to occur.

2.6.1 An increase in knowledge and understanding

Many visitors expressed an increase in knowledge and understanding about disability issues and disabled people following their encounter with the nine projects. Seeing the lives of disabled people from new perspectives and recognising social barriers meant that familiar contexts, such as art and transport, became infused with new meanings. Generally, there was a greater appreciation for the experiences of disabled people and how they live their lives. There was a change in how visitors perceived disabled people – rather than the term being loaded with negative implications, it became something positive (e.g. BM103, BM134, CM1061, CM1069, CM3088, CM3085, CM36, CM82, CM94,GM111, IWM135, IWM47, IWM52, IWM63, IWM8, IWM82, SM35, TWM140, TWM177, TWM28, TWM30, TWM403, TWM83, WM141):

> I think what comes across is the fact that it's nothing to do with people necessarily being … not being able to do things, I think it's more just, it's a different way of experiencing things rather than it being a disadvantage. (Irene, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

New perspectives of disabled people: Giving disabled people a voice (2.4.1) enabled many visitors to connect their learning with the use of 'real' life stories across the nine projects. Typical stereotypes of disabled people as victims were openly challenged by these portrayals and the realisation is reflected in some visitors' comments. Visitors were given new perspectives on how disabled people experience their lives, realising that disabled people do not "view themselves as inferior or lacking" (BM63) or are as "capable as everyone else in a society where disabilities are looked down upon" (BM65) (other examples include BM27, BM28, BM61, BM94, CM1, CM1054, CM106, CM117, CM131, CM18, CM188, CM203, CM121, CM108, CM118, CM210, CM219, CM229, CM239, CM297, CM40, CM59, CM60, GM120, IWM113, IWM118, IWM121, IWM151, IWM170, IWM171, IWM173, IWM180, IWM202, IWM30, IWM34, IWM41, IWM53, IWM58, IWM61, IWM74, IWM81, NM23, RLH8, RLH3, RLH71, RLH83, TWM01, and TWM304). The focus on the real lives and experiences of disabled people or putting disability into a familiar context (e.g. art) helped visitors to negotiate their way through the complexities (e.g. BM157, BM16, BM169, BM181, CM1049, CM259, GM155, GM28, GM73, IWM188, IWM137, IWM185, IWM19, NM42, NM48):

> It makes me think about the complexity of disability and experiences of disability. The use of labels in the 'About me' panels and the discussion about language makes me think about the power of language, about the way it can be constraining or confusing or inhibit honesty. Most of all the film snapshots make an impression on

me, giving time & space to think about disabled people's lives, multiple identities and positive/negative experiences. (CM23 Female, aged 26-35, white, non-disabled)

Appreciation of social barriers: Some visitors emphasised the way in which their (new) understanding of disability included the concept of struggle, or an appreciation of the challenges and difficulties that disabled people face in society (e.g. CM218, CM299, CM3038, CM315, IWM109, IWM176, IWM178, IWM25, IWM2, IWM33, IWM59, NM49, TWM309, TWM82, TWM91).

> I liked the art with the forms for the disability, you know, the wheelchair… I didn't really know what to make of it. It was like a very angry sort of thing. I was quite surprised by that… It was sort of like frustration and almost hatred for the why they have to fill in the forms and things. And it was quite surprising. (Marianna, Tyne and Wear Museums)

The focus on public transport in Glasgow in particular opened visitors' eyes to the challenges that disabled people face when negotiating public transport, often 'taken for granted' by non-disabled people (e.g. GM110, GM112, GM134, GM139, GM146, GM149, GM162, GM163, GM2, GM26, GM56, GM57, GM58, GM60, GM64, GM80, GM87, GM88).

> I hadn't considered how difficult public transport would be for people with a disability. Shocked that 24 hour notice has to be given before travelling by train. (GM57 female, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

The framing of the museum projects by the social model encouraged visitors to see directly the impact of the barriers in society, how language dehumanises individuals and other negative aspects of society that may not be noticed by non-disabled people. The nine interpretative projects enabled visitors to change their conception of disability, mainly in widening their concept of what it is and what it means to be disabled from the perspective of the social model. Other comments simply remarked that the exhibition had made the respondent think more about disability and disabled people, something which was outside their own experience (e.g. BM175, BM178,, BM179, BM49, BM19, BM58, BM98, CM1007, CM135, CM139, CM145, CM156, CM166, CM173, CM184, CM189, CM2023, CM2029, CM268, CM269, CM287, CM314, CM48, CM5, CM58, CM62, CM86, IWM116, IWM13, IWM14, IWM131, IWM175, IWM191, IWM21, NM24, NM28, RLH6, RLH60, TWM104, TWM109, TWM20, TWM202, TWM142, TWM143, TWM186, TWM188):

> It makes you think about people who are disabled and how they cope in the world and also… what little time we have for them really. You know, the world's not made for disabled people, you can get a bit more appreciation for that, for the fact that you're seeing those disabilities actually in painting and then you're thinking about them and it starts to sort of dawn on you. (Tyler, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

> I think one of the things that's probably most interesting about it and very surprising, is it casts the definition of disability quite wide…People inherently think about physical disability…I suppose the main things that I'm going to take away, this

idea about the wider definitions of disability, including mental health issues. (Julian, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)[31]

Other visitors were not so certain about the impact of the nine projects although they felt that some change had taken place. This reflects the limitations to the response card in that it can capture a snapshot, the immediate thoughts and feelings from a visit but not the longer term process of reflection upon an issue, which some of the respondents seemed to recognise (e.g. BM150, CM1000, IWM110, IWM112, IWM35, IWM62, RLH37, TWM318).

Comparisons between past and present: The nine projects enabled visitors to make comparisons between the ways in which disabled people were treated now and in the past. Visitors found relevance in how the past can illuminate our treatment and attitudes towards disabled people in the present (e.g. IWM56, RLH1, RLH75):

> [D]isabled people's access to society is still not brilliant. And so bringing in that context into paintings that are actually quite old or dealing with old issues and bringing it up to date is sort of like ah this isn't just a piece of old artwork, this is something also relating to the situation of people now. (Tom, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

There were a number of different responses from visitors, with some using the past to reflect on how, because of progress, things have got better for disabled people in the present e.g. because of technology or changing attitudes towards care (e.g. CM6, CM243, CM1009, GM156):

> It's quite upsetting really how people in those days were locked away and how cool it is now that they're not locked away and that there are people walking the streets out there now that 50 years ago would have been behind that door [to Severalls Hospital]. And… how far we've advanced. (Gladys, Colchester Castle Museum)

The disability literature, however, suggests a more complex and changing history of social and cultural attitudes towards disabled people (see Working Paper 1). What impact might this have on peoples' understanding of the social model and the more subtle complexities of the argument for equality and independence? Perhaps this gives some people the comfort of knowing that they live in a more 'enlightened' age? A more modified view was that things had got better but there was still a way to go for true equality:

> [T]he thing that struck me most I suppose was the timeline, the history of attitudes against disabled people, from 1829 to present day and how it's taken a long time and involved a lot of people to create a lot of awareness to get where it is at the moment, and it isn't perfect. But I think it was shocking, it was striking to see what

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[31] Some children and young people took the definition of disability perhaps a little too literally and ended up with having a very wide conception of what it means to be disabled. For instance some of the children connected wearing glasses with being disabled, such as the thirteen year old girl who put on the response card that she was 'non-disabled' but added the comment 'unless wearing glasses counts' (also TWM330, TWM331, TWM33, TWM335, IWM30).

society allowed at certain stages… To see all that at a glance, I think it was a powerful way of doing it. (Sam, Tyne and Wear Museums)

There was also the minority view that attitudes towards disabled people were better in the past and things were now worse for disabled people:

'Stumper' was still an important contributing member of the fishing community. Today the 'P.C. Police' would frown on the name highlighting the disability. Today the social service benefits system would remove the need to work and therefore remove some dignity and self-respect. A visible disability is easier to accept and be accepted. (WM132 Female, aged 56-65, white, non-disabled)

Other examples are BM132, CM1009, CM158, CM175, CM183, CM228, CM243, CM277, CM42, CM6, CM63, CM69, CM84, CM96, GM101, GM113, GM131, GM135, GM156, GM48, GM86, GM91, IWM111, IWM142, IWM157, IWM26, IWM54, NM35, NM39, RLH52, RLH70, SM28, SM40, TWM1009, TWM108, TWM123, TWM126, TWM129, TWM281, TWM382, TWM400, TWM43, TWM72, WM132.

Wider contemporary issues: Other visitors used contemporary debates and issues, or comparisons with experiences outside of the UK, to help make sense of the issues raised in the exhibitions and displays (e.g. GM65, GM67, RLH1000, SM145, SM16, SM22, SM7, SM84, SM9, TWM122,

I believe that there is still a certain stigma to this day relating to people with a disability like the statue by Marc Quinn that was outside Birmingham Town Hall which caused controversy and displeasure to certain people. (BM146 Male, aged 16-25, white, non-disabled)

Greater understanding: Visitor responses varied in their descriptions of how the nine projects had led them to greater understanding of disability issues. Pat*, a visitor to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery described how her experience had "made me think a bit more about how disabled people are portrayed in art and so on. It's not something I'd thought about before" (similar examples include BM105 and BM151). More examples include (CM3041, CM65, GM115, GM119, GM141, GM159, GM89, IWM136, IWM138, IWM162, IWM163, IWM165, IWM64, IWM72, IWM73, NM18, NM34, SM13, SM14, TWM111, TWM112, TWM144, TWM146, TWM226, TWM99).

I was quite surprised to find out that one in four people have disabilities to start with and I did not know that Deaf people consider themselves a minority with their own language. (Connor, Tyne and Wear Museums)

Responses from young people who were involved in workshops at the Imperial War Museum and Tyne and Wear Museums demonstrate the impact that specifically focused educational workshops can have on young people in getting them to think differently around a subject (e.g. CM2031, IWM104, IWM122 IWM126, IWM134, IWM117, IWM146, IWM175, IWM83, TWM137, TWM139, TWM190, TWM337, TWM342, TWM381):

The session has changed the way I think about in the way that I see them as stronger... people. And also very motivated to live a normal life. (IWM181 male pupil aged 15, non-disabled)

Being non-disabled: Some visitors were prompted to reflect on their experiences as a non-disabled person, usually how they were able appreciate their status as a non-disabled person more (e.g. they took it for granted) or were encouraged to question their own attitudes and assumptions. Whilst some responses reflected the language and attitudes of both the tragedy and social model, this may show visitors moving between two positions - their previous attitudes and 'new' attitudes (e.g. BM107, CM136, CM177, CM254, CM256, CM306, CM3089, GM12, GM136, GM27, GM50, GM51, IWM127, IWM140, IWM28, NM53, NM19, TWM1010, TWM133, TWM224).

I think in the media at the moment there is a lot of sort of the political correctness and there's a lot of changes being made… And I think that it does make you rather blasé as an able bodied person. You think well why are they doing that? And when you actually come into contact with an exhibition like this… it does reinforce that, and the need to treat everyone as an individual really and for everyone to have equal rights. (Sarah, Colchester Museum)

2.6.2 Understanding through personal experience

In approaching the topic of disability representation, it could be argued that all visitors use their own personal and prior experiences in responding to the exhibitions and displays, whether expressed openly or implied. This section brings together the comments made by visitors in response cards and interviews which specifically refer to their personal experiences of disability and impairment – as a disabled person, experience of disabled family and friends, or encountering disabled people in the workplace. Comments included here are loosely categorised into comments made by disabled people (drawing on their own experiences); comments made by families and carers of disabled people; and, lastly, those who have professional experience of working with or working for disabled people. Some respondents may cut across these categories which is why they are defined very openly.[32] How visitors used their personal experience to respond to the nine museum projects carried. Some respondents tended to say that because they already had experience of disability or impairment the exhibition had not changed their mind but it was good to change the minds of others who might not have had this experience. There was a sense that having prior experience (whether personally or professionally) conferred a 'privileged' viewpoint upon individuals - that having the experience of being, living or working with disabled people gave you a greater understanding of the issues.[33] It was also evident that the promotion of a topic important to visitors' personal and/or professional lives was seen as significant; by approaching the topic of disability representation in a (valued) public space it conferred value upon their own experiences.

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[32] In total, 149 documents were coded to this sub-category, representing 17% of those coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic.'
[33] Hence the importance placed on the real lives and experiences of disabled people being included in the exhibition – real value is placed on the authentic voice.

Responses from disabled people: The nine museum projects received many responses from disabled people who agreed positively with the themes and messages communicated and shared their experiences of social barriers (e.g. BM46, BM92, CM119, CM256, CM296, RLH59, TWM212, TWM221, TWM308, TWM317, TWM52):

> What an informative and thought provoking exhibition. Being affected by Multiple Sclerosis I know only too well the barriers less able people face. The videos and info here inform others and hopefully attitudes will start to change allowing people with disabilities to live better more fulfilling lives. (GM29 male, aged 36-45, white, disabled)

Section 2.5 contains more examples.

The experience of being family, carers, friends and colleagues of disabled people: Visitors who had experience as family/carers, worked or socialised with disabled people shared their experiences through the response cards. They were, on the whole, very positive about the museum projects (e.g. BM179, CM54, CM1070, CM131, CM2015, CM245, NM37, TWM40, TWM47, TWM91). Some suggested that their attitudes had not changed as a result because they already knew about the issues or had experience of disabled people (e.g. BM47, BM56, CM1005, CM1046, CM1056, CM132, CM133, CM134, CM165, CM2013, CM275, CM29, CM64, CM78, CM89, CM280, GM7, GM150, IWM29, IWM38, IWM80, NM51, SM20, TWM66, TWM217, TWM225, WM133).

Other visitors with such experiences did learn something new as a result of their museum experience (e.g. CM104, CM154, RLH60), found the museum projects thought-provoking (e.g. CM3062, CM3082, CM40), moving (e.g. NM35) or reflected on their own attitudes (e.g. CM177).

2.6.3 Action, behaviour, progression

Some visitors talked about how they felt inspired to do something as a result of their experience at the museum, for example to change or think about the language that they use, to change their attitude or the way in which they respond to disabled people (e.g. CM1020, CM103, CM192, CM2008, CM3082, CM32, CM41, GM1, GM69, GM72, IWM100, IWM160, IWM161, IWM97):

> So I started to think more about… because I'm on the school council, so how we can change the school for more children with disabilities coming to the school (Leah, Imperial War Museum)

The exhibition at Tyne and Wear Museums, 'One in Four', was particularly significant for Jessica in that it made her realise how important the views, actions and attitudes of everyday people are in creating a society where everyone can be included:

> It's just reinforcing that we do need to change with the times and be aware of all of these issues that affect disabled people, and our language, and the way in which we do treat, you know, disabled people… I think we've just got to be the ones to make sure that keeps happening.

'How can I help?' was an outcome from some visitors faced with their new information or knowledge of disability and disabled people; they felt motivated by their new understating to put it into practice (e.g. BM10, BM180, CM57, GM107, RLH38, TWM1007, TWM173, TWM213, TWM22). Whilst these respondents talked about a change or action they wanted to put in place stemming from their own understanding, others talked more broadly about what 'should be done' e.g. by the community, society and public in general. Such learning outcomes can also be regarded as increased knowledge and understanding in that these respondents understand that change needs to be made (e.g. CM230, CM308, GM124, GM140, GM142, GM38, GM90, IWM88, NM29).[34]

Impact on language and behaviour: Language and behaviour are very important issues in relation to disability and disabled people, considering that prejudice and stigma towards disabled people are embedded in the terms used to describe disability or specific words are used pejoratively against others to cause hurt (especially slang words). Comments about language and behaviour reveal that these are still very tricky areas for people to negotiate, causing confusion, discomfort and embarrassment. Generally throughout the response cards and interviews people continued to use many different terms to describe disabled people, most of which were perhaps used unconsciously. These included 'people with disabilities' and 'handicapped' people, both terms are no longer felt to be suitable in comparison to 'disabled people.' Some visitors used 'disability' when they meant 'impairment.' Other visitors preferred not to use the term 'disabled' seeing it as an inherently negative way to describe individuals. The exhibitions and displays developed by the nine museums as part of RDR seemed to reinforce this further in some visitors' minds (e.g. BM38, BM44, BM48, BM99, CM3081, GM47). Visitor responses in terms of language were often articulated in terms of understanding that they are using the 'right' or 'wrong' terms; it was sometimes conceived of in a very 'black and white' manner. Where exhibitions challenged how people use language around disability, notably at Tyne and Wear Museums, visitors had different responses to this, either feeling embarrassed or continuing to use the same language whilst explicitly stating that they know they are using the wrong terms. Such visitors seemed to be in a transition between using the 'right' and the 'wrong' language, perhaps because that language is so ingrained. The power of words and the complexity around how and when they can be used and be acceptable was noted by William (Colchester Castle Museum) which he felt was the most significant aspect of the exhibition. There were words that "I as a non-disabled person are happy to use and think it's okay" but which he realised are "not okay." He articulated the confusion that can occur over the 'correct' language to use, the concern to be 'politically correct' and not using terms which could be upsetting to others:

> Well the words, it was the words they used to describe themselves, like crip... but if I said oh you're a crip, that's very different... So in a way, the provocative things all came out through those words... the way they described themselves and how they can use it and why they can use it and why we can't use it.

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[34] Also refer back to 'How people engage with disability' (2.5) as some of these expressions of help were infused with notions of tragedy and pity.

This anxiety or self-correction over which was the 'right' language to use was reflected in some of the comments from visitors (e.g. CM1000, TWM94). Other visitors became less 'inhibited' about their use of language after their experience at the museum, suggesting that the exhibitions and displays may have helped some to overcome some of their anxieties in this area (e.g. CM1074, CM23, CM254, TWM12). Two visitors to Tyne and Wear Museums, Jessica and Christine, separately reflected on how language has changed over the years – what was once acceptable is no longer acceptable now:

> It must be difficult for the older generation because I suppose… it was acceptable to maybe say [certain words] when they were little, but obviously it isn't now. I think that's like a huge learning point for them really, and it's kind of like changing attitude which isn't easy is it? (Jessica)

> Well my mum worked in the late '50s, early '60s, when you weren't disabled, you were subnormal… she's a nurse of mental subnormality, and now you'd be hung off the roof for saying that, but that was how it was. (Christine)

Some visitors conceived of the change in terms of how, after their museum visit, they now knew the 'right' words to use and would 'think twice' before using these newly discovered offensive words (e.g. CM3047). Particularly effective in this respect was an interactive part of the 'One in Four' exhibition which 'tested' visitors' knowledge about the words which they should and shouldn't use in relation to disability and disabled people (e.g. TWM08, TWM13, TWM161, TWM167, TWM164, TWM170, TWM175, TWM227,TWM286, TWM295, TWM302, TWM303, TWM381, TWM41, TWM68).

> I actually failed a couple of the questions and I thought oh my goodness. And that's good because that makes you think about well you shouldn't say that or you should say this rather than that… [For example] Non-disabled. Should you use that? And I went no, and it said yes. Whereas I would have used the term able-bodied, but apparently you're not supposed to say that, and that made me think. (Christine, Tyne and Wear Museums)

With language there are parallels with the way in which people described how they had concerns over the 'right' behaviour to use in their interactions with disabled people - there was sometimes a fear of 'getting things wrong' (e.g. RLH44, RLH9). However, not all visitors agreed with the need to alter or think about the language they used. These visitors did not engage with the complexities of the debate in the same way – they questioned the need for 'political correctness' or the idea that words could have power. They were 'just words' used to describe impairment:

> Labels are a necessary part of life, they are just words and needed to distinguish between things; to [sic] much is made of the label issue, whatever disabled people call themselves it will still be a label and we all have one. (CM255 male, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

2.6.4 Attitudes towards disabled people

As discussed in section 2.4.1 giving disabled people a voice through the nine museum projects was a powerful way of changing attitudes. Negative or ambiguous perceptions of disabled people were challenged or brought to the surface, and many visitors were engaged with the topic for the first time, including Tyler (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery):

> I think probably firstly it makes you think about people who are disabled and how they cope in the world and also how, what little time we have for them really. You know, the world's not made for disabled people.

Disabled people are part of society and should be treated equally: At the very least, visitors were comfortable with the notion that disabled people were an integral part of society and should be included and treated equally to non-disabled people (e.g. CM120, CM1055, CM136, , CM147, IWM155, IWM139, IWM165, SM14, SM15, TWM189, TWM99, TWM81).

> People with disabilities are an integral part of society, they should be treated as such. (Henry, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Disabled people should be treated with respect: Some visitors, mostly young people (e.g. Noah and Ashley, Imperial War Museum), commented that disabled people deserved more respect in their treatment by non-disabled people. Sometimes this was part of a broader message that everyone (disabled and non-disabled) should be treated with respect. For younger respondents this was sometimes expressed as 'because it's not their fault they're disabled' (e.g. BM149, CM3063, IWM103, IWM104, IWM105, IWM123, IWM126, IWM133, IWM188, IWM39, IWM44, IWM45, IWM5, RLH39, SM128, SM75, TWM12, TWM138, TWM148, TWM157, TWM171, TWM172, TWM193, TWM208, TWM209, TWM26,

> I think they were both trying to say to demonstrate how these people have been through a lot and you still should treat them with the same amount of respect even though they've been through all this and maybe disfigured and scarred, but they're still people at the end of the day. (Abby, student, Imperial War Museum)

Disabled people do not need pity or sympathy: Challenging the imagery and language of the tragedy model (see Working Paper 1), some comments reflected that disabled people did not need pity or sympathy from non-disabled people. They are not necessarily 'tragic' figures or victims because of their impairments (e.g. IWM115, IWM159, IWM171, IWM3, IWM36, IWM47, IWM57, IWM60, IWM61, IWM8, SM125, TWM175, TWM203, TWM24):

> Daniel Lambert was a good man, he was a large man yes but that was none of his doing. It was a medical problem he was no glutton by any means. He did not want pity he wanted understanding. (SM121 Female, aged 46-55, white, non-disabled)

Through such comments, visitors seemed to suggest that they were moving beyond a negative view of impairment based on the tragedy model. Perhaps respondents were overcoming or working through some of their latent 'fears', negative opinions and anxieties about impairment? However, some visitors used 'disability' rather than 'impairment' (e.g.

BM165, BM26, BM50, BM82, BM31, BM8, BM88, CM118, CM131, CM133, CM193, CM2004, CM278, CM3036, CM36, CM6, IWM149, IWM176, IWM193, IWM202, TWM307, TWM67,

> It confirms that there shouldn't be barriers to what disabled people can achieve - they can achieve so much, just look at the personal accounts of daily lives, art work, etc. (CM1077 Female, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)

> [You] could still play basketball even if you're in a wheelchair, you could still be president even though you're blind. I don't know, people just get into their head that because you've got a disability, then you're not able to do things the same as other people. (Zara, Imperial War Museum)

Disabled people and their identity: Some visitors talked about a new understanding of how disabled people viewed their identity or how disabled people wished to be 'seen' by others (e.g. BM63, CM156, CM2023, CM213, CM231, CM319). The concept that disabled people might want a separate identity to non-disabled people, however, was not always straightforward (e.g. SM58). Some comments suggested that the visitor's engagement with an RDR project led to (or reinforced) a negative or tragic view of disability / impairment (e.g. IWM99, RLH20):

> I found the film quite sinister in parts due to the lighting & camera angle. This did capture my attention & I feel as though I want to know more about the participants... What are the conditions they are suffering from? ... In a way they isolated the participants and made me look at disabled people in a 'different' group. I'm not sure that is a good thing. (RLH34 Female, aged 16-25, white, non-disabled)

Reflecting on personal attitudes and experiences: Richard, whose son had been involved in the development of the exhibition at Colchester Castle Museum, felt that "having a disabled person in the house makes you think differently." His experience at the museum made him more aware of how other non-disabled people perceive disability:

> Yeah, because you live in your own sort of insular world of dealing with disability every day, and suddenly you open it up and hear other peoples' comments that oh I didn't realise that or never thought about that or I assume this, that or the other.

The film 'Behind the Shadow of Merrick' was particularly effective in this respect, causing viewers to look critically at their own attitudes towards disabled people. It was not an easy process and some respondents reveal the challenge that it presented to their thinking. Not all respondents were able to supply an 'easy' answer to the way in which it had changed their thinking, they were still in a process of reflection. The film was one of the few instances where respondents (most of them University students) openly reflected on the 'message' that they thought the film was conveying to them, and the public in general, about disabled people: (e.g. RLH4, RLH44, RLH7, RLH93).

> It brought to light many of the issues connected to disability that I perhaps had in mind but not confronted. I felt that it was moving and educational to hear from disabled people themselves how they feel, how they connect to Merrick, society's views about disabled people in general. Although I already considered myself as a

tolerant & respectful individual also in regards to disability I suppose this film made me even more aware of how disabled people feel and during everyday life. (RLH1 Female, aged 16-25, white, non-disabled)

2.7 The complexity of visitor responses: debating the concept of disability

While disability or recognising the self as a disabled person is taken as a political identity for disabled people with an understanding of the social model, for others the concept of disability is confusing and promotes labelling. Some comments showed that there was an objection to disability being looked at as a separate issue preferring instead for the subject to be mainstreamed or incidental to the wider museum and gallery exhibits. It is not clear if this is connected to an element of denial or contributes to the wider invisibility of disability issues within public spaces for the museum attendees. This section looks at the more complex, contradictory, even negative responses to the nine museum projects from visitors. Although no hostility was directed at disabled people openly in the comments, frustration and hostility was often directed at the museum by visitors who disagreed with the approach taken. Still, there were relatively few overt criticisms made of the nine interpretive projects, or respondents who considered that the museum was not an appropriate place for such a topic to be addressed.[35] Furthermore, some of the criticisms levelled at the projects focused on one element of them, a design element or an aspect of the interpretation which did not completely deplete their enjoyment of the rest of the experience.

2.7.1 Helping inclusion?

By drawing attention to disability representation, some visitors questioned as to whether this would help disabled people become more included in society. These visitors seemed to find the idea of disabled people as a politically motivated group, or presented in a manner which emphasises their difference discomforting (e.g. BM50, BM35, CM147, CM182, CM45). Other criticisms were based on the belief by visitors that the museum was perpetuating or reinforcing the exclusion and/or negative representation of disabled people. Several visitors to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery objected to the audio interpretations, both disabled and non-disabled (e.g. BM170), based on the (mis) understanding that the audio points were designed only for disabled people to access the paintings. Kurt objected to the accessible audio and large text screens as stigmatising and to including disabled artists as commentators on the audios classifying this as patronising, in that it suggests that disabled people might only be interested in disability issues to the exclusion of the paintings:

> I think that it may well be that you will find that people will see those stations and think oh they're only for the visually impaired or for the disabled to use. Now I think that's a serious weakness and I think how you deal with it, I don't know… Then you see, you've got the other issue of okay, and very rightly and properly, you've got

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[35] 105 documents were coded as 'critical' representing 12% of documents coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic' and 6% of all documents (1658).

some disabled people along to evaluate it and that's good, but then some disabled people would say… I don't just want to know about other people's disabilities and I don't want just to know about… disabled artists' attitude to disability, I just want to appreciate the art in the gallery.

There was also confusion for another interviewee, Vivienne, a teacher, aged 62 who (similarly) assumed that the accessible equipment and formats had been put there for disabled people to use exclusively, but who missed the point of the exhibition and on realising what it was about decided that they 'weren't too keen' on it. Despite having fairly positive views about disabled people initially (disabled people are a part of society and should be included as equals) when it came to the representation of disabled people in the gallery and opportunity for disabled people to have a perspective on the paintings, this visitor was clearly very discomforted by the idea. Making 'a big thing of disability' was seen as problematic with the assumption that it would not help inclusion:

> Why have an exhibition about disability. It's a bit odd really, as if it's making a big thing about it. I don't think it helps inclusion at all.

For another the process of bringing disability issues to prominence was seen as a way of perpetuating the freak show, the comment that whatever sets you apart isolates you is obviously applied to negative aspects of a person or a life, for example a millionaire may be set apart but is not thought of as isolated (e.g. RLH19, RLH40):

> It doesn't really "CHANGE" my views or opinions on disability. I feel like the people interviewed here were picked because of their disabilities; it is the disability that defines them, and no names, anything… I almost felt like, although there are good intentions, its almost perpetuating the "freak show". I think integration is key: whatever feature sets you apart from others in what isolates you. (RLH10)

One visitor to Whitby Museum commented that the display did not change their attitudes towards disability and "may even be counterproductive" (WM128).

2.7.2 Debating the concept of disability

In some cases, the concept of disability was rejected as a means for the commentator to say that disabled people are the same as non-disabled people with talents and something to offer. For example, there were many comments with a plea from the commentator for us to see the person not the disability. Ironically, this may connect with a need to normalise or alternatively with an equality view – it is not clear from the comment alone. This view along with the notion that 'we're all disabled in some way' may suggest an equality view in that all have things they may or may not do better than others, or act as a normalizing statement which denies the differential disabling social barriers that disabled people face in their day-to-day lives (e.g. BM48):

> You can still have a disability but be able to have a talent for something else. - makes you realise the people with disabilities are still the same as us. We shouldn't judge people because they have a disability. They are still talented. (BM8)

For some it was clear that it was a categorisation or 'pigeon holing' that was objected to (e.g. CM236):

> I just thought it was trying to communicate that everyone's who they are really, and I think one of the things I got from that was that we all have something that's a disability in some way… and that everyone's just a normal person really. We are all just people. (Gladys, Colchester Castle Museum)

Or the enigmatic and short comment:

> I sometimes wonder who the real disabled are. (CM1022)

There also appeared to be some confusion over what disability was. According to this response if impairment is treatable it is not an impairment or disability in their terminology. It was interesting that commentators presumed a cure for depression and decided that cure=non-disabled:

> Is depression a disability? I am not sure as it is treatable for many. (BM126)

There was also a confusion of impairment as synonymous with illness a common misconception that all disabled people are ill:

> It is a very interesting exhibition which teaches you about the people rather than the illnesses and as such allows you to get a new perspective on various issues etc. (CM239)

Some rejected the term disability preferring to use the term ability as a liberal non-judgmental term (e.g. CM3081):

> Hasn't really changed as I think I have a very liberal view & don't judge people on their abilities or how they look anyway. (CM304)

Some comments were overtly complementary, but revealed the weight of societal prejudices that were often taken on sub-consciously without realising. In the comment below, we are advised to see the person not the 'problem' and told that the display had been 'normalising' for the commentator's children to see:

> "See the person not the problem!" Fantastic display - very informative and 'normalising' for our children to see. (CM226)

However, an interviewee who had used the term 'normal' quickly tried to explain their selves once they realized what they had said:

> It sounds awful to say normal people. I don't mean it to sound like that, but to focus on them as individuals rather than looking at their disability. (Jennifer, Secondary School Teacher, Imperial War Museum)

An insightful comment from a secondary school student manages to merge both individual thought, recognition of the attitudinal issues of others and coping with social barriers:

Do not think I would be as strong. I couldn't have coped with it. Attitudes remain fairly similar really - disability should not affect how you view someone or what you can and can't do. But I do not have a disability so perhaps I may feel differently if faced by such prejudice. (IWM193)

There was also an assumption that impairments were physical and related to the body or the senses from many of the comments (although a minority did recognise that invisible or unseen impairments existed). For example:

Broken, pitied… I'm sad these people are being subjected to discrimination. Changes need to be taken so that disabled individuals are measured through words and deeds not appearance. (RLH80)

Some people from the health profession provided us with some surprising comments whilst appearing unaware of the impairment that were discussing. That is, the suggestion that all people with cerebral palsy are unable to communicate which is fundamentally untrue.

As an occupational therapist I have worked with people who have had a variety of mental and physical disability… What a shame that Daniel Lambert's personality was lost in his disability. Imagine what it must be like to have cerebral palsy - fully mentally alert, but unable to communicate. This is a good display. Thank you. (SM57)

To be or not to be disabled: For some people filling out response cards or speaking with us in interview or focus groups, there was confusion about whether they considered themselves to be disabled, even though the Disability Discrimination Act may have classified their particular impairment as being covered by the Act. Some were related to technical aids. This would tune in with the social model thinking that technical, environmental and attitudinal barriers cause disability:

I wouldn't consider I am disabled as I have a hearing aid as it does not prevent me from hearing if I have it in. Being a hearing aided person [it] is difficult to know if I am disabled. (TWM1003)

Other related to refusing to accept a disabled label, for example those with mental health issues and Deaf people might fall into this category, and those who although classified as disabled under the Act did not 'feel' disabled. For example people who described themselves as dyslexic but said they didn't feel that they were really disabled. For others, particularly children, there was confusion that the wearing of glasses, or sight loss through age signified that a person was disabled.

2.7.3 No change in attitudes towards disabled people

The aim of the nine museum projects were to develop new approaches to the interpretation of disability and the representation of disabled people's lives and experiences, many of which counter mainstream views of disabled people. However, some visitors considered that they already held the 'correct' attitudes about disabled people or accepted the 'message' that they felt was reflected in the museum exhibition. These are potentially two

different responses and it is not always simple to define the ways of thinking about disabled people to which visitors refer. There is also a certain amount of 'benevolent prejudice' towards disabled people manifest as pity, sympathy and the language of tragedy (see Valentine and Macdonald 2004, Working Paper 1). Visitors may not see anything wrong with this way of thinking if (to them) an expression of sympathy for disabled people is positive and (possibly) shows them to be a tolerant person. This may account for some of the defensiveness expressed by respondents when they are confronted with the idea that their attitudes towards disabled people may be received negatively. The question on the response card may also have provoked some negative reactions from visitors because it focused on changing attitudes. For those who do not think their attitudes need to be changed, this may be seen as a provocative question from a museum.

Visitors with experience of disability, including those with disabled family members and friends or employed in a context where they were working for or with disabled people, often felt that this gave them the required understanding of disabled people and the topics explored in the nine museum projects. A common response was that they 'already know' about the issue, it had not challenged or altered their way of thinking in any way, although it might benefit others who were not so aware of the issues. To a varied extent, were visitors 'performing their own tolerance' and showing that they already had the 'correct' attitudes towards disabled people?[36] (E.g. BM46, BM47, CM1003, CM1056, CM138, CM85, IWM18, IWM29, IWM37, IWM38, IWM44, IWM55, IWM70, RLH30, RLH55, SM2, TWM66):

> No it hasn't changed my mind about disability really. I'm comfortable with talking about it and at the end of the day it's part of life and everything else. (Chris, Colchester Castle Museum)

A few respondents explicitly stated that they generally felt their attitudes towards disabled people to be 'correct' and so did not need to change. By drawing on their experiences as context, respondents were making the point that they were already 'inclusive' suggesting that some may have interpreted the idea of change as assuming that the public have the 'wrong' or incorrect views about disabled people (e.g. BM56, CM100, CM137, CM2027, CM304, CM307, SM12, SM131):

> I don't have a negative image on any of them anyway so it didn't change anything for me, but it's good for other people who might have different views on it. (Prue, Discovery Museum)

Another way in which visitors expressed this was to state that the RDR project had reinforced values or opinions that they already held –however, some comments continued to reflect elements of the individual or tragedy model (e.g. BM67, CM1044, CM187, CM282, CM3064, CM3081, CM32, CM76, IWM120, IWM86, IWM98, RLH39, RLH46, TWM1008, TWM121, TWM298, TWM65):

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[36] This is an issue to be discussed further.

> Doesn't change the way I think about disability. If people just make you aware of their disability like some of the displays then you know how to deal with it. (CM76 Female, aged 36-45, white, non-disabled)[37]

Often it was a matter of semantics – how the visitor interpreted the expression 'the way you think about disability.' Visitors talked about having their perceptions of disability widened or increasing their understanding of the experiences of disabled people, but without it having any impact upon their underlying attitudes. The completion of the response card and the involvement in interviews directly after the event of visiting may also have influenced this response as some visitors explicitly stated the need to reflect more in what they had seen (e.g. TWM120, BM150, CM1073, IWM156, RLH41, RLH62, RLH87, RLH9, SM80, TWM120).

> I sort of know about the issues and that, but then, maybe… there's a lot more to find out about it… and that's a good way… it makes you think about it. (Tyler, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

2.7.4 Criticism of the nine projects and their approach

Despite the attempt to design exhibitions, displays and other interpretative methods to be informative, accessible and inclusive for all visitors, the museums and galleries attracted a few criticisms for the way in which the topic of disability representation had been presented or the way in which various aspects had been laid out. This included the use of text and voice recordings which were "a little too slow" (BM12), lack of accessibility for visually impaired people (e.g. BM161) and too much interpretation or text (e.g. NM39, NM41).Other visitors found the exhibition or display they visited "patronising" (e.g. BM162, GM31) and "boring" (e.g. TWM218). In some cases, the choice of object or painting or interpretation was questioned because it did not fit or accord with the visitor's opinion about what was appropriate for the topic of disability representation. Visitors felt particularly strongly in response to the paintings used in Birmingham's display as the highlighting of the topic of disability representation conflicted (in their mind) with the aesthetic quality or purpose of a painting, or were representative of a different historical and cultural context which had little relevance to the lives of disabled people in the present (e.g., BM182, BM40):

> I suppose I'm not altogether comfortable about high art being used very specifically to change social attitudes… I take a simple view that the fantastic cultural heritage of this country needs to be made available to the maximum number of hard to reach audiences as possible, and that should be the driving force. (Kurt, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)

Some visitors to Stamford Museum and Whitby Museum reacted strongly to the redisplays at Stamford and Whitby objecting to the museum's choice of narrative (e.g. SM29, SM30, SM6, WM133, WM147). For some, the display of Daniel Lambert and Robert 'Stumper' Dryden did not explain adequately enough why they were "different" or disabled. Response

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[37] Here the visitor places the onus on disabled people to make others aware of their impairment. Disability is used here in place of impairment.

cards at Stamford revealed that some visitors were attached to the former display, did not see it as "at all distasteful" (SM78), and were confused by the change (e.g. SM29, SM101):

> Why dismantle a perfectly good display. It's 'replacement' gains absolutely nothing. A waste of good representation. Backward thinking! (SM33 Male, aged 46-55, ENGLISH, non-disabled)

Museums are not the right place: Criticism also stemmed from the disagreement that some visitors had with the topic of disability representation and how it was approached in the museums. Some visitors did not think that the museum was the 'right' place at all to address these issues.[38] It was not always clear from the response cards why visitors did not want to see these kinds of topics addressed. Is it a wider concern to keep museums and galleries free from the 'taint' of social and political issues? Some visitors did not think disability representation was appropriate for a museum e.g. "I want to learn about the Normans!" (CM61) and "I came into the museum to learn about Northampton's history but was sadly disappointed" (NM55). Other visitors did not see the point of raising the issue in the museum (e.g. BM166, CM255) or saw the interpretation as propaganda, biased (Discovery Museum), used as a platform for disabled people to voice their prejudices (Birmingham Museum), or being used to 'preach' to audiences (e.g. SM76, WM147). O'Neill (2002) identifies this objection to 'propaganda' or 'patronising' interpretation as coming from visitors who are 'unwilling to share' their knowledge of the topic/museum with others who are less privileged than themselves – 'It threatens their privileged position, as it means that their special knowledge is available to all' (2002: 35-36). It may also be because the interpretative projects were seeking to change attitudes towards disabled people these visitors are uncomfortable with the idea that museums can change or have an impact on attitudes.

The interviews suggest other reasons for criticism. One reason given is that museums are less accessible than other public spaces - this was perhaps most specific to the Castle Museum in Colchester which charges for admission. For Adrian (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) museums were not seen as appropriate because of the way in which they had approached disability representation and disabled people in the past: "Large art galleries tend to patronise disabled people by doing things like this." Interviews at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and Colchester Castle Museum revealed some visitor's open discomfort at seeing disabled people and disability representation in the museum. Alex (Colchester Castle Museum) in particular was discomforted by the "confrontational" and provocative way in which images presented disabled people in the gallery. It marked disabled people out as different and with a confident identity, which he could not understand:

> Everybody must be treated as individuals, but I just think with those pictures, I really don't like those pictures. I think that's almost to the point of preaching, you know, to people. If, you know, you have blond hair, blue eyes and you put 'I am not an Aryan' across the front of it, I wouldn't immediately think that they were. And I just think that - there's one there with the downs syndrome lad … I just find that they're

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[38] 24 documents, 28% of those coded to the theme 'Approach to the topic'.

almost in your face, I've got downs syndrome, now find a problem or come back with, you know.

Hostility to disabled people is not overtly expressed within these exchanges, perhaps because prejudice against disabled people is much more subtle and entrenched. Sandell also suggests that visitors struggling to come to terms with new ideas and concepts can 'most appropriately conceived of not as 'prejudiced' or 'unprejudiced' but rather as struggling to manage anxieties about difference' (2007:174). This is an issue that needs to be discussed with the Think Tank for further clarification.

2.8 Conclusion

The wealth of comments from comment cards and interviews indicate that the RDR exhibitions, films and various media employed in the project had an impact on changing peoples' views on disability and on raising awareness and new insights for many visitors on issues of disability, social barriers and the histories of inequalities that disabled people have faced and continue to deal with. As noted the majority of the comments and interviews indicated that the philosophy of the social model employed in all projects had worked in raising awareness and recognition amongst visitors and participants.

The nine RDR projects represented an opportunity for visitors to learn more about disability and disabled people, or to use their own (personal, family, friends, workplace) experience to reflect on the issues presented. Broadly, many visitors were able to demonstrate a change in their knowledge or understanding about disabled people, drawing on the new perspectives presented by the real life stories of disabled people presented in the exhibitions. Whilst some visitors already had some knowledge, perhaps from experience, the exhibitions, displays and film helped to expand this knowledge or present the issue from a new angle to illuminate novel ideas for discussion or reflection. The section on attitudes and values show how visitors take the messages from the nine RDR projects and 'frame' them in response to prior or existing knowledge, and a willingness to admit that their attitudes have been changed. Delving beneath the surface of two interviews from two different museums has revealed that where some individuals believe that they have progressive and tolerant opinions about disabled people it is actually only in relation to how they feel disabled people should act and behave in society – on their (the visitors') terms and not on the terms of disabled people themselves. This seems to amount to the view that they can be part of society as long as they are 'seen and not heard', the very silence that the museums are trying to overcome through their nine exhibitions. Sometimes this view is more implied than explicit, for instance the responses to the exhibitions at Stamford Museum and Whitby Museum which, through their implication that both individuals displayed here were not exploited or wanted to be treated differently because of their impairment, seems to imply that there are some disabled people who would, in the words of one visitor, take advantage of their impairment.

At the same time, there was some evidence of the underlying prejudices that have permeated society for centuries. Notions of tragedy, pity, admiration and heroism can be

explained in part because of the continuance of negative   messages that surround the lives of disabled people. These are evidenced in the statistics which show that 50% of disabled people are unemployed, often despite wanting to work , that disabled people travel less than non-disabled people because of the inaccessible transport systems or the cost of private transport on what are often low incomes and that disabled people are more likely to miss family occasions because of the factors that ensure that disabled people lack the same basic equalities that many non-disabled people take for granted. It is only by raising awareness of these factors, new enforceable policies and people working together to eliminate discrimination, negative attitudes and inaccessible environments which restrict independent living that this situation can begin to change.

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